



他们都说
我遇到了

鬼

青色羽翼 [作品]

They All Say I've Met a Ghost - 青色羽翼/Cyan Wings

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CHAPTER 1 - Accepting a Job Offer (Part 1)

My name is Shen Jianguo. I am twenty-six years old. I finished graduate school this year and am in the process of looking for a job. Over the past few years, I have frequently shared some materials and subjective views concerning my field of study on my homepage. Of course, no one has read them. With my schooling over, I am faced with the awkward period of looking for work. Many of my elders have said that this is a very challenging period. Starting today, I will record my experiences and observations during this period on my homepage, in the hope that I can provide some trifling amount of help and insight to students who are about to graduate and face the difficulties of looking for work.

My field of study is Ideological and Political Education. Its employment prospects aren't as good as in some popular fields of study. Shortly before my undergraduate graduation, I also tried to find a job. I submitted many resumes, most of which sank like stones into the sea. Generally, only large businesses seek personnel for Party and government work, but at the time the response I got from them was that their minimum threshold was a graduate education.

So I resolved to take the Graduate Entrance Exam and enrich myself, to become more accomplished and to meet the employment requirements.

In the first half of my graduate year, I sat the National Civil Service Exam, the Public Institution Exam, the Teacher's Exam, and other such exams. Unfortunately, I hadn't prepared enough. I lost too many points on the Administrative Aptitude Test. I didn't even pass the written portion. The Administrative Aptitude Test stresses numerical calculation, detailed logical analysis, and spatial reasoning, as well as the speed of filling in the answers. My abilities are somewhat deficient in these areas, so I missed my chance this

year. Before I take the test next year, I will definitely have to practice these skills to overcome my weaknesses.

I spent a month knocking around the employment market looking for job postings to submit resumes to, but small companies thought that my graduate education was too high; they needed some sturdy, hard-working undergraduate or vocational student. I raised my hands to show that I was young, strong, and able to bear hard work, but they still refused me, for the reason that the base pay was too high.

As for the large companies, they were occasionally recruiting personnel for Party and government work. This time, I did meet the minimum threshold. Unfortunately, I didn't perform well during the interviews. Employers thought I wasn't mature enough and politely turned me down.

To tell you the truth, I felt a bit lost. The purpose of taking the graduate entrance exam had been to give myself more choices and opportunities for employment, but now I was either overqualified or underperforming. It was really frustrating.

In addition to that, having already graduated, I would have to move out of my school dormitory in a few days, which added to the pressure.

I was practically at the end of my rope. I was so upset my hair was falling out. Every morning I swept away a bunch of short hairs. This made me very worried. Many of the older students I knew had started going bald after thirty. I was twenty-six, not very far from thirty.

If couldn't find a job, I might have to change the photo on my personal page from a head of dense buzzcut hair to a bald pate.

Fortunately, heaven helps the willing. While I was searching everywhere for a cheap room to rent, a training institute I had submitted a resume to responded to me.

This was an all-inclusive training institute, including a Graduate Entrance Exam class, a night school class for self-examination, a Civil Servant Exam class, as well as a College Entrance Exam crash course, CET-4 and CET-6 English classes, etc. It wasn't well-known. I hadn't even heard of this "Midnight Harbor" training institute.

I recalled that at midnight three days ago, when I was refreshing the employment website, I suddenly saw a job posting that said: "Base salary 5,000, with bonus; housing and transportation included; no requirements for field of study, gender, age, or educational background." It looked very unprofessional. There wasn't even a contact number, only an e-mail address. But the terms were very good, especially the part about housing being included, which could greatly reduce the stress of my employment prospects.

In the spirit of casting a wide net, I submitted my resume, then forgot about it. I hadn't expected that in the end this company would be the one to extend an olive branch towards me.

I was ecstatic when I read the e-mail with the offer of employment, but after my initial happy surprise, I felt there was something strange here.

A job posting with no requirements, not even an interview, just a look at my resume and they decided to hire me... It looked like the work of a Multi-level Marketing scheme or a scammer.

Fortunately, the reply did have a phone number. I could call first to find out what was going on.

I dialed "94444" and soon got a reply from a mechanical female voice: "I'm sorry, this international company is in a different time

zone, please call after midnight.”

I thought carefully and concluded that I couldn't miss out on such a good opportunity. What if it was real? At midnight that night, I dialed the number again.

This time someone answered. It was a lady. She spoke slowly, in a chilly voice. “*Bzzt...bzzt...Hello...bzzt...*”

What a bad signal. So much static.

I cleared my throat and spoke in my most refined manner. “Hello, I am Shen Jianguo, who submitted my resume a few days ago. I received your reply today. I'm very grateful to you for giving me this opportunity, but you haven't interviewed me yet. Are you really sure about hiring me? You haven't even seen me, how can you know I am the person you need?”

“*Bzzt...Shen Jianguo...bzzt...young, neat, no ill feelings at school...bzzt...a good...bzzt...we have investigated...*”

The signal was really bad. “A good...*bzzt*”? I guess she meant to say I was a good student.

I was slightly relieved to hear this. If they could investigate me like this, it showed that they were a responsible employer. This didn't seem like the work of an MLM scheme or a scammer. Those didn't care about moral character; they just wanted people.

“I am glad that you have such a high opinion of me. Now could you tell me where I should go to formally accept the position? There's no address in the reply e-mail.” I glanced at the computer and shook my head. The e-mail was so ugly.

It was dark red, with some special effect added to the font to give the impression of flowing blood if you looked at it too long. With the

page open, I felt that my computer was about to start bleeding. It was an unpleasant sight.

Still on the phone, I went to close the page. I clicked the “X” in the upper right hand corner, but the computer froze and the page didn’t close.

I’d bought this laptop when I had just started university. It used the now obsolete XP operating system, and the specs were poor. It had only 1GB of RAM, and it belonged to the country’s 1% slowest loading computers. It crashed on a daily basis and wouldn’t turn off unless I pulled out the battery.

Right now, I didn’t have time to pull out the battery, so I closed the computer and kept talking.

“Bzzt...Now...go to the Farther Shore Estate¹...Building 4, Unit 4, Apartment 404...bzzt...bzzt...beep-beep-beep.”

Huh?

The call dropped? I tried to call again and received the notice: “The number you dialed is out of service range.”

Was she really abroad? Was that what made the signal so bad? Had she just boarded a plane?

I racked my brain fruitlessly and wondered whether I should go to the address she had mentioned.

It was midnight. If I went to the estate now, wouldn’t people think I was a burglar? But if I didn’t go, I’d have to move out of the dormitory tomorrow...

In the end it was poverty that forced me past all difficulties. I decided to look up the estate on the internet first.

When I turned on the computer screen, the bloody e-mail was still open. It was truly an awful sight. I went to remove the battery, but it seemed to have taken root on the computer. It wouldn't come out.

I knocked on the computer as roughly as if it had been an old-fashioned TV, and the battery finally came unstuck. The computer shut off and rebooted.

Online, there really was some information about the Farther Shore Estate, Building 4, Unit 4, Apartment 404. Some people on the local message board said it was haunted. Generally, hotels and apartment buildings would skip the number 404, considering it unlucky and treating it as a taboo number. But something had gone wrong with the developer when the building was built. He absolutely had to have a number 404. He couldn't sell it. Finally, the price was lowered, and someone did buy it; less than half a year later, the new owner got into a car accident.

His family transferred the apartment to another family at a low price. After less than a week, the lady of the house went crazy.

In order to pay for her treatment, the apartment was sold again.

It seemed that the Fengshui was really bad. Each owner of this apartment came to a bad end. Even the developer was later stabbed; it seemed that it was the crazy lady from the second family who did it. Who got the apartment later was unclear. There were notices up year-round that it was available to rent or buy, but no one paid attention.

I was a staunch materialist who had studied politics. Of course I didn't believe in such utter drivel. But I could also understand why my new employer would rent this apartment.

Simple: it was cheap.

I no longer hesitated about the included housing. I put on my backpack and went to the Farther Shore Estate. Though it was midnight, what if there really was someone there to meet me?

I had just walked out of the dormitory building when my phone rang.

It was the “94444” number. She must have found a signal again. I picked up and heard the person on the phone say, “*Bzzt...No need...to walk...bzzt...there’s a school bus...bzzt...*”

”A school bus? That’s great!” I said excitedly. ”No wonder the job posting said transportation was included. And I was just worrying that there wouldn’t be a bus this late!”

Of course it was impossible for a poor student like me to call a taxi. I’d been planning on taking a bike share.

”Right, you...wait at...the school gate...*bzzt...bzzt...last digits 444...beep-beep-beep.*”

The signal cut off again. I hadn’t had time to ask the lady what I should call her. She really was a kind and considerate lady, to prepare a school bus for a student like me.

I stood at the school gate and waited. It was very foggy today, and the visibility was very low. I was a little worried about the bus driver’s safety. It was so late, and he had to take the trouble to come pick me up.

Within five minutes, two ghastly pale points of light appeared in the fog. A red bus slowly stopped in front of me. The end digits license plate were “444.” The letters or numbers in front of that were blocked by the fog.

The door opened slowly. I got on the bus and saw that there were no passengers. The driver was wearing a black cap. I couldn't clearly make out his face in the darkness. Had my nearsightedness gotten worse again?

Seeing so many empty seats, I chose the nearest and went to sit down. The driver suddenly said, "You can't sit there."

I looked at him in disbelief.

"The seats have just been painted. Heh. Heh. Heh," the driver said slowly.

I looked at the seats. True, the red paint on them was still sticky. I definitely couldn't sit there.

I had to grab the handrail and stand on the way to the Farther Shore Estate.

CHAPTER 2 - Accepting a Job Offer (Part 2)

Though it was summer, it was cold on the bus. The back of my neck was chilled, as if someone was standing behind me blowing on it.

“Sir, could you turn the air-conditioning down?” I asked uncomfortably.

Without turning around, the bus driver coldly put me off with the words, “Passengers please behave, don’t harass others.”

I was pretty speechless. I was the only person on the bus, and I had just spoken to the driver. Was I harassing him? Leaving aside the question of sexuality, I thought this was an attack on my character.

I, Shen Jianguo, was born on National Day. I lived under the red flag and received the benefits of a solid education. Since childhood I had been a triple-A student, an outstanding member of the Communist Youth League, and an outstanding student civil servant. He could question my abilities as someone who had just entered society, but he absolutely couldn’t question my moral character!

I wanted to justly defend myself, but after the driver said these words, the chill decreased considerably. He must have turned the air-conditioning down for me.

My heart softened at once. It was so late, and the driver had gone out alone to pick me up from school. He must have been immensely frustrated. To look at it from his point of view, I was going to a haunted community in the middle of the night for the sake of a job, and it was still putting a damper on my mood; the driver may have been sleeping at home when he was woken up. It was no wonder he was irritable.

This was only a little tiff. There was no need to get heated with him.

“Thank you, sir,” I said to the driver, smiling.

But the driver remained unfriendly. He turned to look at me, his face indistinct in the darkness. I could only see his eyes, sharply reflecting the light.

He laughed grimly. “I hope I can see you again tomorrow.”

He was wishing me success in being formally employed. He was a driver with a cold exterior but a kind heart. It was too bad his temper was rather stiff. It made a bad impression. But once you knew him better, you would understand he was a good person.

“Thank you,” I replied warmly.

The driver was very steady. Though it was very foggy, he still drove peacefully and without any bumps all the way to the Farther Shore Estate.

While getting off the bus, I said, “Sir, tomorrow I may go back to school to get my luggage...”

I was still speaking when the door callously shut and the bus drove away, leaving not even a puff of exhaust behind.

I knew I’d been wrong. I hadn’t even started working, and I was already asking the driver to help me move my luggage. The company vehicle had no responsibility to help me take care of my private business. To move, I would need to find a moving company. But I’d really been so hard up lately. Well, tomorrow I could rent a pedi-cab. It might be cheaper.

To make a good impression, I was wearing my only proper outfit, specially prepared for interviews: a button-down, a tie, a suit, and black leather shoes. I went to Building 4 and stood downstairs

nervously adjusting my tie, making sure I was clean and spotless. Then I went into the elevator.

The lights in the elevator flickered, and it kept stopping. In the dead of night, this was kind of scary. The management of the Farther Shore Estate seemed to be very lax due to the developer having been stabbed. On the message board there had been people complaining that the property management's service was unsatisfactory. It looked like that was true.

I inwardly bolstered myself: Shen Jianguo, stay strong! A green college student just starting to work has to go through a difficult period. That the job comes with housing is already very good, how can I be so picky about what the housing is like? So what if the elevator isn't safe? It's only the fourth floor. Next time I can take the stairs.

The elevator's weight capacity was average, and it was rather slow. It took ten floors' worth of time to get to the fourth floor, and I was nervous the whole time, afraid the elevator would get stuck along the way.

But luckily that didn't happen. I arrived without incident on the fourth floor.

The lights in 404 were on, and the door was open. I knocked on the door and politely said, "Is there anyone there? I'm Shen Jianguo, the applicant for the teaching position. A lady told me to come here now to move into the employees' dormitory."

"It must have been Principal Zhang." A short man wearing a jacket and a beret came out. "Please come in."

I examined my future dormitory as I followed him into 404.

The lights were a little dim. It looked like I would have to change the bulbs when I'd been paid my salary. These surroundings weren't suitable for preparing for class.

The curtains were too thick. The shady side of the building didn't get much sunlight to start with, and with such thick curtains the place really felt depressing. I would have to change them to thinner ones.

On the other hand, the apartment was quite clean, and there was a lot of space. There was a living room and three bedrooms. In the living room was a desk with two chairs. The short man sat down on one side and gestured for me to sit across from him.

He really was very short, probably not even a meter sixty. I had noticed he walked on tip-toe, as if trying to make himself appear taller.

Ah, I understood what a pain height could be. I was malnourished as a child. In my first year of high school I was only 1.5 meters tall, skinny and short, shorter than the girls. My classmates often made fun of me, and I felt inferior. Fortunately, I took part in a competition and earned scholarship money. The quality of my meals improved. I drank more milk and ate more meat, and during my third year of high school, I grew over twenty centimeters. Now I was 178 centimeters tall. I regretted that I hadn't made it to 180, but it was still a good height for this country. I was satisfied.

"You're Shen Jianguo, right?" The short man didn't look so good. His face looked pale and bloodless in the light. He must have been burnt out from staying up late. "Principal Zhang said you should sleep in the master bedroom tonight. If you're still alive tomorrow morning, you can go to work."

"Is Principal Zhang the lady whose phone number is 94444? Is she the head of our training institute? Anyway, it's only sleeping here for

one night, what could go wrong? You don't believe that talk online about this place being haunted?" I asked carelessly, smiling.

The short man looked up at me. I saw a wound at the edge of his forehead and said in concern, "What happened to your forehead?"

"Oh, I bumped it," the short man said woodenly.

"You already know my name, so could I ask how I should address you?" I asked, reaching out a friendly hand. I knew this was perhaps my future colleague.

He didn't shake my hand. His hands remained on top of the table, and he smiled. "My surname is Ju."

"Is it the 'ju' in 'furniture,' or is it 'ju' as in 'residence'? What an uncommon family name." I drew my hand back a little awkwardly. I hadn't expected to meet with unfriendly treatment from a coworker when I was just starting out.

I had heard from older students that sometimes immature old employees would bully younger ones in the office, mainly because they were afraid of having their work stolen. But most of these people only did these childish things because their own skills were inadequate and they lacked self-confidence and thought the newcomers posed a threat to them.

I told myself not to be angry, answer him with a smile.

The guy stared at me, slowly shaking his head. "Neither."

"Then which character is it?"

"It's the 'ju' in 'chainsaw.'"

I frowned slightly. Was that surname included in the *Book of Family Names*?

“Do you belong to a minority ethnic group?” I asked doubtfully. I’d had some classmates in school who belonged to minority ethnic groups, and some of them had had very odd surnames that didn’t appear in the *Book of Family Names*.

He shook his head again, tilted his neck, and slowly stood up. “You see, I’ve always been short. Taller boys have bullied me since I was little. They kicked me, hit me, said I definitely wasn’t a real man, forced me to take off my pants so they could make sure. Sometimes they would get bags of milk powder and stuff them into my mouth and say I had to drink more milk to get taller. I nearly suffocated. I clutched my throat and begged them to give me water to drink, but they only laughed and said if I wanted to drink I could only drink piss.”

Hearing this made me feel sad. I could understand somewhat why his attitude towards me wasn’t good. Tall boys had left him with a psychological shadow. His aversion wasn’t towards me specifically but towards a whole group of people.

But I had faith that when we interacted in the future, he would come to understand what kind of person I was, and I would work hard to use my own experiences to help him overcome these difficulties.

I stood, went around the table, and took his right hand in both of my hands. In my most sincere voice, I said, “It wasn’t your fault, it was theirs! No matter what age or what reason, bullying others is always wrong!”

“I know.” Mr. Saw’s face was very stiff, his smile a little false. “Of course it wasn’t my fault, it was all their fault. Weren’t they tall because their legs were long? No problem, I just had to saw their legs off!”

“ ... ”

Looking at his joyful expression, I was temporarily speechless. I wasn't a psychology student. I had no experience in these things. I had no idea how to talk him down from such an extreme idea.

“One long leg, two long legs, three long legs, four... So many, so long, I carefully measured and cut them down so they would all be the same height as me.” Mr. Saw's expression was rapt, as if he was immersed in beautiful memories.

This was wrong! I let go of his hand and surreptitiously put my hand in my pocket, wanting to call the police.

“When I sawed off all their legs, their screams sounded so good, like the music of nature. I jumped off the building amidst those beautiful sounds. That was the happiest day of my life.” Mr. Saw stood and pointed at his forehead. “Because I jumped off the building, I have a wound on my head now. It would be inappropriate to take off my hat and show you.”

“Mr. Saw, have you ever thought of going to see a psychiatrist?” I found my phone and quickly unlocked it, trying to dial 110 without looking. In this situation, a smartphone wasn't as good as a phone with a keypad. I couldn't find the keys at all.

Mr. Saw went on: “You aren't especially tall, but your legs are long. I like your legs. Would you let me saw them off?”

“Of course not!” I refused, slowly backing away.

Mr. Saw was also standing. He raised his left hand, which had been hidden under the desk. He was holding a chainsaw.

“Then I’ll have to use force. Relax, it won’t hurt.” He slowly walked towards me.

I stared at him without blinking, not daring to look away, trying to be prepare myself for a sudden attack. He moved forward, and I kept backing up, until my back was against the wall. A cold feeling reminded me that I was close to the door, so I started to shuffle in that direction.

Mr. Saw didn’t seem to be in a hurry to hurt me. He stood up on his toes, licked his lips, and watched me grope for the doorknob and give the door a shove.

The doorknob didn’t move. He had locked the door!

“You can’t get out,” he said, turning on the chainsaw, which buzzed loudly, piercing the silence of the night. “Be good now. Give me your legs, and I’ll let you walk away.”

“If I give them to you, I won’t be able to walk away!” There was no way to escape now. I threw myself at him and grabbed his wrist, meaning to snatch the chainsaw away.

CHAPTER 3 - Accepting a Job Offer (Part 3)

Mr. Saw was unexpectedly weak. When I grabbed his arm, he couldn't raise the chainsaw.

"You!" He stared at me in shock, as if he wanted to ask why I was so strong.

Of course it was because I exercised regularly, often took part in extracurricular activities, had chosen Taekwondo as my elective, and knew a little about all kinds of martial arts. Dealing with an ordinary person was no problem.

Mr. Saw fought desperately. A chainsaw was a dangerous tool, after all, so the back of my hand got cut in the struggle.

Fortunately it was only a flesh wound. I snatched away the chainsaw and pressed the switch.

The chainsaw didn't respond very well. It didn't turn off the first time, so I pressed the switch harder. Blood from the cut on the back of my hand dripped onto the switch. This time, the chainsaw turned off readily. The buzzing came to a stop.

I kicked the chainsaw away. Having taken care of the dangerous weapon, I now had to deal with Mr. Saw. If, as he himself had said, he had already sawed off several people's legs, then I had to call the police.

But when I looked at him, I saw Mr. Saw had fallen to the floor, his eyes rolling up into his head and his tongue hanging out.

I quickly ran over to shake him, but he looked even worse, his face as pale and bloodless as a corpse in a TV show.

“What’s the matter with you?” Although he had just tried to attack me, I still acted in the spirit of humanitarianism, repaying evil with good. If I managed it badly and got a mark on my record for using excessive force in self-defense, it would make it even more difficult to find work.

“B-blood...” His legs flailed on the floor. He looked very ill, as if he was about to start foaming at the mouth.

“Blood?” I looked at my injured hand, then waved the wound in front of his eyes. “You mean this?”

“B-blood...” Mr. Saw’s face was agonized.

I made a guess, then took off my jacket and shirt. I regretfully used my newly bought white shirt to wrap the wound and stop the blood.

As I’d thought, Mr. Saw looked much better when he could no longer see the blood. He slowly got to his feet, supporting himself against the wall. He watched me warily, constantly looking for the chainsaw out of the corner of his eye.

I thought at first that he was going to take this chance to pick it up and attack me again, but instead when he saw the chainsaw he collapsed again. His eyes rolling up, he said, “B-blood...”

Now I was even more convinced. I took a napkin out of my bag and wiped my blood off the chainsaw.

When I had cleaned up all the blood in the room, Mr. Saw at last returned to normal. He clung to the wall, looking darkly at me. “Pure Yang blood! You’re twenty-six years old. Are you actually still a virgin?!”

I’d meant to have a good talk with Mr. Saw, but hearing this, my face went red at once

“So what if I am?” I was very angry. I hated these kinds of personal attacks. “In school, I was focused on my studies. I wasn’t about to pick a partner at random based on physiological impulses. I wouldn’t play with people’s feelings that way. It would be irresponsible towards myself and others. What’s wrong with being a virgin? Do I have to have gone through hundreds of partners to be a man? Even though I’m a virgin, my spirit is still indomitable, and my conscience is clear.”

Mr. Saw must not have expected that I wouldn’t be humiliated like some self-important guys, but instead would forthrightly defend myself. He was struck dumb by my words and could only stare at me.

I had just gone through a battle and didn’t have the strength to argue. I pulled over a chair and sat down. To Mr. Saw, I said, “There are some things we need to talk about. Whether or not I call the police depends on our conversation.”

Mr. Saw looked at me grimly.

I waved my injured right hand at him. Seeing the blood soaking through the shirt, he turned his face away in terror.

I was finally able to confirm my guess. I asked, “Mr. Saw, does the sight of blood make you sick?”

I must have hit the nail on the head. He twisted his head to look at me.

“When you saw me bleeding, your grip on the chainsaw weakened, and you let go, letting me snatch the chainsaw away,” I analyzed. “You’ve seemed unwell ever since.”

Mr. Saw pounded his chest and began to cough violently. I wanted to pat his back for him, but when he saw me approaching he immediately screamed, “Ah! Stay away from me!”

There was nothing for it. I had to back up towards the door and quietly wait for him to calm down.

“Are you sure I shouldn’t call an ambulance? Even though it’s only a psychological issue, if someone with cardiovascular disease or asthma has a bad reaction to seeing blood, it can be very dangerous.”

Mr. Saw looked even worse now. His lips were purple, very much as if he were having trouble breathing.

“No need!” He glared furiously at me, then repeated, “Why a virgin, why a virgin? What’s the date and time of your birth?”

I didn’t want to debate the virgin problem with him. People’s views of the world built up slowly over time; a single debate wouldn’t be enough to change them. So I only answered the last question: “I was born around noon on National Day.”

“The day with the strongest Yang energy...” Mr. Saw began pounding his chest again. He didn’t seem to have any care for himself. The smacking sounds upset me.

“Stop hitting yourself!” I told him. “Tell me the truth. I’ll decide based on your answer whether to call the police.”

“I get sick at the sight of blood.” He looked fearfully at my hand wrapped in my shirt. “Keep your wound away from me.”

I put my right hand behind my back, then asked, “Since you’re afraid of blood, how could you saw off other people’s legs? That’s illogical.”

“Illogical?” He rolled his eyes.

With Mr. Saw so uncooperative, I could only keep guessing. “Do you often have hallucinations? My height triggered some bad memories, so you tried to do the things you hallucinated? Is that right?”

Truthfully, I hoped Mr. Saw wasn't a chainsaw-wielding maniac who had injured people. He was short and lacked self-confidence. His life was hard to begin with. If he really had committed a crime and had to go to prison, his future would be even more difficult.

Now that I had evidence of him being afraid of blood, I was naturally more inclined to think Mr. Saw had gone temporarily mad, and that he hadn't hurt anyone before.

If that was the truth, then as long as I didn't discover that Mr. Saw had maliciously injured others, I could counsel him to seek treatment for his mental illness. Then he would gradually improve.

I asked another series of questions, but Mr. Saw refused to cooperate. He wouldn't answer my questions directly.

There was nothing else I could do. I fished out my phone and dialed 110. If Mr. Saw really was innocent, the police would treat him accordingly.

The cell signal in 404 was bad. I tried a few times without being able to call out. I wanted to go out to look for a signal, but it wasn't a good idea to leave Mr. Saw alone. What if he went crazy again and ran off with the chainsaw?

I was at my wits' end when my phone rang. It was the “94444” number.

Now there was a signal!

I picked up the phone and immediately said, “Hello, am I speaking to Principal Zhang?”

“That’s... right...*bzzt*...” Principal Zhang’s voice was still slow, and the signal was full of static as before.

“There’s something I want to talk to you about, a problem concerning the receptionist in Room 404. He calls himself Mr. Saw. He hasn’t told me his real name. Could you tell me if you’re aware of his psychological condition?”

“I... know...*bzzt*...”

“He tried to attack me with a chainsaw, and I fended him off. This behavior is very dangerous. I think that the school authorities should step in. Also, he talked about committing suicide by jumping off a building. His account of himself is full of holes. He even said he was already dead. I think his mental illness is very serious. He needs institutional treatment.”

“He never.... killed anyone... while living... *bzzt*...”

Why couldn’t any of the people at this training institute make sense! Why did they have to keep talking about living people as though they were dead?

I said somewhat indignantly, “Principal Zhang, Mr. Saw is only mentally ill. He isn’t dead. We should help him, take care of him, not ignore him.”

Right now I didn’t care that I was talking to my future boss. I could do without a job where the employees tried to saw your legs off without provocation.

“*Bzzt...*I know... Tomorrow...I’ll send...a professional...*bzzt...*Stay there...tonight... ..bank account number... ..transfer... .. emotional damage...*bzzt...*”

Principal Zhang’s call dropped again. After all this fuss I had no strength left to argue, so I texted my bank account number and username to Principal Zhang, then turned to look at Mr. Saw.

He was leaning against the wall with his eyes closed. His expression was exhausted. He seemed to be sleeping.

I glanced at the three bedrooms. Each room had a bed. I picked Mr. Saw up so I could put him to bed.

Mr. Saw startled awake. When he opened his eyes and saw me, he looked terrified. He tried to wrestle himself free.

I was speechless. Why was he the one who was scared?

“Which is your room?” I asked irritably.

He looked up and pointed at the darkest room.

I put him on the bed, then sighed. “Since Principal Zhang says you haven’t killed anyone, I’ll trust you. Tomorrow, the school will hire a psychological counselor to come help you. Don’t try to cover up your problems. I’ll be there with you.”

Hearing that I would be there, Mr. Saw looked petrified.

Seeing that he really was afraid of me, I left the room and closed the door. While I was leaving, I said, “I’ll sleep in the room next door. Wake me if you need anything. Don’t think about running off with the chainsaw. I’m a light sleeper.”

To prevent him from hurting anyone, I took the chainsaw and put it on the edge of the bed in the master bedroom. If anyone came to take the chainsaw, I would definitely sense it.

Lying in bed, I thought about how scared Mr. Saw was of me. It must have been that he took me for one of those people who had bullied him before. That made me feel bad. I didn't know whether to feel sorry for him or to be angry.

My body felt heavy. Too many things had happened that night. I closed my eyes and gradually fell asleep.

When I opened my eyes again, it was already broad daylight. I wiped drool away from the corner of my mouth, then reached out for the chainsaw. It was gone!

Surely I hadn't been so fast asleep that Mr. Saw had come in and taken it without waking me?

I vaulted out of bed and dashed out into the living room. I saw a young man with slanting eyebrows standing in the middle of the room. He wore a yellow robe with a design of the Eight Trigrams embroidered on the back. He was holding a wooden sword.

I felt like I had been transported into a television drama. Doubtfully, I said, "Uh... you are...?"

He looked me over from head to toe, snorted, then coldly said, "You are truly fortunate."

CHAPTER 4 - Assuming My Post (Part 1)

From what he said, I understood this was the professional Principal Zhang had hired. His clothing was really quite unprofessional.

I went to Mr. Saw's room first. Not only was the chainsaw gone, Mr. Saw was gone, too.

"No need to look for him. I've already taken care of it." The young man looked at me with his arms crossed. "You must be very bold to dare to sleep in this apartment for a whole night. Leave quickly. If you stay in this apartment any longer, you'll have no idea what hit you."

Then he swished out of the room. He had come and gone like the wind, without even telling me his name.

I stared into space for a while. I didn't really understand what he meant by "taken care of it" and "no idea what hit you." I hadn't seen any trace of Mr. Saw. Had the young man already taken him to be treated?

If that was the truth, then I could rest assured. But whatever way you looked at it, everything about the young man, from his get-up to his speech to his behavior, didn't seem to belong to a psychiatrist or a policeman. I was uneasy. I took out my phone to contact Principal Zhang, to ask her what exactly this professional did.

As soon as I unlocked my phone, I saw two text messages. They had come while I'd been asleep. One was a notice of a transfer from my bank: Principal Zhang had transferred ¥15,000.00 to me. The other text was from the 94444 number:

"Ten thousand is in compensation for emotional distress. Five thousand is your first month's wages in advance, to help you settle

into your new residence. Mr. Saw has been taken away by the professional to be taken care of appropriately. There is no need for you to worry. Two other colleagues live in Room 404, including one who will move into Mr. Saw's former room. They work during the day and will only come home at night. They won't bother you. Our institute's classes are all scheduled at night. I will send the class schedule to you tonight. You are free to do as you like during the day."

I haven't said yet that I want to work for you guys! What kind of person would want to work at a place where he'd nearly had his legs sawed off by a prospective coworker the day before?

But when I looked at the fifteen thousand yuan, I...

I decided to get in contact with Principal Zhang and talk things over. As long as she could guarantee that Mr. Saw hadn't committed any crimes and that he was getting proper treatment, and that the other two colleagues didn't share Mr. Saw's proclivities, I was willing to work at the training institute for the sake of those fifteen thousand yuan.

But Principal Zhang's phone was still out of service range. Was she in the mountains in some foreign country? Why was the signal so bad?

I went around the apartment a couple of times. Those fifteen thousand yuan in the bank were really galling. The employer had already demonstrated so much sincerity; if I refused now, wouldn't it be a little unfeeling of me?

That was when I got a call from the manager of my school dormitory, asking when I planned to move out. There was a new graduate student who wanted to move in.

I looked yet again at the message about the fifteen thousand yuan transfer. I clenched my teeth and steeled my heart, then told him that I had already found a new job and would be coming back to move out.

I couldn't miss out on this job because of the other workers. I had to move.

Now that I had money, I was no longer thinking of renting a pedicab. I went back to school, packed my bags and boxes, and hired a moving company to come help me move.

After moving my things to the Farther Shore Estate, I went to the supermarket to buy some basics. I changed the bedding, cleaned up the rooms, and swapped the curtains for thinner ones.

I didn't dare touch my other two colleagues' rooms. I only tidied up the common areas.

The rooms were very dusty. I had no idea how the others had lived here before. How could they stand to live in such a dirty apartment?

Room 404 was well-stocked with appliances, at any rate. There was a washing machine, a refrigerator, and a water heating tank. But the pots and bowls were covered in rust. They were really unusable. I planned to cook my own food in the future to save some money, so I bought new kitchenware.

I didn't throw the old ones out. I exerted myself to clean them.

The faucet in the kitchen must not have been used for a very long time. When I turned on the tap, the water was red as blood, full of rust. After I'd run the water for a while it finally cleared. The tap in the bathroom was the same.

Cleaning such a dirty apartment was a great labor. By the time I was finished, it was already six in the evening. I'd had no time to cook. I ordered some take-out, ate it and threw out the trash, then went to take a shower.

In regards to taking a shower, I was luckily quite clever. I remembered in time how there had been rust in the bathroom and kitchen faucets, so I first let the water run until it was clear before I dared to shower. Otherwise I might have ended up stained red all over.

After showering, I felt exhausted. I lay down in bed and fell heavily asleep amid the glow of sunset.

When I opened my eyes, it was completely dark. I looked at my phone and saw that it was 23:59. There hadn't been any texts or calls.

Hadn't Principal Zhang said she was going to send me the class schedule tonight?

Now that I'd been paid, I couldn't slack off. I took the initiative and called Principal Zhang myself. This time the signal was all right. The call went through.

"Principal Zhang, why don't we add each other on WeChat? Your signal is always bad. My WeChat signal is the phone's signal." As soon as the call connected, I got straight to the point. I had to say the important things right off. What if the call dropped again and I lost my chance to say them?

"Bzzt...All...right...bzzt..."

Was Principal Zhang elderly? Her speech kept getting slower and slower.

We added each other on WeChat and I sent her a message at once: *Principal, how is Mr. Saw?*

Hospitalized.

She also sent me a picture of Mr. Saw wearing a hospital gown. He seemed to be abroad. The name tag on his chest wasn't in Chinese. It read "jutuigui²."

It seemed his surname really was Ju. What was his full name, then?

I spent a lot time trying to work out what characters it could be made up of, then gave up. Anyway Mr. Saw was hospitalized. The surroundings looked pretty good. I could finally relax on that count.

So Mr. Saw really didn't hurt anyone?

He didn't. Principal Zhang's answer was just as succinct as before.

I believed her, because I was personally inclined to believe Mr. Saw hadn't hurt anyone. After all, he was scared of blood. He wouldn't have voluntarily harmed anyone.

Now that he was receiving specialist treatment I hoped he would be able to get past this psychological shadow and face life with a positive attitude.

Principal Zhang, please send me the class schedule and class syllabus. I hope to have time to prepare.

Tomorrow night at midnight, Benevolence School, Third Year, Fourth Class classroom. Lecture on anything you like.

" ... "

The time went completely against my expectations. This wasn't an international enterprise that needed to make contact with partners abroad. Why would the class be at night? And hadn't Benevolence School closed three years ago? Apparently a student had jumped off a building. Many students had changed schools. The private school, which had once had such a high enrollment rate, couldn't stay in business; it had closed down. How could there be classes there? But the school buildings were still there. It would be possible to rent them out.

Putting aside the first two points, there was still the last one, about lecturing on anything I liked. What did that mean? Don't you guys know what you teach at your training institute?

I was about to discuss this with Principal Zhang when she quickly sent two messages:

I'm going to sleep.

Good night.

Then she recalled her messages one by one, as if she didn't want me taking a screenshot. Everything from "Hospitalized." to "I'm going to sleep." was recalled. Only the "Good night." remained.

Had we really been talking for less than two minutes? She had even been able to recall the first message. What kind of shady technology was this?

It was very irregular. I called her again. Of course she was out of service range.

I was astonished by her casual manner and stared emptily at the wall. Then I heard the sound of the toilet flushing in the bathroom and thought my colleagues had arrived.

I should ask my colleagues, get some advice from my seniors. They had been working at the training school for some time. They should know about what to teach and what kind of students we had to deal with.

I walked out of my room and saw that both the other doors were tightly shut. I didn't know which to knock on.

It didn't seem like a good idea to bother people in the middle of the night. I went hesitantly into the bathroom, wondering whether it wouldn't be better to ask in the morning. It was already midnight. I should sleep.

I meant to go to the bathroom then go back to sleep, but when I opened the toilet lid I saw a tangle of long black hair floating in the toilet.

At this sight all the blood in my body flowed outwards. I immediately left the bathroom and stood in the middle of the living room. I said:

“Who threw a wig into the toilet? Don't you know it's going to clog? Don't you have any public spirit?!”

I was really furious!

CHAPTER 5 - Assuming My Post (Part 2)

I stood in the living room howling for a while, but the doors of the two bedrooms stayed shut.

What could I do? I couldn't be like Mr. Saw and pick up a chainsaw to vent my frustration. I had to stomp downstairs and go to the 24-hour convenience store by the community's gate to buy a plunger, a pair of rubber gloves, and scissors.

Back in 404, the hair was still floating in the toilet. Maybe because the water was overflowing, it looked like there was more hair than before. I put the plunger aside and tried to flush. The thick wig was clogging it up so that it couldn't flush at all. The toilet bowl was completely clogged.

It was time to use my newly purchased Toilet Clearing Suction Device!

I aimed the plunger at the drain and applied pressure with explosive force. The water level did go down a little, but the hair continued to float there. It hadn't come up and it hadn't been forced down. I followed the instruction manual, pressing down and flushing for over half an hour. Sometimes the hair would go down for a while, then fan out again. I couldn't resolve the clogged toilet problem at all.

There was nothing for it. I had to use my method of last resort.

I put on the rubber gloves, picked up the scissors, and started cutting away the hair. The plunger used air to force the pipe clear, creating a vacuum. It used pressure to force the object blocking the water pipe to dislodge or dissolve. But with the hair itself tangled around the pipe, it seemed this small amount of pressure wasn't going to be enough. But if I kept cutting the hair piece by piece, it should loosen the tangle.

Come to think of it, this wig was pretty good quality. It must have been made out of real hair. This type of wig was much more costly than the kind made out of synthetic fibers. Which of my colleagues was so wasteful as to throw away such an expensive thing?

When I had cut away all the hair, I furiously went at it with the plunger again. This time the result was good. I heard a thunk, and the tangled hair finally came loose. I pressed down on the toilet handle again. This time all the hair was flushed down.

To prevent strands of hair from coming back up, I didn't ease up until I'd flushed several more times.

By the time I was through with all of this it was one o'clock. My forehead was covered in sweat. I earnestly washed the gloves, plunger, scissors, and myself, put everything away, then finally left the bathroom.

As soon as I walked out, I jumped. There was a man wearing black-rimmed glasses and a Zhongshan suit standing in the living room looking at me.

I felt embarrassed. Pointing to the bathroom, I said, "Sorry, did I wake you? The toilet was clogged. I cleared it up."

He gazed intently at me without speaking. I had to find something to keep talking about.

"Someone threw a wig into the toilet. I was afraid it would interfere with other people using it, so I tried to flush it. My name is Shen Jianguo. I just moved in today. We'll be roommates from now on. What should I call you?"

I warmly held out my hand.

But he kept his hands in the pockets of his suit pants and stared at my hand. In a hoarse voice he said, “Liu Sishun. I’ve lived here several years.”

I remembered that I had just flushed the toilet. Even though I had washed my hands, there were people who might take issue anyway. I awkwardly drew my hand back and said, “I’m very sorry to bother you.”

Liu Sishun looked very refined. He didn’t seem like a transvestite. The wig probably wasn’t his.

“It’s fine. I go to bed late.”

“Are you also a teacher at the training school?” I asked.

“You could say that.”

“Oh. I heard from Principal Zhang that I had two roommates in 404 who I could only see at night. You must be one of them. We’ll be living under the same roof now. We can look after each other.”

“Yes.” Liu Sishun backed away. He seemed not to want to get too close to me.

I felt hurt. Did I smell bad after unclogging the toilet? I hoped that was it. Otherwise being snubbed by a colleague I had just met would make me very upset.

I could only keep talking without having anything to say. “And my other colleague? I hope I didn’t bother them, too.”

“You just flushed down... Oh, no, that wig you flushed down belonged to our colleague. I think we won’t be having anyone move in now,” Liu Sishun answered.

“Why? Did I do something wrong? Wasn’t that wig meant to be thrown away?” I didn’t make an issue of my colleague clogging the toilet.

“It’s not that. She’d meant to move into Lao Ju’s room, but now that you’re living here, it would be awkward to live with a gentleman. She’s decided not to move in.”

“So the other colleague is a lady. That is a little awkward, but if she doesn’t live in the employer’s housing, won’t that put economic strain on her?” I was concerned. After all, I knew what poverty was like.

“It’s all right. She doesn’t pay to live anywhere. It’s only that after a while she gets kicked out. Sometimes she even gets beaten.”

Gets beaten? I felt uneasy. “Does she live at her boyfriend’s house? Does she get abused there? That can’t be allowed. Should I call the police?”

Teacher Liu had been expressionless this whole time. Now he smiled and slowly approached me, not stopping even when he was right in my face. I wasn’t in the habit of rubbing faces with strangers, so I was forced to back away. But he kept coming closer, until finally I was stuck motionless against the wall. Teacher Liu took his left hand out of his pocket and pressed it against the wall.

“You walk your sunlit path, and we’ll walk our Naihe Bridge³. Principal Zhang hired you to teach, so I won’t trouble you. But take care to mind your own business.”

Was I... being threatened? Why would he threaten me for worrying about a colleague I hadn’t even met?

I was a person who had watched Detective Conan. I quickly reviewed the dialogue we had just had. When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, is the truth!

“Have you also been abusing this female colleague? Did she throw the wig in the toilet in a gesture of silent resistance?”

I quickly constructed the mental image of a weak woman who had suffered abuse. After getting the keys to 404 from Principal Zhang, she had come here in the middle of the night, angrily thrown the wig in the toilet, then turned around and left this place where she had been hurt.

Liu Sishun’s expression stiffened. I threw off the hand he had pressed to the wall and fearlessly looked directly into his eyes, which had a faint dark blue cast. “I am a person who has only just entered into society. I may encounter many unspoken professional rules at work. I’m prepared for that. As long as they aren’t illegal, I can force down my emotions and quietly accept guidance. But if your conduct has gone so far as to hurt others, I absolutely can’t sit by and watch. Please tell me how to get in touch with this lady colleague. If she won’t dare, then I’ll get justice for her!”

I could always find a new job, but I couldn’t lose my principles of being a good person. If a crime was being committed right in front of my eyes, I couldn’t just look the other way.

Liu Sishun must have been intimidated by my imposing manner. He backed up, and I followed closely, pressing closer and closer, the same way he had just done to me. This time it was Liu Sishun with his back to the wall.

I struck the wall and loudly said, “Talk! Have you been bullying this lady colleague?”

“N-no...” Liu Sishun’s arms trembled unnaturally, and his legs began to give way. All the bluster had gone out of him.

“And why does she stay for free at other people’s houses and get beaten?”

“Sh-she sneaks into strangers’ houses at night. When they find out, they throw her out.” Liu Sishun folded down into a crouch, covering his head with his arms. “Y-your wound is open, d-don’t come near me...”

Getting thrown out of strangers’ houses at night? Was she a thief or a squatter? What kind of people was I working with?!

I pulled Liu Sishun up. “Get in touch with her. Tell her to move into 404 and not do illegal things anymore! I can guarantee my moral integrity. I won’t interfere with her in any way. As long as she observes the law, I absolutely won’t let anyone hurt her again!”

“I-I’ll get in touch with her, don’t touch me!” Liu Sishun screamed.

He really was a paper tiger, fierce on the outside but weak on the inside. He had been so imposing earlier, but as soon as I struck the wall with my fist he turned cowardly.

I clenched my fist at him. Liu Sishun fearfully got out his phone, turned away, and dialed a number. While his back was turned, I shook out my hand. I hadn’t had time to go to the hospital today. I’d just hastily wrapped up the wound. It hadn’t healed, and now it had opened again. It hurt quite a bit.

“Hey, hurry back here,” Liu Sishun said into the phone. “No, you have to come back, or else I’ll...”

It wasn’t right to listen to other people’s phone calls, so I went back to my room to get my first-aid box and wrap up the wound afresh.

When I left my room, there was a short-haired woman in white clothes standing in the living room. She was dripping wet. She looked at me darkly.

Liu Sishun was pretty efficient! She'd come back so quickly. Fair enough, she'd just thrown the wig away a little while ago. She wouldn't have gone far.

“Hello, my name is Shen Jianguo,” I said to her in a friendly manner. “I'm a newly employed teacher. Can I ask your name? What job do you do?”

“Li Yuanyuan... Toilet... cleaner...” said Li Yuanyuan, her voice long and drawn out.

Perhaps she was a little near-sighted. Her gaze when she looked you was very direct, her eyes not moving at all.

“Why are you all wet? Has someone been bullying you?” I couldn't take the sight of her soaking wet clothes. It really was hard out there for a girl.

She seemed to want to nod, but then she looked at me and shook her head instead. “No... I went down into the sewers... to swim...”

What nonsense was this?

If Li Yuanyuan didn't want to say, then I wouldn't ask again. Everyone had their own troubles. I couldn't interfere with her life. As long as she could guarantee she wouldn't sneak into people's houses again and didn't get forced out of the dormitory by my presence, I wouldn't pry into her business.

And I also wouldn't mention that her haircut looked as ugly as if a dog had been chewing on it!

When we knew each other better, I would have to ask her where she got her hair cut. I would definitely go out of my way to avoid that hair salon!

“You’ve just moved in. Where is your luggage?”

“I don’t need any...” Li Yuanyuan slowly shook her head again.

I got a new towel and a new set of bathing utensils from my room. I had bought them all that day. They still had the tags on.

“This is for you,” I said. “Go take a hot bath so you won’t catch cold. Set your mind at ease, I’m not interested in women. I won’t do anything to you. Let’s live here in peace.”

To give Li Yuanyuan some breathing room, I pulled Liu Sishun into my bedroom.

“Wh-what do you want?” Liu Sishun asked fearfully, retreating into a corner.

“Don’t worry. I like guys, but you aren’t my type!” I went on to explain, “I just wanted to make Li Yuanyuan more comfortable. At the same time, I’d like to ask for your guidance about what I’m going to teach tomorrow.”

CHAPTER 6 - Assuming My Post (Part 3)

I had originally left my room to ask my colleagues what to teach tomorrow. This school was full of unreliable types, from the principal down to the toilet cleaner. They hadn't even had me sign an employment contract, and they had sneakily sent my first month's salary while I was sleeping.

Of course, this was good for me. No contract meant that I could leave the training school at any time without any restrictions.

But having taken the salary advance, even if the school had irregularities, I still had to earn the salary they'd given me. Even if Principle Zhang was lax, I couldn't be careless.

This was one of the fundamental principles of being a good person.

"Can you tell me what kind of group of students I'll be teaching tomorrow?" I asked Liu Sishun modestly. "Are they receiving vocational training, or preparing for the graduate entrance exam or the Civil Service Written Exam, or what?"

Liu Sishun was surprised. He pushed at his glasses for a while and said, "None of those."

"Well, what do you usually teach?"

"I just teach the right way to be a gho—person," said Liu Sishun. "You really can say whatever you like. It'll be fine."

"And this training institution can still find students?" I couldn't help myself. Was this really an MLM scheme? But what kind of MLM scheme could operate like this? You couldn't develop any downlines.

“Not many students. After all, everyone is cremated these days.” Liu Sishun sighed and said with a melancholy expression, “I still remember that during the Republic, I had companions everywhere. It wasn’t lonely at all. But since the founding of the People’s Republic, there have been less and less of us in this trade.”

I couldn’t understand him at all.

“Might I ask what Teacher Liu does?” I ventured.

“Oh, I like to write strange stories to earn some money on the side. I also work at the school teaching the vernacular.”

“Oh, a Chinese teacher, and a part-time writer.” I nodded. No wonder I didn’t understand what he was saying. It was normal for a novelist to have some unusual ideas. I remembered reading somewhere on the internet that after the founding of the People’s Republic, some creators were limited in what they could write. Teacher Liu must have been talking about that sort of thing.

“It’s just teaching people to read and speak. I wouldn’t call it being a Chinese teacher,” Liu Sishun said. “You may not know, Teacher Shen, today’s gh—people get worse and worse with each generation. It’s heartbreaking to think about what we used to be like. But some of the new gh—newcomers don’t even speak properly. It’s really heartbreaking. What I can do at the training institution is just teaching them how to speak. For example, Li Yuanyuan. When she first came, she couldn’t make a sound, so Principal Zhang had her live with me for extra lessons. She’s better now, but she still speaks a little slowly.”

At this point, I understood what kind of students this training institute was tasked with teaching.

It seemed to be people on the edge of society, like Mr. Saw, who suffered from mental illness due to his short stature, or like Li

Yuanyuan, who had special hobbies and problems communicating with others.

For these people, the most important thing was to acquire the skills they needed to integrate into society and to receive psychological counseling. Some subjects that appeared on exams weren't so important.

And it was no wonder that Principal Zhang had said that I could just say anything. She'd probably hired me because she'd liked my ideological and political education credentials and hoped I could help these students establish a correct world view.

To think of the establishment of such a training school, Principal Zhang really must have been a kindhearted person, while Teacher Liu, patiently teaching these students to communicate with ordinary people, must also be very kind. I had really wronged him before.

When he'd warned me not to meddle in their business, he must have been worried that I didn't understand the significance of hurting these sensitive people unintentionally.

I grasped Liu Sishun's hand, brimming with apology and sincerity. I said, "I misunderstood you before. Teacher Liu is a moral teacher who cares for his students, an example that I should learn from. This is my first job. I'm really lucky to meet a teacher like Teacher Liu. "

Liu Sishun trembled and said, "I-if you have something to say, just say it, don't paw at me."

He must have been frightened by my earlier public announcement of my sexual orientation. Teacher Liu looked like he was in his forties. I supposed it would be hard for him to accept that my sexual orientation was different from other people's. It was a matter of course that he would be afraid of physical contact.

I let go of Teacher Liu, bowed to him, and said in a loud voice, “I apologize for my rude behavior before.”

Teacher Liu trembled again when he heard my operatic intonations.

Maybe it was being alone with me in my bedroom that was stressing him out. By now enough time had passed for Li Yuanyuan to have taken a bath, so I opened the door and said, “It’s so late. Teacher Liu should rest. Going to bed early and getting up early is good for your health.”

Liu Sishun saw me open the door and ran out of my room so fast that I could hardly see his legs moving.

It hurt me a little. We were colleagues and we would be roommates in the future. Because of an impulsive mistake, I had hurt Teacher Liu’s sensitive and fragile heart. I really had been wrong. I had to find a chance to shake hands and make peace another day.

Liu Sishun rushed out of my room straight into his room. He shut the door tightly, as if to prevent me getting in.

I also planned to go to bed, but heard the sound of water coming from the bathroom. It didn’t sound like the shower.

The door was ajar and the lights were off.

I turned on the lights in the living room and looked into the bathroom by the dim light. Li Yuanyuan was squatting beside the toilet, looking earnestly into it. Her head was almost inside it.

Ah, special people did have their own particular obsessions. No wonder Principal Zhang had arranged for Li Yuanyuan to clean the toilets.

I pushed open the bathroom door. Considering propriety in dealings between men and women, I didn't go in, but stood at the door and said, "It's late. You should go to bed."

Li Yuanyuan saw me standing by the door and shuffled away from me, clutching her hair.

She didn't seem to understand what I was saying. Her eyes turned stiffly, and she looked at the toilet... and at the plunger beside it.

"You should go back to your room and go to bed," I advised as gently as I could.

"I want... to sleep here..." Li Yuanyuan put her head on the toilet water tank and closed her eyes quietly.

I couldn't understand her obsession with the toilet, but if she really slept here it would be awkward getting up to go to the bathroom at night.

"Do you like the bathroom, or just the toilet?" I was trying to communicate with her.

Li Yuanyuan thought for a moment, then pointed to the toilet. "This."

"Well, I'll buy you a clean toilet tomorrow and put it in your room so that you can see it before you go to bed every day, OK?"

Li Yuanyuan was a little slow to react. More than ten minutes passed before she nodded stiffly, stood up, stared at me, and said, "It's a deal."

"Yes, it's settled. I'll give it to you as a gift." I mean what I say.

"No take backs, or else..." she said. She looked at my strong-looking arms and shook her head. "Never mind."

After that, she stood up and left the bathroom as if floating. She went into the room Mr. Saw had occupied and closed the door.

At least she had left. I wiped away my sweat and went to the bathroom very uncomfortably. After washing my hands, I went back to my room to sleep.

I slept until it was light. I opened the curtains to let the sun shine in. I stretched and did a set of bodybuilding exercises.

Teacher Liu and Li Yuanyuan's doors were open, and they were gone. I had been too deeply asleep to hear them go. Next time I'd have to get up in time to wish them well on their way.

Through the doors, I saw that each of their rooms had a single bed and a desk. The sheets and quilts were all white, and the two rooms were almost identical.

The only difference was that Teacher Liu had a book on his desk, while Li Yuanyuan had a messy short wig on her bed.

This was quite in line with their personalities.

I had made a promise to Li Yuanyuan and couldn't go back on my word. After I went out for breakfast, I went to the bathroom fixture shop and picked up a toilet that was exactly the same as the one in 404.

If the good Principal Zhang finds out about this, could she reimburse me? I thought expectantly.

I bought two more lamps, one for the living room and one for my room.

When they heard that the lamps were for Apartment 404, Unit 4, Building 4, Farther Shore Estate, the lighting technicians all refused to go. One also advised me, “Young man, you can’t live in that place just because the rent is cheap. It’s haunted. My relatives rent 403. I heard that the toilet at 404 flushes all the time in the middle of the night, and there’s always the sound of a chainsaw sawing things. It’s terrifying!”

He must have been talking about Mr. Saw and Li Yuanyuan. Without coming into contact with them, who could imagine the reality?

They were just some eccentric tenants, but hearsay had turned them into ghost stories. It was probably always like that.

I couldn’t say anything to the lighting technician. Seeing that he really didn’t want to go, I asked about the setup method, planning to set them up myself.

He was very embarrassed and gave me a discount. I didn’t blame him for not helping me with the lamps.

After carrying the toilet home over my shoulder, I put it into Li Yuanyuan’s room. The first gift I’d ever given to a girl in my life, and it was a toilet. What a ridiculous thought.

Referring to the manual and the instructions that the technician had given me, I set up the lamps without a hitch. It was afternoon by the time I finished all the work. I had to start thinking about what I was going to teach that evening.

In fact, I’d already had some thoughts. Since Principal Zhang hoped that I could help her students establish a correct world view, it was naturally a good approach to start from the cultivation of thought.

I pulled the textbook *University Students’ Ideological and Moral Cultivation* out of my bookcase. This was a textbook approved by

the Ministry of Education, the most suitable textbook for students who were about to enter society, which could help them establish their most basic outlooks on the world, life, and values. Of course it was also the most suitable book for the students in the training school.

I spent the afternoon preparing. I consulted an introduction to dealing with the psychology of special groups, to make appropriate alternations to the curriculum.

I went to sleep at eight o'clock in the evening and woke up at 23:30. Not long after I went downstairs, the school bus with the license plate ending in "444" stopped at the gate of the community.

When I got on the bus, I was astonished. One seat had been painted green. There was a note on it that said "Teacher Shen Jianguo's Seat, No Other Passengers." It was like a pregnant woman's seat on the bus.

I was speechless. There were no other passengers on the bus. I was the only one. Why did I have to have this special seat made for me? The other seats were red; mine was the only green one. It was really embarrassing.

The driver saw me standing motionless and said, "Sit down, I prepared that for you."

What could I say? It was kindly meant. I could accept being treated like a pregnant women and sit down.

CHAPTER 7 - Assuming My Post (Part 4)

This time the school bus wasn't so cold. It was very comfortable.

The driver didn't speak. In the dimness I fell fast asleep in my seat. In my sleep, I felt a bitter gust of wind around me. When I opened my eyes, it seemed that the cold wind was swirling away from me. The driver must have had the air-conditioning set to a very particular setting.

I dozed uneasily all the way to Benevolence School. The driver stopped the bus and said to me, "Get off. The classes usually take two hours. I'll pick you up at two o'clock. I'll wait for you until five o'clock in the morning at the latest. If you haven't come out by five..."

The driver looked at me very seriously. His eyes were shining in the night.

I quickly said, "You don't have to wait until 5 o'clock, dage. It's such hard work going out in the middle of the night. If I'm five minutes late, you can go home and rest. I'll get back on a bike share. It's summer, the nights are pleasant. I can get some exercise."

The driver ignored me and stubbornly said, "I'll wait until 5 o'clock. I hope you make it out."

He really was a dedicated and kindhearted colleague. As a new professional, I wanted to take the driver as an example and be a serious and responsible teacher.

As soon as I got out, the driver drove the school bus away, not even leaving behind a trail of exhaust. He really was an efficient person.

I looked up at my future place of employment. Benevolence School had been closed for three years. It looked very desolate from the outside. The gate was covered with dust and cobwebs. Evidently no one had come here for a long time.

Looking at the locked gate, I worried about how to get into the school. Since Principal Zhang had rented a classroom, couldn't she also have hired someone to manage the gate?

Seeing that the start of class was approaching, I took out my phone and sent a message to Principal Zhang: *The gate of Benevolence School is locked. How do I get in?*

Principal Zhang must have been keeping an eye out for news of her new employee. She immediately replied: *The east side, a little gate.*

Then she sent another message: *The students are very naughty and may pretend to be ghosts to scare you. If you are not afraid, it will be OK.*

Of course I wouldn't be afraid of some pranks. When I was a student, the male students often played pranks to scare people.

I quickly ran to the east side with my backpack on my back. I did indeed see a small red gate standing ajar. It looked like the red paint hadn't dried yet. I took a tissue paper from my bag and pushed the gate open with the paper to prevent the paint from getting on my hands.

The Fourth Class, Third Year classroom was very easy to find. That classroom was the only place in the whole school where the lights were on. I could see it as soon as I looked up.

Thinking that the students would be waiting for me in the classroom, I felt hurried and rushed inside. The automatic door opened for me.

The hall and corridor were unlit. The Fourth Class, Third Year classroom was on the fourth floor. I didn't dare to walk too fast in the pitch-black surroundings. First I took out my phone and turned on the flashlight to illuminate the first flight of stairs. Then I climbed up.

Every time I went up a flight, I first lit up the whole stairwell to make sure of my path before I started climbing. When I was halfway between the third and fourth floor, I saw something in the corner of the stairwell. The flashlight wasn't bright enough to see it clearly. I went over to the corner and saw a red dress.

No, it was a girl in a red dress.

Her hair was black and long and worn loose, screening her face, and her dress was very long. At first glance, I had only seen the striking red in the dark, which had made me mistakenly think there was only a dress in the corner.

The middle of the night, an abandoned school, a dark corridor, and a red dress in the corner. It really did seem like a ghost story. A timid person might really be frightened to tears.

I walked up in front of the girl and asked, "Are you one of the students for tonight's class?"

The girl still had her hair screening her face. She quietly said, "Yes."

If I hadn't met Li Yuanyuan before, I might have thought there was something dangerous about this girl.

Thinking of Mr. Saw and Li Yuanyuan, I thought that this school's students really had it hard. They probably didn't like going out and talking to people. I didn't force the girl to push her hair aside. "I'm the teacher tonight, Shen Jianguo. Just call me Teacher Shen. Why

don't you come into the classroom instead of sitting out here alone? Aren't you scared?"

The girl shook her head. Her long black hair rippled like a waterfall.

When I saw her beautiful hair, I couldn't help envying it. That hair was so thick. There could be no thought of baldness. I touched my forehead. I'd been going to sleep late the last few days. Tomorrow would be the weekend. I hoped Principal Zhang could arrange some classes during the day to let me adjust my schedule and save my hairline.

"If you're not scared, you should come to class."

She didn't speak, but reached out towards me. In contrast to her long black hair, her hand was very white, seeming to shine in the dark.

Long straight black hair, white skin, a slender figure. This female student had the three requirements of a beauty.

