Chapter 001 - Jiang Tian

Best Deskmate of the Batch

The chirping of cicadas that year was louder than any other, the tree branches outside the classroom grew as madly as they could; but no matter what, they could not block the scorching sun.

The inter-class breaks were always full of noise in the top floor of Mingli Block in Fuzhong. The study rep of Year 2 Class A drifted from the corridor into the classroom, hollering, “Reporting—our class is getting a new student!”

“The little eunuch from the Respectability room is here to mess with us again,” somebody mocked.

(t/n: Respectability room: It’s the imperial household department in the Ming Dynasty within the Forbidden City, it was where the eunuchs and palace maids were managed. Essentially, this referred to the teachers as ‘emperors’/ ‘empresses’ to be served, and the poor study rep as a d*ckless eunuch in retrospect)

“You’re the one who’s a little eunuch, I’m serious.”

“It’s not even midterm or end of term, what is even going to come in?”

“It’s a transfer student.”

With this said, the ones who were actually awake in the classroom became more alive. “Boy or girl? For sure?”

“Absolutely sure! I just saw him, he’s a guy, quite tidy looking and dashing.” The study rep mulled a little, and added, “Who knows which teacher decided to be a bastard and grabbed the school prince of another campus.”

(t/n: I used this term from ‘Daily life of being the campus idol’s fake boyfriend’, mostly because the original term directly translated into ‘school grass’ which isn’t very nice in English. The students also made a joke with this implying that Sheng Wang was literally grass that the teacher picked from another school. Overall, the term ‘school grass’, refers to the hottest guy in school.)

A chorus of jeering and squawking resounded within the classroom, a few girls stole a quick glance at the corner of the last row amidst the chaos. There was a guy resting his head on his table, catching up on his sleep; a hand covered the back of his head, his long digits slightly curved, and his wrist bone jutting out.

The surroundings were really too noisy, he ran his fingers through his short hair, and leaned his head towards a different direction.

The girls retracted their gaze, and their voices instantly became much softer. “Where did he transfer from?”

The study rep sounded out a name.

“What’s that? There’s a school like this nearby?”

“I’ve never heard of its name too, but it has to be a key province school, otherwise there’s no way he could transfer into our class.”

“Wait, let me check.” The boy speaking dug out his phone from the bottom of his table as if he was a thief. “There’s no teacher around right? Help me keep a lookout.”

He speedily searched on his phone, and after he was done he was dumbfounded. “Fuck?”

“What is it?”

The boy holding the phone displayed the results for a single round, and the remaining people also went dumb.

Only a long while later then did someone finally come back to their senses. “He’s not from this province? Someone not from this province

finished year one and transferred into Jiangsu? Did that handsome guy's head get stuck between the doors?"

(t/n: Jiangsu is notorious for having the hardest college entrance exams out of all the provinces, to the students, someone transferring in is the same as asking for death.)

Sheng Wang, whose head was allegedly stuck between the doors, was waiting for orders at the student affairs office.

The cicadas released its long cries in the heavy shade, he only managed to get a clear listen from the new voice messages sent from his dad after distancing from the windows and stuffing in his earpiece. Three messages in a row, each message a minute long, the usual style of Sheng Mingyang.

"Your Uncle Xiao-Chen just called me and told me you went upstairs by yourself. Why didn't you wait for him? New place new classmates, it's better for someone to guide you—"

"How's the atmosphere of the school, is there much of a difference from First High? Even though both are key schools of the province, but after all it's not just a province—"

“Have you seen Old Xu yet—”

The air condition in the student affairs office was a little old, and could only manage local air conditioning, suitable for the middle age and old. Sheng Wang stood at the front of the air outlet, the tip of his hair, slightly dampened by sweat, was blown to the point of being ice cold. His fingers tapped his screen, and cut the voice message off only after listening to the first few bits, rolling his eyes once every message. By the time he rolled his eyes for the third time he was already a little lost.

He of course already knew about Uncle Xiao-Chen, that was the driver who sent him to report in. The teaching zone did not allow for cars to enter, and the parking spot was also far apart, Sheng Wang felt that the extra effort was a waste of energy, and decided to might as well let him go back first.

Then…...

“Who’s Old Xu?”

“You cut off my voice message again?” Sheng Mingyang instantly replied.

Sheng Wang fanned himself with his own collars, and pretended that he lost connection.

Sheng Mingyang chased after him with a phone call, his tone grudging. “Old Xu is the head of the office, he isn’t very tall, and he looks quite proper, and maybe a little strict. Logically speaking he should be the one fetching you, seen him yet?”

Sheng Wang recalled according to his descriptions. “I don’t think so. The teacher who brought me upstairs was quite amiable, he kept smiling, it’s just that he looks like a big mouth monkey.”

(t/n: Big Mouth Monkey, the name for Paul Frank in chinese. Google it and see what it’s like. Personally I decided that big mouth monkey would make more sense as a nickname in English than paul frank.)

He’s also short, and his direct gaze only reached Sheng Wang’s shoulders, he had to lean upwards to talk to him. After he settled Sheng Wang here he headed downstairs, saying that he was getting someone to help him carry the new teaching material.

Sheng Mingyang's brain jammed a little. "Oh, kinda there, that's him."

Sheng Wang: "....."

After a thought, he said, "Dad, do you think that I look proper?"

Sheng Mingyang wanted to smack him.

As a businessman, his ability to speak human to humans and speak ghost to ghosts was trained to the point of perfection, only here when facing his son then it failed.

The sound of people came from outside the door, Sheng Wang turned around and glanced. "Monkey—no—Dean Xu is here, I'll hang up now."

Sheng Mingyang increased his talking speed. "Sure, do well, try to make a good first impression in front of your teachers on your first day, don't recklessly give them nicknames."

"Ok," Sheng Wang drawled in response.

"I'll get Xiao-Chen to fetch you at night, I should be able to reach home around that time, I'll show you—"

He hesitated a little, and acted as if he was relaxed and casual as he said, “Let’s invite your Auntie Jiang for a meal; it’s that thing your dad discussed with you about last time, alright?”

Sheng Wang pursed his lips.

Auntie Jiang’s name was Jiang Ou, and had a son. He never met Jiang Ou herself, he only saw two pictures, and even so he barely put any effort into it.

He had been hearing that name on-and-off for nearly a year now, the frequency went from once every two to three months to nearly every day; he really was getting used to it soon. It had to be said that Sheng Mingyang was a pro at controlling the mood, and fault could not be found with what he was doing. It was to the point that Sheng Wang could not even find a suitable entry point for him to throw a tantrum.

Last month, Sheng Mingyang said that he would be twice as busy for the second half of the year, and could barely stay a few days at home. He also said that Jiang Ou ran into some issues with her house and could no

longer stay there. Therefore, he wanted to let Jiang Ou move in, and thus she would have a place to stay, and would be able to help take care of Sheng Wang at the same time.

Honestly, taking care was a lie; there was already a lady hired for cleaning and cooking. The issue might not even be real, it was only for the sake of a breakthrough: by the time they really live together could she even still leave?

This issue appeared to be a discussion between them, but in reality before Sheng Wang actually agreed, new items began appearing in his house, everything was prepared to welcome that woman, oh, and that son of hers.

No matter if he showed up for dinner tonight, there was only one outcome.

Sheng Wang's reply did not come after a long while, Sheng Mingyang called out for him from the other side of the phone.

Dean Xu, who looked like a big mouth monkey, walked in just at that moment. Sheng Wang immediately hung up after a short pause.

It was a new student reporting in after all, the head of administration Dean Xu was able to maintain his basic benevolence. “You were calling your home? No worries, don’t need to hurry and hang up, informing your family is what you ought to do.”

Sheng Wang turned his head, his laugh youthful. “Thank you, teacher, I was nearly done anyways.”

Dean Xu pointed at the teacher behind him and nodded. He said it downstairs just now, that this new transfer student may have looks that spelled trouble for girls, but he seemed to be a good student, and would not overstep in his behaviour.

“Come, sit.” Dean Xu pointed at the stack of books newly brought over and said, “This is the teaching material we will theoretically be using this semester, you can take a look.”

What did he mean by theoretically?

Sheng Wang did not understand the meaning of this sentence at the moment. He opened the chemistry book on the top of the pile and flipped through two pages, its content roughly matched up to what he learned before; there was not much of a difference, it should not be a challenge when he has to learn it.

“I’ve read your information, you transferred quite a few times?” Dean Xu said.

Sheng Wang nodded. “Mm, transferred a few times.” He basically went wherever Sheng Mingyang went.

He did his elementary school in Jiangsu, he transferred two more times between middle school and first year of high school, this was the third time. Thanks to these transfers, he held no special regard for any particular place, he did not stay for long in anywhere at all.

“I’ve also seen your results, you are a brilliant student, basically never leaving the top three of the year in your exams. You definitely have the quality, it’s just that there might be a slight tiny difference for the progress

on the academic programme between the schools.” Dean Xu used his fingers to demonstrate a difference of less than 1cm, and consoled, “You will more or less run into problems like this when you transfer schools, with a bit of effort you can catch up, no need to be scared.”

Student Sheng Wang always had a smooth journey, and never actually did face any fear when it came to academics, there was no way he would be scared. But, he could not act as if he was not humble, so he could only let down the tail that was sticking up behind him. “I did some mental preparation before coming here, I’ll do my best to catch up.”

Dean Xu looked even more benevolent. “Have you been through subject streaming in your first year?”

Sheng Wang said, “No, my school tried a semester of fluid classes.”

(t/n: I am..not sure about the term 'fluid classes' actually. It's just a term I came up with. The one Sheng Wang went to allowed students to choose their subjects, and attended classes according to those subjects as compared to having a single class where everyone takes the same subjects in the same class. This school's version however is probably subject banding + a good dose of elitism.)

“Oh.” Dean Xu nodded. “Actually, we also have fluid classes, it’s just slightly more special.”

Sheng Wang was a little confused. “Special? How special?”

“The Class A you are about to enter is the best of year 2 sciences, we shift around every half a term. Isn’t there two major exams in the form of midterms and end of terms? Last three places would go to Class B after every major test, then the top three from then would enter. This is our streamed class.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Simply put, other people’s fluidity was freedom of choice for their subjects, over here for them their fluidity was to let people screw off.

Dean Xu was done with scaring little kids, and finally decided to be humane.

He led Sheng Wang towards Mingli Block through the flower corridors. Sheng Wang could not help to take a few more glances after passing by the wall of honour, as the wall full of expressionless “ID picture” really bore too much similarity to a wanted poster.

This school’s taste was truly something, he thought.

However, Dean Xu tiptoed a little, and preened like a peacock on the spot. He said rather proudly, “There really aren't a lot of Olympiads for year ones, but our performance is still quite decent. Most of the people on this wall will become your classmates, you may familiarise yourself with them in advance.”

Sheng Wang was bad with faces, and had no interest in getting to know his classmates in advance; he only remembered a single face.

First, it was because the repetition rate of his face was too high, and managed to single handedly turn the wall of honour into a match the puzzle game. Second, was because his surname was Jiang, his full name was Jiang Tian.

The important part was the second part.

Sheng Wang self admittedly would be an incapable ruler as an emperor; he enjoyed ‘guilt by association’. If he was petty then he was petty, in any case he held no pleasant feelings for anyone with the surname Jiang at all recently.

Dean Xu was admiring the wall for the thousandth time, and yet he suddenly pulled a long face. He closed up on that Jiang Tian's picture, reached out and wiped it for a bit, and angered, "Who doodled hearts on the wall of honour, how dare they disregard the rules!"

