

GUARDIAN

Chapter: 91

Guo Changcheng's phone had been continuously vibrating, the screen showing a very strange, unfamiliar number that didn't seem like a phone number, but not a proper landline number either, with many 4's in the front. Guo Changcheng glanced over it, feeling that it was a little similar to the TV shopping number and guessed that it was to market something. Everyone else was all discussing important matters and even though he couldn't completely understand, he still sensibly put on a look of trying his best to understand, and despite the continuous vibrating of his phone, he ignored it.

Everyone had been discussing for a good while and their discussion still hadn't yet reached a conclusion, but Chu Shuzhi had nagged about the Water Dragon Pearl given by Snake Fourth Uncle for a while. Chu Shuzhi lived extensively in the graves and was headed down the autopsy route, so his thoughts really weren't very bright and were occasionally a little dark. He was a genuine, proper analyst of conspiracies and schemes.

"Your Fourth Uncle definitely knows something," Chu Shuzhi insisted, "Otherwise why would he suddenly want to take you away at this time, and just so happen to ask you to give Chief Zhao the Water Dragon Pearl at this time?"

Zhu Hong had her arms folded in front of her chest, eyebrows creased as she let out a sigh.

The humans and ghosts alike in the office all fell silent. At this time, Old Li who was on duty at reception during the day and who liked playing with bone carvings suddenly spoke up, saying “Actually I.... I have a source of information.”

Everyone looked towards him simultaneously. Old Li seemed somewhat trapped and smiled a little in embarrassment. “I’m an old loner, with nothing much to do after getting off work. I normally like to go to antique streets to play Xiangqi (Chinese chess) with a couple of old friends. The last two days, I heard an old brother who I play with mentioning this issue. He says that the few house guarding snakes that his family kept have all left in the past two days, not even eating their offerings. The same for other households. It seems like the snake tribe is going to completely move out of Dragon City.”

Zhu Hong was stunned momentarily. “This... My Fourth Uncle didn’t actually tell me this.”

“Not just the snake tribe. Look, spring is right in front of us but is there even half a crow in the city? That bunch of crow tribe idiots, if there’s so much as some wind and stirring of grass, they’d run away faster than rats.” When Da Qing spoke of the word ‘rats’, he made a show of wrinkling his nose, to express considerable disdain—for a cat, just about everything in the world that was worthy of being despised could be described with the word ‘rat’.

“My Fourth Uncle he...” Zhu Hong paused, the crease lines between her brows deepened further. She was brought up since she

was young by Snake Fourth Uncle, basically in her heart there was nothing Snake Fourth Uncle wasn't capable of. She has never seen Snake Fourth Uncle troubled by anything, and it seemed like as long as the snake tribe had him, the sky would never fall.

Zhu Hong knew that he could very possibly not have told her anything because he was afraid her feelings ran too deep for Zhao Yunlan. If nothing happened he knew that she might lose hope and silently leave, but as soon as she knew Zhao Yunlan was in danger, how could she easily leave at a time like this?

But how big did the problem have to be for Snake Fourth Uncle to straight up move away the entire snake tribe without even going through the process of thinking through solutions?

Out of everyone, only Da Qing actually somewhat knew— regardless of whether it's the abnormal activity of the youming (ghosts), or whether it's that strange book from 11 years ago, it all seemed to somehow point toward the old events from over 5000 years ago. That was a time of collapsing skies and sinking earth, where a number of gods fell from the heavens. There was definitely no small occurrence.

And yet, he could also clearly see Zhao Yunlan's attitude.

Since he was little, Zhao Yunlan had always been the type of person to squeeze the light and fear the heavy (to bully the weak and fear the strong), very skilled at getting people together and establishing groups. But as soon as specific tasks for work were involved, he wilted, lazily pushing them onto those lower than him but just as lazy, ordering whoever he could order around. Sometimes when others had gone out and finished investigating, coming b

ack to write up a report for him, he'd still be too lazy to read it. He'd sit on the chair like a big-tailed wolf (t/n someone who acts all high and mighty even though they might not necessarily be), pretentiously making people turn it into a powerpoint presentation and read out all the contents to him.