"Are you worried about not being able to see your way?" I naturally took the girl's hand. "Look down while you walk. Be careful."

I led her up the stairs by the hand. She followed me. When climbing the last step, she suddenly said quietly, "Teacher, did you count the steps when you went upstairs?"

"I was in a hurry to get to class. I didn't have time to count."

I wanted to go on, but the girl didn't move. She was pretty strong. I tugged on her hand, but I couldn't budge her. She remained on the last step.

"Teacher, I counted," she said obstinately. "All the other flights have twelve steps. If you count to thirteen, you'll meet a ghost."

“It’s normal for the stairs on the top floor to be a little higher, but that isn’t kind to obsessive-compulsive disorder. I had a roommate in university who couldn’t stand stairs with an extra step.”

Hearing her, I could understand why she had stopped halfway up the third floor stairs. She probably suffered from more severe obsessive-compulsive disorder. The other flights had twelve steps, and the last one had thirteen. She felt uncomfortable and didn’t want to go up.

What could I do? If she didn’t like it, I couldn’t force her to walk up; but the students in the classroom were waiting.

“Student, if you don’t want walk up, I can carry you up the last step if you’ll trust me,” I suggested.

“Ha ha.” She smiled, probably still not trusting me. After all, men and women should keep a distance. And she was a beautiful girl, and I was a man; my suggestion seemed like I meant to take advantage of her.

Behind me, she said, “Teacher, look into my eyes.”

Naturally, I turned. I saw a blood red eye among her black hair.

I looked closely and nodded. “Your contact lenses are very beautiful, and the color goes very well with your clothes.”

It really was obsessive-compulsive disorder; she had to wear perfectly matching clothes, too. I looked down at her shoes, a pair of red high heels, very delicate. I added, “The shoes are also very beautiful. But let’s go upstairs as soon as possible. The students are waiting. It’s not good to delay today’s class. I know it’s hard to climb the thirteenth step.” I put forward another workable suggestion:

“How about we go back down and count from the second step. Won’t that make twelve?”

Many people with obsessive-compulsive disorder understand that their thoughts are wrong, but they still feel the discomfort. Under those circumstances, it can help to give them a reason to convince themselves.

After a few seconds of silence, she asked, “Teacher, aren’t you afraid of me?”

That was interesting. Late at night, a beautiful woman and a strong young man. Was I really the one who ought to be afraid?

It suddenly occurred to me: she had been covering her face with her hair this whole time. Was there some deformity on her face that made her think I would be afraid of her?

It was very likely.

“I’m not afraid,” I said seriously. “I’m not afraid, no matter what you look like.”

“What if I look like this?” She raised her head abruptly. A wind came out of nowhere to blow aside her beautiful long hair, revealing a bloody face.

She opened her mouth and stuck out her tongue, wrapping it around my neck.

It was a good act. I could almost have believed she was a ghost if Principal Zhang hadn’t warned me in advance.

I grabbed the tongue and asked curiously, “Where did you buy this? It’s very realistic.”

After that, I pulled the fake tongue out of her mouth. The tongue was really well made. She screamed when it was pulled out. The girl tipped backward in response to the false tongue being pulled out. I quickly grabbed her to prevent her falling downstairs.

When I pulled her up, she bumped into my chest, and the blood from her makeup rubbed off on my new white shirt.

For the first day of class, in order to make a good impression on the students, I had bought a new shirt and put on a suit to attend class, but before I'd made it the last step to the classroom, the white shirt was ruined.

My heart ached over the price of the shirt.

Was this a work-related injury? Could Principal Zhang reimburse me for my shirt along with the toilet?

"I'm sorry, I don't mean to take advantage of you. I was afraid you would fall down." I quickly released her, took a tissue out of my bag, handed it to her, and said, "Go on and clean up your face. You're such a beautiful girl. It's not good for your skin to wear makeup like this."

"It's not makeup." She quietly looked up and showed me her bloody face. "I was standing on the tracks dressed in red. The train went by. I was covered in blood, not just my face. My whole body."

"Fine, fine." I nodded perfunctorily and wiped her face with the tissue.

It really was realistic. It smelled just like blood.

After wiping with the dry tissue, I took out a moist towelette to wipe it again. The girl's true features were finally revealed. She was

indeed a beautiful girl, with big eyes, white skin, a high nose, and an oval face. She looked about seventeen or eighteen.

She quietly watched me wipe her face, her eyes with their red contacts showing a trace of emotion.

“You’re very similar to the mortician who sewed up my body and made me all beautiful after I died. I was watching. I felt very grateful to him.” The girl’s voice had turned calm.

Although her words made no sense, I had to go along with them. “Why did you want to commit suicide on the tracks?”

“I was pregnant,” she said, touching her belly. “He not only refused to recognize it, he beat me and made me lose the baby. I missed the College Entrance Exam. Everyone knew that I’d had a miscarriage. I couldn’t go on with my life.”

No wonder she had enrolled in Principal Zhang’s school and was out here frightening the new male teacher in the middle of the night. She must bear a grudge against men.

I felt a little pity for this poor girl. She was so young. She hadn’t yet learned to protect herself when she met someone who couldn’t cherish her and had hurt her like this.

I reached out my hand, saw that she didn’t react, and stroked her hair. “There’s nothing in the world you can’t get past. When you think the sky is falling down, it’s actually the beginning of a new life.”

I was about to say something else encouraging when suddenly a beam of golden light flashed by. A wooden sword appeared from nowhere, pointing towards the girl.

I hurriedly pulled the girl behind me. When the wooden sword touched my clothes, it immediately bounced back. The golden light

shone above me. A young man in a yellow robe came out of the shadows and pointed at the girl behind me with the wooden sword. He said, "Doing evil again, foul creature!"

I was flabbergasted.

I grabbed the young man's wooden sword and recognized him as the professional who'd taken Mr. Saw away the other day. "Did you go to the wrong film set?" I blurted out.

CHAPTER 8 - Assuming My Post (Part 5)

The girl hid behind me, the hand holding my clothes trembling slightly. She was obviously frightened.

The young man was actually really strong. That sword just now had hurt.

“Get out of the way,” the young man said, pointing at us with his sword. “Don’t be misled by fierce ghosts. Ghosts that can show themselves in the current age are all tough customers. They’re extremely violent. Even if she doesn’t deliberately harm you, if you stay in contact with her for a long time, your Yang energy will gradually drain away and your health will get worse and worse.”

“You’ve misunderstood.” I shielded the girl in the red dress, not letting the young man frighten her further. “She was joking with me just now, right?”

The last part I said to the girl behind me. She immediately replied, “Yes, I was just playing a trick on the new teacher.”

I took this opportunity to instruct her. “Don’t go around tricking people in the future. Not even if it’s a joke. You must have heard the story of the boy who cried wolf. If you trick people over and over, eventually no one will believe the truth.”

“I’m sorry, Teacher Shen. I was wrong.” The girl’s voice grew smaller and smaller. She had learned her lesson. I was very satisfied.

“Are you blind?” the young man said coldly. “Turn around and have a look at what’s behind you!”

I looked back. Wasn’t it a pretty girl with a clean face? Fortunately, I was interested in men. Otherwise, I might not have been able to

resist being a beast of teacher—bad thought, I shouldn't be thinking it.

“Her face is covered in blood and her tongue is a foot long. What kind of person looks like that?”

“Oh, I get it,” I said. “You saw wrong. She pretended to be like that just now to scare me. A misunderstanding, it's all a misunderstanding.”

The girl nodded desperately behind me, tightly clutching my suit jacket.

“You... Student, I know you're afraid. Don't worry, I'll explain the misunderstanding. But first, can you not clutch so hard? My jacket... may not stand up to it.” I heard a tearing sound from behind and silently mourned for my only suit jacket.

First the shirt, now the jacket. My losses were too great!

“Your eyes have been bewildered by the fierce ghost's mystification. I won't say anything else to you. You will understand when I have gotten rid of her!” The young man snatched the wooden sword out of my grip with a little effort.

I was pretty strong, strong enough to wrestle the electric saw from the hands of the frenzied Mr. Saw. I had come first in the arm wrestling competition in my university department every year. I hadn't expected to find the handsome young man before me even stronger.

Thinking back to his steady steps when I'd seen him a few days ago, I thought I might not be able to best him, so I rushed at him and grabbed him by the waist. I said to the girl, “Run quickly! When he calms down, I'll explain it for you.”

The girl sounded a little emotional. “Teacher Shen, my name is Mu Huaitong. I’ll come attend your class in the future.”

She walked without a sound. I didn’t know whether she’d really run away or not. I could only keep up my struggle with the young man.

The young man really was strong. I heard constant ripping sounds. My suit jacket was turning into rags.

After a while of this, the young man’s struggles grew weaker. He gave me a push. “Get up. The ghost has run away already. How much longer are you going to pester me?”

I estimated that there had been enough time for Mu Huaitong to run out of the school, so I let go of the young man and got up. As I was getting up, pieces of my jacket fluttered off me. I picked up my phone, which had fallen on the ground, then gathered up the scraps of jacket using the flashlight. I couldn’t just leave garbage lying around in the corridor.

I couldn’t find that tongue from earlier. Mu Huaitong must have taken it with her. She really was a good student who cared about protecting the environment. I would have to praise her next time she was in class.

In the dim light of the flashlight, the young man stared at me coldly, his gaze like a knife, slice-slice-slice.

He didn’t speak. He glared at me for a while, then walked away, straight towards the Fourth Class, Third Year classroom. I remembered my students were waiting in that classroom, slapped my thigh, and followed the young man.

The door of the classroom was ajar. The lights were out and the students were gone.

I heard the WeChat message notification and opened it. It was Principal Zhang:

Because of today's emergency situation, class is cancelled, to be held another day. Your salary will be paid as usual for full time work.

Principal Zhang was such a warmhearted and nice person. I felt deeply moved and replied: *Principal, that professional you brought in before showed up and wanted to beat up a student. Isn't his disposition a little intense?*

I would have liked to say that I'd gotten my clothes torn up stopping him from hurting the student and wasn't that a work-related injury that I could be reimbursed for? Unfortunately, I didn't have the gall to say it.

Don't mind him, Principal Zhang replied simply.

But I think he has been deeply poisoned by superstition. He took the student's joke seriously and wanted to exorcise her. Principal, was it really OK for Mr. Saw to go with him? I'm a little worried.

Principal Zhang didn't reply immediately. When the young man saw the empty classroom, he snorted and said, "Ran off pretty fast, huh."

Then he looked back at me, grabbed the collar of my shirt, pushed me against the wall, and said angrily, "Next time clear your eyes. Don't be fooled by ghosts!"

He was stronger than me, and fierce. But I've never been an easy person to bully.

"Your frame of mind is all wrong. You have a big ideological problem." I glared back, increasing my persuasiveness with my

gaze. “In this day and age, it do to still believe in feudal superstitions and think that ghosts exist. Understand?”

Seeing me so indomitable, he released me. “What’s the use of talking to a muddled idiot like you.”

He shook his head, turned around, and with his wooden sword on his back walked away. His posture was light and easy, like a hero in a TV show.

But life wasn’t a novel or a TV show. You couldn’t live in an imaginary world. If he went out in the street like this, people would think he was a lunatic or a performer at a tourist attraction.

He walked very fast. I jogged a few steps to catch up with him and caught him before he started down the stairs. “Take it slow. It’s very easy to twist your ankle going downstairs in the dark. It’s very dangerous.” I passed him my phone. “Here, a flashlight.”

“No thanks.” He pushed away my phone. “I’ve opened my Yin-Yang Eyes. I can see in the dark.”

I was speechless.

This young man really had it bad.

I grabbed his yellow robe in one hand and held up my phone in the other hand to light the way.

He stopped and looked back at me. His expression wasn’t so piercing this time.

I gave him a friendly smile. “My name is Shen Jianguo, twenty-six years old. What’s your name? How old are you?”

Honestly, I was beginning to suspect he was one of the students at our school.

“Ning Tiance, twenty years old, 187th generation chief disciple of the Maoshan Sect. I am dedicated to rescuing you and all those who have been blinded by evil spirits.”

“What a coincidence! I am dedicated to guiding nice young men like you who have been fooled by feudal superstition back to the path of science and democracy.”

By this time, we had come to the first floor lobby, the two of us walking side by side. Hearing me, he turned around and gave me a direct look. I looked straight back at him without wavering.

He was somewhat taller than me. I had to tilt my head up at a forty-five degree angle.

“Ha,” he sneered again. “The ignorant are innocent. I’ll spare you this time.”

“But I can’t spare you so easily,” I said to him good-temperedly. “How about we add each other on WeChat, and I’ll send you any information I come across in the future about breaking free of feudal superstition. Of course, if you believe you can persuade me, you can also send me videos about evil spirits and ghosts.”

I would try my hardest in order to save this misguided young man.

“Well,” said Ning Tiance, “if you’re ever in a dangerous position because of a ghost, you can contact me.”

After we friended each other, we walked out of the school building, and Xiao Ning ran straight to the gate. I wanted to tell him that there was a small gate open on the east side, but on level ground he ran

unusually fast. In a step he was at the base of the wall. He leapt two meters up in a single breath.

I couldn't help applauding from a distance. But for a move like that, how much experience skipping school must he have had to get so practiced at it!

Xiao Ning was twenty years old, university-aged, but instead of going to university he was mired in law-breaking and superstition. It was heartbreaking to think about.

I had to guide him to the right path and make him a young man who believed in science and worked for the benefit of the country and society.

When I had sworn this, another strip fell off my jacket. I picked it up awkwardly and blushed in the night with no one to see.

It really was a mess.

It was only one o'clock now, not the scheduled time yet. Of course the school bus wouldn't be waiting at the front gate. I didn't have the driver's contact information, so I had to send a message to Principal Zhang: *Please tell the driver not to come to pick me up. I will go back by myself.*

I walked two kilometers before I found a bike share in front of a police station.

When I went to scan the code, a police officer on duty saw me. He swept his flashlight over me and immediately came over. He looked me up and down and said, "Have you been fighting, or were you mugged?"

My jacket was in shreds and my shirt was covered in blood. It looked pretty bad. It was no wonder that the policeman wanted to

question me.

“I’m fine.” I shook my head. “There was just a misunderstanding between a boy and a girl.”

He looked at the blood on my chest and frowned. “There isn’t that much blood. Did you hurt someone?”

“It’s fake blood.” I sighed. “The girl pretended to be a ghost to frighten me and got her makeup all over me. As for the suit, I’m pretty upset about it myself.”

The policeman saw that I didn’t seem to be lying and said, “Well, leave me your contact information. If anything turns up in this area, we may be in contact with you.”

I left my contact information, got on the bike, and rode ten kilometers in the dark to the Farther Shore Estate.

Apartment 404 was very quiet. The doors of my two roommates were closed. I opened the bathroom door and saw that Li Yuanyuan wasn’t in there. I relaxed, then showered and changed.

After my shower I lay in bed feeling exhausted. It had been a very tiring day. Probably everyone who had to work for a living had troubles like these.

CHAPTER 9 - Part-time Job (Part 1)

Biking ten kilometers in the middle of the night was somewhat tiring. I slept past ten o'clock. I checked my phone and saw a message from Principal Zhang, and a missed call from my college roommate.

Principal Zhang's message said: *Your next class will be at 12 AM three days from now. I will send you the class topic and location one day in advance. Spend these days preparing for the class. Your salary will not be deducted. Additionally, I heard that you ruined your clothes yesterday. I will refund your expenses at the end of the month and every month after.*

This message put a stop to all my questions. After lengthy deliberation, I only sent back the word "OK."

The training institute was irregular, the class schedule was inhuman, the students were unfriendly, the coworkers played with chainsaws and slept in the bathroom; none of that was a problem. The important points were that the hours were short, the salary was high, rooming was included, and there was no need to clock in.

If I always taught from 12:00 to 2:00 at night, I could have a part-time job during the day.

Principal Zhang was such a kind and considerate lady. It was a pity that she was abroad. If she returned to China in the future, I had to treat her to a good meal and thank her for taking care of me.

After replying to Principal Zhang's message, I called back my college roommate.

"Hello," said my roommate Xia Jin's voice over the phone, "is that Shen Jianguo?"

“It’s me,” I replied. “I haven’t changed my number.”

Xia Jin exchanged greetings with me. Then he said, “Our mall is putting on a promotion this weekend. We need to recruit some temporary staff. Do you have time on the weekend? Do you want to earn extra money?”

“Of course,” I agreed at once.

“OK, 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, X— — Mall. Two days in total. There may be work until midnight both days.”

I considered the following days. Today was Friday, and my next class was on Monday. There was no conflict, so I was able to say, “No problem.”

Xia Jin had been my roommate when I was an undergraduate. He studied human resource management. After graduation, he didn’t take the Graduate Entrance Exam but went straight to work. Three years later, when I graduated from graduate school, he was already an HR manager at a large shopping mall. He worked very hard, but his annual salary was very good.

Over the past few years, every time he needed to hire temporary staff, he would come to me. He knew that I needed money and would help me earn some extra. After all these years I was used to it and had become a skilled worker, as well as accumulating experience.

Having determined that I would have some extra income this weekend and knowing that Principal Zhang would pay for my clothes, I felt very pleased. I ran out of my room to wash up.

As usual, my two roommates weren’t in their rooms. The arrangement of Liu Sishun’s bedroom was exactly the same as

yesterday, while Li Yuanyuan's room had gained a toilet. The wig that had been tossed on the bed before was now inside the toilet.

I really didn't understand Li Yuanyuan's attachment to the toilet. Why would a girl have such a strange fetish? Had Principal Zhang really not considered hiring a psychologist?

In fact, I wanted to talk with Li Yuanyuan about this issue. Of course, I respected everyone's preferences. Just like my love of money, sitting on the toilet was a common hobby. As long as it wasn't a psychological problem, there was nothing else to say.

Unfortunately, that night I fell asleep too early and didn't get to see my two colleagues, who were busy working during the day, so I could only see them at night.

On Saturday morning, I biked to the mall as usual. Xia Jin simply explained our assignments to us temporary employees and hustled off to prepare for the promotion.

I put on a heavy teddy bear costume to solicit customers, distribute flyers, and help the promoters to hand out prizes. I was busy all day.

At six or seven o'clock in the evening, the people hired by the shopping mall stopped working, and I finally had time to breathe and sit on the ground to rest.

Just then some brats ran over to surround me. They hit me on the head. With the bear's thickly-padded head in the way, it didn't hurt, but it didn't feel very pleasant. I was very tired, not in the mood to play with children, so I stood up to find a quiet place to rest.

But instead the children chased after me and kicked my butt. Who knew where the parents had gone off to; they didn't come to stop their children.

I couldn't run fast wearing the costume. When I was about to take off the headgear and give the children a lecture, I heard a familiar voice beside me: "Stop that, all of you. There's a person inside that costume. They're tired from working all day. Don't bully them."

I looked up and saw Ning Tiance.

Today, he was wearing normal clothes, a white T-shirt, dark blue jeans, white sneakers. He looked young and neat, my favorite type. Very handsome.

When the children saw an adult had come, they ran away quickly to avoid being disciplined. I looked at Ning Tiance with my head to one side. He looked much better in these clothes. His legs were very long. Why did he have to be on the path of feudal superstition?

Ning Tiance patted my fluffy arm and consoled me. "Children don't understand anything. Don't get discouraged on their account."

What a nice person, I couldn't help thinking.

I wanted to take the costume's headpiece off and thank him, but thinking back to what had happened the night before yesterday I felt embarrassed. Instead I took a piece of candy from the costume's pocket and put it in his hand.

I had snuck a taste of this candy while I was on break. It was delicious, so I had kept several pieces for myself to eat when I was tired. Wearing a costume like this was sweaty work, and having some sugar was a good way to deal with it.

After Ning Tiance took the candy, I thanked him cupped fists, and he smiled. "Thank you."

Then he peeled the candy, put it in his mouth, and said to me, "It's delicious."

Simple clothes accompanied by his neat smiling face—there really was an unusual beauty about him.

There was something special about Ning Tiance. Even dressed in ordinary clothes, he seemed to be glowing.

After throwing the candy wrapper into the garbage, he nodded to me and left. I watched him go, raising the teddy bear's fat hand to wave at him.

He didn't look back. He didn't see me wave goodbye to him.

I felt a little strange. I sat on the ground holding my head and thinking deeply about I didn't know what until the foreman told me that the evening shopping peak was coming and asked me to stand at the gate of the mall to attract customers, so I got up and stopped thinking.

The mall did good business. The number of customers only started to gradually decrease after ten o'clock. The mall closed at 11 o'clock and the temporary employees left. I stayed to help Xia Jin clear up. He always paid overtime.

It wasn't until 12 o'clock that we wearily finished the day's work. We would go back to work at 8 o'clock the next morning.

I look at Xia Jin's thinning hair and grieved silently. Someday I would also look like this.

We were so tired that we were in no mood to reminisce about the past. We went to the restroom. While we were washing our hands, we heard a watery noise coming from the women's toilet next door. It didn't sound like there was someone there but rather like something was leaking.

As an HR manager, Xia Jin had some responsibility here. He bravely went into the women's room to check. I waited for him at the door.

A few seconds later, I heard a heavy thud and Xia Jin's scream.

I wanted to go in to see what had happened to him, but held back: what if he had run into some lady?

So I stood at the door and shouted, "What's the matter, Xia Jin?"

"Ghost! There's a ghost! Ah!" His screams grew increasingly desperate.

I rushed in and saw Xia Jin sitting on the floor, water staining his expensive pants. Even though they weren't my pants, the sight still upset me.

I fearlessly helped him up and asked, "Where is the ghost? I'll go take a look. There's no such thing as ghosts, only people playing tricks."

"No... I saw a woman's head coming out of the toilet!" Xia Jin's legs were shaking and he was leaning all his weight on me.

A woman's head coming out of the toilet... how come that sounded familiar?

I leaned Xia Jin up against the wall and went to try the stall doors.

"Don't..." stammered Xia Jin. "She hasn't come out, let's hurry and run away..."

He hadn't finished speaking when the door of the women's bathroom was shut by a gust of wind. This knocked Xia Jin off balance and he slid to the floor again.

How could he be so gutless?

“It’s only the wind. There are windows open everywhere in summer, isn’t it normal for there to be a wind?” I put my hand on the handle of a toilet stall.

“But our mall is totally enclosed, except for the stairs and the emergency exits. Even the toilets have central air-conditioning.” Xia Jin was on the point of tears. “Do you see any windows in the bathroom?”

“Then it’s just the air-conditioning. I have some experience with this. The air-conditioning on a bus sometimes makes a vortex. It’s pretty interesting.” As I spoke I opened each stall in succession.

The last stall seemed to be locked from the inside. After I confirmed that this was not a utility room, I knocked on the door. “Is there anyone there? The mall is going to close. If there’s anyone in there, come out quickly.”

“Just—just now... that woman’s head, it—it came out in that stall. How—how can it be locked now?” Xia Jin was so scared that he couldn’t speak properly.

“It must be the prankster. They got scared when they saw us coming and now they don’t dare come out.”

I continued to knock on the door. “Madam... no, I don’t know whether you’re a man or woman. The person in there, if you do that again, we’ll call the police. Open the door.”

I banged on the door with all my strength, making a very loud noise. Faced with criminals, the thing to do was to act stronger than them. Xia Jin and I were two strong men. Even if there really were criminals we’d still have the strength to restrain them. Anyway, the stall wasn’t very large, there couldn’t be more than two of them in there.

I wasn't afraid of chainsaw-wielding maniacs with psychological problems. I certainly wouldn't be afraid of a joker playing at ghosts in the toilet.

"I'll kick down the door if you don't come out."

I stepped back and raised my leg, preparing to kick. Then I heard a familiar voice from behind the door. "Don't, I'll come out."

The door of the stall opened slowly, slowly. Xia Jin gasped in fright.

A girl with short hair wearing a white dress stood in the stall looking at me. When I saw her, I was furious. "Li Yuanyuan! I already bought you that toilet you like so much. If you really want to sleep in the bathroom, we'll go home and talk it over. There's no need to scare people at the mall."

"You know her?" Xia Jin asked in a daze. "Go home? Is that your girlfriend?"

These three questions of his were so irritating they gave me a stomachache. I quickly explained, "Of course not. This is my roommate, we live in the same apartment. She has a special hobby and likes to be in the bathroom."

At this time, I thought of Liu Shishun saying that Li Yuanyuan liked to sneak into people's houses in the middle of the night and ended up getting beaten up. I'd been quite sympathetic to Li Yuanyuan then. Witnessing this scene, I could understand why Li Yuanyuan was always getting beaten up.

"Xia Jin, she's just a little eccentric. For my sake, don't blame her. I'll take her home." I told Li Yuanyuan to come over and apologized to Xia Jin in her stead.

Li Yuanyuan didn't speak. She made a deep bow towards Xia Jin.

Xia Jin waved a hand, smacked his chest, and said, "As long as it's not a ghost. You look after her. Don't let her come back to our mall. If rumors about ghosts get out, it won't be good."

"Yes, yes, I'll have a talk with her when we get home."

CHAPTER 10 - Part-time Job (Part 2)

“No, wait,” Xia Jin said suddenly when he was no longer afraid, “how did you come out of the toilet just now?”

Li Yuanyuan was about to walk out of the women’s toilet with me. When she heard Xia Jin’s question, she immediately hurried over to the last stall as if floating, opened the door, and prepared to stick her head into the toilet.

I quickly grabbed her and said to Xia Jin, “You just saw wrong, stop bothering other people about it.”

Xia Jin grabbed at his sparse hair and looked perplexed. “Weird. I clearly saw...”

He saw Li Yuanyuan looking longingly at the women’s toilet and shook his head. “Forget it, let’s say I saw wrong. Take her home and keep an eye on her. She can’t go around scaring people all over the place.”

“Of course.” I looked at Li Yuanyuan with her muddled expression. I really didn’t know how to get through to her. It seemed that Liu Sishun had a pretty good understanding of Li Yuanyuan. When we got back, I’d have Teacher Liu try to have a word with her.

The three of us filed towards an unobstructed elevator. The mall was empty. The elevator soon reached the fourth floor. Xia Jin said to us, “Let me drive you back.”

Then he glared at Li Yuanyuan and said, “You didn’t really jump in the toilet just now, right? You can’t get in my car otherwise.”

I smelled Li Yuanyuan’s clothes. There was no distinctive odor. The white dress was clean. So I shook my head at Xia Jin, and Xia Jin,

relieved, went into the elevator.

I followed, but Li Yuanyuan stared at the elevator, motionless.

“What’s the matter?” I said to Li Yuanyuan. “Let’s go. Xia Jin is my schoolmate. His bark is worse than his bite. He’s a very upstanding person. If he’s willing to drive you, it means he doesn’t mind anymore.”

Li Yuanyuan pointed to the elevator: “The elevator...”

“Oh, how can you be afraid the elevator?” Li Yuanyuan liked small spaces like bathroom stalls. She couldn’t be claustrophobic. Was she afraid of elevators?

Li Yuanyuan shook her head. “I’m not afraid.”

“Then let’s go home and rest.” I tugged on her hand.

Li Yuanyuan nodded and walked in slowly with me.

Xia Jin pressed “-1” to send the elevator directly to the parking lot on the first subfloor. The elevator in the shopping mall was of good quality. It glided all the way to the first subfloor, but it didn’t stop. It kept going down.

“Hm?” Xia Jin pressed the elevator button a few more times.

“What’s the matter? It’s still going down.”

I took a closer look at the floors shown on the elevator. The lowest floor was the second subfloor. There were two parking lots underground. “Could someone have called the elevator from the second subfloor?”

The elevator didn’t stop after it reached the second subfloor but instead went back up to the fourth floor.

“What’s going on?” Xia Jin pressed the “-1” button and watched the elevator pass the first subfloor, go to the fourth floor, then go down again, and then climb to the fourth floor again.

Xia Jin and I were speechless.

“What’s going on?” Xia Jin was tired from working all day, and his face was full of fatigue. After work, Li Yuanyuan had given him a fright, and now the elevator had malfunctioned. After the elevator reached the fourth floor for the third time and started going down, his face was already greenish.

“The elevator must be malfunctioning.” I quickly pressed all the buttons on the elevator, had Xia Jin and Li Yuanyuan stand firmly against the elevator wall, and immediately pressed the alarm button.

Normally, as long as the elevator was running, there would be staff on standby, but the intercom rang for a long time without anyone answering.

As an HR manager, Xia Jin was overcome with anger. “I’ll deduct their wages tomorrow, I’ll deduct all their wages!”

“It’s not necessarily the staff’s dereliction of duty,” I put in. “Since there’s a problem with elevator, it’s also possible the intercom is broken. Tomorrow, you need to check the CCTV, find someone to repair the elevator, confirm who is responsible, and then decide how to deal with it.”

Perhaps because the elevator hadn’t stopped and was even running pretty smoothly, Xia Jin and I weren’t especially afraid and took out our phones to call for help.

But the signal in the elevator was weak. Our calls couldn’t make it out.

Li Yuanyuan must not have brought her phone. She watched the two of us quietly.

To be honest, this kind of situation scared me. Faced with a murderer, at least I had the ability to fight back. But in the face of such an emergency, I was just an ordinary person; what resistance could I put up against reinforced concrete?

But with Li Yuanyuan and Xia Jin there, I couldn't waver, and I definitely couldn't panic. Panic is contagious in an enclosed environment. If that type of emotion spreads, the chances of being able to get help go down.

I was very calm in front of the two of them, leaning against the elevator wall with one hand and opening up WeChat with the other. I couldn't dial out because the signal was bad, and if I kept trying to dial, the phone would run out of power. But WeChat didn't need a constant signal. If the signal was good for a moment, the message might get out. I sent a request for help to my recent contacts, hoping someone would see the information.

Principal Zhang: *You're trapped in the elevator?*

The first person to reply to my message was Principal Zhang, who was always out of signal range.

Yes, yes, Principal Zhang, please call the police or 119! I sent back immediately.

The message tone sounded again. I checked my phone—

Superstitious Xiao Ning: *Are you a virgin? In cases like these, a virgin's urine is most effective to dispel evil.*

“ ... ”

“Superstitious Xiao Ning” was my nickname for Ning Tiance. His real WeChat name was Ning Tiance; he wasn’t part of any friend group. His profile was simple, with only his WeChat name and a Yin-Yang symbol as his profile picture.

To someone of my sexual orientation, Comrade Xiao Ning’s words were clear sexual harassment—and sexual harassment laden with feudal superstition!

I didn’t know how to reply to him. Just then, Li Yuanyuan jabbed the elevator button. She pressed so weakly it didn’t even make a sound, but Xia Jin was still startled. He said, “Don’t just push it, there was already a malfunction, what are we supposed to do if you break the button?”

As he spoke, the elevator stopped. *Ding*. The door of the elevator opened. It had stopped at the parking lot on the first subfloor.

Xia Jin rushed out of the elevator, gulping large mouthfuls of air. My legs also felt a little weak, but I still walked out of the elevator steadily. With my feet on firm ground, I finally relaxed. I turned back and said to Li Yuanyuan, “Although that was a risky move, it seems to have done the trick. You really saved the day.”

Li Yuanyuan raised her head and smiled at me. “That toilet... you gave me. I like it very much.”

Her appearance was ordinary; it would be hard to pick her out of a crowd. But her little smile had a hint of grace, quite different from the girl I had seen staring obsessively at the toilet.

“Can I venture to ask why you like the toilet so much?” I asked boldly.

Li Yuanyuan shook her head and said, “I don’t like it. I hate it.”

“And why is that?” I was entirely confused.

“Before... people... would push my head into the toilet and force me to drink,” said Li Yuanyuan, starting to cry. “I didn’t like it, but I couldn’t leave it.”

I looked at her quietly, not knowing what to do.

I wasn’t into girls. Under these circumstances, I couldn’t let her cry on my shoulder. It would be wrong to give a girl who had suffered like this the wrong idea.

“Now, I don’t hate it anymore.” Li Yuanyuan wiped away her tears before they could fall. “Someone pulled me out of the toilet.”

“That’s good,” I said with a slight sigh of relief, reaching out to her. “It’s late. Let’s go home and rest.”

Li Yuanyuan nodded, put her hand in mine, and whispered, “I don’t want to take his car.”

I looked at Xia Jin, who was still shivering. “I don’t think he’ll be driving today. It’s cramped in the car, too uncomfortable after an experience like that. Let’s take a bike share back. It’s environmentally friendly and healthy.”

I’ve always been a supporter of energy conservation and emissions reduction. A bicycle is a means of transportation that saves money and keeps you fit. It’s my first choice.

Xia Jin agreed with me. He wanted to be out in the open now.

We walked out of the parking lot, safely taking the stairs. As soon as we were outside, I heard the WeChat notification.

Principal Zhang: *I sent the school bus to help you.*

The bus with the license plate number “444” had stopped in front of the parking lot.

“My new boss is very good to me. She sent the school bus to pick me up.” I look at Xia Jin. “Don’t you live on the way to the Farther Shore Estate? Do you want to ride with us?”

Xia Jin didn’t see the license plate number, but looked at the spacious inside of the bus. Seeing that it wasn’t like the suffocating interior of the elevator, he nodded after a moment’s pause.

So I led Xia Jin and Li Yuanyuan onto the school bus.

CHAPTER 11 - Part-time Job (Part 3)

After boarding the bus, Xia Jin looked at the words on the only green seat and laughed. Then he sat down on the red seat behind the green one. He really must have been tired today; otherwise, he would have patted me on the stomach and asked me how many months. Today he was letting me off easy.

When Xia Jin sat down, the driver immediately looked back at him.

I quickly said, "Dage, this is my schoolmate. He lives on the way. He'll get off at the stop before the Farther Shore Estate."

The driver was silent as usual. He turned his back to us and said in a deep voice, "Well, it won't kill him."

I couldn't understand this, but I saw that he wasn't angry and didn't seem to mind taking Xia Jin along, so I sat down in front of Xia Jin and looked at my phone.

Li Yuanyuan didn't sit with us. She ran to the last row in the far corner of the school bus by herself. She was hidden among the shadows, her figure hard to distinguish.

After finding out that we had boarded the bus, Principal Zhang set her mind at ease. On the other hand, Ning Tiance had sent several messages in a row:

I've seen that you are full of Yang energy. Your Yang source must still be whole. A virgin's urine is the most effective way of dispelling evil. Could I be wrong in supposing you are a virgin?

How are you? Did you make it out? I'm near the mall. I'm coming to help you.

I'm here. Security has shut the door. Hold on while I find something to break the glass with. If you're really scared, prick your middle finger. A drop of heart's blood full of Yang energy will work. Just hold on a little.

I hadn't expected that rather than calling the police, Xiao Ning would rush to the mall to break down the door to save me. I put a voice call through to Xiao Ning. There was no answer for a long time. I was afraid he was too busy breaking down the door to hear his phone.

When I was starting to get really worried, the call was picked up. Ning Tiance's panting voice came from the phone: "I'd just found a brick, then the security guard rushed out to chase me. Don't worry, my qinggong is very good, I can dodge him. Wait."

I immediately interrupted. "I've already gotten out. I'm on my way home."

The voice at the other end paused. After a while, I heard Ning Tiance say, "I just hid in a corner to avoid the security guard. It's inconvenient to talk. It's good that you've gotten out, but there's still a ghost in the elevator. I still have to get in to exorcise it."

"Wait a minute." I quickly stopped him from hanging up. "It's really nothing, just an elevator malfunction."

"No, I walked around the mall earlier today. The Yin energy was very strong. At that time, I thought something might happen. Unfortunately, the mall closed at eleven and they asked me to leave. If I had known something might happen to you, I would have stayed longer."

I was very moved. After all, we barely knew each other. Xiao Ning had gone to the mall in the middle of the night to break down a door for a stranger. He really was a kindhearted and estimable young

man. Only his awareness of the law was a little weak, and he had been poisoned by feudal superstition. It really was upsetting.

“It’s wrong of you to do that.” I gave him some basic information. “In this case, you should dial 119, 110 or even 122 first. You can’t break down the door. You should explain the situation to the security guard. If he doesn’t believe you, he can check the CCTV to confirm. That way he’ll help you get the door open.”

“Ghosts can interfere with CCTV, and ordinary people can’t see them. I just have to take the risk,” Xiao Ning replied earnestly.

“...”

This couldn’t go on.

As a new teacher, perhaps my experience was limited, but I couldn’t stand by and watch a kindhearted young man sink into the mire. I had to help him find new faith in science.

“Let’s meet another day.” I couldn’t say everything clearly over the phone, so I decided to meet up in person. “I have work tomorrow for my part-time job, so I have no time. How about the day after tomorrow, Monday, at noon?”

“Do you want to talk about ghosts? No problem. You’ve encountered ghosts several times in the last few days. Your fortune must be fairly bad. You need to break free of it.”

“So don’t go breaking down the door of the mall now. We’re already out. Even if there is a ghost, you don’t know that it’s going to hurt anyone. Right?”

Ning Tiance hesitated. “But if I leave it there, it will hurt someone eventually...”

“Well, it’ll be better for you to come when the mall opens tomorrow. And we’ll get a chance to see each other,” I suggested.

“All right.”

I was relieved to hear at last that he wasn’t planning on violating the law and breaking into the mall. I stayed on the phone with Ning Tiance a while longer, chatting, then told him to go get some rest. Then I put down the phone and leaned back in my seat, closing my eyes.

The swaying of the school bus nearly put me to sleep. Suddenly I felt a shadow in front of me. When I opened my eyes, Xia Jin was standing up looking right at me.

I asked, “What is it?”

I remembered Xia Jin falling asleep as soon as he took his seat. He hadn’t woken up even while I talked to Ning Tiance about his plans to break down the door of the mall, so he must have been very tired. How come he was so energetic now?

As I was wondering, Xia Jin suddenly curled his lips into a simpering smile that made my flesh crawl. He said, “Teacher Shen.”

I was so disgusted by his expression that I pushed him away with a slap. “Get away. So it’s a specially reserved teacher’s seat, what’s so weird about that?”

He must have rested enough and had now come to tease me. In university that was Xia Jin’s favorite thing to do. Three years of work hadn’t reined him in at all. When it came to his former schoolmates, all he wanted was to make trouble.

He leaned against the arm rest. He didn’t look angry. He crooked his finger and sidled up to me in a slinking, catlike motion. “Teacher

Shen, you really are heartless. Some of us really admire you.”

For a time I was shocked speechless by his behavior. Taking this opportunity, Xia Jin actually sat down on my lap, put his hands around my neck and his head on my shoulder. Pouting, he said, “Your chilly demeanor is just so attractive!”

After that, he even tried to kiss me. I pushed him away and loudly said, “Settle down!”

Xia Jin and I had a good relationship. When I was in college, he was one of the few people who knew about my sexual orientation. Although he was straight, he didn’t shun me. There was nothing he couldn’t say to me. Anyway, even if I liked men, it didn’t mean that I would like any man I met. Our relationship was one of pure Socialist brotherhood. Him knowing about my sexuality didn’t mean we couldn’t show our affection with some slaps on the ass on the basketball court.

He could talk to me about my love life, and I could go see movies with him, but I wasn’t going to fall in love with him. He was always pursuing girls.

During his three years of work, Xia Jin had found a girlfriend. Their relationship was very stable. They were trying to save up money for a down payment on an apartment, planning to get married when they had saved up enough. He couldn’t have suddenly developed an interest in me.

I was pressing Xia Jin back against the window and he, with incredible force, was trying to get close and kiss me while I struggled desperately. On the school bus, the two of us flailed at each other.

Fortunately, the driver and Li Yuanyuan were both well-mannered. I glanced at them and saw they were both keeping their eyes to

themselves. The driver was focused on driving. Li Yuanyuan was looking out the window. Both of them were obviously not looking at me. That made me feel secure.

“Wake up, don’t you have a girlfriend?” I stuck my elbow against Xia Jin’s chest, holding him at bay.

“But suddenly I just feel so safe around you. Look at this strong arm of yours.” He couldn’t kiss me, so he reached out and touched my arm, making the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

This couldn’t continue. It was too scary. Xia Jin was probably overstimulated tonight. Was this some kind of PTSD? When I was studying basic psychology in university, the teacher mentioned this kind of psychological disorder. When people are threatened by death, or seriously injured, or their bodily integrity is threatened, they will have delayed and persistent mental disorders. Most of the time they would be normal, but some stimulus would make them burst out like this.

Could it be that my calm manner in the elevator had made such a strong impression on him?

This couldn’t go on. He had even started tearing at my clothes. How were we going to go on being brothers?

Exerting all my strength, I finally wrestled Xia Jin to the ground and delivered a fist full of Socialist friendship. Xia Jin fell unconscious when I hit him.

I hadn’t hit him that hard!

Seeing that he was unconscious, I quickly pulled him up and put him in my pregnant woman’s seat. He flopped on the seat, not moving. I quickly said to the driver, “Dage, why don’t we go to the hospital first? Did I hit him too hard?”

The driver didn't turn back. He looked at the road ahead and said, "He's all right now. He'll wake up soon."

Maybe the driver had studied medicine or something. As soon as he had spoken, Xia Jin woke up, clutching his head. He mumbled, "Sleeping under the air-conditioning gave me a headache, the cold wind was too strong."

I looked at him hesitantly and asked tentatively, "Do you... remember what just happened?"

"What just happened?" Xia Jin shook his head and saw that he was sitting in my seat. He rolled his eyes at me and said, "You were getting revenge because I laughed at you. You moved me to your green chair while I was sleeping. I was so exhausted I didn't even wake up."

"..."

I couldn't tell if Xia Jin really didn't remember what had happened just now or if he was faking it.

I stared at him for a while, but I didn't dare to sit down. I didn't want to be trapped in a seat unable to fight back if he had another attack.

Whether he was pretending or really didn't remember, it was still for the best not to mention it.

But tomorrow I would have to contact his girlfriend to give her a hint her that Xia Jin had been tired lately and needed some extra attention.

Xia Jin fell asleep again under my scrutiny, but this time he didn't have an attack and slept all the way home. I was worried something

would happen to him, so I left Li Yuanyuan on the school bus and went with him, only relaxing when I saw him go upstairs.

It must have been a temporary, one-off phenomenon. As long as the relationship between him and his girlfriend remained stable, it shouldn't happen again.

I would see what happened when we met the next time. If he didn't mention it, it would be like it had never happened, and we could go on being brothers.

CHAPTER 12 - Part-time Job (Part 4)

I'd gotten off the bus early to see Xia Jin to his door, so I biked the rest of the way as usual. The distance wasn't far. It only took about ten minutes to get home.

When I got home, I saw Liu Sishun pacing back and forth in the living room. When he saw me, he immediately approached me and said, "Because of you, Li Yuanyuan has transc — decided to go home."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ah, it's a sad story," said Liu Sishun. "When Yuanyuan was ali-... When she was little, she had a bad time. She was timid and got bullied by her classmates all the time. When she grew up and went to work, she met a classmate had who bullied her when she was at school. Her classmate pushed her head into the toilet and she was drowned. She couldn't leave the toilet after that."

I said angrily, "That isn't schoolyard bullying anymore. We can report that student for intentionally harming Yuanyuan and leaving her with serious psychological trauma. She should be held responsible by the law, and she should have to pay for the treatment Yuanyuan will need in the future."

"Oh, don't worry about it, she's already been taught a lesson. It's just that Yuanyuan is so pitiful. Tied to the toilet, her obsession too strong. Even if she wanted to she couldn't leave. She had to keep appearing by the toilet at night."

"At home you rely on your parents, outside you rely on your friends. I think that as her roommates, we should advise her to go to seek treatment and get out from under this psychological shadow as soon as possible."

“There’s no need. When she was ali-... before, her classmates used to say that she smelled like a toilet and always rejected her. But you never despised her. Wherever you met her you always reached out. Now she has gone home and will live a good life in the future.” Liu Shishun said, “Just now she came back and left with her luggage. She also asked me to take good care of you in the future.”

I looked at Li Yuanyuan’s bedroom, which was as clean and tidy as before. The toilet was still there, but the wig was gone.

As Liu Sishun said, Li Yuanyuan always smelled of toilet cleaning solution, which didn’t go away even when she showered. In fact, I didn’t like that smell, but I knew that I had to be careful with Li Yuanyuan’s emotional state. Even though I didn’t like the smell, I still had to persist in extending the hand of friendship to her.

If she had really been able to make progress, that was great, but it was too bad she had left in such a hurry that we hadn’t gotten to see each other.

But it didn’t matter. As long as there was a connection between them, two living people would always have the chance to meet.

“Thank you, Teacher Liu. I know you were waiting especially to tell me about it.”

“It’s nothing. I don’t sleep very much at night. By the way, this notebook is for you. You can take it with you when you teach your class. You can use it to write lesson plans or record the names of students.” Teacher Liu handed over a very old notebook. The paper was thin and yellow. It seemed to have been preserved for many years. Inside it was blank, with nothing written in it.

This must have been his favorite notebook, which he had kept safe for many years. I put it next to my heart and said, “Thank you. I’ll

carry it with me in the future.”

“Ah, no, no, you don’t need to carry it on you, definitely don’t put it next to your heart. Your blood is too strong and hot.” Liu Sishun waved his hand and said, “You should put it in your book bag. If you run into any disobedient students in class, just take it out.”

What was the connection between a lesson plan and disobedient students? It probably had to do with Teacher Liu’s teaching experience. We would discuss it later.

Now I was very sleepy, almost falling off my feet. After taking the notebook and giving Teacher Liu a vague parting, I went to my room and fell asleep.

In my dream, I dimly saw Li Yuanyuan. She was wearing a dress with flowers on it, smiling and waving at me. Then she flew up into the sky.

When I woke up, I thought it had been a good dream. I was in a good mood. I went to work wearing an ordinary, cheap T-shirt that I’d bought at the wholesale market for 20 yuan.

Xia Jin had gone to the elevator maintenance staff in the morning, but there had been interference in the CCTV signal during the period we were trapped. There was only a blue screen. By the time the signal was restored, we had already left the elevator. And the staff really hadn’t heard our distress call at all, though they’d been working diligently the whole time.

Xia Jin investigated for a long time without turning anything up. The shopping mall would open at nine, so he had no time to keep looking. He quickly got into his working demeanor.

I watched him and saw that he didn’t remember what had happened last night. I knew him; I didn’t think he was pretending.

This made me both worried and relieved. Worried that he really had had a psychological attack, and relieved that he didn't remember it, so it wouldn't affect our future brotherhood.

I put my cell phone into the staff's temporary locker, put on the bear costume, and proceeded to perform my laborious and adorable part-time job.

While I was working, I kept strolling casually past the elevators, mainly to see Ning Tiance, if he showed up today. I was really concerned that in order to dispel evil, he was going to pee in the elevator.

However, Xiao Ning didn't appear all day. Not until I was about to get off work at 10 pm did I see a bright yellow robe. Just looking at the clothes, I knew that it was Ning Tiance.

Seeing him ignore the staff's obstructions and head directly towards the elevator, I rushed to stop him, but I was still wearing my bear costume and fell down after two steps.

Looking up, I saw Ning Tiance still striding towards the elevator. I struggled, realized I would have a hard time getting up, and instead used my arms to crawl forward.

The floor of the shopping mall was very smooth. It's wasn't hard for the fuzzy costume to slide along it. I quickly caught up with Ning Tiance, who was waiting for the elevator. Just then, the elevator arrived. When I saw that he was going to enter the elevator, I quickly used my furry arms to hug his thigh.

"Wait – for me –" I gasped inside my bear suit.

Ning Tiance must have been shocked. He pulled out the wooden sword on his back, pointed to me and said, "What evil is this? Show

your original shape.”

I held his leg firmly with one arm and reached to unzip my costume’s zipper with the other. I was already clumsy in the suit; holding a person with one hand made my movements extremely awkward. I couldn’t get the zipper open for ages.

The staff came with Xia Jin. Just as I was about to ask Xia Jin to help me take off the bear suit, I saw Xia Jin shaking Ning Tiance’s hand warmly. “Hello, Master Ning, my name is Xia Jin. I asked you to come. Didn’t I say before that you could come to my office directly from the staff elevator? Why did you come here?”

“I was worried about the haunted elevator,” Ning Tiance said as coldly usual. “Also, could you ask your employee to let go of me?”

When Xia Jin looked down, I shouted to him, “Help — help me out of this costume!”

“Shen Jianguo?” Xia Jin was surprised. “Why are you holding on to the master I invited here? You also must have guessed what kind of thing we ran into last night. Come on, we’ll tell the master what happened last night together.”

He stooped and pulled me up. After taking off my suit, I waved to Ning Tiance with my face full of sweat. “Hi, Xiao Ning.”

“Who are you calling Xiao Ning! He’s called Master Ning.” Xia Jin smacked me on the back of my head. “Crawling on the ground and grabbing a customer’s thigh in the middle of the mall, what a disgrace!”

Xia Jin had been working for many years, and his public relations ability was quite strong. He immediately turned to the customers who had started taking pictures and watching the bustle and said, “I’m sorry, these are two actors we invited for the event. They’re

rehearsing the performance of ‘The Celestial Master Exorcising a Bear Demon.’ If they pass the audition, you may see this program in our mall in the future. We’re going to close soon. Please pay for your purchases as soon as possible. At 11 o’clock, the registers will close. “

When the surrounding crowd heard Xia Jin, they put away their phones and went to the registers. Some people also told Xia Jin that the program was good and funny. They hoped to see it sometime.

After the crowd dispersed, Xia Jin took me and Xiao Ning back to his office.

As soon as he entered, he politely asked Xiao Ning to sit on the sofa and offered him a cup of tea. Then he glared at me and said, “Talk about losing face for me. Even if you wanted to find a master to the dispel the evil as soon as possible, you still have to mind appearances.”

I’ve never stood on formality with him, so I just said, “It’s precisely because of minding appearances that I was rushing to stop him from going into the elevator. With so many people there, what would happen if Xiao Ning went around peeing virgin’s urine in the elevator? I’m guessing you’re a virgin, right?”

This last was addressed to Ning Tiance, who blushed and took a sip of tea to cover up his expression. He pretended to be cool and said, “Although the Maoshan Sect doesn’t forbid marriage, we aren’t allowed to divide our Yang source until we’re powerful enough. I’m not powerful enough yet, so the time hasn’t come.”

So he was a virgin.

Xia Jin said fawningly to Ning Tiance, “Master Ning is being modest. A few days ago you solved the haunting at President Liang’s house. President Liang highly recommended you to me. He said that your

skills are profound, and you would certainly solve the haunting at our mall.”

I tugged at Xia Jin’s clothes. “Ah, you’re a university graduate, why are you so superstitious? There’s no such thing as ghosts.”

Xia Jin slapped my hand. “Are you blind? You saw what that elevator was like last night, you think that wasn’t a ghost? And your roommate Li Yuanyuan, I saw her come out of the toilet with my own eyes. And I looked up the residential history of Apartment 404, Unit 4, Building 4 of the Farther Side Estate. It’s an abode of ghosts! And you still dare to live there, with her as your roommate. Have you ever seen her during the day? Haven’t you been living with a ghost all this time!”

“You’ve gone too far. It’s one thing to be superstitious yourself, but don’t insult my roommate by calling her a ghost. Yuanyuan is a nice girl, she’s just a little strange. How could you talk about her like that?”

“Then you try calling her over here during the day. If she dares to come see me by the light of the sun, I’ll believe she’s human.”

“She went back to her hometown. She’s not in the city. How could I call her over? Anyway, is this something that needs to be proved?” I was angry. That Xia Jin was also immersed in feudal superstition made me feel hopeless.

Xia Jin saw that he couldn’t lead me astray into his superstitions. He shook his head and said, “Ning-tianshi⁴, look at him, isn’t he the one who’s surrounded by ghosts? I’ve never run into this kind of thing before, but yesterday while I was with him we kept running into ghosts. It must be his presence dragging me down.”

Ning Tiance looked at us for a while and shook his head. He said, “Mr. Shen Jianguo is a man of integrity, untouched by the supernatural. On the contrary, Mr. Xia, you have Yin energy on your brow. Your fortune has been bad recently, and you’ve been susceptible to hauntings.”

Well, look at that. Xiao Ning knew I didn’t believe in ghosts, so he wouldn’t say it was me. That’s was just routine.

CHAPTER 13 - Part-time Job (Part 5)

“Then, tianshi, what should I do to change my fortune?” Xia Jin asked nervously.

“The disciples of Maoshan specialize in removing demons and expelling ghosts. We don’t practice changing fortunes.” Ning Tiance appeared apologetic. “But heaven rewards virtue. As long as your heart is kind and your deeds are good, your fortune will naturally improve.”

He looked at me and said, “Like Mr. Shen, for example.”

Hearing Ning Tiance say that I was lucky, Xia Jin rolled his eyes. The whole school of Ideological and Political Sciences had known that Shen Jianguo was famous for his bad luck. If I ever skipped a class, the teacher was sure to take a roll call. Anything I didn’t study was sure to appear on a test. If my classmates wanted to skip class, they would ask me if I was planning to attend. If they were studying for a test, they would ask what parts of the curriculum I wasn’t planning to review.

What could I do? I could only struggle on, being as conscientious as I could to do right by myself. I didn’t dare to trust to luck, didn’t dare to miss a single part of the curriculum if I wanted to graduate. But there were benefits, too: because I had a solid foundation in my courses, I passed the examinations easily.

This shows that in living a correct life, we can’t be careless. We can only reap the benefits of what we sow. You can’t plant sesame seeds and expect to harvest a watermelon. Being thoughtful and realistic will always lead to the best results.

Hearing Ning Tiance say that my luck was good had made Xia Jin lose some faith in the celestial master. But he still said to Xiao Ning,

“Now that the mall is closed and all the customers are gone, tianshi, why don’t you come with me to see the elevator and the women’s restroom?”

“Very well.” Xiao Ning nodded slightly. “The mall is a place where people gather. It’s full of vitality. Any ghost that can survive here must be extremely violent. In the long run, it will cause harm to humanity and must be eliminated.”

Hearing this, I was very worried. As Xia Jin wasn’t an outsider, I grabbed Xiao Ning’s clothes and said, “You aren’t going to pee in the elevator and the women’s toilet, are you?”

Xiao Ning looked at me with a stiff expression. “Mr. Shen, although a virgin’s urine dispels evil, it’s only an emergency measure for ordinary people. How can our disciples use such inefficient methods?”

I felt relieved and nodded. “OK, as long as you’re not going to pee anywhere in public.”

Xia Jin pulled me aside and whispered, “What’s going on? Do you know him?”

In order to keep Xia Jin from falling into the whirlpool of feudal superstition, I told him about the message I had sent on WeChat when I couldn’t get a phone call out, and also mentioned the solution Ning-tianshi had suggested. My main purpose was to get Xia Jin to see that superstition wasn’t the way to go.

But instead Xia Jin slapped his thigh and said, “Even a call to the police couldn’t get through, but you could still get a message through to him. Doesn’t that go to show he’s really an expert!”

Then he went to Ning Tiance, took his hand and asked him to go to the women’s toilet.

What could I do? I had to follow them. So three grown men went together to the women's restroom at the mall.

Li Yuanyuan having gone back to her hometown to look for a job, naturally there was no one trying to stay the night in the women's restroom. Xia Jin didn't see anything this time. Ning Tiance also shook his head after an inspection. "There's a trace of Yin energy. A ghost may have passed by, but it hasn't lingered. Let's go to the elevator to have a look."

Xia Jin relaxed and said, "It seems that your roommate really isn't a ghost. But room 404 is still cursed. How many residents have died? You have to move out as soon as you can afford it."

I despised the superstitious thought but appreciated the concern of an old schoolmate, so I could only nod vaguely. As for moving... If I could have bought an apartment in H City, I definitely would have moved. Before I could buy an apartment... living in a free dormitory was good enough.

The three of us left the restroom and walked to the elevator. Ning Tiance stopped us in front of the elevator door. He said with a serious face, "The Yin energy is very dense. Was there an accident during the installation of this elevator?"

"There was," said Xia Jin, "I started investigating as soon as I got to work today, and indeed I found that when the elevators were being installed in this building, the equipment broke down and a worker fell and died. The family members came to make trouble, but the developers ran out on their debts, leaving the widow and orphan without a pension. It's a sad story."

"So that's how it is." Ning Tiance took out an old wooden disc engraved with symbols. "He became a demon out of concern for his family. His resentment is very strong. It will be hard to deal with."

I stared at the pointer on the wooden disc in his hands and said, “Xiao Ning, this compass of yours isn’t very useful. The hand keeps spinning around.”

Xia Jin smacked me on the back of my head and said, “Are you stupid? That’s called a compass of evil. It points out ghosts. The hand reacts to the surrounding Yin energy. Because there are ghosts around, the hands are spinning.”

I sighed deeply. Xia Jin was too deeply taken in to be rescued.

Xiao Ning didn’t respond to my words, but his expression became more and more serious. He frowned and said, “This won’t be an easy matter.”

“What’s wrong?” Xia Jin asked.

“At this ghost’s death, his blood flowed into the elevator. You must have cleaned it, but this kind of thing is hard to clean away entirely. His blood remained in the crevices in the corners of the elevator, and the ghost merged with the body of the elevator. You could say that he is the elevator, and the elevator is him. Unless the elevator is removed and destroyed, the ghost can’t be removed,” Ning Tiance explained.

“That’s...” Xia Jin looked troubled. “If there’s no fault in the elevator, we wouldn’t expend the effort to change it. Tianshi, isn’t there another way?”

“Yes, but...” Ning Tiance hesitated. “It would be necessary to enter the tiger’s lair. Go into the elevator, lure out the ghost, and fight it. But the ghost controls the elevator. If it dodges me while I’m fighting it and drops the elevator from a height... Well, I am only flesh and blood, after all. So it’s safer to dismantle the elevator.”

Xia Jin, that opportunist, looked suspicious. Seeing his expression, Ning Tiance agreed to take the risk.

“I’ll go into the elevator to expel the ghost. You wait outside,” Xiao Ning said.

I couldn’t bear watching him going off so bravely to face death. “Wait, there’s something wrong with the elevator. What if something happens while you’re in there on your own? How about this, I’ll go with you. We’ll call the elevator to the second subfloor. Xia Jin, if you stay outside and turn off the power, I don’t believe it will be able to rise again.”

I didn’t believe in evil. There wouldn’t be a problem if the power was shut off.

“You are not a Taoist cultivator. You should not enter.” Ning Tiance looked disapproving. “I am concerned I will be unable to protect you while doing battle.”

“I don’t need protecting.” I waved my hand. “I’ll come with you into the elevator today and use facts to prove to you that there’s no such thing as ghosts.”

Xia Jin was very happy to hear that he didn’t need to dismantle the elevator or go in himself. He cooperated with me to lower the elevator to the second subfloor. Ning Tiance said that we had to wait until the door was closed and the elevator ghost thought that we were entirely in its power. Only then would it appear. That would be the time to cut off the electricity supply. He had no faith in the efficacy of cutting off the power; the ghost had integrated with the elevator, so even if the power was cut off, the ghost could still control it.

Towards this statement, I only said, “How did you do in high school physics?”

Ning Tiance said, “I grew up in the Maoshan Sect...”

“Enough, I know you didn’t attend senior middle.” I sighed. “Feudal superstition really can kill. Come on, let me, a liberal arts student who hasn’t studied any physics since my second year of senior middle, explain it to you. The elevator goes up by converting electric energy into kinetic energy to offset the force of gravity. In the absence of electric energy, even if there is a ghost, I don’t believe it can lift this thousand-pound plus elevator and then send it falling back down.”

If the elevator had been on the fourth floor, then I would also have been concerned. After all, we were only flesh and blood. But the elevator was on the lowest floor. What could go wrong?