Sheng Wang grunted and added fuel to the fire at the side. "And it's not only one person."

The school photographer's methods were too unorthodox, still the person in the picture still kept a certain air to it; in Dean Xu's words he could spell trouble for girls everywhere. But, Sheng Wang felt that cold guys like him have a high chance of 'B-king'.

(t/n: Bking, or it should be read as B-king, is cn internet slang used to mock/tease people who seemed to appear 'cool' for every single action, and the light practically shining out of their asses.)

He prayed that he would be able to stay further away from this person, to avoid having to fight him the day when he could no longer stand him.

However not even five minutes since he made the wish, he was forcibly placed right next to the real life B-king himself. The reason was that he just started and it would be difficult for him, the best solution was to find his deskmate whenever he has questions.

Dean Xu said, “When you look at the entire batch, you probably can’t find a better deskmate than Jiang Tian.”

The moment his voice stopped, 40+ pairs of eyes all directed their suffocating gazes at him.

Sheng Wang dully gave Big Mouth Monkey a look, and internally said *screw you*.

*re-edited: 22/12/20

Chapter 002 - A Blow

This is Your Auntie Jiang's Son, Call Him Ge

"Teacher, someone's looking for you." A girl called out to Dean Xu, and pointed outside the window.

The hand pressing down on Sheng Wang was finally lifted, Dean Xu nodded at the person looking for him outside the window, saying, "The meeting, right? Coming."

He straightened up, pointed to the earpiece still dangling from Sheng Wang's ears and said, "Oh yes, today's reporting is an exception. Tomorrow onwards, things like mobile phones and PSP should not appear in the classroom anymore, if I catch you, hey—"

His pointer finger jabbed twice, and he rummaged through the table of the guy sitting in front at a speed faster than anyone could react.

"What the fuck!" The guy immediately sprung up, the speed at which he held on to his school bag was as if he had been electrocuted.

"You think just because you covered it up there's any use? This is already the second time, Gao Tianyang." Dean Xu raised his hand, and waved the newly confiscated phone, saying to Sheng Wang, "See this yet, this is a negative example. Also, where's the discipline rep?"

A girl sitting in the first row stuck her head out. “Here.”

“Using a handphone, deduct three points from civility. Swearing, deduct one point.”

“Okay.”

Dean Xu finished a major transaction, and walked away with his spoils in satisfaction.

Sheng Wang watched the seize in close distance, his expression a little lost. The guy named Gao Tianyang looked at him, his gaze gradually turning bitter. A few seconds later, Sheng Wang finally reacted and quietly removed his earpiece, and stuffed it into his bag along with his phone, so as to avoid further agitating people.

Gao Tianyang was still looking at him.

Sheng Wang thought for a bit, and politely consoled him. “Accept fate.”

“Fuck.” Gao Tianyang did not keep it up, he looked like he didn’t know if he should laugh or cry as he wiped his face, and said, “It’s fine, it’s not even the first time anymore. Anyway, they check for phones every once in a while, nobody here has ever escaped.”

“Oh.” Sheng Wang nodded, and then puzzled, “Then what were you looking at me for?”

Gao Tianyang: “I’m just curious.”

Sheng Wang: “?”

“We were just talking about it before you entered the classroom, I even Baidu’d your original school. Why have you lost your will to live at such a young age, and transfer into Jiangsu in year two of high school?”

Sheng Wang gave a hollow laugh. “Go ask my dad.”

Gao Tianyang rubbed his buzzcut, and wanted to gossip for a bit more, but was unfortunately stopped by the school bell. The students sitting sloppily and chattering idly all sat up straight; the people who slept for most of inter-class period all raised their heads, stretched their arms and necks, and dug out a stack of test papers from their tables.

When everyone returned to their seats and no longer clustered in groups, Sheng Wang suddenly stood out way more—because everyone in this class sat! In! Single! Seats! Only him had his table placed right next to someone else’s, a deskmate who slept like the dead.

Fucking……

Sheng Wang just fished out his new teaching material; he held on to his bag, unsure of whether to let it go or not. With extreme awkwardness, he could only twist his head and glared at Jiang Tian.

The deskmate highly suspected to be a B-king probably stayed up all night as a burglar or something, he did not even hear the bell ring. The arm propping him covered a good half of his face, only the lines from his lower jaw bones could be seen from the gap. A white round sleeve t-shirt revealed the curvature of his shoulders and back, rising and dipping lightly with his breathing.

Is he about to sleep till school ends, Sheng Wang said internally.

Gao Tianyang, the person sitting in front of them, suddenly turned behind as if he suddenly recalled something. He reached out and quickly nudged Jiang Tian, and whispered, “Hey, hey, wake up Tian-ge, it’s self study.”

He pointed at Jiang Tian and explained at Sheng Wang, “He told me to wake him up when it’s class, so he wouldn’t oversleep.”

After Gao Tianyang tried for two times, Jiang Tian finally woke up.

He grunted “Mn” in a low voice in response, the fingers covering the back of his head curled and uncurled a little, the short black hair stuck out from the gaps between his fingers. His thumb squeezed on the joint of his pointer finger, letting out a light sound of “crack”, then finally lifted his head. After he sat upright, he also rubbed his face.

One could see with the naked eye how hard it was to wake up.

“My god, what did you do last night that made you so drowsy?” Gao Tianyang could not help but ask.

“Some trivial thing.” Jiang Tian obviously did not want to speak anymore on that issue, other than sleepiness there was also displeasure between his brows. He fished out a bottle of mineral water from his table, the condensation covering the bottle further dissolving with his fingertips. He unscrewed the cap and took a sip; he finally glanced at Sheng Wang from his peripherals.

He frowned and turned his head. Perhaps it was because he just drank iced water, his voice and tone were both cold. “Who are you? Why are you here?”

Come listen to this nonsense.

Sheng Wang already considered him as guilty by association because of his Jiang surname, and after a provocation with this tone, he was made to have further no good impressions. His young master temperament came up, and pointed at the new teaching material on his table with his chin. “I’m new, whatchu gonna do about me sitting here?”

Two handsome guys attacking each other was quite the attractive sight, the classmates a few tables in front all turned behind and looked.

The moment Gao Tianyang realised that something was off with the mood, he was the first one to come rushing out to mediate. “No, you were catching up on your sleep so you didn’t know, the teacher made him sit here.”

“Which teacher?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Who else could it be, it’s Big Mouth.” Gao Tianyang said, “Didn’t you know that he always liked to blindly assign seats? Last time a sentence from him sent my seat to right next to the teacher’s desk, and then he himself forgot the next day, and asked me why didn’t I sit in the perfectly fine rows, and insist on squeezing with the teachers. I really was dogfucked then.”

Sheng Wang was still coldly standing off against Jiang Tian, the moment he heard Gao Tianyang’s words he turned and stared at him, his face clearly displaying a line of reprimand in capital letters: Why didn’t you say this when Big Mouth Monkey was around?

A ‘huang-lang-lang’ dragging sound suddenly rang beside Sheng Wang, he followed the sound, only to see Jiang Tian already standing up,

carrying his chair, and pulling his single table behind, a distance away from him.

“What are you doing?” Gao Tianyang asked, bewildered.

“Changing seats.” Jiang Tian did not even take a look, he tilted his head towards Sheng Wang’s direction, and said, “He’s shorter, he’ll sit here, I’ll sit behind.”

Sheng Wang: “Who’s short?”

Jiang Tian already sat down on his new seat, he pulled out a thick stack of test papers from the bottom of the table and tossed it on top, then he leaned backwards on his chair, lifting his gaze to look at Sheng Wang. “If not, you’re taller?”

“.....”

At this point, there was no saving Sheng Wang’s bad impression towards this person at all.

He shifted the single table in front of him towards the left a little, aligning itself with the entire row, and also stuffed his bag into the bottom of the table. He just sat down when Gao Tianyang used his pen to tap his desk, turning his head and chatted with a low voice. “Hey, bro.”

“Hm?” Young master Sheng’s displeasure was focused on the perpetrator when he was displeased, he would not misdirect it at uninvolved

people.

Gao Tianyang covered his mouth with his hand, and used an even lower voice, “Don’t take it personally, he usually isn’t like this. Something probably happened to him these two days, his mood isn’t very good.”

Sheng Wang said “Oh” out of politeness, but internally he was thinking that that was none of his goddamn business.

As compared to the ice cold pestilence behind him, he was more concerned about the other people in class.

The reason being that as far as the eye could see, he was the only one with teaching material on the table out of the entire class, other people’s tables were filled with stacks and stacks of test papers. Furthermore, the school bell had rung for so long, and there was not a single teacher in sight.

What’s wrong with this school?

His gaze swept around once, and before he could even ask, Gao Tianyang the heartwarming jacket spoke spontaneously. “Today’s Saturday, and it’s supplementary time, so it’s self study all day long. You...didn’t bring any test papers?”

Sheng Wang was done as he reminded him. “I literally just came.”

“Oh, then what are you revising with?” Gao Tianyang jabbed the brand new teaching material, saying, “Textbooks?”

“Revision?” Sheng Wang repeated, “You said revision?”

“Yeah.”

Sheng Wang suddenly had an ominous feeling, he asked dully, “Why do I need to revise?”

Gao Tianyang said, “Because we are having a test tomorrow.”

Sheng Wang: “???”

“What are we doing tomorrow?”

“Test.”

Sheng Wang used a gaze that said *what is this sleeptalk* and looked at him. “Test what? Content from year one?”

“That’s last semester’s final exam, what year one topic would they even test us with.” Gao Tianyang pointed at the teaching material Sheng Wang just received today and said, “They’ll test these.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Say that again?

Maybe the way he froze up was a little dorky, Gao Tianyang laughed like crazy.

Sheng Wang pointed at the teaching material, and used a completely monotone voice. “Dean Xu told me that this is your new teaching material for this semester.”

“Theoretically it is.” Gao Tianyang said, “But we are already done with it. Today’s August 8th, right? We started summer break from July 10th, just ten days, and then we came back for class. We just finished two days ago.”

“What subject?”

“In any case we are already done with math and physics and chem, language is slightly slower, and English never followed the textbook in the first place.”

Sheng Wang felt as if he was suffocating. “So I will need to take a test for five subjects that I have never learned before?”

“Yes.”

“Can I take medical leave?”

“Probably not.” Gao Tianyang purposely acted as someone who had been through too much and said, “Friend, you have a long struggle ahead, and you are on your own. When you graduate, all you need to do is to find someone to beat Big Mouth Xu up.”

This was overly thrilling, to the extent that till the end of the day, student Sheng Wang was in a state of mental drunkenness; in short, he was completely gone.

It was only when the chauffeur, Uncle Xiao-Chen, called his phone, then he realised that self study was over. Most of the people in the classroom already left. Gao Tianyang seemingly spoke to him right before he left, the unpleasant presence behind him also disappeared.

He received his dad Sheng Mingyang's call when he was half way home. His dad was truly his flesh and blood dad, a "Mn" was all it took for him to realise that something was wrong.

"Are you okay? Did something happen to you?" Sheng Mingyang asked.

Sheng Wang leaned his head against the car window, lazily sprawling on the car seats behind, and said numbly, "I'll like to bother you with a request."

"Say it?"

"I want to quit school."

"....."

Sheng Mingyang blanked out for a moment, he couldn't help but laughed. "Aiyoh, is this still my son?"

