

Revival 576

Chapter 576 Meeting the Parents

Under Xiong Wenwen's insistent dragging, Yang Jian could only agree to meet his parents.

During his spare time, he had looked over Xiong Wenwen's file. It said that Xiong Wenwen became a Guardian because of a car accident. At the time, his parents were taking him on a trip when they encountered a supernatural event. The details of the encounter and what exactly happened were not explained in the file.

As a result of being involved in the incident, Xiong Wenwen's father died, and his mother, who knew about the accident, chose to remain silent, apparently unwilling to recall that terrible event.

As for Xiong Wenwen, it seemed as though after that incident, he was possessed by some strange entity, or perhaps a ghost had entered his body.

He developed the ability to foresee the future.

Xiong Wenwen's precognition was limited, lasting only about ten minutes. Exceeding this duration posed the risk of an evil spirit's revival. Moreover, the envisioned future was not fixed; it continuously changed based on surrounding variations and his own actions.

Just like the last time he was at Caesar Hotel, he foresaw his own death by a ghost, but he knew he wouldn't really perish. He could take action before the predicted demise to alter the outcome.

Even with just ten minutes, this peculiar ability was extremely precious.

Unless it was a large-scale paranormal event with at least an A-level danger rating, headquarters wouldn't call on Xiong Wenwen for support.

After all, there were many Guardians, but there was only one Xiong Wenwen.

The only regret was that this ability to foresee the future manifested in a mischievous child. Had any of the other Guardians from headquarters possessed this power, they would have become incredibly formidable.

If Yang Jian had this ghostly power and could overcome the risk of an evil spirit's revival,

then he would become an Unsolvable Level Guardian, able to confront real ghosts head-on.

In Yang Jian's view, such foresight was almost equivalent to an S-level ghost's revival, perhaps even more powerful. After all, revivals could fail, whereas precognition carried no such risk, with the initiative firmly in one's own hands.

"We're here. This is my house."

Xiong Wenwen and Yang Jian took a ride to a high-end residential complex not far from Ping'an Hotel. The complex's security seemed to recognize Yang Jian and did not stop him, the stranger.

After entering the complex, it was only a short while before they reached the tenth floor of one of the buildings.

Xiong Wenwen's home was apartment 1001.

He fished out the keys from his pocket, opened the door, and called out, "Mom, I'm back—and I've brought Yang Jian with me! He's going to be my teammate from now on."

Before he could finish speaking, someone inside the house seemed to have heard them and came out to take a look.

Just as Yang Jian was about to step inside, he saw a woman in an apron standing in the living room.

The woman looked to be in her thirties. While dressed in slightly loose home clothes, she could not conceal her perfect figure, slender legs, and an improbably ample bust. Her fair, melon-seed face showed no traces of age. Instead, she exuded the charm of a mature woman.

The only downside was that the woman's expression carried a touch of sadness and worry, lending her an air of vulnerability.

Still, one could imagine that, ten years prior, this woman must have been a knockout beauty on the level of a campus belle.

It was just unfortunate that such a beauty had married and had children early, bearing the troublesome child Xiong Wenwen. It really made one wonder what underhanded tactics his father had used to chase after his mother.

Though Xiong Wenwen was conceited and brash every day, he did get one thing absolutely right—his mother was indeed beautiful. After meeting her, Yang Jian had to admit in his heart that she was attractive, no wonder Xiong Wenwen always seemed to boast when he brought her up.

"Aunt, hello, I am Yang Jian. I apologize for the abrupt visit today," Yang Jian greeted her politely.

Aunt?

Hearing this term, the woman's maternal instincts made Chen Shumei's ears prick up. Even though she was already thirty, whether outside or when meeting others in the complex, she was always greeted as a beautiful lady. Even when she used to shop with her husband, several men would approach her if they were separated for just a moment.

How much time had passed since then?

Having an important guest refer to her as "Auntie" was a bit difficult for her to adapt to.

"So you're Yang Jian? Captain Yang? Hello, I'm Xiong Wenwen's mother, Chen Shumei. It's my first time meeting you today, and I'm delighted to meet you."

Chen Shumei walked over politely, "Please come in and have a seat. I just finished cooking. You probably haven't had lunch yet, Captain Yang, why don't you join us for a simple meal?"

"Then I won't be polite." Yang Jian nodded, not refusing the offer.

Chen Shumei sized up the stranger who was about to enter her home once more.

Before, when she heard that Xiong Wenwen was going to bring his captain over, she thought it must be a mature and stable middle-aged man in his thirties or forties, but looking at Yang Jian, he seemed to be just in his early twenties at most. Furthermore, his skin was very pale, almost unnaturally so, slightly handsome - although not exactly a pretty boy - but the term "baby-faced" definitely applied to him.

His eyes, however, were sharp, lacking the unfocused, floating sensation of youth, imparting an indescribable sense of danger, making one feel that he was not easy to get along with.

"Captain Yang, please take a seat. I'll bring out the food," said Chen Shumei, not scrutinizing too much. She just wanted to confirm whether this person named Yang Jian was reliable or not.

Her son, Xiong Wenwen, absolutely could not follow a captain who couldn't be trusted.

However, just as she turned around, Xiong Wenwen's mischievous nature revealed itself. He said with great pride, "What do you think? I wasn't bragging, was I? Isn't my mom beautiful? Now that I've introduced you to my mom, you can't go back on your promise. You have to look out for me in the future. Otherwise, I'll badmouth you to my mom every day."

"..." Only then did Yang Jian understand what this rascal was up to.

Chen Shumei, who had just come out with the meals, staggered upon hearing Xiong Wenwen's words, nearly spilling the food.

Xiong Wenwen brought Yang Jian home for this reason?

Has it been a long time since this kid was spanked? He even dared to deceive his own mother.

But...

Chen Shumei wasn't angry with her child. She was just a bit curious, for ever since Wenwen's father passed away, he had been very wary of any man entering their home, fearing she might find him a stepfather, even scaring away many relatives and friends, which resulted in few visitors coming to their house.

Why would he take the initiative to bring Yang Jian home this time?

Was the child deceived outside?

The likelihood was slim. Wenwen was very cautious, plus his special intuition, no one could get past his guard.

Last time, a young company president came to visit personally and talked with her about Xiong Wenwen, wanting to recruit him into his company, but he ended up being chased away by Wenwen too.

"Captain Yang, I've served your meal already, let's eat first. It's just some simple home cooking; I'm not sure if it suits your taste," said Chen Shumei. "Wenwen, you eat too. Don't play with your cell phone again. The food gets cold quickly with the weather being chilly."

"Aunt Chen, just call me Yang Jian. I don't really consider myself a captain yet," Yang Jian said as he sat down.

Chen Shumei looked at him and asked, "I don't know much about the headquarters, so please don't mind me asking, but you seem very young. How old are you?"

"I'm exactly twenty years old. I graduated from senior high last year," said Yang Jian.

Chen Shumei, who was eating, almost choked on her food upon hearing this, looking at Yang Jian in amazement.

What?

A student who had just graduated from senior high?

"You just graduated from high school?" Chen Shumei asked in surprise.

"Yes, if it weren't for those incidents, I'd probably be in my first year of college right now," Yang Jian said.

Chen Shumei gave an awkward smile, "Then you're really remarkable, becoming a captain at such a young age."