Trusting in science, I accompanied Ning Tiance into the elevator. Xia Jin, who had remained outside, immediately turned off the power after the elevator doors closed. The inside of the elevator became so dark you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face.

“Xia Jin turned off the power too thoroughly. He might have left the lights on,” I mumbled, taking out my phone. I saw it only had 2% battery left. I said to Xiao Ning desperately, “Use your phone’s flashlight, mine’s about to turn itself off.”

But instead, Xiao Ning said somberly from beside me: “Shutting off the lights wasn’t Xia Jin’s doing. It was the elevator ghost controlling them. It wants to trap us in the dark. Soon the elevator is sure to start rising on its own.”

“How could that happen.” I hit the wall of the elevator with a fist. Maybe I had used too much strength; the whole elevator shook. “Let’s see it go up, then.”

I leaned against the elevator wall with my arms crossed in front of my chest. The darkness was soporific. I'd been staying up late these past few nights, so I was very sleepy.

When I was on the point of falling asleep, I felt a cold hand touching my chest. It was so cold that it woke me up right away. Somewhat awkwardly, I said to Xiao Ning, "If you can't see then turn on your phone's flashlight. Don't go groping around."

The touch had me blushing.

Ning Tiance's voice sounded across from me: "I can see in the dark. It wasn't me touching you just now, it was the elevator ghost. I don't know why it's more interested in you than in a Celestial Master who poses a greater threat to it."

"You aren't going to admit you touched me?" I was a little angry.

Although considering just where he had touched me, a somewhat delicate and awkward place, not admitting it was all right. It saved me from being embarrassed.

The two of us were together in this enclosed dark space, and after all my orientation was rather bent. Just closing my eyes, I could imagine Xiao Ning's handsome face. All my anger dissolved at once.

Appearances really were what mattered in this world.

Then Xiao Ning took out some gold, glowing thing that hurt my eyes a little. Squinting, I could see he had taken out his wooden sword and was swinging it around in the narrow empty space, still feigning propriety.

"What are you doing!" The sword swept in front of my face several times.

“The ghost has already appeared. It’s going to use this elevator to kill the two of us. It can’t take on a visible form, so you can’t see it,” Ning Tiance replied as he waved his sword around.

I was forced to plaster myself to the wall in the corner of the elevator like a caterpillar for fear of being stabbed by the wooden sword. The nonexistent ghost didn’t scare me, but Xiao Ning did.

After a long time, Xiao Ning stopped swinging and leaned against the elevator wall panting. “This ghost is too cunning. It’s gone back into hiding in the elevator.”

I saw that he had finally stopped and went to force the wooden sword out of his hand. I banged the sword against the elevator wall like a discipline whip. “You’ve been too deeply poisoned by superstition.”

By the golden light coming from I didn’t know where, I saw Xiao Ning’s face change when I beat the wall with the wooden sword. Thinking that he was upset about his sword, I thrust it into his hand. “Here, take it back. I didn’t want to steal it, I just didn’t want you blindly swinging it around again.”

Ning Tiance took the wooden sword, his face disbelieving. “The elevator ghost has disintegrated.”

“Huh?”

“Just as you hit the wall with the sword, the ghost showed its face and was destroyed.” Xiao Ning’s face looked he was on the verge of collapse.

I was so stumped that all my anger vanished. Whatever I said, Xiao Ning wouldn’t believe it. I could only sigh. “If it’s gone then let’s get out of the elevator. If we stay longer we’ll start running out of oxygen.”

“R-right.”

Ning Tiance immediately contacted Xia Jin and told him to turn on the power. We left the elevator, and I sat down on the ground dispiritedly.

Convincing people to believe in science was a chore!

CHAPTER 14 - Teaching Class (Part 1)

Xia Jin ran out of the electrical room and, beaming, said to Ning Tiance said, “Tianshi, now that the ghost problem has been solved, there’s no need to dismantle the elevator, right?”

He looked irritatingly like a dog trotting at someone’s heels.

Xiao Ning, still with an expression like his whole world had collapsed, nodded.

“Well, please tell me your account number. I’ll ask the accountant to transfer the money.”

“No need.” Ning Tiance shook his head and looked at me. “I wasn’t the one who got rid of the ghost. Mr. Shen did it. He was somehow able to wield the peach wood sword handed down from generation to generation by the Maoshan Sect. It’s truly astonishing, if only — “

“Don’t!” I immediately interrupted him as soon as I saw where he was going. “I’m a university graduate with a degree in Ideological and Political Education. The only things I believe in are Marxism and communism. I will never join the Maoshan Sect.”

He smiled wryly. “Since there’s no chance of success, I won’t ask. We’ll part now.”

“Wait.” When I saw that he was going, I got up, dusted off the seat of my pants, and ran up in front of him.

Though this Ning Tiance was full of feudal superstitions, hadn’t gone to high school, had attacked Mu Huaitong and groped me in the dark, he was still a good person. He’d stepped in to help me when those children had gathered around to hit me, and then he hadn’t even known that it was me. I could have been any staff

member. In this ever colder desert of society, Ning Tiance was a rarity.

So I had to thank him!

“That person in the bear costume getting hit by children was me. Thank you for helping me stop them,” I said sincerely to Ning Tiance. “Although we have different beliefs, I still think we can be friends.”

Xia Jin, who knew me pretty well, glared at me with a look that could have burned through my face. I ignored it, boldly looking at Xiao Ning.

Ning Tiance nodded slightly to me. “A small matter. In the future we may meet again.”

“Where are you going tonight? We can go together, it might be on my way.”

Ning Tiance shook his head. “I’m going out to the countryside.”

Well, that wasn’t on my way. I could only watch Xiao Ning leave the mall and disappear in the distance.

Xia Jin was still staring at me.

When Ning Tiance was gone, I said to him, “You can drive me.”

Xia Jin said meaningfully, “Ning-tianshi is handsome, isn’t he?”

I thought about the way he had looked wearing ordinary clothes yesterday and had to agree: “Yes, very handsome.”

“Ha,” Xia Jin sneered, “don’t come to me to drink your sorrows away when your love affair goes wrong.”

“Ha,” I sneered back, “what a filthy mind. I was just grateful!”

“You know perfectly well what you were thinking,” Xia Jin said as we walked to the parking lot on the first subfloor.

In fact, if it hadn't been for yesterday's incident on the school bus, I would have told him what I was really thinking. When I was in university, I'd had a crush on a very handsome senior who played basketball. At the time, I wasn't very physically fit. In order to get close to him, I spent every day on the basketball court. Later, I led my basketball team to defeat the senior's team. He took some people to help him corner me at the school's back gate to beat me up, and instead they got beaten up by me. From then on there was an irreconcilable feud between myself and that senior I'd had a crush on. The only time my heart had been moved, that had been the outcome.

After that, Xia Jin drank with me every night for around a month to relieve my wounded feelings. I had been poor even since university, so at that time it was Xia Jin buying 2 yuan a bag Baijiu, which tasted very bad, was very difficult to drink and gave you a headache the next day. I had never forgotten this demonstration of brotherly feeling.

I didn't speak all the way back to 404. It was already past one in the morning. The following night I had to go to class. Before going to bed, I picked up my cell phone. Principal Zhang had sent the lecture topic and address.

Midnight on Monday, the assembly room on the fourth floor of the former site of the H City Fourth Hospital. Class will run for two hours. The topic of the lecture is Ideological and Moral Cultivation. The school bus will take you there and back.

It wasn't Benevolence School this time.

Lying in bed, I looked up the former address of the Fourth Hospital. The information I found was simply petrifying.

The Fourth Hospital was forced to relocate due to rumors of hauntings. The old site hadn't been sold yet. All the developers who came to investigate died suddenly. All the information was of this sort. Principal Zhang really knew how to pick locations.

I was puzzled. Since Principal Zhang wanted to help these special people, why didn't she find a fixed location for the class?

I voiced my doubts over WeChat and soon received a message from Principal Zhang: *A student helped me find it. It's free.*

The word "free" instantly dispelled all my doubts. So that was it. Recently I'd found I really liked that word.

Principal Zhang was a kind-hearted person. I didn't even know whether she collected tuition fees from her students. If she didn't, then the school was run purely as a charity. In that case, Principal Zhang's economic outlook wasn't good. She had to save money where she could. So what if there was no fixed location? If the students didn't mind, then it was fine.

But I had another problem. Why were classes always at night? Daytime was better. Even if it had to be at night, couldn't it start at eight?

I thought unhappily of Xia Jin's hairline.

Principal Zhang's response: There are fewer people out at night, the students feel more secure.

I thought of Li Yuanyuan. She always appeared at night. Probably there were too many people for her to feel comfortable going out

during the day, considering what she had gone through.

I could understand this. Ah, baldness was worth it for the sake of the students.

I lay tossing and turning in bed, unable to get to sleep, thinking of Comrade Xiao Ning's stern, tight-lipped face. Though he was clearly very young, he still acted like an old man. His speech was also pretty old-fashioned. Thinking about it, it really was adorable.

I picked up my phone and sent Xiao Ning a message: *Are you sleeping?*

He answered almost the next instant: *No.*

Why aren't you asleep this late at night?

I'm at H City's cemetery, thinking how to walk the road ahead, how to find the right path for my cultivation.

What bizarre freak of Ning Tiance's was this? Going to a cemetery in the middle of the night to contemplate life? I asked: *Are there ghosts in the cemetery?*

There were before the founding of the People's Republic. Now, cremation is popular. There are no bones for the soul to attach to. Most of them don't stay. There are no ghosts here, and no people. It is the clearest place in the earthly realm.

When I thought about Xiao Ning's appearance of having had all his ideas overturned before, this way of talking worried me a little. Having your worldview pulled down by others was a very painful experience. It was very easy to go astray as a result.

Didn't we arrange to meet on Monday? I didn't expect I'd see you the night before. Let's meet again during the day. Xiao Ning's

emotional state didn't seem to be very good. I wanted to see him and have a chat.

I'm sorry. I may have to break my appointment. Before I went to the cemetery, I went to the railway station to buy tickets to return to my sect early tomorrow morning. What just happened shook me to my core. I need to go back for a while.

Oh. Where is your sect? How long does the train take?

It's over thirty hours sitting on a hard seat, three or four days for a round-trip, plus the time I'll need to spend meditating. Altogether it should be between seven and fifteen days. How about we meet then?

More than thirty hours on a hard seat! Just thinking about it made my back and butt hurt. It seemed that Xiao Ning's exorcism didn't bring in much money. Thinking that I had just snatched business away from him, I felt guilty.

Is there a discount on hard seat tickets? This time of year, plane tickets are sometimes cheaper than train tickets.

No, I'm not short of money. I ride on a hard seat to cultivate my mind and heart in the earthly realm.

Reading the words "not short of money," I felt a faint stab of jealousy. I was very short of money. Every time I rode on a hard seat it was to save a few hundred yuan for living expenses.

Then... I won't disturb you anymore. I'll see you when you come back. You must remember to come see me.

After the message was sent, I suddenly wondered whether it was too direct. What if Xiao Ning wasn't gay? Though he had touched me in the elevator...

I added a sentence: Come see me, and I'll help you read up on pop science.

All right, Ning Tiance replied simply. I didn't know whether he suspected my intentions.

After chatting, I slowly fell asleep. I slept without dreaming. When I woke up in the morning, seeing the sunlight put me in a good mood.

I'd never dreamed much since I was a child, and I could sleep easily. Aside from not being able to sleep in class, I could sleep anywhere.

Principal Zhang had told me what the topic for today's class would be, a subject I was good at. All day I shut myself into my room making up a lesson plan. Since an abandoned hospital might not have a projector, after putting together a PowerPoint, I wrote my lesson plan down in the notebook Liu Sishun had given me as insurance.

At night I went to wait for the bus at 11:30 as usual. The bus driver, as always, was punctual.

Getting on the bus today, I felt a little hot. I couldn't help saying, "Sir, it's a little warm in here today. Haven't you turned on the air-conditioning?"

"You can have any seat today," said the driver, not answering my question.

I looked around. Sure enough, the chairs had all become green, and the sign for Teacher Shen Jianguo's seat was gone.

Although I'd felt a little embarrassed about the special seat for pregnant women, it had also shown the driver's good intentions.

Having it gone felt a little unfamiliar.

“Why have all the chairs been painted green?” I asked.

The driver continued to avoid answering my questions directly.

“You’re the only one tonight. You can sit anywhere you like.”

He said that as if I hadn’t been the only one every time... But thinking about it, suddenly I thought of what happened between me and Xia Jin the other night. Thinking that the driver must have seen it, I felt uncomfortable talking to him and quietly took a seat.

After arriving at the old site of the Fourth Hospital, the driver said to me, “I’ll come for you at two, and I’ll wait until five. Before five you have to... forget it, you’ll definitely come back.”

Then he dropped me off and drove the bus away.

The Fourth Hospital’s original buildings were still in good condition. In the dark I couldn’t clearly distinguish the office building, the outpatient building and the inpatient building.

My class would be in the assembly hall in the outpatient building. That was supposed to be where doctors met to discuss treatment plans. The meeting room was very large, and there were projection facilities. It was well suited for a classroom lecture.

As I approached the front gates of the hospital, I saw a girl in a red dress standing at the door waving to me.

I came closer and saw that it was Mu Huaitong. She must have been wearing too much face powder. Her face in the night was as shining white as snow, and her lips were unnaturally red.

“Teacher Shen,” Mu Huaitong said to me with a smile, standing at the gate and not coming out, “I was afraid you wouldn’t be able to

find the classroom, so I volunteered to come out to meet you.”

CHAPTER 15 - Teaching Class (Part 2)

In the moonlight Mu Huaitong's smile was extraordinarily piercing. I sighed. How could a nice girl like this have a worse idea of female beauty than a cast-iron gay man like me? It was one thing to use some powder to cover up blemishes and lipstick to add a little color, but putting on too much powder made the face look bloodless, and her lips looked as if she'd been drinking pig's blood. There was nothing beautiful about it.

Mu Huaitong took my arm in a natural gesture and said softly, "It's not good to walk after dark. I was worried Teacher Shen wouldn't be able to see clearly. Let me help you."

She was talking as though I was an old man in his seventies or eighties. And Mu Huaitong was plastered to my body, her chest rubbing against my arm.

"Mu Huaitong, you..." I hesitated, looking at her.

She looked up at me and blinked. Her big eyes were like a spirit lure, and her chest rubbed against my arm again.

"You should drink more goji berry concentrate," I said with concern. "You're so cold, even though it's summer. Your blood iron content must be low and your blood circulation poor. Having such problems when you're this young will make it hard for you in the future. The most important thing now is to exercise more. When we have a break during class I'll recommend my exercise routine to you. It's very effective."

Saying this, I pulled my arm away from her chest, took off my jacket, and put it on her. The jacket was warm from my body and would help her warm up a little.

Fortunately, I had bought another jacket and shirt for class. If I'd been wearing a 19.9 yuan t-shirt like I wore for my part-time job, taking it off would have meant going bare-chested. I couldn't have lent it to Mu Huaitong.

Mu Huaitong's face shrank down into the jacket so I could only see her eyes looking at me. She asked, "Teacher, am I ugly? Is my figure bad?"

"You're very beautiful," I said confidently. "I was a liberal arts student. The majority of students at our school were girls. It was like drifting among clouds of beautiful women. But even in those surroundings you would be among the first rank of beauties. Your only disadvantage is that you lack self-confidence. I'm not like those straight men who have a problem with women wearing makeup. I think makeup can make you look more beautiful, as well as giving you more confidence. As long as you take care to protect your skin, makeup is a good thing. But everything has its limits. You're so beautiful. Heavy makeup will only cover up your beauty. You should stick to light makeup."

And the most important thing was that her make-up was badly applied. When I went to school, I was surrounded by female students. They had passed along a lot of make-up tips to me. Even though I wasn't interested in that, I still remembered a lot.

Mu Huaitong's face twisted. She stared at me and said, "Don't you have any other ideas about me, teacher?"

After that, she blinked repeatedly. Her eyelashes were really long, but they weren't as long as Xiao Ning's. I thought of how Xiao Ning looked with his head lowered, deep in thought. His long, long eyelashes had captured my attention.

"I do," I said, nodding. "I hope you can make it out of the shadow of your past as soon as possible and face life with a positive attitude."

There's no barrier in the world that can't be crossed. People are stronger than they think. "

I knew that abandonment, miscarriage, and the contempt of her fellow students had hurt her a lot. This kind of pain wouldn't go away just because I stood there and told her to be strong. Mu Huaitong's future path wasn't an easy one to walk.

"I'm not a psychology student. I don't have a lot of theoretical knowledge, but one thing I know very well is that exercise makes people happy." I smacked my chest and said to her, "When I'm in a bad mood, I run 10,000 meters, sweat all over, then take a bath. When my body's tired, my mind can't overthink things so much. If you want, you can ask me to accompany you on a morning run."

Mu Huaitong threw my jacket into my face and angrily walked ahead of me. "Teacher Shen, you're never going to have a girlfriend."

That was perfectly reasonable. I didn't want a girlfriend, anyway.

After Mu Haitong got angry, we went much faster. Within five minutes, we went into the outpatient building. It was dark in the building. I couldn't help grabbing the arm of Mu Haitong, who was walking in front of me.

"What is it? Are you scared?" Mu Huaitong looked back at me and smiled, her face as white as A4 paper.

"Well, a little scared," I admitted. "What if I run into another student pretending to be a ghost in the dark? Last time, because you stopped me halfway up the third floor stairs, that class was cancelled. I didn't even see the students. Principal Zhang didn't blame me, but I don't want to miss work again. It makes me feel unworthy of the salary Principal Zhang is paying me."

Mu Huaitong could probably tell that I was alluding to her naughty behavior and seemed a little conscience-stricken. She was silent for a long time, and didn't speak until we reached the fourth floor. "Don't worry, Teacher Shen. No one will dare to stop you in the corridor this time."

I was ready to praise the students for their obedience, but Mu Huaitong added, "But they won't necessarily behave in the classroom. I hope you'll be able to deal with them like you dealt with me."

After that, the door to the assembly room behind her opened by itself without any wind. The lights inside were off. Mu Huaitong disappeared into the darkness. I guessed she was hiding behind the door to frighten me.

Ah, these students were too wary of their teacher. They hadn't even turned on the light. They must have wanted to have a frightening welcome ceremony in the dark.

Fortunately, after my experience at Benevolence School, I had come prepared. I took out my newly purchased energy-saving LED table lamp from the bag I was carrying. I had charged it during the day, and it was at full power. It could light up 40 square meters of space when it was turned on, the first choice for dealing with a power outage.

I went into the classroom carrying the lamp. On entering I saw a student wearing a hospital gown, his head covered in blood and brain matter, floating in front of me. He saw me and grinned. By the lamplight I saw maggots crawling on his teeth.

"Such delicious human energy, such thick Yang. It's enough to keep me full for a year. Hee-hee-hee!" He let out an ugly-sounding laugh, and maggots fell to the ground from his smiling mouth.

This student had gone to a lot of trouble to scare me. I didn't know whether the bugs were real or not.

What a joke. Was I the sort of person who would be scared of some insects? When we'd had cockroaches in the dorm Xia Jin had howled, crawled up from the bottom bunk to my top bunk, clung to me, and said that there was a cockroach on his bed and he didn't dare to sleep. I grabbed the cockroach with my bare hands and threw it out of the window. How could I be afraid of these little bugs now?

The maggots rolled on the ground and crawled towards me. Unhurriedly, I took out the notebook Teacher Liu had given me and used it to crush the maggots. At the same time, my expression not changing, I patted the student on the shoulder. "Young man, you've really gone out of your way to scare me. What's your name?"

"You — you actually killed the blood maggots I worked so hard to raise?" said the student angrily. "Do you know how much thought and effort it took me to grow these maggots in formalin?"

"I know you aren't very conscious of hygiene." I tried to stay away from him. "Go back to your seat. All the students are waiting."

Principal Zhang had given me a roster in advance. There were 23 students in this class. The number wasn't very large, but judging by this one in front of me, none of them would be easy to deal with.

After going through the door, I held up the powerful lamp and saw the faces of the 23 students clearly.

They were dressed up in all kinds of strange ways. Some were in wheelchairs, some were wearing cheongsam, some had wrapped themselves up like mummies, and there was even a boy about thirteen or fourteen sitting in his seat with a bedplate on his back, apparently not afraid of damaging his spine.

Seeing them like this, I suddenly felt that you could call Mu Huaitong's behavior towards me the other night polite. At least she understood hygiene and didn't try to disgust me with insects.

"Ahem," I cleared my throat. "Hello, everyone, I'm your teacher for this Ideological and Moral Cultivation class. My name is Shen Jianguo. You can call me Teacher Shen, Teacher Jianguo, or Shen Jianguo, it's all fine. This is my first job. This class will be a chance for us all to learn and to progress together. I'm very glad that all 23 of you could be here today. I know it's hard to attend class at night and in such surroundings. In order to get to know you better and faster, let me call the roll. Mu Huaitong."

Sitting at the front of the assembly room, Mu Huaitong slowly raised her hand, supporting me. With her taking the lead, the rest of the students cooperated. A few minutes later I remembered all the students' names and appearances. Of course, this wasn't because my memory was good, but because their outfits made a deep impression; once you had seen them, you wouldn't forget.

For example, the student who liked playing with maggots was called Tian Bowen⁵, a rather literary name.

The electricity in the classroom seemed to have been cut off by the naughty students, so I couldn't use the projector. I could only use my specially-prepared traditional materials. I put the notebook that Teacher Liu had given me on the table, and the students became quiet and well-behaved.

"Ideological and Moral Cultivation is a subject we actually begin to encounter starting in elementary school, and we learn about it at every stage after. Because it is not a compulsory subject, schools, students and even teachers don't attach importance to it, but it really is the most important subject, because it can help students to

establish a correct world view during their developmental period, as well as helping adults find direction during confused periods in their lives. What do I mean by world view? This is the topic we will cover in today's class."

After my opening remarks, I wrote down the words "world view" on the whiteboard in the assembly room.

The students were very quiet. Mu Huaitong even took out a notebook to take notes. I was very pleased. Although everyone had dressed strangely to scare me, they were all good children.

My throat was dry after talking for an hour, so I took out a bottle of water and said, "Let's take a ten minute break. You can go to the toilet or stretch your muscles. Uh — which student does this classroom belong to? Can you tell me where the power is? I'll turn on the light. This darkness isn't good for everyone's eyes."

Hearing my words, the thirteen- or fourteen-year-old boy wearing the bedplate shuffled over to me. "Teacher, I lent this classroom."

I remembered that his name was Tan Xiaoming, a name commonly seen on rosters.

"Do you know where the power is?"

"I can turn on the light," Tan Xiaoming said to me, then laughed: "Haha." My students really liked to laugh. "But there is one condition."

"What condition?"

"Teacher Shen has to sleep with me tonight."

I looked at Tan Xiaoming's fresh young face and said very properly, "Although you are handsome, you're a minor. That can't happen."

“No,” said Tan Xiaoming, shaking his head, “I mean, Teacher Shen has to sleep in the morgue tonight with me.”

CHAPTER 16 - Teaching Class (Part 3)

As strong as I was, I was still shocked by Tan Xiaoming's malice. Did today's students all go to such great lengths to disgust their teachers? I wasn't afraid for myself. I slept so well that I could even nap in a cemetery. But wasn't Tan Xiaoming afraid? The sacrifice was too great.

"I won't have a problem, but what about you? What about your family? Won't your parents be worried about you being out so late at night?" I asked with concern.

Tan Xiaoming's expression suddenly became very pitiful. He blinked tears out of his eyes. "My parents didn't want me. I had no place to sleep. I found that there was a bed in the morgue here, and I've been sleeping there ever since."

It really was too pitiful.

I thought about it and said to Tan Xiaoming, "Wait a moment."

After that I immediately called Principal Zhang. Lately the time I was able to contact Principal Zhang had stabilized. At night her signal would be better, and it would be relatively easy to contact her.

I left the students to themselves and went out into the corridor to make my call. "Hello, Principal Zhang. It's Shen Jianguo. I have a question about one of the students. His name is Tan Xiaoming. He says he's homeless. What's the situation? — Oh. His father was abusive, his mother couldn't bear it and left. He became the new target of his father's malice, so he couldn't stay at home."

So that was it. It was no wonder that Tan Xiaoming had a rebellious streak and seemed malicious. The harm his father had inflicted on him had been too great.

At this moment, I made a difficult decision.

“Principal Zhang, I’d like to ask if there’s another employee who’s going to move into the room Li Yuanyuan used to live in. If not, I want to have Tan Xiaoming live in it. Of course... the rent can be deducted from my salary.”

Saying this, my heart lurched. It felt like a corkscrew being driven right into my heart, so painful I couldn’t breathe.

Deduct my salary... Deduct my salary, when I was already so poor...

But Tan Xiaoming’s problem had to be solved. First, find him a place to live. He couldn’t keep living in the morgue. Then, contact his father. If he refused to correct his behavior, then the law would have to protect Tan Xiaoming’s rights and interests.

Although it was better for minors to have unbroken families, with a father like Tan Xiaoming’s, he would be better off without his care.

Fortunately, Principal Zhang was as kind as ever. “He can... live there... *bzzt*... No need... for you... to pay... *bzzt*.”

Principal Zhang really was the best boss I had ever encountered (though I’d only met this one boss); as long as she didn’t fire me, I would certainly follow her to the end!

After putting down the phone, I walked back to the classroom in a happy mood and said to Tan Xiaoming, “You don’t need to live in the morgue anymore. Come back with me tonight. You can live in Apartment 404, Unit 4, Building 4 of the Farther Shore Estate. There are three bedrooms in that apartment. A female colleague moved out recently and left a room vacant. You can move in tonight. The school bus will pick me up at 2 o’clock. I’ll help you move.”

Tan Xiaoming must have been too surprised and pleased to control his expression. With a blank face he said, “The room Li Yuanyuan used to live in?”

“Oh, you know her. You should call her Yuanyuan-jie. It’s not polite to call her by her full name like that,” I corrected him.

“Hahaha!” Mu Huaitong burst out laughing. The way she laughed was very unique. Instead of pounding on the table, she scratched at the table with her fingernails, making an ear-splitting sound as she laughed.

“Student Mu, do you have any better views to put forward?” I looked at her.

“No, no!” Mu Huaitong waved her hand. “I’m happy for Tan Xiaoming. He finally has a place to live. I’m so happy. Hahahaha!”

I’d known that Mu Huaitong was a nice girl. Even if the way she expressed her emotions was rather unrestrained, her heart was good.

Tan Xiaoming seemed not to want to move. Children with his background could be very wary of strangers. It was normal for him to refuse.

He thought for a long time and said, “I can move there, but Teacher Shen absolutely has to stay with me tonight. If you still want me to be your roommate after tonight, then I... I... I’ll move!”

His last words sounded tearful. He must have been very moved; it was only that adolescents felt awkward expressing emotions.

“No problem. It’s settled. I will accompany you tonight,” I promised.

The break went by like this. Soon it was time for the second half of the lesson. According to my lesson plan, I explained to the students what constituted a correct world view. The next class would tell them how to systematically establish one.

Soon it was two o'clock. The students quickly got up and left. They were all on good terms with Tan Xiaoming. Most of them patted him warmly on the shoulder. They must have been happy for him. After all, Xiaoming finally had a place to live.

Only Mu Huaitong and Tian Bowen stayed back to talk to me. Mu Huaitong took my arm as before and said, "Teacher, why don't I stay with you tonight? Keeping you here like this is really unfair of Tan Xiaoming. It's finders keepers, and I was obviously here first. How could you go sleep with him?"

"Xiaoming is young. I'm worried about him," I explained to Mu Huaitong. "And you are a girl, how can you sleep in the same place as two men? You should learn to protect yourself."

After soothing Mu Huaitong, I looked at Tian Bowen. "What is it, Student Tian?"

Student Tian must have taken off his make-up during class. Now he looked pretty normal. He was wearing a white coat, and the maggots in his mouth were gone. It seemed that before he had made a great sacrifice to give me a welcome ceremony.

"I'm fine," Tian Bowen said, staring at the notebook in my hand. "Teacher, could you give me that notebook?"

"No." I shook my head firmly. "It's a gift from a friend. I cherish it deeply. If you really like it, I'll buy one for you tomorrow. "

"Who knows what will happen tomorrow?" Tian Bowen shrugged and left with Mu Huaitong.

There were only two people left in the classroom: Tan Xiaoming and me. He said to me enthusiastically, “Teacher, let’s go to bed together!”

“Just a moment,” I said. “The driver will be waiting at the door to pick me up. If I don’t come out, he’ll wait until five o’clock. I have to go and tell him that I’ll be staying here tonight so he doesn’t sit up all night. You can wait for me in the morgue.”

“No,” said Tan Xiaoming stubbornly, “I’ll come with Teacher Shen. What if you run away?”

“I won’t go back on my promise.”

It was a pity that Tan Xiaoming still didn’t trust me. He insisted on coming with me to the hospital gates. In the thick fog, the school bus stopped in front of me. The door opened. I stepped up with one foot and said to the driver, “Sir, there’s a student who wants me to stay with him at the hospital tonight, so I won’t be going back.”

The driver looked at Tan Xiaoming, who was peeking out from behind me, and, looking serious, said, “Be careful.”

“Don’t worry.” I smacked my chest.

“I didn’t mean you.” The driver pointed his gloved finger and nodded at Tan Xiaoming. “I meant him.”

With this sentence the driver drove away in the empty bus, leaving me where I was to ponder.

After seeing everything that had happened with Xia Jin the other night, the driver must have been on his guard against me, thinking I was the sort of beast who would touch a minor. It was too unfair!

I really wanted to take out my phone to explain things to him, but the driver and I hadn't added each other as friends yet. I had once held out the olive branch of friendship to him, but the driver had refused. He'd said he didn't particularly want to know me better, and if I had something to say to him I could contact Principal Zhang.

Receiving this kind of unfriendly treatment from a coworker was frankly frustrating. But on the other hand, it was hard work driving a bus at night, so it was normal for his temper to be rather bad. We should try to forgive each other.

After parting with the driver, I followed Tan Xiaoming into the morgue.

On the way, I asked, "Xiao Ming⁶, why are you always carrying that bedplate on your back?"

"As long as I have this bedplate, I can exist anywhere," said Tan Xiaoming.

Ah, the child was so insecure. Like a snail with its shell on its back, wherever he went, he would retreat back to his bedplate to sleep.

Tan Xiaoming was two steps ahead of me getting to the morgue. By the time I went in, he had already taken the bedplate off his back.

Without the bedplate, Tan Xiaoming seemed less confident. He pointed to a bed in the corner, made up with dust-coated white sheets.

"I'll sleep in that bed?"

He nodded and didn't speak.

"What about you?" I asked.

“I’ll watch you sleep,” Tan Xiaoming said, looking at me. “I’ll go sleep after you’ve gotten into bed.”

He pointed into a dim corner where there seemed to be a dilapidated bed.

“Where did you put your bedplate?”

“In your bed. See how good I am to you.” Tan Xiaoming grinned.

“OK.” I nodded. “I’ll remember to bring your bedplate when I help you move tomorrow.”

Tan Xiaoming didn’t speak. After watching me climb into the bed, he went into the shadows.

The bed was very damp. I couldn’t get comfortable lying on it. I wanted to talk to Tan Xiaoming, but he was silent in the darkness. I guessed he had gone to sleep.

I suddenly thought of Ning Tiance and felt regretful. I could sleep in the morgue with a student, so why hadn’t I gone to the cemetery last night to keep Xiao Ning company? In the desolate night, Xiao Ning had been all alone in the cemetery, contemplating life. It was so sad.

Thinking of this, I felt an irresistible urge and sent Xiao Ning a message: *Are you asleep?*

He responded practically the next second: It’s hard to get to sleep sitting on a hard seat.

So he was still on the train. Thirty hours or more on a hard seat — Ning Tiance really had it hard.

I thought about it and said: I'm also not sleeping comfortably. I'm in the morgue, keeping a child company.

My fingers flew over the phone's keyboard, telling Xiao Ning about Tan Xiaoming.

For a long time, Xiao Ning didn't answer. Maybe the signal on the train was bad. I was about to fall asleep holding on to my phone when I heard the faint sound of a message notification.

Opening it, I saw it was Xiao Ning.

Send me your location. I've gotten off at the nearest station and I'm carpooling back to H City to come to you. That boy is very dangerous. Don't approach him, and don't lie in that bed.

While I was wondering about this, I heard a voice coming from the bedplate saying: "Back to back, such a comfort. Back to back, such a comfort."

CHAPTER 17 - Teaching Class (Part 4)

Why had he suddenly gotten off the train to carpool back?

I thought about it, then called Xiao Ning, but by now I didn't have a single bar of reception left. The coverage in the abandoned hospital must have been spotty.

“Back to back, such a comfort. Back to back, nice and warm.”

Tan Xiaoming's voice didn't stop. I couldn't help sitting up and asking, “Xiao Ming, do you want to sleep in the same bed with me?”

But as soon as I sat up, he stopped talking. Was he shy?

To be honest, I didn't particularly want to share a bed with Tan Xiaoming. Most of the installations in the morgue had already been taken away. There were only a few broken down single beds, between 90 and 100cm wide. It was a little cramped for an adult man to sleep in, never mind two people.

If Tan Xiaoming wanted to sleep in the same bed with me, we would have to sleep very close together: the “back to back” posture he had described, or else I would have to hold him.

Imagine an adult male sexually attracted to men, sleeping in a single bed with a 13 or 14-year-old boy in his arms; it was no different than a 26-year-old male teacher holding a female middle school student. The image was truly unsightly. It absolutely wouldn't do.

I could only say, “Xiao Ming, it's not convenient for us to sleep in the same bed. If you're cold, let's go back to my dormitory. The room is empty, and there's a bed in it.”

Under these pressing circumstances, I was willing to shell out money for a taxi. Xiao Ming was so frail, he wouldn't be able to bike home with me.

Tan Xiaoming didn't speak. I took this as silent refusal. Adolescents could easily enter a rebellious stage, and given his domestic situation, it would be difficult for him to accept a new environment.

Today was my first formal day of teaching. Between them, Tan Xiaoming and Mu Huaitong had really made me feel that it was no easy task being a teacher. When I was a student, I couldn't stand my teachers. I'd thought that they were always making trouble.

But now that I was a teacher, I found that managing this many students, preventing them from going astray, worrying about their studies and their lives, really was a difficult matter.

It was a long and serious path.

I thought that although I couldn't sleep with Xiao Ming, I certainly couldn't let him continue being so lonely. I had to help him rejoin society and become a healthy and active young man, instead of someone who hid in a morgue trying to scare his teacher.

I tossed my phone on the bed, hopped up and walked to the corner where Tan Xiaoming was sleeping. As I approached, I said cautiously, "Xiao Ming, it's all right if you can't sleep. I'll keep you company. But I can't sleep in the same bed as you. How about this: you sleep here, and I'll sit beside the bed to keep you company."

So what if I had to sleep sitting on the ground? It was all for my students.

However, when I came to the corner, there was only an empty bed. At some point the child had crept out of his bed without making a sound. Of course, it may have happened while I was chatting with

Xiao Ning. I'd had my whole heart focused on waiting for Ning Tiance's responses. I wouldn't have noticed anything going on around me.

That was a dereliction of duty on my part.

Had he run away, or was he still hiding in this room?

"Xiao Ming? Xiao Ming?" I whispered Tan Xiaoming's name in the morgue for a while without getting a response. I went to the door and saw that the handle had been blocked from inside with a wooden bar. That couldn't have been done from the outside, so that meant no one had gone out that door.

Because the hospital was abandoned, there were strips of sealing wax on the windows. All the seals were intact, without any traces of damage. That meant Tan Xiaoming was still in the room.

Where was the child hiding?

I turned around and around for a long time without finding him, then lay down in bed and looked at my phone in confusion. There was still no signal; the last message was about Xiao Ning planning to carpool back.

What kind of emergency had made him suddenly get off his train and come rushing back to H City? Had he left something behind? Then couldn't he have asked me to mail it to him?

After I'd rolled around in bed for a while rereading my chatlog with Ning Tiance, I heard Tan Xiaoming's voice again: "Back to back, such a comfort. Back to back, nice and warm."

I didn't rush to get out of bed but instead listened carefully for the source of the voice.

The morgue was large and empty, full of echoes. It took me a long time to realize that the voice was coming from under me.

I leapt out of bed, grabbed the lamp I'd left at the head of the bed, turned it on, crouched down, and shone the light under the bed. As expected, I saw Tan Xiaoming, hanging from the bedplate and looking at me. His face was red and his eyes were protruding, probably due to the force of gravity. It looked very uncomfortable.

How could anyone be comfortable after tying himself to a bedplate and hanging like that?

I was very angry. I said to Tan Xiaoming, "How could you do this, child? Even if you're running around trying to scare your teacher, you still have to look after your own health. Just look at you! You've tied yourself up so tightly you've cut off your circulation. Your skin is turning blue!"

When I went to untie the rope for Tan Xiaoming, he said quietly, "After my mom left, there was only one bed at home. At first, I slept with my dad. Later, he began to beat me. He said I was crowding him. After he was done beating me, he'd tie me to the bedplate, under the bed. Back to back, such a comfort."

"Comfort my ass!" I really wanted to go and beat up his dad.

Tan Xiaoming was tied too tightly. I didn't know how he'd managed to tie himself up like this. In the dark I couldn't get the knot untied, and I hadn't brought scissors with me. I watched his eyes roll up and show the whites, his tongue lolling out of his mouth.

Afterwards, I would have to remember to bring scissors or a knife to class. The students really were too much.

"Xiao Ming, don't worry. A bit of rope won't defeat me."

I, Shen Jianguo, aside from having gone to university, had one other good quality: I was fit and strong. It was only a bedplate. I could just flip it over.

Tan Xiaoming's bedplate was one meter by two meters. It was just the right size to have come off that empty bed. I stood up, put my hands on both sides of the bedplate, and lifted it from the iron frame. First, I put the bedplate upright so Tan Xiaoming's head would be more comfortable. Then I flipped the bedplate around, lifted it and put it back on the iron frame. This time Xiao Ming was face-up.

He looked blankly at the ceiling and said, "Teacher Shen, I like sleeping under the bed. Let me sleep back to back with you."

"Like hell!" I used my teeth to break the rope tying him, freeing Tan Xiaoming.

After all this messing around it was already four in the morning. I rubbed Tan Xiaoming's skin; with the rope unfastened his skin was regaining its color, and his eyes no longer protruded. It seemed he had recovered.

"Go to sleep." I took off my jacket and put it on him. I sat down on the floor beside him, using the notebook Teacher Liu had given me as a cushion. I patted Tan Xiaoming. "I'll help you move tomorrow, then I'll consult a lawyer and a psychiatrist about how to go about reporting your father."

"No need." Tan Xiaoming looked at me. "He's dead."

I was startled. There wasn't a trace of sadness in Tan Xiaoming's expression; he was wearing an eerie smile.

"He was drunk. He woke up in the middle of the night and heard me talking. He looked under the bed and got scared to death when he

saw me. Hahahaha!”

In the morgue, the sound of Tan Xiaoming’s laughter was sorrowful.

I clapped him on the arm angrily. “Don’t think like that! He wasn’t scared to death by you. He’d drunk too much, and his heart was weak, so he died. How could anyone be scared to death by seeing you? I wasn’t scared. Don’t think about it. Go to sleep now, and you’ll move in the morning. I’ll come with you.” I kept lightly patting him to encourage him to sleep.

“I don’t have any luggage. If you take the bedplate for me, that’ll be enough,” Tan Xiaoming said. “Tomorrow I have something to do during the day. I’ll go over in the evening.”

“No, I’m going to take you to see a psychologist tomorrow,” I said stubbornly.

Seeing that Tan Xiaoming couldn’t sleep, I began to recite the principles of Marxism to him. During school, whenever I started reciting them, I would immediately fall asleep. Tan Xiaoming shouldn’t have any problem.

Sure enough, after reciting for a while I fell asleep myself. When I opened my eyes, it was day.

My jacket was on the bed. Tan Xiaoming was gone.

That child. He’d snuck off while I was sleeping.

I picked up my phone and saw a dozen unread messages, one of which was from Principal Zhang. The timestamp on it was four in the morning, just after I’d fallen asleep.

Principal Zhang: I’ve already found the best psychologist in the country for Student Tan. In the future, he will go to treatment every

day and go back to the dormitory at night. There's no need for Teacher Shen to worry.

Principal Zhang was always reliable. I was relieved.

The rest of the messages were from Ning Tiance. He thought I'd run into a ghost again and had sent a string of texts:

I got off the train at a small station. There are no cars here in the middle of the night. I have to walk to the big city thirty kilometers away to find a car. Hold on, wait for me.

Where are you?

This talisman is for you. Although it's just a picture, it'll still be of some use. If you're in danger, hold up your phone.

If you see this message, answer me. Let me know you're safe.

I've already run 20 kilometers along the highway. I met several cars on the road, but no one stopped. I can only keep running. I'm in good training, I'll be there soon. Please hold on.

I have arrived at the big city. I can't get a carpool at night. I've rented a car to get back to H City. I should be at the hospital after ten in the morning.

The last message was sent at 6:00 am. Had Xiao Ning been racing along the highway all night?

My heart felt warm. Although Ning Tiance clung to outdated beliefs, he really was a kind-hearted person. He thought I'd encountered a ghost, so he'd gotten off his train in the middle of the night to come find me.

What a nice boy. Despite his feudal superstitions, I couldn't help being attracted to him.

As I was reading Xiao Ning's messages, I walked out of the morgue carrying the bedplate on my back.

It was 9:30 in the morning. Xiao Ning was on his way to the hospital. Owing to some complicated psychological motives that I myself couldn't clearly understand, I didn't answer his texts but stood in the hospital's courtyard waiting for Ning Tiance.

While I waited, I put the bedplate down in the courtyard to dry out in the sun so Tan Xiaoming would be able to sleep more comfortably.

When I had waited for around forty minutes, a car stopped at the hospital gate. Ning Tiance, looking travel-worn and exhausted, got out of the car and ran into the courtyard. When he saw me, he came to a halt.

The sun shone on his handsome face. In that moment, I was dazzled.

I, Shen Jianguo, fell in love.

CHAPTER 18 - Teaching Class (Part 5)

Ning Tiance came to me, his face full of undisguisable fatigue.

He looked at the bed plank I was drying and asked, “Is this from the bed you slept on last night?”

My heart had yet to recover from its fresh shock. I calmly nodded and gave up my seat. I said to Xiao Ning, “You must be tired from running around all night. Why don’t you... sit down on the bedplate?”

I pulled over the bedplate and put it in front of Xiao Ning. Ning Tiance looked down at it, moving his lips, which were turning white from exhaustion. He asked in a serious voice, “Tell me about your experiences last night.”

I told him every detail of what had happened between me getting on the bus and me falling asleep reciting Marxist principles. With my mind full of love and my IQ lowered as a result, I described Mu Huitong’s poor makeup technique, unhealthy physique, and cold limbs, Tian Bowen’s hobby of playing with insects, the driver’s misunderstanding and telling Tan Xiaoming to be careful, Tan Xiaoming’s abuse by his father, all without any concealment.

Perhaps my students were too pitiful. Ning Tiance’s expression looked worse and worse as he listened to me. Finally, he looked at the bedplate with a sympathetic gaze. He must have felt very sorry for Tan Xiaoming.

I felt the bedplate. The top of it had already dried, so I turned it over to dry the other side.

“I’m having Xiao Ming move to my place. That child is insecure and seems to have an obsession. He absolutely insisted I bring the

bedplate along,” I explained. “But the bedplate has been in that gloomy morgue so long, it’s all damp. I’m trying to dry it out in the sun before taking it with me.”

Ning Tiance said, “If you do dry it out, Tan Xiaoming may never be able to move again.”

“Hm? Why?” I didn’t understand. “Surely a bed is only comfortable if it’s clean and freshly aired out in the sun?”

Ning Tiance stared at me, his gaze full of unspoken words, but finally he just said, “Take the bedplate back to your dormitory now.”

“What about you?” I asked. “You should have a good rest after running around all night. Didn’t you want to go back to your sect? If you have enough money, you’d better take a plane this time. The train is too tiring.”

I thought some more, then with great difficulty said, “Actually, last night it was only because you were worried about me that you came rushing back. I should pay for your plane tickets.”

Although I was very poor, I would still give everything good I had to the person I liked. That was the true way of love.

“No, I’m not going back to my sect anymore.” Ning Tiance looked at me and said, “I wanted to go back to my sect because there were some things I couldn’t understand. I wanted to ask for my shifu’s help. But now it seems that I’ll have to cross this barrier on my own. It was heaven’s will that sent me back here last night, and my own fate.”

I didn’t really understand what he was saying. After all, I didn’t know much about feudal superstition. But today, love made me reconsider. Since I loved Xiao Ning, I should try looking at things from his point of view. Before, I’d said that I wanted him to believe in

science, but if I didn't even understand feudal superstition, how could I use science to refute, guide, and influence him?

"I really don't believe in ghosts and gods, but it would still be all right to understand more about my country's old traditions." I extended this olive branch to Ning Tiance.

"No need," he said, looking at me, his face wan. "If a normal person has a lot of contact with ghosts, even if his Yang energy is great, over time it will be worn down and gradually weakened by Yin energy. His life span will be reduced. The ghosts around him will absorb the Yang energy and become stronger because of it."

"Hold on," I interrupted him, "just a moment, I want to take notes."

I quickly took the notebook out of my backpack. It was very thick. Even with my lesson plans and the student roster in it, there would still be room to write down Xiao Ning's ideas.

I started from the back this time. I wrote down what Xiao Ning had just said and gestured for him to go on.

Xiao Ning looked at the notebook in my hands with an indescribable expression. He must have thought it was too old. There were few such old notebooks in modern society.

"My colleague, Teacher Liu, gave it to me. He's my roommate. He also lives in 404. He's a very nice person." I explained the notebook's origin, then described my living conditions so Xiao Ning could also understand more about me.

Ning Tiance looked up at the sky. At ten o'clock on a summer morning, the sun was brilliant. Under its rays the peculiar musty smell of the notebook gradually unfurled. It smelled quite bad.

“Let’s find somewhere to rest, then keep talking.” Ning Tiance’s expression was suddenly full of compassion. “You must be tired after sleeping in the morgue all night. We need a quiet place with some shade, not too much sunlight or too many people.”

I considered the requirements he’d named; didn’t that perfectly describe my dormitory?

“Then let’s go to my place. You also need to rest. At the very least you should drink some water. Look at how dry your lips are.” I stared at Xiao Ning’s dry, white lips.

This time Xiao Ning didn’t refuse. He only said, “OK.”

I called a pickup truck and threw the bedplate into the back. There was only one passenger seat at the front of the pickup. Naturally, I generously let Xiao Ning have it and sat in the back with the bedplate.

Back home, I wanted to let the bedplate finish drying out in my sunny bedroom, then put it in Li Yuanyuan’s bedroom, but Xiao Ning said that he wanted to rest as soon as possible, so I could only arrange the bedplate for Tan Xiaoming right away, letting Xiao Ning lie down on my bed to sleep.

When I finished putting the bedplate away, I snuck a look into my room. Xiao Ning wasn’t asleep. Instead, he was sitting up in bed and staring out the window.

I went to pour him a cup of water, then brought it to him.

Ning Tiance looked at the water in the cup and asked, “You’ve been drinking this water?”

“Don’t worry, I boiled it,” I said. “Or would you prefer tea?”

If he wanted tea, I could go downstairs and buy some.

Ning Tiance shook his head. “There’s hardly any Yin energy. It must have run off. In another few days the remaining Yin energy will have dissipated.”

After saying these words, which were incomprehensible to me, he drank the cup of water in a single gulp, looking relieved.

It was a little difficult to communicate with Xiao Ning, but what did that matter? Back when I was bad at sports, hadn’t I relied on my perseverance to become a man who could match up to that senior? *Come on, Shen Jianguo, you can do it!*

“You should sleep,” I said. “We’ll talk when you wake up.”

“There’s no need. A cultivator can absorb the power of the stars and moon at night. I only need to rest a little, and I won’t be so tired anymore.”

I took the notebook to write down what he had said, planning to review it later. Ning Tiance said, “Could you use a different notebook?”

“Why? Isn’t it more convenient like this? Having everything in one place.” At school I’d had all my subjects in one thick notebook. I’d never encountered the problem of not being able to find the right notebook.

“Please use a different one. I don’t want my words written down in that notebook. It’ll be better for both of us this way,” Xiao Ning insisted.

All right, then; Ning Tiance’s words did require special treatment. I rummaged around in my bookcase and found a notebook with only

a few pages of writing, tore out those pages, then wrote on the first page: “For Xiao Ning’s Special Use,” then drew a heart after it.

This was so obvious that, given that Xiao Ning had touched me in the elevator, he had to be able to understand my intentions.

Ning Tiance saw that I had swapped notebooks and went on speaking: “I am the chief disciple of the Maoshan Sect. I am destined to inherit the sect in the future. My shifu and the elders regard me as the future sect leader. I left the mountain in order to complete my training. When I’ve finished the assignment my shifu gave me, I will formally be a Celestial Master, defending justice and destroying evil, keeping to the true path.”

“Hey, can you marry if you inherit the Maoshan Sect?” I asked with concern.

What if their sect was like Buddhism and didn’t allow them to get close to women... No, I wasn’t a woman. Even if he couldn’t marry he could still do gay stuff.

“We aren’t permitted to divide our Yang source until our cultivation is strong enough. We need our Yang energy to protect ourselves from evil spirits every day,” Ning Tiance said. “But when our skills are sufficient, then we can take a wife and have children. In fact, I’m the current sect leader’s own son.”

That was all right. I carefully wrote down “superstitious family” in the notebook, then said to Xiao Ning, who was focusing on my writing, “Go on. What was your assignment? Can you tell me?”

Xiao Ning hesitated and said, “It’s strange. Since the time I started leaving the mountain at twelve, I’ve never received such a bizarre assignment. My shifu told me to send a resume in response to a specific online job posting at midnight, but on that day I couldn’t find the posting, so I haven’t found out my assignment so far.”

This sounded something like my experience in searching for a job. It turned out that it wasn't easy being a Celestial Master, either.

“By going back to my sect, I wanted to clear my thoughts, and also to ask my shifu about the assignment,” Ning Tiance said.

“Why don't you call and ask?” I looked at Xiao Ning's phone. He didn't seem to be an otherworldly master who couldn't use a phone.

Ning Tiance sighed. “It may involve our sect's secrets, so it's better to ask in person. You may not know that the development of talismans is very advanced now. Some sects can listen in on other people's calls by attaching talismans to their phones. There's no way to defend against it.”

So they had this kind of capability, too... I was suddenly wondering whether the Maoshan Sect and the rest were actually backwards or advanced.

“Then why aren't you planning on going back anymore?”

Ning Tiance looked at me deeply, his gaze extremely focused. After the burst of emotion I'd just experienced, that look of his made me a little flustered. I grabbed the closest thing to me and clutched it to get a sense of security.

As soon as I'd done that, I thought that it wasn't a very good move, so I tossed the thing I'd picked up back onto the bed.

In this way, Teacher Liu's notebook got picked up then tossed away again.

Xiao Ning took a deep breath, put his hand on my shoulder and said, “Before, I believed that however plentiful a man's Yang energy was, he would still sooner or later be harmed by fierce ghosts. Even

if he was an experienced cultivator, if he didn't take care, it would still be difficult for him to repel their attacks. But these past few days have shown me that actually with integrity, steady belief, and a pure heart, you really can overcome all the evil in the world.

"I thought I had already seen the vastness of the world, but it turned out that my thoughts were still too shallow. Rather than return to my sect, it will be better for me to stay in H City to cultivate my heart."

"Oh." I only somewhat understood, but I had grasped that he wouldn't be leaving for now. "I don't believe in ghosts, but Ning-tianshi's perseverance has inspired me. I would also like to understand these matters."

This way Xiao Ning and I would have things to talk about in the future. First we'd be friends, and then... hehehe.

"There's no need," said Ning Tiance. "You'll be all right staying the way you are."

CHAPTER 19 - Teaching Class (Part 6)

You'll be all right staying the way you are... I would take this as praise for the moment, since after all Xiao Ning was smiling as he said it.

“What are you going to do in the future?” I asked in concern.

Although Xiao Ning had said that he had money, he actually lived a very impoverished life. He had to sit on a hard seat for over thirty hours to get home, and he had to rely on the most primitive means of transportation on his return, running wildly along the road. I knew that in modern society there were still circles where a Celestial Master could make a good deal of money, but Xiao Ning was only a trainee Celestial Master, and his graduation assignment had somehow vanished. H City's cost of living wasn't cheap. It must have been hard for him to stay here.

“I want to spend more time going around H City at night, and I also want to come and listen in on your classes. Can I?” In Ning Tiance's eyes there was confusion, and a hint of something else I didn't understand.

“Of course, there's no problem!” I said, nodding.

My classes were all at night. I imagined the dark of the night, the howling wind, myself and Xiao Ning alone on the school bus...

Finishing that thought would have been a little embarrassing.

“Where are you staying?” I was waiting for Xiao Ning to say that he hadn't found a place to stay long-term yet and was making do with a hostel and had to find somewhere as soon as possible.

If he just said the word, I would invite him to stay with me. My bedroom was the largest in 404. There was plenty of room to add a single bed. Then Xiao Ning could take the double bed, and I could have the single.

“I don’t have to worry about accommodation,” said Xiao Ning. “The Maoshan Sect has a long-term private room at an international hotel, large enough to house a dozen disciples. I’ve been staying there this whole time.”

He took out a business card and handed it to me. Looking at it nearly gave me a stomachache.

This was the most luxurious five-star hotel in H City. An ordinary room started from 2000 yuan a night. Xiao Ning’s room, with space for a dozen disciples, had to be a suite at the very least. The cost per day would be...

A poor college student like me couldn’t comprehend it!

It turned out that Xiao Ning had told the truth when he’d said he had money.

“It’s getting late,” Xiao Ning said to me after a look at the sun. “You probably didn’t sleep well last night, so I won’t bother you any further. If you have a class in the future, please make sure to tell me. I really want to listen to Teacher Shen teach.”

“That’s no problem at all.”

After I reluctantly sent Xiao Ning away, I ate a bit of something and then sat on my bed staring into space. Before this, I had always wanted to destroy his feudal superstitions, get Xiao Ning to study math and science, become a young man of the modern era. But thinking about how much money the Maoshan Sect’s Celestial Masters made hunting ghosts, I felt a bit...

Alas, at heart I was a vulgar materialist. Just hearing about making money could shake my firm faith in science.

Could a bit of money defeat an upright man?

I lay in my bed in my rental apartment, imagining the handsome Ning Tiance taking a shower and going to bed in his five-star hotel, and at some point slipped quietly into sleep.

Principal Zhang had told me before that the class schedule wasn't busy. There wouldn't be classes every night. She would send me the schedule the day before, which would give me sufficient time to prepare for class, and I shouldn't worry about it.

Since she hadn't told me last night that there was a class scheduled, that meant there would be no class tonight. To be honest I was pretty tired after yesterday. It wasn't comfortable spending half the night sleeping seated on the floor of a morgue. In my familiar bed, I slept until midnight, when I was woken by hunger, and went to make myself some instant noodles, planning to go back to sleep after.

When I left my room to boil some water, I saw that there was a light on in Tan Xiaoming's room, and there seemed to be voices coming from it. I was concerned about Xiao Ming, so while the water boiled I went to knock on his door. "Xiao Ming, you've moved in?"

After a while, Tan Xiaoming's door creaked open on its own. I saw Tan Xiaoming sitting on the bed and Teacher Liu sitting on the toilet I had given Li Yuanyuan. The two of them were deep in conversation.

When he saw me come in, Xiao Ming curled up in a corner of the bed, hugging his knees and watching me. I knew that he was making room for me to sit down, so I sat on the bedplate and

naturally said, "This bedplate was too damp. I put it out in the sun to dry today. Now it'll be more comfortable to sleep on."

"I know," Tan Xiaoming said slowly. His voice was hoarse, as if he was thirsty.

He must have spent too long talking to Teacher Liu while I was sleeping and had talked himself hoarse.

I looked at Liu Sishun. "Teacher Liu is also acquainted with Xiao Ming?"

Teacher Liu's voice was also a little hoarse. "I'm a literature teacher. On days when you aren't teaching, I hold classes."

He gave his clothes a shake as he spoke. I noticed an unpleasant smell on his clothes. It was rather familiar. It smelled like...

It smelled like the stink when Tian Bowen opened his mouth!

To tell the truth, I was impartial towards my students. I held them all at the same level. But humans all have their private views, and I really didn't like getting too close to Tian Bowen. He really didn't understand hygiene. In order to frighten me, he had actually put bugs in his mouth. Each time he opened his mouth, a stench came out. It came from the bugs.

"Has Teacher Liu just seen Tian Bowen?" I asked.

"I have." Liu Sishun's expression looked rather unhappy. "And he covered me in bugs."

Hearing this made me angry. "Tian Bowen has gone too far. I'm a new teacher, not familiar to the students. He can scare me all he likes. But Teacher Liu is an old teacher. Why would he want to treat you like this? I'll have to discipline him sternly next class."

Hearing that I was going to discipline Tian Bowen, Tan Xiaoming gave an involuntary shiver. He also must have suffered because of Tian Bowen's bullying.

I thumped Xiao Ming's knee to bolster his courage. "Don't be afraid, Xiao Ming. I'll certainly be able to guide Tian Bowen back to the right path. Tomorrow I'll go buy insecticide."

Teacher Liu shuddered and said, "Listen... Teacher Shen... It's all right for you to discipline Tian Bowen, but could you stop using the notebook to crush his bugs? I... I really..."

Teacher Liu had given me his precious notebook, and I had casually used it to kill bugs. I hadn't treasured it properly. I had been wrong.

"Don't worry, Teacher Liu. Today, a very handsome young man already reminded me about this. In the future I'll be sure to protect that notebook. I absolutely won't use it for anything a notebook shouldn't be used for."

"You don't need to protect it so thoroughly, either. You can just put it in your bag. Don't take it out in the sun or anything... It's very old. If the sunlight hits the pages they may disintegrate and then..."
Teacher Liu's face was pained.

That was fair. I nodded, smacked my chest, and promised Teacher Liu.

Teacher Liu and Tan Xiaoming were rather over-dressed for sitting in this room. Yesterday Xiaoming had been wearing a tank-top, but today he wore long sleeves and long pants. Even his hands were covered. He also had a hat covering his head, and sat with his head hanging down, not speaking as he listened to Teacher Liu and me.

“Teacher Liu, what’s the matter with Xiao Ming? He seems a little depressed.” The Xiao Ming I had seen yesterday wasn’t like this. Although he’d been full of malice and mischief, he had also been very lively. He hadn’t had the deathly aura he had now.

“Oh, you see, I’m try to persuade him to attend a normal school,” Teacher Liu explained. “Going on attending your classes won’t do, and living in these surroundings, such a lousy rental apartment, I’m worried that after some time his soul will... I mean, I’m worried staying up late all the time will be bad for his health.”

What Teacher Liu said made sense. Xiao Ming really did need a normal education. Staying up late like this wouldn’t have any benefits for his mental and physical development.

“Teacher Liu’s grasp on the problem is very comprehensive,” I said with emotion. “As a newly employed teacher I can only do basic things like comforting him or staying with him for the night, but Teacher Liu can resolve the problem at its root. I’ll work even harder to be able to get up to your level in the future...”

“No, absolutely do not work even harder!” Tan Xiaoming interrupted abruptly, raising his head. “You’re fine as you are!”

Only then did I see his face clearly. There were wounds all over it. They seemed to be burns.