Sheng Wang had the personality of a peacock spreading its tail open ever since he was a kid; it was only when he was acting unreasonable and shameless then he would say "I can't do it", when he got older he never heard that ever again. A sudden reappearance of this tone made Sheng Mingyang a little rueful, even his tone became much gentler. "Come tell your papa, what got you like this?"

Sheng Wang let out a "ha", and was just about to pour out all his complaints, until he heard an indistinct and muffled voice from Sheng Mingyang's side. It was the low voice of a woman. Sheng Mingyang's voice also muffled; he probably replied to her while covering the phone.

Sheng Wang stopped, and suddenly his interest waned.

"Nothing much, I was just saying, I'll hang up now." The corner of his mouth tugged as he spoke, his tone still sounding light and carefree.

"Oh, then where are you now?" Sheng Mingyang asked.

Sheng Wang turned to look outside the window. The car just went past Green Sun main street, and he could vaguely see a side road the car

could turn into in the near distance, a few more moments of driving and they would reach White Horse Alley. A few carts selling snacks stopped at the alley entrance, steaming god knows what, a thin smoke spreaded out at the walls of the alley entrance.

White Horse Alley was where his ancestral home was located, he only stayed there until he was five before he moved away. Before he was eight, he would occasionally make some return with his mom, after he turned eight, his mom passed away, and he never came back.

The change here was actually quite massive, he also did not have a deep impression of his childhood.

But as he watched that cloud of smoke, he surprisingly felt a trace of longing.

When Xiao-Chen drove the car into the courtyard, Sheng Mingyang was already standing there and waiting.

The sky was ashen blue with a tinge of darkness, some houses already turned on their lights. Sheng Wang left the car with his head lowered, then he heard his dad gently call his pet name. “Wang-zai, this is your Auntie Jiang, this is Auntie Jiang’s son, Jiang Tian. He’s slightly older than you, call him Ge.”

Jiang who???

Sheng Wang blanked out, and abruptly looked up.

(I figured that we're already at the bottom of the page so there's no need to insert the note up there ahaha)

Translator's notes:

1. Wang-zai: □□ in chinese, which is a play on Sheng Wang's/□□'s name and popular brand/logo, □□. It's the picture of the cartoon boy on the home page, and can be found on products like Hot Kid Milk. □ is a suffix added on to a name, roughly meaning 'kid'. Both are pronounced in the exact same way, 'wang-zai'.
2. Ge: □ in cn, meaning 'older brother'. HOWEVER people can also call unrelated people □ for respect or as terms of familiarity. Throughout the tl, I will be keeping most iterations of □ as 'ge' rather than translating to older brother all the time, as the novel will be touching on the ambiguity of this term.

*re-edited: 22/12/20

Chapter 003 - Tests

For How Long Do You Intend to Keep My Paper From Me?

The sparsely lit lamps carved out light and shadow in the courtyard, Jiang Tian stood in that patch of shadow. He had a tall stature, and the unique nimble figure of youth, yet he was not overly lanky. He carried his school bag on one shoulder, his thumb hooked onto the black colour strap, and kept his head looking in a different direction.

It was only when Sheng Mingyang dragged his son over then he finally turned to face them, and immediately the expression of having eaten spoilt food appeared.

After seeing the extent of the other person’s unhappiness, Sheng Wang felt a little more invigorated.

“It’s my fault, I really did not do my part as an elder well. I only just found out that Xiao-Tian(1) is also a year two studying at Fuzhong(2), the two of you are in the same class!” Sheng Mingyang had his arm over his son’s shoulders, and attempted to move Sheng Wang, who was still rooted to the ground, a step forward: “So therefore, did the two of you already meet in the day?”

Apparently interacting with his own son was not enough, he even looked up at Jiang Tian, as if Jiang Tian would give him the time of day.

Jiang Tian obviously did not respond to him.

It only took a moment's effort for Jiang Tian to already revert his expression back to a cold one, he looked at Sheng Wang like he was looking at a stranger.

"Xiao-Tian." Someone softly called.

After hearing a woman's gentle voice, Sheng Wang then remembered that other than Jiang Tian, there was actually a more important person on the scene——

Jiang Ou stood right next to her son, and was simply dressed. Her style was completely different from what he thought it would be. She was considered to be more willowy among women, yet she was still a good chunk shorter than Jiang Tian. Not only did this juxtaposition make her seem completely harmless, she even gave off a sense of delicate cordiality.

She tugged at her son's elbow, and quietly said: "Xiao-Tian? Uncle Sheng was asking you something, you are classmates with Xiao-Wang(3), and already met him, right?"

Jiang Tian turned his head, the space between his brows quickly wrinkled, the expression in that instance was full of his instinctive impatience and resistance. And yet, in the end he was not able to withstand the gaze of his own mom, a moment of rigidity later he turned his head back, and tossed out a neutral line: "Was asleep for the entire day, didn't notice."

Sheng Wang said internally, bullshit, you liar.

If the conversation kept going on, it would only become more awkward. Sheng Mingyang intervened and mediated at the nick of time.

He gave a laugh: “It’s the first day of being classmates, it’s only too normal to not remember so many faces. You will slowly become close after you get to be along with each other for a while, we have plenty of time ahead.”

Jiang Tian looked at him expressionlessly, the thumb on his bag strap slipped, and pulled his bag upwards. His attitude seemed as if he was going to leave and walk away the very next second.

Just as expected, he opened his mouth and spoke in a low voice: “I’ll go——”

“Go accompany your mom for a meal, wouldn’t you?” Jiang Ou’s gentle voice held a tinge of cautiousness, sounding very much almost like a plea.

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Sheng Wang thought he almost saw the soul within this person’s flesh suit violently struggle for a bit, and then sullenly lay back down.

He was rejoicing very much in watching other people’s misery, but he soon was unable to rejoice, as after Jiang Ou dealt with her son, she turned and smiled at him.

It was the first time Sheng Wang got a proper look at this woman’s front view, in the instance she smiled, he suddenly discovered that her looks half resembled his mom’s.

Maybe the lighting blurred her features, maybe both their cheeks had a light dimple.

Or maybe it had been too long, no matter how hard he tried to strengthen it, the colours of the person in his memories faded irreversibly, and was no longer that clear anymore, even to the point that it was gradually blending in with a certain stranger……

“Xiao-Wang?” Jiang Ou asked him uncertainly.

Sheng Wang snapped out of it, he suddenly was no longer in the mood to even give a half hearted excuse, he muttered: “I have gastric, dad, I’m going upstairs first.”

“Hey don’t run away, what about dinner?” Sheng Mingyang did not manage to grab him even though he wanted to, “Didn’t we go through this, are you not going to reward a little face(4) for your dad?”

Sheng Wang doved indoors with his bag in his hands, and said without looking back: “Your son has tests tomorrow, with not a single subject out of five learned yet, the hell with time for dinner.”

The hired lady presented him his slippers, and he shuffled upstairs. When he reached the corner, he could not help but take a single glance outside the window. They were still in the courtyard downstairs, Sheng Mingyang was saying something to Jiang Ou.

It could not be anything but to explain how his son had a young master temper, take it lightly and it would be over, do not take it personally.

Jiang Tian was still trapped in his mother’s grip, and could not leave. He stood in the darkness apathetically, his spare hand holding his phone, his head lowered as he scrolled.

He was barely on his phone before it was as if he detected something, and looked upwards unexpectedly, towards him.

Sheng Wang was startled, and quickly left.

He placed a sign that said “Do not knock” on his door handle, locked his room from the inside, stuffed in his earpieces and turned the volume higher, high to the point that he would not be able to even hear thunder, then he sat down.

The new teaching material was laid out in a row across the table, he curled up in his chair, and spun his pen around.

The screen on the phone he left at the side lit up for a bit, and lit up yet again. He accumulated a few before he finally reached out to unlock his phone,

The one sending him messages on WeChat was his deskmate from his previous school, he was not super good at studying, but he was upright and loyal, and had natural heroic energy. Sheng Wang often felt that he was not there for school, but was there to ascend Mount Liang.(5) As long as the person was alive, people from all the way in year one to year three were acquaintances with him.

StarAniseCrab:

The sciences exam papers from year 2’s end of semester? What do you want this for? Big boss don’t tell me…...you are already preparing for classes the moment summer vacation started?

StarAniseCrab:

Wait that doesn’t seem right, why would you even want exam papers for revision?

StarAniseCrab:

Big boss?(6) Reply to me.

StarAniseCrab:

Sheng-ge?

StarAniseCrab:

Class monitor! Fine, you won’t even look at the messages if I don’t send over the exam pics.

Sheng Wang spun his pen around and jabbed at the screen with one hand——

Canned:(7)

I just saw that.

StarAniseCrab:

Pretend, go on and keep pretending. You’re just lazy, and think that it’s too much effort to even send another message, every time you would

wait for the messages to accumulate before you would even reply altogether.

StarAniseCrab:

See, you are doing it again.

StarAniseCrab:

Fine, you’re handsome, you can get away with anything. I already acquired the exam questions for you, one copy each for math physics and chemistry, right? Why don’t you want the papers for languages? Why are you practising subjects discrimination.

Canned:

You’re the discriminatory one here, I won’t have time for this many tonight, got to learn to give and take.

StarAniseCrab:

What the heck? One night? What are you(8) doing? And also aren’t you so usually so lazy to the point that you refuse to send messages if you could just send voice messages, what’s up with you today? You actually manually typed two messages.

Sheng Wang’s finger hovered above the screen as he ‘tsked’, finally gave up on typing, and sent a voice message over: “This is because I just arrived at this tragedy of a school today, they have a weekly test tomorrow,

testing them on everything taught in the first semester of year two. If I don’t embrace Buddha’s leg at the last minute(9) I would get zeroes across all five subjects. No time for language and English, it’s all on fate now, the three subjects math, physics and chem are still worthy of a deathbed struggle.”

StarAniseCrab replied him with eight black man question mark stickers (10), and then sent the three papers over without any further questions, even attaching a single voice message with it.

“No, I don’t think I understand yet. Even if you do one paper for one subject you would still barely score? There’s no way people would test the exact same questions on these papers.”

Sheng Wang: “Who said I’m doing the papers”

StarAniseCrab: “Then what are you doing with it?”

Sheng Wang: “I’ll highlight the key points according to their score weightage in the tests. There may be a wide range of diversity of questions asked in tests across provinces, but the main difficult points are still somewhat similar. I’ll take a look at which component scores the most, gather them together and huddle them tonight, the cost-performance ratio is better that way.”

StarAniseCrab: “This works too?”

Sheng Wang: “I already said, this is a deathbed struggle.”

StarAniseCrab: “What about the rest then?”

Sheng Wang: “It’s all up to fate.”

After replying with that line, the little young master suddenly felt a wave of heartache. He had mixed around in the Jianghu(11) for sixteen and a half years, and yet the day where he had to rely on fate for exams arrived.

He thought for a bit, and asked Crab: “What is that answer-guessing mnemonic chant again?”

StarAniseCrab: “Ay, you wait for a bit, I got it noted down on the first page of my notebook, I’ll send a pic to you. My god, I can’t believe I get to see the day you use the answer-guessing mnemonic chant, what a call for universal celebration.”

Twelve plus, midnight, Sheng Wang settled chemistry and physics, his eyes dry and aching. However, his stomach was the one that ached even worse——he was on the verge of starving to death.

He went two rounds around his room, searched through three snack hoarding spots, and was unable to find any spare food at all. He had no other choice but to open his door.