But now, what he was faced with at the moment, or... what the Guardian Order was faced with, other than occasionally asking them to help research some small and insignificant things, Zhao Yunlan covered everything up tightly, not letting even the slightest waft of information out. Mostly it was because he knew that even if these people were to be involved in this, they'd end up being the ash left behind from a gunshot (t/n people that were sacrificed), and so wanted to shoulder everything by himself.

The black cat shifted his pupils around, gaze landing on Guo Changcheng, and found a random excuse to interrupt the haphazard, unrelated blind guesses of the others. "Xiao Guo, your phone is almost vibrating hard enough to turn into a sieve, isn't your hand numb? Go take the call—from what I can see, we can't really get anywhere just from us discussing like this. Those who had day shifts can all go home to rest, Sang Zan and Wang Zheng who are taking the night shifts go together in a while, go to his house and check if he's come back or not. If Chief Zhao isn't back before day break tomorrow, then we can go into the underworld to look for him. If worse comes to worst.... Occasionally asking Hell for assistance wouldn't really be that embarrassing."

As the black cat finished talking, he jumped onto the table, with a look of someone taking over because the greatest leader wasn't

there, very purposefully and properly instructed, “Right, Zhu Hong, after a while you give Lin Jing a phone call, ask him whether he’s on the train yet and exactly when he will get back.”

Zhu Hong gave an “Oh”, reached out to pat the cat’s fur, then casually scratched his chin while she’s at it.

Da Qing turned from a King of overwhelming superiority to a kitty that loved to eat and hated to work in one second flat. Her scratching was so satisfying that he placed a front paw on the table in a big stretch, so pleased that he let out a long, thin “meow” sound.

Immediately, a couple sounds of suppressed laughter erupted from the office.

Da Qing violently gave his head a shake, using his paw to push away Zhu Hong’s hand at the speed of light, seriously and matter-of-

factly saying: “What are you doing? Men and women should keep their distance, you better show me some more respect!”

Old Li stood off to the side and stroked the white bone ring on his hand while simultaneously politely asking, with a slight air of attempting to get on Da Qing’s good side, “Da Qing, you’ve been

busy all day, do you want some dried fish? Yesterday I also fried some from home...”

Despite Da Qing attempting to act out a look of superiority, he was betrayed utterly and completely by his pricked ears. Only after a good while did Da Qing reach out a paw, with a posture of an aloof royalty like “hold His Majesty”, he let Old Li carry him away.

Guo Changcheng finally took that nagging call that had been irritating him all this time, the ringtones of a domestic mobile phone was particularly loud, the sound of someone on the other end talking could be heard even two steps away. With a heavy foreign accent, the speed of that speech was fast enough to leave the atmosphere and fly up to the moon. Chu Shuzhi heard how Guo Changcheng politely listened from the start to the end of the large paragraph the other person was saying, before weakly replying: “My apologies, I couldn’t hear very clearly... could you say-say it again a bit slower?”

The other end of the line went silent for two seconds, then suddenly there came the sound of low sobs.

It was unknown whether Guo Changcheng’s phone was seriously that awful, but those sobbing sounds were exceptional, flowing out through the speakers and spreading across the entire office room like waves of water. Chu Shuzhi, who was originally packing up his things to leave, halted in his steps, suddenly turned around and raised his hand to snatch Guo Changcheng’s phone, pressing the handsfree button then placing it on the table.

Guo Changcheng was stunned. Chu Shuzhi raised an index finger, holding it up by his lips. He carefully listened, then pulled out a pen from the penholder on the table, writing on the notepaper: 'it's a ghost crying.'

Goosebumps popped up all over Guo Changcheng's body.

Chu Shuzhi rapidly wrote again: 'Tell her to stop crying, ask her if there's a problem.'

Guo Changcheng did as he was told. After quite a while, the crying sounds from the other end calmed down and quieted slightly. The person said while hiccuping and sniffing, trying very hard with imprecise mandarin: "Teacher Guo, do you remember me? Three years ago you came to my house for a home visit when you were teaching, my daughter is called Cui Xiuyun, I've given you a bowl of vegetable tofu before."