“What happened to you?” I pushed back his sleeve, and sure enough, all the places covered by his clothes were burned. “Who’s been abusing you?” I said angrily. “I’m going to report them! Didn’t you go to see the psychiatrist today?”

Tan Xiaoming’s eyes were full of hatred. He grit his teeth and said, “It was you...”

Teacher Liu quickly tugged at his clothes. Tan Xiaoming calmed down a little and said, "I used boiling water to burn myself. You were the one who forced me to do it!"

W-why?

I was stricken. Had I acted too rashly pulling Xiao Ming off the bed last night? Had he felt safer tied to the bed plate?

"No, no, no," Teacher Liu quickly comforted me. "Don't get excited, Teacher Shen. You didn't do anything wrong by turning over Xiao Ming's bedplate. Drying the bedplate was... uh, no, no, it was me, it's my fault. I was advising Xiao Ming to go on the right track. He abused himself in anger."

As he spoke I saw the burns on his hands, though they weren't as severe as Tan Xiaoming's.

"Teacher Liu, your hand..."

Teacher Liu immediately drew back his hand, thought about it and explained, "It's nothing. I got hurt by accident when I was stopping Xiao Ming. I'm old and hardy, the wounds are slight. I'm not like a child with a weak constitution who's easily hurt by a bit of heat."

I'm felt angry and sorrowful. I said to Tan Xiaoming, "Xiao Ming, if you're angry, take it out on me. I'm strong, it's OK if you scratch and bite at me. But Teacher Liu is acting entirely in your interests. How could you hurt him? And the most important thing is, each person is his own treasure. First of all, you have to love yourself, cherish yourself. Don't hurt yourself because of a little setback! "

Tan Xiaoming didn't say anything more. He turned his head away to face the wall.

Teacher Liu pulled me out of the room. In a warm voice he said, “Don’t be too angry. I was just trying to persuade him, wasn’t I? Last night Xiao Ming already untied one of the knots in his heart, and today you helped him move. It’s been very good for him. He’s willing to go back on the right track, he’s just missing a little extra push. I’ll keep talking to him. I have faith that in another two days he’ll be willing to attend school.”

“Well, all right.” I knew that continuing to try to advise Xiao Ming would only backfire, so I went disconsolately back to my room. I didn’t even make instant noodles.

Before I left, I heard Teacher Liu saying to Tan Xiaoming in a whisper, “Don’t be impulsive, he doesn’t know that we’re... and he can still... if he knew... then we’ll...”

His voice faded in and out. I couldn’t hear it clearly. Anyway it wasn’t good to listen in on other people’s conversations. It wasn’t the behavior of a gentleman.

I lay in bed feeling hungry and lost. I took out my phone and sent a message to Xiao Ning: Tan Xiaoming is rebelling. He burned himself and Teacher Liu with boiling water. What can I do? I’m useless.

Xiao Ning stayed up late a lot. He replied to my message at once: Let Teacher Liu advise him. I believe Tan Xiaoming will soon be able to accept his situation and move on.

CHAPTER 20 - Education (Part 1)

With Ning Tiance's consolation, my mood improved at once. I was a new employee. There were many things I would have to ask Teacher Liu for instruction on. It was entirely normal that my teaching abilities wouldn't be as good as his. For those of us engaged in education, our own gains and losses weren't the most important thing. What mattered most were those students standing at the crossroads of life. As long as they could choose the right path, what did it matter if I endured some hardship?

Every time Xiao Ning replied to my messages so quickly, I felt a sliver of expectation in my heart.

I considered, then continued writing: It's so late and you aren't asleep yet. It seems like you stay up late every night.

Ning Tiance: I absorb the essence of the moon and stars every night, so I go to bed late. Lately I have also been concerned about you.

I was at once full of emotion. I wildly typed into the input box: *I'm concerned about you, too. I really like you!*

Before I clicked send, Xiao Ning sent another message: *About your roommates.*

I silently deleted the unsent text, restrained my surging emotions, and switched to a calm, professional tone: Yes, Xiao Ming is really concerning. I hope Teacher Liu will be able to persuade him to move on. Now that I mention it, I also have another student who has gone too far.

My fingers moved quickly, briefly describing the circumstances related to Tian Bowen. In my opinion, Teacher Liu was a teacher

who should be deeply loved by his students. Tian Bowen had really gone too far in bullying him. I wanted to use insecticide to teach Tian Bowen a lesson and make him stop growing bugs. But when I considered that he was perhaps a student with psychological problems, I couldn't tell whether this would hurt him.

So I wrote to Principal Zhang about this issue. Principal Zhang was such a kind and responsible person, she would certainly have a clear understanding of all the students' situations. Her advice was very useful to me.

Two messages came in at the same time. First, I read Xiao Ning's: Generally insecticide wouldn't be useful for dealing with your student, but it will be if you buy it. Also, I'm going to be staying in H City for some time, and I still lack some basic necessities. Do you have time tomorrow?

Of course I did! I quickly arranged to meet Xiao Ning to go shopping. We were going to Xia Jin's mall. I often worked part-time there, so I had coupons and discount cards. Naturally it was more cost-effective to go there.

Then I read Principal Zhang's text: Tian Bowen's behavior is very bad. It goes beyond the level of a prank. You can carry on with your plan, Teacher Shen. If this continues, I will hand the matter over to a professional to be dealt with.

But isn't he a student with psychological problems... I still hesitated. Although I had been disgusted by him, as a teacher, I should have an inclusive attitude towards my students.

Principal Zhang replied: He has a record of harming other students. I expelled him three years ago but he refused to leave. He has also bullied students and staff.

So that was it. There was no need to go easy on him. As Principal Zhang had said, I would carry on!

After making arrangements with Ning Tiance, finding out that Tian Bowen no longer belonged to the school and discussing how to deal with him, my mood improved a good deal. I went out to make myself instant noodles. Seeing that the light was off in Tan Xiaoming's room, I returned to my room, ate my noodles, and peacefully went to sleep.

The next day, my alarm went off at 8 am. While I was feeling around for my phone, my hand touched Teacher Liu's notebook.

Although the notebook was old, the cover was of extremely good quality. It felt like genuine leather, which ought to be water resistant. Precisely because of this I had felt comfortable using it to kill bugs.

The traces of the bugs had been cleaned off. I had forgotten to clean it last night, so did that mean that Teacher Liu had snuck into my room in the middle of the night to clean it?

On opening the notebook I found that a line written in another person's handwriting had appeared in it: I've taken Xiao Ming to see a psychologist. Teacher Shen doesn't need to worry. Also, please remember not to take this notebook with you except when you go to class.

The handwriting was very elegant, the writing of someone who had spent many years practicing calligraphy, consistent with the impression I'd gotten of Teacher Liu.

Only Teacher Liu had written in traditional characters. If I hadn't spent many years reading Taiwanese comics, there were some characters I wouldn't have understood.

He really cherished this notebook. A very important person must have given it to him...

It was really too bad of me to have used it for killing bugs and as a cushion to sit on. Afterwards, even if it meant using my crappy old computer that took three minutes to boot up, I still wouldn't use the notebook.

I wiped the cover of the notebook with a towel, then applied a coating of clear protective oil. I put it facedown on the windowsill to dry. My room got sunlight from seven in the morning to twelve. It was eight now; four hours should be enough time to dry it out.

After taking proper care of the notebook, I went to wash up. I'd agreed to meet Xiao Ning to go shopping at 10 am. We were meeting right in front of the mall. Taking the bus from the Farther Shore Estate to the mall would take about an hour, so I was short on time.

I went downstairs to eat a hurried breakfast of soy milk and youtiao, then charged onto the bus. I got to the mall at 9:50. As soon as I got off the bus, I saw a luxury car stopped near the mall and Ning Tiance getting out of it.

As if it had been decreed by fate, he looked over and saw me. He smiled and came over.

At the moment, I practically couldn't see Ning Tiance's handsome smile. My eyes were glued to the wildly expensive car. I didn't recover until the car had driven away and Ning Tiance had waved his hand in front of my face.

"That car..."

"It's reserved for the use of Maoshan's disciples while in H City. The driver comes from the hotel," Xiao Ning said casually.

I clutched my chest, which hurt a little.

So Xiao Ning really was rich. So rich, and he still rode on a hard seat to train his endurance. He really was a nice young man!

Looking at Xiao Ning now, there seemed to be a brilliant golden glow of goodness enveloping him, making him look even more handsome.

Seeing me hesitate, he reached out a hand to me and said, “What is it? Let’s go.”

Looking at his hand with its clearly defined knuckles and long slim fingers, the strange distress in my heart disappeared at once. I hopped over and patted him on the shoulder. Laughing, I said, “Xiao Ning, you’re pretty handsome now you’re not wearing your yellow robe!”

Ning Tiance blushed faintly. “The yellow robe is ceremonial attire. I can only wear it when I’m out on an assignment. Of course I wouldn’t wear it out in public under ordinary circumstances.”

“But when you went to the hospital yesterday morning to find me, you were wearing the yellow robe. Hadn’t you just gotten off the train?” As far as I remembered, last Saturday at the mall was the only time I had seen him wearing ordinary clothes. He’d been especially good-looking with that clean student look.

Ning Tiance’s face went even redder. “I changed while I was running along the highway. On the train I was wearing a black elbow-length shirt and shorts.”

Broad-minded as I was, I was still shocked by Xiao Ning’s behavior. Had he exposed himself by the side of the road in the middle of the night?

“The ceremonial clothes add power during rituals,” Xiao Ning explained. “I don’t have enough power, so I still need help from objects.”

My heart ached even more. Feudal superstition was a killer! Such a kind-hearted, handsome young man, cheated into becoming a highway exhibitionist. Fortunately, there had been no one on the road at the time. What if it had happened in the middle of the street?

My determination not to be corrupted by money was once again restored. No matter how rich he was, he couldn’t be left to become the victim of outdated ideas. I had to help Xiao Ning love science and love life.

The first floor of the shopping mall where Xia Jin worked was a big supermarket carrying all kinds of goods, as well as bargain-priced clothes. Because I had coupons, I often came to the mall to shop for clothes. Right now I was wearing bargain-priced clothes I’d bought last year.

Ning Tiance needed to buy some basic household goods, so naturally I took him to the supermarket. If he needed casual clothes, we could go upstairs to pick some out.

Not long after, Xia Jin, having heard that we’d come, took some time out of his busy schedule to entertain us. I waved and said, “You go back to work. We’re old schoolmates, there’s no need to be so polite.”

“Who’s here for you? I came to entertain Ning-tianshi.” Xia Jin kicked me and said enthusiastically to Xiao Ning, “Ning-tianshi, anything you like, just say the word and you can have it. We’ll say it’s on the house.”

Ning Tiance shook his head. “We have rules. We can’t be greedy in accepting gifts from believers. Last time, my part in exorcising the ghost was negligible. If you want your mall to be free of troubles in the future, you can invite Teacher Shen to work for you. With him here, there’ll be nothing to worry you.”

In fact I really could take on another job. The training institute’s classes were all at night, and there were no more than ten classes per month. I wouldn’t have to miss anything.

I immediately recommended myself to Xia Jin, saying that I wouldn’t require the salary that came with a graduate degree. I could take a job that only required an undergraduate one, do office work at the mall or something.

“Our marketing department is looking to recruit people right now.” Xia Jin looked at me. “But your specialization isn’t right.”

“Then you can treat me as an intern for the first month,” I said. “After the first month, if I’m useful, you can pay the standard salary. If I’m not useful, you can just fire me. Isn’t that a good deal?”

It wasn’t that urgent to have a salary now. It would also be good to have a job that would allow me to accumulate social experience.

“That’s fair.” Xia Jin nodded. “Send in your resume tomorrow and our HR department will talk it over.”

With the hope of a part-time job in my future, I was quite pleased. I took Xiao Ning all over the place to buy stuff, and bought a spray can of insecticide for myself. On Xia Jin’s recommendation, I bought the most effective insecticide.

The so-called most effective one was only meant for mosquitoes. There was no guarantee it would work on Tian Bowen’s maggots.

I told Xiao Ning my concerns. After thinking about it, Ning Tiance said, "Our Maoshan Sect is located in a scenic area. The landscape is beautiful, the vegetation is lush, and there are no mosquitoes, because we have a special method for repelling insects."

"Can you tell me a little about that?" I looked at him expectantly.

Ning Tiance nodded, took the insecticide, and removed the spray nozzle.

Then he took my hand. As I watched him with my heart beating like a drum, he bit down firmly on the middle finger of my right hand, then squeezed a few drops of blood into the insecticide.

He screwed the spray nozzle back on, gave it a good shake, then handed the insecticide back to me. "That'll do. Next time you have class, use this to get rid of those bugs. I guarantee the outcome."

What... What kind of secret recipe was this?

CHAPTER 21 - Education (Parts 2-4)

(Part 2)

It's said that the fingers are linked to the heart, but I didn't feel a trace of pain. My eyes were fixed on Ning Tiance's lips. Had he put my finger in his mouth and bitten it in broad daylight, just like that?

Too, too shaming!

After he was finished, Ning Tiance saw my dazed expression. He took out a band-aid from the shopping bag and stuck it on for me. When he was looking down at my finger, I saw his long, long lashes trembling faintly, combing through my heart.

"I'm sorry," Xiao Ning said to me. "I'm used to biting my finger. I forgot we could go to the drugstore and buy a needle to get the blood. The wound would be smaller that way."

He looked perfectly serious, so I couldn't have any suspicions. I waved my hand. "It's all right, it's all right. I'm thick-skinned. It'll be fine soon. But what kind of secret recipe is this? Does mixing blood with insecticide multiply the insect-repelling effect? I'm a liberal arts student, I don't know much about chemistry. Is there a scientific principle behind this?"

Ning Tiance frowned when he heard the word "chemistry." He said, "I remember... in junior middle Year 3 chemistry, we did an experiment with magnesium reactions..."

Although Xiao Ning had been raised in the Maoshan Sect, it seemed he'd still received the nine years of mandatory education.

Neither of us knew much about chemistry. We looked at each for a moment then silently agreed not to discuss it.

“I suppose it’s the same as putting cheese in a mousetrap,” I said. “Mosquitoes like to suck blood or eat spoiled food. Using blood to attract them will multiply the effect of the insecticide.”

“Something like that,” Ning Tiance said vaguely. “Blood from the middle finger is the best, heart’s blood.”

“So your Maoshan Sect relies on insecticide mixed with blood from the middle finger to repel insects. I recall that that scenic area is pretty big. Doesn’t that use a lot of blood?” I was a little worried about Xiao Ning’s health.

“That’s not necessary. We have special incense,” Xiao Ning explained. “It’s our sect’s secret recipe. Only the Sect Leader can pass it on. As I haven’t finished the final assignment yet, I’m not permitted to know it.”

Xiao Ning and I strolled happily. He bought several sets of clothes at the mall. I rather wanted to pay for them, but when I saw the prices I silently recanted. At present, I had 15,000 yuan in my bank account. If 15,000 yuan could have paid for these clothes, I would have done it, even if it meant spending all my money. But the price was beyond my means.

In the end it was Xiao Ning who bought me a set of casual clothes. He said he felt bad about tearing my jacket that time at Benevolence School and wanted to buy these clothes to make up for it. I kept saying he didn’t have to, but Xiao Ning had already paid for them at checkout along with the clothes for himself. He said his shifu had given him a card when he’d left the sect. He didn’t know how much money there was on it, but he’d never gone short.

I silently took the clothes Ning Tiance had given me and went back to 404 with the insecticide.

When I went into my bedroom I saw that the notebook had fallen onto the floor. I'd opened the window before I left. The wind must have blown it down.

Fortunately, I'd swept the floor before leaving in the morning. The notebook wasn't dirty. Otherwise, Teacher Liu would have been distressed again.

Today's meeting had left me frustrated. I kept saying I wanted to help Xiao Ning get rid of his out-dated ideas and connect with the new age, but the reality was that science was as impoverished as I was, while superstition was as wealthy as Xiao Ning.

In *Das Kapital*, Marx said that the economic base determines the superstructure, which was the nearest thing to an essential truth in this world. As much as I didn't want to admit it, it was the reality. I was poor and Xiao Ning was rich; we weren't equal. I had no way to convince him to change his beliefs.

If I wanted to act on my beliefs, I needed to work hard so that I could equal Ning Tiance.

Tomorrow I had to prepare my resume to send to Xia Jin's company so I could get a part-time job. The marketing department dealt with event planning, publicity, and advertising. My specialty wasn't suited for it. But marketing was suitable for being able to quickly accumulate funds. As long as my performance was good, even as an intern I could still earn a commission. The only downside was that it would require some hard work, but fortunately I was strong and not easily shamed. It wasn't a big problem.

I kept thinking about this, then eventually drifted off to sleep without closing my bedroom door. Some time later I was woken up by the sound of rustling beside me.

I opened my eyes and saw Teacher Liu, wearing a face mask and crouching right beside my bed, doing something I couldn't see. It really gave me a scare!

I jumped up and turned on the light beside the bed. The room lit up. I could clearly see Teacher Liu crouching by the bed, with his hand poised over the notebook I'd left beside my pillow.

"T-teacher Liu, it's the middle of the night, what are you doing?" Fortunately I was brave. I'd only been scared for a moment. Someone in worse health than me might well have been scared into a heart attack.

Although the lower part of Teacher Liu's face was covered by the mask, I could still see the embarrassment in his eyes. He kept his hand over the notebook and said, "I... I wanted to have a look at my notebook, while it was the middle of the night."

Teacher Liu really valued this notebook. Wasn't it unfeeling for me to hold onto it? But he had given it to me himself. Since he liked it so much, why would he want to give it away?

He felt uncomfortable bringing it up, so I should be the one to go back on the agreement.

"Actually, Teacher Liu, I've been meaning to tell you, this notebook really is too valuable. Every sheet is brimming with the sense of antiquity. With someone like me going around using it casually, it's very easy for it to get damaged. So... What if I gave it back to you?" I asked tentatively.

"Of course, no problem!" Teacher Liu quickly took the notebook into his arms. "Actually, it needs maintenance. That's why I snuck in here in the middle of the night."

“I already put protective oil on it today, and put it facedown in the sun. The paper inside is aged and can’t be exposed to sunlight, but after oiling the leather, it’s good to sun it for a while.”

“You- you- you... All right, thank you, but there’s still something I need to do.”

Seeing that he had been moved almost to tears, I felt glad. That was me, Shen Jianguo, an understanding teacher. In the future I would become an even more accomplished person!

When I got up to get a drink of water, I saw that Teacher Liu had spread out his notebook and was carefully applying the contents of a bottle of moisturizer to the cover. Teacher Liu seemed to be a frugal person. Rather than throw away the empty moisturizer bottle, he had filled it with oil.

“Is Xiao Ming back?” I asked Teacher Liu while I drank my water.

“He’s already left.” Teacher Liu sighed. “He finally made a breakthrough under my persuasion last night and agreed to go into treatment. After the treatment is completed, he will attend a normal school.”

“What about the cost?” I remembered that Tan Xiaoming’s mother had left home and his father had died of heart troubles. He didn’t seem to have any other relatives.

“There’s no need to worry about that. Principal Zhang will find a way to resolve it. Now it’s only the two of us again here in 404. You can see Xiao Ming’s bedplate has been removed.” Teacher Liu pushed open Tan Xiaoming’s door. Inside there was only the bed and the toilet I had given Yuanyuan.

I sensed that Teacher Liu was out of spirits, so I said comfortingly, “There’s no need to be sad. Student Tan left so he could receive a

better education. It's unavoidable to be upset at a parting, but we should focus on being happy for him."

"I'm not worried about him. He's young, he'll recover easily... I'm thinking of myself." Although Teacher Liu was wearing a face mask, he couldn't conceal the despondency in his eyes. "When will these days at last come to an end for me..."

As he spoke, he began unwillingly to shed tears. I began to feel grieved as well.

Teacher Liu looked to be around forty. At his age, he had yet to start a family or establish a career. He was living in an apartment provided by his job, crowded in with a recent graduate like me. He must have wished for a home of his own in H City.

I had no way to comfort him, because I myself hadn't found a place to settle down.

I was feeling really down. Teacher Liu said, "Principal Zhang just told me you'll be having class tomorrow. Can I come to observe?"

"Of course, there's no problem. I look forward to hearing Teacher Liu's comments," I said happily.

Teacher Liu was a teacher with a wealth of experience. I was honored that he was willing to listen to me teach.

Teacher Liu sighed. "I wouldn't dare to comment. I'm just worried that if you don't have the notebook, the students will make trouble... Ah, I'm worrying for nothing."

After chatting for a while, I was sleepy again. I said goodbye to Teacher Liu and went back to my room to rest. Before going to bed I looked at my phone. There was indeed a message from Principal Zhang. I was to hold class in the multimedia classroom of the old

campus at the H City Normal University at midnight the following night.

As an H City college student, I was familiar with the old campus of the Normal University. Although it was still in use, there were no more students there.

The word went that the location of the old campus of Normal University used to be a burial mound. When the school was built, a master was invited, who said that the place was heavy with Yin energy; a school with a lot of vital energy should be built on top of it to suppress the Yin energy. According to that reasoning, it would have made sense to build a University of Technology on that spot. Universities of Technology have more male students, so the stronger Yang energy would suppress the Yin energy of the grave. However, after it was built, it became a Normal University campus, with a majority of female students.

Ever since the Normal University opened, there were constant rumors that it was haunted. It was very famous in H City.

What's more, the suicide rate of Normal University students was the highest among H City's universities. Red rescue helicopters were often seen flying over the artificial lake at the center of the campus.

Later, as all the large universities expanded their enrollment, the old campuses became insufficient to accommodate the number of students. The Normal University built a new campus in the suburbs and gradually transferred the students there. The number of suicide cases slowly decreased.

Other schools that had built new campuses still had many students at their old campuses, but the Normal University had thoroughly moved over. There were no students there now. I'd heard that that the old location would be sold to a vocational school with a majority of male students. They were currently in talks.

This time the location of the classroom really was a pleasant surprise. Holding class in abandoned schools and hospitals, I'd been gradually becoming accustomed to teaching in broken down and deserted locations. But the former location of the Normal University was different. In order to be able to sell it at a good price, the campus had been well-maintained. All the installations would be in good repair. The projection facilities in the multimedia classroom would be useable.

The PowerPoint I'd made would finally come in handy!

(Part 3)

As for the talk about the Normal University being haunted, I'd never taken it seriously.

I had been to the Normal University once. To the girls' dormitory, in fact. I'd snuck in through the window in the middle of the night.

It was like this. I had a roommate in undergrad who had a girlfriend at the Normal University. Every day he stayed up half the night chatting with her on WeChat, hiding under his covers and giggling. In my opinion, he was scarier than any ghost.

One day, my roommate suddenly said that his girlfriend's dorm was haunted. Every night there was someone out in the corridor making a loud thudding sound like dribbling a ball. It was very frightening. The girls didn't dare to go to have a look. They could only put up with the terrifying sound all night. They were on the brink of collapse from sleep-deprivation. His girlfriend was already showing warning signs of depression.

I scoffed at the idea of a haunting. Clearly it was someone pretending to be a ghost to disturb their sleep. The thing to do was to righteously stand up and put a stop to it. If I had been in their

place, I would have rushed out and punched the joker in the face a long time ago.

So my roommate said, in that case, we'd go to the Normal University girls' dormitory tomorrow night and see if it was a ghost or only someone pretending.

If he wanted to go, we'd go. Anyway, being gay, I'd be as calm in a girls' dormitory as though I were sitting in meditation.

Those girls really must have been scared silly; they actually agreed to get the two of us in. Their dorm room was on the third floor. They tied their curtains into a rope for us to climb up. At that time I was in excellent physical condition because I was pursuing the senior, so I was up in a flash. My roommate couldn't manage it; I had to haul him up in the end.

At midnight the dribbling sound really did start up. My roommate stood on a chair and looked out through the small glass window at the top of the door. He said the whole corridor was empty. It was scary.

I thought he was extremely useless. Since he couldn't see the person, they had to be directly under the little window. Right in front of the door was the only blindspot.

This time my roommate lay down on the ground and looked out through the crack under the door. After a single glance he shrieked, hugged his girlfriend and cried, even wet himself a little.

Asked what he saw, my roommate said that he saw a pair of blood red eyes. Then he and his girlfriend held each other and wailed, like a pair mandarin ducks fallen on hard times.

I couldn't bear to see any more of this. Ignoring the others' protests, I opened the door.

As soon the door was opened, I saw a person standing on her hands in front of the door, her head constantly hitting the floor. Because her head had been facing down for too long, her face was purple and her eyes were bloodshot.

The girls in the dormitory huddled up into a pile and cried, saying that they'd seen a ghost and everyone was going to die that night.

I couldn't stand watching them scaring themselves like that. I grabbed the person's feet, lifted, and used my surpassing arm strength to flip her over.

I pushed her against the wall of the corridor and said angrily, "Why are you pretending to be a ghost and scaring people?"

"I'm not pretending," she said. "I was head-down when I jumped off the building, so when I died I got stuck like that."

Liar. Hadn't I just set her upright?

I exhorted her. "If you want to improve your arm strength by doing handstands, that's fine, I agree, exercise is a thing that makes people happy. But you can't exercise in front of other students' dormitories in the middle of the night. This time I'll let you go, but if it happens again, I will definitely report you to the school. For the sake of the students' physical and mental health, the school is likely to expel you. You worked hard to test into this university, your parents are waiting for you to make something of yourself, wouldn't it be a fine thing to get expelled?"

She started to cry.

Seeing her looking pitiful, I asked which room was hers, offering to walk her there. She shook her head and said there was no need;

now that she had been flipped over, she didn't need to be upside down all the time. She could leave on her own.

Then she slowly turned and left. When I went back to the girls' dormitory, the roomful of girls gave me adoring looks. My roommate's girlfriend kicked him aside and warmly took my arm, saying, "You're really amazing. You can even exorcise ghosts. It feels really safe with you here."

"What kind of ghost was that? It's only a stressed out student scaring people to make herself feel better." Now that the matter had been resolved, I couldn't stay in the girls' dorm. I picked up my roommate, whose legs had gone soft, put him on my back, and took him back down the way we'd come, leaving behind neither merit nor fame.

The aftermath of this incident was my roommate and his girlfriend breaking up at the speed of light later that night. My roommate's ex-girlfriend immediately sent a text asking me out on a date and was righteously turned down by me, whose heart was fixed on the senior.

The location of the class this time called these past events to my mind. It was pretty interesting, almost as if I could go back to university.

Right away, I sent the time and place to Ning Tiance and suggested that he could ride the school bus with me to class.

Xiao Ning was up late again waiting to hear from me: *Tell me in detail about your school bus.*

He was starting to get interested in me. From accompanying me to class to understanding my living conditions, now he was even asking for details about my means of transportation. It really made my heart sing.

I was excited and at once told him over voice message everything from the first time I'd taken the school bus to the last time, when the driver had displayed sympathy towards Tan Xiaoming. The main purpose of this was to give him a hint about my sexual orientation. If even the bus driver could tell, then shouldn't Xiao Ning be able to work it out even faster?

But Xiao Ning focused on something different: Tell me in more detail about Xia Jin's altered behavior when he made advances towards you.

Haha, he must be jealous. I'd known from the time he'd touched me in the elevator that Xiao Ning had some feelings for me. My chest muscles were very firm; it absolutely hadn't been a mistake on my part.

After hearing my account, Xiao Ning's status was inputting text, but he didn't send anything. I waited until I had nearly fallen asleep, then finally received a very short message: *I don't know whether Manager Xia is lucky or unlucky to have a friend like you.*

I looked at this for a long time without being able to decide whether it was praise or criticism. In the end, I fell asleep.

The next day, I took my resume and went to Xia Jin's company for an interview. I was calm and open-minded, indicating that although I had finished graduate school, my work experience was insufficient, so I was willing to accept being taken on as an intern and staying at the company to learn. I hoped that they could give me a chance.

Sure enough, on seeing my sincerity, they agreed. I was assigned to the marketing department, with a base salary of 800 a month and a performance-based commission. Although the salary was very low, this was still a big step forward for me.

Those who have just started out at a new job should speak less and do more, silently observe and study, be low-key and proper.

I kept to this principle all day, memorizing the notable points of our company's products. Fortunately, there had been many subjects in my university's liberal arts department that required memorization, so my memory was up to it. I got the main points down during the first day.

The supervisor in charge of me was named Lu Guangxi. He was younger than me. His performance was the best in the whole company. At the age of twenty-five, his yearly salary was already a million yuan.

I wasn't jealous. Lu Guangxi's income actually made me more confident.

On weekdays when there were no special events, the office usually stopped work at six in the afternoon, and the sales people at nine in the evening. As for me, when I went out of the office on assignment in the future, my hours would be relatively free.

When I got home, I once again carefully reviewed the lesson plan I had prepared. At 11:30, Teacher Liu was waiting for me by the door.

Teacher Liu preferred wearing a Zhongshan suit, an attire that seemed especially suited to his temperament. With its refined, studious air of the Republic, it was much more suitable than a Western suit and leather shoes.

Ning Tiance's hotel was quite far from my house. There was no call to take the school bus. When I'd gotten up that morning I'd received his message saying he would meet me in front of the old campus of the Normal University. The scene of the two of us in a world of our own on the school bus wouldn't be happening.

At nightfall it had started to rain. Teacher Liu stood in the rain carrying a paper umbrella, a vision of old-world charm. As for me, my view was that I didn't need any umbrella. A little rain was nothing; an umbrella was useless. Teacher Liu invited me to stand under his umbrella, but I refused. The rain was light and felt very pleasant.

The driver was punctual. We hadn't been waiting a full minute when he arrived at the estate's gate. When I got on the bus with Teacher Liu, Teacher Liu seemed shocked. He said, "The passengers... No, why have all the seats become green? They've always been red before."

The driver glanced at us and said in his usual calm voice, "They would rather walk. They said it's better for your health. At any rate it's better than having your soul punched to smithereens."

Teacher Liu took a deep breath. After a long time, he managed to say, "And now you're the only one left. You still have to drive the bus every night. It can't be easy."

The driver sighed. "Not for you, either. I'm only the coachman. Your position is worse."

"Ah, such is life." Teacher Liu shook his head.

Listening to them, I figured they were talking about working at night. The driver could rest a while after he dropped us off at school, but Teacher Liu and I had to teach in the dead of night. Teacher Liu was older than me, so it was harder for him.

We all had difficulties, but in order to save students like Tan Xiaoming, I would gladly endure them.

"There's a new student today. She's not clear on where to go, so I'll be making a little detour to pick her up," the driver explained.

“Oh? Principal Zhang is still accepting new students?” Teacher Liu was shocked. “Didn’t she say it would only be this class?”

There seemed to be some inside story. If there was only this class of students, would Principal Zhang close the school after they graduated? Then what would happen to me? Would I lose my job?

I acted like I wasn’t paying attention, but actually I pricked up my ears to listen to them.

“Not a new one, really, just one who’s been brought back,” the driver said. “She ran away before and couldn’t find the way back to school. Principal Zhang found her recently and arranged for her to attend class. After drifting around out there all these years, I don’t know what she’ll be like now.”

“Drifting around all the time is no good...” Teacher Liu shook his head anxiously. “With no one to look after her, I’m afraid...”

I nodded where they couldn’t see me. Most of our school’s students had psychological problems, but not so severe that they needed to be hospitalized. The goal of the school was to guide these students back to living a normal life. This student had gotten herself lost. Her mental state had been delicate to start off with, and without the school’s protection...

Alas, I also couldn’t tell what she would be like now.

I was just thinking this when the driver stopped the bus. The door opened. From outside came the sound of rain falling.

The rain seemed to be getting heavier.

A person wearing a raincoat that hid her face boarded the bus. She wasn’t tall, about 155 cm in height. Her raincoat was dripping. The

floor of the bus soon had a large puddle on it.

After she got on the bus, she looked around, then went straight towards me.

Teacher Liu seemed nervous. He ran over to me to block the student. “Duan Youlian, you’d better sit next to me.”

She raised her head, and the hood of her raincoat fell back, revealing a pale, ordinary face. “Why is there a strange person here?”

(Part 4)

I couldn’t rely on Teacher Liu’s mediation. I stood and reached out a friendly hand to Duan Youlian, warmly saying, “Student Duan, I’m the new teacher, Shen Jianguo. I look forward to your comments.”

Duan Youlian stared at me. She pushed Teacher Liu away with a shove that actually sent him reeling from the front of the bus to the very back. How strong was she? She must have suffered a great deal while drifting around outside.

Instead of extending her hand, she leaned in close to me and sniffed at my neck. She repeated the words, “Why is there a strange person here?”

The driver acted like he saw nothing and concentrated on driving. After getting thrown aside, Teacher Liu didn’t move; he lay down playing dead.

“The school was short on teachers, so Principal Zhang made a job posting online. I am a graduate student specializing in Ideological and Political Education. I sent in my resume and was hired by Principal Zhang as a teacher at your school. At present, I have only given one formal class. If necessary, I can give you a make-up class

in private. But today, considering that it's a group lecture that will build upon the contents of the last class, if you have any trouble, be sure to take notes."

It seemed that Duan Youlian had a hard time communicating normally with others, but I still needed to have a normal dialogue with her, as befit the spirit of a teacher. Even if she couldn't understand it today, after some repetition, she would slowly come to understand.

"The smell of the living..." She was getting closer to me, watching me with a strange expression, her eyes hardly moving.

"I know you certainly don't have a notebook. Coincidentally, I brought a new notebook today, so I'll give it to you as a gift." I took out a thin one yuan notebook from my schoolbag, used a two yuan gel pen to write the characters of her name on it, then handed both the notebook and the pen to her.

She may not be able to take notes, but this my was my little gesture as a poor teacher.

She didn't take the notebook or pen. Her gaze fell on the notebook and she stared at it with her head tilted.

I kept my hands raised, still wanting her to take the items. I wanted this new student to see my sincerity, so that she could open her heart and accept me.

Maybe my sincerity moved her. Duan Youlian's hand appeared from out of her raincoat, but instead of taking the notebook, she reached her hand towards my neck and screamed.

I got a clear look. Oh my, her nails were at least 10 centimeters long. Although they were painted with red nail polish, I could still faintly

see the black mud caked on them. It was too unhygienic. How long had it been since she'd cut her nails?

She rather aggressively went for my eyes with her fingernails.

I quickly grabbed both her wrists and pressed Duan Youlian down into a nearby seat with all my strength. She started screaming when I touched her, as if I had done something heinous.

Did she have an aversion to physical contact with males? She'd just refused to shake hands with me and was showing aggression towards me, a male, screaming when I touched her.

I tried my best to calm her. "Don't be afraid, I'm a good person. I won't hurt you. At most... at most, I'll cut your nails for you. They're very unsanitary."

As I said this, I took my keychain from my waist. I was in the habit of keeping small collapsible scissors and nail-clippers on my keychain, which was very convenient for when I needed some simple tools.

Duan Youlian was skinny, and her wrists were particularly thin. I held both her wrists in one hand, holding the nail clippers in the other hand and using them to cut her thumbnail.

One blood red nail fell to the floor. The driver slammed on the brakes, and the whole bus shook violently. Duan Youlian took the opportunity to struggle to get away. Fortunately, I had hooked my foot over the railing next to me; otherwise I would have gone flying towards the driver's seat.

"Sir, what's the matter?" In the midst of chaos, I still remembered to be polite to the driver.

"Nothing," said the driver. "I got scared by your nail cutting."

I understood him. I was also scared by such long nails.

Because of the inertia of the car braking just now, Teacher Liu had slid down to where I was. He picked up the fingernail clipping and looked at Duan Youlian in anguish.

“Don’t be afraid, Teacher Liu,” I comforted him. “I’ll be quick.”

Wielding the nail clippers I quickly snipped off Duan Youlian’s nails one after another. In less than five minutes her nails had become short and tidy.

At first Duan Youlian was still screaming. When I finished the first hand, she went silent. Teacher Liu, on the other hand, gasped every time I cut a nail. He was much too excited.

When I had cut all ten nails, Duan Youlian calmed down completely and sat still in the seat. I put the notebook on her knees and said softly, “You don’t need sharp nails to protect yourself. Your teacher will protect you.”

Teacher Liu picked up the cut nails one by one and offered them to Duan Youlian with trembling hands. “L-let her keep them as a memento.”

Duan Youlian didn’t move, so I folded the nail clippings into the notebook.

This time she finally took the notebook, held it in her arms, and stared blankly out the window at the rain coming down.

“My name is Shen Jianguo. You can call me Teacher Shen,” I said enthusiastically.

“Teacher... Shen...?” Duan Youlian repeated.

“Yes, that’s right.” I happily gave Teacher Liu a furtive wink. The student was already starting to return to normal. Soon she would be able to speak properly.

Teacher Liu sat beside Duan Youlian and said comfortingly, “Accept it. You should have known this would be the outcome of coming back to attend class.”

“But...why?” Duan Youlian asked.

For some reason, Teacher Liu started to cry. He must have felt very sorry for Duan Youlian. He wiped his tears and said, “How do I know?”

I couldn’t understand what they were saying. It must have been about some past events beyond my comprehension.

Fortunately, with Teacher Liu’s help, Duan Youlian gradually softened, seeming less fierce.

The school bus arrived punctually in front of the Normal University at midnight. As soon as I got off the bus, I saw Ning Tiance holding an umbrella and waiting, wearing his yellow robe. He looked very handsome. The rainy night gave him an added touch of mysterious beauty.

I ran under Ning Tiance’s umbrella but didn’t quite dare to get close. In my struggle with Duan Youlian just now, water from her raincoat had gotten all over me. I was in a miserable state.

Xiao Ning looked at the water on me and frowned. “Where’s that water from? There’s hardly enough warmth left in your body. How can you face your students like this?”

“It’s OK,” I said indifferently. “Some water from Xiao Duan’s raincoat got on me. It’ll evaporate soon enough from my body heat!”

Ning Tiance's gaze suddenly became sharp. He looked at Duan Youlian and Liu Sishun standing together.

I introduced them. "This is Liu Sishun, who's been looking after me since I started working. The other one is Duan Youlian, a new student. She's afraid of strangers."

To the two of them, I said: "This is Ning Tiance, a disciple of the Maoshan Sect, a Celestial Master. He came to listen to me teach. Principal Zhang agreed."

Duan Youlian's face altered. She took two steps back, as if she wanted to return to the school bus. But the driver hadn't stuck around after we got off the bus, so there was no means of retreat.

Teacher Liu, though, nodded ardently to Ning Tiance and said, "Thank you so much for your help a few days ago, Ning-tianshi."

"It was no trouble." Xiao Ning inclined his head slightly.

They look at each other for a moment but didn't reveal anything else. They seemed to have some tacit understanding.

"You've met before?" I asked Xiao Ning.

"A single chance meeting." Ning Tiance didn't say anything more. It seemed this was another story I didn't understand.

Duan Youlian didn't like having contact with strangers. She tried to run off, but Teacher Liu held her back.

"Ah, where can you run to?" Teacher Liu sighed. "Your nails are gone, wherever you go you'll be bullied by lonely souls and wandering ghosts. You're better off staying with Principal Zhang. At least in class no one will fool around. And there's Teacher Shen..."

“Nails?” Ning Tiance frowned.

“Oh, her nails were too long, so I cut them for her.” I didn’t mention the dangerous scene just now in which I ran the risk of getting clawed by those nails.

“Cut them?”

“Right, I have very good nail clippers.” I took out the key chain and handed it to Ning Tiance.

Ning Tiance took it and looked. “You’ve been using these nail clippers for a long time.”

“Yes, since high school. It’s been about ten years. When I first bought them they were very sharp, and I was so clumsy then, I even cut myself,” I said sheepishly.

“They’re good. You should keep them with you.” Xiao Ning gave the keychain back to me. The nail clippers were warm from his touch. They warmed my chilled fingers.

After Teacher Liu’s persuasion, Duan Youlian seemed at least willing to go to class with us.

I was familiar with the Normal University campus and easily led the three of them to the classroom building.

Unlike the last two abandoned locations, the classroom building of the Normal University was in good condition. The voice activated lights in the main hall and corridors lit up as soon as we stepped in. There was no need to go up the stairs carrying a battery-operated lamp.

As soon as the light in the first floor hall came on, we saw Tian Bowen standing there looking coldly at us.

Seeing Duan Youlian, he gave a malicious smile. “Well, if it isn’t Xiao Lian. How did you get back?” He rolled up his sleeve, revealing a long scar on his arm. “You gave this to me last time. It hurt. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Last time? I immediately stepped in front of Duan Youlian and said to Tian Bowen, “Did you have a disagreement with Xiao Duan? Did you bully her?”

“Look at my scar. She’s the one who hurt me! But I didn’t let her have it easy. My little darlings crawled all over her.” As Tian Bowen spoke, a pile of plump insects fell from his sleeves.

I felt sick just looking at them. Duan Youlian must have felt awful having them crawl all over her. It must have left a psychological shadow.

Teacher Liu didn’t like Tian Bowen either. He said to me, “When Xiao Duan left the school, it was because of a clash with him. After that, Principal Zhang expelled Tian Bowen, but he never left, and he got his insects all over me. It was disgusting!”

This was completely unacceptable. I shielded Xiao Duan and told her, “Don’t worry. I’ll settle the score for you.”

Then I quickly got the insecticide out of my bag and sprayed it at Tian Bowen’s arms.

When I took out the insecticide, Xiao Ning opened his umbrella to shield Teacher Liu and Duan Youlian from the spray.

At first Tian Bowen was still sneering. “What good is your pathetic insecticide again me? My darlings are...”

Before he had finished speaking, his maggots rolled over and died.

His expression changed. He grabbed handfuls of his hair and shrieked, “What is this? Why can it hurt my killer insects?”

Xiao Ning took the insecticide from me with a serious expression and said to us, “Get to class quickly. There’s no need for you to delay, I’ll handle the rest.”

CHAPTER 22 - Education (Part 5)

It really was almost time for class, and I was feeling rushed. I remembered the time Xiao Ning had come running back to rescue me in the middle of the night. I could trust him.

So I gave him some advice: “If he goes too far you should call the police. Don’t let yourself be dragged into a fight, or he may be able to put the blame on you.”

Looking at the dead insects on the ground, I said, “If the insecticide isn’t very harmful towards humans, use it as much as you can. You have to kill all those bugs.”

“Don’t worry.” Ning Tiance’s expression was earnest and solemn. He really was trustworthy.

Xiao Ning stood between us and Tian Bowen with his insects. I took Duan Youlian and Teacher Liu up the side stairs to avoid Tian Bowen. A few insects crawled over to us. I was just about to raise my foot to crush them, but the insects climbed onto Duan Youlian’s raincoat and were drowned by the water on it.

“Nicely done, Xiao Duan!” I praised.

Xiao Duan still hadn’t shaken the water off her raincoat. When I was cutting her nails on the school bus the water had gotten all over me, and I still felt cold from it. In fact, I wanted to pull her raincoat off and shake the water off, but I was afraid she wasn’t wearing anything under it and didn’t dare to act.

Even if I wasn’t interested in women, I was a man, after all, and determined to be a gentleman. Naturally I couldn’t go around pulling off girls’ clothes.

The three of us quickly got to the classroom. It was already full of students. I counted quickly: there were still twenty-three. Tian Bowen had left and Duan Youlian had returned, so the number was the same.

Mu Huaitong really was a good student. Like last time, she was sitting in the center of the front row, looking fixedly at me with her chin in her hand.

When she saw Duan Youlian, her smile stiffened. Mu Huaitong stared at Teacher Liu and said, “Why is she back?”

Xiao Duan seemed to have some problems with her personal relationships. Tian Bowen didn’t count, he was an expelled social element who was still around harassing the students. Xiao Duan could be forgiven for having a poor relationship with him. But Mu Huaitong...

Duan Youlian didn’t speak. She just sat down next to Mu Huaitong. The water dripped off of her, spreading until it nearly reached Mu Huaitong’s red high-heeled shoes. Mu Huaitong shrieked and stood up to avoid it. She said to Duan Youlian, “Get the hell away!”

Mu Huaitong was a child who liked cleanliness. Seeing the water, she was so scared she grabbed at her hair. Her long, long black hair floated around as if it was full of static electricity. It was about to wrap around Duan Youlian, but when it touched the water on her raincoat, the moisture dispersed the static and the hair smoothly fell back down.

Before class, I first had to establish harmonious relations between my new student and the other students. Teacher Liu huddled in a corner watching from the sidelines, as if he didn’t want to get involved in the women’s war.

But I couldn't let my classroom become the battlefield of a catfight. I stood between the two of them, grabbed Mu Huaitong's hair, and gathered it together. "Who has a rubber band? If you tie up your hair, there'll be no more static electricity."

Mu Huaitong was nearly about to cry. Her eyes were bloodshot. She stared at me and said, "You dare to tie my hair?"

"Your hair is long and beautiful, but if it's too long it will block your eyes and make it harder to attend class," I said. "When a girl's hair is so long, isn't it nice to put it up in a pretty hairstyle? What if I got you a bottle of hair gel?"

Hearing about the hair gel, Mu Huaitong shivered all over and obediently braided her hair. She deftly tied the end with a strand of hair to keep it from coming loose.

"Good child." I nodded in satisfaction, and said to Duan Youlian, "Xiao Duan, it's time for class, and it's not raining in here. Shouldn't you take off your raincoat? There's so much water, it'll affect the other students' ability to pay attention in class."

Duan Youlian laughed scornfully and said, "Liu Sishun!"

"All right!" Teacher Liu replied at once.

Teacher Liu got out a large water bottle from somewhere, one of the 1-liter types. Duan Youlian took the bottle with her pale fingers, unscrewed the cap, and poured it over her head.

"I like pouring water on myself. How about it?" Duan Youlian approached me, malice in her face. "You're powerful. You can cut my nails. But can you get the water off me? After they knocked me unconscious, they threw me in the water. I was still alive then. The water poured into my ears, my nose, my eyes, my mouth. My

stomach, my lungs were full of river water. Can you get the water off me?”

Ah, Xiao Duan also had a painful history.

The water from her body dripped onto my clothes, making me colder and colder. I even felt as if it wasn't summer anymore, but the dead of winter.

It must have been that Xiao Duan's heart was cold, and she was passing on that coldness to me.

Although a teacher ought to mind his image while teaching class, faced with the grief-stricken Xiao Duan, I had to do something.

Because lecturing for a long time made me thirsty, I had put a bottle of coke in my backpack. I resolutely took out the bottle of coke, opened it and poured it over my head. The sticky coke trickled down my face. I stuck out my tongue and licked it. It still tasted pretty good!

The carbonated drink bubbled on my head. I said to Xiao Duan, “I can't go back there to save you, but I can keep you company.”

My heart was steady. I had only one thought: even though Xiao Duan was dripping wet, I couldn't push her away. She had already gone to the edge, and showing any disgust now would push her into the abyss. But if I reached out to her, I could still pull her back.

This steady conviction warmed me. As my temperature rose, my clothes gradually dried.

With the coke covering my head, I walked towards Duan Youlian, but she took a few steps back and shook her head. “No, you won't. The whole world despises me. You're only pretending.”

I answered her sincerely. “If all of you were only people passing me in the street, I might say something like, how can this girl be so careless? But today I am your teacher, and you are my student. As a teacher, I would never despise any student.”

I held out my hand to her. She looked down for a moment and calmly said, “Who’s going to shake hands with you when your hand is covered in coke?”

Then Duan Youlian turned her head away and went to sit down beside Teacher Liu. She even took out the one yuan notebook I’d given her.

The students in the classroom didn’t speak. They had been looking attentively at us all along.

I went up to the lectern, a little embarrassed, and said, “Although it has been a little eventful, we still need to have class. Everyone clap your hands to welcome Duan Youlian back into our group.”

The classroom filled with the sound of clapping.

Mu Huaitong, her hair in a long braid, put her chin in her hand and looked at me. Smiling, she said, “Teacher Shen looks very cute when he’s wet.”

“Ahem, don’t make fun of the teacher.” I hunted around in my pockets. I had run out of tissues. It was embarrassing to lecture when I was so wet.

That was when Ning Tiance walked into the classroom.

As soon as he came in, the atmosphere thickened again. I quickly introduced him. “Students, this is Ning Tiance. He... Although he has already graduated and started work, he is also eager to learn.

He's attending my class in his spare time. He won't disturb you. I hope you can get along well with each other. "

"Huh. Is he here in his spare time, or is he here to work?" Mu Huaitong's manner wasn't friendly.

I didn't know how to explain. After all, I had brought Xiao Ning to class from my own selfish motives. Fortunately, Teacher Liu was there, and he stood up to help Ning Tiance explain. "Ning-tianshi... Ning Tiance is a good person. He saved me a few days ago. He isn't one of those old-fashioned types."

Teacher Liu had status among the students. After his intervention, the other students raised no objections.

Mu Huaitong just snorted.

"How's Tian Bowen?" I asked.

Ning Tiance said lightly, "He won't be coming back."

"And the insects?"

Ning Tiance shook the empty can of insecticide. "All dead."

"I hope you didn't break the law." I wasn't sure. Xiao Ning was a good person, but he could be a little free-handed. Before, he had done things like jumping over the wall of Benevolence School and smashing the mall's doors with a brick. He was a bit like a knight in a wuxia novel. He had a chivalrous heart but didn't attend to details.

"I didn't," Ning Tiance shook his head. "Don't worry."

With him so resolute I couldn't keep asking. I could only suppress my doubts. After class I would ask Principal Zhang. Principal Zhang

had connections. She would know what had happened to Tian Bowen.

After showing Ning Tiance to a seat in the corner, I turned around to start the lecture, but Ning Tiance called me back. "Wait."

I turned my head back. Xiao Ning gave a helpless-sounding sigh. "How did you get yourself covered in coke?"

He took out a bandana and wiped my hair and face. Although it was still sticky, it would no longer impact my image while lecturing.

Twenty-three students and one Teacher Liu made forty-eight eyes trained on us, but I had no attention to spare to feel awkward. All I saw was Xiao Ning's focused, handsome face.

He was so gentle...

My heart was deeply moved.

I didn't know when I would be able to say to my students, This is Ning Tiance, your teacher's boyfriend, who's come to pick me up after work.

While he was wiping, his fingertips brushed against my face. They felt so warm.

"You've warmed back up?" He felt my clothes and said wonderingly, "And your clothes have dried this fast?"

"Of course!" I smacked my chest proudly. "I said before, I have enough body heat, so the water will evaporate soon. You don't have to worry."

"I really don't need to worry, do I," he said, smiling and shaking his head. "I thought you were in danger this time. But after all you're still

you.”

“That’s right, I’ve hardly ever had a cold in my life.” Xiao Ning was making too big of a deal out of this. How could catching a cold be dangerous?

After getting cleaned up, I went with a turbulent heart to teach my second lesson: how to set up a correct world view.

Today I mainly talked about the first important point: the necessity of learning. It was necessary to establish a positive attitude towards learning, and to arm yourself with an abundance of knowledge.

“Only by increasing our store of knowledge can we form a theoretical system of our own and explain things through scientific means when we encounter them, rather than through self-deception. I’ll use myself as an example. The students in our class are very free-thinking and dress in a rather avant-garde ways. Now, of course I’m not saying you aren’t well dressed. This is a free class. As long as we don’t expose too much and affect others, we can even dress up as a mummy, like this student. What I mean to say is that another person might view you all as ghosts. Because I’ve been learning for many years and can see the world correctly and scientifically through the lens of chemistry, philosophy, psychology and other disciplines, I won’t be impacted by common views and led to be biased against you.

“Therefore, students, you should learn as much as you can. Keep up that attitude and be understanding towards others. After class I’ll recommend some books to everyone. Anyone who is interested can read them.”

After I had recommended *The Wisdom of Life* and other books, I announced that class was over.

CHAPTER 23 - Education (Part 6)

Today's class time had been slightly delayed, so I didn't take a break in the middle and lectured until two o'clock. The students were very well-behaved. None of them asked to go to the toilet. They listened through the whole lecture.

After recommending the books, I announced the end of class, so that the students could leave and get some rest.

There was something strange here. Clearly we had a school bus, but the driver never picked up the students. He only took me. I didn't know why.

So I asked Mu Huaitong, who was sitting closest to me in the front row. "Student Mu, how do you get to school every day? Aren't you scared of being out so late?"

If I had a car, I would definitely have added the sentence, Would you like me to drive you home?

"I just fly..." Mu Huaitong paused and chuckled. "I drive myself."

Ning Tiance laughed at that.

Mu Huaitong at once became ferocious and gave Ning Tiance an unpleasant look.

I only then remembered that these two were enemies. The first time I'd met Mu Huaitong, she had pretended to be a ghost to frighten me, stuck out a long red tongue and wrapped it around my neck and got it yanked out by me. Watching this scene, because of his superstitions, Xiao Ning had taken this nice girl for a ghost and tried to stab her with his wooden sword, and he'd also... also torn up my clothes...

I quickly stood between the two of them to avoid another fight. Since that time Xiao Ning had gotten off the train in the middle of the night and come back, he had softened a great deal. He didn't raise a hand against Mu Huaitong but instead turned his head to one side, closing his eyes and not looking at her.

Mu Huaitong was really beautiful, especially with her black hair in a braid. The long braid made her look like a love interest in a school story. Such a good-looking person, and Ning Tiance actually wasn't even interested in looking at her. Didn't that mean Xiao Ning's orientation was...

Hehehe. I had a good feeling.

"Teacher Shen doesn't need to worry about the school bus," said Mu Huaitong. "We don't need to make do with it."

Was she suggesting that my students were wealthy?

Then it was no wonder that Principal Zhang could arrange her classes so casually and pay me such a good salary, and could even pay for Tan Xiaoming's psychological treatment. It was all because we had rich students at our school!

At last I could relax and not worry so much about Principal Zhang's financial situation.

Today I'd used the projector in the classroom to teach, so after class I had to retrieve my computer. My old laptop was very slow to shut down. The little chrysanthemum just spun around and around without shutting down. By the time I'd put it away, Xiao Ning and I were the only ones left in the classroom. Even my roommate Teacher Liu hadn't waited for me.

“Doesn’t that feel unpleasant?” Ning Tiance reached out and touched my sticky hair.

“Of course it does.” The sugar in the coke had made me very uncomfortable. “But as soon as I started lecturing I couldn’t feel it anymore. I’d forgotten about it until you reminded me.”

“You teach very well,” Ning Tiance said. “I even took notes. And I’m going to buy *The Wisdom of Life*.”

“Really!” I was very happy.

My course was aimed at students with mental disorders. I had brought Xiao Ning here out of selfish motives. It was a real surprise that he had been listening. It would be great if I could get a Celestial Master to believe in materialism.

“Really,” Ning Tiance said. “This world is full of wonders. The old customs have been lagging behind. When I take over the Maoshan Sect in the future, I’ll have to take in some disciples with a basis in modern culture.”

“If you think that, that’s great,” I said, taking his hand enthusiastically. “Even if we believe in different things, it doesn’t prevent us from understanding each other, does it?”

“Of course not.” Ning Tiance squeezed my sticky hand and frowned slightly. “Right, why don’t you go over to my place tonight?”

“Oh? So soon?” My thoughts were galloping like a herd of wild horses, already conjuring images of Ning Tiance and me romping around in the presidential suite of a five-star hotel.

“What’s soon?” He looked bewildered. “You’re wet. You need to take a nice bath. And you were attacked by Yin energy today. Although you’ve already dispelled it with your upright and honest

heart, we had still better perform a rite. I have all the necessary equipment in my room. It's more convenient to go there."

"Oh, I see..." I lowered my head in dejection, not just because I was embarrassed about misunderstanding, but even more so because Xiao Ning still believed in ghosts.

But then I thought about Ning Tiance listening to my lectures and trying to understand my world. So I really should repay him by understanding his background.

"All right, thank you very much." I suddenly thought of a question. "How much does performing a rite cost?"

"How could I take your money?" Xiao Ning's smile was very warm. "Teacher Shen is my spiritual guide."

I was dazzled by his smile, just as if I had been hypnotized. I got into Xiao Ning's car in a daze and went back to the hotel with him.

It wasn't until I got inside the five-star hotel and sat down on the luxurious sofa in the presidential suite that the glitter of the hotel called me back to myself.

By this time Xiao Ning was sticking talismans onto me. There were strips of paper stuck all over my face, as if I'd lost a poker game in university.

"Oh no!" I sprang to my feet.

"What's the matter?" Xiao Ning asked as he picked up a fallen talisman.

"I forgot to tell the driver that he doesn't have to wait for me." My watch said three o'clock. Was there still time to contact Principal Zhang?

“No need,” Xiao Ning said. “I had Teacher Liu help pass on the word.”

“Huh? Since when did you have such a good relationship with Teacher Liu?” Recalling everything that had happened today. Teacher Liu had acted very nice towards Xiao Ning the whole time.

“We only met once in passing before. Besides, in addition to exorcism, at the Maoshan Sect our technique for controlling ghosts is also good. I let him know when we left. It was only a matter of a single talisman.”

“Oh? Huh? You mean you used a talisman to contact Teacher Liu?” I was bewildered.

Ning Tiance looked at me for a while, shook his head with an expression that said, “What am I going to do with you?” and sighed. “I have Teacher Liu’s contact information.”

“Oh, on the phone.” I nodded. “What was that about controlling ghosts?”

“My sect’s secret technique. It can’t be spread outside.”

I wisely shut up and stopped discussing this issue with Xiao Ning. Anyway, even if he’d explained it, I still wouldn’t have believed him.

“Don’t worry about it. Let’s continue,” Xiao Ning said.

“All right.” I obediently sat still and let Xiao Ning stick papers all over me.

When he was finished, I sat down on the floor in the middle of the living room at Xiao Ning’s direction. It was painted all over with patterns I couldn’t understand. In his yellow robe, Xiao Ning burned

incense, picked up his sword, and began to do a sword dance in front of me.

He really was handsome, every one of his gestures beautiful. Ning Tiance's skill at sword dancing was good enough to take part in the New Year's Gala. I stared stupidly at him in wonderment.

This time his robe was belted. It was a white belt hanging slightly down, twisting as he moved. The belt flashed in front of my eyes.

What a narrow waist...

At the end he leapt up and quietly recited something, pointed at the center of my brow with his sword, and firmly said, "Burn!"

There was no reaction. The scene became very awkward.

After a while, Xiao Ning spoke again: "Burn! Burn, burn, burn!"

I couldn't help asking, "Burnburn? Who's that?"

Xiao Ning glares at me angrily. He lifted off the talisman on my brow with the tip of his sword and looked at the drawing on it. His face was full of disbelief.

He took three steps back, knocked over his incense burner, shook his head and spoke as though his whole world had collapsed: "Why? It can't be?"

I was frightened by his appearance and didn't dare to move. I could only sit in the middle of the array and ask, "What's the matter?"

He took the talisman and said to me, "This is a cleansing talisman painted with cinnabar and cockerel's blood. It's full of Yang energy. When encountering Yin energy, it will ignite without fire. Yin and Yang will harmonize, and the Yin energy will be neutralized.

Normally, no matter how strong a ghost is, it won't fail. But this talisman..."

"This talisman... You forgot to mix in the phosphorous?"

That was the only reason I could think of. Phosphorous has a low ignition point, so Xiao Ning could generate heat by rubbing the wooden sword against the talisman, and the phosphorous would burn...

"Of course not..." Xiao Ning said disbelievingly. "This talisman... No, all the talismans on your body, not only have they not disappeared from neutralizing Yin energy, they've been filled up with Yang energy. They've changed from ordinary cleansing talismans into powerful exorcism talismans, more powerful than the exorcism talismans we normally produce. In our sect, only the sect leader's shishu can produce talismans like these. But even he has to rest after making just one, and there are ninety-nine talismans stuck to you..."