As expected, there was a post-it stuck to his door, with 「There’s washed red grapes in the fridge, and matsutake with shredded chicken porridge left heated in the kitchen. Don’t eat the rest at night, it’s bad for your stomach.」written on it.

This was left behind by the hired lady, Sheng Mingyang was often not home, without a parent making sure, Sheng Wang’s three meals were irregular. Every time the lady did not receive a response from knocking, she would leave some food suitable for eating in the middle of the night, thus providing him some ease whenever he would go down to hunt for food. Eventually, it became an unspoken convention between them.

With Sheng Mingyang’s schedule, he was definitely asleep by this time.

Sheng Wang did not even bother with his slippers, he wore his socks and silently went downstairs. Just as he opened the fridge, stuck his head inside and searched for food, he heard Sheng Mingyang’s low speaking voice from the balcony beyond the glass.

He stopped for a moment, carried his red grapes and sneaked over. Sheng Mingyang was talking to someone, a hand on his phone, the other pinching the space between his brows, looking like he was extremely sleepy too. Still his tone was tender.

Sheng Mingyang told the person at the other end of the phone: “I’ve asked about the school dorms, he could only apply for it when school starts. Xiao-Tian can’t move over yet for the time being even if he wants to.”

“Yes, moving in here first is better.”

“Actually, I would be happier if you stay here for the long term, the morning after tomorrow I’ll bring Xiao-Chen over to help you move. You can tell Xiao-Tian that the courtyard is symmetrical, both sides have their own bedrooms, living rooms and bathrooms, he could pretend that the two of us are splitting rent, and we just happen to share the kitchen.”

The mouthful of grapes got stuck in Sheng Wang’s throat, his ear tips even reddened from choking.

He predicted that the two of them would soon officially move in after this meal, but he did not think that it would be this fast, so fast that he got three nightmares in a row that night.

He dreamed of getting chased by blank exam scripts, getting chased by dogs, and getting chased by Jiang Tian.(12)

The weekly tests in Fuzhong were organised in a relatively screwed up manner, five subjects in one day, from seven in the morning, all the way to nine at night. The first subject tested was mathematics, possibly out of the desire to help them get their heads clear first thing in the morning.

The invigilator counted the papers in front, and separated it into a few copies according to groups (13), getting the students sitting in front to pass it behind. Gao Tianyang who sat in front withdrew one copy, passed on the remaining to him, and conveniently asked: “So what do you plan to do?”

Sheng Wang gave a bitter laugh: “I’m done for, if nothing works choose C for all, at least better than no marks at all.”

“You——” Gao Tianyang gave him a look, wanting to say more, but he hesitated, and silently shut up and sat properly under the invigilator’s stare.

I what?

Sheng Wang perplexed for a moment, but in the very next second, he knew why Gao Tianyang had that look on his face. It was because as he quickly scanned through the paper he discovered……

There was no! Multiple choice questions! In mathematics!

Just as he numbly meditated in silence, he suddenly received two jabs on his shoulder, Jiang Tian’s low, throaty voice came from behind: “You can also try filling in C for all fourteen fill-in-the-blanks questions.”

“.....”

Are you nuts?

Sheng Wang twisted his head and stared him down: “If I want to fill it in that way, then I’ll fill it in that way, it’s none of your business? You had to poke me to say it?”

Jiang Tian looked at him, and unfolded his palm wide open: “I poked you because I wanted to ask, for how long do you intend to keep my paper from me?”

Sheng Wang’s mind went blank for a moment: “.....Oh, I forgot.”

Footnotes:

1. Jiang Tian’s name ‘Tian’ but with a ‘xiao’ at the front, as an affectionate way to call someone younger than you

2. Name for affliated school, kept the hypy to make it more pronounced as a noun

3. Same case as Xiao-Tian, it’s Sheng Wang’s name turned into an affectionate nickname.

4. Ah, the ‘face’ of chinese culture. In other words, he was asking his son to give him a little respect by turning up for the dinner.

5. Mount Liang, a place said to be where heroes of the classic novel, Water Margin, began their journeys, or more broadly, a place where heroes went to.

6. Original word: □□, something that translates to tycoon/top shot/leader etc etc. Overall though, the meaning of this word has been used to describe someone who’s very powerful + good at what they are doing, therefore I’m using the term ‘big boss’ to kinda convey that he’s super respected

by SAC for his abilities, but also boss also came from the idea of ‘boss level monsters’

7. Sheng Wang’s WeChat name was a reference to his nickname, wang-zai, being that hot milk kid drink, a canned drink

8. He uses the respectful ‘you’ here

9. Chinese proverb for seeking help at the last minute, has desperate energy to it

10. Confused Nick Young, the meme. It’s surprisingly well known in China.

11. Milieu in which wuxia plays out, Sheng Wang was dramatising his experience as a student to one of a Xia, a rogue, in ancient historical drama

12. Possibly a pun/foreshadow on how he would get ‘chased’/wooed by Jiang Tian lol

13. The groups here refer to columns by single row seats

Chapter 004 - A Small Target

Let’s Set You a Small Target

This had to be the longest ever exam in history.

There was still 30 minutes before it was over, after twirling his pen around his pointer finger for two rounds, Sheng Wang settled it on the table. This was just a minor movement, and somehow he still attracted many looks——curious ones, nosey ones, sympathetic ones, and even just casual glances.

At the age of being teens, rumours always spread quickly, there were no secrets between young people, every little thing could become common knowledge.

With one night, it was common knowledge that the hot transfer student in the top class, Class A, was in deep trouble for his five subjects, his scores probably trailed towards single digits, it was the tragedy of the century! Even the invigilator, a teacher from another class, could not help but look at him more than normal.

The bell rang right at the last second, the invigilator clapped: “Alright time’s up, put down your pens. Ay, the boy sitting near the window in the first column, quit writing. It’s all Class A students here, is this ten to twenty seconds really that important to you? Spare the students in the other classes, please.”

Muffled laughter came from the people, that student released his pen, his face flushing red, and rubbed at the sweat coming out of his palms.

“What are you so nervous for, isn’t it just the last question. The newbie is even calmer than you are.” The student behind him gave him a kick in his butt, and made a casual joke along the way. Everyone looked at Sheng Wang again.

Teasing like this could not be said to be good natured, but neither was it bad natured. This was only because he was a stranger, his words subconsciously alienated the newbie from the main group when his words were analysed. It was the inevitable beginning that came with every school transferral, Sheng Wang was used to it, and even played along with a laugh: “That’s right.”

Nobody expected that reply, and went dumbfounded.

“Don’t be loquacious, last student in every group, collect the papers from the back to the front.” After the invigilator finished, a chorus of chairs moving could be heard.

Jiang Tian held on to his script and stood up, two finger tips knocked with a ‘du’ on Sheng Wang’s table, indicating him to hand in his script.

Sheng Wang shot him a look, just as he was about to stuff his script at him, Gao Tianyang turned behind in the chaos and asked: “Are you okay?”

“Kinda.” Sheng Wang said.

“Wow you can still smile.” Gao Tianyang gave him a thumbs up: “Your mental fortitude is good, if I end up in a situation like yours, I would

probably just shut down."

Going off topic was nothing, at least the pen was constantly moving. Having to suffer through two hours despite knowing nothing at all, that was the real torture.

Quite a few students tried to peek, wanting to see exactly how blank Sheng Wang's paper was. A sense of curiosity was normal, and Gao Tianyang was no exception.

However, no one succeeded, as there was an impatient true · stone-faced top student standing in the way.

Before they could catch anything, Jiang Tian already whisked the paper away. As Sheng Wang was about to speak, his hand suddenly emptied. By the time he raised his head and looked over, Jiang Tian was already knocking on Gao Tianyang's desk.

"Take it take it take it." Gao Tianyang withered, and handed in his paper gloomily.

He finally endured through one subject.

Sheng Wang extended his arms and stretched his body. He then stood up with his cup.

"What are you doing, student?" The invigilator looked at him in confusion.

Sheng Wang was even more confused than him: "I'm getting some water from the back?"

After he spoke he scanned around the classroom. He suddenly realised that everyone stayed put in their seats, he was the only one prepared to take a break.

The invigilator placed the collected scripts at the left of the teacher's desk, and next, he took the leather packet on the right and said: "We're not done yet, there's still another paper, did you forget?"

……

Huh?????

Sheng Wang collapsed back into his seat, the invigilator started giving out the new paper after he opened the packet.

Gao Tianyang leaned backwards, his back touching his table, and said: "Oh right, was it that you didn't know? We have two papers for math, the main paper comes first, and is collected after two hours. Next, we have an additional question, which takes another half an hour. Of course, the main paper will be given five minutes before the formal exam."

He did not get any reply when he was done talking, a look behind, and he saw Student Sheng slouching in his chair, his head turned up, his expression already vexed.

"Let me ask just this, how many marks are your maths worth?" Sheng Wang's tone already showed that he no longer had any vested interest in living.

"For the science students, 200 marks, the total for gaokao (1) is only 480 marks, go ahead and process this weightage with your soul."

"....."

After he looked up for a few seconds, someone pressed a finger against the top of his head.

Jiang Tian's voice appeared again: "Get up from the edge of my desk. Take the paper."

It felt bizzare to have the top of his head touched by someone. The hairs stood up at Sheng Wang's neck, he shot upright as if he was a corpse that suddenly sprung up (2). He took his own paper, and tossed the last copy behind him.

With the weirdo in the form of mathematics that laid the foundation for him, the tests ahead of him were no longer a big deal anymore. In the blink of an eye, it was already nine at night.

"Jiang Tian, Teacher Wu wants you to go to the office." After the scripts were collected, a girl sitting next to the window passed the message.

Sheng Wang turned around and looked, and witnessed the pestilence, wanting to leave right there and then initially, furrow his brows after he heard the message: "Now?"

"Yeah. He came over the moment the bell rang and said that." The girl pointed at the corner of the window, "He wants you to go the moment you finished the tests."

Jiang Tian looked like he was rushing for time, he did not look particularly pleased, and yet he dumped his bag and went.

The school had coaches at night, and sent day-students(3) back to all over the city, all they needed was to tap their student cards. The pickup time was adjusted according to school ending times for year ones and to threes, on days like this with exams, the bus was similarly adjusted to pick them up

at 9.20pm, the students would be left with plenty of time by the time they were done with handing their scripts, packing their bags, and walking to the carpark.

“I’ll be leaving with the school bus, how about you?” Gao Tianyang asked.

Sheng Wang was refilling his cup at the back of the class: “I’m waiting for someone.”

“Sure, I’ll see ya tomorrow then.” He used an ‘er’ sound(4) that he learned from god knows where, and left with his bag. In the end, he was barely gone before he came right back, and said: “Bro, go make a trip to the office in front, Old He is looking for you, I ran into them the moment I left.”

“Which Old He?” Sheng Wang took a sip of water, and asked.

“The homeroom teacher, if not which Old He.” Gao Tianyang said: “Oh right, you haven’t actually got the chance to meet him ever since you arrived. He had something going on and wasn’t in school yesterday, and today he was sent to another class to invigilate, figures that he was finally free now.”(5)

Gao Tianyang left the moment he passed the message. Sheng Wang put down his cup, sent a voice message to Uncle Xiao-Chen who came to fetch him, and finally made his way to the office.

There was a giant office for the year twos, all the main teaching staff were in there, as a teacher usually did not teach only only class, with the exception of Class A. Big Mouth Xu already showed him the way, the main

subject teachers for Class A did not take on any other classes, therefore they had their own five-person office to themselves.

