

GUARDIAN

Chapter: 96

Shen Wei, who was immersed in the lesson plan, lifted his head and met Zhao Yunlan's gaze. He then bent down and picked up the broken line. With a gentle touch of his fingers, it disintegrated into powder and fell like burnt ashes.

Shen Wei withdrew his hand and sniffed his fingertips carefully. He said: "Currently, it should still be ok. There are no traces of death or scent of blood. He should still be alive, just that we can't contact him. Don't worry, rest assured for now."

Zhao Yunlan didn't make a sound. He stuffed the last bun into his mouth but had already lost his appetite. He took out a stack of notepads from underneath the table. Surprisingly, this man who lived his life incredibly sloppily was actually very precise in his time management. There were three bookmark labels stuck to the top of his notepad. The one on the very top was labeled "urgent", the next one was "important", and lastly was "completed".

The last column was empty. Lately, he had been through a lot of hardships and there pretty much hadn't been anything that wasn't important.

Through the incredibly messy handwriting, as if he were a surgeon writing on a shaky rocketship, Shen Wei read with difficulty that in the column labeled "urgent" there was only his name and the sentence "think of a way to get rid of the broken bowl on Dad

's body." In the "important" column was a long list of items related to his work.

Zhao Yunlan lifted his pen and wrote a check mark after Shen Wei's name. He then filled in a third item under "urgent": "Quickly find Lin Jing."

Zhao Yunlan spoke as he wrote: "Lin Jing was actually born into a pure line of Dharma. To tell you the truth, there is no one else under me who has such pure lineage. In addition, he doesn't look very attractive. Even his selfies can be used as talismen to wear off evil spirits. Also, this scum is very good at pretending to be weak and would never purposefully stir up trouble. Not to mention I only asked him to investigate a common life force-stealing case that reoccurs theseventh day of every moon cycle. If we're talking about this, actually the person who I'm normally least worried about is him..."

He drummed the tables once with his fingers: "I have to bring someone to go check it out, are you coming?"

Just earlier, Shen Wei was brooding and did not have the mind set to care about what the bunch of people in the Guardian Order were busying themselves with. When he heard this, he directed his extremely gentle, almost watery, gaze up from where he was staring in the notepad: the check mark next to his name. The corners of his lips contained a smile—it seemed like he didn't care that Zhao Yunlan wrote his name as abstractly as if it were dogs writing with their paws, "Hm, stealing life force?"

Zhao Yunlan pulled out the message Wang Zheng had forwarded to him: “This one. The greatsaint is asking us to take a look at it .”

Shen Wei, the old-fashioned man, had never used a smartphone before. He received the phone from Zhao Yunlan and then wanted to look at the picture more clearly. However, the touchscreen was difficult to handle and he wasn't able to enlarge the photo even after fiddling with it for a long time.

He then turned to Zhao Yunlan, who was currently gulping down the soymilk, and said: “Lower your head for a moment, don't look.”

In the next moment, Shen Wei hovered his hand over the top of the smartphone screen. As if he was grabbing something from the air, the picture of the dead victim floated into the air like a 3D projection. The visual effect was extremely shocking. Like this, it was almost as if the dead body, with a face bloated like an eggplant, was lying flat on the dining table.

Out of curiosity, Zhao Yunlan lowered and then quickly raised his head. Expectedly, he reaped what he sowed, the mouthful of soymilk caught in his throat and he almost spewed it all over the “corpse's” face.

...This was really a paragon of old-fashioned superstitions defeating modern technology

Shen Wei carefully examined the corpse's complexion, and then used his fingers to “pinch” the corpse's eyes. It was like he turned

d the air into a 3D touch screen, even including the ability to magnify and shrink!

“This man may not have died from taking someone else’s life force,” Shen Wei said as he pointed to the eye of the corpse that was enlarged to the size of a palm, “Take a look at his eyes.”

“I just finished eating dinner...” Zhao Yunlan covered his stomach in agony. He followed Shen Wei’s finger to look over at the extremely enlarged eye, only to find that the pupil had already been dilated. However, if he looked carefully, he could almost make out a human shape reflected in the middle.

Zhao Yunlan was stupefied and held down Shen Wei’s hand: “Can you enlarge it a bit more?”

Shen Wei shook his head: “It’s only a picture. If I enlarge it any more it won’t be clear anymore.”

“Nn nn, it doesn’t matter.” Zhao Yunlan pulled out a piece of napkin from underneath the table, wiped his mouth quickly, and then ripped out a piece of paper from the back of the notepad and sketched out the general shape of the shadow, “It’s already much better than our shoddy part-time technician.”

Shen Wei casually asked: “Who is the part-time technician?”

Zhao Yunlan: “Zhu Hong.”

The foot of the table made a tooth-grinding “crunch” sound as it grated against the floor.

Zhao Yunlan only felt a chilly gaze land on his bare nape. He pretended he didn't know anything and sprawled on the table, carefully using a ballpoint pen to draw out the thing inside the corpse's eye. With his back turned to Shen Wei, he secretly smiled in delight.

