

## Guardian Chapter: 18

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He walks past Guo and sits opposite Zhao; Guo smells something.

It's nothing like the decaying odour of a hungry ghost; it's not unpleasant at all, but somewhat aromatic, although incredibly mild. The smell reminds Guo of winter in the Greater Kthingan mountain range.

It's the smell when you open the door to a night of snowfall, clean and freezing; it has a tinge of the aroma of a withering flower.

The Ghost Slayer speaks softly and gently, like a scholar in an ancient Chinese drama. There is nothing particularly frightening about him besides the sheer blackness, but as Guo fully wakes up from his nap, he begins to feel utterly terrified.

That terror is inexplicable, and illogical.

Yet it comes from the soul.

Guo now realises why the ghosts in the corridor are all horror-struck like mice meeting a cat.

"He comes from the Southern hemisphere, it's winter over there..." Guo closes his eyes and struggles to convince himself with a scientific explanation.

The office only has four people, whether human or not, save the passed out black cat. Zhao pours four cups of tea, but neither Lin nor Guo dare to drink. The only person who is not frightened is Zhao, he calmly sits at his working desk.

The Ghost Slayer finishes his tea, and Zhao stands up, "come, I will bring you to the interrogation room."

The Ghost Slayer quietly follows him, "you don't look too well, Guardian, must be a result of this case; take care."

Zhao sluggishly waves, "I'm fine, I can survive a few all-nighters; if not, I'd be happy too, I can find an easier job in Hell."

The Ghost Slayer disagrees, "life and death are matters of great significance, Guardian, perhaps it's best not to joke about it."

Zhao laughs it off, and opens the door to the interrogation room.

'Li Qian' has woken up, and begins to scream uncontrollably. The screaming stops abruptly as the Ghost Slayer enters.

When 'Li' sees the Ghost Slayer, she quivers in horror like a dying chicken; a moment later, she rolls back her eyes and falls on the floor.

Guo follows the group at the very back, and suddenly feels something pouncing at his face; he stumbles backwards, and the Ghost Slayer raises his arm as a powerful black wave gushes outwards towards a ghastly shadow. The ghost seems to be a woman, long-haired, and wearing a worn out dress; twitching and howling, the ghost is crushed instantly, and dissipates into black smoke, as the Ghost Slayer absorbs it into his sleeves.

"Obdurate in sin, and attempted to rejuvenate through possession; culpable." The Ghost Slayer blandly says, his tone remains the same no matter what he says.

Guo shivers.

Li Qian is tied to a chair.

Lin sprays water across her face to wake her up, and says, "we're the police, we need to ask you some questions, be honest or bear the consequences."

Li is puzzled, but she soon recognises Zhao and Guo. She wants to say something, but to her terror, she realises she is tied to a chair, and asks, "what... what's happening?"

Zhao gently asks, "the culprit who murdered Lu and attacked you has been caught, we just need to confirm your testimony and file a case report, could you do that?"

This looks nothing like filing a case report; it looks more like a trial.

"Then why did you tie me up?"

Zhao raises his eyebrows, snaps his fingers, and the ropes are undone.

The girl is startled, but quickly composes herself; she asks uncomfortably, "if you've caught the murderer already, then what's there left to ask? I've already told you everything. I wanna go home."

Lin smashes the desk, and assumes the character of a ruthless cop, "don't give me that bullshit, just answer our questions! Or do you want to be charged with aiding and abetting the murderer? What's your motive? What was your relationship with the culprit?"

Li is petrified.

Lin gives Zhao a signal, who pretentiously pushes Lin on his shoulder, and asks calmly, "August 31st, ten twenty at night, you saw the victim Lu Ruomei by the entrance of the university; you also saw the thing that was tailing her. There is something else we need to know: since when were you able to see ghosts? Was it after you touched the old sundial?"

Li bites her lips, and quickly nods.

Zhao's long fingers gently knock on the desk, "legend says that the sundial was crafted from a Stone of Reincarnation, and inlaid with the scales of a fish from the Forgetful River. It has the power to bring back the dead, at the cost of one's own lifespan; and once you use the sundial, you will get so close to death that you start seeing the dead, right?"

Li stares at Zhao's fingers, and silently nods.

Zhao leans backwards on to the chair.

"You're a good kid," he sighs, "I wonder how many young people would be willing to give up half their life to bring back their deceased relatives?"

The Ghost Slayer interrupts, "the Sundial of Reincarnation is one of the Four Mystical Artifacts from Hell, they can disrupt the order of Yin and Yang; humans should not use them."

Li twitches her fingers, and says with difficulty, "I didn't know what it was... I only heard about it, people say it can bring back the dead... my grandma had a stroke all of a sudden; she raised me as a kid, my parents abandoned me, and she was my only family... do you know how that feels? I wanted to cry but I

couldn't, and I couldn't believe she was just gone like that, just like that... why do people die?"

"So you found the sundial." Zhao says.

"I thought I was going crazy, who would believe such a thing, but it really worked..." Li glances at Zhao, and looks back down, "I thought, what's there to be afraid of? I'm still young, maybe I can live to a hundred, even if I give her half I can still live to fifty, why wouldn't I bring her back? If humans shouldn't use it, why did I find it right when I needed it? And why did it respond to my wish?"