Sheng Wang walked straight ahead, following the corridor.

Mingli Block was the territory of the year twos in Fuzhong, with four floors in total, and a few classes on every floor, other than the top floor. The top floor only had Class A, the staff office for Class A, a toilet, and two suspicious looking rooms.(6)

There was no signage in front of the suspicious room, and it had been locked for the past two days. Sheng Wang could not tell what its purpose was.

He discovered that there was someone in the corridor as he nearly reached the office. The lamps were not switched on in the two suspicious looking rooms, a swarth of darkness covered the entrance, and two people stood there, talking to each other while their backs faced the corridor railing.

A look was enough to tell him that the one whose back was facing him had to be Jiang Tian, the other one had to logically be Teacher Wu.

Sheng Wang did not have the habit of intruding in other people's private business, but after all he was rather near, he could not help but to catch some words.

"Sure, that's what we'll be doing for the exams, I'll give Dean Xu a call tomorrow." This was Teacher Wu speaking.

"En." Jiang Tian's reply was very simple.

"Then your dad——"

Jiang Tian cut Teacher Wu off just as he opened his mouth: “My matter has nothing to do with him.”

As he said that, his voice abruptly turned frosty, emanating an indescribable sense of how completely fed up he sounded. Even Sheng Wang, who had beef with him, did not hear such a bad tone from him.

Teacher Wu did not speak anymore, and patted his shoulder.

“Is there anything else teacher?” Jiang Tian was very straight forward with his question.

“No more, just these.”

“I’ll go first then.”

He was about to turn around and go after he finished saying what he said stiffly, when he made eye contact with Sheng Wang. In that moment, Sheng Wang felt a rare and subtle trace of guilt.

One only needs to think for a second to realise that a conversation like this was not meant to be eavesdropped on.

Sheng Wang said almost immediately: “He the Elderly got me to come to the office.”(7)

Jiang Tian’s pitch-black pupils stared at Sheng Wang, not showing any signs of whether he bought into his words or not. He stood there for a few seconds, before expressionlessly lifting his legs. When he passed by Sheng Wang, he suddenly lowered his head, placed a hand on Sheng Wang’s shoulders and said indifferently: “Teacher He is barely thirty this year, not at the point of being called He the Elderly yet.”

He left without looking back after he spoke.

Sheng Wang stopped on the spot for a moment, and by the time he turned back to look there was already nobody at all in the corridor. He “tsked” internally, lifted his foot and stepped into the office. The homeroom teacher’s seat was the first one, there was a name place card on the table, the words “He Jin” written on it.

Just as Jiang Tian said, the homeroom teacher looked like someone who’s barely thirty, a goose egg shaped face was adorned with a pair of spectacles, the skin was very pale, and had curly hair that draped across the shoulders. Just a little effort into dressing up and looking good would be no hard matter at all. The only flaw was the thinness that added a little sickliness. (8)

That’s right, Teacher He was a female teacher, in charge of teaching Class A physics.

Sheng Wang recalled the mistake he made earlier on with ‘He the Elderly”, and touched his nose with his pointer finger. This was all that idiot Gao Tianyang’s fault, he seriously called a homeroom teacher like this “Old He”,(9) what was he even thinking.

“You’re here?” He Jin’s eyes crescented behind her glasses, gentle and cordial.

Sheng Wang also smiled back at her: “Is there something the teacher needs me for?”

“Not much really, it’s just that I wasn’t in school to welcome the new student yesterday, I feel a little bad about that.” She said to Sheng Wang: “And there is also the matter of your progress on academic content.”

She used her chin to point behind her, and said: “We’ve already heard from Old Xu, you are a book behind for every subject, it’s my fault for not being in school yesterday, if not I could have helped to file an appeal, you wouldn’t have needed to force yourself for today’s weekly test.”

Sheng Wang was all smiles on the outside but internally he spat out blood, saying to himself why didn’t you say so earlier!

He Jin was able to detect the emotional turmoil behind his smile. She was amused, and continued: “It was a little hard for you to endure through the 10+ hours today, wasn’t it?”

Sheng Wang humbly said: “It wasn’t just a little.”

The other teachers were also amused, including Teacher Wu who was speaking to Jiang Tian earlier on: “It’s okay, we know about your situation, we won’t be treating your results for real this time round, five marks ten marks are both normal, don’t feel stressed out.”

“Hold on, I don’t care about the rest, but it would be too much if he got five to ten marks for language wouldn’t it?”

“It’s a bit much for English too.”

The teachers joked around clamorously, the atmosphere in the office lightened up for quite a bit. He Jin took a look at Sheng Wang, as if she was observing if he was nervous, and in the end she concluded that this student was truly unshakable.

She thus decided that she would not bother beating around the bush anymore, and headed straight to the point: “We won’t treat your results seriously this time, but the large gap in progress is an actual problem, and not a small one either. Class A’s syllabus is done very quickly, we have to

finish all the content for high school within the first half of the semester, and cannot stop to wait for you. Therefore…...you will likely have to think of a solution on your own, and catch up on what you have missed while following the rest of the class in learning new content."

This was all within Sheng Wang's expectations, he nodded.

He Jin continued: "Make good use of your spare time, you will definitely run into difficulty, but just grind your teeth and it will pass. During summer break, you have much more free time, our nightly self study only lasts until 8pm, and the night before exams we would not even have night self study, we would give you a holiday."

It was the first time Sheng Wang heard that break being called a holiday, and let out a hollow laugh.

The other few teachers laughed along again. He Jin waved her hand and said: "Don't sound so hollow. Okay let's continue with proper matters. This time round we won't take your results seriously, but next week will be yet another weekly test, can I see some progress from you?"

"Of course you can."

He Jin made eye contact with the other teachers, and said: "We roughly estimated how much you can catch up within a week, let's set you a small target."

Sheng Wang was straightforward with his answer: "Sure, how much?"

“The total marks for physics and chemistry, these two subjects, is 120, we hope that you can hit above 50 after a week. Setting aside the annex question, the total for maths is 160, you should try to get 70. We won’t set anything for language and English, we’ll see how it goes.”

As He Jin kept talking, she noticed that the expression on this new student’s face was a little odd, and asked: “Are you okay, is this a little too hard?”

“No.”

“Then what is it?”

Sheng Wang let out a “hm”, and said: “Nothing, let’s keep the target like this for now.”

The teachers were bewildered for an entire day, in the end during night self study on the next day when the weekly tests were marked, the new student who just got the teaching material the day before got the following scores:

Chemistry and physics scored a 62 and 68 respectively, an 83 for maths, and his language and English were both a good chunk better than Class A’s average. (10)

Translator's notes:

-LONG CHUNKY EXPLANATION OF JIANGSU GAOKAO-

Sigh. Okay, so Jiangsu is known for its notoriously difficult gaokao. Different from the majority of the provinces, Jiang su's total score is 480. The total score is calculated via '3 + academic level test + overall quality'. The '3' refers to 'English, math, and foreign language', 160 marks for language (+40 marks of extra questions as a humanities student), 160 for maths (+ 40 marks of extra questions as a sciences student). The 'academic level tests' consists of the following 7 subjects: physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, IT. Anyways the gist is that humanities students have to take history + something else, sciences students have to take physics + pick one from biology and chemistry. Sheng Wang's class takes physics and chemistry. The number of marks for a paper is like around 150? The text hasn't stated that yet. But the 'sciences' aka physics and chemistry would be recalculated to a total of 120 in gaokao if I'm not wrong?? Will update this again. Basically Sheng Wang didn't pass but performed way above expectations. Jesus christ this is confusing. I think the score per paper is /150 in his test in this case.

Footnotes:

1. Gaokao: college entrance exams

2. A chinese idiom

3. Technically the meaning would be "students who do not stay in the school dormitories", but I figured I might as well make it a noun here.

4. He added an 'er' in his original line, which is why i changed the 'you' to 'ya' to indicate a change in formality/tone

5. the 'him' used in the text could also be gender neutral

6. So the term used here directly translated into: little black house, or according to baike the black house, originally an internet slang referring to the 'forbidden zone' internet forum users would get sent to after they break the rules, implying that this would be the place where they would

not be seen or heard. In the context of this usage here, it probably means that it was incredibly shady looking.

7. In chinese, he basically reversed the words for ‘He’ and ‘Old’, thus changing Old He to He the Old person (as an address)

8. Can you tell how hard I tried to avoid pronouns?

9. Adding “Old” in front of someone’s name is usually meant for men

10. The score per subject was calculated differently from the “total score” mentioned earlier, Jiangsu gaokao runs differently. Also there's a difference between total score and actual score.

Chapter 005 - Moving In

That Bastard Named Jiang Tian Seriously Grew Legs and Escaped.

It happened to be Monday again, and the timetable was fine tuned once more. The study rep made a trip to the office during night self study to bring back a brand new timetable, and posted it on the notice board.

Sheng Wang squinted at it for a few seconds, tapped Gao Tianyang and asked: “Why are there still subject names for the boxes under night?”

“Hm? Which two boxes?” Gao Tianyang was busy burying his head and replying to someone on WeChat at the bottom of his table, he did not truly realise what he was asking.

“The timetable on the noticeboard.” The pen spinning around in Sheng Wang’s hand stopped, and used the tip to point in that direction: “It says physics for tonight.”

‘The timetable?”

“Yup.”

Gao Tianyang looked up, stared at the board infront intently for about three seconds, and violently turned his head back to ask: “You sit in the fucking second last row, you can still see the words on the timetable clearly?”

“I sure can.”

“You(1) have a microscope for a face?”

Sheng Wang said slowly and clearly: “Scram.”

“No wait, I was just expressing my shock. You can take a look around, you’re the only one in our class who’s not shortsighted do you know that?” Gao Tianyang said.

Sheng Wang’s head did not even turn, he jabbed his thumb in the direction behind, for some mysterious reason lowered his voice and asked: “Doesn’t it means that he’s not human for not wearing glasses too?”

Gao Tianyang, however, was slow on the uptake and continued to use his normal volume to reply anyway: “Tian-ge happens to not wear it normally that’s all, just look at him when it’s lesson time.”

Sheng Wang internally went: the hell with looking, why are you this moronic and speak so loudly for?

The good thing was that Jiang Tian was catching up on his sleep during the inter-class period again, and heard nothing at all.

Sheng Wang was rather bemused, why did this person seem to lack sleep every day as if he was busy staying up being a thief all night, don’t tell him it came from doing questions?

As he zoned out, the people at the first few rows exploded into chatters.

The study rep’s voice drifted over clearly, his tone clearly gossiping: “Really, I don’t know what happened, in any case when I entered the office

the teachers were rioting, they went nuts and were super excited, they wouldn’t stop going blah-blah.”

“What were they saying?”

“I didn’t catch it, when I went in they became normal again.”

“Then the hell did you even mention this for.”

Gao Tianyang was an active member, when he heard the study rep’s words, he joined in the discussion from two tables away. As a result, after rounding about, the question Sheng Wang asked him at first did not get a reply either.

However, the answer soon turned up by itself.

Shortly after the bell for night self study rang, the homeroom teacher He Jin sandwiched a stack of test papers between her arms and entered the classroom. She placed it on the teacher’s desk like it was a matter of course, then pulled the board behind her with a natural ease, saying: “The weekly tests have been marked, we will be going through the paper tonight.”

At this point, Sheng Wang finally knew——

The night study in this tragedy of a school was never actual self study from the start, it was for class! One subject per day all the way from Monday to Friday, everything was planned out nicely and neatly.