Hearing this, I was flummoxed. I didn't understand why Xiao Ning was so surprised.

He pulled all the talismans off my body and carefully put them away, leaving one on his desk.

Ning Tiance then took out a sheet of paper specially made to be written on with a brush, rubbed an ink stick onto an inkstone, took up his brush and wrote: "Reporting to the honorable Sect Leader. This foolish disciple's sojourn in H City..."

Xiao Ning's writing was very beautiful, but it was also very refined. If I hadn't been a liberal arts student, I wouldn't have understood it.

He was saying something like, his sojourn in H City wasn't passing smoothly. He had originally thought this was part of the Sect

Leader's test for him, testing his ability to solve the problem himself. He had once had the cowardly notion of returning to the sect to ask for help, but in the end he had stopped himself and returned to H City to continue his training. But now he had encountered a rather thorny dilemma and had no choice but to report to the sect...

I didn't read any more. This was a letter from Xiao Ning to his sect; I shouldn't have been peeking.

I made for the bathroom to enjoy the hotel's bubble bath. It sure was good to be rich.

When I was clean and sweet-smelling, I wrapped myself in the hotel's bath towel and went back to the living room, my face all steamed up.

Xiao Ning had just finished writing his letter and was putting the talisman he'd left out into the envelope.

Out of politeness I asked him, "Do we still need to cleanse the Yin energy?"

"No." He shook his head. "My cultivation is too weak. I can't see anything clearly."

Seeing that he was depressed, I sat beside Xiao Ning and said comfortingly, "How about... I recite Marxist principles to you? It's very helpful for falling asleep. No matter what's troubling you, if you have a good night's sleep, you'll wake up to a new day full of hope."

"All right, you go ahead and recite. I want to hear it," Ning Tiance said listlessly, leaning back against the sofa.

After reciting for a while I fell asleep myself. I didn't remember anything that happened afterwards. I only knew that when I woke up

the next morning, I was lying in the big bed in the guest room. Xiao Ning must have put me to bed.

I felt all over my body. There was nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing had happened.

Ah, Xiao Ning is a gentleman, I thought a little hopelessly.

CHAPTER 24 - New Job (Part 1)

Yesterday I'd gotten a new job, and today I had to go to work. I looked at the time, then quickly got up and washed. I was brushing my teeth when Xiao Ning walked in.

"You're up early," I greeted him.

"I went to mail my letter."

After exchanging good mornings I immediately got dressed. When I got to the hotel yesterday, I'd given my clothes to the hotel staff to be washed, dried, and ironed. A big hotel really was a great thing. My clean suit had already been delivered earlier.

A waiter brought breakfast to the hotel room. I ate as soon as I was finished washing up, sighing to myself. Under the corrupting influence of money I almost didn't want to go to work. I just wanted to stay with Xiao Ning at his hotel.

I beat my chest and said to myself, *Buck up, Shen Jianguo!* In order to conduct myself with integrity, I had to display strength and discipline, spend the money I had earned myself so I could hold up my head. Though I was poor, my soul was still worthy, without any psychological stain. I could even sleep peacefully in a morgue.

When I was finished eating, Xiao Ning said, "You said you'd found another job. I'll take you."

"No need, no need." I put a piece of bread in my mouth. "I'll be fine taking the subway."

"Please let me take you," Xiao Ning said with light smile. "I really want to learn more from Teacher Shen."

Usually I would be happy to hear this, thinking it meant Xiao Ning was interested in me. But this time, even though I wasn't a very sensitive person, I could still hear the bitterness behind Xiao Ning's smiling expression.

"Xiao Ning, I think you aren't in a good state right now."

He gave me the feeling of having ascended through an epiphany, as though he had already cast off the mortal realm. If he hadn't been eating breakfast, I would have been afraid that he was going to shun food the way they did in novels.

Wake up, Xiao Ning! A novel is only for entertainment, it isn't reality!

"It's not what you think." Ning Tiance looked up at me. "I love my sect. It's my dream to inherit the Maoshan Sect and carry it forward. But sometimes, it's not enough just to love it. I want to learn more social principles from Teacher Shen. The old ideas are out of date. We need a new theoretical system. "

Ning Tiance was a really good student. He'd had this realization after attending just one class. I was very glad.

Since he insisted on taking me to work, I graciously accepted.

After I got out of the car, my phone sounded. It was a message from Principal Zhang that had been sent around three in the morning.

Was there something wrong with the WeChat system? The message had only arrived after five hours.

Principal Zhang's message was an answer to my question about Tian Bowen. She said that Tian Bowen had learned his lesson and would never harass the students again. As for the formalin he had used to breed his maggots, it had been completely destroyed. Ning

Tiance hadn't violated the law but had used aboveboard means to take care of Tian Bowen. I was reassured.

When I thought back to the Ning Tiance who jumped over walls and smashed up glass doors, I was full of satisfaction. Xiao Ning had grown up so fast. He was getting more and more reliable.

For the next three days my life was peaceful. During the day I was busy getting used to my new job. I tagged along after Manager Lu, working as his assistant. In the evenings I happily chatted with Xiao Ning. Since attending my class, Ning Tiance had been very interested in my specialty, always discussing my courses with me. I'd accompanied him in performing a rite when I'd gone to his hotel before. Our lives were getting closer and closer together.

Xiao Ning was very interested in attending class and kept asking when my next class would be. I had to ask Principal Zhang. Principal Zhang said that the schedule for the other classes had been full lately, and the driver wanted to take some time off. My class would be postponed for now. It would start again in a week.

I thought that the busy class schedule must have been Teacher Liu's. I hadn't seen him these past few nights, so perhaps he had been in class.

My primary focus during these days shifted to my daytime work. Manager Lu wanted to acquire national rights to a foreign brand. These days his days and nights were reversed. Every night there was a video conference with a foreign company. The time difference was fearsome.

Originally I had thought that it would be enough for me to help with sales during the day. If we won the rights it would be to Manager Lu's credit alone. It had nothing to do with a little intern like me, and there would be no cut for me.

But I thought that as a new employee it was always good for me to learn more. I had no classes to teach at this time, so I volunteered to work overtime in the middle of the night with Manager Lu.

At three o'clock in the morning, after a video conference with our foreign partners, Manager Lu rubbed his temples wearily and said, "Get me a cup of coffee, thanks."

I handed him the coffee, held back a yawn, and asked, "Isn't the meeting over? Aren't you going to rest yet?"

"After the meeting, the other side will send us a quote. I'll perform a market analysis and send it upstairs tomorrow. They'll decide whether to accept the price," Manager Lu explained.

I took out a notebook to take notes on what he was saying. It was all experience.

Manager Lu, a twenty-five-year-old man with a future, saw that I was seriously taking notes and explained further. "The current price is actually already a concession from the other party. We'll be able to make a profit. It remains to be seen whether the price will line up with what our superiors have in mind. What we need to do now is to find a balance between our superiors and the partners, find a way to satisfy both sides, so as not to be robbed of the rights by other companies. "

"Right, right." I nodded repeatedly.

Although Manager Lu was very young, he was in a much higher position than me. He had been perfectly poised while conducting an international video conference. Xia Jin was also a manager, but in front of me he always seemed helpless. I didn't know whether it was because he just wasn't very skilled or whether he didn't hide his weakness in front of me.

In other words, Manager Lu, who seemed so capable, might have his own weak points, too.

Seeing him rubbing his stomach while drinking the coffee, I knew that staying up late and drinking coffee on an empty stomach had given Manager Lu a stomachache, so I went downstairs to buy two bowls of congee from a 24-hour fast food chain restaurant.

While I was taking the congee upstairs, the lights in the elevator flickered on and off, as if something was wrong with the power supply.

Ah, this company of ours. The mall was on a pretty grand scale, but the infrastructure wasn't very reliable. The elevators kept malfunctioning, and there were always problems with the CCTV.

But this time it seemed that the problem wasn't with the elevator. It must have been an unstable circuit, because the lights in the corridor by Manager Lu's office were also flickering on and off.

As soon as I got off the elevator, I heard a shrill scream coming from Manager Lu's office. I hurried over, setting down the bowls of congee.

The door of Manager Lu's office was closed. I twisted the knob and couldn't get it open. It was locked from inside.

"Ah! Stay away from me, stay away! Ahhh!" Manager Lu screamed inside his office.

Could it be... that a crook had broken into the building in the middle of the night and locked the door while Manager Lu was writing his analysis?

I pounded on the door and shouted, "What is it, Manager Lu? Open the door, I'm here!"

“Ahhh! There’s a ghost!” Now Manager Lu was also knocking on the door. I heard banging sounds coming from inside, as well as Manager Lu’s screams: “I didn’t lock the door, but it won’t open... Ahhh! Stay away from me!”

I didn’t know just what was going on inside, but when I heard him say there was a ghost I wasn’t afraid anymore. There were no such things as ghosts, only people pretending.

I calmed down and said, “Manager Lu, step back. I’ll kick the door open.”

“That... that won’t do any good, I just tried, the ghost closed the door and won’t let me out.”

“It’s because you aren’t strong enough,” I said. “Get out of the way, I’m kicking down the door!”

Then I backed against the wall behind me, charged at the door, and sent it flying open with a kick.

The lights in Manager Lu’s office were off. Only the 60-inch TV on the wall that we’d just held the video conference on was lit up. Some channel was playing *The Ring* in the middle of the night; it was just at the scene where Sadako climbs out of the well.

“Oh, so that’s what happened.” I sighed. “Manager, it’s the middle of the night. Instead of working on your analysis or getting some sleep, you locked the door to watch a horror movie?”

“I — I didn’t!” Manager Lu sat on the floor, his face tear-stained. “I had my head down writing my analysis, and suddenly the lights went out. I looked up and saw the ghost girl about to come out of the TV. I wanted to run, but the door wouldn’t open.”

“Of course it wouldn’t open after you’d locked it. Where’s the remote control?” I turned my back to the TV and looked for the remote. What was the big deal? All you had to do was turn off the TV.

“Ahhhh!” Just when I’d found the remote, Manager Lu’s eyes started out of his head in fear. Pointing to the TV like a dying goldfish, he said, “She’s coming out, her head is already out of the TV!”

I turned my head. No, she’d just come out of the well.

“Oh... As soon as you turned around she got back in,” Manager Lu said in disbelief, tears in his eyes.

“Manager, I think you’re overtired. You’re having hallucinations after staying up late for several days. You touched the remote by accident without noticing it. You should go to bed as soon as possible,” I advised him as I pressed the “off” button on the remote.

The TV screen didn’t go dark. The ghost was still at the edge of the well. This movie was really taking its time.

“It’s useless. The remote control doesn’t work, I tried it just now.” Manager Lu leaned against the wall hugging his chair, trembling all over with fear.

“Then the battery is out of power. I’ll have to go to the logistics department to get some batteries tomorrow. And we’ll have to change the lights. When the circuit was unstable just now the bulbs must have burned out.” I wrote down tomorrow’s to-do list in my notebook and said, “Just unplug the power cord.”

“There’s a current, I can’t touch it,” Manager Lu said mournfully.

“There’s a leak in the TV or the TV outlet. Manager Lu, there’s a big problem with your office’s circuit. The light in the elevator was flickering just now, and the outlet is leaking. It’ll be very dangerous if this goes on. We must tell the maintenance department tomorrow. If it catches fire there’ll be a lot of damage.” While exhorting Manager Lu, I walked around the room looking for an insulator.

There was nothing I could use as an insulator in the whole room. The chairs in Manager Lu’s office were all swivel chairs, not suitable for knocking out a plug.

“I remember there was a mop with a plastic handle in the utility room. Just a moment, I’ll get it. If you’re afraid, come with me.”

I strode out of the office. Manager Lu’s legs were unsteady or something. He didn’t come with me, but stayed in the room screaming.

It was really worrying. I could only dash to the utility room, grab the mop, and go back to the office.

As soon as I came through the door, I saw Manager Lu sitting in front of the TV touching his neck. His tongue was sticking out. He was speaking with difficulty: “Don’t... don’t strangle me, help...”

I looked at the TV again. It was paused. The ghost girl was motionless by the well.

I patted Manager Lu. “Manager, I’ll turn off the TV. You should rest. It’s really not good to get too tired.”

Manager Lu pointed to the TV and said, “The ghost girl... used her hair... tried to strangle me... you... didn’t... see?”

It was really bad with him.

I sighed and knocked the power cord out with the mop. The TV turned off. Manager Lu fell back in a faint.

The company had a rest area. I carried Manager Lu there, slung over my shoulder, and put him in the bed.

Looking at the dark circles under his eyes, I couldn't help shaking my head.

He absolutely shouldn't be staying up late. So young, and already having hallucinations.

CHAPTER 25 - New Job (Part 2)

Worried that Manager Lu would wake up and start hallucinating again, I brought a chair to his bedside, sat down, and went to sleep.

In the morning, I was woken up by Manager Lu making a phone call. “Hello, Manager Xia, it’s me, Xiao Lu. You said you called in a Celestial Master to catch ghosts when our company was being haunted last time. Can you give me his number? I think I ran into a ghost yesterday! Oh, I’m writing it down, he’s called Ning-tianshi, all right, I’ll get in touch with him.”

At first I was annoyed by the noise. My mind was blurred. Hearing the words “Ning-tianshi” woke me at once. I opened my eyes and saw Manager Lu sitting on the bed, looking pensively at his phone.

“Manager Lu, are you OK?” I asked in concern. “Do you remember what happened last night?”

“Of course I remember. Who’s going to forget a ghost girl crawling out of the TV and wrapping her hair around your neck!” His face went pale when he mentioned this.

I felt helpless. It wouldn’t be good to tell him plainly, *You were overtired and hallucinated it*. After all, he was my boss, and he wasn’t Xia Jin. I could only tactfully say, “Manager Lu, you should be resting more. Don’t stay up late so often, and drink less coffee. You had a stomachache yesterday.”

But he ignored my concerns and asked disbelievingly, “You really didn’t see the ghost girl coming out of the TV last night? You really thought I’d put on *The Ring*? The TV turned itself on, I was writing my analysis the whole time.”

I didn't think so. Yesterday I'd found the remote next to Manager Lu's ashtray. Probably his attention had been distracted, between smoking and drinking coffee and working on his analysis, so when he'd gone to tap the ash into the tray he'd accidentally touched the remote.

He went on for a while, saw that I didn't believe him, then said in a stifled voice, "You wait, I'll prove to you our company is being haunted."

I understood his persistence. After all, last night it was only the two of us. Most of the world didn't believe in ghosts. If he was the only one who said he had run into a ghost, and I said that the problem was the power supply, everyone would surely say that Manager Lu was going senile at a young age. It was understandable that he wanted me to believe him.

All the same, even if I could understand it, I still thought it was ridiculous. Even a proper Celestial Master like Ning Tiance hadn't been able to make me believe in ghosts. That this promising young man, raised by the state, was so superstitious, really showed the decline of civilization.

I got cleaned up, then applied myself to my work. Although sleeping sitting up had given me a backache and staying up late so many nights in a row had left me dry-eyed and dizzy, I, Shen Jianguo, a young man who had inherited a tradition of hard work and plain living, wouldn't be brought down by these troubles.

Manager Lu got up and quickly finished his analysis, then went to submit it to his superiors for approval. I went around with a salesperson instead. There was a technique to being a good salesperson. Being too indifferent could make customers feel ignored, but being too eager would get on their nerves.

In a large shopping mall where a single piece of clothing could cost tens of thousands, the salespeople should be gentle and courteous, making customers feel at home without being overly enthusiastic.

Most of the salespeople were female, but it was also necessary for some to be male. After all, there were many different types of customers to be dealt with, and we had to strive to satisfy all of them.

While I watched the saleswoman I was following quietly persuading customers to grit their teeth and swipe their credit cards, my thoughts drifted to my class. Most of my students were rebellious. I should learn from this saleswoman's gentle promotion technique, promoting knowledge to my students like a product until they couldn't refuse my teaching.

The wisdom of the ancients hadn't misled me: everyone has something to teach you.

I worked very hard to learn, but however hard I tried I really was very sleepy. After staying up working overtime with Manager Lu several nights in a row, then on top of that sleeping uncomfortably and giving myself a backache last night, I really was having trouble staying upright.

While I was dazedly walking towards the bathroom, I carelessly stepped into a puddle and slipped.

I was just about to get closely acquainted with the floor when an arm grabbed my waist and scooped me up.

A familiar voice said, "I've always though Teacher Shen was indomitable, never failing in strength, never needing anyone to worry about him. I didn't expect you would be so light."

I was also surprised. I squeezed Xiao Ning's arm and said, "And I didn't expect you to be so strong..."

No, I just hadn't been thinking clearly. Xiao Ning could run thirty kilometers along the highway at night. That clearly showed great physical strength and diligent exercise.

Ning Tiance's long, slender fingers brushed the corners of my eyes. He sighed. "It's only been a few days since I saw you. How did you get such heavy black circles around your eyes?"

"Staying up late working overtime." When I saw that the cleaning lady wasn't around, I left Ning Tiance's arms and ran to the utility room in the bathroom, took out a mop, and started mopping up the water on the floor. I was tough enough that it didn't matter if I fell down, but what if a customer fell? Not only would it be an unpleasant experience for the customer, but the cleaning lady would have her salary deducted. As long as I was here, I could clean it up.

"Manager Lu called you?" I asked Xiao Ning as I mopped. "Why are you on your own? Where is he? Didn't he come with you?"

"Manager Lu and I arranged to meet at three. It's only two now, I'm the one who's early. His meeting isn't over yet," Ning Tiance explained. "I knew you were working here, so I asked the staff, and they said you'd gone to the bathroom. I'd just found you when I saw you slip. Looks like I was just in time."

"It was pretty well-timed." I scratched my head awkwardly, went to put the mop back into the utility room, and washed my hands. "What do you think about all of this?"

Ning Tiance became serious. "Manager Lu didn't elaborate over the phone. I don't understand the facts clearly, so I can't make a final determination."

I told Ning-tianshi what had happened last night. “Personally, I think that he was overtired and having hallucinations. Feeling like you’re suffocating can’t mean anything good, you should advise him to go to the hospital.”

Ning Tiance looked at me with a kindly expression. “You were there at the time.”

“Yes.” I nodded.

“Every time you looked, the ghost girl was in the well. As soon as you turned away, Manager Lu started screaming that she was coming out of the TV?” Ning Tiance asked.

“Right, it was just like that.”

Xiao Ning rubbed his chin with his thumb and index finger, muttered to himself, then said, “Strange. It could be that Manager Lu has done some shameful deed.”

“You mean his illness has a psychological origin?”

“No, I mean, if he still felt suffocated while you were there, he must have done something he shouldn’t have done.”

I was overcome by this flattery. “I’m just an ordinary employee, not a doctor. I’d be at a loss if something went wrong with him.”

“No, your Yang energy is so strong that ghosts don’t dare to act in front of you. They run a serious risk if they do.”

It seemed that Xiao Ning still suspected there was a ghost in the TV. I’d better take him to have a look.

After explaining matters to the staff, I took Xiao Ning to Manager Lu’s office.

I'd kicked down the door of his office, so we didn't need a key. After I asked for permission over WeChat, I took Ning Tiance to Manager Lu's work station.

At Manager Lu's orders, no one had come to clean the office for him. Everything remained just as it had been last night.

Ning Tiance looked at the lights, then plugged in the TV. He pulled back his hand and frowned. "This socket is leaking electricity?"

"That's right." I nodded firmly. "Last night when the lightbulbs burned out, it must have had something to do with the leak. There's definitely something wrong here."

I stood on Manager Lu's desk to take down the lightbulbs, borrowed a voltage tester from the handyman and checked: the lightbulbs had burned out.

Ning Tiance was puzzled. "So it really was human interference, not a ghost?"

I opened the cover of the outlet and found that there were two wires screwed together. It was very skillfully done. It could make the lights short out without affecting the TV.

"A professional." I shook my head and said, "It looks like it wasn't just in his head. Someone wants to hurt Manager Lu."

He'd just had a cup of coffee before hallucinating last night. I'd brought the coffee from the office's drinks machine. Last night, Manager Lu and I were the only ones working overtime, and Manager Lu had a habit of drinking coffee at night. You could be sure that he would drink it.

I plugged the TV into a different outlet and looked at the playback record.

“One truth prevails,” I said like Detective Conan delivering an analysis. “Someone connected to the Wifi in Manager Lu’s office and used it to play The Ring on the TV. Combined with the lights going out and the hallucinogen in the coffee, this caused Manager Lu to have his hallucinations. Let’s call the police.”

Ning Tiance took out his compass... of evil and circled the TV with it. Puzzled, he said, “There really is no Yin energy.”

I wanted to call the police right away, but Ning Tiance didn’t agree. I could only stay with him and wait until Manager Lu returned so we could tell him our analyses.

As expected, Manager Lu believed my version. “Someone wants to hurt me? Then let’s call the police.”

Xiao Ning still didn’t believe it. He shook his head, saying, “No, it’s not possible. Everything points to it being a ghost, how could there be a human involved?”

I felt sorry for Xiao Ning. He’d been raised the Maoshan Sect receiving a Daoist education, being trained to rid the world of evil. His first time out on an official assignment, he’d gone to H City to get work, but the waters were deep in the big city, and he hadn’t found it. Then it was one hit after another, his world view constantly being challenged.

When a person was establishing a new world view after his old one had collapsed, his family and friends had to look out for him, paying attention to his emotional state. During this period of change he would be vulnerable to damaging information, his thoughts gradually becoming more extreme. This was just how characters in TV shows going evil worked.

I did want Xiao Ning to slowly come around to believing in science, but I didn't want it to happen so fast.

In the end, Manager Lu chose to call the police, and the police brought us in to give statements. We left Xiao Ning in the office, staring into space.

I was very worried about him. On the way to the police bureau, I sent him several comforting messages. Xiao Ning didn't reply.

The whole time I was giving evidence at the police bureau, I was burning with impatience to get back and comfort Ning Tiance.

It was almost midnight by the time the preliminary investigation was done. I had come with Manager Lu, so I asked him to drive me. I quickly told him the address of Xiao Ning's hotel.

After last night's experience, Manager Lu and I were on quite friendly terms. He agreed to drop me off near the hotel. When we left the police bureau I was so nervous that I left my phone in the inquiry room. A police comrade gave Manager Lu a call, asking me to come back and pick it up.

"You go get it, I'll wait for you in the parking lot," Manager Lu said.

When we'd arrived there hadn't been any parking near the police bureau, so Manager Lu had parked his car in the underground parking lot a block away. After I picked up my phone I ran all the way to the lot. Manager Lu's car was waiting for me.

I pulled open the passenger's side door and got in. I gasped, "Thank you, Manager Lu."

Manager Lu didn't speak. He put a soft, white hand onto the gearshift.

Manager Lu's hands... looked like this?

I turned my head. It wasn't Manager Lu sitting in the driver's seat at all. It was Mu Huaitong in her red clothes.

Whipping my head around, I saw Manager Lu lying on the back seat, out cold.

I looked at Mu Huaitong. Mu Huaitong smiled sweetly at me. "Hi, Teacher Shen. Bye, Teacher Shen."

Then she opened the door and ran for it. The sound of her high heels echoed through the parking lot.

I yelled, "Stop! Don't move! Come back here."

Mu Huaitong stopped, looked back, and continued to smile sweetly at me.

CHAPTER 26 - New Job (Part 3)

“What are you doing here?” I asked sternly.

“I’m...” Mu Huaitong cast around wildly for an excuse.

I stared at her, waiting to see what reason she would come up with.

“I’m a chauffeur. This man said he wasn’t feeling up to driving, so he called me to drive him.” Mu Huaitong’s face beamed with innocence. “Teacher, I’m just doing a bit of honest work!”

I opened the backdoor and checked Manager Lu’s breath. I determined that he was still alive and breathed a sigh of relief.

“Sheer fabrication.” I crossed my arms and looked at Mu Huaitong.

“I really am a chauffeur, though,” Mu Huaitong said earnestly.

“Oh? Show me the order on your phone, then, and your driver’s license.” I put out my hand.

Mu Huaitong didn’t respond. Her expression became serious, and she said, “Teacher Shen, mind your own business.”

“I wouldn’t get involved in other people’s business, but you aren’t other people. You’re my student.” I sighed and went towards her. “Last night, were you the person scaring Manager Lu, trying to make him hallucinate being strangled?”

“If you want a person, it wasn’t me.” Mu Huaitong’s gaze was fearless and direct. I believed her. She wasn’t an expert liar, she was just a little mischievous.

“But I think you know what happened?”

“Yes, I know what happened last night, although I didn’t take part.” She muttered, “How could I, when I knew Teacher Shen worked at that company.”

“And what about today?” I pointed at the comatose Manager Lu. “Why is he unconscious?”

“Just scared. It wasn’t hard,” Mu Huaitong said disdainfully, “there’s no one in this whole world I can’t scare into fainting, oh, except for Teacher Shen.”

I started to relax. If Mu Huaitong hadn’t taken part in yesterday’s events, and today she had only scared Manager Lu unconscious and been stopped by me before she could drive the car away, then her behavior only constituted a prank and wouldn’t go on her record. In this situation the police would only caution her. If she didn’t mend her ways, at most they would fine her or detain her for ten to fifteen days. It wasn’t a big problem.

After silently reciting these legal provisions to myself, I decided to caution Mu Huaitong on behalf of the police comrades. I told her that it was her first offense, and she shouldn’t haggle. If she dared to offend again, it would mean three days under detention as a warning.

“Where were you planning on taking him?” I asked.

“I was just going to drive around.” Mu Huaitong’s gaze drifted around. It was clear she hadn’t had good intentions.

“What was going on yesterday, anyway? Why would someone want to scare Manager Lu, or drug him?”

“No one drugged him. The police won’t find anything when they examine the coffee cup.” Mu Huaitong went on to explain, “It’s just

that when the cleaning lady was clearing up his office she accidentally broke the outlet. She couldn't repair it herself, and by some miraculous twist she ended up damaging the power supply. Playing *The Ring* on the TV was only a prank. If he was so scared he fainted from it, it was because he has his own personal ghosts. Teacher Shen didn't faint, did you?"

I really hadn't fainted. What Student Mu was saying made a lot of sense.

"What does the cleaning lady have against Manager Lu that made her want to scare him like that? And what personal ghosts does Manager Lu have?" Mu Huaitong seemed to know something about this, so I kept questioning her.

Mu Huaitong's sweet smile at once changed into a serious expression. "I have a good friend. He killed her."

Killed her? But Manager Lu was a good person. He was very patient about teaching me as a new and inexperienced employee. There weren't many people who would be that patient.

"What happened?" I asked. "Please tell me in detail."

"This was a girl named Yin Yaqiu," said Mu Huaitong. "The two of them were together when they were in university. Afterwards they stayed in H City to work, trying to save up money for a down payment on a house so they could get married. But one day, Yaqiu disappeared. Yaqiu's relationship with her family was poor. Her family valued men over women. When she graduated from university, her family asked her to go back to her hometown to get married so her little brother could have her bride-price. She didn't agree and broke off contact with her family. She had no close connections apart from Lu Guangxi. She went missing and no one even knew.

“Three years later, her mother came to H City to look for her daughter. It was then that she discovered her daughter had been missing all this time. She suspected that Lu Guangxi knew about it, so she frightened him in the middle of the night, trying to scare him into admitting the truth.”

“I can understand her feelings, but you can’t act that way with no basis. You’ll get in trouble, and any testimony obtained that way can’t be used as evidence.” It concerned me that Mu Huaitong and Yaqiu’s mother’s understanding of the law was so weak.

“If he really admitted it, would we leave it to the law to resolve?” Mu Huaitong tossed her long black hair. “We’d just do away with him ourselves. This type of man doesn’t deserve anything else.”

This was bad. I said solemnly, “Student Mu, your ideas are very dangerous. I’ll tell you what you and the girl’s mother should do. First, report Yin Yaqiu missing. The police will investigate her relationships before her disappearance. If Lu Guangxi really was involved, he won’t escape the punishment of the law!”

“Can I trust you?” Mu Huaitong looked at me and said, “Teacher Shen, I’ve never had any faith in men.”

I thought of her past experiences and understood Mu Huaitong’s malice towards men. Men did have many shortcomings. They were creatures that thought with their lower bodies. But I had always believed that faith, justice, ethics, morals, and law, all these intangible things, could make men restrain their base desires and live with clear consciences.

At least that was what I had always demanded of myself.

“Student Mu, at this moment I am not an ordinary man, I am your teacher. Until you enter society, I am willing to stand in front of you,

become the tree that shelters you from the harsh winds and rains of existence. Therefore, you can trust me.”

“All right, I’ll trust you this once.” Mu Huaitong showed her sharp canine teeth. “This is the last time I trust a man. If Teacher Shen fails to live up to my expectations, I will climb out of my grave, I will risk my very soul, in order to drink your blood and eat your flesh.”

The hatred in her tone was piercing, but I didn’t feel fear, only grief for this girl who had experienced so much suffering at such a young age.

“I’ll tell you. Three years ago, Yin Yaqiu was pregnant. She told Lu Guangxi that she wanted to have the baby and get married, still living in their rental apartment. She didn’t care whether she had a house of her own, she just wanted the baby to have a family. Lu Guangxi disagreed. He told her to get an abortion. They argued. Lu Guangxi knocked her down. Yin Yaqiu was bleeding heavily. She asked Lu Guangxi to call an ambulance to save the child. Lu Guangxi thought that if he waited to call the ambulance, she would miscarry. But he only missed the opportunity to save her. Yin Yaqiu bled to death right before Lu Guangxi’s eyes.”

Mu Huaitong’s voice reverberated through the underground parking lot. As tough as I was, I still felt cold all over.

“Lu Guangxi panicked when he found that Yin Yaqiu was dead. Instead of calling the police, he chose to cover it up. He cut up Yin Yaqiu’s body, boiled the parts clean, wrapped them up like leftovers, then buried them in the dump in the middle of the night. Three years later, can we still find them?” asked Mu Huaitong.

“Of course we can!” I said firmly. “This country still primarily handles garbage disposal by leaving it in a landfill. We’ll go to the dump to dig.”

“Teacher Shen, do you know how big the dump is?” Mu Huaitong smiled. “How are you going to dig all by yourself? And what if I’m tricking you? After all, the first time we met, I pretended to be a ghost to trick you. If I trick you into spending ages digging through the dump, getting yourself covered in the smell of garbage, then tell you it was all a lie, will you be angry?”

“If it’s a trick then it’s a trick,” I said with a carefree smile. “Then I’ll say the physical work was exercise. If this will make you less angry and make you able to graduate school and integrate into society faster, then that will be all for the good.”

Mu Huaitong’s eyes suddenly reddened. She lowered her head and said, “Teacher, you can drive. We’ll go now.”

“What about manager Lu?” I asked.

“Take him along. Let him see for himself,” Mu Huaitong said darkly.

I was actually still concerned about Xiao Ning, but right now Mu Huaitong’s matter was more pressing. I sent a message to Xiao Ning: I’d meant to come see you at the hotel, but Mu Huaitong made an appointment with me to go to the dump and dig up some bones. I’ll find some time to see you tomorrow. Wait for me patiently. Don’t accept any harmful beliefs during this time. Read books with a positive influence. I’ll find some time to see you tomorrow.

Oh, I really was very worried about Xiao Ning.

In acceptance of my fate, I drove to the dump. Manager Lu didn’t wake up the whole way. He must have been very badly frightened.

At two in the morning, ninety percent of the city was already peacefully sleeping, and here I was digging through long-buried

garbage at the dump. It was truly saddening. I hadn't slept well for several nights, and my hair...

I sadly touched the increasingly sparse hair on top of my head, picked up a shovel, and put my efforts towards digging. Mu Hwaitong watched me from afar.

I dug and dug. My phone suddenly rang. It was Xiao Ning's number.

"Where are you?" Xiao Ning asked.

"Due some reasons I currently have no way of verifying, I am at the dump destroying the accomplishments of our country's sanitation workers." I sighed. "You should get to bed. Although you're still young, going to bed late will still make you lose your hair. Your thick black hair is part of your appeal. You have to protect it."

"I'm going over there now. Wait for me."

Saying this, Xiao Ning hung up. At first I wanted to call him back to stop him from coming, but on second thought, it would also be bad to leave Xiao Ning alone at this time. It would be all right if he came and got some exercise with me.

The garbage dump really was huge. The landfill was handled by compacting layers of garbage with layers of soil between them. I didn't know how thick the buildup below me was. If I really wanted to dig anything up, I was afraid it would take me another three years.

In about an hour, after three o'clock in the morning, Xiao Ning also came rushing to the dump. Seeing me aimlessly digging a hole, he came over to me. Not minding that I was dirty, he tapped me on the shoulder.

“You’re here?” I said. My head was covered in sweat. “I’d thought you might dig with me, but it really stinks. You’d better stay away. I can keep digging on my own.”

Xiao Ning suddenly hugged me, taking no notice of the fact that I smelled awful. He buried his head against my shoulder and whispered, “I’ve never seen another person like you. Every moment you overturn everything I’ve ever known. Every action you take makes me honor you.”

“If... if you don’t mind the smell, why don’t you help me dig? I’m getting tired,” I said with a smile.

Xiao Ning took out his compass of evil and said, “I can help you find it. The place where the bones are buried must be full of resentful energy. The compass of evil can find it.”

Thereupon his compass began to spin rapidly, showing no signs of stopping.

“...”

“The bones must be too scattered. The compass can’t fix on them.” Ning Tiance looked up at me guilelessly.

His expression was so amusing that I leaned against him laughing, hardly able to stand.

“I know where they are,” said Mu Huaitong, who had been peacefully watching me dig for over an hour.

CHAPTER 27 - New Job (Part 4)

Following Mu Huaitong's directions, we finally dug up some bones before dawn. They were definitely human bones, including a femur and ribs. The rest of the bones were still buried deep in the pile of garbage, but this was enough to report a case.

As the sky gradually lightened, Mu Huaitong stood by the car watching us, a pale smile on her lips.

"It's time for you to leave," Ning Tiance said suddenly.

"Oh, yes," I said, looking at my watch. "Xiao Tong, you haven't slept all night. You should go home and rest. Since Lu Guangxi has nothing to do with you, you should keep clear of this and leave it to me to call the police."

"What are you going to say to the police? You were digging through garbage in the middle of the night?" Xiao Tong asked.

"Well..." I looked at the pile of garbage I'd been rummaging through. I really couldn't find a reason.

"Teacher Shen is so honest and upright, of course he can't think of a means for deceiving people," Mu Huaitong said with a smile, "but it doesn't matter. Finding the bones is enough. Make Lu Guangxi hold Yin Yaqiu's bones and don't worry about the rest. I'm sure that he will find his conscience and turn himself in."

I didn't quite understand what she meant, but Xiao Ning approved of this idea and put a bone into Lu Guangxi's hands.

When Lu Guangxi felt the cold rib, he was at once startled into consciousness. He looked down at the bone in his hand and asked, "What is this?"

“Yin Yaqiu’s bone.” I didn’t know if it was true, but I decided to trust Mu Huaitong.

“What?” He started to convulse as though he were having an epileptic fit. He foamed at the mouth and his eyes rolled up into his head.

I thought Lu Guangxi was sick. I quickly held him down and fished out my phone to dial 120.

The phone had just started to ring when Lu Guangxi suddenly reached out and turned it off. He resumed his earlier poised appearance. Holding the rib bone, he said, “There’s no need to call an ambulance. I want to turn myself in.”

He took out his phone and dialed 110. “Hello, Comrade Police Officer, I want to turn myself in. I killed my girlfriend Yin Yaqiu three years ago. I suppose this line is being recorded. I’ll tell you the whole story over the phone now.”

It took him about ten minutes to tell how he had watched Yin Yaqiu bleed to death in front of his eyes, how he had boiled her bones and thrown them away like garbage. Then he told the police where he was, hoping that the officers would come to the dump to arrest him.

Lu Guangxi also said that he had dug up the bones himself because of his own conscience. Xiao Ning and I hadn’t known what we were digging for, we’d only been helping.

After that, Lu Guangxi fainted again. He didn’t wake up no matter how I pinched him.

“What did you do to Manager Lu, Xiao Tong? You didn’t give him truth serum, did you? That’s illegal.” I was concerned about Mu Huaitong, afraid she had involved herself somehow. But when I

looked back, Mu Huaitong and the car Xiao Ning had driven here were both gone.

“Where’s Xiao Tong?” I asked.

“While you were focused on Lu Guangxi’s confession she drove my car away,” Xiao Ning said. “It wasn’t suitable for her to stay here.”

That was true. My own private view was that I didn’t want Mu Huaitong to be questioned by the police. She’d had a miserable experience similar to Yin Yaqiu’s. It wouldn’t be suitable for her to dig up those painful memories again.

The police arrived quickly. They collected the bones we had dug up in order to use DNA to verify the identity of the deceased, and took me, Xiao Ning, and the comatose Manager Lu back to the police station. The skeleton was incomplete. The police would have to expend great efforts to find the rest of Yin Yaqiu’s bones among the garbage.

When we arrived at the police bureau, Yin Yaqiu’s mother was waiting at the door. She said that she had just had a dream in which her daughter told her to come to the police bureau to give evidence to help her address her grievances.

Yin Yaqiu’s mother told the police that she’d pretended to be a ghost to frighten Manager Lu. This was also because of a dream. These past few years, she had always had nightmares about her daughter being thrown into a pot and boiled. In the dreams, Yin Yaqiu wept and cried out to her in pain. Her mother couldn’t stand it anymore. She’d come to H City, then dreamt of Lu Guangxi boiling her daughter.

So she became a cleaning lady, came to our company to do the cleaning, and looked out for her chance.

“You have no education and there are no expert electricians in your family. How were you able to alter the wires so efficiently?” the police asked.

“My daughter told me,” Yin Yaqiu’s mother said with a small proud smile. “She was a brilliant student at the University of Technology. After graduation, she went to work at a big company. She understood everything. She was so accomplished. I was the one who was wrong. I was greedy for a bride-price from the Wang family next door. I wanted her to come back and get married instead of staying in the big city looking for work. I wanted the money for my son, so he could marry his fiancée. But... I didn’t want my daughter to die!”

As she spoke she began to cry bitterly right there in the police bureau. She shouted, “I’m guilty! Comrade Police Officer, you should arrest me.”

I was so upset that I didn’t even notice my nails digging into my flesh. Xiao Ning, who was beside me, uncurled my fingers one by one, then laced his fingers together with mine.

Xiao Ning didn’t speak. He waited with me for the police to question us. But with him by my side, I felt strong again.

With Yin Yaqiu’s mother there, the police were able to compare her DNA to the DNA extracted from the bones and confirm Yin Yaqiu’s identity. When Lu Guangxi woke up, he denied what he had said, resolutely refusing to admit it. He said that he had been injected with hallucinogens and everything he’d said had been a lie.

However, the police found no traces of hallucinogens in his system.

When we had given our evidence, Ning Tiance and I were able to leave the police station. If there was any progress in this case in the future, the police would ask us to assist in the investigation. They

hoped we would remain in H City while they were collecting evidence.

After leaving the police bureau, stinking all over and having stayed up all night, I was so tired that I fell asleep on Xiao Ning's shoulder in the backseat of the taxi.

When I woke up, I found Xiao Ning had taken me back to his hotel. Xiao Ning had already bathed, while I was lying on the sofa, still stinking.

"I'm sorry, I'll go take a bath right away." I smelled the rancid smell on myself. It was unbearable. I went straight towards the bathroom to scrub it off.

After my bath, I realized that I had no clothes to wear.

Just then Xiao Ning called from outside, "I've left my clothes out, you can change into them after you've washed. The underwear is new. It hasn't been worn."

I stuck my head out of the bathroom and quickly put on the clothes. Xiao Ning's clothes were a size larger than mine. The underwear especially felt loose.

Normally I might have gotten excited about wearing Xiao Ning's clothes, but I wasn't in the mood now.

I sat down beside Xiao Ning. I didn't want to say anything. I just wanted to be quiet.

But Xiao Ning started a conversation with me. "Teacher Shen, how do you think Mu Huaitong and Yin Yaqiu's mother knew so many unknown things? Was it Yin Yaqiu's spirit sending them dreams?"

I thought about it and said, “The sixth sense is amazing. I’ve experienced it, too.”

My high school was a boarding school. One evening during self-study I’d felt inexplicably irritable. When I saw my best friend I went crazy and started beating him. My teacher assigned me to write a self-examination as punishment. Then I would read it out loud in front of the whole class. This would ensure I wouldn’t do something like that again.

Actually, I’d thought it was very strange. It had felt like there was a breath stopped up in my chest, as if something was pressing down on me. If I didn’t cry out, I would go mad.

I didn’t write a self-examination the next day, because my uncle called me out of the dormitory that night. It was past midnight. They took me to the hospital, and my aunt told me that my parents had died in a car accident just at the time when I’d had that terrible mood.

“I believe there’s a sixth sense that connects relatives. Science just hasn’t been able to explain it yet,” I said dully. “It isn’t that science doesn’t have an explanation, it’s just that our understanding of humans and of our universe isn’t deep enough yet.”

Ning Tiance looked at me gently and asked, “After such an experience, why do you believe so firmly that ghosts don’t exist? What if it was their souls saying goodbye to you?”

“The dead are dead. You can’t see them, hear them, or touch them. There’s no way to reach them anymore. No matter how difficult it is for the people left behind, they still have to rely on their own strength to survive. Yearning for those who have passed on to return to help us through our difficulties is impossible. People have to depend on themselves to make their own way. They can’t rely on unreal things.”

I look at Xiao Ning, hoping that he could understand this. “This talk of ghosts is just people who can’t accept that their loved ones are gone imagining things to comfort themselves. I don’t believe in it.”

Xiao Ning reached out and hugged me. He said quietly, “I understand what Teacher Shen means. If you say they don’t exist, then they don’t exist.”

Today’s subject was rather painful, and I was exhausted. Even though Xiao Ning was holding me in his arms, I couldn’t get any ideas about it. I just fell asleep right there.

When I woke up it was night. Because of my work, my days and nights had been backwards lately. I was always awake around midnight. Ah, if only someone would call me to go to class now.

When I came out for a drink of water, I heard Xiao Ning standing at the door saying to someone, “I can make an exception and take down the array to let you in, but you can’t take any liberties.”

“Come on. With Teacher Shen here, what are you afraid of, little tianshi probationer?” A familiar voice came from outside the door.

“Xiao Tong?” I asked.

“It’s me, Teacher Shen.” Mu Huaitong waved to me from outside the door.

Xiao Ning opened the door when he saw me. Mu Huaitong came in and sat on the sofa. She looked very different today. She was even wearing a white dress instead of a red one. She still looked just as beautiful.

“Teacher Shen.” Mu Huaitong looked at me with a smile. “I’m going to leave. I won’t be able to come to your classes anymore.”

“Why?” I had some idea.

“I want to integrate into society and live a normal life instead of going to Teacher Shen’s class in the dead of night.” Mu Huaitong’s smile was full of relief. “I’m not full of hate anymore. Not all men are scum. I just... couldn’t see clearly before. I hadn’t met a person like Teacher Shen.”

“Then I can rest assured.” Although parting was sad, I was still happy for Mu Huaitong. It was good that she could walk out of the shadow from now on. “I can always contact you later.”

“I’m afraid not. I’m going abroad,” Mu Huaitong said. “If fate doesn’t intervene, we won’t meet again in this lifetime.”

“Foreign medical facilities are better than ours. Going abroad is a good choice. Give me your address. I have something I want to send you.”

It was something I’d wanted to give to Mu Huaitong for a long time. I just hadn’t seen her for a while. Now it might be my last chance.

“An address... Where can I get an address...” Mu Huaitong thought for a moment, then said, “You can give it to Principal Zhang. She can burn... send it on to me.”

But I didn’t have Principal Zhang’s address!

Ning Tiance suddenly said, “You can give it to me. I know Principal Zhang’s address.”

I thought back to the very beginning, to the trouble with Mr. Saw. The professional Principal Zhang had invited then had in fact been Xiao Ning.

Right... Xiao Ning wouldn't have taken Mr. Saw for a ghost, would he?

Mu Huaitong said good-bye to us after that. Probably she had to prepare to go aboard and didn't have much time. I felt melancholy for a while. I picked up my phone and placed an order online with Xiao Ning's hotel as the delivery address.

"What do you want to send her?" Ning Tiance asked, naturally sitting beside me.

"Two books, the *Constitution* and *Criminal Law*." I sighed. "I've found that the students in our school, possibly due to their mental disorders, don't take the law very seriously. This time Mu Huaitong went to the very edge of the law. It's very bad. I was just lecturing about world view. How can you establish the basis of a world view without a clear understanding of the law? Only by knowing what to do and what not to do can we become independent people with personal dignity. I was going to talk about these two books at the beginning of next class, but she graduated ahead of time, so I'll send them to her so she can read them for herself."

"...she'll certainly thank you."

"But I haven't had a class for a long time. It's been almost a week. If this goes on they'll forget everything I taught them before."

So I sent a message to Principal Zhang: Principal Zhang, could you tell me when the next class is? I hope to teach new content as soon as possible, to avoid the students forgetting. Also, does our school give tests? Could I arrange a little quiz?

CHAPTER 28 - New Job (Gone)

For half an hour Principal Zhang's status was "typing," but she didn't reply. How indecisive was she? Typing, deleting, then typing again for so long?

"Having a test after only two classes really seems a bit..." Ning Tiance's tone was somewhat constrained.

"When I was a child, I hated tests," I recalled, "but I have to admit that only by undergoing tests did I get a firm grasp on the knowledge. If you want to learn, relying on interest isn't enough. Our students are of a different nature. They are all special students who need contact with society. They have problems with their common sense. Next class, I'm planning on giving them an exploratory quiz to test everyone's social common sense and legal common sense levels, then focus my teaching. "

Ning Tiance picked up the cup of water that I'd put down on the coffee table and took a sip, then slowly said, "Please be sure to ask me to come with you to your next class. I want to see the students' answers."

From his voice he seemed to be smiling, even trying not to laugh. I turned to look at him, but Xiao Ning's expression was serious. He didn't seem about to smile at all.

I must have heard wrong.

I waited for a long time without receiving a response from Principal Zhang. I saw another unread message on WeChat, so I switched the interface. Xia Jin had sent it.

Xia Jin: Shen Jianguo, you're fired. Although you are still in your internship period, the company is discharging you without cause, so

according to regulations you will receive a month's salary as compensation. You received no commission this month, so there will only be the base salary of 800 yuan. I'll transfer it to you, remember to accept it. There is no need to come to work tomorrow.

It was as if I'd been struck by lightning. I stared at my phone without speaking for a long time.

W-why!

I immediately called Xia Jin. It rang for a long time before he picked up. He shouted into the phone, "Shen Jianguo, do you know that it's one in the damn morning! Some of us have work tomorrow!"

Another voice came from the speaker. It was Xia Jin's girlfriend. "Xia Jin, it's the middle of the night, what are you shouting for! Get into the bathroom to take your call!"

Then I heard the rustling sounds of someone rolling out of bed. After a while, I heard Xia Jin roar in a lowered voice, "What do you want at this hour?"

Look, here was my good brother Xia Jin. Even though he didn't dare to shout under his girlfriend's despotic rule, he still had to roar quietly to be imposing.

I... was anxious. I'd lost my job. I'd forgotten what time it was.

But I'd already called and woken Xia Jin up. It was better to just get right down to it. "Why did I lose my job? I went to the police bureau today to help with an investigation. I told the company. You aren't firing me because I took a day off? That's unreasonable..."

"You've only been at work for a week and you've already gotten our marketing director arrested," Xia Jin said in a low voice.

“But isn’t it the duty of any normal member of society to report it when he discovers that someone may have committed a crime?” I argued with justice on my side.

“And if you discover one day that our boss has been evading taxes, are you going to report that, too?” Xia Jin asked.

“I’d have to report it!” I nodded repeatedly. “Taxes are the most important form and source of income for our nation’s public finances. Our lives, property, and safety can only be guaranteed through taxes. Every citizen has the duty to pay taxes. With sufficient taxes, the nation can invest more money in public construction and national defense. Only in this way will our country become stronger and our citizens be able to live in peace and enjoy their work, and the money everyone earns truly go into their own pockets. Otherwise, you could be robbed walking down the street. However much money you make, what’s the use?”

“And that’s why you’re fired,” Xia Jin said. “I tried to fight for you, but there was nothing I could do. The boss doesn’t feel comfortable having a person like you at our company. All right, I’m going to sleep now. You don’t need to come to work tomorrow. You can sleep in.”

I heard the busy signal coming from my phone and felt a little hurt.

“Xiao Ning, I’ve lost my job.” I was a little aggrieved. I’d meant to rely on this job to achieve wonders, become a rich man with an income on a level with Xiao Ning’s, but in the end my illusions had gone up in smoke after just seven days.

“But you didn’t do anything wrong.” Ning Tiance’s voice was firm and mellow, gradually warming my chilled heart. “At least three people have found deliverance through this: Yin Yaqiu, her mother, and Mu Huaitong. If you’d known that you would be fired, would you still have done it?”

“I would,” I replied without hesitation.

Justice may be late, but it will never be absent. Even if a day should come when I was utterly penniless, I would still be living be living honorably, without a stain on my conscience.

“So there’s no reason to hesitate. It’s enough to know you haven’t done wrong. Besides, if you weren’t this kind of person, you would have died your first night at 404.” Ning Tiance reached out and stroked my head. “Don’t be afraid. As long as I have money, it’s enough.”

“Your money isn’t mine...” I muttered, but I was still glad.

Shortly something came along that made me even more glad.

Principal Zhang hadn’t responded for a long time. Now she sent me a transfer of funds!

I received the transfer notification. Madam Zhang had sent me 100,000 yuan! Heavens, why?

Principal Zhang’s message and transfer notice came at the same time: Teacher Shen has already been at work for one month. I am now sending your first month’s commission. During your time teaching at my school, Mr. Saw, Li Yuanyuan, Tan Xiaoming, Tian Bowen, and Mu Huaitong have all graduated in succession. For every graduating student, this school gives the teacher a 20,000 yuan commission. Five students altogether make 100,000 yuan. Please verify and accept.

My face was splitting from smiling. The benefits at our school were amazing! I would follow Principal Zhang my whole life.

Principal Zhang sent another message: Concerning the quiz, I leave that up to your discretion. I respect your teaching method. In the

future, I will arrange more classes for you. Tomorrow night, Benevolence School, Fourth Class, Third Year classroom. Please do just as you like.

“Hahaha!” I held Xiao Ning’s neck and laughed. “Xiao Ning, what do you think, if I get all the students to graduate, will the bonus be even larger?”

Ning Tiance smiled and said, “I believe you can do it.”

I fell into slumber with that dream in mind. The next day, I went back to my lodgings and sat in front of the computer, wildly searching for test questions, exerting myself to write a set of test papers that would be able to evaluate my students’ level of common sense.

During this time an express delivery man knocked on the door. Seeing that I lived in 404, he made a face like he’d seen a ghost. Ah, young people these days, they really were gutless.

The delivery was of some books I had bought. I’d placed the order at the same time as ordering the *Constitution* and *Criminal Law* for Mu Huaitong. Those two books were sent to Xiao Ning’s hotel, but for myself, aside from these two, I’d also ordered *Comprehensive Law* and *Citizens’ Legal Common Sense*. These books were important reference materials for my topic.

After I finished writing, I went out to print thirty copies and got a receipt. Principal Zhang had said that I could be reimbursed for the printing. After returning to the apartment, I went to sleep. At precisely eleven at night I was woken up by my alarm, gathered what I needed to gather, then went out to go to class.

When I left my bedroom, I met Teacher Liu, who had returned at some point, in the living room. He jumped when he saw me, immediately shivered, then said, “You... came back... to stay this evening... why?”

“For the past few days I’ve been working overtime at the company. My sleep schedule has been a mess. Today I was fired, so I could only go back home.” I could already calmly face the fact that I’d been fired. Mentioning it to Teacher Liu didn’t embarrass me.

“Oh, I see. Your company really has no vision, to lose a talent like yours.” Teacher Liu sighed. “If you could always stay at the company, I would be so comf- lonely!”

Heh, Teacher Liu rather liked me. I was glad.

“There’s a class tonight, is Teacher Liu coming?” I asked.

“Ah, those students are pretty obedient. I don’t think I need to go.” Teacher Liu shook his head. “Teacher Shen’s teaching method is extremely skillful, I have nothing to worry about.”

Teacher Liu’s recognition made me very happy. He was an old teacher. For him to say such a thing meant I was doing well.

I got excited and took out the test papers I’d prepared to show them to Teacher Liu. “Teacher Liu, this is an exploratory test I’ve prepared, I’m planning to have the students take it tonight. Please have a look.”

“A... test...” Teacher Liu took the test papers with trembling hands and swallowed. “You want to... give the students a test?”

“Right! Without testing, how can you evaluate the students’ level of study?” I said naturally. “Doesn’t Teacher Liu give tests?”

“I teach language. It’s all right as long as there’s no problem with communication. You can see the students’ level without a test.” Teacher Liu read the examination paper carefully. “You’re testing... law?”

“Yes.” I nodded. “Mu Huaitong graduated, right? Before she left, I noticed that her legal common sense was quite flimsy. I more or less teach ideology and morals, and law is the baseline of morality and so a part of my subject. Establishing a correct world view requires knowledge of the law. So before we parted, I decided to send her two volumes of law. I think she should like them.”

Teacher Liu exclaimed, “You even got Mu Huaitong to graduate? And she’s our school’s number one fierce... problem student. She’s on a par with Duan Youlian. She managed to set aside her obsession and graduate?”

When I saw that there was still some time, I explained the matter of Manager Lu in simple terms. “In fact, the incident has not been resolved yet. Manager Lu’s confession alone isn’t enough to prosecute him with. It will still take some concrete evidence. But the testimony is enough to detain him.”

“So that’s it. You found Yin Yaqiu’s bones...” Teacher Liu thought, then once again took out his notebook and handed it to me. “I think... this notebook is better off with Teacher Shen. If it’s with you, perhaps one day I will also be able to leave the school.”

I stared at the notebook, not knowing what to do. This notebook was being passed back and forth between Teacher Liu and me. If he wanted it back again later, I would be really embarrassed!

“Remember, this notebook absolutely must not be exposed to sunlight. Please take care to remember this time. Also, don’t get your blood on it, or put down any spells or talisman designs for exorcising ghosts that Ning-tianshi tells you in it.” Teacher Liu said seriously to me, “This is a notebook made with human skin, handed down from the Republican period. The notebook’s owner was skinned alive and made into a book. He survived being skinned and

ran around screaming to find his skin. At last he was taken for a monster and beaten to death.”

“That’s...” I hadn’t expected there to be such a heavy history to this notebook. What a sinful age!

“This notebook was made with my... my ancestor’s skin, so I value it very much.” Teacher Liu focused on me and said, “I’ve always thought that as long as this notebook was in the world, my ancestor couldn’t rest in peace, always experiencing the pain of being skinned. Giving it to Teacher Shen was at first because I wanted to help you maintain order, but now, I hope Teacher Shen will be able to help... my ancestor.”

Although what Teacher Liu said about his ancestor’s suffering was nonsense, I still solemnly took the notebook out of his hands.

“Teacher Liu can be assured that from now on there will only be righteous things recorded in this book. I will be sure record all the beautiful scenes I’ve seen and heard of in this new era. That should be able to give your ancestor peace.

“Even though this is a notebook that was created through pain, I am willing to use it to record happiness. “

Teacher Liu paused, staring blankly at the notebook, then suddenly began to laugh with a trace of desolation. While he laughed, he wept, saying, “So this is it, this is it, hahaha! I’m wrong, I’ve been wrong all along! Returning one evil for another only leads to greater sin. The only thing that could ever wash away evil is goodness.”

With his cold fingers, he gently covered my hands holding the notebook. “On the day that this book is full of happiness, my ancestor will cast off his pain. Please use your kind eyes to see, to write justly. These clouded eyes of mine can only see sin. I can’t write about happiness.”

I didn't understand what Teacher Liu meant, but I would definitely perform the task he had entrusted to me. "OK, set your mind at ease, Teacher Liu. There are so many people in society now. The notebook will be full within a month."

CHAPTER 29 - The Test (Part 1)

Teacher Liu, who hadn't planned to attend the class initially, changed his mind after I had put away the notebook, saying he had decided to see the results of the test.

He kindly said to me, "I only ever taught the students how to speak. I never verified the results of my teaching. This idea of yours is a good one. I have some pens for you here. You can give them to the students."

"Teacher Liu is really thoughtful. I'd nearly forgotten that the students might not have pens. If they don't have pens, how can they take a test?"

I smiled at Teacher Liu in tacit understanding and boarded the school bus with my examination papers and pens.

After working for a month, I had finally established a friendly relationship with my colleague. This was a big step forward in my career.

The driver saw Teacher Liu and me get on the bus with our arms around each other's shoulders and made an expression like he'd just seen a ghost. Probably it was because Teacher Liu seldom had physical contact with people.

My mood was very good. Seeing the driver, I greeted him energetically. "Sir, you've driven me so many times, but I still don't know what I should call you."

"My name is Qi Dazhuang," the driver said concisely.

"Qi-dage! Is it all right if I call you that from now on?"

“Whatever you want.” The driver started the bus. He seemed not to want to communicate with me.

The driver just had a reticent nature. I was used to it. I chatted with Teacher Liu about my school days, telling him how I’d studied English word lists every morning and evening, memorized an ancient poem every week, copied a page of model characters every day.

Listening to this, Teacher Liu slapped his thigh. “My teaching methods are really behind the times. I didn’t know practices like these existed. Although this type of education isn’t suitable for our students — we might cut back on quizzes, unit exams, monthly exams, mid-term exams, and final exams — they should at least understand the rules before we let them go.”

“Right!” I nodded. “Afterwards, we can’t let the students graduate casually like Mu Huaitong. They’ll have to pass a graduation exam first.”

“Well...”

“Yes? Does Teacher Liu have a different suggestion?”

“No, no, I fully support Teacher Shen’s teaching methods!”

The driver slammed on the brakes. There was no seat in front of me to block my momentum, so I flew forward. Fortunately, I had practiced Taekwondo and was in excellent physical condition. I grabbed the pole in time to avoid getting hurt by the abrupt stop.

“Qi-dage, what is it?” I asked, horrified.

“Avoiding a cat.” The driver turned his head slowly. The streetlights reflected in his eyes looked unexpectedly green. “So there is something you’re afraid of.”

“How could there be a person who isn’t afraid of anything? I’m afraid of lots of things. I’m afraid of being bald, of having no money, of not being able to find a job. There’s plenty of things.”

The driver looked at me for a moment, silently turned around, and started the bus again.

I didn’t dare to sit in the front row seat anymore. I ran behind Teacher Liu and grabbed the back of the seat, terrified that the driver would make another sudden stop.

“Teacher Shen, Xiao Qi didn’t mean anything by it. Don’t be angry.” Teacher Liu hurriedly started to mediate the situation.

“It’s OK, I’m not angry.” I waved my hand.

I’d always thought that the driver had a story. I could slowly find out about it later.

When I got off the bus, I saw Xiao Ning waiting in front of the school gate. This time, he wasn’t even wearing his yellow robe. He was wearing a black shirt and looking particularly handsome.

I abandoned Teacher Liu and ran over to Xiao Ning with the test papers in my arms. I offered them to him. “Have a look at this, what do you think of the questions?”

Ning Tiance pulled out a test paper, flipped through it, and laughed quietly. “Very good!”

“I’ll take you through the back door. Don’t jump over the wall this time.”