Guo Changcheng paused: "Ah! I remember, I remember you!"

The other end hiccupped and choked again: "Xiuyun is missing."

A girl that he got to know three years ago. After calculating she should be around 15 or 16 years old now, Guo Changcheng asked: "A grown girl, how could she be missing? Is it possible that she's run into the mountains by herself to play?"

Chu Shuzhi watched him with great interest. He realized that Guo Changcheng's speaking voice had gotten somewhat louder, and quite a lot steadier.

The sobbing of the other person seeped into their voice whenever they got desperate, and when they cried, the words that left their

her mouth came out in a dialect, and communication between both ends was considerably difficult. It took a good while for them to understand that the young girl's father was working out of town and earning some money. He bought her a mobile phone, it was considered quite high level locally, and after she learned how to use the internet, she very quickly made a couple of internet friends with unknown occupations. One of her internet friends even came all the way to see her, saying how they could take her to Dragon City to find a part-time job, and whisked the silly girl away with only a couple of words and a few sentences.

When her family found out, all they saw was a little slip of paper

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Guo Changcheng raised his eyes in a glance, seeing Chu Shuzhi writing: 'Ask her if she can leave the region, come to Dragon City.'

Guo Changcheng asked, and the other person suddenly replied with stuttering, hesitant words: "I... I can't leave the village, I... I am a bit sick..."

Chu Shuzhi nodded. This was an Earthbound spirit (ghost bound to a particular location).

Guo Changcheng asked again: "Is there anyone else in the family?"

“There’s only an old grandma... You’re the only person I know in Dragon City. Teacher Guo, help me out, help me find her, my daughter’s still so young, she doesn’t know anything....”

Dragon City was bustling and populated, the flow of cars like running water. Looking for one person was honestly like fishing for a needle in the ocean. Particularly as even if Guo Changcheng knew the girl, he hadn’t seen her for 3 years, who knew how her looks have changed— Chu Shuzhi shrugged, writing on the paper: ‘Don’t easily agree to the ghost’s words, we’re finding trouble for ourselves.’

Who would’ve known that when the words ‘easily (agree)’ had just been written, Guo Changcheng had already agreed: “Alright, don’t worry yourself auntie, I promise I’ll find and bring back your child!”

The tip of Chu Shuzhi’s pen bent, leaving a long mark down the paper. He was just about to raise his head to give Guo Changcheng a scolding, in his hate that iron has not turned into steel manner (t/n unsatisfied at his progress, wanting him to be better), but then he saw the white light on Guo Changcheng’s body that represented merit flash for a second. Miraculously, it seemed to have changed color. In that moment, in the flash that passed, it seemed to have been a flame-like orange.

Shocked, he grasped tight onto Guo Changcheng’s shoulder. Guo Changcheng had just hung up the call, looking at Chu Shuzhi in bewilderment.

“No- nothing, I probably saw wrong.” Chu Shuzhi muttered, thinking

for a moment, then put his own bag back. "How do you plan on looking for the person? I'll help you."

At this moment, the two ghosts Wang Zheng and Sang Zan who were sent to Zhao Yunlan's house had already arrived, politely knocking on the door. There was no sound from inside, so Wang Zheng took Sang Zan and straight up went right through the door to slip in. They saw no lights on indoors, but the coffee table had shifted to a new spot, the chair and the table both looked like they were sat on by someone, the fire to boil water was still on, the water pretty much boiled dry, and yet there's no sight of anyone.

Sang Zan bent down at the waist, fiddled around with the tea tray that was left behind. He understood without being told to turn the fire off, interpreting and saying: "Came back, left again, two people, left before it got dark."

Setting out tea was a gesture indicating a long conversation; what did they talk about?

During dusk on this day, after that sentence was spoken by Zhao Yunlan, Shen Wei looked at him blankly for a while, seemingly as though already wallowing in Zhao Yunlan's eyes, and only after a good while did he lowly agree: "Alright."

And then he fell silent for an even longer time period, gaze traveling over the white steam curling upwards from the tea pot, appearing somewhat lost in a daze.

Upon tracing back millions of years of memories, he suddenly became just like an old person.