Then there came the problem…

The classes in the day assigned them homework, the three subjects maths physics and chem were simple and straight to the point, each assigned a practice paper. Language was slightly more humane, and did not

give an entire paper, only printing two comprehension passages for them. The only one that spared their lives was English, and it was because there was no English lesson that day.

Overall, there were eight shitty pieces of paper roughly in total from the few subjects, if there was no self study for night study, when will they get to do these shitty papers???

Sheng Wang felt like he could not breathe.

He Jin finished her opening speech, picked the paper in front of her up, shook it, and said: “All of you would quite like to know how you did, don’t you? I’ll talk about my overall impression first. I think that all of you broke your heads with the summer break.”

Everyone was silent, some lips inaudibly moved, probably ridiculing that a break of ten days should not have the guts to call itself a summer break.

“The average performance was incomparable to the last few exams last semester, your speed at finishing the questions was slower than before, I knew this the moment I marked the papers. It’s not that you didn’t know how to solve the question, you just didn’t have time to do it properly. Ey, the handwriting at the back for some students were so trembly, so pitiful, I couldn’t bear to mark it as wrong——”

Her expression relaxed a little, and scornfully went: “So I just deducted marks, and also erased two points from the overall score.”

Someone in class did not manage to hold it in, and let out a whine. (2)

He Jin said: “What are you whining for, are you trying to act cute with me? Is there any use to acting cute at all?”

Forty plus people dragged their voices and answered: “No use, yiiiiiiiing——”(3)

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Was this the result of too much pressure that repressed an entire class of students into cuckoos?

He Jin was also angered to the point of laughter, but she was unfazed, one could tell that this was not the first time: “I know that this is your old habit, you would become like this every time you return from holiday. I won’t go on anymore, but make sure you somewhat know this in your heart could you?”

The whole class dragged their voices and replied again: “Sure.”

He Jin pointed at them and said: “You bunch of liars.”

The class went into laughter again.

“The nerve to laugh!” He Jin continued: “The class average this time round is lower than last exam’s, certain individuals really put it in their all at dragging the overall score down.”

Most people in class had a tacit understanding, they would not look at any particular person at this time, they had to save some face for them no matter how good their relations were. But there were some that could not control themselves, and started wildly looking around.

At that very moment, Sheng Wang felt as if he was under the spotlight, there were at least five to six people looking at him.

He Jin adjusted her glasses, and said: “What are you looking at? You haven’t even received your scripts back, all you know is to look at the new student! I was about to talk about this. Sheng Wang, he just entered our class on Saturday, he basically did not learn anything tested on the test. But after calculating proportionately according to past cases, both his chem and physics entered grade B, his main three, language math and English scored over 300. If this was gaokao, he could make it for undergraduate courses. He only spent one day, to achieve all these.”

She raised a single finger, her gaze landed on Sheng Wang, and smiled at him.

The classroom was silent for three seconds, and then everyone went apeshit.

Forty plus heads turned to look at him at the same time, eighty plus eyes were all on him. Sheng Wang felt as if he was called out.

He forcibly lifted the corner of his mouth and let out an empty laugh, the finger spinning his pen around purposely jerked, planning to carry out a strategic dropping of pen. With the effort it takes to pick up a pen, he could stay crouched over and endure until everyone turned back.

In the end he accidentally jerked too hard, the pen swung around two rounds, and flew behind.

He was screwed, he was going to hit the pestilence.

Sheng Wang turned back in embarrassment, and when he did he was stupefied.

Jiang Tian’s nose indeed supported a pair of glasses during lesson time. The lenses were very thin, with Sheng Wang’s limited knowledge, he felt that the degree would not be too high. The smoke-coloured frame was

thin and circular, when it was on other people's faces it made them look scholarly, and yet Jiang Tian was an exception.

The cold white light of the lamp above was reflected in his lenses, adding a layer of seeping coldness over his orbs. He was basically a "I'm displeased" in giant capital letters.

That pen tumbled onto his table, the arm that rested on top was marked with a scrawly uneven line, it was especially conspicuous with the contrast of his cold and fair skin.

His gaze shifted up, he looked at Sheng Wang through his glasses for a few seconds, and then capped his pen.

"Thank you." Sheng Wang thought that he was about to pass the pen back, and planned to apologise after he thanked him. Who would have thought that just as he opened his mouth, Jiang Tian placed the recapped pen down right in front of himself with much finality, with absolutely no sign of returning it to him at all.

"What are you doing?" He asked.

Jiang Tian's gaze was already fixed onto the blackboard: "In case you can't keep your hands to yourself again."

Sheng Wang: "???"

"Is there something wrong?" He Jin asked at the desk.

Sheng Wang could not make himself do such a stupid thing like complaining to the teacher, he could only turn back and smiled at He Jin:

“Nothing’s wrong, teacher. Dean Xu told me to learn more from Jiang Tian, so I was just asking when I will pass the tests.”

The students in class immediately guffawed, and stopped staring at him.

He Jin also burst into laughter. “Indeed, if we look at the total score, you are still not passing your three sciences yet. Still, you are already not that far off, you just need to strengthen your foundations. By reaching this level in a single night, it shows that you have a very, very strong learning ability.”

She used two “very” to praise him, Sheng Wang shamelessly added internally: You are right.

“However the three sciences all happen to be like this, it is easy to score for your foundational knowledge, but when it reaches a certain level, just increasing a single point is incredibly difficult.”

As He Jin spoke, she sorted the scripts in her hands according to groups, and passed it to the first person in the group, getting them to find their own scripts and pass it down.

By the time it reached Sheng Wang there were only two scripts, one belonging to him and one to Jiang Tian. The learning ability that he proved with his single day of effort was enough to let his peacock tail spread wide open in front of the teacher and most of his classmates, but when he saw Jiang Tian’s score, he immediately shut his tail. (4)

Because Jiang Tian scored full marks.

Fuck.

Sheng Wang muttered soundlessly, and then he waved the script in his hand at Jiang Tian: “Want your script? Pass my pen to me, I’ll pass the paper to you, you pass me the money with a hand and I’ll pass you the goods with the other.”(5)

Jiang Tian scanned over the script once: “I’m broke.”

After he spoke, the full-pointer removed his glasses, dug out the stack of papers assigned in the day, and used the pen he confiscated along the way to do his work.

Sheng Wang was completely stifled.

Going through the paper was more annoying for the teacher, but for the students they did not suffer as much. The students of Class A were known for mis-behaving, there were two sets of paper on nearly everyone’s desk, one set would be the one that they just received from their test, the other would be homework.

As He Jin went through the answers in front, the students behind constantly switched between two pens. When they reached the part where they made a mistake they would use a red pen to do corrections, otherwise they all buried their heads in their assignments.

They were relatively well-trained in switching between the two tasks, one could see they were all old foxes.

Sheng Wang scanned around, the words “If life forced my hand” (6) escaped from his mouth in a mutter, and then he stuck his hand into his desk and dug out his homework.

Night self study ended at 8pm, Gao Tianyang and co yelled “Yesssss" as if they got a super good cut of the pie, and then scurried outside, their bags in their clutches.

Sheng Wang zipped up his school bag. Just as he was about to call Uncle Xiao-chen, he received a call from Sheng Mingyang instead.

“What?” Sheng Wang was baffled for a moment before he finally remembered that today was the day that Sheng Mingyang would be letting Jiang Ou and Jiang Tian move in. Which was to say that from tonight onwards, the ancestral home at White Horse Alley would have two more people in its courtyard.

Just as expected, Sheng Mingyang pacified his son with a couple of lines across the phone before he went straight to the main topic: “Night self study just ended, right? Xiao-Chen is nearly reaching the school entrance, go get Xiao-Tian and come back together.

Bleh.

The little young master spat, internally saying that if he wanted to bring him he should do it himself, it’s none of his goddamn business. He even specially urged him to do so, making it seem like he would grow legs and escape or something.

The phone call got on his nerves, Sheng Wang was irritated: “He’s sitting right behind me, if you want anything go find him yourself.” After he spoke he turned to pass his phone to the back, only to see that the table behind was completely empty. That bastard named Jiang Tian seriously grew legs and escaped.

Footnotes:

1. The respectful ‘You’ is used here

2. The word used here was , internet slang for a cutesy sound of crying

3. Said onomatopoeia of crying noise

4. Direct translation of the metaphor, it basically means that he’s preening

5. Comes from saying as directly translated, it means a secure exchange where both parties will adhere to their promises

6. Possibly a reference to apparently elementary/middle school recommended reading, a translation of the poem “If life deceives you” by Pushkin.

Chapter 006 - To Catch Someone

Where Are You Going? Don’t You Know How to Open the Door?

“Hello, is this Xiao-Tian? I’m your Uncle Sheng.” The person on the other side on the phone, Sheng Mingyang, thought that it was already a different person, and immediately was much more polite.

Sheng Wang checked around, his mouth moved: “Hello Uncle Sheng, I’m your son Sheng Wang.”

Sheng Mingyang: “.....”

“Goddamn it.” Sheng Mingyang asked, annoyed: “Didn’t you say that you will pass the phone to Xiao-Tian?”

“I did, but he disappeared.”

“What do you mean?” Sheng Mingyang was clearly baffled, “What do you mean by disappeared?”

“In any case he isn’t in the classroom now.”

On the other side, Sheng Mingyang removed his phone from his ears and murmured something to someone else, and then told Sheng Wang: “Wait for a bit before you hang up, I’ll get your Auntie Jiang to ask.”

Sheng Wang rolled his eyes, and tossed his phone onto the table.

Previously, there were some students who were walking towards him, appearing like they wanted to chat with him about the test. They pulled the brakes the moment they saw that he was on the phone, bid farewell to him and left.

In the sheer span of a few minutes, there was only Sheng Wang left in the classroom.

He played with his bag straps in extreme boredom, listening to the chatter of people slowly fade into the distance like lowering of tides, from the corridor to the staircase, and then completely disappearing. The entire top floor was filled with silence.

He looked at the phone screen that displayed “in call”, and suddenly recalled that it was like this when he was young for a while too. Back then his mom just passed away, possibly out of fear that he would be left to his own thoughts, Sheng Mingyang was determined to fetch him from school everyday.

The crucial time period in business was always busy and chaotic, Sheng Mingyang was often late, Sheng Wang just did his homework as he waited. By the time Sheng Mingyang finally rushed over, he would have already completed his homework and every student had left, and Sheng Mingyang could carry his bag and apologise profusely with “Wang-zai” here and “Wang-zai” there.

Afterwards, there was Xiao-Chen the chauffeur, did Sheng Wang need not to wait so often anymore. Later, Sheng Mingyang rarely called him “Wang-zai” after quite a few protests from him.

The corridor suddenly clicked with the “du-du-du” of high heels, Sheng Wang came back to himself and looked in that direction. A figure with long hair flitted past the windows, from the bearing alone one could tell that it was their English teacher, Yang Jing.

It had been three days since Sheng Wang arrived, he did not attend a single English lesson, and it was this teacher that left the deepest impression on him. This was because the old foxes, Class A, changed colours whenever they spoke of the “Jing” (1), the moment they hear the words “Jing-jie(2) is looking for you”, they would visibly pale in teror.

From their words alone, Sheng Wang thought that the one who taught them English was a Yaksha. (3)

It was later when he saw her then he realised it was not a Yaksha. Yang Jing was tall and willowy, her features were not much to speak of. Her cheek bones were a little high, but she would definitely be the most outstanding one when placed in a crowd.