The three of us entered by the little door in the back. Benevolence School was the first place where I’d had class, and the place where

I'd met my first student, Mu Huaitong. Although she was mischievous, she was very studious. Every time she'd sat in the front row, listening to me lecture with her chin in her hand and her head tilted.

It was sad to come back to Benevolence School again when Mu Huaitong had gone abroad.

It would have been a good thing if she could also have taken the test. Student Mu was so clever and studious, she would definitely have been able to get a good grade on this test.

The lights in the Fourth Class, Third Year classroom were brightly lit. There were twenty-four seats in the room, three of them already empty. Mu Huaitong had graduated, Tan Xiaoming had gone to get treatment, and Tian Bowen had been expelled. There were still twenty one students remaining, 420,000 yuan...

No, no! I fervently shook my head. How could I think like that? These were my lovable students, not money! Even if Principal Zhang hadn't been paying me, I still would have given them my whole lifetime's store of knowledge.

Ning Tiance and Teacher Liu sat in two of the empty seats, which were in the back row. There was still an empty seat in the middle of the classroom, which would have been Mu Huaitong's.

Duan Youlian was sitting in the seat behind Mu Huaitong's. On her table were the notebook and pen I had given her.

I put the papers on the lectern and said to everyone, "Hello, students! It's been a week since we last saw each other. Has anyone read the books I recommended?"

The students shook their heads as one body. Xiao Ning raised his hand up high. "I read them."

“Those auditing the class can come speak to me in private after class if they have something to say.” I motioned for him not to disturb the teacher during class.

It hurt me that the students hadn’t read the books, but it was all right. As long as I tested them on fundamental legal principles, I didn’t need to be afraid that they weren’t learning.

I said to everyone, “This week I’ve adjusted my teaching methods to add a new element to our studies — tests.”

The pen on Duan Youlian’s desk clattered to the floor.

She looked at me with her mouth open wide, her raincoat constantly dripping water onto the floor.

This time, I was prepared. I picked up a mop and went to Duan Youlian to mop up the water at her feet. While I was accommodating Duan Youlian’s preferences, I could still make sure not to impact the other students.

“I don’t take tests!” Duan Youlian said, grabbing my arm. “Don’t think you can make me answer questions!”

This young lady was extremely strong. My wrist even hurt. Fortunately, I was stronger. I pulled away her wrist and said, “As a student, you should obey to your teacher’s instructions.”

“And if I don’t take the test, what are you going to do to me?” She snorted coldly. “Even though you can cut my nails, I can still not come to class.”

This move was so bold that it left me with nothing to say. I stared silently for a while, then sighed and said, “Then I could only make a home visit.”

Duan Youlian was stupefied.

“As a teacher, I can’t get rough with my students. If all of you don’t care about attending school and don’t cooperate with your teacher, it’s no loss to you. The only thing I can do is deploy a teacher’s methods, go door to door, earnestly advising you to study.” I sighed. “This is my only job. I have plenty of free time, and luckily I don’t have many students. I can pay visits to your families day and night, ask them to cooperate with me in teaching you to study.”

The disobedient auditor Xiao Ning raised his hand again and said, “I’ll go with Teacher Shen.”

“Me too...” Teacher Liu said after thinking about it. “I can’t go during the day, but I can go with Teacher Shen at night.”

“You-you don’t know where I live.” Duan Youlian took a step back, looking very frightened. It seemed that she was afraid of her parents getting involved. All students were afraid of that.

“I can ask Principal Zhang.”

There and then I picked up my phone and sent a message to Principal Zhang: Could you please tell me, if I wanted to make a home visit, could you tell me the student’s address?

Principal Zhang replied in seconds: *Whose do you want?*

Such an understanding principal. I smiled and sent a voice message: “No need for it at the moment, but if a student doesn’t cooperate with my teaching, then I really will have to.”

Duan Youlian looked around desperately. “You... all of you, when did you sell out to Shen Jianguo?”

Teacher Liu sighed and said to Duan Youlian, “Xiao Lian, this is what life is like. Haven’t you already understood this? Study hard, and one day you will be able to graduate.”

Duan Youlian sat down weakly. I put a test paper on her table, along with a pen, one of the ones Teacher Liu had given me.

I distributed twenty-one test papers, leaving nine. I slipped one each to Xiao Ning and Teacher Liu so they could look at the questions.

Proctoring tests was a tiring and boring thing. You couldn’t make a sound to disturb the students, and you also had to monitor them to make sure they weren’t cheating. You also couldn’t play on your phone. It was very hard work.

Especially in the middle of the night. If I sat in my seat, I would definitely fall asleep. I could only stand up and walk around the classroom, preventing the students from cheating and also getting a glimpse of their answers.

If I didn’t look, I wouldn’t know. As soon as I looked, I nearly died from anger.

This question, for example:

Multiple Choice Question: Among the following subjects, those who are not included in the electorate according to the electoral law of our country are:

- A. the mentally ill
- B. drug addicts
- C. seniors
- D. incarcerated criminals

Everyone's answers were uniform, just as if they had consulted about it beforehand. Ignoring all the options, they wrote "me" in brackets.

For another example, this short answer question: A and B have a quarrel. In the dispute, A picks up a brick, kills B, and escapes. If you are a family member of the victim B, how can you use the law to get justice for B?

Everyone's answer were once again uniform: kill A.

But everyone's methods of killing were different. For example, Duan Youlian's was drowning. The student dressed as a mummy wrote in strangulation. There was also pushing down the stairs, electrocution, poisoning, smothering, scaring to death. In short, no one wrote go to the police.

The most exasperating one was Teacher Liu, who was also answering the questions and even using a brush. He answered this question very carefully, writing many words in the blank: After A is found, he should be washed clean with hot water, then steamed for three days and fed nourishing food. Once the skin becomes tender and elastic, cut from the back and peel. In this way you will obtain a fresh human skin. This type of degenerate should be subjected to the most severe torture. It is very painful to be skinned. I have experience.

I stood at the lectern, pounded my hand on the top of it, and loudly said, "Enough! No need to go on answering! I already perfectly understand everyone's level of common sense!"

CHAPTER 30 - The Test (Part 2)

Hearing me say there was no need to answer, Duan Youlian at once threw her pen onto the floor, tore up her test paper, and threw it into the air.

The other students followed suit. Some threw pens, some tore up their papers.

Teacher Liu, however, used the test paper to wipe the ink off his brush, carefully put the brush away, then adjusted his Zhongshan suit, elegant and refined, just as if he hadn't been the one boiling, feeding, and flaying just now.

With a heavy heart I said, "This is my mistake. I shouldn't have tested you right away."

Though Duan Youlian had returned to school late, she seemed to hold the position of a leader in the class. When she had quarreled with Mu Huaitong during the last class, Mu Huaitong had seemed to be in the position of the class monitor. Now that she had gone abroad, Duan Youlian had become the monitor.

As soon as I spoke, Duan Youlian led the class in clapping. The sound of applause echoed in the classroom.

Amidst their applause, I continued to speak: "I should have first had you memorize principles of legal common sense, and then tested you. I really didn't expect your sense of the law would be so weak."

The applause came to an abrupt end, and Duan Youlian asked stupidly, "You want us to memorize?"

"Actually it's not absolutely necessary for you to memorize them. At the very least you have to hear them and understand. In fact, I'm not

trying to make you into lawyers, but there are some basic common sense principles you must understand. The law isn't a set of regulations to limit your behavior, it's a means of protecting yourself." With bitter resentment I said, "Today, I will deliver the third lecture. This will be about the second minimum requirement for establishing a correct world view — the law."

I took a breath and went on: "Of course, that isn't to say that if the law doesn't punish an action it means we can do it. It's only the moral bottom line, not a moral standard. As a human being, to establish a correct world view, the first important requirement is knowledge and experience, and the second is law and morals. Only in this way will you establish a more comprehensive outlook."

Fortunately, I had prepared in advance. When I'd printed the test, I had also put together some common sense legal principles and printed thirty copies. After the lecture, I handed out these common sense principles to everyone and told them that this was their homework for this class. In the next class they would be tested on it.

I didn't want them to memorize it or copy it however many times. I wanted them to read it and understand how to act in similar circumstances.

Xiao Ning asked me to go to his hotel after class like before, but today I firmly refused.

"I have something to say to Teacher Liu," I said to Xiao Ning. "I have to go back to my dormitory today."

"Wh-what do you want?" Teacher Liu looked at me in horror.

"I want to have a serious talk with you."

“I’ll go, too,” Ning Tiance said. “Can I go to your dormitory to rest? I’d also like to come along with you on the school bus. I’m interested in that bus driver you keep talking about.”

“Of course you can come,” I said with warm welcome towards Xiao Ning. “But what about your car?”

“I’ll come get it tomorrow,” Ning Tiance said.

The three of us got on the school bus. When he saw us, the bus driver frowned. “Why is there another outsider on the bus? Last time that Xia Jin... Ah, forget it, anyway the unlucky one wasn’t Xia Jin.”

He had to bring up last time. Last time I was the unlucky one, all right?

I was a little scared. I kept a close eye on Qi-dage, afraid that he would tell Xiao Ning what had happened. It would be bad if Xiao Ning misunderstood the relationship between me and Xia Jin.

“Manager Xia has been on this bus?” Ning Tiance asked with interest.

“He only caught a ride.” I saw the driver was about to answer and forestalled him. “It was late one day, Xia Jin wasn’t feeling well. Principal Zhang had sent the school bus to pick me up, and I suggested that he should catch a ride.”

Ning Tiance looked at the empty inside of the bus and said, “It’s all right, anyway. The inside of the bus is very clean.”

It really was clean. The driver always had the bus cleaned up so that there wasn’t a speck of dust.

“I’m getting fewer and fewer customers by the day. Even a Celestial Master gets on my bus. How am I going to maintain my livelihood in

the future?” The driver muttered these sentences then started the bus and drove onto the road.

When we reached the dormitory, I asked Xiao Ning to go wash up first. I pulled Teacher Liu into my bedroom and said seriously, “Teacher Liu, do you really not know how to answer that legal common sense question?”

“That...” Teacher Liu thought for a moment and said, “Ah, I got too worked up. I said I would let it go, but in my heart I’m still carrying resentment. During the test I inadvertently said what was in my heart. The answer should have been for B’s family to pay a vagrant to kill A, so it would have no connection to them?”

“They should go to the police!” I said. “Assist the police by supplying pertinent evidence, use the law to get justice for B. No matter how deep the desire for revenge, you can’t take the law into your own hands!”

“Oh, r-really?” Teacher Liu scratched his head sheepishly. “How about you lend me your book about legal common sense? I can lay up some knowledge. For someone like me, after so much time has passed, it may be impossible to reincarnate. If I learn about the law, I may be able to find part-time work in the underworld in the future.”

“You’re only forty. Why are you talking about things after death? Though I can lend you the book.” I didn’t feel comfortable lecturing Teacher Liu too much. I just put the book into his hands. He went back to his room with it to rest.

After Teacher Liu left, Ning Tiance stuck his head into the room. “You’ve finished talking?”

“Yeah.” I nodded feebly and collapsed motionless onto the bed. It was one thing for the students not to understand, I really hadn’t expected that Teacher Liu would...

Wait! I sat up abruptly and said to Xiao Ning, “Give me your test paper, please. I saw you were also answering.”

Ning Tiance took out his test paper and gave it to me. I scanned it. Most of the public common sense questions were right. The problem again was with the short answer about A’s wrongful killing of B. Xiao Ning’s answer was: *B’s family should quickly find a Daoist priest to summon B’s spirit and help it transcend to avoid B becoming a fierce ghost after a violent death.*

I returned the paper to him and said, “I’ll give you a copy of Legal Common Sense tomorrow, too...”

“All right,” said Ning Tiance, “it’s helpful to learn more.”

While we were chatting, Xiao Ning’s cell phone suddenly rang. After he looked at it, his face changed a little. He said, “My Shifu is here.”

He showed me his phone. There was a WeChat message from “Maoshan Sect Leader”: This master has arrived at the hotel, and you aren’t here. Have you gone somewhere to exorcise ghosts? Do you have enough strength? Do you need me to come lend you a hand?

Xiao Ning replied, “I’m with Teacher Shen. Teacher Shen is the elevated one I told you about, who transformed a hundred ordinary cleansing talismans into exorcism talismans at once.”

Really, Xiao Ning, who was elevated now? I felt awkward hearing him say it, considering that Xiao Ning was 183 cm tall, and I was five centimeters shorter than him.

Where is he located? This master will go call on him!

“My Shifu wants to see you, at once. He wants to come to 404 now. Is it all right if I tell him your address?” Xiao Ning asked a little awkwardly.

It was very late. Xiao Ning’s Shifu was an elder, after all. I couldn’t make him come to me.

I had said just about everything I’d wanted to say to Teacher Liu. I thought for a moment and said, “I should be the one to call on the sect leader. Let’s go to the hotel.”

Ning Tiance seemed very pleased. He quickly booked a car online, and we drove through the night to Xiao Ning’s hotel. Another two hours had passed in all these comings and goings. By the time we got to the hotel it was already four in the morning.

As soon as we came in, we saw a middle-aged man with a long beard and long hair, dressed in Daoist robes, sitting upright on the sofa. When he saw us, he said, “This must be Mr. Shen? Tiance, help me up. I’ve sat on a hard seat for over thirty hours, my back is a little stiff. I’m unable to get up and pay my respects.”

He was sitting very upright, his posture extremely elegant. I’d thought it was very worthy of the head of a big sect, but actually he couldn’t stand up because of a backache.

I just couldn’t understand it. The Maoshan Sect could afford such a large suite, so it definitely didn’t lack for money. Why didn’t they fly? What was this obsession about hard seats on trains?

“Don’t get up!” I hurriedly ran to the sofa and sat down. This way the sect leader wouldn’t have to get up.

Ning Tiance sat next to his Shifu and massaged his back for him. At the same time, he introduced us. “This is my Shifu, Ning Yi, the current leader of the Maoshan Sect. Shifu, this is Mr. Shen Jianguo.”

“Greetings, Sect Leader Ning.” I held out my hand to Sect Leader Ning.

Though Sect Leader Ning had a backache, he was still nimble. He grabbed my hand at once. But instead of shaking hands with me, he turned my hand over, looked at it, and said, “The left is for men, the right is for women. Please give me your left hand, Mr. Shen.”

Who shakes hands with their left hand? I speechlessly held out my left hand. Sect Leader Ning touched the palm, nodding each time he touched. He said, “Mr. Shen’s horoscope... You lost both parents at a young age, your family financial situation was poor, you’ve drifted half your life with no one to rely on, you’ll never have children. Though you aren’t the bane of others’ existence, with such a horoscope, why would you have such plentiful Yang energy? Even though you are a virgin, it shouldn’t be possible for someone who hasn’t cultivated to be so powerful...”

Sect Leader Ning had it fairly right. After my parents died, the inheritance they left behind was only enough to pay for me to attend university. After graduation, I was very poor. Not being able to buy a house in H City could be called drifting, and not having children was of course because of my sexuality. I couldn’t get married just to produce an heir. It would only be harming some poor woman.

“When is Mr. Shen’s birthday?” Sect Leader Ning asked.

I told him my birthday. He pressed down on my hand several times, shook his head, and said, “Strange. Though you were born on a day with a gathering of dragon energy and were tainted with a bit of the nation’s fortune, it still doesn’t amount to being impervious to gods and ghosts, let alone being able to fill talismans with Yang energy. Could it be that you are the reincarnation of some god? Let me see your soul.”

“See my soul... How?” I was a little dizzy from these strange actions from Sect Leader Ning. I rather wanted to counsel him against superstition. But he wasn't Ning Tiance. With a man of Sect Leader Ning's age, however superstitious he was, I couldn't directly point it out. I could only cooperate.

But as for my soul, it wasn't like I could just sneeze it out...

I looked at Xiao Ning a little helplessly, using my eyes to send him the message, *Quickly get your Shifu to go to bed, I can hear his back creaking and cracking.*

Ning Tiance didn't understand my painstaking efforts. He patted me on the shoulder and said, “Don't worry. This so-called looking at your soul is just my Shifu opening his third eye to have a look at the three flowers on your head. All you need to do is not turn your head away.”

I watched Sect Leader Ning lick the index and middle fingers of his left hand, put the two fingers together, rub the saliva onto his eyelids, then say, “Ning Yi, 342nd generation disciple of the Maoshan Sect, invites the holy gaze and opens his third eye!”

Then he opened his eyes side and stared at me without blinking. The protruding eyes scared me. The old man's eyes were bloodshot. He had sat on a hard seat for over thirty hours, and now it was four in the morning. If he didn't go to sleep soon I was worried he would faint.

Sect Leader Ning's face suddenly changed after he had opened his celestial eyes. He pointed at me and said, “Y-you... you're... you're actually...”

Before he had finished speaking, his head fell back, and he collapsed motionless onto the sofa.

“He... hasn’t really fainted?” I tentatively put my finger under Sect Leader Ning’s nose. I hadn’t touched him yet when heard I him snoring thunderously.

Ning Tiance said awkwardly, “Opening your third eye is a ceremony that requires a great deal of power. My Shifu used up his energy and fell asleep.”

“Are you sure he’s tired because of the third eye and not because of over thirty hours on a train?”

“Well...” Xiao Ning wasn’t very sure either. He sighed. “Shifu’s strength really isn’t what it was. Ten years ago, he took me to Russia. He sat on the K2 line for seven days and seven nights, meditating from start to finish. There was no sign of back pain. Now... Ah... I’ll put him to bed right away.”

He was afraid to touch Sect Leader Ning’s back and moved very carefully. Finally, I helped him by supporting Sect Leader Ning’s back. The two of us together carried him to the bed in the master bedroom.

I was extremely sleepy after getting Sect Leader Ning settled. Without even taking a bath I collapsed onto Xiao Ning’s bed and fell asleep.

I dimly sensed Xiao Ning taking my shoes off for me. I struggled a little, wanting to take them off myself, but I couldn’t shake off the demon of sleep.

CHAPTER 31 - Sect Leader Ning (Part 1)

My days and nights had been reversed lately, and I was starting to get used to it. Although it was after four in the morning when I went to sleep, I woke up clear-headed at seven in the morning.

Waking up in a strange place, I was confused at first. I looked around and saw Xiao Ning asleep beside me. All the buttons of his black shirt were undone, revealing his firm chest and abs.

Eh? What happened? Was it possible that I'd been so tired that I'd...

No. It was possible to have drunken sex, but was there really such a thing as exhausted sex?

Looking down, I saw Xiao Ning was still wearing his pants. Only the fly was open, revealing a very narrow and firm waist.

I stared at his waist and chest muscles, wondering whether I should touch them. Xiao Ning had gone to sleep even later than me last night. He was sleeping so heavily now that if I touched him he probably wouldn't wake up.

But taking of advantage of someone that way isn't the conduct of a gentleman. Xiao Ning had put me to bed last night and hadn't done anything. *A peach was presented to me, and I returned a white jade*⁷ — I should take a lesson from Xiao Ning and act with decency and propriety.

When I'd made up my mind, I pulled my hand away from Xiao Ning's waist and patted him on the shoulder twice.

Xiao Ning groaned, opened bleary eyes, and, catching sight of me, said sleepily, "Oh, it's Teacher Shen. Why not sleep some more? It's

only seven, let's sleep in.”

Heh, it turned out that as serious a person as Xiao Ning could also sleep in. His languid appearance now was a stark contrast to his usual stern-faced countenance. It was very cute.

I used my whole lifetime accumulation of willpower to resist the impulse to kiss Xiao Ning's cheek and go on saying properly, “Your Shifu... Sect Leader Ning, shouldn't we go see how his back is doing?”

“Not for the moment.” Xiao Ning shook his head. “This past decade, every time he performs a rite he's completely sapped of energy. He'll sleep till noon at least. There's no need to disturb him.”

But a slipped lumbar disc would hurt something awful...

I had a tutor in college who had a disc slip during class. He was delivering the lecture sitting down. During the break, he went to get up to go to the bathroom; as soon as he stood up, he fell right back to the floor and couldn't get up however he tried.

I immediately carried him on my back to the school clinic, and the school doctor said he needed physical therapy. So I went to the nearest hospital with my teacher on my back to get physical therapy, and then I learned from the doctor what a painful complaint a slipped lumbar disc was. Never mind that it wouldn't heal, it could also oppress the nerves in the legs and cause pain while walking. It was excruciating.

Later, after a period of physical therapy, my teacher felt a lot better and was very grateful to me. As a graduate student I tested in as his student... Wait, did I pass the graduate student interview because my teacher used some influence behind the scenes?

Forget it. That wasn't important. What was important was Sect Leader Ning.

Since Xiao Ning wasn't getting out of bed, I'd take it upon myself to go see the elder. It was fortunate that I was male, so there wasn't a problem with me being in Sect Leader Ning's room. If I had been female, however worried I was, I still wouldn't be able to do anything, since I'd have to avoid suspicion.

Sect Leader Ning's bedroom door was ajar. Through the gap I could see Sect Leader Ning, lying on his front, flailing his limbs apparently trying to get up. His back hurt too much; however he tried not to, after a little movement his hands went to his back.

His expression was miserable, but he didn't make a sound. This really was...

Keeping face even while dying, enduring while alive.

I gently knocked on the door. "Sect Leader Ning, are you awake?"

The calm and dignified voice of Sect Leader Ning came from the room. "Come in, please."

I went in and saw that Sect Leader Ning had changed his position. He was lying on the bed with his legs together, his palms folded in prayer, his eyes closed and his mouth reciting words.

Seeing me come in, he relaxed his hands and said, "Oh, it's Mr. Shen. This is my Maoshan Sect's position for cultivating before getting up in the morning. No doubt you think it's funny. I must spend half an hour reciting scripture. Could I ask you to wait outside for a little while?"

To give you half an hour to get up? With your back already in this condition, you couldn't flail around without making the problem

more serious.

Fortunately, I had experience carrying patients. I walked steadfastly into Sect Leader Ning's room and lifted him off the bed.

The patient was very uncooperative. In a loud, clear voice he said, "Mr. Shen, what are you doing? I can't just move around while cultivating or else it will break my concentration. Please put me down!"

Was this the time to be projecting like a news anchor? I paid him no mind. Carrying Sect Leader Ning on my back, I called to the sleeping Xiao Ning, "Xiao Ning, Sect Leader Ning has a slipped lumbar disc, I'm going to call a cab and take him to the hospital for physical therapy, call me when you wake up!"

"Mr. Shen, you... Why are you forcing me to do this?" Sect Leader Ning leaned feebly on my shoulder. "I really was cultivating."

"Fine, fine, then you can do that on my back." I wasn't going to refuse to give an elder some face, so I followed along with his words. "When we get to the hospital and get you physical therapy, you can also cultivate. It's all right."

I carried Sect Leader Ning all the way to the hospital and got in line. By the time we'd gotten x-rays done it was already noon. After looking at the x-rays, the doctor chided me, "The herniation of the lumbar disc is so serious. How could you still let the old man do manual labor? He needs rest and recuperation, don't you know?"

"Yes, yes." I nodded.

Sect Leader Ning closed his eyes and didn't speak, just pretend to be above it all.

“Go to physical therapy. It will be more effective if it’s physical therapy you haven’t done before. You should be able to sit up after you’re finished today. But don’t let him sit up too long,” the doctor exhorted me after writing out an order.

Seeing that it was noon, I figured that we would have to wait in line for a while. I asked Sect Leader Ning, “Do you need to go to the toilet? I’ll help you.”

“No need!” Sect Leader Ning’s eyes suddenly opened wide. “This poor cleric can do it himself.”

Saying so, he tried to get up supporting himself against the wall and holding his back.

I sighed. “Sect Leader Ning, I won’t look. I’ll carry you to the toilet. After you’re standing and firmly holding the wall, I’ll leave, and when you’re finished you can call me back in, OK?”

Probably because he really was suffering, Sect Leader Ning gave a long sigh and nodded slightly. It looked like he was agreeing.

After he’d answered the call of nature, I took Sect Leader Ning to wash his hands. He sighed. “Even a cultivator can’t refuse to accept old age. Back when I was young, I could sit in meditation for three day and three nights without a problem...”

“Three days and three nights?” I asked. “But Xiao Ning said you travelled through Russia on the K2 line for seven days and nights.”

“Don’t you think I got up and moved around while he was asleep?” Sect Leader Ning said, glaring at me. “What living person can manage without going to the toilet for seven days and nights?”

He wasn’t maintaining his elevated manner around me anymore. I’d already carried him to go to the toilet, anyway. What was there

worth keeping face about?

“Say, your Maoshan Sect isn’t short on money. What’s your obsession with hard train seats?” I asked.

“Alas, it’s because people’s hearts have been inconstant in recent years, and our disciples have grown more proud and extravagant by the day. As a Sect Leader I must set an example, establish a firm tradition of hard work. Only by withstanding poverty and bearing loneliness can we successfully cultivate and suppress human desires. Humans have their emotions and desires, and excessive desire will be used by evil. Doing battle with ghosts is dangerous. I don’t want to see my school’s disciples die at a young age, the white-haired burying the black-haired.”

This sounded familiar to me. It seemed that the Maoshan Sect’s values were in line with the values being promoted by the state. This was keeping up with the times!

I suspected that Xiao Ning hadn’t heard the words I’d shouted to him in the morning at all. He called me after noon to ask where I had gone with his Shifu. Sect Leader Ning’s face was full of pleading, so I had to help him cover up, saying that the sect leader and I had gone out... to buy books. I told him to handle lunch on his own.

Saying this, the sect leader and I were sitting in line at the physical therapy department, each with a box of food in our hands, sad as you could ask for.

After we’d eaten, it was finally our turn. I accompanied the sect leader to physical therapy, after which he was finally able to stand up and walk slowly.

In fact he was still in some pain, but he insisted on maintaining his elevated appearance in front of Xiao Ning.

Before going back, in order to support my lie, I really did take Sect Leader Ning to buy some books, all about leaders' speeches, how to preserve good traditions, various legal books. I returned to the hotel carrying a bag.

We reached the hotel at three. Xiao Ning had changed. He was wearing a white shirt, slightly transparent, that faintly showed the skin underneath. I stared for a long time without being able to pull myself together.

"How did Shifu think of going to buy books with Teacher Shen?" Ning Tiance asked in bewilderment.

"You're never too old to learn. This master also needs to know more about different beliefs." Sect Leader Ning sat on the sofa looking like an ascended immortal, with *Principles of Marxism* in his hands. It really was... unique.

My heart ached for him. It must have hurt so much to sit like that.

I hurriedly intervened. "Shouldn't the sect leader go and rest? You didn't sleep very much last night, and you came with me to buy books."

"That's true." Sect Leader Ning nodded slightly, and I held out my hand to help him up.

Xiao Ning asked, "Shifu, when you opened your third eye last night, what was it you saw?"

Sect Leader Ning, who had just started to get up, showed a restrained smile. Although I suspected he was using this expression to help him bear the pain, I had to admire his perseverance.

"Mr. Shen is a rare man of integrity," said Sect Leader Ning. "Through the third eye his righteous energy appears as a golden

dragon protecting Mr. Shen's whole body. No wonder all the little ghosts dare not approach."

"And the talismans..." Ning Tiance was still very puzzled about this.

"I understand that." I helped Sect Leader Ning invent. "According to the law of conservation of energy, Yang energy or righteous energy can be converted and conserved. Your talisman has the function of absorbing and transforming. It turned part of my righteous energy into Yang energy, which was then absorbed by the talisman, isn't that right, Sect Leader Ning?"

Sect Leader Ning lowered his head slightly. "That's precisely it."

"But... can righteous energy alone really have such power?" Ning Tiance still couldn't accept it.

"I have never seen such a spectacle, but in fact there is a record of it in ancient books," Sect Leader Ning said. "In the past, Li Shimin, a king of the Tang, killed too many people when he was young. At night he received incursions from ghosts and gods, always waking suddenly from his dreams. Later he hung the portraits of two generals, Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong, on the door. From then on, ghosts and gods dared not enter. The two generals were not cultivators, and their portraits weren't talismans. They could repel the ghosts and gods because of their righteous energy and murderous energy.

"As for Mr. Shen, he has never killed, and he has no murderous energy. His righteous energy is enough for him to drive away ghosts. However, his portraits couldn't prevent ghosts and gods from entering a door."

"I think it's only a matter of time..." Ning Tiance said, looking at me. "I feel that in another couple of days, Teacher Shen's photo will have the effect of a talisman."

After explaining, I helped Sect Leader Ning back to the room. As soon as he lay down, he grimaced in pain. He didn't look at all like that ascended immortal just now.

"Why put yourself through all this?" I shook my head. "Keeping face even while dying, enduring while alive, even tricking Xiao Ning about the righteous energy. There's no such thing as ghosts at all."

"Y-you... You..." Sect Leader Ning pointed at me with trembling fingers. "You've caused so many fierce ghosts to transcend, and yet you still think there's no such thing as ghosts?"

"Huh?" I jumped up and said, "Sect Leader Ning, with our relationship, surely we don't need deliberate mystification?"

CHAPTER 32 - Sect Leader Ning (Part 2)

“Wh-what relationship?” Sect Leader Ning turned on me. “Didn’t we just meet last night?”

“The relationship of helping you hide the truth from Xiao Ning,” I said. “Your health is poor, and you don’t want to make trouble for your juniors. That’s part of the psychology of most elders. I understand. And anyway, a herniated disc isn’t a fatal disease. You’ll be more careful after you finish physical therapy and not always insist on sitting on a hard seat. So I’m willing to help you hide that from Xiao Ning. But it’s wrong to say that there are ghosts. That’s of a different nature.”

He stared at me as though at some rare marvel. “You clearly stole Tiance’s assignment, transcended so many fierce ghosts, and yet you still don’t know that you’ve encountered ghosts?”

“I stole Xiao Ning’s assignment? What happened?” I was bewildered.

“Ah,” Sect Leader Ning sighed at length, “at this point I can’t conceal it anymore. The bedroom is not suitable for talking about important matters. Let’s go to the living room. Call Tiance, too. I’ll tell you both.”

Ning Tiance and I sat in a chair together, while Sect Leader Ning sat cross-legged on the mahogany sofa looking like an ascended immortal. I thought he must be suffering something awful. That kind of sofa is very expensive, but fiendishly hard to sit on. A cloth sofa was more comfortable.

So I stuck a cushion behind Sect Leader Ning’s back to give him some support and relieve the pain.

Xiao Ning looked at me speechlessly and quietly said, “Shifu has always advocated a plain life. He doesn’t like these frivolous things.”

“Then the sect leader is welcome to yank it out and throw it aside himself,” I said.

Sect Leader Ning laughed faintly. “How could this poor cleric waste Mr. Shen’s kind intentions? Thank you very much.”

I knew he wasn’t going to pull it out.

“Tiance, I called you and Mr. Shen here together today because I have something to tell you,” said Sect Leader Ning. “Transcending the twenty-six students at Benevolence School was an assignment commissioned from the Maoshan Sect by a person called Principal Zhang.”

Benevolence School and Principal Zhang were both familiar to me. Wasn’t that my school? But there were only 24 students in my class, two less than what he’d said.

Ning Tiance had always been concerned about this matter, and immediately asked, “Then why did it become Teacher Shen’s job?”

“At this time I’m not sure about the main points. I’ll tell you in detail what I understand,” said Sect Leader Ning. “Two months ago, this master’s phone received a message commissioning the Maoshan Sect to transcend a class of students. The commissioner was Principal Zhang. She claimed that she was steeped in sin and unworthy of being a teacher. All she could do was gather all the fierce ghosts who had been harmed because of her into a class, compile a roster, and use this force to bind them and keep them from harming others. But she couldn’t hold out much longer, so she hoped that our Maoshan Sect could transcend them.”

“It’s easy to scatter a fierce ghost’s soul, but to make them release their obsession and transcend really is a little...” Having said this much, Ning Tiance looked at me and changed what he was saying. “When I think about it, it’s also pretty simple.”

What was he looking at me like that for? His gaze was like like a hook, making my heart jump wildly.

“I also replied to Principal Zhang that way,” said Sec Leader Ning. “Expelling ghosts is simple, transcending is hard. Principal Zhang said that each of these ghosts was ferocious. She didn’t want Maoshan’s disciples to sacrifice themselves to transcend them, she only asked that we try our best. These students were all pitiable people in life.

“In recent years, people’s hearts have been inconstant. The disciples of Maoshan have weak powers, and as for the older generation, we rarely leave the sect. So I sent you, who have the strongest powers, and I gave you the precious ceremonial robes and the peach-wood sword, hoping they would be able to help you. If you could accomplish such a difficult assignment, I could rest assured and pass on the position of sect leader to you.”

Saying this, Sect Leader Ning furtively raised his eyebrows at me.

I understood. The Maoshan elders might all find it difficult to move because of herniated discs, so they could only sent Xiao Ning, who wasn’t that powerful.

Actually, come to think of it, this was quite normal. Who wouldn’t get a hernia spending decades sitting motionless in that meditation position?

“But I didn’t get the job,” Xiao Ning said. “At midnight that night, I searched the website Shifu had told me about for a long time, but I didn’t find that job posting.”

“That we’ll have to ask Mr. Shen.” Sect Leader Ning asked me, “Please tell me, on what day and at what time, and also on which website, did you find your job?”

I couldn’t actually remember clearly. After all, in those days, as soon as I caught hold of a job posting I sent a resume, almost like working an assembly line.

Fortunately, I still had the email. I logged into my inbox on my phone, found the resume I’d sent, and determined the date and the website.

After I said it, Ning Tiance looked at me dimly. “That’s the job posting I was looking for.”

“Eh?” I was shocked. “I stole your job? So shouldn’t the 115,000 yuan Principal Zhang gave me...”

But during this month and more I’d spent a good deal. How could I give it back to Xiao Ning?

“Don’t worry, Mr. Shen. There is a follow-up to this.” Sect Leader Ning continued, “After Tiance didn’t find the job posting that night, he contacted me as soon as possible. I looked for Principal Zhang, but she only replied to me a few hours later. She wasn’t asking us to accept the assignment anymore, but instead to meet a Leg-sawing Ghost who was willing to transcend.”

Leg-sawing Ghost... That sounded familiar, as if I’d seen or heard it somewhere...

“I was the one who went to transcend the Leg-sawing Ghost,” said Xiao Ning. “When I arrived at Farther Shore Estate, Building 4, Unit 4, Apartment 404, the Leg-sawing Ghost was lying in the living room, his ghost energy so faint he could hardly materialize,

muttering, 'How scary, how dreadful.' I didn't know who could have scared a ghost so much."

The apartment number Xiao Ning had said was very familiar...

"That was the easiest time I've ever had transcending a ghost," Xiao Ning recalled. "After only one recitation, it left the human world voluntarily, very fast. I'd wager that if he hadn't already lost his Yin energy at the time, his obsession would have been transformed and he would have transcended on his own."

Sect Leader Ning took over. "After Tiance told me about his experience transcending the Leg-sawing Ghost, I told him not to leave H City for the time being and observe Benevolence School. At that time, I suspected that Principal Zhang had found another master. I didn't expect that a few days later, Tiance would tell me in a huff that he'd met a blind fool holding onto a fierce ghost, taking her for a student and protecting her."

Sect Leader Ning and Ning Tiance looked at me simultaneously. Their eyes were like four searchlights, making my hair stand on end. I couldn't resist rubbing my arms. The hotel's central air was on too high; in a while I would have to call the front desk and have them turn it down.

"During those days I watched Benevolence School from the outside every night until midnight." Ning Tiance watched me fixedly. "One night, before midnight, a light suddenly lit up on the fourth floor. At the same time, a ghost bus stopped in front of the school gate. Teacher Shen got off the bus and went into the school by a back door."

"You've been talk-talking about me this whole time?" His look made my hair stand on end, and I shrunk back at it.

Xiao Ning didn't let me back away. He took my hand and said seriously, "That night, the one who stood in front of Mu Huitong and wouldn't let me use the peach wood sword to destroy her, wasn't that you? Do you know what I saw that night?"

"As soon as you looked back at Mu Huitong, she became a sweet-tempered, beautiful girl. But as soon as you turned away, Mu Huitong immediately turned ferocious, her whole body covered in fresh blood, her limbs broken, her hand hovering over your back by your heart. Several times she was about to dig your heart out, but each time she stopped a centimeter away from your body. I don't know whether it was your righteous energy blocking her, or that she wasn't willing to hurt you."

CHAPTER 33 - Skipping Class (Part 1)

Considered from a scientific and rational perspective, I was facing a pair of con artists.

Considered from the point of view of faith and emotion, I was even more certain that there was no such thing as ghosts.

But against all odds a small branch of my emotions broke off, betraying my faith. Privately, I didn't think Xiao Ning was a liar. I still remembered the time he'd gotten off the train in the middle of the night and rushed back to H City, and the travel-worn way he had looked the next morning.

Before deciding whether to believe them or not, there was something I wanted to make certain of.

I said to Ning Tiance, "Were you the one who touched my chest in the elevator?"

Xiao Ning blushed, shook his head, and said, "No, it was the ghost possessing the elevator."

"A statement isn't reliable. You have to try touching it again." I tried my best to look at this matter from an objective and academic point of view. "I still remember how it felt then. I can tell whether it was you by comparing. If it really wasn't you, then I'll believe that there was a third party in the elevator that day."

"What is this?" Sect Leader Ning looked at Xiao Ning in utter confusion.

Ning Tiance then had to briefly tell Sect Leader Ning what had happened in the elevator at the mall. Of course, his version was different from mine. In his version I used the wooden sword to hack

to death a ghost that had stuck its head out of the elevator, while in my version he did a sword dance in as cramped a place as the elevator. What a pity that it had been too dark at the time and I hadn't seen it clearly; he must have looked very good.

Sect Leader Ning touched his beard and nodded. "I see. In that case, in order to prove that my Maoshan Sect hasn't made its name by deceiving the public, Tiance, go ahead and touch him. Let Mr. Shen see the truth."

The flush on Xiao Ning's face hadn't gone down. He looked at me and said, "Really? Here?"

"Yes!" Sect Leader Ning said seriously. "A true man owns up to what he's done and hasn't done. How can we let the stain of a sneak attack in the shadows remain? Clearly it was that evil creature trying to do harm under the cover of darkness."

Xiao Ning slowly approached me, rubbed my chest briefly, then let go.

"That's wrong," I recalled seriously, "the gesture and the force were different. Let me demonstrate."

Xiao Ning was wearing a shirt, while I'd been wearing a pullover with a wider neckline. "That day, someone put his hand in my neckline, then lightly stroked, like a caress. I still remember the fingers were a little cold."

I put my hand into Xiao Ning's shirt and demonstrated the gesture.

"Oh, so that's how it was," said Sect Leader Ning with a cold snort. "That evil creature touched the place where your heart's blood was hottest. It had seen your Yang energy and wanted to absorb it."

I didn't quite understand that and addressed an academic question to Sect Leader Ning. "Didn't you say before the Yang energy would cause harm to Yin-heavy ghosts and monsters? So why would they want to absorb Yang energy?"

"Mr. Shen's Yang energy is to ghosts what the sun is to humans. If you get too close, you'll be burned to death, but humans still need light and heat," said Sect Leader Ning.

I accepted the metaphor, but I was still dubious.

"Did you get the gesture and the force?" I patted my chest at Xiao Ning. "Come on, we'll see whether you can persuade me with one move."

Xiao Ning's expression was very complicated. He hesitated for a long time, until Sect Leader Ning couldn't resist saying angrily, "Don't be such an old woman. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Go on and display the manner of my Maoshan disciples! "

Only then did Xiao Ning imitate the gesture. When I felt his touch my heart went cold.

It really hadn't been Xiao Ning. Xiao Ning always carried a sword. There were calluses on his fingers and on the webbing between them, unlike the fingers that day. Then... I had practically only felt a chill. There had been no calluses on that hand.

"There really was a third party in the elevator..." I thought deeply. "But only Xiao Ning and I entered the elevator that day. You could see the whole elevator at a glance. There were no magic tricks, nowhere for a person to hide. Was it really a ghost?"

"Mr. Shen finally believes." Sect Leader Ning touched his beard with relief.

Xiao Ning was staring at his hand, motionless. I didn't know what he was thinking.

"I can't believe it completely." I shook my head. "I still want to confirm it with Principal Zhang. And even if there are ghosts, it doesn't mean that my lovable students are ghosts. I won't believe it until I see their bodies!"

After that, I called Principal Zhang. The embarrassing thing was, her phone was out of range as usual.

"There'll probably be a signal tonight." I remembered that all of my contact to date with Principal Zhang had been at night. "She's aboard, it's always like this."

"Abroad?" said Sect Leader Ning, frowning. "Actually, we at the Maoshan Sect have thought all along that this commissioner was strange. Principal Zhang can trap a couple dozen fierce ghosts in the school, so she must have great power. How could she be unable to transcend them? Our sect's elders have discussed this. We've suspected all along that she may be a ghost herself..."

"Impossible!" I stood up and excitedly interrupted Sect Leader Ning. "I have evidence!"

I found the record of the transfers Principal Zhang had made to me. "Tell me, could a ghost pay my salary?"

Sect Leader Ning read through the transfer record. "There seems to be no precedent for this. If there was a ghost strong enough to invade the national banking system, I'm afraid the whole world would be turned upside down."

"Exactly!" I said with satisfaction. "I'll hold onto my reservations for now. We'll talk again when I've contacted Principal Zhang tonight."

“That’s only fair,” said Sect Leader Ning. “I’ll go back to my room and meditate. We’ll speak again tonight.”

Then he gave me a look. I understood that he wanted me to help him up, then made a production of going over and taking Sect Leader Ning’s hand, saying, “Just in time. I was just going to the bathroom.”

As soon as Sect Leader Ning got through the door, he grimaced in pain and lay on the bed. I helped him find a comfortable position before returning to the living room.

That day I’d stayed up late again and then waited in line at the hospital on top of it. Now I remembered that I had only slept three hours last night. I was wiped out. I fell onto the sofa, ready to fall into heavy sleep.

Xiao Ning patted me. “Teacher Shen, the sofa’s too hard. Go back to the room to sleep.”

I said murkily, “Sleepy... can’t get up... the sofa’s magnetic, and I’m iron...”

Xiao Ning’s deep and magnetic laughter sounded in my ear. “Teacher Shen certainly has an iron will.”

He blew into my ear when he spoke, making my ear itch. I automatically raised my hand to scratch it but accidentally touched something soft.

I really was too sleepy. I put my hand down and went to sleep. I dimly sensed someone lifting my head and putting a pillow under it. In my dream I thought, Who’s that? They’re really nice.

Before going to sleep, I'd sent a message to Principal Zhang and was waiting for her reply. In the middle of the night, I was woken up by the alert on my phone. I looked and saw that it was Principal Zhang's message, but she wasn't answering my question. Instead she said: *Due to not wanting to take tests, Duan Youlian has run away from school.*

"What!" I immediately sat up. When I moved I found that there was someone else lying beside me and used my phone's flashlight to have a look. It was Xiao Ning.

Xiao Ning's legs were still in an upright seated position, but his upper body had fallen onto my legs. He was sleeping soundly, only vaguely opening his eyes when the light hit him.

I got off the sofa and turned on the light. I said to Xiao Ning, "How come you were sleeping here? Why didn't you go back to the room?"

"At first I was sitting on the sofa and thinking. Then I fell asleep without noticing," Xiao Ning said. "What did you just say?"

"Bad news! Duan Youlian ran away from school." I showed him my phone. "That child had just come back to attend classes, and now she's run away again. Can she still integrate into society?"

Sect Leader Ning heard my voice from the master bedroom. He shouted, "This fierce ghost's powers are so strong that it can even escape confinement! Tiance, I'm afraid it will be hard to deal with. Take the peach wood sword. I'll go, too!"

I went into Sect Leader Ning's room and said to him, "You just rest, let your back recover. I'll go with Xiao Ning."

"No!" Sect Leader Ning was so excited it sent his beard flying.

Xiao Ning also came in and said, “Shifu, Duan Youlian met with Teacher Shen on the ghost bus and tried to use her nails to attack him. Teacher Shen cut off her blood red nails with nail clippers.”

Sect Leader Ning was speechless.

“She really has the heaviest Yin energy of any ghost I’ve ever seen. The corpse water from her body dripped onto Teacher Shen, invading him with Yin energy and making him feel cold. I wanted to help Teacher Shen dispel the Yin energy, but he dispelled it without knowing how himself, and even filled up my talismans with Yang.”

“Corpse water? So it wasn’t rain?” I asked.

“No,” said Xiao Ning. “The water on her body stinks, but ordinary people can’t smell it. In that class, she’s probably the only one even I can’t get close to. Actually, she should be on a par with Mu Huaitong, but you pulled out Mu Huaitong’s tongue on your first meeting...”

“That wasn’t a store-bought prop?” I wondered, then immediately pulled back my train of thought. “That’s not the point. The point is we can’t let Xiao Duan keep drifting. We have to find her.”

I had just asked Principal Zhang where Duan Youlian might go. Principal Zhang replied to me with three locations: Duan Youlian’s original address, every corner of Benevolence School, and the river outside of H City.

Principal Zhang also said: I hope you will be able to find her tonight. Otherwise, the consequences don’t bear thinking about.

I thought, then sent a message to Principal Zhang: The professional you found to take of Mr. Saw, Ning Tiance, says Xiao Duan is a ghost. Is that true?

Principal Zhang said: Wait until you've brought her back, then come see me.

She didn't give me the address, but I trusted that she would tell me when Xiao Duan came back.

"Shifu, Teacher Shen and I will go together," said Xiao Ning. "I'll take all the exorcism talismans he filled up with Yang energy last time, as well as the ceremonial clothes and the precious sword. Nothing will happen."

"You... Ah," Sect Leader Ning sighed, "you must be careful. If it really is corpse water on Duan Youlian's raincoat, I suspect she isn't a ghost, but a living corpse! If she turns out to be too much to handle, leave at once. We'll send word to the sect. I'll have the elders come to the city as soon as possible to perform an exorcism."

After delivering these orders to Xiao Ning, Sect Leader Ning finally let him go. During the day, a driver had already brought the car back from Benevolence School. Xiao Ning drove me to Duan Youlian's home. It was the Farther Shore Estate, Building 4, Unit 4, Apartment 404.

"Isn't... isn't this my house?" I looked at the address, dazed. "Xiao Duan used to live here?"

"Before I went to 404 to deal with Mr. Saw, I checked up on that apartment. The first owner who came to grief was surnamed Duan." Xiao Ning pursed his lips and looked very serious. "After he died in a car accident, his family sold the house. I couldn't find out where the Duan family moved after that."

So it really was Xiao Duan's home. Would she have come back home?

The car soon reached 404. There was no one in the room, not even Teacher Liu.

“She came and took Teacher Liu.” Xiao Ning pointed at the floor of Teacher Liu’s room.

I looked over. There was a puddle there, as if someone dripping wet had stood there for a very long time.

CHAPTER 34 - Skipping Class (Part 2)

Xiao Ning stuck all the talismans he'd taken off me onto the inside of the yellow robe, then handed me the peach wood sword. With a serious expression, he said, "I'm afraid Duan Youlian has gone mad. Even Teacher Liu, a ghost with such deep magic, was taken by her. We can't underestimate her. That sword will be more effective in your hands than mine, so I'm leaving it to you. If necessary, bite through the tip of your tongue and spray a mouthful of blood into her face. It'll be enough to save your life."

He took out a bunch of little flags from his satchel, which looked to me like party decorations. He recited, reading out each flag. I counted: eight by eight, sixty-four flags.

"This is an Eight Trigram Yin Yang array, an implement that can transform Yin into Yang and trap ghosts in its array. In the past, the ancestors of the Maoshan Sect used it to deal with a powerful yaksa. It's a pity that with my skill, I can't give full play to the power of the array." Xiao Ning looked like he was ready to go out and stake his life. His lips were even turning white.

I was quite speechless. "It's only... a student skipping class... Skipping class is normal, I skipped class when I was in my first year of undergrad. The teacher called roll that day and took ten points off my final exam. I didn't dare to skip again after that."

"Don't worry," said Xiao Ning solemnly. "Even if I'm destroyed, I won't let any harm come to you."

I really was speechless to the point of tears. Why did looking for a truant student have to be such a production?

Xiao Ning said Duan Youlian was a water ghou. The most likely possibility was that she had returned to the place where she died,

which was the river outside of H City.

H City had been established beside the river, and in the past the river really was outside the city. By now it had been fully brought into the bounds of H City. The river banks were covered with upscale residential estates, which you couldn't get into however much you wanted. We looked for a long time before we left the range of the villas. Then there were guardrails around the river, with signs saying: "Danger: deep water; swimmers will be fined 500 yuan."

"Duan Youlian may be at the bottom of the river." Xiao Ning narrowed his eyes. "If we want to find her, it may be necessary to dive in."

Then he was going to take off his clothes and jump into the river. I grabbed him and said, "No, no, don't, don't you see the sign? There's a fine. And there have been security cameras along the river for the last five years, they've basically achieved full coverage. I think the possibility of disposing of a body here is very small. How about you take your compass... compass of evil and search with it."

In recent years, in order to maintain a beautiful environment for the villa estates, and to strengthen sewage treatment, H City had sent people to salvage garbage from the river every day. To be honest, ten years ago it would have been possible to sink a body in the river, but ten years after... it would be pretty hard. The cleaning squad would come along and scoop it up...

In the past, it had also been common for swimmers to drown in the river. In recent years strict measures had been taken. Security guards patrolled the river every two hours. Rather than being caught and fined, it was better to go to the swimming pool.

I finally persuaded Xiao Ning not to jump into the river. He took out his compass of evil and searched all over with it. I was afraid he

would only pay attention to the compass, lose his footing, and slip into the river, so I took his arm. We walked slowly along the river, blown by a gentle breeze.

After we'd walked for about half an hour, several security guards came up to us and said, "You two, we've been watching you on the security camera footage for ages. What are you doing? Swimming is forbidden here!"

"Just taking a walk." Holding Xiao Ning's arm, I said, "We haven't been into the estate. Isn't taking a walk by the river allowed?"

"A man and a woman, fine, but two guys..." The security captain looked at us, his gaze full of suspicion.

"What, do you discriminate against minority groups?" I said, holding my head high. "What's wrong with two guys?"

Disbelief was written all over the security captain's face, but Xiao Ning and I hadn't done anything. We'd just been walking along the river. This was a public place, an open scenic spot.

I was stubbornly answering the security captain's gaze when Xiao Ning turned his head, gently kissed my lips, and said, "Do you think we'd make such a sacrifice just for the sake of swimming in the river? He and I suffer a lot of societal pressure from being together. During the day there are straight couples walking here, or pairs of girls. How could two men dare to be close in broad daylight? What's wrong with us taking advantage of the night to relieve some of the pressure?"

The security captain was frightened by Xiao Ning's boldness. He opened his mouth to the size of an egg as if planning on drinking the river, then said, "You guys... take care. You can take a walk, but absolutely no outdoor sex by the river. The cameras are running."

Then he led the others away, fleeing like refugees from a calamity. I watched him go, patted Xiao Ning's arm, and said, "Nicely done!"

Xiao Ning took a deep breath. "Teacher Shen, do you actually..."

"Actually what?" I waited for a long time for him to go on, raising my eyes to look at him under the light of the street lamps.

In the night Xiao Ning was truly handsome. I only then belatedly realized that he had just kissed me.

Not counting when my parents and relatives had kissed me when I'd been an especially cute baby, this was more or less my first kiss.

The cool, damp breeze off the river blew on my face, and I realized that I was blushing, red and hot.

Xiao Ning looked at me for a while, picked up the compass and said, "You're right. It's very clean here. In recent years, the city's sewage treatment has been very good. There's no Yin energy here. Let's go to Benevolence School."

He had changed the topic, and I couldn't say anything more about it. Maybe Xiao Ning had just been trying to put off the security guard. After all, he hadn't been the one to touch me that day in the elevator. I had misunderstood.

I followed him to the car. The whole time, the air inside the car was silent and oppressive, full of an atmosphere I had never experienced before.

There were few cars at night, and we soon got to Benevolence School. After getting out, my face finally stopped burning so much, gradually resuming its normal temperature.

The back door was closed this time, so we had to jump over the wall. Fortunately, Xiao Ning's skills were good. He flew onto the wall, then pulled me up.

I found that though Xiao Ning was taller than me, had longer legs and larger hands, it still seemed that in terms of strength... I was stronger.

"If a student skipping class runs away to her own school, can that still be called skipping?" I asked while we searched the school.

"The Yin energy is very strong here." Xiao Ning held up the compass of evil with its rapidly spinning hand and said, "Stay close to me. We can't split up."

There was something I really didn't understand. "Didn't you and Sect Leader Ning say I was protected by righteous energy, impervious to ghosts and gods? Even if Duan Youlian really is a living corpse, I cut her nails once before. Couldn't I cut them again now?"

"Your faith has been shaken now," Xiao Ning said, pursing his lips. "Before you were fearless because you firmly believed in science. You thought that they were human, a group of disobedient students, so you had no fear in your heart. But now that you've been shaken, your righteous energy may be contained in your chest with no way to flow out. You may not be equal to Duan Youlian, now that she's gone mad. I'm worried about you."

The last sentence made me blush again.

I followed Xiao Ning's compass around the whole classroom building, but we didn't find Duan Youlian. The Yin energy was very heavy in the Fourth Class, Third Year classroom, though. Xiao Ning said that my students might all be there, but when I went in I didn't

see anyone. The temperature in the Fourth Class, Third Year classroom was just a little colder than in the corridor.

“Fierce ghosts are the only ones that can materialize in front of people. Ordinary ghosts, like those in the elevator and on the school bus, can’t materialize. They can make ordinary people hallucinate, but Teacher Shen... You would probably only feel a little cold,” Ning Tiance explained. “And fierce ghosts can choose not to show themselves if they don’t want to be seen by humans. Although they’re in the classroom, they aren’t willing to let you see them.”

“Why?” I said to the Fourth Class, Third Year classroom. “Don’t you like me?”

The chalk on the lectern flew up and wrote “don’t like” on the blackboard.

I was so hurt that I didn’t care about the chalk flying on its own with no wind. I continued calling out to empty space. “Why don’t you like me? Aren’t I nice to you!”

The word “test” appeared on the blackboard.

All right. I also didn’t like tests when I was in school.

“Where is Duan Youlian?” I asked.

The chalk wrote on the blackboard: “the old dormitory building.”

“Good,” I said to the air. “You’re all obedient, earnest students. I’m going to bring Xiao Duan back, and we’ll all have class together.”

I said to Xiao Ning, “They said she’s in the old dormitory building. Let’s go have a look.”

Xiao Ning stared at me and asked, "Aren't you afraid? You saw the chalk writing by itself with your own eyes. You must just about believe me now. Why don't you seem afraid at all?"

I didn't know myself. Probably it was because the students were so well-behaved. I couldn't see them as something different from me.

Xiao Ning and I ran to the old dormitory. Benevolence School had encouraged its students to live in. Duan Youlian had lived in the girls' dormitory building. Xiao Ning said the Yin energy was very strong there and told me to be careful. We went in back to back.

On the fourth floor of the dormitory, we heard the faint sound of crying.

We followed the sound. The door of dorm room 404 was ajar. A girl was crouching on the floor, crying quietly.

There was a notebook floating beside her. Xiao Ning tapped each of my eyes and ears, and before my eyes the notebook became Teacher Liu, sitting on the bed frame.

"Ah, don't cry," Teacher Liu counseled her earnestly. "Look, you cried all the way from the school to the Farther Shore Estate, made me help you steal the test papers, saw the test papers weren't to be stolen, then cried again. You got the floor of my room all wet with your tears."

"I don't care. If there's no test paper, we don't have to take the test," wailed Duan Youlian. "I'm dead, why do I still have to study law?"

"It's not that I didn't want to help you steal it, it's Teacher Shen's computer... Before, when your classmate Xiao Wang hid in the e-mail to scare him, he dug out the battery. Xiao Wang was holding on tightly, and he still got the battery out. Xiao Wang's shoulders were both dislocated and haven't healed yet, and he still had to write in

the answers. If I'd tried to steal the test papers, I... I really..." While he spoke, Teacher Liu wiped away his tears, seeming despondent. "I was afraid you would take it too much to heart. Do you think it's easy for a notebook to float around following you? You didn't even carry me."

Listening to their conversation, Xiao Ning silently put the 64 flags in his hand back into his satchel, and I handed the peach wood sword back to him.

At this point, as a teacher, I had to show my face.

I knocked on the door of the dormitory a few times and then came in. I said to Duan Youlian, "Xiao Duan, I didn't know you were ghosts before and used the real world's laws to test you. It was wrong of me. I made a mistake. I won't do it again."

Seeing me come in, Duan Youlian's face displayed horror, but after hearing what I said, she stood up excitedly and said with a surprised smile, "Teacher, you're really nice!"

"But you still have to learn the law. The living have the laws of the living, and the dead also have rules for the dead. Xiao Ning, does your Maoshan Sect know if there are rules in ghost circles?"

"There are." Xiao Ning nodded. "There are records in ancient books at Maoshan."

"Very good. Wait for me to study Maoshan's ancient books. Then we'll update the curriculum. After we've studied ghost law, we'll have another test, OK?"

Having heard this, Xiao Duan fell over backwards.

CHAPTER 35 - Principal Zhang (Part 1)

“Xiao Duan, Xiao Duan?” I rushed into the bedroom and reached out to help Duan Youlian.

But Teacher Liu stopped me and said, “Her mood is unstable now, her Yin energy is especially heavy. If an ordinary person touches her... Ah, forget it. How can your righteous energy be even more exuberant? You’d better not touch her. I’m afraid she’ll cry.”

After that, Teacher Liu helped the frail Xiao Duan get up and had her sit on the bed frame.

I didn’t know how Teacher Liu did it, but Xiao Duan came around very quickly. She shook her head wildly and said, “I won’t memorize questions, I won’t take a test, I won’t cut my nails, I want to be reborn!” While shaking her head, she saw Xiao Ning, and immediately pleaded, “Ning-tianshi, you can transcend me.”

Xiao Ning looked uneasy. “If you were an ordinary fierce ghost and had freed yourself of your worldly ties, it would be pretty easy to transcend you. But you’re a living corpse. Compared to Teacher Liu, a ghost who has existed since the Republic by possessing human skin, you’re even harder to transcend. Your entire corpse still exists. Your soul won’t leave your body. There’s nothing I can do.”

“Would cremation work?” I asked.

“Absolutely not!” said Teacher Liu, looking horrified. “Last time you put me on the windowsill to dry I nearly died. If you cremate her, either her soul will dissolve in the crematorium, or it’ll lose its support. Then it’ll be even more difficult to transcend.”

I had just now accepted the fact that I had been hired by a ghost school. It really was a little hard on me to make me remember so

many facts about transcending ghosts and monsters. Rather than trying to understand, it was better to ask outright. “So how can we get Xiao Duan to leave her body?”

I looked at Xiao Duan’s form. Apart from her raincoat constantly dripping water, she seemed normal, without any traces of decay.

“If the soul stays in the body and can’t pass on, it means there is still an obsession,” Teacher Liu said with a sigh. “Like me, for example, though I can feel my obsession gradually disappearing. With Teacher Shen’s help, one day I will leave. If Xiao Duan wants to free herself, she needs to understand her own mind.”

I comforted Xiao Duan: “Xiao Duan, I won’t make you take tests for now. Can you think why you’re trapped in your body?”

Hearing I wouldn’t make her take tests, Duan Youlian’s mood gradually stabilized. She thought for a long time, her expression puzzled. “I... I have nothing to regret. The ones who hurt me died a long time ago. Why am I still here?”