"Aunt Chen, that can hardly be considered a compliment. People like us tend to have short lives. Maybe I'm alive this month, and the next month grass is already growing on my grave."

Yang Jian swallowed a mouthful of rice and glanced at Xiong Wenwen, "He is no different, even though headquarters has done a good job protecting him. But reality is reality, it doesn't change because of that."

"Since Aunt Chen knows about these matters, she should understand this in her heart."

The awkward smile on Chen Shumei's face vanished, replaced by worry and melancholy. Although Yang Jian's words were harsh, they were the truth.

The peculiar ability of Xiong Wenwen came at a price, which had been mentioned before by that Captain Zhao, Zhao Jianguo.

"That's why I hope Xiong Wenwen can find a capable captain to protect him in the future, so that he can live on. Can Captain Yang give me that assurance?" Chen Shumei asked.

Yang Jian said, "I can understand a mother's feelings, but the reality is that no captain dares to say they can definitely protect him well. As for the matter of staying alive, that's even harder. Even I can't ensure my own survival, and the same goes for Xiong Wenwen."

"Furthermore... even if there's a way to survive, it's very dangerous, so I can't give you that assurance."

Upon hearing this, Chen Shumei's face instantly turned cold. She set down her chopsticks and said, "If you can't assure Wenwen's safety, then how can I feel at ease handing him over to you?"

Yang Jian replied, "You haven't handed him over to me. He simply made a choice, to team up with me. Of course, he can refuse as well. I came here just to explain the situation. However, I believe that Xiong Wenwen will live the longest with me. If he follows another captain, he'd only die faster."

"Unfortunately, there's no way to compare. Otherwise, you'd understand. You shouldn't take offense at my blunt words, Aunt Chen, because I'm only speaking the truth. If it were another captain at your door, they might promise anything, agree to anything. Then you would surely send Xiong Wenwen off with great joy. But still, the outcome wouldn't change. When the time comes for someone to die, they will die."

"Alright, Captain Yang, if there's nothing else, you can leave after you finish eating. I won't let Wenwen follow you." Chen Shumei became increasingly displeased and even a little angry.

After all, no one would be happy to hear someone tell a mother that her child is going to die and die quickly right in front of her.

"Since Aunt Chen is unhappy, I won't bother you any longer." Yang Jian had just finished eating, then he stood up, ready to leave.

He had barely taken a few steps when he stopped and said, "By the way, Aunt Chen, Xiong Wenwen said you're very beautiful, and he wasn't wrong at all. The food you cook is also delicious. Even though we haven't talked much, I know you must be a good woman. But you're not a qualified mother. Sometimes you should listen to the children more. Overindulgence is a kind of harm."

Having said this, he left the house.

"Yang Jian, wait a moment..." Xiong Wenwen called out.

"What is it? Sit down and eat." Chen Shumei said coldly.

Frightened, Xiong Wenwen shrank his neck and obediently sat back down.

"You can't team up with him, he won't take care of you. Following him is definitely dangerous," Chen Shumei said.

"But Yang Jian didn't say anything wrong," Xiong Wenwen said, a little defiantly.

Chen Shumei said, "What do children know? This isn't about right or wrong, it's about your safety, and we can't be careless. Just listen to me, that's the right thing to do. You don't have to worry or say anything. I'll refuse those people for you, to avoid you saying something wrong and offending someone."

Seeing his mother angry, Xiong Wenwen dared not speak any further and quickly buried his head in eating.

Seeing this, Chen Shumei's expression softened slightly, but when she thought about how she had just driven Yang Jian away, she felt somewhat guilty.

After all, wasn't he a guest? Had she been too impulsive?

Yang Jian, having left the place, couldn't help but shake his head slightly.

It seemed that teaming up with Xiong Wenwen would be a difficult task, unable to get past his mother. After all, Xiong Wenwen was just a child, unable to make decisions for himself.

"What a pity," Yang Jian thought to himself.

He felt sorry not because he had lost a teammate, but because a child like Xiong Wenwen was being exploited by a bunch of so-called "adults".

Putting himself aside, which of the people at headquarters was suitable to be Xiong Wenwen's captain?

Jang Shangbai? Cao Yang?

Leuk San? Or is it Li Jun?

Li Jun might be the best choice among them, but he was too loyal to duty, which meant his tasks would increase, and the level of danger would correspondingly rise.

Yang Jian was different, however, as he had already resigned from his position as captain, so he only needed to be responsible for one Dachang City.

How many supernatural events could there be in one Dachang City and its surrounding area?

Even if there were any, it wasn't certain that Xiong Wenwen could be used every time.

This meant that teaming up with Yang Jian would reduce the frequency of encountering supernatural events to a minimum.

Besides that, in case of real danger, his five-layer Ghost Domain could protect Xiong Wenwen at critical moments, getting her out of harm's way.

However, Yang Jian didn't say any of this, because it was pointless to do so.

Chen Shumei didn't understand these matters and didn't know which choice was the best or worst one. She simply made her decisions based on what others said and her own judgment, so what Yang Jian considered the best was not necessarily the best in her eyes.

Once he had already formed a bias, there was no need to continue the conversation.

As time ticked by.

What Yang Jian didn't know was that on the top floor of Ping'an Tower, at a friends' circle meeting, President Fang Shiming had already made up his mind to do away with him.

This time no information was leaked out, so he was completely in the dark.

"President Fang, a call from Cao Yanhua. He's pressuring us again." In the afternoon, Jang Shangbai had already received a call from headquarters, and it was personally made by Cao Yanhua himself.

Fang Shiming waved his hand and said, "You handle it, and keep an eye on them. Don't let them leave. I'm going to make some preparations, and unless it's something urgent, don't disturb me."

After glancing at the time, he stood up, stretched languidly, and then walked out of the conference room.

He went down to the archive room on the floor below.

The friends' circle had collected all the information on ghost controllers available in the country. Aside from computer storage, there was also a dedicated archive room for paper documents, a facility like this could not be operated without substantial financial resources and an intelligence system.

After passing identity verification, Fang Shiming entered the archive room. When he emerged, he had in hand a file folder.

Written clearly on the folder were two lines: Codename Ghost Eye, Name: Yang Jian.

He went into a nearby office, sat down, and flipped open Yang Jian's file. He wasn't interested in Yang Jian's personal information because a dead man didn't need to be remembered.

He took out a full-body photograph of Yang Jian from the file.

It was unclear where they had collected this photo from.

With the photo laid out on the desk, Fang Shiming didn't give it much attention, focusing instead on watching the time.

He was waiting for it to reach six o'clock.

As for the reason why,

That was because headquarters needed him to provide a response before six o'clock.

By that time, Yang Jian's death would be the best response.

Nothing more than that.

Chapter 577 Sudden Wound

In the afternoon, Yang Jian spent most of his time wandering around downtown, since the Ghost Domain operation had already started, it seemed a bit inappropriate for him to stay in the hotel sleeping, so to support the operation, he decided to take a walk.

The result was quite evident.

After wandering through several snack streets and food streets, apart from feeling a bit full, everything was normal.

Indeed, after being chased out by Xiong Wenwen's parents at noon, he hadn't been able to eat his fill.

"It's about time, let's call it a day," Yang Jian checked the time, it was almost six o'clock.

He thought about calling it a day and returning to Ping'an Hotel, to continue today's work.