“In the past, there was a rumor in Jianghu that the eyes of the dead must be wrecked, otherwise they will leave the shadow of the last person he saw, which could be checked by the police.” Zhao Yunlan said as he drew, “But even Xi Yang Yang (t/n a cartoon sheep character) knows that that's impossible, otherwise the entire criminal police department would have nothing to do all day long; all they'd have to do is study ophthalmology. But there's no smoke without fire...there's always gotta be a bit of shadow in the origins of folklore, right? What's the shadow in the eyes of this corpse?”

Shen Wei was utterly silent.

Zhao Yunlan looked at him with his eyes curved into a smile: “Hm?”

Shen Wei's gloomy expression made it clear that he was very dissatisfied with the topic of Zhu Hong. Shen Wei was silent for a few seconds, and then with a little bit of chilliness, said: “It's capturing the soul. The eyes of the dead whose souls were taken by the reapers would be clean, but if their time was cut short by other creatures of the underworld, or if the soul was taken by other things, the dead's eyes would leave a ghostly reflection.”

”Hm...then what do you think this is?” Zhao Yunlan asked.

Shen Wei lowered his eyes. With a repressed voice, he quietly said: “How do I know?”

“Ah, what is it? Are you unhappy? Jealous?” Zhao Yunlan said wantonly, “I like it when other people are jealous. Quick, why don’t you be jealous again for This Lord?”

Shen Wei: “...”

“Before, you used to keep it in all day, like an otherworldly male god (t/n male god means someone who is really handsome). I’m tired of seeing you pretending. Even looking at you makes me feel exhausted for you.” Zhao Yunlan casually stuck the note paper behind a lesson plan draft that Shen Wei had used and said, “Come, this male god, there is a scanner beside the computer. Help me scan it into a picture and send it to the office so that they can find out as much as they can before I go over there.”

Shen Wei took it and walked in a stupor to stand in front of the computer. After he turned it on, he started a staring contest with the assembly of electronics in front of him—the male god actually only knew how to turn machines on and off and how to play PowerPoints that others had already made for him. Everything else his teaching assistant basically did for him; he couldn’t even distinguish between a printer and a scanner.

At this time, Zhao Yunlan suddenly came behind him, reached both arms around from behind, and took Shen Wei’s hand to guide

the piece of paper into the scanner. Step by step, he operated it. Finally, within the noise of the machine, he purposefully blew a gust of air next to Shen Wei's ear: "Hm, you don't know how to do it? If you don't know how to do it why don't you ask your husband to teach you?"

Shen Wei: "..."

With a bad smile, Zhao Yunlan quickly touched Shen Wei's butt. Before Shen Wei, with his face and ears flushed red from shame, could reprimand him, he had already dodged far away to pick up a calendar from the table. He knocked on the email account and password written on it: "You at least know how to do this, right? Go into the contacts and find the one that says 'colleagues'. Then, send the scanned picture to them."

With that, the smile on his face seemed to fade away at an incomparably rapid pace as he dialed No. 4 Bright Avenue's number: "Wang Zheng? You're still awake? You've worked hard. Close the curtains a bit tighter—

yes, I know something happened to Lin Jing. I sent a picture to you, let everyone in the office pass it around to take a look at it. If you can figure out what it is, that'd be best. Let Old Li assist in preparing two cars. In half an hour we'll set out to the scene of the crime."

At this moment, the hanging lamp in the room shook slightly. Dragon City experienced a vague tremor. After this small, imperceptible earthquake passed, the sound of a notification for a new email could be heard from both within and outside of the phone at the same time.

From within the phone, Wang Zheng said: “Wait, Chief Zhao. There’s an email from Lin Jing.”

From outside the phone, Shen Wei turned around: “The person you are looking for seemed to have sent an email.”

Zhao Yunlan squinted and said to Wang Zheng: “Don’t hang up just yet.”

What Lin Jing had sent over was a video of himself that he had taken using his cellphone.

This selfie emperor, who was always preening and taking selfies, had superb camera skills. Usually, no hand shaking could be detected and the pictures were always very stable. However, the current video was continually shaking and Lin Jing’s breaths were coming out in pants. The screen shook up and down forcefully; he was either walking quickly or running.

He was a little out of breath, but the sound of his gasping was pressed very low. Lin Jing’s hand shook badly. The screen was directly aimed at his face yet when he opened and closed his mouth, no sound came out. With furrowed eyebrows, Zhao Yunlan read his lips with difficulty: “I...lost my voice...are...ear...I’m starting to lose hearing in my ear...budget...no...it’s my fingers are stiffening and I have a foreboding feeling.”

Immediately following, Lin Jing’s hand shook and the camera moved away from his face to aim directly at an extremely high-end resort—

it was the rehabilitation resort where the life forcestealing case occurred.