“Actually, all the students I can keep confined to the school have resolved their grudges,” said Teacher Liu. “Otherwise, even I couldn’t completely confine them. There’s only Xiao Duan who can still cut class. I really don’t understand it.”

“You’re the one confining the students to the school?” I absolutely hadn’t expected the refined Teacher Liu to be so powerful.

“Well, it’s not entirely my power,” Teacher Liu said, proudly adjusting the buttons of his Zhongshan suit. He explained, “I’ve existed since the Republican period. Every owner who could awaken me had hatred in their hearts. I used their resentment to help them realize their wishes, then consumed their life energy, in this way becoming more and more powerful. But Principal Zhang is different. Her heart is set entirely on helping the school’s students. I don’t know why I

would be awakened by her feelings. It's Principal Zhang's will added to my power that keeps the students contained. After they've fulfilled the object of their obsession, they remain inside the school, not harming innocent people."

"So that's it," Ning Tiance said suddenly. "No wonder I felt your Yin energy was extremely heavy, your strength enormous, and yet you couldn't exert much power. It was the holder's will limiting your power."

"That's part of it," said Teacher Liu, scratching his head sheepishly. "More importantly, it's that Teacher Shen is too powerful. The first time I saw him I mistakenly thought he was the Celestial Master Principal Zhang had invited. I wanted to warn him to mind his own business. I've had dealings with Celestial Masters over the years, my impression of them wasn't good at all. Who knew that Teacher Shen... Ah, if not for Teacher Shen, I'd never have thought that one day I would have my life saved by a Celestial Master."

"When did Xiao Ning save you... Forget it, that's not the point. If Xiao Duan doesn't know why she's trapped in her body, would Principal Zhang know?"

My head really was a mess now. There was too much information. The two people next to me still had the same familiar appearance. To thoroughly understand the truth, I would have to overturn all my previous perceptions of the real world, entirely destroy my previous world view and build a completely new, entirely opposing world view. It was very difficult to do all at once. Rather than getting tangled up in all of this in a girls' dorm room in an old dormitory building at an abandoned school, it was better to focus on one thing.

Whether the students were ghosts or not, for a teacher the important things were a student skipping class, refusing to take

tests, and wanting to quit school. I needed to find an informed party who understood the background.

After settling on a decision, I ignored Teacher Liu and Xiao Ning, who were becoming increasingly pleased with each other the more they spoke, and took out my phone to send Principal Zhang a message: Principal, we found Duan Youlian. There's a difficulty we need your help with. You said I could see you after I found Xiao Duan, which means that you are located close to us. Could you tell me where you are?

Principal Zhang replied very quickly: It's good that you found Duan Youlian. I'm at H City's Fourth Hospital, Inpatient Area, the Department of Neurology, Room 902. It's not convenient to visit in the middle of the night, but I trust Teacher Liu and Student Duan will have a way. Come over here. The school bus will be waiting for you outside the school.

Principal Zhang must have been referring to the new Fourth Hospital. I showed the text message to Xiao Ning and Teacher Liu.

"It's good to take the school bus." Teacher Liu rubbed his hands. "I'm not used to taking human buses, and there's Xiao Duan. If corpse water gets onto a bus, it'll be very hard to clean away. The driver and the passengers may become sick and die."

I was a little worried on hearing this. "How did Xiao Duan get from the school to the Farther Shore Estate?"

I'd heard that ghosts could choose not to be seen by humans, but a living corpse had a physical body, visible to the naked eye. Since she couldn't take a bus, had Xiao Duan run all the way to my house wrapped up in her raincoat? And Teacher Liu had said he'd been worried about Xiao Duan and followed her all the way back to school. Had there really been a notebook tumbling along chasing after a girl in a raincoat?

“I called the bus,” said Teacher Liu. “Fortunately there haven’t been many people taking the bus recently. Master Qi has been fairly idle. Usually the bus is full. If there had been no seats, I would have had to float.”

“So ghosts can’t teleport. Or is it only ghosts like you who are attached to some physical object who are subject to that restriction?” I asked, holding to an attitude of academic inquiry.

“Not just the ones who are attached. All ghosts have to move to cross distances,” Xiao Ning explained. “Those who are attached to something will control humans to help them move. Those who aren’t can slowly float.”

“At what speed? How long would it take to get from China to the United States?”

Xiao Ning paused. “I... haven’t looked into that. The average ghost wouldn’t go so far.”

I could only turn to ask the experienced Teacher Liu, who had lived since... no, who had been dead since the Republican period.

Teacher Liu was also at a loss. “The ghosts I know all seem to be entrenched in a certain location. If they really floated around all over the place, they would already have been captured by the Heibai Wuchang⁸. There are also ghosts who can possess bodies or objects and travel by various means of transportation, but it would have to be a plane at night. Otherwise, it’s very hard to maintain possession when encountering the sun.”

“And if it’s an international flight? There are time differences. If it’s night on one side and noon on the other, will they be harmed by the sun?”

CHAPTER 36 - Principal Zhang (Part 2)

“I... I don’t know...” Teacher Liu’s face looked suffocated. “These hundred years and more, I’ve never been out of the country!”

Unable to leave the country for a hundred years — he really was shut in. As poor a student as I was, I’d still gone abroad once with my teacher to attend an academic conference.

I felt an odd sense of superiority and said to Duan Youlian, “Xiao Duan, did you hear? There’s no future in being a ghost, even a superior ghost like Teacher Liu. What does it amount to? You’re still subject to so many constraints, like physics, chemistry, geography, sunlight, and so on. When you think about it, being a human means you’ll have more freedom than being a ghost. At least you can move around during the day. You’d better graduate and be reborn as soon as possible.”

Xiao Duan’s face was thoughtful. She seemed very moved.

On the other hand, Teacher Liu was grieved. After repeating my words to himself for a long time, he wiped the tears at the corners of his eyes and said to Xiao Ning, “Ning-tianshi, can you transcend me as soon as possible? Listening to Teacher Shen, I’ve only now realized that during these hundred years I haven’t accomplished anything. Humans can go to the moon, but I’ve always been trapped in H City. When I was alive I imparted knowledge, once led my students out to protest in the streets, and now I’ve sunk to this!”

Xiao Ning didn’t answer Teacher Liu. Instead he looked at me and smiled, smiled in a way that made him especially good-looking, smiled so that I couldn’t help remembering the kiss by the river to put off the security guard. My heart beat faster.

He came up to me and with a quiet laugh. “Before, I concealed matters concerning ghosts from you because I was worried that once you understood the truth it would shake your determination, that you would lose your firm belief and be unable to suppress the ghosts. I was narrow-minded. Teacher Shen will always be Teacher Shen. You won’t change because of anything.”

“No, no, no, I’ll change.” His praise was too much. I quickly waved my hand. “Before I thought the students just had special needs and aimed to help them integrate into society. I can’t teach them like that in the future.”

Listening to me, Duan Youlian looked happy.

I went on, “In the future I’ll learn from the Maoshan Sect’s experience, find ways to help my students transcend, strive to get them to memorize scriptures for transcending themselves, gives tests using ghost laws as their standards. I’ll strive to achieve transcendence for the entire class as soon as possible.”

Duan Youlian’s smile had yet to fully manifest when it became a tearful expression again. She covered her face and said to Teacher Liu, “Why is my life so bitter!”

While we were talking, the school bus arrived at the school gates, and the four of us got on the bus.

“You’re really busy tonight. I’ve had to make several rounds,” the driver Qi-dage said, displeased.

Now that I knew the driver wasn’t human, I could dimly understand why had hadn’t let me sit on the seats before. I could tell that he was a good person. So I sat down in the little seat beside him and said, “Qi-dage, what’s the farthest place this bus can go?”

“The human world above, Difu below.” Qi-dage’s voice was as cool as ever, his speech curt and forceful, but now I didn’t think he was cold. He just wasn’t very skilled at communicating with others.

“So if I wanted to go to Beijing, I could also take your bus? That could save a lot of money!” If the driver didn’t hurt people and was willing to keep driving, I should be able to get on well with him, as well as being thrifty.

Qi-dage looked at me with the expression living people use when they’ve seen a ghost. “My bus can only move within H City. Its only function is to take ghosts ready for reincarnation to Difu to line up to be reborn.”

“Oh.” I was disappointed. “Since I, as a living person, can get on your bus, that shows it must exist, from the standpoint of physics. So where do you park it during the day? Teacher Liu can’t be out in the sun during the day, so what about your bus?”

My string of questions had the driver a little panicked. He turned to the passengers and called out, “Which one of you told him I was a ghost?”

Teacher Liu and Duan Youlian simultaneously looked at Xiao Ning. Xiao Ning took up the peach wood sword and smiled. “My Shifu, the Sect Leader of the Maoshan Sect.”

“Oh, a sect leader!” Qi-dage’s expression improved at once. He smiled politely at Xiao Ning, then turned his head to stare at me. “I can always park it in an abandoned parking lot. The bus is real, it doesn’t mind the sun. I’m the one who minds the sun, and I can hide in the bus to avoid sunlight during the day.”

“An abandoned lot... Qi-dage, that’s dangerous!” I was rather afraid. “Won’t the bus leak oil? Does it run on electricity or gas? Do you have to pay to charge it or get gas?”

Qi-dage took his hands off the steering wheel, clenched his fists, gritted his teeth, and said, "Have you ever seen a ghost bus need gas?"

"Then what does it use for energy?" I couldn't understand it, and I was really curious.

The driver couldn't get anything out for a long time. Finally he said, "I don't really know. Anyway, it can't move during the day, and at night it can."

"Then there must be some mysterious energy during the night that science hasn't been able to discover yet that moves the bus. But this energy is incompatible with the sun's light and heat, so the bus can't move during the day. The bus's speed is probably between forty and eighty kilometers per hour, so even if it drove all night it could still only go five or six hundred kilometers. It really can't go very far." I sighed. "Unfortunately I stopped taking physics in my second year of senior middle. Otherwise I would have a deeper understanding."

The driver didn't answer my question. Instead, Teacher Liu pulled me from the little seat and whispered, "Don't ask anymore. If he gets angry and crashes the bus, Duan Youlian and I will be all right, but it won't go well for you and Ning-tianshi."

I thought about it, then sat down next to Xiao Ning and quietly asked him, "Does anyone pay the driver? He's been driving all night."

"I suppose he collects Yin energy." Xiao Ning thought about it and said, "Most ghost vehicle drivers are those who drive to the other side. They can cross between the human world and the underworld. You couldn't say they're officials of Difu, but they still have some power. In ancient times the drivers were called ferrymen. They

ferried souls across the Wangchuan River to Difu. On the river they would collect the ghosts' most important things. Now times have changed, and the ferries have become buses. This type of school bus must be able to hold more ghosts than a small boat."

I nodded. "There's also the fact that the population has increased by a lot. The daily mortality rate is so high that a small boat wouldn't be enough. So you could say that the driver is a temporary worker of Difu. Do you know if he can become a permanent worker in the future?"

Xiao Ning probably hadn't considered this kind of question before. He didn't answer.

I asked Duan Youlian, "Do you have a driver's license? One of the Class A ones, that you can drive large vehicles with?"

Duan Youlian shook her head.

"Then you can't be a temporary worker, so you'd better be reborn," I advised. "As for reincarnation, once you've learned some legal common sense, then you can graduate and become a splendid child. I have to make a plan. First, I need to understand how Difu operates, explain it to the students, and let them choose whether they want to be reborn or become employees of Difu. Then I can tailor my teaching to their career plans."

It really wasn't easy being a teacher. You had to consider so many things. My level of expertise was inadequate.

I spent the whole ride thinking about what I should do in the future. By the time the bus reached the Fourth Hospital, my head hurt from thinking.

Xiao Ning led me off the bus. With Teacher Liu's help, the four of us smoothly avoided the watchman and entered the Inpatient Area.

Room 902 of the Neurology Department was a private room. A woman in her fifties was lying on the bed with her eyes closed and her mouth covered by an oxygen mask.

When Teacher Liu opened the door, he disappeared, turning into a notebook that appeared in the woman's hand. Duan Youlian sat on the floor looking blank, as if she had lost her soul.

“Principal Zhang has status. Ghosts can't misbehave in front of her,” Xiao Ning explained.

I went to Principal Zhang's bedside and looked at the instruments at the head of the bed. Her pulse was slow, but she was still alive.

But Principal Zhang was comatose. How could she stay in contact with me and even send me money?

Then my cell phone lit up.

Principal Zhang: Hello, Teacher Shen. This is the first time we've met, and I can't greet you properly. I'm truly sorry.

We could communicate!

I used my phone to send a message: Principal Zhang, how can you send messages?

Teacher Shen, please do me a favor. My cell phone is in the cabinet. It only has 1% power left. Please charge it for me, so I can continue to communicate with you. The nurse's aide always forgets to charge it for me.

I numbly took the cell phone and charger out of the cabinet and plugged it in. Under her oxygen mask, the corners of Principal Zhang's lips curved slightly.

I watched wide-eyed as the phone lit up and typed me a message with no one operating it: *Teacher Shen can ask any questions he has for me!*

CHAPTER 37 - Principal Zhang (Part 3)

I had a lot of questions for her, but I didn't know where to start.

Unlike Teacher Liu and the other ghosts, Principal Zhang was still alive, but not in good shape.

“Her living soul is leaving the body,” Ning Tiance said after checking Principal Zhang's eyes and the top of her head. “The Yang fire on her head has gone out.”

“What Yang fire?”

Teacher Liu explained: “Humans have three lamps, one on top of the head, and one on each shoulder. These are flames lit by Yang energy. It's hard for ordinary people to see with the naked eye. Yang energy is weak at night. If you turn your head suddenly, the lamp on your shoulder will go out, and Yin energy will be able to invade your body. Ghosts will be able to control the human's mind and spirit. So when we're dealing with humans, we usually think of a way to make them turn around. The first time Mu Huitong saw you, she was hiding in the corner of the stairwell. She'd heard you had cut Yuanyuan's hair and had quite fierce Yang energy. She knew you would be hard to deal with, so she thought of that method for extinguishing your soul lamp.”

“So has mine been extinguished?” I looked left and right, then held up my phone to take a picture of my head, trying to see whether there was a lamp.

“Yours...” Teacher Liu paused, then went on: “If the soul lamp of an ordinary person is an oil lamp that can be blown out by a breath of air, then yours is a forest fire. The more the wind blows, the fiercer the fire becomes.”

“Then...” I looked at Principal Zhang’s haggard face. “Can I use some of my fire to light the lamp on Principal Zhang’s head?”

“No,” said Xiao Ning. “Her life span is coming to an end. Even her living soul won’t last long. Anything you have to say, you should say it now.”

I quickly sent a message to Principal Zhang: Principal, what can we do to make Xiao Duan leave her body? What is her obsession?

Lying in the hospital bed, Principal Zhang didn’t move, but her phone seemed to be controlled by an invisible hand, typing on its own.

Duan Youlian was part of the first group of boarding students I enrolled when I was principal of Benevolence School. After her father’s car accident, I asked her mother if she wanted her child to move out of the dormitory and switch to day schooling. Her mother asked me about the advantages and disadvantages of boarding and day schooling. I told her that day schooling meant her daughter could stay with her family, so that her mother wouldn’t be too lonely. As for boarding, the school environment was simpler, and the child would be more likely to overcome the homesickness of leaving her relatives. Her mother said she would choose what was best for the child, and had Duan Youlian stay at the dormitory. But I never expected that the innocent cruelty of children could sometimes be more ruthless than society.

After I read out Principal Zhang’s message, Duan Youlian said, “The dormitory teacher thought I stayed in the dormitory every night, but it was really my roommates pretending. They chased me out of the dormitory. I always spent the night at an Internet cafe. It was cheap, and I could pass the time by going online. But it was a very disordered environment. I went every day, and soon someone got their eye on me. One night when I left the school by the back door to go to the Internet cafe, I was attacked. I got knocked out in the

struggle. The riverbanks weren't fully covered by security cameras then, so they threw me in the river. At first it was very painful. Then suddenly I became very strong and swam up from the bottom of the river. I stood on the shore. My head was full of water. Even my brains poured out of my ears. That was when I knew I was dead."

I felt particularly sad on hearing this, but I still grasped the key point. "You left the dormitory at night, which is like cutting school. Your body was dumped, but crawled up on its own. If no one finds a body and calls the police, it's very hard to determine that a death has occurred. I suppose you're still listed as missing by the police. How many years has it been since you passed away?"

"I don't remember. My brain is gone, I don't have any sense for numbers." Duan Youlian shook her head.

I sent a message to Principal Zhang: In what year did you become a principal? And when did Duan Youlian go missing?

I remember clearly that at the beginning of 2011, I became the principal of Benevolence School. At the end of that year, Duan Youlian went missing.

"I don't suppose Xiao Duan could still be alive?" I said inadvertently after reading the text.

"Impossible." Ning Tiance quickly shook his head. "She's definitely a living corpse. I'm very sure."

Teacher Liu also chimed in. "Ning-tianshi is right. I've been dead so many years. I can tell the living from the dead."

Duan Youlian also insisted that she was dead.

I looked bitterly at these three law-blind people, pounded my chest and began to explain. "2011 was eight years ago. Civil law

stipulates that if a citizen's whereabouts are unknown for four years, or two years following an accident, interested parties can apply to the People's Court to have that person declared dead. In other words, if Duan Youlian's mother didn't apply for a declaration of death, Xiao Duan is legally still alive."

Principal Zhang: Duan Youlian's mother Lin Jianying has probably not applied for a declaration of death. Before I fell into a coma, I made inquiries about her. She has never given up looking for her daughter.

Duan Youlian burst into tears. She crouched on the floor and said to me, "Teacher Shen, I want to see my mom..."

Before I could say "no problem," Xiao Ning immediately said, "No! Your resentful energy is too strong, and you're a living corpse. If an ordinary person encounters you, their life span will be reduced, even if you don't mean any harm."

Then what could we do? I had no understanding in this area. I could only stare at Xiao Ning.

"The only way is if Xiao Duan is willing to use this talisman to suppress her Yin energy." Xiao Ning took the yellow robe out of his backpack and took out one of the exorcism talismans I'd charged up from inside. "An ordinary fierce ghost, even if this talisman didn't destroy their soul, would still be unable to move. You're a living corpse, so you should still be able to move, but it will be painful." He saw Duan Youlian reach for the talisman and said significantly, "Very painful, perhaps even more painful than when you died."

Duan Youlian shook her head. "It doesn't matter if I'm in pain. As long as I can see my mom."

"We'll go to her now." I held up my phone. Principal Zhang had just sent me Xian Duan's mother's address.

Although there were still things I wanted to ask Principal Zhang, Xiao Duan's business was more pressing. It was best for this mother and daughter pair to see each other tonight. We snuck back out of the Fourth Hospital. Before leaving, I'd returned Principal Zhang's phone to the cabinet.

The driver, who had been waiting for us outside the hospital, took us to the gate of the estate, looking displeased. "It's already 4 AM. I get off of work at five. If you aren't out by four-thirty, you can find your own way back."

Xiao Ning and I would be all right. We could move around during the day. But it would be harder for Teacher Liu and Xiao Duan.

I was concerned. "I can carry Teacher Liu close to my chest to help him avoid the sunlight on the way home. Xiao Duan..."

"That won't do at all," Teacher Liu said hurriedly. "Teacher Shen, your chest is the place where your blood is hottest. It's no different from being exposed to the sun. I... I'd better go in Ning-tianshi's backpack."

"You're sure about that?" Xiao Ning opened his backpack, which contained sixty-four colorful flags and a big pile of talismans.

Teacher Liu didn't speak.

"How about this: I'll take off my shirt and wrap it around you," Xiao Ning said thoughtfully. "You're possessing an object, so you'll be fine as long as you avoid direct sunlight."

"Thank you so much, Ning-tianshi!" Teacher Liu said gratefully.

"No problem. It's my first time worrying about a ghost. It feels quite novel." Xiao Ning was clearly talking to Teacher Liu, but his eyes

were on me, holding a smile.

The two of them were busy being polite, but I was anxious. I looked at the entrance to the apartment building and said, “The door is locked. How can we get in? Even if we could get in, we’d have no way to get into Lin Jianying’s house. Teacher Liu, can you unlock the door?”

Teacher Liu’s face was embarrassed. “I can temporarily leave the notebook and pass through the wall, but I can’t bring Xiao Duan in. Xiao Duan is strong enough to kick down the door, but...”

Duan Youlian certainly wouldn’t be willing to kick her mother’s door down. Repairing a door would cost a lot of money.

“Ah, you see, what future is there in being a ghost?” I sighed lengthily and said to Xiao Duan, “Why don’t you ring the doorbell? Maybe when Auntie sees your face on the screen, she’ll open the door.”

In fact, there wasn’t much hope, but we had no time. We agreed that if Auntie Lin didn’t open the door, we would get on the bus and leave. During the day, Xiao Ning and I would come up with a way to arrange to see Auntie Lin and ask her to leave the door open for Xiao Duan at night.

“All right. Ning-tianshi, put the talisman on me now?” Xiao Duan calmly looked at Ning Tiance.

“Don’t cry out,” Ning Tiance said, sticking the talisman over Duan Youlian’s heart. “The cry of a living corpse is piercing. It’ll wake up the people in the estate.”

After the talisman was stuck onto Duan Youlian, her whole body trembled, and her nails grew a centimeter on their own. She

clutched her arms and clawed at them, grimacing in pain, yet she still didn't make a single sound.

Enduring the pain, Xiao Duan rang Auntie Lin's doorbell again and again.

"This estate is pretty upscale. Won't the security cameras have caught us sneaking in?" I asked worriedly while Xiao Ning and I hid in a copse of trees.

"That's no problem. Duan Youlian has been a living corpse for a long time. Her Yin energy is strong. She can affect the security cameras' signal. Like the time you and Manager Xia met a ghost in the elevator and the security cameras didn't capture anything. At most the security cameras here will see the two of us going into the estate. They won't capture Duan Youlian and Teacher Liu."

"So the cameras will see us going into the estate, then hiding in the trees? If we're found out in the future, how can we explain?" Teaching ghost students was more tiring than teaching human students. In one night I'd worried so much my hair would be coming out by the handful. Aside from the students' physical and mental health... their mental and spiritual health, I also had to be concerned about my own conduct. It was too nerve-wracking.

"We'll use the same excuse as by the river." Xiao Ning took my hand and said, "With these trees in the way, the cameras don't know what we're doing. It's our own business."

"Eh?" I realized what Xiao Ning was talking about. Was he really thinking...

The door of the apartment building suddenly clicked open. Duan Youlian's mother really had taken a look at the screen and come running downstairs in the middle of the night.

“Xiao Lian...” A middle-aged woman reached for Duan Youlian, trembling. “You...”

Duan Youlian stepped back, turned her face away and said, “You can’t touch me.”

Then she walked into the building with Auntie Lin. I couldn’t hear what they were talking about.

I squeezed Xiao Ning’s hand nervously. “Xiao Ning, what do you think Xiao Duan will say to her? Can Auntie accept it?”

“Teacher Shen,” said Ning Tiance in an altered voice. “After that time I rushed back to H City from the train station, I asked Manager Xia about you. He misunderstood and thought I was also interested in you, so he hinted to me that you liked men, and that you had some feelings for me. My feelings at the time were very complicated.”

I was stunned. Xia Jin, that jerk! I’d planned on being friends with Xiao Ning first; I hadn’t expected him to sell me out so early!

I quickly tried to salvage the situation. “Xiao Ning, don’t believe Xia Jin, I...”

“I believed him.” Xiao Ning interrupted me with his lips.

It was a very beautiful night. Xiao Ning and I hid among the trees. Under the soft moonlight, we exchanged a gentle kiss.

CHAPTER 38 - Principal Zhang (Part 4)

I swear that in that moment I wanted to forget everything and concentrate on responding to Xiao Ning. He was kissing me, never mind why. I should enjoy it while I could.

However, there was a mosquito constantly buzzing by my ear. I searched for the source of the sound, reached out my hand, and slapped Xiao Ning on the face.

Xiao Ning covered the part of his face that I had hit and looked at me, eyes full of shock and heartbreak.

I spread out my hand and showed it to him. “Look at this mosquito. My whole hand is covered in blood. How much of your blood did it suck?”

Xiao Ning’s gaze moved numbly from my face to my hand. He saw the blood-stained body of the mosquito.

I touched Xiao Ning’s bitten face, my heart aching. Xiao Ning’s skin was so white. Tomorrow there would be an ugly bump on his face.

“I’ll go to the drugstore to buy some ointment in a while,” I said. “There’s a kind of ointment that works well. I attract a lot of mosquitoes, so I use it often.”

Just then, a steady stream of mosquitoes came to attack me. I had been dealing with mosquitoes for over twenty years and was rich in experience. I didn’t need to be able to see to know where they would attack. I slapped a few times, and several dead mosquitoes appeared under my palm.

Looking at the blood on my palm, I shook my head and sighed. “I still got bitten. There are too many mosquitoes. I’m outnumbered.”

I performed a visual inspection. There were two or three mosquitoes that had died unsatisfied lying in my palm, full of my blood.

Xiao Ning said nothing. Looking grave, he turned his face towards the apartment's entrance. "Duan Youlian is out."

A figure in a raincoat walked slowly out of the building. She looked up at the window of the room where her mother lived. Then she stopped looking back, stood in front of the trees where we were hiding and said, "Let's go."

I dusted the mosquitoes' bodies off my hands and came out of the woods. I looked at the time; it had only been ten minutes. "So fast?"

I'd thought that after so many years of not seeing her mother, she would have stayed longer.

"Life and death are two separate worlds. Ten minutes is already a violation." Xiao Ning crawled out and tore the talisman off Duan Youlian. "Have you figured things out?"

Duan Youlian said, "I have. It's enough to see her once."

It was already 4:20. Time was pressing. We quickly left the estate and got on the school bus.

On the school bus, Teacher Liu manifested. He patted his chest and said, "I really was scared to death just now. I was afraid that Teacher Shen would hit the mosquitoes with the notebook. Some of those mosquitoes had sucked Teacher Shen's blood. If they got on my skin... the consequences don't bear thinking about!"

It seemed that Teacher Liu hadn't gotten past the time I'd used the notebook to crush bugs. I felt helpless. In my university dorm, it had been perfectly normal to use books and notebooks to crush bugs.

“You’re also afraid of blood sucked by mosquitoes?” I asked, changing the subject.

“Naturally. Mosquitoes and other creatures like that will choose people with strong blood. The blood they ingest is the essence of the human body. It’s very powerful,” said Teacher Liu, scared after the fact.

I asked Duan Youlian, “Are you afraid?”

“Just now, when you came out of the trees, it was fortunate that you dusted the mosquitoes off your hand first. Otherwise, since I was suppressed by the talisman, if I’d touched your pure Yang blood, I’m afraid my soul and body would have been shaken. I may not have been able to reincarnate.” Duan Youlian’s face was also full of fear.

“So where’s the future in being a ghost?” I said excitedly. “You can’t even stand up to a mosquito. Xiao Duan, have you resolved what you need in order to reincarnate?”

Xiao Ning had the right to speak on this matter. “Her resentful energy has dissipated. We can take her back to the Maoshan Sect to perform a transcendence ritual, and she’ll be able to leave her body.”

Actually, this was something that had been worrying me. Xiao Duan had been missing for eight years. If her corpse suddenly appeared after eight years, not having rotted, even if Xiao Duan’s mother didn’t investigate, the police couldn’t let it alone. It would be a homicide case.

“If you take her back to the Maoshan Sect, will the police misunderstand?” I asked with concern.

“It won’t come to that.” Ning Tiance smiled confidently. “The Maoshan Sect has some connections. Besides, Duan Youlian has already dealt with the ones who killed her. The police wouldn’t find anything. After she has transcended, we can return the body to her mother, let her cremate and bury it.”

I didn’t ask Xiao Duan what she had said to her mother. That was private. Seeing her looking peaceful now, without the soaring resentment she’d displayed before, was enough.

The driver took advantage of the lack of cars in the early morning and not having to worry about being caught by the traffic cameras. He flogged the bus the whole way. First he drove Teacher Liu to the Farther Side Estate. Then he drove Xiao Ning, Xiao Duan and me to the hotel. The whole process took less than half an hour. He still had to find a shady place to park the bus in the last ten minutes.

This was my first time taking a ghost bus going over a 150 kilometers per hour in the city. The driver floored the gas pedal and ran red lights the whole way, brushing past countless cars. I was so scared that I clutched the armrest with one hand and Xiao Ning’s arm with the other, terrified that the two of us would be thrown off the bus.

When we got off the bus, the driver tipped his cap and smiled derisively at me. “My top speed is only eighty? What a joke!”

After throwing us off the bus, he stepped on the gas and sped away. I held Xiao Ning’s hand, my face pale. “That driver is really something. I’m feeling inferior. He actually dares to drive at highway speeds in the city!”

Without turning a hair, Xiao Ning said, “He drives a ghost bus. The ghost and human worlds are separate. He won’t run into other cars. Even if he did run into them, the bus would just pass through. It would be fine.”

Xiao Ning really was amazing. He could even keep his calm at such speeds. Maoshan's Celestial Masters were remarkable...

"Ugh..." While I was lost in thought, Xiao Ning rushed to the garbage can outside the hotel and threw up.

I said nothing.

In the end I helped the carsick Xiao Ning into the elevator. Back at the room, I helped him sit down on the sofa, poured a cup of warm water and handed it to him. "Rinse your mouth. Ah, why show off if you get carsick? You should keep your eyes closed as much as possible instead, rest and let me rub your temples."

Xiao Ning silently looked at me. There seemed to be a lot of words behind his eyes.

He was always looking at me like that lately. I was used to it.

I went to get a hot towel, sat on the sofa, and had Xiao Ning lie down on my lap. I wiped his face with the hot towel. "Close your eyes, lie quietly for a while. You'll feel better when you've slept."

After I wiped his face, I examined the mosquito bite on Xiao Ning's face. There was no bump, but it was a little red.

I concentrated my efforts with the hot towel on that place, trying to promote blood circulation and prevent swelling to preserve Xiao Ning's handsome appearance.

Xiao Ning wasn't very obedient. Except for when I was wiping his face, he hadn't closed his eyes. He was following my every move with his gaze.

When I was focused on taking care of his face, Xiao Ning grabbed my hand and quietly said, “Teacher Shen...”

I was so flustered that I dropped the towel.

Xiao Ning swallowed. His attractive throat rolled gently. I didn’t dare to look at his face, keeping my eyes on his throat. I felt an impulse to bite it.

Although I didn’t meet Xiao Ning’s eyes, my ears were working, quietly waiting for him to speak.

I heard...

Bang! A loud knock came from outside the door. I immediately recovered my intellect and got up to open the door.

Xiao Ning fell off the sofa with a thump. Ah! I’d forgotten he was lying on my lap, and as soon as I stood up he would...

The knocking was loud and urgent. Sect Leader Ning, who had been asleep in the master bedroom, came out holding his back and yawning. “Why aren’t you opening the door?”

Then he went to open the door. I’d thought all along that I’d forgotten about something. Now, what was it?

The door was open. Sect Leader Ning shouted, “What living corpse is so bold, knocking at the door of the Maoshan Sect’s hotel room? Tiance, the exorcism sword! Watch me deal with this evil creature.”

Ah, I’d been so devoted to helping the carsick Xiao Ning into the elevator that I’d forgotten Xiao Duan downstairs...

CHAPTER 39 - Principal Zhang (Part 5)

The scene was very chaotic for a time. Sect Leader Ning didn't wait for Xiao Ning to bring the sword; he made a hand gesture in preparation for a battle to the death with a living corpse. It was past five o'clock. It got light early in summer, and our room was high up; the first rays of sunlight came in through the window in the hotel's corridor. Xiao Duan screamed and ran towards the room. Xiao Ning absolutely hadn't expected that I would stand up while he was lying on my lap and send him toppling off the sofa. With that added to the carsickness that hadn't faded yet, he lay on the floor in a state of utter confusion.

Under the circumstances, I made a quick decision. I would leave Xiao Ning lying on the floor for now. He had fallen already, anyway. Helping him up now or later would come to about the same thing.

The key thing was Xiao Duan. She had voluntarily put the talisman on herself that night, which had injured her core strength, and releasing her obsession had decreased her power. She couldn't bear a sliver of sunlight, and on top of that there was Sect Leader Ning about to do magic. If she really got attacked from both sides, Xiao Duan could stop thinking about ever reincarnating.

As a teacher, my student was my greatest concern. I charged over, grabbed Sect Leader Ning by the waist, moved him away from the door, and called to Xiao Duan, "Get in, quick!"

Xiao Duan ran inside. The curtains in the room were drawn. She turned off the light and hid in a corner, looking shaken.

"Sect Leader Ning, just wait a moment. Xiao Duan is my student, she's willing to go to the Maoshan Sect to transcend. I was the one who forgot her downstairs, making her have to come up here and

knock on the door. It was my fault,” I explained to Sect Leader Ning as I closed the door.

Xiao Duan cooperatively nodded her head wildly at Sect Leader Ning. “Hello, Sect Leader Ning. I’m willing. I don’t want to stay in the human world at all, please transcend me as soon as possible. I really don’t want to go to Teacher Shen’s class again!”

Sect Leader Ning calmed down a little and asked his his chief disciple, “Tiance, is this true? Have you already dissolved this living corpse’s resentment?”

Xiao Ning stared at me fiercely, got up from the floor by himself, and said coolly, “That’s right. She actually already had the wish to transcend when we found her last night, she was just unable to leave her body. Teacher Shen contacted Principal Zhang to learn about Duan Youlian’s life. We helped her see her family for the last time. Her obsession has already disappeared. She can transcend.”

Sect Leader Ning finally relaxed. Mildly approving, he said, “Well done. I’ll contact the Maoshan Sect and have them send a vehicle to transport the living corpse.”

He turned to Duan Youlian again. “In order to transport you to the Maoshan sect, I will pack your body, suppressing your Yin energy as much as possible. I can also keep you from being harmed by sunlight. Do you agree?”

“As long as it won’t hurt,” said Duan Youlian.

“Don’t worry. It’ll be like having your senses sealed. You won’t feel a thing. By the time your consciousness is restored, it’ll be time for you to leave this world.”

“Thank you very much, Sect Leader Ning,” Duan Youlian said calmly.

Then Xiao Ning pulled a long strip of yellow cloth out of some cabinet and used it to wrap up Duan Youlian. After she was all wrapped up, Sect Leader Ning took out a brush and cinnabar and recited something while drawing patterns I didn't understand on the yellow cloth.

"This matter of the living corpse is resolved," said Sect Leader Ning with a sigh. "When we accepted Principal Zhang's assignment, we never expected there would be such a dreadful monster in the class. If we have known then, we never would have sent you to H City alone."

"It's no big deal," said Xiao Ning with a look of total indifference. "After all, Teacher Shen is here."

I awkwardly scratched my head and said, "No, no, I just did what a teacher should do."

At six o'clock in the morning, the three of us ordered a big breakfast. I ate the most. I was starving.

After eating, Ning Tiance said to me, "I know if I try to have a serious talk with you now, you'll only fall asleep. We've been busy all night, and we're exhausted. We'll rest now. When we wake up, I have something to say to you. Then, even if there are mosquitoes, flies, cockroaches, ants, mice or any other type of pest, even if a demolition team comes to break down the door, you must let me finish speaking!"

He gritted his teeth while he spoke, making me feel oddly guilty. I kept my head down like a quail and nodded obediently.

Xiao Ning finally let out a small smile, touched the back of his head and said, "You nearly knocked out one of my mortal forms."

I went into the guest room dejectedly and went to sleep. At eight o'clock in the morning, my phone alarm rang. I snuck out of the room and saw Xiao Ning was still sleeping, so I took Sect Leader Ning to physical therapy.

It was 11 AM when I returned to the hotel after the physical therapy. I was unbearably sleepy and fell into a heavy sleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. Since starting work, I'd spent a lot of time making up sleep. I just couldn't get enough, however hard I tried. Ah, you could really get burnt out burning the midnight oil.

I slept the whole day away. The hotel's curtains blocked the light well. When I opened my eyes, I didn't know what time it was. I vaguely felt around for my phone, but accidentally touched a hand.

I pressed the switch on the bedside lamp and saw Xiao Ning sitting at my bedside, firmly holding my hand.

"What is Teacher Shen looking for?" By the dim light, Xiao Ning looked very beautiful. His lips were moist, making me think of the two kisses last night.

"Looking for my phone to see what time it is," I replied automatically.

"It's 8 PM," Xiao Ning said. "Do you want to eat?"

I touched my stomach and nodded agreeably. "Yes."

Xiao Ning called to order food. I ran to the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth. Thinking of Xiao Ning's appearance just now, I felt the hairs on the back of my neck standing up.

Before we ate, I cautiously asked, "Xiao Ning, what did you want to say?"

“Eat first,” said Xiao Ning lightly. “I’m afraid you’ll choke in the middle of the conversation and I won’t be able to finish.”

After eating a quick meal and preparing everything, Xiao Ning led me to his room and sat me down on the bed. He said, “The Maoshan Sect’s car arrived in H City this afternoon. While you slept, my Shifu took Xiao Duan’s body away. The two of us are the only ones left here at the hotel. It’s nine in the evening, so Principal Zhang and your students won’t appear now. I’ve eliminated every possible mishap. Now give me five minutes. During these five minutes, even if a dog bites me, could you not do anything about it?”

Xiao Ning’s manner was so imposing that I lowered my voice in response. In a whisper I said, “Where would the dog come from... Forget it, you go on and talk. Even if the president calls me, I won’t answer.”

I put my phone on silent and concentrated on Xiao Ning’s deep eyes.

Xiao Ning took my hand. His voice was as soft as the moonlight last night. “Teacher Shen, I really like you. I think... you really like me, too?”

He had started out speaking very emphatically, but the last uncertain words revealed Xiao Ning’s nervousness.

Fortunately, I was also very nervous. I didn’t call his bluff. I bowed my head and said, “Yes.”

Although I, Shen Jianguo, had run wild at school for so many years, had been good friends with countless girls, had bravely pursued my crush on the basketball court, the truth was, I didn’t know a thing about love. This was the first time someone had told me to my face that he liked me.

Xiao Ning approached me tentatively, put his arms around my waist and asked softly, “Can I kiss you again? This time without the mosquitoes.”

“Yes,” I accepted quietly.

Xiao Ning’s unbearably handsome face slowly drew near. He kissed my lips. In my daze I couldn’t help thinking of one thing: why would Xiao Ning like me? He clearly hadn’t been the one who’d touched my chest that day!

I glanced at the screen of my phone. It hadn’t been five minutes yet. Forget it, I could ask after five minutes of kissing.

CHAPTER 40 - Principal Zhang (Part 6)

I didn't end up asking, because Xiao Ning took away my phone.

When we paused for breath I asked him if it had been five minutes yet. He said no, then kissed me again. Later I just forgot about it. Why worry so much about it? Anyway, it was enough that Xiao Ning liked me.

Considering that Xiao Ning's skills weren't high enough, he had to remain a virgin before formally becoming a Celestial Master. And my students hadn't all transcended yet, so I still needed the force of pure Yang blood. So we stopped our intimacy at the neck. We didn't even give each other a helping hand. It was extremely frustrating.

But Xiao Ning was quite satisfied. He insisted on lying on my lap and holding down my legs with his hands, saying that I wasn't to stand up without his permission. Today he was absolutely going to keep lying there!

I finally got my phone back. At midnight I sent Principal Zhang a message: Principal, are you fully charged today?

Fully!

It seemed that the phone being fully charged had put Principal Zhang in a good mood. It was the first time I'd seen her use an exclamation mark.

I briefly told her what had happened with Xiao Duan. Principal Zhang replied: Sect Leader Ning told me about this earlier. I'm really happy for Xiao Duan. She was finally able to free herself.

Seeing that she was really was happy for Xiao Duan, I couldn't help asking Principal Zhang: I think you are a good person and a

responsible teacher, so how can you think all the students in the class are your fault?

After a moment's silence, Principal Zhang said: *I failed in my duty.*

I graduated at the age of 23 and became a public school teacher. I always treated educating as my duty. I always thought that I was earnest and responsible, that I did right by each student. Until one day I was attending Li Yuanyuan's funeral. She was a student I had taught in my thirties. At that time I finally understood I had failed to discover the waves below the calm surface.

Li Yuanyuan... Before, Teacher Liu had said that she'd gone back to her hometown to find a job. I had always thought there would be an opportunity for us to meet in the future. Now it seemed I'd already missed the chance to see her for the last time.

That business made a lot of noise at the time. Li Yuanyuan died while being bullied by a former student, and that student was sentenced to prison. I only then found out that such a thing had happened in my class. Back then, when Li Yuanyuan told me that that student had written on her back, I'd taken it as children playing and thought that with some scolding they would be able to resolve it themselves. But instead, because Li Yuanyuan had told me, it intensified the conflict and led to her being bullied even more. If I had paid more attention at the time, the later tragedy wouldn't have happened.

After the incident with Li Yuanyuan, I began to investigate the internal conflicts among the students of Benevolence School. Then I found out that many things had happened in my jurisdiction. Except for Duan Youlian, most of these students had come to grief after graduating or dropping out of school, but that didn't lessen my responsibility.

But they were already dead, and I didn't know what remedy there could be. That was when Teacher Liu appeared. He said that he could help me realize my wish, without breaking the law. I could tell him whoever I wanted to kill. I said that if there really were ghosts, I wanted to find my students, and use my own life to find a remedy for them.

Teacher Liu helped me find the students in H City. After I knew what they had done, I disbanded the school, which had a bad reputation anyway. In exchange for my lifespan, I asked Teacher Liu to trap them in the school.

My lifespan could only do so much. I had no way to grant them true relief. So I found the phone number of the Maoshan Sect online and asked them to help me.

I didn't expect that when I made the posting online, by some miracle it would be seen by you, a newly graduated political teacher.

Then came everything I had encountered. When Principal Zhang had seen that I'd subdued Mr. Saw, she'd decided to let the mistake stand and see how far I could go.

Teacher Liu told me that the students don't want to be ghosts anymore because of your tests. I will arrange for another class tomorrow. You and Ning-tianshi can go; you should be able to bring everything to a conclusion. I will transfer the money originally prepared for the Maoshan Sect to you. I only have another three or four days left of my lifespan. Any later and I won't be able to send the money.

After reading this message, my heart gave a tug, and Xiao Ning, lying on my lap, cried, "Ow, ow! Teacher Shen, don't pull my hair."

Oh, I'd forgotten I was touching Xiao Ning's hair. Xiao Ning's hair was very good, black and straight. I couldn't tear it all out or I'd be

very upset.

Xiao Ning finally sat up. While helping me massage my legs, which had gone numb, he asked, “Are you unhappy?”

I nodded, put my head on Xiao Ning’s shoulder, and said sadly, “I’m going to lose my job.”

I handed Xiao Ning my phone and showed him the message from Principal Zhang.

Actually I didn’t know if I was upset because of losing my job, or sad that Principal Zhang’s lifespan was coming to an end. Anyway my heart felt blocked up.

“Last night in the hospital, I saw Principal Zhang’s countenance,” said Xiao Ning. “She is a person who has accumulated a lot of merit. Originally she should have lived another thirty or forty years.”

“She’s a good teacher and a good principal,” I said dully.

“Don’t be sad now. Try to lift your spirits,” Xiao Ning comforted me. “Tomorrow we’ll attend the last class and strive to make all the students graduate!”

CHAPTER 41 - The Last Class (Part 1)

Transcending twenty students at one time was a big deal. I had no experience in this field, so I asked Xiao Ning, the professional, whether there was a way.

Xiao Ning said, “A century ago, the Maoshan Sect did perform this kind of great magic working, transcending dozens or even hundreds of wandering souls at one time. But society is changing rapidly now, people’s lives are becoming better and better every day. Starting from my Shifu’s generation, no one has that kind of experience.”

After sighing, he looked at me with blind faith. “But I believe in Teacher Shen. I’m sure you can do it.”

With the approval of the one I cared for, I immediately pounded my chest as if I’d lost my soul. “No problem. I have my bag with me. Tomorrow I’ll focus on preparing the lesson. I’ll definitely think of the most perfect way to make everyone go be reborn together.”

Xiao Ning smiled and kissed me. Maintaining our above the neck policy, we rolled around half the night before going to sleep.

In the morning, I woke earlier than Xiao Ning as usual. I thought of my promise the night before and was worried enough to lose my hair.

I looked at Xiao Ning’s sleeping face and my heart tightened. Too many things had happened yesterday. I’d stayed in the hotel all day and had forgotten to buy the ointment. A little red bump had come up on Xiao Ning’s face. He’d been scratching it in his sleep, too.

I went downstairs to buy ointment and band-aids. After applying the ointment for him, I stuck a band-aid onto Xiao Ning’s face to keep him from unconsciously scratching and ruining his looks.

After finishing all of this, I decided to go back to my apartment to get Teacher Liu. Teacher Liu was rich in experience, so he should know what to do.

Xiao Ning's car was still parked in the parking lot at Farther Shore Estate. I had to drive the car back.

This time I had learned my lesson. I absolutely couldn't let Teacher Liu be out in the sun, or let him touch my blood.

Back in my room I picked up my laptop and the lesson plans I'd written in the past, put them in my bag with Teacher Liu, swept the room, and left a little reluctantly.

If all the students could transcend tonight, the school would be defunct, and I'd lose my job. My free housing would be gone.

Thinking back to my experience looking for a job, I patted my face. No matter how hard life was, I had to face it bravely.

I was driving Xiao Ning's luxury car for the first time. I had no idea what I was doing. I'd gotten my driver's license when I was in university and was a driver of five years' standing. But in reality I'd hardly touched a car in all those years. The whole way I was terrified of damaging such an expensive car.

Xiao Ning was already awake when I got back to the hotel. He'd piled up a large stack of books in the living room and was sitting cross-legged on the floor flipping through them.

"What's this for?" I was startled by the stack of books taller than I was.

"These are some copies of ancient books I had sent back to H City," Xiao Ning explained. "I'm going through them to see if there's any

way to mass transcend ghosts, and I have found some, but all of them need many people to form the array. There isn't a space large enough now, so they're not very convenient to perform."

I also picked up a book of scripture about reincarnation, read for a while, then felt drowsy. It was even faster than reciting Marxist principles...

Wait, reciting?

"I've thought of a way!" Raising the scripture, I happily patted Xiao Ning on the shoulder. "Today, we'll simply have the students recite! This reincarnation text isn't long. I'll read it aloud, the students will follow along on their copies, they'll keep reading, and then they'll transcend, right?"

"This is my first time hearing about fierce ghosts reading reincarnation texts themselves... However, it should be possible. After all, if it's Teacher Shen making them read it, they won't dare not to read." Xiao Ning was in support of my idea.

The text really was very short. If you read it out quickly it'd take about five minutes. Xiao Ning told me that in general, in order for the scripture to take effect, the Daoist had to recite it repeatedly, accompanied by magic power; the greater the power, the greater the effect. But if a ghost's resentment was too heavy and its obsession remained in the real world, no matter how great the magic power, the only effect would be to destroy its soul.

"It's actually the same with teaching," I said thoughtfully after listening to him. "If students don't want to learn, however skilled the teacher, however vivid the lectures, however many times they're repeated, the students still won't learn anything. But if the students have a powerful interest towards a certain subject and spend time and effort on it, even if no one teaches them, they'll still learn it on their own. So I think that the effect of having the students read the

scripture themselves should be better than a forced recitation by a Daoist.”

If it were me, however handsome Xiao Ning was, if he was beside me reciting reincarnation scriptures, I would still want to sleep.

“Somehow I think that makes sense. We can have a try.” Xiao Ning nodded, picked up the scripture, and went out to make copies. When we went to class at night we could give one to each student.

Meanwhile, I picked up my previous lesson plans, recalling the classes I had taught before. Of the three points of establishing a correct world view, there was one I still hadn’t finished teaching.

An upright person had to do well from start to finish. This last class was the deciding moment. I should finish delivering my last lecture.

After going through my books, checking my materials, and writing down my lesson plan, I looked at the time. It was only four in the afternoon.

I opened Teacher Liu and saw the first lesson plan I’d written. I thought that Teacher Liu might also need to establish a new world view; after all, he was also a ghost who wanted to be reborn.

I copied the remaining lesson plan into Teacher Liu, so the lesson would be complete for him, as well. Then I wrote some of the good things I’d encountered during my life in the notebook, little by little.

A person’s past experiences constitute his present worldview, and that worldview determines what choices he will make on the road ahead. My past had shaped the person I was now. I hoped that my experiences could give Teacher Liu some good impressions, make him love the world and be willing to live in the world as a human, to return once more to her embrace.

I wrote all the way until 11 PM. I hadn't expected that I'd had so many beautiful experiences in my life. I was really blessed.

Xiao Ning watched me write. He was very quiet, not disturbing me at all.

Without noticing, I filled up 95% of the book. There were only two or three blank pages left. I saw that there was still time and decided to copy down the reincarnation scripture.

I had only written the first character when the notebook closed itself, toppled from the desk onto the floor, and in front of my eyes once again became Teacher Liu.

Teacher Liu seemed a little different from yesterday. Smiling, he said, "Wait, I'll write the rest of the scripture myself when we're in class."

Xiao Ning was stunned. I was pleasantly surprised and said, "Teacher Liu, you've figured things out?"

Teacher Liu nodded, smiling. "You've written all over me. If I still couldn't figure things out, I'd be failing to live up to Teacher Shen's kind intentions."

"I didn't write anything in particular, just some common things ordinary people often see," I said awkwardly, scratching my head.

"They're common, but they're also beautiful. And the beauty isn't because of the events, but because they're beautiful in your eyes," said Teacher Liu. "Those who'll blame everything under the heavens but themselves will think even a blue sky with white clouds is mocking them. For Teacher Shen, stormy weather is all for helping you temper your will. I've always lived with the agony I experienced at my death. Whatever I saw was full of blood. But with Teacher Shen's lesson plans for leading people onto the true path and his

own views on the world recorded in the notebook, written on my heart, engraved on my very soul, what grudges and resentments can I still have? Over a hundred years have passed. If I still stay tangled up in these little matters of the past, then I am really blind.”

I handed Teacher Liu a copy of the reincarnation scripture. He took it, looked at it, and said, “Let’s go attend this last class. In the classroom I’ll write down the scripture along with the students.”

The three of us went down to catch the bus. The driver was waiting at a bus stop near the hotel.

Xiao Ning’s faced turned white, but he was still the first to take a firm step onto the bus.

Xiao Ning could face his own shortcomings and bravely overcome them. It was one of his good points, and also one of the reasons I loved him.

The driver seemed to know that this was the last class. He snorted and said, “I hope this is my last time driving a living person. Don’t get on the bus in the future. I haven’t had any business in a month.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” I said quickly, smiling apologetically. “I guarantee this’ll be the last time. So Qi-dage, drive a little slower. It’s really scary to go 150 kilometers per hour in the city.”

The driver smiled complacently. “Teacher Shen, if I can scare you, then I’ve really made my name among ghosts. After this, let’s see anyone dare try to lord it over this bus and not pay because they’re a fierce ghost.”

Today he was in a good mood and talked a lot. He also said to Teacher Liu, “When I was alive, you were already riding ghost vehicles. I’ve been dead for decades, and you’re still riding in a ghost vehicle. I hope I won’t have to drive you again after this.”

Teacher Liu said, “I hope so, too. I hope you can get a permanent position as soon as possible.”

The four of us looked at each other and smiled. At this moment, there hardly seemed to be any difference between the humans and the ghosts.

CHAPTER 42 - The Last Class (Part 2)

My students seemed to have their own information network. They already knew that I had found out the truth. For this class, everyone was dressed especially dramatically, hair a mess, faces grimy, dripping with blood, not at all as cute as before.

The lights in the Fourth Class, Third Year classroom were bright, and the impact of twenty fierce ghosts was powerful. When I walked into the room, I backed up and looked at the doorplate again to make sure that I hadn't gone into the wrong classroom. For a moment I thought I'd walked onto a film set by mistake.

Mu Huaitong and Duan Youlian had graduated early. The front row was empty. To my left there was a student missing half his head, holding his eyes, which had fallen out, in his hands. He seemed to be using them to look at me.

"Ahem." I was little nervous. I cleared my throat, and then began in a soft voice: "Hello, students. I'm really ashamed. We've been acquainted for some time now, but I've only just now found out your true identities. I've fallen somewhat short in my duties. Let's get to know each other again. My name is Shen Jianguo, a newly graduated teacher at my first job. I'm nervous about leading a class for the first time. No matter what your identities are, to me, you're the first group of students I've taught, and the most difficult for me to forget. Now I'll call roll."

After calling the twenty students one by one, I wrote the words "how to establish a correct world view" on the blackboard. "You must all have heard from Principal Zhang that this is our last class. The key task is to help you all graduate. But I still think that whether you're humans or ghosts, everything has to be done well from start to finish. I still have to finish teaching this lesson about establishing a world view.

“Now I’ll talk about the most important point. You have to have the ability to determine right from wrong.”

This wasn’t a very good topic to lecture about. Countless philosophers in history have spent their lives discussing good and evil without finding an answer that suited everyone. Naturally I also couldn’t say anything very concrete.

What I could tell everyone was that it was enough to maintain an honest heart and never be ashamed of it.

After lecturing for over an hour, I said to the students, “You may be thinking, now that I know you’re ghosts, why am I still talking about world view? Isn’t talking to ghosts about worldview the ravings of a lunatic? But after my recent experiences, I believe that the boundary between humans and ghosts isn’t actually life and death. There are some people who are just like evil ghosts, even though they’re alive. They can only do harm to people’s lives and property. Some people’s spirit will still remain in the hearts of the living after they die.

“Teacher Liu and Ning-tianshi have told me that when you take Qi-dage’s bus and cross the Naihe Bridge, you’ll forget everything about your past lives. The things I’m telling you about now, you also won’t remember. But I believe that even if the memory won’t remain, there are still some things engraved on the soul that can’t be forgotten.”

After I finished, I took out a stack of graduation intention questionnaires and gave one to each student.

“This form gives you a number of choices: transcend, continue to attend class, or become a civil servant of Difu. Those students choosing to transcend, please pick up the reincarnation scripture on your table. You will recite it under the leadership of language teacher

Liu Sishun until you have transcended. If you choose to become a civil servant of Difu, I will investigate Difu's job offerings and burn the materials for you. If you want to stay to attend classes, when we've finished tonight, Ning-tianshi will take you to the Maoshan Sect, and I will continue to teach you."

As soon as I stopped speaking, all the students as one picked up the copies of the reincarnation scripture and began to recite. There was one student who didn't even have hands and still firmly picked up the scripture with his mouth.

"It seems that everyone's hearts are firmly set on graduating. Then let's invite Teacher Liu to the lectern to lead the reading."

I stepped off the lectern. Teacher Liu straightened his gray Zhongshan suit, pulled out a comb from somewhere and combed his hair. Then he picked up the notebook he had just finished writing in and mounted the lectern.

I sat beside Xiao Ning, listening to everyone reciting the scripture. Very soon I began to doze off. As soon as my head went down, Xiao Ning pushed me awake. We had arranged this in advance; I definitely couldn't sleep during the last class.

They kept reading until two in the morning. When the driver arrived punctually at the school gates to pick me up, Teacher Liu led each of the students onto the bus.

Not one of the twenty students was left behind. They sat in their seats, quietly looking at me through the windows.

"The next stop on this bus is the Naihe Bridge," said the driver. "No living people on the bus."

Xiao Ning and I stood next to the bus, watching Teacher Liu board last of all, waving to us.

“I’ve had no business for over a month, and finally I’m doing business again,” said the driver, waving at me with a gesture like swatting a fly. “In the future, you can stay away from ghost buses.”

The doors closed, a fog came up, and the bus with the license plate number 444 gradually disappeared into the fog, leaving Xiao Ning and me staring after it.

My phone alert sounded. It was a message from Principal Zhang: Your salary and bonus have been transferred to your account. Our employment relationship is now terminated.

I stared at the notice of 425,000 yuan entering my account, but I didn’t feel happy.

Principal Zhang sent another message: Thank you. Also, remember to come to my funeral in a couple of days.

Xiao Ning calculated on his fingers. “Principal Zhang’s lifespan has come to an end. The next ghost to ride that bus will probably be her. But you can rest assured, with her merit, she’ll certainly be reborn soon. She’ll be a good person again, with a happy life.”

“I know,” I said a little sadly. “But this is my first job after graduation. I only had this one colleague who was human, and now she soon won’t be, either.”

“There will be new colleagues,” Xiao Ning said.

“But I have to find a new job, and you’ll definitely inherit the Maoshan Sect later.” I suddenly thought of something. “We only just got into a relationship. Are we going to have to do long-distance? That’s too dire!”

I’d just had my first kiss yesterday.

“It doesn’t have to be long distance,” Xiao Ning said, touching his chin. “In fact, our Maoshan Sect has always kept pace with the spirit of the times, doing whatever was done during each period. For example, more of our income comes from our scenic spot now than from exorcising ghosts. That’s also progress.”

I didn’t understand what he meant. I only knew that Xiao Ning might have a way to solve the long-distance problem, so I stared at him eagerly.

Xiao Ning said solemnly, “As the Sect Leader’s Chief Disciple and the future Sect Leader of the Maoshan Sect, I have always been deeply concerned for the political literacy of the Maoshan Sect’s disciples. Young people these days are too flighty. Sometimes when they see a ghost, they scream even louder than the victims of the haunting. Taking them out really is a little humiliating. We urgently need a political teacher who knows the internal situation, isn’t afraid of ghosts, has excellent theoretical knowledge, and has a postgraduate degree or better, to teach them to arm themselves with thoughts in line with the current of the times, and foster a heart that is just and firm, fearing neither ghosts nor gods.”

Eh? Somehow it seemed that the requirements Xiao Ning had mentioned... fit me perfectly!

“How much is the monthly salary?” I asked immediately.

“Our Maoshan school is a large-scale private enterprise. From the Sect Leader down to the temporary workers on the scenic site, there are several hundred people. The salary should be in line with that of a large enterprise. How about a base salary of 10,000 yuan, including food and accommodation, and a commission according to the number of people who complete their training?”

“Do Sect Leader Ning and the Maoshan Sect elders agree?”

“With transcending twenty-one fierce ghosts at once on your record, is there anyone who wouldn’t agree?” Xiao Ning looked at me and smiled. “Now it seems that all that’s missing is a resume.”

“I have a resume on my laptop. Tell me the e-mail address and I’ll go send it right away!” I pulled my laptop out of my bag.

“There’s another difficulty.”

“Whatever difficulty there is, I can overcome it!” My head was full of ten-thousand a month.

Xiao Ning pointed to the band-aid on his face and said, “The head of human resources, Ning Tiance, wants to abuse his power for personal gain and pursue the new political teacher. If Teacher Shen doesn’t agree, he may experience some degree of harassment at work in the future.”

I kissed Xiao Ning on his band-aid and said, “Teacher Shen agrees!”

“Then go print out the resume and put it in a file. I’ve completed my assignment and can formally become a Celestial Master. After attending Principal Zhang’s funeral, we’ll take the resume to the Maoshan Sect. I’ll go get train tickets.”

“Absolutely no hard seats!”

I grabbed Xiao Ning’s hand before he could book tickets, lacing our fingers together. “You can’t book train tickets at night. We’ll take bikeshares back to the hotel now, and tomorrow morning we’ll get plane tickets, OK? I’ll pay my own way.”

Just think of it: I had hundreds of thousands in my account now, as well as a handsome boyfriend who was responsible for a large-scale national tourist area. My future was limitless.

I had really ascended to the pinnacle of life.

END

CHAPTER 43 - Extra 1

Ning Tiance stayed at the Internet cafe past one without finding the job posting his Shifu had spoken of. Angry and anxious, he left the smoke-filled Internet cafe and walked numbly through the streets.