It's unknown how much time passed before he gently released a breath, glancing at Zhao Yunlan with a pained smile: "I... I don't know where to begin."

As Shen Wei spoke, he put down his tea cup, sitting with his back straight on the bed, reaching out a hand towards Zhao Yunlan: "Why don't you come see for yourself?"

Zhao Yunlan felt like he should reasonably have some resentment towards Shen Wei, but before his mind could react, his hand was already given over.

Shen Wei grabbed onto his hand, suddenly tugging him towards his chest with a burst of strength. Zhao Yunlan felt like he was about to crash into his body, subconsciously reaching out with a hand to brace himself against the edge of the bed. His fingers, however, seemed to have travelled through an empty space, going right through the center, and then it was like he fell into something. His feet staggered for a moment, then he was gently steadied by a pair of hands again.

Zhao Yunlan opened his eyes wide, and yet couldn't see a single thing. He could only tightly clutch onto the hand that was holding him: "Shen Wei?"

Shen Wei softly gave a sound in response.

Even though it was black in front of his eyes, his surroundings weren't just an expanse of complete silence. There seemed to be the wailing sound of wind, but Zhao Yunlan couldn't feel even the slightest movement of air. He quieted down, carefully listening, t

hinking that it sounded like crying, also sounding a bit like roaring, but it rose and fell, sounding close at some times and far at others.

Zhao Yunlan couldn't help but ask: "What is that?"

Shen Wei subconsciously grasped his hand tight, and only after a long while did he say: "Wait a moment."

Before his words fell from his lips, suddenly, the entire surrounding world lit up, a distant dragon cry carried over from far away, seemingly immensely pained. The earth was also shuddering, then a great ball of fire fell from mid-air, just like the sun dropping out of the sky, scorching hot.

From extreme darkness to extreme brightness, in the blink of an eye Zhao Yunlan's tears were squeezed out, but he stubbornly endured the pain and couldn't bear to let his eyes slip shut.

He felt like he was seemingly witnessing a scene of the creation of the world.

He only saw the great fire fall, shattering into infinite broken shards, the light reflections like fragments of gold made one feel as though they were stepping on a galaxy. That kind of beautiful scene as if the blinding light was flowing, and colors uncontainably bright, could easily steal one's breath away. Zhao Yunlan quickly wiped away the tears that have been pricked out of his eyes from the visual stimulation, not bearing to even blink.

Then, countless hands reached up from below the scattered tongues of fire, as though they were growing out from the mud, bit by

bit adjusting their own shapes, until eventually they grew to be a round the height of a person, crawling out from the mud.

No one “created” them, they achieved life themselves from the mud and silt.

No one taught them how to survive, how to reproduce; they clumsily and blunderingly taught themselves how to walk and run on the earth that was covered in shards of light, then continued to act out of instinct and taught themselves how to kill each other and devour each other.

The Ghost tribe, born in the slight cracks between light and darkness. <

There is a gigantic mound of fire where the ball of fire landed. As it continued to burn, the mud beneath it continued to swell up, slowly inflating into a large flower bud.

The large flower bud grew bigger and bigger, but the fire above it became smaller and smaller, until eventually the fire was completely sucked into the “flower bud” that was made of mud. All of the Ghost tribe that were running, feeding, killing, halted in their own movements without making a conscious decision to. They simultaneously turned their heads toward that place. A line suddenly split through the flower bud made of mud, and that rift subsequently became larger and larger, until with a “crack”, like pottery burned until damaged in the kiln, the “flower bud” made of mud shattered into a couple of petals.

Within it, two inky-black human shapes were conceived, the closest of the Ghost tribe was sucked towards them uncontrollably, and was very quickly devoured without even having time to struggle at all. With more of the Ghost tribe swallowed, those pitch black shadows became clearer. They slowly developed a head, neck, torso, four limbs, facial features and even hair.

Just like the droplets of mud that Nuwa casually flicked out, it was as if all the beings born from the mud were pushed forward by a force in the darkness, growing toward a certain direction—almost the exact same as gods and saints.

Perhaps... the gods and saints that lived long and well might have once been born in this way too.