As long as there were no unexpected incidents in the next two days, he could smoothly return to Dachang City. Although he had encountered several dangers and experienced quite a few supernatural events this trip, at least there were gains, and the main goal was also accomplished.

He had come here to address the deterioration of his own body and the problem of the ghost's revival.

Now he had managed to control three ghosts to achieve a very good balance, had killed Gao Zhiqiang, and taken the ghost from his body, which would allow his own body to recover to a healthy state, which was better than he had expected.

Beyond that, there was the acquisition of supernatural objects and an increase in the number of Ghost Candles in his possession.

He believed that if nothing unexpected happened, he could survive for quite a long time.

During this period, he intended to do some things he wanted to do.

With these thoughts in mind, he walked alone toward the hotel.

However, at this moment.

A fatal crisis that had gone unnoticed had quietly arrived.

Inside an office of Ping'an Tower.

Fang Shiming sat motionless, staring at the clock on his desk, like a statue, and had been sitting there for several hours.

Patience was something he always had in abundance, even sitting there for a whole day was an easy feat for him.

After all, he was no longer an ordinary person.

The winter sun set earlier than in other seasons.

The originally bright office was now cast in darkness and during this time, he had not gotten up to turn on the lights, nor had any company staff come in to disturb him, making the surroundings exceptionally silent.

He didn't know how long he had been sitting in the dim office.

Not until the clock on the desk reached five fifty-five, did Fang Shiming finally move.

He slowly reached into his clothes and pulled out a box.

The box wasn't large, just a bit bigger than the size of a common smartphone, colored a striking gold, because it was made of gold.

Only gold could seal off all things supernatural, a common knowledge in the Supernatural Circle.

The box was welded shut, without leaving the slightest gap.

Fang Shiming took a small knife and drew a line around the box, finally opening that long-sealed golden box.

Once opened.

The dim office immediately became somewhat colder, and a faint stench of decay spread through the air, suggesting that something had rotted away.

Inside the box was a pair of scissors.

The scissors were outdated in style, not resembling modern designs but rather those from the Republic of China Period. It was unclear if the item had lain buried in mud for a long time as the black stains on it couldn't be scrubbed off, indistinguishable as rust or as having absorbed something they shouldn't have.

The eeriest part about these scissors was the handle, which was wrapped in strands upon strands of black hair, with some even connected to the scalp.

The rotten stench seemed to be emanating from there.

Ghost Scissors!

That's what Fang Shiming called them, simple yet fittingly descriptive because he had obtained this item from a ghost during one supernatural event.

"I really don't want to mess with this thing."

He furrowed his brows, as if using these eerie scissors was subject to some taboo, making him afraid to use them casually, so he could only seal them in the golden box and carry them with him.

But...

Looking at the photo of Yang Jian on the table.

Fang Shiming knew that Yang Jian, with his Ghost Eye, was not easy to kill. If he were to face Yang Jian head-on, he might win but would definitely be dragged down to a state akin to ghost's revival, and it was very likely they would both end up dead.

But Yang Jian had to be killed.

Not just because he posed a threat, but also because he knew about the existence of the Ghost Scissors and even demanded them from Jang Shangbai as a condition.

This crossed Fang Shiming's bottom line, so he was very resolute, with no possibility of wavering. Even if Cao Yanhua had been pressuring him all afternoon, he still had to kill Yang Jian today.

"It's a pity I couldn't get that Coffin Nail. Otherwise, with the two items countering each other, it would be even more advantageous for me," Fang Shiming's gaze shifted slightly.

The time reached five fifty-nine.

Just one minute left until six o'clock.

Fang Shiming didn't touch the scissors but picked up a ballpoint pen and wrote two characters on the full-body photograph of Yang Jian: Yang Jian.

A real name, a complete full-body photo, that was the method to trigger the Ghost Scissors' killing rule.

At least that's what Fang Shiming had found through experimentation.

Therefore, the threat of this object falling into human hands far exceeded the threat of it being in ghostly hands.

Otherwise, Fang Shiming wouldn't have been able to obtain this supernatural item from the ghost in the first place.

"The time has come, time to send you on your way, Yang Jian," Fang Shiming saw that the time had reached six o'clock.

Without any hesitation, he took off his gloves, revealing a pair of dreadful hands reminiscent of those from a mummy, the dark brown skin clinging tightly to the bone, all flesh already gone, and looked exceptionally creepy.

Even though his hands had transformed into this state, it didn't affect their use, they were still able to move.

Fang Shiming grabbed the Ghost Scissors.

Instantly.

The surrounding dimness deepened all at once, and the whole office was shrouded in darkness.

Drip, drip!

The sound of water droplets echoed around, and the decaying stench in the air grew even stronger, carrying with it the thick smell of blood.

Most eerily, within this deepening darkness, several shadows flickered and gradually formed into the contours of corpses... These silhouettes of corpses were incomplete, some missing arms, some missing heads, and others missing legs.

Nevertheless, these weird, incomplete shadows kept moving closer to Fang Shiming.

Fang Shiming held the Ghost Scissors in one hand, and in his other hand, he picked up Yang Jian's photograph.

However, at that moment when he picked up the picture, the backside was already smeared with sticky fresh blood. His gaze shifted slightly. Despite the close distance, he didn't know when a pale, severed human head had been placed on his desk, blood oozing from the neck, gradually covering the entire desk surface.

Not only that, but when he moved his feet ever so slightly, it felt as if he had stepped on something.

Cold, soft, like stepping on a corpse.

"The curse of the Ghost Scissors has deepened."

In the face of all the eerie happenings in the office, Fang Shiming remained calm and collected, not showing the slightest disturbance as he continued to go about his work in an orderly fashion.

This level of a curse still couldn't take him down.

The scissors landed on the photograph bearing Yang Jian's name. The once brightly colored picture now suddenly aged, a dark shadow looming over it, and the vibrant colors seemed to rapidly fade away.

The picture was painstakingly snipped apart, a strange curse beginning to spread.

At that very moment.

Walking on the streets of Dachang City, Yang Jian, walking along, was on the phone with Cao Yanhua.

"Yang Jian, I've already put pressure on people in our circle. They've denied your request and refuse to hand over that item. However, you're free to propose other conditions—gold, assets, companies... If it's money you want, then boldly name your price; they'll do their best to meet it."

"This is mere stalling, pure and simple," Yang Jian spoke, "I know how wealthy everyone in the circle is, a group of top conglomerates, capitalists tirelessly backing them—funds are of no real consequence to them. I asked for a response by six o'clock, but obviously, this reply is far from satisfying."

"Cool down for a second, Yang Jian. This is at least a good start. Negotiations never reach an agreement in an instant," Cao Yanhua continued to persuade him, "If you trust me, I can keep negotiating and applying pressure on your behalf. But that's provided you don't go off the rails now, Headquarters doesn't want a conflict between you and the people in our circle at this juncture."

"We can't afford to deal with the Ghost Painting and your situation simultaneously."

"It's not my fault; it's theirs. I shouldn't be the one to shoulder the blame," Yang Jian said, "Moreover, your approach doesn't work with people in the circle. If it did, they wouldn't have waited until now to

give you an answer. They're stalling. I have a premonition that the people in the circle won't stop. They're planning to retaliate against me."