On the surface, all the houses looked beautiful. However, Zhao Yunlan felt a sense of discordance at first glance.

At this time, the sound of Lin Jing's fingers tapping on the back cover of the mobile phone emitted from the video. The sound was very loud and slightly grating to the ear. It were these sounds that highlighted the deadly silence of the entire resort.

Lin Jing raised a finger and wrote out "empty, there's nobody here" in front of the cell phone camera. Zhao Yunlan noticed that the second joint on his finger was stiff, almost like a rock, and could not bend at all. A strange gray color emitted from it.

Then, Lin Jing's fingers paused. He aimed the camera at his face, pointed to his ears, and, with a solemn expression, shook his head. Subconsciously, he took out a string of Buddha beads and closed his eyes. His lips opened and closed slightly. Although he didn't make any sound, it seemed as though he was forcefully remaining calm by reciting sutras.

A moment later when he opened his eyes again, he seemed to be momentarily stunned before suddenly squinting strenuously. Following, the camera shook violently for a while and the video cut off.

"At the end it may be that he realized he couldn't see clearly any more and so quickly sent the video." Zhao Yunlan determined: "Maybe it was because of his vision that he clicked the wrong thing and sent a timed email, that's why we only saw it now, or..."

“Or because, due to whatever reason, the email couldn’t be sent.” Shen Wei continued.

Zhao Yunlan turned his head and their gaze connected. A moment later, they both quietly said at the same time: “The earthquake just now.”

Right as their voice fell, the faint tremors came again just like an ordinary aftershock. The sound of footsteps and voices came from the corridor. Zhao Yunlan lived higher up. Perhaps because the shaking was stronger on higher floors, people began to run out in a panic.

Zhao Yunlan was not someone who’d never experienced an earthquake before. He stood where he was, unmoving: “Don’t you feel that this ‘earthquake’ is a bit strange? When the Earth’s crust is moving, it seems to be more of a swaying motion...this seems to be shaking.”

Shen Wei lowered his eyes and carefully felt it for a moment: “It feels as though it’s the movement of the underworld.”

“The underworld?”

Shen Wei’s expression was slightly grave. Zhao Yunlan thought for a bit, squatted down, and stuffed the gun full of special bullets. He inserted a dagger engraved with incantations underneath his pants legs. Then, he took all the money out from his wallet, crammed them into his pocket carelessly, and, in the empty wallet, stuffed a thick pile of talismans.

Lastly, he took out a piece of wood from his drawer. That was the real “Guardian Order”, the real bark that was cut from the trunk

of the Da Shenmu. When the words “Guardian Order” touched Zhao Yunlan’s fingers, they burst into a series of dazzling sparks

“Let’s go.” He stuffed the Guardian Order into his pocket and said decisively.

Twenty minutes later, they arrived at No. 4 Bright Ave. After a while, two off-road vehicles drove out from the yard at the same time, directly towards the location where Lin Jing had the accident.

The distance between Dragon City and the scene of the crime was less than 300 kilometers. With the highway, it took about four hours. The location had no local industry, but there were mountains and hot springs; it was a typical little tourist town for recuperation. The natural villages in the surrounding area had moved away for the sake of the beautiful environment. Only purchasers and service personnel come and go from here every day.

The town was too quiet, virtually like a ghost town. There was a big caravan used for towing goods parked improperly on the side of the road at the entrance, within which was a full load of fresh vegetables. Not a single thing was missing, but the driver’s door was open and there was no one inside.

“There must be a lot of service people coming here from the surrounding small towns and villages every day.” Zhao Yunlan said, “Xiao Guo, get off and go drive the other car to the town to find t

he local police station. Ask them if they had received any family reports about missing people in these recent days.”

Guo Changcheng paused in a daze. He keenly felt the strangeness of this town. Even just standing here, his legs were nonstop shaking. Zhao Yunlan had clearly asked him to leave, obviously wanting to protect him. At first this let Guo Changcheng let out a breath of relief, but then for some unknown reason he felt his heart go higher up in his throat.

“Let Zhu Hong go with you.” Zhao Yunlan said.

Zhu Hong wasn't like Xiao Guo, who could be beaten at will. She immediately protested: “I won't go! I'm not going anywhere!”

Zhao Yunlan pulled out a cigarette and held it in his mouth. He didn't spare her a glance: “What, you didn't officially resign yet and my words are already useless?”

Zhu Hong: “I...”

Zhao Yunlan was a man of his word. Allowing no explanation, he sat back onto the car and closed the door: “Lao Chu, come sit over here.”

Zhu Hong stood rigidly in place, glaring angrily at Zhao Yunlan. Before getting onto the car, Chu Shuzhi gently pushed her shoulder: “Hurry up and go, Chief Zhao's orders makes sense. Even if you're here you wouldn't be able to help much. Xiao Guo over there might not be able to communicate properly, go help him a little.”

Zhu Hong didn't even have time to reply before Zhao Yunlan, this bastard, had already stepped down on the accelerator and driven away.