

Guardian Chapter: 5

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The hand probed out of the shadow and viciously clenched Shen Wei's leg but he hadn't seem to notice it.

Zhao Yunlan suddenly pulled Shen Wei a few steps back by his shoulder.

"Oh right, I just remembered."

As he talked, he flickered some ash towards the shadowy corner and the dark hand, burnt by the ashes, retreated back.

"This case was just handed to us on short notice so I should talk to the principal about this. Could you help us make an appointment?"

Shen Wei finally looked at Zhao Yunlan, and he realized that Shen Wei's eyes curved into narrow lines like an ink wash painting. Behind the lenses, his captivating gaze almost penetrated his soul.

His gaze in the dimly lit corridors was reminiscent of a fabled female ghost who had painted a picture of her beloved scholar.

Then, Shen Wei smiled, "Right, I can't be of much help here. The rooms over there all belong to the Faculty of Mathematics. Just ask around, and I will speak with the principal."

"Thanks." Zhao Yunlan took one hand out of his pocket and shook Shen Wei's hand. Guo Changcheng, following behind the Chief, headed towards the office rooms.

After several steps, Guo Changcheng looked back.

The professor hadn't left. He stood in place, took off his glasses and wiped them inattentively, his eyes fixated on Zhao Yunlan's back. His gaze was mysterious and sombre; the expression he wore was one mixed with nostalgia, restraint, and adoration... but along with a touch of utmost sorrow.

Shen Wei's figure stood lonesome and wretched in the long, long corridor.

Guo Changcheng strangely felt as if Shen Wei must have waited for centuries just like that.

After a very long time, Shen Wei finally noticed Guo Changcheng.

The young professor politely smiled, placed his glasses back on, and returned to his normal expression. He nodded Guo Changcheng goodbye, and as if nothing had ever happened, headed towards the elevator.

“Chief Zhao, that guy...”

“Haven’t you noticed that this is not the so-called Faculty of Mathematics office?” Zhao Yunlan interrupted him, swiping some dirt from the dusty window sill and wiped it off.

“Do you think it was an accident or did Professor Shen tricked us intentionally?”

“Then why let him go? I mean, if he tricked us intentionally, then why...”

With one hand buried in his pocket and the other holding a cigarette, Zhao Yunlan turned around and looked at Guo Changcheng through a cloud of smoke. Guo Changcheng was inadvertently silenced by it.

“He’s a normal human, I checked. You’re a newcomer, it’s alright if you don’t understand, we will teach you slowly.” Zhao Yunlan lowered his voice, “Generally, we have the same authority as other departments of the MPS. We can ask questions, require citizens to cooperate with our investigation. We can even arrest on suspicion and interrogate suspects but there is one important rule: we can’t let a normal citizen stay in a dangerous area in case anything goes wrong.”

Guo Changcheng shivered.

Zhao Yunlan looked away from Guo Changcheng, “You’ve probably realised by now that we usually get rather abnormal cases, many of which cannot be resolved through regular legal prosecution. So we have the power to execute criminals on the spot... which could be dangerous; and that’s why there’s a set of rules we must follow. Do you know what’s the first rule?”

Even though Zhao couldn’t see him, Guo Changcheng shook his head.

“Whoever we’re dealing with, whether human or ghost, if there is no compelling evidence, we must presume innocence.” Zhao Yunlan gave the black cat a pat on the butt, “And you, fatty, what’s wrong with you? Did you turn into a dog?”

The black cat clawed Zhao Yunlan and bounced off of him, “I just found the professor very odd but he makes me comfortable.”

“Ghosts and spirits make you very comfortable too. You even like sleeping in coffins.” Zhao Yunlan coldly pointed out.

The black cat wagged its tail, “You know what I mean, stupid human.”

Guo Changcheng was left speechless, “.....”

The further ahead they walked down the corridor, the darker it got, like a gloomy, never-ending maze. Zhao Yunlan lit the way with his lighter, and the small flame flickered uncomfortably in the darkness.

Under the flame, Zhao Yunlan’s face appeared unhealthily pale but his eyes were markedly attentive, though visibly worn out. A nasty, rotten stink oozed out and Guo Changcheng covered his nose.

“I hate going around in circles,” Zhao Yunlan lightly remarked, “I hate anything that’s circular, like a never-ending cycle of life and death.”

Guo Changcheng was incredibly tensed, and just then, heard a crackling sound, like that of a loading pistol. He felt a soft breeze against his neck and heard Zhao Yunlan’s voice, “Move over.”

It was as if he was casually asking someone to “move over” while holding a bowl of hot dumplings.

Guo Changcheng desperately bounced on to the ground.

In the dark, the sound of a gunshot was heard, followed by a piercing scream from behind. Guo Changcheng felt as if he was having a heart attack, the pounding of his heart was vigorous and frantic while he felt an intense pain in his chest.

He sat on the floor, and looking up, through the dim light of Zhao Yunlan’s lighter, saw a shadow of a five-year-old on the wall with blood steadily flowing from the bullet hole in its heart.

“WHAT IS THAT!!!???” Guo Changcheng shrieked in terror.

“It’s just a ‘shadow’, don’t overreact.” Zhao Yunlan wiped the shadow with his hand and the bloody liquid peeled off like dried paint.

“What... what kind of shadow?”

Zhao Yunlan faced him with a creepy grin hanging off his face and whispered, “You know, sometimes, a person can have more than one shadow.”

Guo Changcheng dropped dead against the wall, sliding down like noodles.

“This is all your fault,” Da Qing circled the unconscious Guo Changcheng, wagging its tail restlessly. “What good does it do you when he passes out?”

“I didn’t mean to,” Zhao Yunlan gently nudged the body using his foot, which made it slide even further down. “How would I have known he would pass out so easily? I thought he would just... wet his pants or something.”

Zhao Yunlan carried Guo Changcheng on his shoulder like a sack of beans, “Then I can blame it on the adult diapers and cut his salary.”

He swiftly walked around with the body, and coldly asked, “So tell me. This kid must have some connections otherwise he would’ve never gotten a job here.”

“I heard his uncle is one of the big wigs in the MPS.”

“Does that idiot know that the SIU doesn’t take new recruits directly from other departments? Or maybe he figured death in the line of duty would be a good way for his useless nephew to go?”

“Don’t complain to me,” Da Qing the cat meowed. “You call him an idiot behind his back but if you ever saw him, you’d treat him as the big boss. I have lived for a few thousand years, and I’ve never seen a Guardian with less integrity than you.”

“Integrity doesn’t make money.”

Zhao Yunlan put off the cigarette and softly slapped the cat on the head.

“What about your huge monthly paycheck, regular bonuses, and special rights exclusive to the SIU? They don’t fall from the sky, do they? What’s integrity? Is it edible, is it tasty?”

Da Qing the cat thought back to all the high-class cat food he enjoyed every day and quickly shut his feline mouth.

Throughout the history of the Guardian Order, Guardians have always taken the role of Hell’s ambassador in the realm of the living, whom would inevitably feel alienated on earth. Rarely has there ever been a Guardian so close to the living world.

Not only was he close to the living, he was also very well-adapted to the formalities and complexities of the modern human society.

He was your classic bad boy, gentleman, and rogue all in one. He could do the kind and friendly well, and the bad and nasty even better.

The old cat couldn’t help but think that if it weren’t for his “unfortunate” inheritance – the Guardian Order – he’d probably have climbed up the social ladder pretty fast.