"You're being paranoid; they absolutely wouldn't dare make a move. I can assure you," Cao Yanhua said with conviction.

The circle may be influential, but the bigger the force, the more restraints they have. It's solo players like Yang Jian who are the most dangerous, acting without care for the consequences.

"Is that so? Too bad I can't bet my life on your guarantee," Yang Jian replied.

Cao Yanhua hesitated for a moment, then, grinding his teeth, said, "You head back to the hotel and rest tonight. Don't get into another fight, just give me some time; I'll have them agree to your demands by tomorrow morning."

"You can't guarantee that. However..." Yang Jian's words were cut off mid-sentence as his footsteps suddenly came to a halt.

For some reason, he felt an intense sense of crisis at that moment.

It was as if... ghosts were right beside him.

Yang Jian looked around vigilantly, scrutinizing every passing pedestrian, his body tensed to the extreme, and even his Ghost Eye had surreptitiously opened.

Yet, he discovered nothing.

"An illusion? Or am I being too sensitive?" he frowned deeply.

But out of caution, he still felt he should leave the area. It would be unfortunate to become unwittingly involved in a Ghost Painting incident.

But just as he was about to take a step.

Suddenly, a strange gash appeared on his neck.

The gash was large and deep, almost severing his entire spine. In an instant, blood gushed out, splattering onto several bystanders, and his head lost support, dangling powerlessly.

"Gurgle, gurgle..."

...

Blood backflow choked Yang Jian's throat as he staggered and fell to the ground, his brain instantly feeling dizzy.

Everything happened so swiftly, without any warning, as if he had inadvertently triggered a ghost's killing pattern, attacking Yang Jian in an incomprehensible manner.

But at this moment, Yang Jian had no time to think about that; if only his neck had been half-slit, he would still be conscious and able to react.

In an instant.

Skin split open all over his body, eerie eyes opened, and the entire street was immediately enveloped in a red glow.

Moreover, the intensity of the red glow intensified in an instant.

Four-layer Ghost Domain—Yang Jian, in that moment, activated the four-layer Ghost Domain, dragging the whole street into his Ghost Domain.

He no longer had time to select people or things, nor to care about whether it affected reality.

The moment the Ghost Domain was activated, the black shadow laying behind him moved.

The black shadow extended a hand to cover Yang Jian's slit throat, seemingly trying to fill and complete the wound.

Ghost Shadows have the ability to piece together corpses; they can stitch together even the bodies of ghosts, let alone those of humans.

An icy breath seemed to invade his brain, energizing Yang Jian's spirit. The feeling of dizziness and lack of oxygen immediately improved. With only an injury of this level, he wouldn't die.

The survival capability of a ghost controller was fully exemplified in him.

Yet, that hair-raising sense of danger had not dissipated.

In the few seconds of clarity, he immediately pulled out a red Ghost Candle.

He could no longer worry about what the situation was; as long as he lit the Ghost Candle, he would be safe at least until the candle burned out, even if faced with an S-rank evil spirit, he could survive a while.

But he had just taken out the Ghost Candle and hadn't even had time to light it.

Crack!

That bizarre split manifested again, and Yang Jian's entire neck was completely severed,

The Headless Ghost Shadow's stitching had no effect; his head separated from his body and rolled a short distance forward.

"How is this possible..." Yang Jian, observing his headless body gushing blood, his eyes slightly narrowed, displayed an expression of disbelief.

Four-layer Ghost Domain, combined with a Ghost Shadow, couldn't block this strange attack?

At this moment.

Inside the office of Ping'an Tower.

Fang Shiming looked at the photo he had cut with scissors. The split in the photo aligned perfectly with Yang Jian's neck, but the originally faded photo had turned a shade of red as if soaked in paint, making the Yang Jian in the photo seem very unreal, gradually blurring away as if he was about to disappear from the photo.

"Not dead yet? In that case, let's do it once more."

He moved the scissors again.

According to Fang Shiming's experience, decapitation was the most effective way to kill. No one could lose their head and still live—ninety-nine percent of ghost controllers couldn't either.

Furthermore, the neck occupies the least space on the photo, so cutting it uses the least effort and is less likely to deepen the curse of the Ghost Scissors.

"This time, sever the head."

Fang Shiming pondered for a moment. Since he had decided to make a second cut, he wanted to be thorough, to eradicate all possibilities for Yang Jian.

Chapter 578 The Released Curse

"Hello? Hello, Yang Jian, are you going to talk? What were you trying to say just now? Hello..."

At the headquarters, Cao Yanhua, who was on the call, discovered that suddenly there was no sound coming from Yang Jian's side. The conversation had cut off mid-sentence, and the phone line had not disconnected, nor had the signal been affected in any way.

"Yang Jian, are you still there? Hello."

Cao Yanhua called out several times, but there was still no sound from Yang Jian on the other end of the phone.

He frowned and subconsciously assumed that Yang Jian had deliberately moved the phone away, not wanting to continue the conversation with him, especially since he hadn't been satisfied with what had been said just before.

"Liu Xiaoyu, keep trying to connect with Yang Jian. No matter what, we need to hold him steady. Tell him not to go out and cause trouble tonight. I'll continue to negotiate with people in my network and assure him that I can give him a satisfactory answer by tomorrow morning," Cao Yanhua put down the phone and instructed Liu Xiaoyu from the switchboard room.

"Alright, I'll try my best to persuade Yang Jian," Liu Xiaoyu nodded, indicating she understood.

"Really, each and every one of them is a headache," Cao Yanhua felt an immense headache. He had a lot of things to deal with and couldn't afford to focus all his energy on handling Yang Jian alone.

However, he couldn't afford to ignore this situation either. Although Yang Jian was just one person, the trouble he caused was significant.

After Cao Yanhua left, Liu Xiaoyu had no choice but to work overtime to try and get in touch with Yang Jian, hoping to keep him stable.

But what they didn't know was that Yang Jian hadn't suddenly gone silent during the call; rather, he had been subjected to a terrifying attack by some unknown supernatural force and couldn't attend to the unfinished call anymore.

On a street near the Ping'an Hotel.

A very bizarre scene had unfolded; the entire street, along with the nearby buildings and the vehicles and pedestrians on the road, were all shrouded in a dense red light. This red light seemed to have become everything on this street, changing all the colors, even obscuring the sky above.

"What's going on, what happened?" someone exclaimed, clearly shocked by the sudden change.

"Am I seeing things? Why has everything turned red here? Could there be some special astronomical phenomenon?" Another person looked up at the sky, trying to confirm their guess.

"This road, something's not right."

However, the drivers on the road felt an inexplicable panic because they found that no matter how they drove forward, they could not leave this street. The road was still the same, the speed of the car was as before, but the surroundings hadn't changed at all.

This was an unimaginable and eerie feeling.

People on the street began to panic slightly.

But for Yang Jian at this moment, all this was already insignificant. He was in a terrifying state, lying prone on the sidewalk by the street, with a ferocious gash across his neck leaking blood profusely, staining the ground red in the space of just a few moments.

And his head had rolled off to the side, no longer connected to his neck.

Such a scene had terrified the passersby, who fled the scene as if running for their lives, not one daring to come closer.

Although Yang Jian's head lay beside his own body, he still retained consciousness, and his thoughts were relatively clear. His eyes were slightly open, showing an expression of disbelief and shock.