Du-du-du.

Yang Jing walked past the door and came back again, her chin lifted up and she knocked.

“Jing——” Sheng Wang was brainwashed for too long, and almost let a “Jing-jie” escape his mouth, luckily he stopped in time: “Teacher Yang.”

“En.” Yang Jing asked: “You’re still here? What for?”

She spoke quickly and her chin was always slightly pointed up, a perfectly normal sentence felt like an interrogation when it came from her mouth.

However, Sheng Wang was never scared of teachers, he smiled and said: “I’m waiting for someone.”

“Oh.” Yang Qing shot a glance at his table, “How bold of you, you really just place your phone right under my nose?”

Sheng Wang was stumped, he grabbed his phone and wordlessly passed it to her.

To act like he was well-behaved was one of the young master’s top tricks, Yang Jing raised her long and thin eyebrow, took a look around the empty classroom first, and then sized him up again: “What are you giving it to me for, my surname isn’t Xu. Go give it to the admin office yourself.”

After she spoke, she left with her high heels clacking.

Sheng Wang settled his phone on the desk, just as he was about to let go, the person inside let out a “Hello”.

“Am here, speak.” Sheng Wang answered half-heartedly.

“Jiang Ou called him.”

“Called who?” Sheng Wang nearly did not catch what he was asking, he then went “Oh” and said: “It’s Jiang Tian, right, he brought his phone? I never would have guessed that he’s the daring kind too.”

Sheng Mingyang said, completely done: “Who are you trying to speak bad of with your talk? Call him ge next time.”

“No way, don’t even think about it.” There was no one around, Sheng Wang was explicit with his reply.

Sheng Mingyang was still quite the pro when it came to dealing with his own son, Sheng Wang refused to call him that, so he changed the

address himself first: “Jiang Ou said that your older brother has been summoned to the office by a teacher.”

What the……

Sheng Wang silently swore.

“You think that I wouldn’t know what you said even if you didn’t sound it?” Sheng Mingyang teased him, “Fine, you come back with Uncle Xiao-Chen first.”

“Oh, I don’t need to wait anymore?” Sheng Wang asked emotionlessly.

He vaguely heard what Jiang Ou said softly on the other side: “It’s probably an olympiad or something else, it’s like this in the past too, by the time he reached home it was usually eleven. Quick, don’t keep Xiao-Wang hanging anymore, let him come back already.”

Who’s the teacher that was so powerful so as to waste time with him till eleven? Sheng Wang carried his bag, and was puzzled as he went towards the entrance.

“Sure then, come back first. I’ll get Xiao-Chen to make another trip later.” Sheng Mingyang said, and urged again: “Make sure to let your older brother know before you leave.”

In your dreams.

Sheng Wang switched off the lights in the classroom with a “pop”, and hung up without a second word.

Walking past the office was a compulsory part of the journey downstairs, he said in your dreams earlier on, but when he walked past he still deigned himself to cast a glance inside, only to see that all five heads

were buried in work in the office. In front of them was either test papers or the teaching plan. As for the Jiang Tian who was summoned to the office or so the legend foretold, not a single trace of him was to be found.

Sheng Wang paused in his steps, his head full of question marks: Do certain people not bother making sure he gets his alibi straight before he starts making up bullshit? Isn't he worried about getting exposed? Or…...he really is not in this office, but in another place?

He looked left and right. He initially wanted to ask the teacher, but Uncle Xiao-Chen already sent a message, saying that he was at the school entrance, he could not park for long there.

Therefore he hesitated a few seconds, and decided to continue downstairs anyways.

The key school(4) within the city did not consist of Fuzhong alone, but most of them sat in the outskirts, far from the urban district and far from the people, all looking like they were dying to religiously seclude themselves.

Fuzhong was the rare exception. It was built early, and somehow managed to acquire a fortunately situated piece of land in the middle of the urban district, the moment it was built it stayed there for 130 years. Eventually as the surroundings gradually bustled and flourished, they surrounded the school and living area with a huge patch of woods, separating them from the noise.

The school named that patch of woods and greenery "Garden of Conduct", the students called them "Magpie Bridge." (5)

Adult couples of human society would cross the roads, hand in hand, the pre-maturely dating young couples(6) of the temple, in order to avoid being caught and exposed, could only cross the mud in the woods. At night, they were really more like ghosts.

The three days Sheng Wang was here, he already got spooked for quite a few times by these hauntings.

There were a few residential zones right outside the school gates, what constituted as residents were very simple, just three kinds——staff, students, and those who rented to accompany their child for school.(7)

Sheng Wang left the school gates as he walked along the haunted road, and saw Uncle Xiao-Chen gesture at him after he rolled down the car window.

He stood at the school gates and waited for Xiao-Chen to turn the car around, when he suddenly heard the sound of people talking from the residential block nearby. The lamp here appeared to be spoilt, and flickered non-stop.

Sheng Wang vaguely spotted two figures, one following the other in exiting from the block, and turning into another road.

“The street lamps are a little short-circuited, it’s quite dark. How about I accompany you there?”

“No need.”

He dimly heard a conversation like this, but it was muffled through the fence around the area and the traffic. He only felt that the person who replied had a cold tone, and it was familiar for some reason.

“Xiao-Wang.” Uncle Xiao-Chen called him.

Sheng Wang answered, lifted his foot and walked towards the car.

Out of the corner of his eyes, the figure beneath the residential block seemingly looked back, but perhaps it was just an illusion from the overlapping shadows from the trees. Sheng Wang sat at the back, his head against the window, and wanted to take a nap.

When the lights in his vision blurred together, then did he realise why that voice was so familiar. It was because it sounded a little like Jiang Tian, but yet it could not really be true, why would Jiang Tian go there?

Sheng Wang woke up for a bit, then slowly gave in to drowsiness once more, and did not think too much of it.

After all, no matter if it was Jiang Ou or Jiang Tian, although they may be living under the same roof, they were only Sheng Mingyang’s guests, and had nothing to do with him.

Despite the new people moving in, there were no major changes to his home, what changed were the details.

When Sheng Wang entered, Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou stood at the door, looking like they had been waiting for a long time. The housekeeper who was usually there was the one who was already gone instead.

He did not even look up, opened the shoe cabinet, only to see that there was an extra row of unfamiliar looking shoes. One part was nearly the same type as sports shoes he owned, the other was women’s shoes.

Ever since his mom passed away, things like these had not appeared in the house for a long long time.

“Your slippers are right here.” Sheng Mingyang bent over and passed his slippers to him, “I already prepared it for you.”

Sheng Wang lowered his eyelids and stood in front of the cabinet for a while, then closed the door again, busying himself with untying his shoelaces.

“You were still fine on the phone just now, why are you so closed off the moment you enter the doors?” Sheng Mingyang patted Jiang Ou’s shoulder, adjusted the material of his trousers, and half squatted in front of Sheng Wang, asking: “I was on the phone with Old Xu, oh, your Dean, just now. He said that my son did quite well in school, the teachers in class all like you very much, and I hear that your tests yesterday went quite well?”

After hearing this, Sheng Wang’s fingers, which were previously occupied with changing his shoes, paused.

He lifted his head and gave Sheng Mingyang a glance, straightened up, carried the bag on his shoulder and said: “It’s quite fine, I failed three subjects.”

After that he sped past them and went upstairs.

Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou both looked at each other in dismay, and stood rigidly in awkwardness.

“I already told you it’s better if I’m not standing here.” Jiang Ou said.

“He will have to get used to this one way or another.” Sheng Mingyang heard the bedroom door on the second door close with a “bang”, and sighed: “This kid is all harsh words but deep down he’s soft, he can rationally tell who’s good and who’s bad, it isn’t that he’s out to get you, he’s just……”

“He just misses his mom, I understand.” Jiang Ou said.

She peered at the kitchen, and said to Sheng Mingyang: “I won’t be bringing the porridge to him then, you should do it.”

“He’s probably still angry for now, he wouldn’t open the door for me.” Sheng Mingyang let out a fake laugh, and said: “Who do you think the sign that says do not knock on the door is for? Warm the porridge and leave it there first, he would come down to eat when he’s hungry.”

“I feel like the way you and Xiao-Wang interact have some issues……” Jiang Ou could not help but say.

“Nah, we already got along like this for so many years.” Sheng Mingyang said, not sounding pleased.

Jiang Ou looked upstairs in concern.

“Don’t look, it’s not a big deal if he doesn’t cry.” Sheng Mingyang said in all confidence.

Jiang Ou: “???”

Second floor bedroom, Sheng Wang was entirely clueless about his father’s words.

He dug out a packet of melon seeds from the snack cabinet, curled up beside the table, and munched on it as he listened to Crab ramble on in voice messages.

StarAniseCrab: “That grandson got full marks? So what if it’s fu-full marks? Did you not score many full marks in the past? After you get through the books thoroughly, full marks are as easy as abc!”

Sheng Wang swept away melon seed shells on his hand, and answered: “Don’t stutter, you can say it properly.”

“Say it properly?” Crab whimpered: “I will go kowtow in front of my ancestors if I ever score full marks in any life I live in. Still, you scored this much with a only day of studying, can you imagine the possibilities with a week?”

“Did you drink?”

“I didn’t.”

“Then why are you speaking like you’re drunk.” Sheng Wang said: “All my marks are free marks, the kind that anyone can score after going through the teaching material once, if I can score full marks with a week of studying, then what’s the point of me going to school?”

“Why do I never realise that there’s so many free marks?” Crab aggrieved.

“You’re blind.”

“Fine, do you still want any papers? I can go ask the year twos again.” Crab was always eager to help.

Sheng Wang flipped through the assignments he received, and said: “For now, no need. I bought a few assessment books, I’ll do them first.”

He managed to finish off two comprehension passages for language as well as the foundational questions for the three sciences, math physics and chem, during night self study. The remaining he planned to slowly grind his way through while learning them, slowly chip away at it at night. In the end, the chipping away took two hours straight.

Crab was probably doing questions too, he felt a little like he did not want to be left out. He popped up and asked Sheng Wang: “Sheng-ge, how’s it going Sheng-ge, do you feel like you are one with the heavens all your arteries and veins are unblocked everything’s flowing like cloud and water and you got everything down at one go?”(8)

Sheng Wang let out a dry laugh, and said: “I can’t do it”

Crab: “Huh? How?”

Sheng Wang was also despondent.

He was usually a very good self-learner, even though this may make him sound shameless, but he was pretty self-aware. There were three things spreaded across the table in front of him, on the left was the teaching material, the centre the test paper, and on the right the assessment books.

He always looked at the question on the test first, circled out what piece of information was he getting tested on, speedily read through the relevant portion in the teaching material, next go to the right to get a feel of the question with two similar question types, and then attempt the question on the test.

With this series of steps, with more deduction, he would be able to solve similar questions.

He quickly finished most of the assignments with this method, and yet only the last question for physics was still blank, as he was unable to find a corresponding question type.

“Really? It can’t be?” Crab said, “Send a pic of the question to me.”

“What, you’re helping me solve it?”

“You jest!” Crab said, “I’m seeking help from the audience. There’s a couple of pretty smart seniors living next dorm over, let me go ask them.”

Sheng Wang sent a picture to him, and directly went online on his computer to search too.

Around half an hour later, Crab came back with his tail between his legs: “The seniors turned on the torch light and went to solve the question on their stomachs. As they tried they kept yelling at me, saying that I’m out to get them, if they can’t solve it by tonight, they won’t be able to get any rest.”