The sect's elders attached great importance to this assignment. Before Ning Tiance had left, they'd told him that if the fierce ghosts were too powerful, he must contact the sect.

As the Chief Disciple of the Maoshan Sect, Ning Tiance's heart was full of pride. After all, he was a disciple who could deal with a fierce ghost on his own. All his shidi could only succeed in trapping a fierce ghost if many disciples formed an array together, while he could wield the sect's precious evil-dispelling sword.

The arrogant Ning Tiance hadn't expected that leaving the sect this time wouldn't go smoothly. He had actually made a mistake in receiving his first assignment.

A not remotely cool wind blew in his face. H City wasn't as good as the Maoshan Sect. The environment was noisy, people's hearts were inconstant, and even the night wind was fickle.

He walked until four in the morning, when his Shifu sent a message: Tiance, Madam Zhang, who entrusted this task to us, has told me that a ghost possessing a human body has already been dealt with. It only remains to transcend it. You have done well. This master is pleased.

Ning Tiance replied honestly: Shifu, I didn't do it. I haven't received the assignment yet.

Eh? What's going on? Someone got in ahead of us to deal with the ghost? But if there is such a master, why didn't they also transcend

the ghost?

Sect Leader Ning could make nothing of this. He could only say: Go to the Farther Shore Estate, Building 4, Unit 4, Room 404 and have a look. It's a haunted abode. The building was built in a cursed spot, and because of the construction all the evil spirits were concentrated in 404. Only a truly gifted person would be able to survive living there. Anyone else will die and have their family broken up. I don't know how many evil ghosts have accumulated there over the years. This master will send the information to you. You must be careful.

With his Shifu being so cautious, Ning Tiance naturally didn't dare to make light of the matter. First he found a public toilet to change into his ritual attire, then got a taxi to the Farther Shore Estate.

The dark energy of Room 404 of Building 4 was visible to the naked eye from outside the building. Ning Tiance took a deep breath, smeared his blood on the evil dispelling sword, then rushed in.

On the fourth floor, he saw a man who had been firmly tied up. The man had pushed open the door of 404 and was just struggling to get out.

Ning Tiance saw that this man was possessed. For some reason the master who had subdued him had only used rope to tie him up and hadn't left any magic.

He pointed his sword at the man's nose and said, "Quickly leave this body. I can transcend you, or else I'll destroy you."

"Ah... the blood... the blood... the blood..." The fierce ghost possessing the body saw the blood on the evil dispelling sword and was scared into rolling backwards like a zongzi. He huddled against the wall, trembling and staring pitifully at Ning Tiance. "M-master, go

ahead and transcend me, I don't want to see people's legs off anymore, boo-hoo..."

As he spoke he began to cry. How had the master who had subdued this ghost tortured him to bring him to such a state?

The ghost already had the idea of reincarnation. With such cooperation, Ning Tiance just recited an incantation and transcended him.

While the fierce ghost was transcending, Ning Tiance sensed some dark energy disperse in the master bedroom. He quietly pushed the door ajar and saw a man sleeping on the bed with his mouth hanging open. There was a chainsaw at the bedside.

When Ning Tiance took the chainsaw away, the man in the master bedroom still didn't wake. He put the chainsaw into the hands of the man who had been possessed. The man's head hadn't cleared yet; he was still in a daze. He answered whatever Ning Tiance asked.

He said that he was a carpenter, and the chainsaw was his tool. Ning Tiance told him to return home, and that when he woke he would have forgotten what had happened that night. The man dazedly left 404 and went home.

After the man who had been possessed left, Ning Tiance remained in 404, feeling the bone-chilling gloom of the apartment.

There were three rooms and a living room. A lucky idiot was sleeping in the master bedroom; in the second bedroom there was dark energy ready to take form. Fortunately, it was after five o'clock, and a ray of sunshine entered the room, slightly curbing the dark energy.

In the bathroom, kitchen, and other places, there were entirely unhidden fierce ghosts; yet the idiot in the master bedroom had still

slept in this apartment all night.

Ning Tiance knew that he would not be able to stand up to the fierce ghosts in 404 by himself. He would have to ask for help from the sect. He waited until dawn for the heedless idiot to wake up.

The man could really sleep. He slept until eight in the morning. Ning Tiance hadn't slept all night; he was so tired he was leaning against the wall and dozing when he heard a cry of "my chainsaw!" Ning Tiance woke at once and stood in the middle of the living room with his hands behind his back, projecting an aura of mystery.

Then the man rushed out of the bedroom. His well-muscled upper body was bare. He looked stupidly at Ning Tiance and said, "Uh... you are..."

"You truly are fortunate." Ning Tiance snorted. "You dared to sleep in this apartment for a whole night. Leave quickly. If you stay in this apartment any longer, I don't know how you'll die."

After delivering his advice, Ning Tiance maintained the attitude of a master and left 404 like the wind, not even seeing the man's appearance clearly. He only remembered his foolish-looking sleeping face.

If he didn't move out of 404 immediately, within three days he would start bleeding from the seven apertures of his face and die.

After returning to where he was staying, Ning Tiance was exhausted. He planned to sleep and then return to his sect. The assignment had already been stolen by a master; there was no use in staying in H City. Besides, he had to return to the sect to ask for assistance in disposing of that ghost in 404, which had at least a century's accumulation of power.

But when he woke up, his Shifu told Ning Tiance not to leave for the time being. He should go observe an abandoned school called Benevolence School. They were very curious about this master who had taken the assignment.

Sect Leader Ning told Ning Tiance that he must be careful and not enter Benevolence School at night. There were more than twenty fierce ghosts sealed in there; Ning Tiance wouldn't be able to handle them on his own.

Ning Tiance was also very curious about this master. He didn't know what the person had done to scare the Leg-sawing Ghost into such a state. Keeping watch outside of Benevolence School with its frightening resentful energy, he wondered who could keep so many fierce ghosts sealed in this school.

At midnight of the third day, a psychopomp bus stopped in front of the school gates. Ning Tiance knew that this bus was used to conduct ghosts into the underworld, but the fierce ghosts in Benevolence School didn't want to go to the underworld, so why would it stop here?

To Ning Tiance's extreme surprise, a living person got off the bus, then said goodbye to the driver, saying he'd see him at two.

This was bad. The man was in danger.

As a disciple of the Maoshan Sect, it was his duty to guard righteousness and ward off evil. Even knowing he couldn't win, he couldn't stand by and watch an ordinary person be harmed.

Ning Tiance picked up his sword, gathered his courage, and rushed into the school. He may not be able to return to the Maoshan Sect, but even if he lost his life, he still had to save this person.

Ning Tiance raced the whole way to the third floor. Halfway up the stairs, he saw a red-clothed fierce ghost holding the man. He clapped his chest and his protective golden jade flew out, floating in the air and emitting a dazzling light. The golden jade was a precious weapon of his sect. He had cultivated with it since childhood, until it had melded with his life. If the jade splintered, his soul would be destroyed. Ning Tiance wouldn't have used it except in the most dangerous circumstances.

And this was the most dangerous moment!

Ning Tiance stabbed at the red-clothed ghost's chest, not expecting the man to step in front of the ghost and shield her, blocking the sword.

"Get out of the way!" Ning Tiance knew the man had been misled by the fierce ghost. He believed that this was a poor girl, not realizing that the fierce ghost behind him was covered in blood, pointing her nails at his back. One slip, and the fierce ghost would dig out his heart and eat it.

At that moment, he finally noticed that this man was the idiot living in 404. He had a buzz-cut and actually looked pretty nice. His appearance was pleasant; he was sort of person who would always be asked for directions in the street.

He was just a little stupid. In order to protect a fierce ghost, he would actually fight with a Celestial Master, making him have used his golden jade in vain and letting the ghost get away.

Not only had the red-clothed fierce ghost run away, all the ghosts in the classroom were also gone.

Ning Tiance was angry, but he also felt faintly lucky. If the red-clothed ghost hadn't been injured by someone before, his skills would have been inadequate to deal with her.

Who had hurt the fierce ghost? Could it have been the other master Madam Zhang had invited?

The man named Shen Jianguo went on and on at Ning Tiance, something about being a school teacher, something about not believing in feudal superstition. He had no idea what he had escaped.

He couldn't be called short, but Ning Tiance had grown up in Maoshan and cultivated daily, so his stature was taller.

Ning Tiance looked down at the man's fluffy buzz-cut, resisted the impulse to touch it, and thought to himself, *A teacher? Does he teach the ghosts?*

He hadn't expected to discover that he really did teach the ghosts!

But two days later, Ning Tiance once again encountered Shen Jianguo. This time, Shen Jianguo had been trapped in a ghost elevator.

A ghost possessing an object was hard to deal with, especially since this one could control the elevator. If he couldn't manage to subdue the ghost before the elevator dropped, then the force of the elevator dropping would kill him.

Hurriedly, Ning Tiance could only suggest that Shen Jianguo use virgin's urine to scare off the ghost long enough for him to arrive.

But instead...

Ah, recalling the events that happened afterwards shook Ning Tiance's Daoist's heart. He had spent many years steadfastly cultivating, but he couldn't match Shen Jianguo's single casual stab. He himself had been fighting with the ghost until his forces

were almost exhausted. He believed he and Shen Jianguo would meet their ends in the elevator. Then Shen Jianguo snatched his evil dispelling sword, and Ning Tiance watched wide-eyed as the elevator ghost stuck out its head and was immediately destroyed.

Using the evil-dispelling sword required a great deal of magic power. Ning Tiance had been cultivating since childhood. After over a decade of hard work, at eighteen, he had finally been able to use the sword. But Shen Jianguo...

Ning Tiance went numbly to the graveyard and sat in silence for a night. The next day he got on a train and left. There were too many capable people in the world, and he was only a disciple who hadn't completed his training yet. His abilities were too low. He had to return to his sect and cultivate in seclusion for a decade; only then could he complete his training.

Sitting dejectedly on the noisy train, smelling the instant noodles the people around him were eating in the middle of the night, Ning Tiance fell asleep with difficulty.

He didn't have his Shifu's ability to sit motionless for seven days. After sitting for a little while, his legs were numb, and he needed to get up and move around. At the same time he checked his phone.

Checking his phone, he saw Shen Jianguo's message. He said that he'd had a class with his students today, and that he was accompanying a student wearing a bedplate on his back to sleep in a mortuary for the night.

He thought too highly of his luck. He could only be satisfied if he made trouble.

Ning Tiance got off hurriedly at the nearest station, desperately calling Shen Jianguo, but the other party was out of service range.

Ning Tiance was so nervous he ran along the road. Only at daybreak did he finally manage to hire a car at the nearby city.

In fact, Ning Tiance very clearly understood that after the whole night had passed, Shen Jianguo would certainly be dead. But though he knew this, he still wanted to return. They had known each other for a short while. Even if he couldn't come in time, he still wanted to collect Shen Jianguo's body and perform a transcendence ritual for him, so at least he would know how he had died.

But when he reached the hospital, Shen Jianguo was idiotically drying a bedplate in the sun. He saw Ning Tiance and excitedly waved his hand at him.

CHAPTER 44 - Extra 2

Ning Tiance opened his third eye for the first time, wanting to see what was so special about Teacher Shen that made it so he could spend a night in a morgue surrounded by fierce ghosts.

As soon as his third eye opened, he saw the soul of a teenaged boy shivering under the bedplate, pitifully hiding from the sunlight.

Then, like a demon, Shen Jianguo turned over the bedplate, and the young fierce ghost was directly exposed to the late morning sun.

This was the first time Ning Tiance had seen such a powerful ghost. He could even struggle on momentarily in the sun. Of course, it was also the first time he had seen such a miserable-looking ghost.

When the Maoshan Sect dealt with a ghost, even if they destroyed it, they first had to undergo a bitter battle. They set up an array, recited spells, exhausted their powers. The fierce ghosts were ferocious, howling, trying to do harm at every moment. A moment's carelessness and they would be injured by Yin energy.

But this fierce ghost somehow made Ning Tiance think of barbecue. After one side was roasted, you turned it over to roast the other side.

Teacher Shen happily invited Ning Tiance to sit on the bedplate, too. Ning Tiance silently looked at the young fierce ghost and inexplicably felt a trace of sympathy.

He thought that a fierce ghost, even if it died, should die with dignity. Being destroyed by a Celestial Master putting his dedicated efforts into an array was already better than being treated like barbecue.

Ning Tiance was even more surprised when Shen Jianguo took a human-skinned notebook out of his bag. The dark energy of this notebook was familiar; it was just the same as the dark energy in the second bedroom of 404.

Now, of course, it was also about to be barbecued.

And a notebook was harder to use to block the sun than a bedplate. In Ning Tiance's third eye, a man in a Zhongshan suit appeared crouched under the notebook, using its pathetic shadow to block his form from the sun. The arm exposed to the sun was gradually becoming transparent, and at the same time the notebook emitted a clear, fresh smell.

This fierce ghost with at least a hundred years of skills was exceedingly pitiful. Ning Tiance didn't know who to sympathize with right now. Sympathize with Teacher Shen for spending the night in a morgue in the company of a fierce ghost? Sympathize with himself for running over thirty kilometers between two and six in the morning because he was worried? Or sympathize with the fierce ghosts looking at him pathetically under the sun?

Curiously, he asked Teacher Shen about his teaching experience the night before. The more he listened, the more petrified he became. That ghost growing insects in his own body — the insects were recorded in Moashan's ancient books. They were called corpse blood insects. If an ordinary person was bitten by them, he would get corpse poisoning, and his body would die within an hour. His corpse and soul would be enslaved to the master of the corpse blood insects, never to be reborn again.

Oh, Teacher Shen said he had used the notebook to crush the corpse blood insects.

Looking at the blood-stained Republican era fierce ghost under the notebook, Ning Tiance felt inexplicably sorry for him. This was such

a strong fierce ghost, with the power to kill corpse blood insects with his own body, but he had come to such a sorry end — sat on like a cushion, dried out in the sun.

There were also the students in the class who weren't afraid of the corpse blood insects, and whose strength must be on a level with this Tian Bowen. More than twenty fierce ghosts — just what was so holy about Shen Jianguo?

Harboring such questions, Ning Tiance did not refuse when Teacher Shen invited him back to 404 to rest. Although it was a murderous place, curiously, Ning Tiance wasn't afraid now.

And from some psychological impulse, Ning Tiance advised Teacher Shen not to put the notebook and the bedplate in the sun, casually saving the lives of the two fierce ghosts. The Republican era ghost even cupped his hand in gratitude towards Ning Tiance, looking comical.

As a disciple of the Maoshan Sect, he should be unable to coexist with fierce ghosts. He should eliminate these harmful things as soon as he saw them. But Ning Tiance felt that if the fierce ghosts who had troubled him for many years were rubbed out in such an undignified way, it would be wronging the hard-working Maoshan disciples.

Ning Tiance stayed a while at 404 and found that the dark energy in the apartment was disappearing at a speed visible to the naked eye. There were also two ghosts missing. There remained only the human skin notebook, which Teacher Shen was flipping through. At that moment, Ning Tiance became fully aware that the master who had stolen his graduation assignment was Teacher Shen, with his buzzcut and his not unhandsome face full of righteousness.

He wasn't a cultivator, and he didn't believe in ghosts. His heart and mind were fully devoted to his ghost students. He even wanted to

find a psychiatrist for the Bedplate Ghost.

His motives were purely good and upright. It made a person not know whether to laugh or cry, but at the same time feel some admiration.

After leaving 404, Ning Tiance wouldn't help contacting Manager Xia, whom he had dealt with before, wanting to learn something of Teacher Shen's past experiences.

He'd thought that Teacher Shen had only developed such powers after accidentally coming upon Principal Zhang's job posting. Only on hearing Xia Jin's descriptions did Ning Tiance discover that during his school days, Shen Jianguo had already forced an unknown number of fierce ghosts to transcend of their own volition, yet he knew nothing about it.

Ning Tiance, silently pitying the ghosts, inquired in detail about Teacher Shen's past. Over the phone, Manager Xia chuckled and said, "Seems that this time that silly boy Shen Jianguo isn't in unrequited love. When I found out he had fallen for Ning-tianshi, I was a little worried he was in for another disaster. But if this crush is mutual, then I can relax and count it as someone coming along to clear away a threat. You don't know how many of the girls at our school had crushes on Shen Jianguo. My girlfriend still scolds me every day, saying it would be better if I was half as considerate as Shen Jianguo."

Manager Xia said many things, but Ning Tiance didn't hear any of them clearly. As soon as he thought the words "he had fallen for Ning-tianshi," the inside of his head started to roar, and he couldn't hear the other's voice.

Teacher Shen was attracted to men, and moreover was interested in him!

This news seemed more shocking than Teacher Shen's bare-handedly abusing ghosts.

Lying in bed, Ning Tiance couldn't get to sleep for a long time. After last night's running along the highway he should clearly be exhausted, but he just couldn't sleep. He picked up his phone and scrolled through Teacher Shen's friends circle, tossing and turning, his mind in confusion.

Then Teacher Shen sent a message, saying that the Bedplate Ghost was self-injuring and had burned himself and the Human Skin Notebook Ghost. The Notebook Ghost was just counseling the Bedplate Ghost. Teacher Shen was very worried and didn't know what to do; he was a little frustrated.

It was a good thing that the Bedplate Ghost had been able to concoct lies to trick Teacher Shen, fearing that if Teacher Shen discovered that he was a ghost, his treatment would be even more cruel. Ning Tiance thought back to the young ghost he had seen during the day. His obsession seemed to have been physically yanked out of him. He wasn't far from transcending now. So he advised Teacher Shen to let things take their own course, let the two ghosts console each other.

As expected, Teacher Shen's mood improved. He had a simple character, that was clear at a glance. He quickly put this matter aside and said he wanted to buy insecticide to teach his student not to play with insects.

While admiring Teacher Shen's mental circuitry, Ning Tiance couldn't avoid raising the corners of his lips. He eagerly arranged to meet Teacher Shen the next day to go buy basic necessities. He wanted to see how Teacher Shen would deal with the corpse blood insects that had given the Maoshan Sect such a headache.

After arranging the time, Ning Tiance was in extremely high spirits. He found that after all he was only a young man just past twenty, and he was very much looking forward to some things that were outside of his experience.

At that moment his head was full of insecticide and dispelling ghosts. He had actually forgotten the fact that Teacher Shen liked him, that the two of them going out like this could count as a date. He also forgot his earlier insomnia. Hugging his phone, he fell deeply asleep and dreamed all night about punching ghosts along with Teacher Shen.

When he woke up, he was smiling. He couldn't remember the details of his dream, only dimly knew that it had been a wonderful dream.

His smile persisted until he met Teacher Shen, who called him handsome to his face. Then Ning Tiance remembered that Teacher Shen liked him and blushed slightly. He didn't know whether he should avoid Teacher Shen, or continue getting along with him in order to increase his skills.

Forget it, let nature take its course. Anyway, Teacher Shen's appearance was very fine. Ning Tiance didn't find spending time with Teacher Shen troublesome at all.

It was very easy to get along with Teacher Shen. Although he was stubborn, he wouldn't slander another's beliefs. He said that he didn't believe in ghosts, but he never tried to brainwash Ning Tiance by saying that the Maoshan Sect were con artists.

When Ning Tiance saw the insecticide, he suddenly recalled how afraid the Leg-sawing Ghost had been of blood, then put Teacher Shen's blood into the insecticide. That way it would be able to dispel ghosts and kill insects.

Going to class with Teacher Shen that night, Ning Tiance was nervous. This was the boldest thing he had done in his life, rushing unaided into a crowd of vicious ghosts, not knowing whether he would escape with his life.

Teacher Shen didn't get off the ghost bus alone. There was also the Notebook Ghost, and a living corpse.

The Notebook Ghost was calling himself Teacher Liu. Seeing Ning Tiance, he first warmly thanked him for his help a few days ago, then signaled with his eyes for Ning Tiance not to worry; with him there, the fierce ghosts couldn't make any trouble.

Ning Tiance had never expected that there would come a day when he had to rely on the protection of a fierce ghost to make it out with his life. He felt a little frustrated. When he saw the living corpse Duan Youlian dripping corpse water, Ning Tiance's heart tightened.

After his brush with corpse water, Teacher Shen had actually been invaded by Yin energy, turning him white-lipped and cold-looking.

Ning Tiance wanted to beat his chest and attack with his protective golden jade, but the living corpse seemed to be even more pitiful. Her nails were all gone. Teacher Shen took out his rusty nail clippers and said he had cut the living corpse's nails for her.

Ning Tiance touched the nail clippers carrying Teacher Shen's warmth. He didn't know whether he should say Teacher Shen was careless or admire his bravery.

They went into the classroom building. Tian Bowen was in the hall. For the first time, Ning Tiance saw the legendary corpse blood insects. He felt incomparably nervous, knowing there would be a fierce battle today. But Teacher Shen took the lead, pulling the insecticide out of his bag and spraying it at the bugs. The corpse

blood insects fell to the ground and died, while Tian Bowen's core was severely injured.

At that moment, Ning Tiance unexpectedly thought that it would be a good thing if Teacher Shen never knew there were ghosts. Then he could always bravely go straight ahead, protecting his students with no doubts.

Seeing that Teacher Shen looked anxious to get to class, Ning Tiance took over the insecticide, telling them to go to class. He would stay behind to deal with Tian Bowen.

This was probably the easiest time Ning Tiance had ever had dispelling a ghost. The insecticide was invincible. When the whole bottle had been used up, Tian Bowen knelt and begged for mercy. Ning Tiance easily arranged an array to transcend him.

Holding the insecticide, he suddenly felt that he was simply the fox borrowing the tiger's fierceness, relying on Teacher Shen's invincible righteousness to run roughshod through the world of evil spirits.

Was this Marxist principles at work? Should he start a political education class at the Maoshan Sect in the future?

After dispelling the ghost, Ning-tianshi was in a good mood. When he entered the classroom and saw a room full of fierce ghosts with towering resentment, he didn't feel a trace of fear.

The atmosphere in the classroom was a little strange. The red-clothed fierce ghost Mu Huaitong was looking unpleasantly at the living corpse Duan Youlian. These two ghosts were equal to each other in power and seemed ready to fight for first place. But why was Mu Huaitong's hair in a braid?

Ning Tiance, who had been dealing with female ghosts for many years, knew that the two hardest aspects of a female ghost to deal

with were their nails and hair. There was poison in their nails, no weaker than in corpse blood insects. Their hair could be long or short, and either way the attack range when it was let loose was terrifying. A powerful fierce ghost could often defeat ten or more Maoshan disciples using only her hair.

But now Mu Huaitong's hair was braided, and Duan Youlian's nails had been cut off. This must all be Teacher Shen's masterpiece.

At some point Teacher Shen had gotten coke all over him. His stiff buzzcut had fallen flat. Ning Tiance couldn't stand to look at Shen Jianguo in such a state. To him, Teacher Shen should look like an ardent teacher, dressed in a suit and leather shoes, his gaze scorching. He shouldn't stand at the lectern covered in sticky coke.

He took out a napkin to wipe it off for Teacher Shen. Ning Tiance wanted to take him away to clean up; what lessons could you teach a group of fierce ghosts? However well Teacher Shen spoke, it was still playing the lute to a cow.

But Teacher Shen attached great importance to his class. After just a little wiping, he rushed off to deliver his lecture. Ning Tiance could only sit in the corner of the classroom and listen.

Unexpectedly, Teacher Shen's lecture was fascinating: how to establish a correct world view. Ning Tiance found that he had never systematically considered this subject. He took keeping the right and eliminating evil as his duty. A human must be saved, a ghost must be eliminated. Now, spurred on by Teacher Shen's lecture, he gained a vague acquaintance with the world.

Carefully writing down the books Teacher Shen recommended, he looked at the fierce ghosts whose expressions showed they wanted to stop being dead and be reborn. Ning Tiance smiled furtively and invited Teacher Shen back to his hotel.

He was still worried about the Yin energy on Teacher Shen, wanting to cleanse it for him.

Teacher Shen really must have liked him. He happily nodded and agreed, then kept stealthily glancing at him. Ning Tiance felt happy. He didn't find Teacher Shen's liking troublesome at all.

If what came next hadn't happened, he and Teacher Shen might have gone a layer deeper in their conversation and improved their understanding of each other, letting their feelings develop naturally.

But Teacher Shen changed all his cleansing talismans into exorcism talismans.

This made Ning Tiance uneasy. He immediately put away the exorcism talismans and wrote a letter to his sect leader. He couldn't handle such important matters on his own.

Teacher Shen recited Marxist principles and fell asleep beside Ning Tiance. Ning Tiance picked him up and carried him to the guest room to sleep. Before leaving, he looked deeply into Teacher Shen's entirely unguarded sleeping face.

Could Teacher Shen really like him when he'd shared a room with him so calmly?

CHAPTER 45 - Extra 3

Ning Tiance found that the frequency of his self-doubts increased after he met Teacher Shen.

In the past, Ning Tiance had thought that he was the chief disciple of the Maoshan Sect, the designated future sect leader, a master at expelling ghosts, eminent among his peers, calm, brave, self-disciplined, laughing at life and death, willing to devote his whole life to the true path of the world.

After meeting Teacher Shen, Ning Tiance felt that his persona had collapsed, leaving behind not much more than “chief disciple of the Maoshan Sect.”

He was really curious about how Teacher Shen could do all of this relying only on his warm blood. He began paying attention to Teacher Shen. For a time, whenever Ning Tiance dreamed, his dreams were of Teacher Shen’s buzzcut head and how nice it would feel to the touch.

Ning Tiance had received an orthodox education from his Shifu since he was small. Sect Leader Ning had told him that before he had perfected his skills, he must remain pure in order to keep the upper hand in fighting ghosts. While many disciples, during the first stirrings of adolescence, had secretly violated sect rules to carry on romances, Ning Tiance had stayed true to his intentions, telling himself that he could have no contact with love before he was thirty. Because of this, he had no emotional experience.

Reasonably speaking, when he’d found out that Teacher Shen had feelings for him, Ning Tiance should have chosen to keep his distance from Shen Jianguo to avoid them getting more deeply entangled.

But with the situation as it was, how could he keep his distance from Teacher Shen?

More importantly, Ning Tiance didn't want to push Teacher Shen away. He was even enjoying the sudden ups and downs of feeling. Shen Jianguo was the greatest accident of his whole unchanging life.

He lived under straightened means, yet he was filled with contentment. He was upright and serious, yet willing to compromise for his students. He was passionate, but he could never figure out what was going on. He made you angry, but he also made you want to laugh. He could touch every fiber of Ning Tiance's heart.

When one person's energy is wholly concentrated on another person, there will be a sort of chemical reaction between them.

Ning Tiance found that he always liked to check his phone to see if Teacher Shen had sent anything, wanting to know if he had encountered anything unusual during the course of his work.

Unfortunately, after staying at the hotel that night, Teacher Shen started a new job and became very busy. He rarely sent messages to Ning Tiance. When he had some occasional free time to send word, it was all about Manager Lu being a good boss and how he was working overtime with Manager Lu again, learning a lot of new things.

Ning Tiance used these days to pick up the pieces of his past one by one and stick them back together. He found that Shen Jianguo had appeared in all the gaps between the pieces.

It had only been a few days, yet he was getting a taste of the feeling that not seeing each other for a day was like three years apart.

When he received a call from Manager Lu asking him to exorcise a ghost, Ning Tiance actually found himself overjoyed. Finally he had an upfront reason to go see what Teacher Shen was like at work.

Ning Tiance recalled how Teacher Shen looked delivering his lecture, standing at the lectern and seeming to glow all over.

At the mall, he watched Teacher Shen from afar, then approached quietly. Before he could say hello, he saw Teacher Shen slip. Ning Tiance automatically went to steady him. At that moment, he found that though Teacher Shen could roll up his sleeves and punch a Leg-sawing Ghost and crush corpse blood insects under his feet, in reality, he was very thin, with a very narrow waist. Ning Tiance could hold him with one arm. His height was quite suitable, too.

He had just sorrowfully put his fingers to the black circles under Teacher Shen's eyes when Teacher Shen pushed him away, picked up a mop, and energetically mopped the floor.

Pushed away, Ning Tiance strongly suspected that Xia Jin had been wrong. Did Teacher Shen really like him?

What happened next made it more difficult for Ning Tiance to hold firm to his beliefs. Manager Lu's encounter with a ghost showed clear traces of human interference. It seemed there was a human plot involved, but the genuine article resentful energy wasn't a trick. Last night there really had been a ghost.

What Ning Tiance was shaken by wasn't that there had been human interference, but that someone had been willing to work with a ghost to harm others.

If it truly had happened like that, then what was the difference between humans and ghosts?

Then Teacher Shen, who had gone to the dump to dig up a corpse, gave Ning Tiance the answer with his own actions. What divided humans from ghosts wasn't life and death, but the human heart.

He willingly joined Teacher Shen in digging up the corpse, digging until he stank all over. Looking at Mu Huaitong, who had worked past her hatred of the world, Ning Tiance unexpectedly felt a dim sense of danger. If this type of feeling remained in Mu Huaitong's heart, she would feel a sense of familiarity towards Teacher Shen even if she met him in her next life, and be attracted to him.

Manager Xia had said that Teacher Shen had been very popular in school. It was very fortunate that he was attracted to men; otherwise he really would have been a public menace to males. Girls could always sense Teacher Shen's sexuality and would gradually change the way they treated him, acting more like brothers than lovers.

Could so splendid a person as Teacher Shen actually like him?

When he heard that Teacher Shen was going to give the students a test, Ning Tiance almost laughed.

Though he was a disciple of Maoshan, he'd still had to go through the nine years of compulsory education. When he was young, Ning Tiance's magic powers had been average. When evil spirits had found out that he was a disciple of the Maoshan Sect, they'd secretly changed his test papers to make Ning Tiance fail his exams. It had been very humiliating for the sect leader. This matter had always been a shadow in Ning Tiance's heart.

But now Teacher Shen wanted to test the students' legal knowledge. Ning Tiance suddenly thought that if ghosts could become law-abiding, it would be a good thing.

Ning Tiance wanted to clap his hands and stamp his feet in approval, but considering his deportment in front of Teacher Shen, he finally agreed with a reserved nod and said he would attend the class.

While Teacher Shen's teaching work was progressing in full swing, his new job wasn't going so smoothly. Because he had reported his colleague to the police, he was fired, and only received a month's internship salary.

He was very hurt, saying that he had no money. Ning Tiance had never known how much money he himself had, but he had settled the Maoshan Sect's accounts with his Shifu and knew the current market price for exorcisms. Comparing that with Teacher Shen's current monthly salary, he felt that it wouldn't be difficult to support Teacher Shen.

If Teacher Shen could come to the Maoshan Sect to teach the sect's disciples to strengthen their moral quality and legal awareness and the two of them could see each other day and night, it would be a wonderful thing.

His Shifu was already on the train. When he came, he must remember to mention this to him. With Teacher Shen's abilities, his Shifu certainly wouldn't refuse. If there were more people like Teacher Shen at the Maoshan Sect, the disciples' strength would be greatly enhanced.

After he'd looked on smugly while Teacher Shen tested the ghosts, his Shifu arrived in H City and Ning Tiance invited Teacher Shen to stay at the hotel and see his Shifu. You could call it doing things out in the open.

The cultivation world had no objection to male homosexuality. There was even a way of thought that said that two male disciples cultivating together would preserve more Yang than a male and a

female. Although his Shifu was somewhat inflexible, he wasn't of a disposition to force him to marry and have children. He shouldn't object.

As Ning Tiance had expected, his Shifu had a very good first impression of Teacher Shen. As soon as they met, it was all reading his fortune from his palm and asking about his birthday. Ning Tiance had surreptitiously calculated according to his own eight characters and birthday: he and Teacher Shen were a match made in heaven.

Teacher Shen had been overworked the last few days. After helping Ning Tiance put Sect Leader Ning, who was exhausted after opening his third eye, to bed, Teacher Shen fell asleep sitting on Ning Tiance's bed. Ning Tiance took off his shoes and socks for him, arranged his head on the pillow and covered him with the quilt.

Reasonably speaking, with Teacher Shen accidentally falling asleep in his bed, it would only be polite for Ning Tiance to go sleep in the guest room.

But looking at Teacher Shen's unguarded sleeping face, Ning Tiance's heart itched. He was unwilling to leave.

Even if they hadn't sorted out a relationship, given the relations between them, sharing space with Teacher Shen shouldn't be a problem...

Ning Tiance was very uneasy lying beside Teacher Shen. Thinking of what Manager Xia had said, he unbuttoned his shirt, slightly revealing his abs. He wondered what Teacher Shen would say when he saw that in the morning.

With these thoughts in mind, Ning Tiance fell asleep beside Teacher Shen. He had been staying up all night to exorcise ghosts since he was small and in fact never slept easily at nighttime. But lying beside Teacher Shen was especially peaceful. This time, he fell

asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow, and slept without dreaming the whole night.

Never mind waking up and seeing Teacher Shen's reaction in the morning; he was so fast asleep he didn't even wake up when he was shoved. Hugging the quilt Teacher Shen had put over him, he slept on heedlessly and didn't get up until noon. When he saw that Teacher Shen and his Shifu weren't there, he called and found out that they had gone to buy books.

With the sect leader on such good terms with Teacher Shen, he certainly wouldn't oppose a relationship between them. Now the important thing was for Teacher Shen to give the nod. Teacher Shen liked him, so he should agree readily.

The strange thing was...

Did Teacher Shen really like him? In order to determine who after all had disrespected him in the elevator that day, Teacher Shen had him demonstrate touching his chest and showed no reaction. His eyes were so calm. It made Ning Tiance strongly doubt what Manager Xia had said. Never mind liking him, Teacher Shen may not like men at all.

If Teacher Shen really only thought of him as a friend and brother, how could he live well given what he felt?

After fretting for half the night, when the security guards asked why they were wandering by the river, Ning Tiance suddenly had a breakthrough and boldly kissed Teacher Shen in front of them. It was only a light touch, but it carried infinite sweetness.

The following thump on the shoulder and the "nicely done!" were a blow that really did Ning Tiance an internal injury. He couldn't help asking, "Teacher Shen, do you actually..."

Before he finished speaking, Teacher Shen blushed under the light. He was such an upright-looking person that even when blushing he still didn't seem shy. Instead it seemed like the flush of someone whose blood was up after exercise.

If Ning Tiance hadn't had his third eye open to look for Duan Youlian, he almost wouldn't have noticed it in the dark of night.

The whole time Ning Tiance wondered whether he'd been mistaken. When they found Duan Youlian and helped her understand her wish, he and Teacher Shen hid in the trees to avoid the security cameras. They were so close, and the moonlight was so beautiful.

Ning Tiance didn't want Teacher Shen's attention to be all on his students. He boldly spoke what was on his mind.

At that moment, he realized that if he continued to be ambiguous, given Teacher Shen's directness, they would probably never be together.

This time, Ning Tiance kissed him with all his growing feelings, closing his eyes and concentrating on communicating with Teacher Shen, but in exchange he got a slap in the face.

The slap smashed Ning Tiance's heart into pieces, almost irreparably. Only back at the hotel, head pillowed on Teacher Shen's knee, being gently cared for after getting car sick, did Ning Tiance finally manage with great difficulty to pull himself together and gather his courage to express himself again. And he was routed by a living corpse knocking at the door.

Teacher Shen stood straight up, and Ning Tiance rolled off the sofa and fell to the floor. This time, never mind his heart, his body was also smashed to pieces.

What was more painful was that Teacher Shen didn't come to help him, but instead went to take care of the living corpse. What could Ning Tiance do? If you loved someone like Shen Jianguo, you would have to be a little stronger, not wait around to be indulged.

Ning Tiance, having had his fill of devastation of both body and heart, made a divination for himself after his Shifu left. After making sure he wouldn't be held back by anyone again, he cautiously said, "Teacher Shen, I really like you. I think... you really like me, too?"

The last syllable was very quiet, as if the roof beams would collapse if he spoke any louder.

Teacher Shen nodded. Ning Tiance was ecstatic, but he still carefully determined that there were no mosquitoes around before kissing Teacher Shen's lips.

While kissing, he still had to make sure to snatch Teacher Shen's phone to avoid some person or ghost sending him a message.

It really wasn't easy being a Celestial Master. He'd managed to have his heart touched, and now not only did he have to fight over his boyfriend with people, he also had to contend with mosquitoes and living corpses and all kinds of accidents and mishaps. Most importantly, he had to do battle with Teacher Shen's nerves, which were as upright as reinforced concrete.

Fighting with ghosts was a breeze; fighting with Teacher Shen was incomparably wretched.

Fortunately, the rest of the students were quite obedient and aware of their circumstances. After one class, they graduated, led onto the psychopomp bus by the Notebook Ghost Teacher Liu, who had undergone the same emotional change. Henceforth it was ashes to ashes and dust to dust. When they had passed the Naihe Bridge

they would be reborn. Ning Tiance's assignment was successfully completed.

And Teacher Shen agreed to come back to the Maoshan Sect. With the two of them working at the same place and seeing each other, there should be no more mishaps...

Should be.

CHAPTER 46 - Extra 4

When he was alive, his name was Qi Dazhuang. He was an honest and law-abiding driver. After dying of illness, he was appointed to drive a psychopomp bus because of his skills. He was able to accumulate some virtue for his wife and children so that they could live a better life.

In order to prevent them from harassing their still living relatives, Difu assigned psychopomp drivers to posts that were far from where they had lived. From his remote city, Qi Dazhuang came to H City and drove steadily and safely every night.

The contract he had signed with Difu was for fifty years. In fifty years his children would have grown old, and Qi Dazhuang would be able to go reincarnate in peace.

Day after day, year after year, he drove uneventfully. Sometimes he met a fierce ghost and had his bus looted. Fortunately, he was a temporary employee of Difu and had means of protecting himself. In an emergency he could call on an official. He didn't have to be afraid of fierce ghosts.

But recently he'd received a notice from his superiors saying that a group of imprisoned fierce ghosts in H City was about to escape. A temporary Difu employee like him, with a little bit of power, was a favorite with fierce ghosts; if they ate him they could seriously increase their skills. He had to look out for the Farther Shore Estate, Benevolence School, the Fourth Hospital's former site, and the Normal University's old campus. Most of the ghosts boarding at these locations would surely be fierce ghosts. He must exercise caution and call for help as soon as possible if he noticed anything wrong, before the fierce ghost could do anything. Otherwise the rescuing ghosts might be eaten when they arrived.

As soon as Qi Dazhuang received this notice, he got a call, saying there was a human who wanted to catch a ride to the Farther Shore Estate.

Qi Dazhuang had a receiver on his bus; ghosts could send messages to it with just a thought. Ghosts who had just died were often confused about whether they were humans or ghosts. It was normal for them to get it wrong.

But the Farther Shore Estate...

Qi Dazhuang gripped his alarm device and took a bus full of ghosts to some university to pick up the new ghost.

He didn't expect that it really would be a human getting on the bus!

How could a human have sent a signal? Why did a human have to hitch a ride on a ghost bus? Couldn't he take a taxi?

Although he was stricken, as a temporary employee of Difu, he had to maintain a dignified appearance. Maintaining a serious expression, he looked coolly at the person who had gotten on the bus.

Was he someone who knew the inside story and was about to die? Or was he a Celestial Master sent by Difu to help him control the fierce ghosts?

But it was neither of those. Seeing the man about to blindly sit down on seats full of ghosts, Qi Dazhuang quickly warned him, "The seats have just been painted. Heh. Heh. Heh."

The last three "heh"s hadn't been on purpose. He hadn't spoken for a long time; Qi Dazhuang was just clearing his throat.

The person who had gotten on was very compliant. Hearing he couldn't sit on the seats, he obediently stood in the middle of the bus. The passengers on the bus were very curious about this living person. One blew mischievously on the back of his neck.

It wasn't good for a living person to have close contact with so many ghosts. It would decrease his life span. Qi Dazhuang warned the passengers to take care not to disturb other passengers unlike themselves. As a temporary employee of Difu, his words had some use. The passengers quickly stepped back, sat in their seats, and kept glancing at the living person.

Getting off the bus, the living passenger walked idiotically towards the gloomy community. Qi Dazhuang couldn't help saying, "I hope I can see you again tomorrow."

How did that come out so badly? He really hadn't spoken to a living person for too long. He wasn't used to it.

The Farther Shore Estate was terrifying. As soon as the passenger was off the bus, Qi Dazhuang stepped on the gas pedal without waiting for him to finish speaking. He secretly prayed for the passenger, hoping to see him next time, even if it was as a ghost. At least he wouldn't have been eaten by fierce ghosts, unable to ever reincarnate.

Harboring these worries, a few days later Qi Dazhuang received a second notification. The living passenger from last time had survived the Farther Shore Estate and wanted to go to Benevolence School.

Was he really an unassuming Celestial Master? Doubtfully, Qi Dazhuang prepared a seat for him; to prevent the ghosts from sitting on it, he specifically stuck on a note reading: "Teacher Shen's Seat."

He'd thought that the Yin energy of the Farther Shore Estate was scary enough; he hadn't expected Benevolence School to be even more frightening. How many fierce ghosts were sealed in there? Qi Dazhuang, temporary employee of Difu, shivered when he saw it, but Teacher Shen wanted to go inside.

Qi Dazhuang had his responsibilities. There was nothing he could do but order him to be out at two. He hoped Teacher Shen could survive until two in the morning.

However, Teacher Shen didn't show up that night. Qi Dazhuang received a notice saying that he didn't need to pick him up. That night he took a bus full of ghosts to the Naihe Bridge, then clocked out.

Finding an abandoned car parking lot, Qi Dazhuang pondered the circumstances at daybreak. Benevolence School's Yin energy was so heavy; he probably really would be eaten. He hoped that by dying at his post he could get better benefits for his wife and children...

Thinking these sad thoughts, Qi Dazhuang found a spot on the bus where he could avoid the sun and went to sleep.

Once again, he didn't expect that Teacher Shen would still be alive! He energetically got on the bus at a shopping mall and even brought a second living person with him, saying he was his classmate from university. They had met a ghost and needed a ride.

Met a ghost, indeed. There was a short-haired fierce ghost following them, her Yin energy so heavy that Qi Dazhuang shivered. He couldn't say a word.

He only hesitated for a moment, and the living person Xia Jin sat right down on a female ghost. Qi Dazhuang was stunned, but to keep face for Difu he could only keep quiet.

Anyway, the ghosts on the bus were all law-abiding ghosts on their way to reincarnate. Even if they wanted to get off the bus, the sun would soon scatter their souls. They wouldn't dare.

Except that the female ghost really did dare: she absorbed Xia Jin's life force, then used his body to tempt Teacher Shen, trying to absorb another living person's Yang energy. After eating two portions of life energy, this female ghost would be able to turn into a fierce ghost.

This couldn't go on. The heavy Yin energy would harm the man called Xia Jin. Qi Dazhuang was getting ready to stop the bus and use his temporary employee's tool to temporarily subdue the female ghost, but Teacher Shen punched a portion of life energy right into Xia Jin, forcing the female ghost out. She floated for a while in the air, and then her soul scattered.

The passengers screamed and clutched each other for safety, afraid of coming into contact with Teacher Shen. The short-haired fierce ghost sitting in the back looked calm, as if she'd seen it all before.

Teacher Shen, having lost a portion of life force, was still radiant with energy. He helped Xia Jin onto a seat to sleep. How exuberant was his life force? He had punched out enough for a whole living person!

Qi Dazhuang watched in confusion as the two living people gamboled off the bus early. The short-haired fierce ghost on the bus said to him, "I'm not going back to the Farther Shore Estate. I'll go straight to the Naihe Bridge."

"You want to go to Difu?" This was Qi Dazhuang's first time seeing a fierce ghost voluntarily go to reincarnate.

“Yeah.” The short-haired ghost nodded. “I hope in my next life I can meet someone as nice as Teacher Shen.”

She smiled faintly, then plucked out a bit of her hair, which flew into the Farther Shore Estate. She must have been sending a message to someone.

Arriving at the Naihe Bridge, Qi Dazhuang found out that this was one of H City’s troublesome fierce ghosts. If she had made trouble, several Qi Dazhuangs wouldn’t have been enough to deal with it; but instead she’d peacefully chosen to cross the bridge herself, leaving the world of the living to enter the underworld.

Qi Dazhuang secretly congratulated himself on his luck, but hearing that there were still more than twenty fierce ghosts in H City, the Difu staff all gave him sympathetic looks, quietly trying to boost his morale, hoping he could survive.

Heavy-hearted, Qi Dazhuang had no business for several days. None of the ghosts in H City dared to get on the bus. Word spread quickly among ghosts; everyone knew that at night there would be a living person riding the bus who could punch ghosts to death. Until that person bought a car, it was safer to be a wandering soul for a while.

Every day, Qi Dazhuang looked at the empty ghost bus. His feelings were very complicated. If he had still been alive, he would definitely have lit a cigarette and pondered the nature of life.

Fortunately, only a few days passed before Teacher Shen needed the bus gain. He went to the former site of the Fourth Hospital. This time, Qi Dazhuang wasn’t worried about him anymore. How could anything happen to Teacher Shen? Sure enough, the next day a young fierce ghost boarded the bus. He was covered in burns, and there was a bedplate on his back. Crying, he said he couldn’t take it anymore. If he continued to live with Teacher Shen, sooner or later

his soul would be destroyed. It was better to reincarnate while he could.

Qi Dazhuang didn't think this was unusual. He calmly took him to Difu.

Teacher Shen was a marvelous person.

A few days after that, Teacher Shen brought along a fierce ghost from the Republican period, calling him Teacher Liu. At the sight of Teacher Liu, Qi Dazhuang couldn't help shivering. Even the officials couldn't match up to a Republican era fierce ghost. No wonder Difu's officials hadn't dared to follow the bus to grab the ghosts. They were afraid of this Republican ghost!

With over a hundred years of accumulated magic power, he could consume several of them.

Qi Dazhuang was very nervous. But Teacher Liu politely sat beside Teacher Shen, looking ingratiating. There was none of a fierce ghost's domineering air. Later there was a living corpse who got on the bus... Ah, better to say nothing. It was too dire. Watching the living corpse screaming as Teacher Shen cut her nails, he quietly looked away and played the driver who knew his place and saw nothing.

That night, a male ghost covered in wounds dragged himself onto the bus and went to Difu. He was hugging himself and trembling all over, saying something idiotic about insects being gone, power being scattered. One look and Qi Dazhuang knew this was one of Teacher Shen's students. He smiled knowingly.

Although he didn't take any wandering souls, the fierce ghosts came one by one. There was a beautiful girl in red called Mu Huaitong, who came to reincarnate holding hands with a girl in white. She said her wish had been fulfilled, thanks to Teacher Shen.

Mu Huaitong was also holding two law books. Gnashing her teeth, she said that Shen Jianguo would be single all his life.

Qi Dazhuang became more and more accustomed to this, and more and more natural in front of Teacher Shen. He even dared to speed in the city streets and frighten Teacher Shen. All the ghosts in the area said he was quite a guy. Anyone who could scare Teacher Shen was truly a god among ghosts.

The final twenty-one fierce ghosts of H City got on the bus. Teacher Shen stood next to a Celestial Master whose powers were no match for his, waving from outside the bus, looking misty-eyed. How could such a person transcend so many fierce ghosts?

On the way, Qi Dazhuang asked this question. After a moment of silence, Teacher Liu gave Qi Dazhuang the human skin notebook he had possessed.

“My desire has been fulfilled. There’s no use bringing this notebook to Difu. It’s better to give it to you to study. Teacher Shen’s lesson plans are recorded in it. I hope they can help fierce ghosts who have lost their way reach the Naihe Bridge. They’ll know that the human world contains Teacher Shen, so it’s better to go to Difu.”

Qi Dazhuang flipped through the notebook and suddenly felt that his heart was full of righteousness. He would never be afraid of his bus being taken over by a fierce ghost again.

After all the fierce ghosts had transcended, Teacher Shen left H City, and the psychopomp bus returned to normal.

If anyone accidentally boards an empty ghost bus at night, please don’t be afraid. There’s a driver on that bus who has read Teacher Shen’s lesson plans. He is a very kind-hearted driver who will take you home safely.

And maybe when you wake up the next morning, you'll find some never-before-studied Marxist principles in your head.

CHAPTER 47 - Extra 5

The Maoshan Sect had a political teacher.

There was actually nothing strange about this. Many large private and state-owned enterprises currently attached great importance to political education. In its capacity as a large-scale tourist attraction, there was absolutely nothing remarkable about the employees in the Maoshan Sect's scenic area receiving some ideological and political education.

But for the inner disciples — those who daily studied the Tao Te Ching, the Maoshan Sect's secret writings, the Record of a Hundred Ghosts, the sixty-four trigrams of the I-Ching, the Tui Bei Tu, ancient and modern arrays and all manner of subjects like that — the traditional Daoists, for them to suddenly also have to take a political class, the sort of political class where they had to keep up with the country's current affairs and politics and write reflections on whatever conferences there were... didn't there seem to be something wrong with this picture?

The disciples protested against the political class many times, and even jointly wrote to the assembly of the sect elders, but they were all turned down.

The political teacher, Shen Jianguo, was a serious, earnest, extremely conscientious person. He gave a quiz every three days and a test every five. Some of the disciples took the questions for the national civil service exam and completed them in time. They found that their written examinations could get them high marks. If not for the fact that their academic records were insufficient, they would have been able to have careers as civil servants.

But they were future Daoists! Why should they have to test for civil service?

They were different from ordinary people. They were disciples who had seen with their own eyes that ghosts existed. They were a group of people who struggled in the shadows to guard the world. They were so great — why did they have to study politics?

They really didn't want to remember the significance of some assembly of some committee's plenary session!

Nearly a hundred students gathered together to plan to teach Teacher Shen a lesson. Their politics grades wouldn't impact the completion of their apprenticeships; they weren't afraid of Teacher Shen giving them bad grades.

Some disciples made inquiries. The reason for Teacher Shen's great power within the Maoshan Sect was that he and Ning Tiance, the chief disciple of the Maoshan sect and the designated future sect leader, had a relationship of a delicate nature. The word was that Ning Tiance was a rare talent, not seen at the Maoshan Sect in a thousand years. In order to persuade him to stay, Sect Leader Ning had reluctantly agreed to let him use his power for personal gain and bring Teacher Shen to work at the Maoshan Sect so the two of them could conveniently date.

After their discussion, these good for nothing disciples raised a stink in class.

"This whole class is asking to go on vacation together?" Teacher Shen stared at the note.

"Teacher Shen, we have an important task to do," said Lou Taichu, the head of the class and the leader of the plot. "Some time ago, while developing a natural oxygen bar tourist attraction in G Province, the developers discovered a mass grave dating back to an unknown period. Without performing a rite, the developers dug up the bones and sent them to a crematorium to be burned. Now

the tourist site gets daily hauntings, and the developers are so poor they can't afford to buy pants. They specially requested that we Maoshan disciples come at once. Since it was a mass grave, there must be many resentful spirits, so I decided to take all the disciples along. We need to take a month off."

"A month! You'll fall very far behind on your school work." Teacher Shen's face was troubled. "How about you do it during a public holiday?"

"No need, no need," Lou Taichu said immediately. "In fact, we only need a long time to prepare. Teacher Shen can come with us, and even enjoy the natural oxygen bar at the same time."

"Oh... Wait while I consider it."

The outcome of Teacher Shen's considerations was to take Ning Tiance with him. He could avoid missing class and take his boyfriend on vacation; what was there against it? The disciples had expected this; when the time came they could delay Chief Disciple Ning and take Teacher Shen to a seriously haunted location to scare him.

Chief Disciple Ning didn't refuse, so scores of disciples packed themselves into a hard seat carriage, and everyone happily went off to their destination. Only Teacher Shen held his back and complained about the Maoshan Sect's obsession with hard seats. If they had the money to buy out a whole car, why not make it a sleeper? His back hurt.

Chief Disciple Ning massaged his back for him and let him lie in his lap. There were plenty of seats, so the two of them took up a seat meant for three people and fooled around.

When they arrived at their destination, one of the students cornered Chief Disciple Ning while the others took Teacher Shen hiking,

promising to write about the experience, in this way finally managing to separate the two of them.

Seeing them going in the direction of the mass grave, Chief Disciple Ning seemed to want to say something, but he was interrupted by the disciple and finally kept quiet.

Everyone had settled things. As soon as they reached the haunted place, they would scatter, leaving Teacher Shen alone. They would wait for the ghosts to scare him to tears, then appear to save him. This way, Teacher Shen would understand that they were future protectors of the human world from evil and wouldn't make them memorize political questions again!

After Lou Taichu and the other disciples scattered, they gathered at a pre-arranged location to keep an ear out for Teacher Shen's screams.

"Lou-shixiong, why is it getting colder and colder? The Yin energy is very strong," a disciple surnamed Lin said, rubbing his arms.

"Shixiong, my back feels like there's a weight on it. Who's pressing on me? I can't take it."

All the disciples dimly felt something had gone wrong. They looked over and saw a bloody head on Lin-shidi's back, grinning at them.

It wasn't just Lin-shidi. Half of the disciples had been beset by incomplete figures. Some had no head, some had no hands or feet. The most nauseating were the ghosts with their guts hanging out, all covered in blood.

The disciples knew that the blood was only an illusion. The ones who hadn't been possessed set up an array at once. They hadn't expected the mass grave to date back to before the founding of the People's Republic. These ghosts had died miserably. Their resentment was very powerful, far exceeding the disciples' strength.

“Quick, quick, someone run and ask Chief Disciple Ning to come!” Lou Taichu said hurriedly.

Their phone signals were blocked, and on top of that they ran into a ghost maze. They couldn’t get out at all! With these ghosts sticking to them, when dawn came, the humans and ghosts would switch places. They would become crippled ghosts, while these fierce ghosts would use their identities to live on.

“Lou-shixiong, what do we do?” Lin-shidi was the youngest, only fifteen. The ghost’s head had sunk halfway into his body. He couldn’t move at all and was so scared he started to cry.

Lou Taichu didn’t know what to do. He was principally responsible for this. They had deliberately gotten Chief Disciple Ning, who was the most powerful, out of the way, and now that they had run into this predicament, none of them could get out.

And if the disciples with their powers were in this state, then Teacher Shen, who was an ordinary person and had been left alone, had probably already come to grief.

“We just wanted to frighten Teacher Shen. How were we to know the ghosts would be this powerful? We could never handle this. We were wrong, and now no one can escape.” Lou Taichu knelt in repentance, but what was the use of repenting? These ghosts wouldn’t take pity on them.

“It’s good that you know you were wrong,” a familiar voice said, approaching. “How can you want to bully your teacher because some topics were hard to memorize? As young people of the new era, you should welcome difficulties. Legal provisions, laws of social development, speeches should be no obstacle. As long as you are determined, you can definitely memorize them!”

“Teacher Shen!” Seeing Teacher Shen quickly walking towards them, Lou Taichu shouted, “Teacher Shen, run away!”

“Who’s running? As a teacher, how can I be the first to run away when my students are in trouble?” Teacher Shen quickly ran into the woods, right into the circle of fierce ghosts. “You ill-intentioned monsters, be sensible and let my students go at once!”

“Ho-ho!” Lin-shidi had been partly possessed by the fierce ghost, and its voice came out of him. “Another one, and the body’s pretty good. Who wants it?”

“Teacher Shen, if I sacrifice my heart’s blood to the sword, I can gather enough power to break these evil beings’ array. You get out and call Chief Disciple Ning. It was my idea that brought so much harm to my shidi, and it should be me cleaning up this mess!” said Lou Taichu resolutely.

“Very good. If you know you were wrong, you can improve. You understand the importance of taking responsibility. You’re a good child. I forgive you.” Teacher Shen patted Lou Taichu’s shoulder. “But you can’t throw your life away casually. Don’t be afraid. I know Taekwondo, and I’m quite skilled. There’s... one, two, three... only nineteen fierce ghosts. They can’t beat me.”

Then he went right up to Lin-shidi, grabbed the exposed half of the fierce ghost’s head, yanked, and pulled the fierce ghost right out.

Lin-shidi fell down feebly. Teacher Shen picked up and threw down the half-crippled ghost several times. The ghost no longer looked imposing. It lay pathetically on the ground, looking like it had been horribly mistreated.

Teacher Shen laced his fingers together. His knuckles cracked noisily. He stepped on the half-crippled ghost’s head and said, “You aren’t my students, and you aren’t my colleagues, either. I won’t go

easy on you. I'm giving you three seconds to leave my students' bodies, and you may still have a chance to transcend. Otherwise it'll be time's up."

How could the fierce ghosts retreat because of his words? The eighteen remaining possessed bodies surrounded Teacher Shen.

What happened next was something Lou Taichu would never forget. He watched Teacher Shen punch each person, punching the ghosts out of the bodies. He broke off a tree branch, bit through his middle finger, smeared the blood from his finger onto the branch, then began using the branch to flog the ghosts.

The fierce ghosts were flogged until they knelt to beg for mercy. How could they dare to possess anyone? Each of them was crying in an un-ghostlike fashion.

Chief Disciple Ning came along then and coldly said, "I'm giving you a chance to transcend. I'll give you a reincarnation scripture. You can read it yourselves."

The ghosts grabbed eagerly at the scripture, but some of them were illiterate, and Teacher Shen read to them.

The fierce ghosts fell over themselves to recite the scripture and transcend. Within half an hour, all the fierce ghosts had vanished without a trace.

Chief Disciple Ning grabbed Teacher Shen's hand and put the finger he had bitten into his mouth. Only after taking care of the wound for him did he say, "Did you think you were so careful the sect elders couldn't figure it out? The only reason they dared to let you disciples who haven't finished your training yet off the mountain was that Teacher Shen was going with you. And you still tried to bully him, huh?"

Teacher Shen, however, was good-tempered. “Don’t be angry, they’re only children. They know they were wrong and they can improve. When we get back I’ll just have them copy the text of the new conference ten times.”

“You’re going to spoil your students,” said Chief Disciple Ning, glaring at him. “Have you forgotten that I’m also your student?”

Teacher Shen hugged Chief Disciple Ning and kissed his face. “You can’t be a student. If you were a student, I’d have to break up with you. How could a teacher date a student?”

The disciples who had already been possessed now got an eyeful of PDA, then went back to the sect to question their respective masters. Only then did they learn the story of Teacher Shen transcending all the fierce ghosts in H City. In the whole sect, the most awesome person wasn’t the sect leader or any of the elders, but the unassuming Teacher Shen.

If you asked Teacher Shen, *Why are you strong?* Teacher Shen would tilt his head, think about it, then hand over a book on Marxism and a copy of the constitution and say that when you had memorized these you would understand.

Lou Taichu spent half his life memorizing and only realized when he was old that ideological and political education was only a means of helping people get on the right path. What really made Teacher Shen strong was...

His righteous heart, fearing neither ghosts nor gods.

¹ 彼岸 - bi'an: "the other shore" more literally — or more littorally — as in, the other shore of the river in the underworld; death.

² 锯腿鬼 - Leg-sawing Ghost

³ 奈何桥 - the bridge souls cross to be reincarnated.

⁴ 天师 - "celestial master," the title Ning Tiance gets called most of the time.

⁵ 博文 - "pursuing knowledge/culture"

⁶ So, helpfully, the kid's name is "Xiaoming," (晓明) bright dawn, but a lot of the time he's called "Xiao Ming," (小明) little Ming, affectionately.

⁷ The next line of this poem is: Not in return, but so our friendship would last, AKA, give more than you take in a relationship.

⁸ 黑白无常 - a pair of spirits that escort the dead to the underworld.



他们都说
我遇到了鬼

青色羽翼 [作品]