But for how long can a human head retain consciousness after separating from the body?

Three seconds? Five seconds? Or ten?

Regardless of the duration, this lingering consciousness would be extremely short-lived because with the significant loss of blood and lack of oxygen, one would rapidly lose consciousness.

Yang Jian was no exception.

He was a ghost controller, but not all ghost controllers could survive without their heads.

Feng Quan could.

That was because Feng Quan's entire body had already been eroded by the bizarre grave soil; inside his body was all mud, devoid of any trace of human flesh and blood.

Wang Xiaoming's brother, Wang Xiaoqiang, could as well, since his body was that of a ghost. He was merely a tattered shell parasitizing a ghost's body, long detached from the realm of the living.

But Yang Jian couldn't, because most of his body still belonged to the category of the living, not much eroded by fierce ghosts.

This was both an advantage and a flaw.

The body of a living person signifies health, represents the mental stability of a ghost controller, but it also indicates frailty and susceptibility to death.

Yang Jian, however, had overcome the shortcomings brought by the living body because he had tamed the Headless Ghost Shadow, which could attach to his body in times of danger, allowing his body to retain human health while possessing some characteristics of a ghost.

Yet, the Headless Ghost Shadow was flawed.

Due to its lack of a head, Yang Jian's head wasn't covered by the Headless Ghost Shadow, causing his body to have a fatal weakness.

As long as Yang Jian's head hit the ground, he would truly die, just like any ordinary person.

Now, Yang Jian had no time to ponder why that sudden attack had aimed for his neck, nor to consider why such an eerie assault could ignore the obstruction of the four-layered Ghost Domain, even preventing the Headless Ghost Shadow from stitching back together.

"I must find a way to survive..." The only thought in his head now was to keep living.

Beyond that, everything else wasn't his to consider because there was simply no time left.

He was unclear how long his consciousness could last in his severed head, only knowing that once his eyes closed, everything from his time at No. 7 Middle School to the present—all his efforts, everything he had been through—would be wasted.

Yang Jian didn't want to die; he, like any ordinary person, had a strong will to live.

If he had harbored thoughts of suicide, he would have died back in Dachang City.

Light the Ghost Candle? To isolate from all paranormal activities around and then take advantage of the opportunity to figure out how to put the head back together using the Headless Ghost Shadow?

Or should he rush to use the death-dodging doll to block all fatal attacks at this critical moment?

Or perhaps do nothing and bet everything on the bizarre Eight-Tone Music Box he had placed on himself but had never used?

Three choices—these were the best solutions Yang Jian could think of while his consciousness was at its clearest.

None of these methods might work; perhaps the Ghost Candle couldn't block that terrible attack, maybe the death-dodging doll would only delay the inevitable death a bit, or perhaps the Eight-Tone Music Box fetched from headquarters wasn't as powerful as imagined.

Which to choose?

This thought echoed in Yang Jian's mind.

He had to make a decision within the shortest possible time.

At that moment, his eyelids were growing increasingly heavy, everything before his eyes was gradually darkening, and his thoughts seemed to be sinking into darkness... He was about to die, barely hanging on to a few seconds of consciousness. In these final moments, he could only do one thing.

And at this moment,

inside the office of Ping'an Tower,

Fang Shiming's scissors once again fell upon an ordinary photograph identical to the one he had previously cut—a copy. The content had not changed in the slightest, displaying a full-body image of Yang Jian.

As for the ruined photograph, he did not continue to use it, as its incompleteness prevented the activation of the Ghost Scissors' murderous rule.

Therefore, a photograph could only be used once.

But for him, replicating the same photo dozens or even hundreds of times posed no difficulty whatsoever.

This time, Fang Shiming's scissors aimed at the head of Yang Jian in the picture.

It only took a snip to bisect Yang Jian's head into two parts.

If this still wouldn't kill him... Fang Shiming took a brief look around.

In the dark office, the peculiar smell grew even stronger. Several incomplete humanoid silhouettes stood right by his side, almost sticking to him, and the office desk in front of him was no longer distinguishable, its surface saturated with blood and strewn with various dismembered limbs.

There were ghastly white heads with eyes closed facing this way, split legs eerily standing there, and severed fingers that seemed to wriggle ever so slightly.

Within these remnants lurked the real ghosts.

If Fang Shiming were to touch a real ghost, he would have to bear the terrifying curse of the Ghost Scissors.

What the consequences would be, Fang Shiming did not know, but they were certainly not going to be good.

So using the Ghost Scissors twice in quick succession was already his limit. Combined with a Ghost Candle, he could ward off the surrounding eeriness for a while and seize the opportunity to use the Ghost Scissors twice before the candle extinguished.

But Fang Shiming did not have a Ghost Candle at hand, so after the second use, no matter the outcome, he would stop using the Ghost Scissors.

However, he believed that these two attempts were sufficient to thoroughly kill Yang Jian, leaving no chance for survival.

Even if he didn't die, the vengeful ghost would revive.

The outcome was inevitable.

Fang Shiming's withered palm moved slightly, and the photo immediately underwent the same transformation as before. The colorful photograph suddenly lost its vibrancy, aging instantly—a curse from the Ghost Scissors. Then, the figure of Yang Jian in the photo began to blur, with a layer of red pigment contaminating it.

The curse reflected some of the subject's condition in the photo. The blurriness of the photo and the indistinctness of the person indicated that the individual was using a ghost's power to resist.

Unfortunately, this ghostly power was still far from enough.

The figure in the photo did not disappear, and the sudden layer of red paint did not completely obscure the photo either.

Fang Shiming's scissors met no obstacle or disturbance as they successfully made a cut in the photograph, and the crack swiftly spread forward, soon reaching the forehead of Yang Jian in the picture.

He cut sideways, so this fissure could completely tear Yang Jian's head from slightly above the eyebrows.

And if a ghost controller could live without a head, well, if his brain were split open too, he was surely doomed.

Fang Shiming's movements, compared to before, were somewhat slower, his desiccated palm trembling slightly because he had already seen that the ghastly white Dead Man's Head on the desk had opened its eyes.

At his back, at the nape of his neck, an icy breeze seemed to rise, as if someone was breathing behind him.

Tap, tap!

In the not-so-large office, from a pitch-black corner, there came clear footsteps, which seemed to be approaching him the moment they started.

A ghost had sensed Fang Shiming's presence and had begun to draw near.

Bearing the curse of the Ghost Scissors, summoning an unpredictable fierce ghost.

Even so, Fang Shiming was set on killing Yang Jian.

But in these short ten seconds, on the street covered by the Ghost Domain and now a heap of corpses, Yang Jian—who had become one himself—took advantage of the last bit of consciousness in his decapitated head to make his choice.

At that moment, his body twitched, and the red Ghost Candle he held loosened and fell to the ground.

This movement signified that Yang Jian had given up on lighting the Ghost Candle.

Then his arm twisted in an unnatural way and reached into a pocket of his shirt, retrieving a golden box.

The golden box was opened, revealing a wooden Eight-Tone Music Box inside. Its red paint was mottled and peeling as if it had weathered decades.

He didn't place his bets on the life-for-a-life doll but on this terribly cursed Eight-Tone Music Box instead.

However, now Yang Jian's eyes were gradually closing. His Ghost Shadow still connected to his body from beneath, allowing him to control the ghost shadow to momentarily move his body and make some small movements that were still possible.