“The thing that fell just then, was that my soul fire? That is... you and Gui Mian (t/n ghost face)?” Zhao Yunlan only asked after a long while.

“That is us— at the time you were asked a favour from Chiyou, to protect the Witch and Demon tribe,” Shen Wei’s voice was deep and calm, lowly explaining beside his ear, “Never would’ve thought that without even a few decades passing since the first great battle of the Gods and demons, the Water God and his people started a second war of the Gods and Demons with the Zhuanxu Emperor. The Water God was close to the Dragon tribe, they formed an alliance with the Demon tribe, and then Hou Yi (a legendary archer in Chinese mythology) from the East found a Fuxi Bow, brought together old Chiyou troops, and battled with the Witch tri

be. Witch, Demon, Human, the three tribes fought until it was difficult to pull them apart.”

“At that time, the flood controls were not in place. Not long after Nuwa created man, she could only watch as they reproduced in masses, died in masses. She didn’t even get the chance to become soil. So, at the time, Youming (ghosts) did not exist, and of course there also wasn’t the so-called ‘cycle of reincarnation’. For those various tribes that died during that time, death was simply death. As Shennong said, ‘death’ is to turn into chaos, and return to the profane land that is empty without a single living being, cut off from hope, cut off from the senses, cut off from everything, and just have absolutely nothing. There wasn’t anyone that did not fear ‘death’, especially those who died whilst holding onto hate. They did not wish to die with lingering burdens, and as a result they were stuck in between life and death, and their souls remained in the living realm.”

“In the two great battles of Gods and Demons, there was the flowing and running of blood. The souls of those that hesitated to move on floated through the air all day, desolately wailing nonstop, with no hint of disappearing. Suffering under the scorching sun during the day times, there were some that were melted alive from the sunlight, returning to chaos. There were others that survived through that, recovering somewhat in the nights, but suffering the same torture the very next day.”

Shen Wei paused, gazing in the direction of himself, he only continued to talk after a while: “Nuwa only now knew that what she created herself wasn’t virtue, but creatures of evil. She provided humans with short individual lifetimes that were brilliant but sho

rt, lives as delicate and vulnerable as flowers in spring. Afterwards, she then made them suffer through all of the hardships known to man, suffering through the pain of burning under the blazing sun, suffering through the pain of souls that had nowhere to settle, suffering through the pain of being chased down their entire lives by death.”

Shen Wei turned his head to give Zhao Yunlan a look: “Some people say that the reason why newborn children burst out crying is because they are one step closer to the death that they were destined within their lifetime— so at the time when Shennong lost his God status and out of helplessness asked to borrow soul fire from you, that was to use the soul of the Mountain Saint to pacify all the vengeful spirits in the world that died from war, to lessen their suffering and to be at peace earlier. This was also the reason why the Da Shen Mu (Great Godly woodtree) that you later left behind was branded with the name of ‘Guardian Order’.”

At this moment, the crack above their heads grew larger and larger, until eventually it revealed a slit of the sky, weak moonlight sprinkling in. This was Buzhou Mountain on the brink of completely collapsing.

Shen Wei continued to say: “Shennong carried your blossom of a soul fire, when he passed Buzhou Mountain, and just so happened to come across others that were riding the heavenly dragon. With an air of advancing forwards without looking back, it crashed into a stone pillar of Buzhou mountain. The Great dragon’s tail perfectly swept Shennong’s shoulder, your soul fire fell from Shennong’s hands, and by a twist of fate, it landed on the great profane land at the foot of Buzhou mountain.”

Shen Wei's voice halted, and then followed with a sound of cold laughter: "These are the things that you told me, I don't know if they're true or false. Maybe it really did fall from pure fate and coincidence, maybe Sir Shennong did so deliberately, who knows?"

Just at this moment, Zhao Yunlan saw two people landing on the great profane land that had been revealed in the human realm, they were precisely Kunlun Jun and Sir Shennong.

Kunlun Jun seemed to be somewhat at a loss as he looked upon the demons and monsters all over the land. He asked: "What are all of these?"

Shennong said: "They are born from nature."