

Guardian Chapter: 12

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After Zhao got rid of Guo, he drives back to No. 4 Bright Avenue, and heads straight for the office to view the footage over and over.

The office is a lot less busy during daytime, there is only one female officer working.

She looks to be in her twenties, a cleanly combed ponytail, light makeup, but her eyes are drooping and visibly tired; though her hands are working very fast.

She is in uniform top, but her legs are covered by a long and thick blanket.

The blanket really is quite long, Zhao carelessly steps on it, and it slides away slightly; a giant python tail wriggles beneath the blanket, and quickly retracts.

There is a name plate on the desk, which reads: Zhu Hong.

The footage is blurry, as it seems to be interfered by some magnetic field. And since the small hutong is rarely visited by anyone, the only people were the victim Lu Ruomei and Li Qian.

Like she said it herself, Li arrives at the university entrance after buying something, she passes by Lu and greets her.

Afterwards, Lu crosses the street and is about to enter the small hutong.

Li inattentively glances at Lu, and stumbles backwards in shock.

Zhu stares at the screen for a moment, and her drooping eyes widen, her irises contract into two narrow, vertical slits; the snake eyes on a human face give off an eerie vibe.

“She is looking at the street light?”

Zhao nods, “can we take a closer look at the street lamp?”

Zhu tries to widen the image, but the resolution is not good, “sorry, that’s all I can do.”

“I will send you to study another degree in a couple of days, you’ve gotta improve your technological skills.”

Zhu slaps her ‘leg’, “that’s gonna take at least two years, how do I explain taking leave from work so often?”

Zhao rudely says, "can't you just say you're having your period? Stupid woman."

Zhu stays silent for a while, "you really leave me no room for fantasising about you, Chief."

"If you know I'm your Chief then you better not be fantasising," Zhao presses her head lightly, "or do you not want your bonus?"

Zhu's irises contract even further, and licks her lips with a long and thin forked tongue, "if you sleep with me, I will even give up my salary."

Zhao looks down and says with a fake smile, "really?"

She suddenly realises that there is a good possibility the Chief would really agree to something like that.

"Flirting with your boss at work," Zhao laughs, "you're really something, Zhu; I think you would like the training sessions the department offers, it might improve your thinking."

Zhu changes the subject awkwardly, "if the CCTV didn't get it, it probably didn't want to be seen; that girl probably only saw it because she touched the sundial."

Zhao lightly knocks on the desk repeatedly, "I know about the Wheel of Reincarnation, it's usually attached to a sundial and has philosophical quotes engraved on it; normally it doesn't have much practical use, what's special about it?"

"When you mentioned an ancient sundial in the afternoon I thought of it instantly," Zhu opens a drawer, and takes out an old account book, "I borrowed this from Hell, you can have a closer read yourself; it's said that the back of the sundial is made from shattered pieces of a Stone of Reincarnation, the fish scales on the back are from a fish in the Forgetful River."

Zhao nods, signalling her to continue.

Zhu opens the account book, "when Pangu created the universe, and separated Yin and Yang, the Road to Hell and Forgetful River were the only boundaries between the two realms. Afterwards, life flourished and increased in numbers, so the Gates of Hell were created to better manage life and death. Long before the Gates existed, the Four Mystical Artifacts were created, and the Sundial of Reincarnation is one of them."

Zhu's long fingers scroll through the pages, and stops at 'Sundial of Reincarnation', where there is something else written in small print: 'lent for extending life-span'.

"Extending life?" Zhao frowns, and thinks of the weird new ghost that was following Li around, "does Li know anyone who died less than a week ago?"

Zhao leans backwards, and starts smoking, "it must be, that's why the old lady was appearing in broad daylight, she had borrowed life energy from the Stone of Reincarnation; and Li was lying to me as I thought, she borrowed the sundial to extend her grandma's life, well..."

"Only the older can borrow life for the younger, I have never heard of it being the other way round, Chief Zhao, have you?" Zhu takes out a thin piece of rice paper out of the air, which has Li Qian's name and horoscope readings on it.

Zhu says, "I told Hell to help investigate, Li's destined time of death was altered, her life was shortened, not lengthened."

Zhao raises his eyebrows.

"The Sundial of Reincarnation, round and round three times round the Stone, half my life and half of yours, we weren't born together, but we ought to die together," Zhu explains, "what that means is, if you have the mystical artifact, you can use half your remaining life-span to raise someone back from the dead, and afterwards these two people will die together when the time comes. Two years ago, Li's grandma should have died, so she used half her life to bring her grandma back."

"I checked her background, she used to live with her grandma, who raised her ever since she was little. She had a little brother as well, and since at that time the one-child policy was very strict, she had to stay with her grandma."

Zhao understands, and Zhu continues, "two years ago, her grandma had a stroke, the doctors thought she was done for, but she miraculously recovered. Afterwards, though, she was still in poor health; and when Li got admitted to university, her parents finally took them back in."

"So Li exchanged life for her grandma when she had the stroke," Zhao flickers some ashes, "why did she have to lie to me about this then?"

Zhu turns her chair around, and glares at Zhao with her snake eyes, which are surprisingly not frightening, "think about it, if you love someone enough to sacrifice half your life for them, but they eventually leave you regardless, how would you feel?"

Zhao blandly frowns, and hesitates.

Zhao is entirely oblivious to this tear-jerking, tragic story; he is still thinking long and hard about anything suspicious. Zhu sighs.

Zhao shrugs, "alright, snake lady, tell me what you think."

"Li always buys things online, mostly healthcare products for the elderly. She doesn't have a lot of money, but she uses it all on her grandma. She is a great kid, and she is

still devastated due to her grandma's death, if it's not directly related to the case, you don't absolutely have to know, do you?"

"The things she buys online can't prove anything, sometimes when you don't love someone anymore you will use money to compensate..."

Zhu stares at him, with a face that says 'you heartless, cold-blooded monster'. What an insult coming from a snake.

"Alright, fine." Zhao says, "let's say you're right, she exchanged half her life for her grandma, but now her grandma's dead, why is she still alive then?"

"This could be an accident, for instance the old lady might have died before her time was up," Zhu says, "Lin Jing sent me a list of missing souls, I checked, grandma isn't on the list. Hell doesn't know that she is wandering out there, her soul is linked to the living by the sundial, so the Hell Guards never noticed her."

Zhao pauses for a thought, "hmmm..."

"I suddenly thought of something, Li Qian and Lu Ruomei look quite similar, they have similar hairstyles, and they were wearing the same T-shirt that day; they were even at the same place when Lu died... think about this, Li used the sundial, so she must smell like the Mystical Artifact, which has the power to escape the Hell Guards' detection, so she escaped prisoner..."

"You're saying the hungry ghost's target was supposed to be Li Qian!?"