"Open it," his consciousness was about to dissipate.

His unwillingly closing eyes were firmly fixed on his body's movements. At the very last moment, he needed to open the Eight-Tone Music Box to unleash the curse that could grant immortality.

Meanwhile, a crack appeared on Yang Jian's forehead.

That haunting sensation of being attacked was coming again...

Unavoidable, unstoppable, and not even the overlapping of four layers of the Ghost Domain could prevent it.

Crack

Yang Jian's corpse's palm grasped the Eight-Tone Music Box, gave a slight nudge, and finally managed to open a corner of the box.

But at the same time, the crack on Yang Jian's forehead intensified further.

Just like the previous occurrences,

his head was completely bisected by this peculiar attack.

Yet faintly, Yang Jian heard a serene, pleasant tinkling near his ear.

The curse of the Eight-Tone Music Box was released.

Chapter 579 Emotional Breakdown

"Hello, is Yang Jian there? This is Liu Xiaoyu, if you hear me, say something back."

"Yang Jian, did you lose your satellite-positioned phone? There's not even the slightest sound from your end, at least say something."

"Are you mad at the vice-minister?"

In her private office, Liu Xiaoyu was hunched over the desk, tirelessly calling into the microphone, hoping to successfully connect with Yang Jian.

She was certain there was no issue with the communication this time; it had been maintained from the start, there was just no sound coming from the other end.

"This is the first time something like this has happened—could something have gone wrong on Yang Jian's end?" No one responded to Liu Xiaoyu's calls for a long time, and she began instinctively to sense that something was amiss.

Her work experience told her that this was definitely not a simple case of not answering calls.

But faced with the lack of response on the other end of the line, just calling like this wasn't a solution. Liu Xiaoyu glanced at the location and found that Yang Jian's phone hadn't moved from its place from before to now, and the location of the occurrence was also rather strange, as it was not in a remote place but on a street near Ping'an Hotel.

"Yang Jian, if you don't respond, I'm going to have someone go look for you," Liu Xiaoyu tested once more.

Still, no one responded.

Although it seemed unlikely, Liu Xiaoyu was now truly suspecting that Yang Jian might have casually thrown the satellite-positioned phone into some corner and then went off to do something else.

There was no helping it.

She could only speculate as much.

"Let's see what's really happening. If Yang Jian really lost his phone, we must get someone to retrieve it immediately." Liu Xiaoyu hesitated for a moment, then finally decided to forcefully activate the phone's camera to check out the surroundings.

After a series of operations.

Soon, Liu Xiaoyu forcefully turned on the camera of Yang Jian's satellite-positioned phone to see what was happening around it.

But as soon as the camera was activated, Liu Xiaoyu sensed something was wrong.

The image transmitted on the screen was awash in red, not the dim hues of evening.

The things captured in the video were quite normal; it was the side of a street. But judging from the angle on the phone, the satellite-positioned phone seemed to have been placed on the ground, and moreover, it was carelessly tossed there.

"It wasn't actually casually discarded by the roadside by Yang Jian, was it?"

Liu Xiaoyu suddenly touched her head: "What on earth is Yang Jian thinking? The phone is lost; is he planning to resign? Oh my god, you better not suddenly resign, what would I do if you resigned? Being your operator is tough enough; I don't want to be the operator for anyone else."

"But even if you really want to resign, at least talk to me about it in advance, don't you trust me?"

She thought somewhat resentfully in her heart.

Complaints aside, she still had to follow protocol.

If the phone was lost, Liu Xiaoyu had to retrieve the phone as quickly as possible after determining its location, because this phone contained a large amount of intelligence data that could not be leaked carelessly.

Liu Xiaoyu controlled the camera to slightly rotate the view to confirm the specific location around it.

But as soon as the view shifted, her complexion suddenly changed, a sense of panic and unease began flooding from the bottom of her heart.

Liu Xiaoyu saw a person gradually appearing in the camera's view.

This person lay motionless on the cold ground, with blood spilled all around, turning the ground next to the body a deep shade of red. Although she couldn't see the person's full image, the body shape and clothing were very similar to... Yang Jian.

"No, it can't be."

Liu Xiaoyu's eyes widened as her body trembled slightly. She was extremely nervous as she continued moving the camera, attempting to ascertain the truth.

As the view shifted upward once more.

The body lying on the ground gradually revealed its full picture, and she saw a red Ghost Candle scattered next to it, as well as the familiar set of clothes, confirming it was what Yang Jian was wearing during the meeting that day.

The view shifted again.

The next moment.

A decapitated body appeared in front of Liu Xiaoyu. Next to the headless body, Yang Jian's head lay starkly there...

"Ah!"

Liu Xiaoyu sprang up from her chair, her complexion immediately turned pale, and her body instinctively backed away, as if trying to distance herself from the cruel image on the screen. But she had backed up against the wall behind her and had nowhere to go. The image of Yang Jian's severed head and body was deeply etched into her mind.

She covered her mouth, emitting a choked sound, tears uncontrollably surged from her eyes, and she was struck with immense shock.

...

"Whoo-who!"

Liu Xiaoyu bent over, crying and screaming, completely losing control of her emotions.

She herself didn't know why she was acting like this.

She only knew that Yang Jian had died, and she felt like she was about to collapse from the pain.

In fact, this wasn't hard to explain. During the nearly half a year she had served as Yang Jian's communication operator, her entire life and work revolved around him, with long periods of communication, his voice always in her ear, and sometimes maintaining contact for twenty-four hours straight.

She even knew clearly what Yang Jian was doing with a woman for the first time.

This long duration of life made Liu Xiaoyu feel as if she existed just for Yang Jian, and a very special kind of relationship had already formed between the two of them.

This wasn't love, but a kind of spiritual pillar, something indispensable to her life.

Therefore, last time when Liu Xiaoyu was nearly bullied by Gao Zhiqiang at the headquarters, Yang Jian didn't hesitate to eliminate the guy – not a moment of hesitation. Liu Xiaoyu also knew about some of Yang Jian's nerdy quirks, like how she would always greet him with twin ponytails and dressed in Lolita fashion.

But today, everything had collapsed.

Liu Xiaoyu had even seen Yang Jian's tragic state with her own eyes – that body lying in a pool of blood, a head severed from the neck, brain split in two.

The impact was too great.

Crying, screaming.

Liu Xiaoyu vented her emotional breakdown in her own dedicated communication room. This condition lasted quite a while until she regained some composure and then, while still crying, dashed out of the communication room and ran to Vice Minister Cao Yanhua's office.

"Ping'an Hotel, the entire street nearby has disappeared? Is it a Ghost Painting incident?" At this moment, Cao Yanhua received a critical call.

The voice on the other end was Li Jun: "It's unclear. I'm on site now, and it's certain that this is the Ghost Domain. The whole street must have been pulled into the Ghost Domain, but it doesn't seem like a Ghost Painting incident because the Ghost Domain caused by a Ghost Painting can't make an entire street disappear. The situation here has completely affected reality..."

"Alright, I got it. Temporarily block the surrounding area, assess the level of danger, and report any updates at once. If there's danger, I'll immediately send support for you," said Cao Yanhua, his expression turning grave.

Could this be another supernatural event?

An entire street vanishing into thin air? This was no small matter.

"Bang!"

However, right at this moment, his office door was forcefully barged open, the loud noise slightly startling him.

Setting down the phone, he saw Liu Xiaoyu standing at the door.

She was panting and crying at the moment, her emotions seeming very unstable.

"Liu Xiaoyu, is there something you need to report?" asked a staff member next to him in surprise.

Liu Xiaoyu's red eyes were fixed on Cao Yanhua, her lips trembled, and she delivered news she found hard to articulate: "Yang, Yang Jian is dead."

Huh?

Cao Yanhua was initially stunned, taking a moment to process before he saw Liu Xiaoyu's state and reflected on her words, beginning to realize the severity of the issue.

"What did you say?"

He suddenly stood up from his chair, his face instantly contorted with a drastic change.

"Yang Jian is dead," Liu Xiaoyu repeated, then collapsed to the ground and wept uncontrollably.

Cao Yanhua glanced at the phone next to him. Li Jun had reported earlier that a street had disappeared, swallowed by the Ghost Domain. If that Ghost Domain was not caused by a Ghost Painting incident, then it was very likely due to Yang Jian, because Yang Jian's codename was Ghost Eye, a spirit controller with his own Ghost Domain.

He then looked at the time displayed next to him.

The time showed 6:15.

This time was just shortly after the last response in the circle of friends... combined with the previous call that was suddenly cut off with Yang Jian.

Cao Yanhua immediately understood everything.

"Everyone follow me," he barked with a somewhat ferocious look, demanding obedience.

He then left the office without another word and rushed toward Liu Xiaoyu's communication room.

On the way there, Cao Yanhua's palms were trembling, and amidst the fright, there was an indescribable rage.

Chapter 580 The Effect of the Curse

At this moment.

Liu Xiaoyu's personal communication room was already filled with people, all of whom were some of the most influential leaders at the headquarters, with Vice Minister Cao Yanhua leading them.

All of their eyes were fixed on the screen above the communication platform.

The screen displayed a bloody scene, with a headless corpse lying on the ground and half of Yang Jian's pale, ashen face.

This image came from the camera on Yang Jian's satellite-positioned phone, so there was no doubt about its authenticity.

Even though Liu Xiaoyu had just tearfully informed them of this fact, when they actually saw the scene, everyone fell silent.

Yang Jian was dead?

The famous Ghost Eye Yang Jian from the Supernatural Circle had died like this on a common street in our city, his body severed, his head split in two, a sight too horrifying to endure.

And Yang Jian hadn't died in some supernatural event; instead, he was suspected to have been killed by someone from his circle of friends.

There had been continuous reports that an entire street near Ping'an Hotel had vanished, and Li Jun hurried over to investigate, guessing it had been swept into some Ghost Domain. Now it seemed, this must have been caused by the ghostly resurrection following Yang Jian's death.

"This is bad."

After a moment of silence, this was the only thought in many people's minds.

It wasn't just the problem brought by one person's death, but a series of chain reactions that left them stunned, unsure of how to handle the situation.

Once the news of Ghost Eye Yang Jian's death spread, how many spirit tamers would resign on the spot? Even if they didn't resign, who would dare to stay here? If there was a mass personnel shift, what would happen to the Ghost Painting incident? Could it still be resolved smoothly?

Besides, the ghosts that emerged following Yang Jian's death were already showing signs of resurrection; otherwise, the street wouldn't have disappeared. And if he were to fully resurrect, what level of supernatural event would that be?

It would have to be classified as at least an A-level event, surely.

Which means that a significant number of people would have to be allocated to deal with the ghost of Yang Jian.

"Vice Minister, what do we do now? Yang Jian is dead..." Shen Liang's face also bore a trace of shock.

Although uncertain, the sight of Yang Jian's body still sent chills through him.

He was acutely aware that Yang Jian had life-saving items like the substitute doll, the Ghost Candle; under normal circumstances, he shouldn't have any issues. But now he had died without even the chance to light the Ghost Candle, that red candle lying next to the body, soaked in blood, extremely conspicuous.

Cao Yanhua's face was terrifyingly grim; he had never felt as bad in his life as he did today.

Anger, humiliation, almost enough to overwhelm his sanity.

He clenched his fists tightly, veins bulging, and in that moment, there was even the impulse to kill.

"Call, make a call to Jang Shangbai, ask if it was done by their circle of friends," Cao Yanhua managed to suppress all his rage forcefully, and said through clenched teeth,

What?

Yang Jian was killed by someone from his circle of friends?

Cao Yanhua's words left many who were still in the dark completely dumbfounded, but those who already knew of the situation remained calm.

"I'll make the contact right now." A responsible person immediately began to make the call.

Despite the high probability of suspicion, Cao Yanhua still had his wits about him, so he wanted to confirm this fact.

Before long.

Inside the top-floor meeting room of Ping'an Tower.

Jang Shangbai, who had been sitting here for a meeting without leaving, heard his phone ring.

Jang Shangbai took out his phone and hesitated for a moment.

"Is it from headquarters? If so, they must be coming to reprimand us, it looks like President Fang has succeeded, and Yang Jian... is most likely dead," someone let out a cold laugh.

Others sighed in relief.

With Yang Jian dead, it meant that many in the circle of friends could now sleep easy, not having to disappear or die in confusion like Zhang Jian, President Fei, and He Tianxiong.

"How should I answer this call?" Jang Shangbai fell silent.

The death of Yang Jian did not seem to please him; instead, he felt the situation had become serious.

Previously, Yang Jian was indeed targeting the circle of friends, but what about after Yang Jian was gone? The problems didn't decrease; now the circle probably had to face the tactics of headquarters.

"Just tell Cao Yanhua that it was us who killed Yang Jian; that's the response from our circle of friends."

At this moment, the elevator opened, and Fang Shiming appeared in front of everyone. His complexion was not good, beads of sweat still present on his forehead, as if he had just experienced something extremely dangerous. Yet, his expression remained calm.

"President Fang, maybe we can play for time, no need to admit it so soon; delaying a bit could be good," someone suggested.

Fang Shiming said, "Do you think we can keep this news hidden?"

He glanced over everyone present. Aside from Jang Shangbai, it was possible that there were others from headquarters amongst them. He could clearly be aware of every move made by headquarters, just as they knew most of the intelligence on the circle of friends.

Both parties were well aware of each other's situation, so on such a major issue, it was impossible to keep things completely concealed.

Instead of being docile, it was better to admit it directly and face it with strength.

Showing weakness at this time would be a foolish act.

"Jang Shangbai, say whatever you want to say; if Cao Yanhua dares make any move, tell him I can take down Yang Jian just as I can take down Li Jun, Cao Yang, all his team captains, and turn his headquarters into a shell. If he knows what's good for him, he'll act as if today's events never happened."

"The circle of friends remains as it was, and we will also assist fully with the Ghost Candle incident, and by the way, we'll take care of Yang Jian's body."

Fang Shiming didn't take a completely hard line; he gave Cao Yanhua a way out.

"President Fang, is it really okay to say something like this?" someone's eyelids twitched, feeling that it was like pouring fuel on a fire.

Fang Shiming let out a cold laugh: "Who is Cao Yanhua? Just a common politician. What else can such people do besides compromise? Each and every one is looking before and after, needing to consider the bigger picture, afraid of losing control of the situation, and not wanting to increase the loss. After losing Yang Jian, would he really risk adding several more team captains?"

"Even if he had the audacity, there are ministers above him, and others above the ministers... it's not up to him to decide."

"Do you know why I don't join the headquarters and prefer to stay in the circle of friends as a corporate president? It's because I see through this; to me, Yang Jian was a gift. It's his close team members we should be wary of, lest they retaliate suddenly. But they are nothing more than insignificant small fry that can't do any real damage."

"Jang Shangbai, my words should be clear enough now, right?"

"You're the president; once you've decided, I have nothing more to say," Jang Shangbai shook his head slightly and answered the phone, connecting with someone from the headquarters.

A short while later, the call ended.

The communication ended.

Inside the communication room of headquarters.

With a suppressed voice, Cao Yanhua asked, "What did Jang Shangbai say?"

The manager making the call also had an ugly expression on his face as he discovered the mobile phone, "There's an admission, the Friends Circle is saying they took out Yang Jian, here's the explanation for you, Deputy Minister. If you want to take action against the Friends Circle, they're ready to oblige. They wouldn't mind knocking down a few of our team leaders to leave us with nobody to use."

"Moreover, they said that as long as we treat today's incident as if it never happened, they'd vigorously assist us. They'd help deal with the Ghost Painting incident and even take care of Yang Jian's corpse."

Before he'd finished speaking, Cao Yanhua was so furious his eyes were blood red, and with a kick, he sent the office chair of Liu Xiaoyu flying, "This bunch of bastards, they've gone too far. Order everyone to put aside their current tasks, even the Ghost Painting incident. Not handled for now. Give me half a day, I give them half a day to take out the Friends Circle."

"Shut down all the industries related to the Friends Circle, arrest all involved personnel. If they resist, kill them on the spot."

"Have Old Qin make a trip to Ping'an Tower, and bring over the murderer who took out Yang Jian."

This response fueled Cao Yanhua's rage even more, and he couldn't wait even a single night to start dealing with the Friends Circle right away.

"Stay calm, Deputy Minister. If we act like this at this moment, the situation will spiral completely out of control. If the Friends Circle people fight desperately, we may indeed lose a few more team leaders. The big picture is what's important." Someone's face turned pale, and they immediately began to persuade him.

"Yang Jian is already dead. We can't add more Ghost Controllers to the dead for the sake of a deceased person. This sort of retaliatory action is wrong."

"The urgent priority is the Ghost Painting incident, and the issue of Yang Jian's ghost resurrection after his death. The Friends Circle needs to be dealt with, but not right now."

The majority did not agree with Cao Yanhua's order.

"What are the rules for, do I need to repeat them for you? Yang Jian was a responsible person. The Friends Circle took out one of our leaders, under these circumstances, we absolutely cannot let them off," Cao Yanhua bellowed, "Stay calm my ass, if we don't deal with the Friends Circle now, we're finished."

"This is too serious. We need to notify the Minister. Moreover, Deputy Minister, you are too emotionally agitated at the moment. Under these circumstances, we can refuse your commands, and I will write a report afterward." Still, no one agreed with his behavior.

Shen Liang stayed silent, with a slight squint in his eyes, he was very clear about the reason for this scene.

Simply put, they didn't want Yang Jian's death to affect others.

Everyone wanted to stem their losses.

Meanwhile, at the doorway.

Liu Xiaoyu, with eyes red from crying, saw the arguing scene inside and was momentarily stunned.

It seemed that Yang Jian's death was no longer so important.

At the same time,

On a street covered in red light, a headless corpse lay silently on the cold ground. A brain, sliced in half by something, lay near the body, with blood continuously flowing from the severed neck, soaking everything around it in a pool of blood.

As time passed, less and less blood flowed from the body, the pool of blood around it gradually congealing, leaving only the cold and death behind.

No one dared to approach the corpse.

Passersby who discovered the body kept their distance in terror, and a few called in to report the crime.

But what they did not notice was that the corpse's hand still clutched an old wooden Eight-Tone Music Box.

The Music Box was slightly open, with a pitch-black interior that revealed nothing but an indescribable ominous aura—as if out of place in this world, belonging to some antiquated object that had been discarded.

Ding, ding ding...

A crisp, ethereal sound resonated faintly around, as if a child with a lovely voice was singing beside you. Listen to the individual notes and you'd find them pleasant and melodious. But when combined into a piece of music, they struck an eerie, hollow note that brought despair and a chilling sensation.

Curiously, although people kept their distance in horror after discovering the body, not a single one heard the sound. Perhaps it was too faint for them to notice, or maybe these eerie notes weren't meant to pulse for them.

Regardless, the music emanating from the Music Box was real.

And the only listener was the headless corpse lying in the pool of blood.

Such a scene appeared to permeate the soul with terror.

Yet, as time ticked away, the frigid body that should have sunk into darkness and vanished, found the once-lost consciousness of a living person gradually returning, as if a spirit was being summoned back from hell by the ringing of an Eight-Tone Music Box.

No one noticed the eyes on Yang Jian's head, split in two, void of life and luster, were slowly regaining a glimmer of light.

The disappearing consciousness was returning.

Heaviness, exhaustion, and the icy grip of imminent death began to fade away.

A thought process belonging to Yang Jian was slowly awakening, and that faint, absent music was becoming increasingly clear.

At that moment, Yang Jian was sure he heard it.

He heard the melody of an Eight-Tone Music Box echoing in his mind, a sound that seemed to possess an incredible power, rousing him from the slumber of death, just as an alarm clock awakens a sleeper.

"Am I, still alive?"

He did not know how long had passed, but at some point, Yang Jian's consciousness fully recovered, allowing him to think normally. And his thoughts were clearer and more profound than at any previous time.

Without the influence of pain, fatigue, cold, hunger, or any other physical sensations, his thought process reached the best state of his life.

He was more lucid than ever.

However, this state was highly illogical because Yang Jian's head was not only separated from his body, but also split in two. Under such circumstances, consciousness should be impossible; he should have been long dead.

Yet Yang Jian understood very clearly that he was still alive.

Despite his body's condition being inadequate for survival, a terrible curse persisted in keeping his consciousness alive.

"Is it the curse of the Eight-Tone Music Box that has allowed me to live? It seems that my earlier choice was correct. Although I admit there was an element of gambling, it appears I have gambled correctly," Yang Jian thought very clearly.

He had forsaken the replacement doll and the lighting of the Ghost Candle, staking his life solely on the Eight-Tone Music Box.

It required immense courage.

Because Yang Jian did not understand the object, he was completely unaware of its true function and power, and was without confidence in it.

But the result was still fairly positive; he was alive and had not been eliminated.

"But my current state seems very bad."

Although he was "alive," he could no longer see clearly; everything was pitch-black. It seemed his eyes had necrotized, losing the ability to see.

Deprived of vision.

However, it seemed he could still hear.

A series of eerie bell tones formed a snippet of music that echoed incessantly, repeating and playing endlessly as if it would never cease.

To describe the sound more accurately, it was not so much resonating next to his ear but directly emerging within his mind.

Surrounding his consciousness.

Just like a strange piece of music inserted abruptly into the middle of a movie, it felt very out of place.

"However, now is not the time to be concerned with this. That strange previous assault seems to have stopped, and I should think about how to recover..." Yang Jian told himself with clear thinking that the crisis was not yet over.