Sheng Wang bit his lips as he glared at the computer screen, and did not reply.

Crab sent three messages in a row again, and in the end he went straight for a voice message.

The moment he got to Sheng Wang he asked: “How is it?”

Sheng Wang went reticently: “I found something that looks kinda similar.”

Crab: “Oh! Then it’s fine already, just do it!”

“The hell with doing it, it’s an olympiad question.”

Crab: “..... Why is your homework so hardcore?”

Wasn’t it a little too screwed up to get someone who did not even learn the content to do an olympiad question?

“I’ll hang up first, I need to go down for some ice water to calm down.” Sheng Wang spoke, cutting off the voice message and grumbled on his way down.

The living room was already dark, with only the light at the entrance being left on. He shot a look at the clock before realising that it was already 11pm. He brought out a bottle of ice water from the fridge and went upstairs, leaned against the window and chugged two mouthfuls. Just as he prepared to return and chip away at the question, he suddenly spotted someone standing next to the street lamp outside the courtyard.

That person carried a bag on the shoulders, and was on the phone.

Maybe it was the street lamp being bright enough, maybe it was his eyesight that was good enough. Sheng Wang could see the irritation and vexation on the person’s face all the way through the window pane and across the courtyard.

Who’s on the other side on the phone that caused so much anger?

Sheng Wang was a little curious. He saw Jiang Tian tap the screen once, and stuffed his phone into his pants' pocket with a cold look on his face. Yet, he did not immediately enter the courtyard, but rather he stood out there by himself for quite a bit, before turning to look at the building.

Sheng Wang closed the curtains on instinct in order to shield himself, only after closing the curtains then he realised that this was more obvious instead.

Fine whatever this was too dumb.

After some thinking he opened the curtains again, and unabashedly looked outside the window, only to see that Jiang Tian had already turned around, and was walking in the opposite direction.

"Eh?" Sheng Wang was dumbfounded.

By the time he realised, he already opened the window, and yelled at the person outside the courtyard: "Where are you going? Don't you know how to open the door?"

The commotion was a little bit loud. When he was done, the bedroom window downstairs also opened.

Sheng Mingyang stuck his head out and looked at him: "Who are you talking to?"

Without needing Sheng Wang's reply, he immediately realised: "Jiang Tian?"

"If not who else? A thief?" Sheng Wang said.

But he soon came to regret it.

Two minutes later, Jiang Tian who initially planned to leave was dragged into the living room by his mom and Sheng Mingyang, and was besieged at the intersection of the first and second floor.

Young master Sheng Wang cracked open the door, wanting to watch the show. Just as he revealed a single eye he directly met Jiang Tian's icy gaze. With some thought, he silently shut the door once more.

Footnotes:

1. This character contained the character for 'green' in chinese, basically they spoke of 'green' and their faces paled/turned white accordingly.

2. Jie: suffix indicating 'older sister', this is a very casual and disrespectful way of addressing a teacher, thus a nickname the students would use amongst themselves and not say it directly to the teacher's face

3. A scary looking spirit in both hindu and buddhist mythology

4. Key schools are schools distinguished from ordinary schools by academic reputation and are generally allocated more resources by the state, both Sheng Wang's present and previous schools are this. Will change tl back in chapter 1 to reflect this.

5. Magpie bridge: the one that the cowherd and the weaving maid reunites every lunar seventh month seventh day aka chinese valentines

6. Pre-mature dating aka dating while still in school, the narration also sarcastically called this place a temple but it should be noted it isn't one, just a figurative way of saying that they aren't allowed to date, just like monks. Also, early dating is heavily frowned upon in chinese schools and they would actively break couples up/inform parents and guardians etc etc for some.

7. *Peidu (accompany to study)*: some parents (usually moms) would accompany their kids to locations near favourable schools for the sake of their studies, quite common for abroad too.

8. The following idioms used here, in a row: “Oneness of heaven and humanity”, “Six pulses are all unclogged”, “moving clouds and flowing water” “do everything at one go/to flow smoothly”, basically, he was asking: did everything come easily for Sheng Wang/if he made much progress

Chapter 007 - Post-it Note

These were the Steps for Solving the Last Physics Question

By the time the whole hullabaloo was over, it was already midnight.

Who knew what Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou resorted to, in any case they managed to get Jiang Tian to stay. Sheng Wang listened through his bedroom door, but whatever he caught was incoherent . Still, he deduced from what he witnessed before and figured that it was once again Jiang Ou who acted pitiful. As long as Jiang Ou put on that pleading yet wary look of hers, Jiang Tian would not bear to be too harsh.

Footsteps came upstairs in bits and pieces, Sheng Wang was still leaning against the door when he heard Sheng Mingyang say: “Xiao-Tian, you can stay in this bedroom.”

There was an independent bathroom and study opposite Sheng Wang’s room, the ‘this bedroom’ in his dad’s words was right next to him. Though the house was quite not quite new, it did get a complete renovation at one point and had decent soundproofing. Regardless, with the rooms stuck right next to each other and even sharing a wall, they more or less could somewhat hear each other.

Sheng Wang felt like his private territory was invaded, a tinge of awkwardness mixed in with his resentment.

His phone suddenly vibrated. Sheng Wang listlessly swiped on his phone; Crab was still updating him on the two seniors' progress.

StarAniseCrab:

Good news, they finally solved the first part. I even managed to feel their fervor all the way from the other side of the wall, then their dorm got a warning from the teacher on patrol.

StarAniseCrab: Hey, still awake?

StarAniseCrab: ??

Sheng Wang brought the phone near his lips: "It's not even that late yet, I'm still up."

StarAniseCrab: It's already 12.30am ge. How 'bout you? How's your progress?

Canned: "Didn't get the chance to."

StarAniseCrab: Huh? Then what have you been doing all these while?

Canned: "Witnessing a family soap opera."(1)

Crab was his previous dormitory roommate after all, they were quite tight and he roughly knew about his situation at home. The phone, once vibrating non-stop, suddenly went quiet for a while. Much later, Crab cautiously asked: What's the situation now?

Sheng Wang held down the voice message button, let go of it a few seconds later, and decided to type instead.

Crab received a voice message filled with silence. He sent a long chain of question marks in response.

Sheng Wang did not bother with an explanation. He slumped against the door and typed on his t9 keyboard: A woman about to become my stepmother moved in with her son, her son lives right to me, I

I what? There was not much point in saying this to other people, and it was a little prissy. It was mostly because that it was prissy, it did not match his suave image. As Sheng Wang thought so, he deleted the words he already typed out, and voice messaged: “Nothing much, it’s just that there’s this grandson(2) living next door to me now, and I have to call him ge out of politeness.”

His words were ambiguous, Crab thought that it was some one-of-a-kind relative,(3) and was instantly relieved.

StarAniseCrab: Then did you call him?

Canned: “Impossible, I’ve always lacked manners.”

StarAniseCrab: Hahaha then chase him out.

Canned: “I totally want to. Don’t you own a dog? Lend it to me later, I’ll bring the dog to that room and let it piss all over, let’s see who can even stay there.”

StarAniseCrab: Fuck, stop describing, I can nearly smell it.

Sheng Wang cheered up. He got a kick out of his words, yet he suddenly recalled the way Jiang Tian looked as he stood by himself outside the courtyard, the street lamp stretching out his shadows. Quite proud, but a little...lonely.

The young master ‘tsked’, and continued: “Whatever, it’s too troublesome. As long as he doesn’t try to talk to me, and not affect my studying, it will be fine. Out of sight out of mind. I’m going back to my questions now.”

StarAniseCrab: Eh? Hold on.

StarAniseCrab: Speaking of doing questions I suddenly just remembered, if you are made to call him ge, then the grandson next door should be older than you, right?

StarAniseCrab: He’s at least year two onwards, right? How about you try showing that question to him, if he could solve it that’s just fine, if he couldn’t you could embarrass him.

This train of thought was truly a little audacious, Sheng Wang was so floored by him, he replied with zero hesitation: You’re embarrassing me.

Canned: I’m going offline!

The last sentence was a little harsh, StarAniseCrab chickened out, and quiet down as expected.

After Sheng Mingyang arranged Jiang Tian’s accommodation, his footsteps hesitated briefly before he stopped outside Sheng Wang’s door, and called out in a soft voice: “Son?” His voice was not loud, nor did he knock on the door, like he was afraid of disturbing people.

Sheng Wang was actually standing right behind the door, the father and son were only separated by a single wooden board. He heard everything loud and clear, and yet he did not reply.

“Son?” Sheng Mingyang called out once more.

Sheng Wang still did not respond.

A while later, he heard Sheng Mingyang say to Jiang Ou in a low voice: “It’s already been more than an hour, he’s probably asleep.”

“Really?” Jiang Ou was a little unsure.

“He should be.” Sheng Mingyang estimated the time with the wall clock, and mumbled: “It’s almost one, let’s go down first.”

Deliberately lightened footsteps retreated away from the room, and went down along the stairs.

Sheng Wang dimly heard his dad say: “I have to catch the morning flight tomorrow, help me take care for a bit.”

Sheng Wang only returned to the table after any movement downstairs completely disappeared. He pushed his book aside as he sat on the table, his feet on the edge of the chair, the test paper spreading on his lap. He stared down at it for ten minutes, his head a complete mess without a single clear train of thought at all.

He raised his head, his upper body slightly leaned back.

From this angle, he could see half of the window next room over. The light specifically that came from a desk lamp was reflected onto the glass through the curtains. With this, it appeared that Jiang Tian was probably rushing his homework too.

He wondered if his physics was completed……

He should probably be done, he was already doing practice papers during night self study, if he was still stuck on that he would be doing a disservice to the name of top student.

What if he also did not know how to solve the last question?

But that person scored full marks.

There was probably a Crab residing in his head, going blah blah blah and endlessly debating him non-stop.

Test paper or face, he had to pick between one. (4)

The pen in Sheng Wang’s hand spun for n rounds, he finally slapped it on the table: I choose face.

Five minutes later, the young master dragged along the face that met its demise and stood in front of the door next to his. He lifted his hand three times before he grudgingly knocked on the door.

“Who?” Jiang Tian’s voice ranged behind the door, it was chilly.

This person, even when living under another person's roof, had zero intention to act carefully and cower, a “Who” was asked with so much

audacity, Sheng Wang was nearly blown back into his room with the force of it. His left foot shifted before he kept it back again, and chose to strategically act deaf as he held onto the door frame.

With not a single response heard, Jiang Tian shuffled over in his slippers. The door handle clicked and the door half opened.

He evidently did not expect the visitor to be Sheng Wang, and was startled. Perhaps he held a grudge for him getting dragged inside, his expression was not friendly, looking like he had a toothache or an ache in general.

“What’s with your look?” Sheng Wang said.

“Out with it.” Jiang Tian obviously did not want to chat.

Sheng Wang’s mouth opened, he stuck out his hand and said: “Return my pen.”

Jiang Tian looked at him expressionlessly for two seconds, and went back into his room.

The moment the door was vacated, Sheng Wang turned his head and swatted at his own mouth.

Are you a coward handsome guy, I’m asking if you are a coward?! He viciously mocked himself on the inside, and yet in the instant Jiang Tian went back to the door he returned back to his lazy idling self.

Jiang Tian handed the pen over to him, and asked again: “Is there anything else?”

“Just this.” Sheng Wang said.

Jiang Tian nodded, and closed his door without a second word.

“.....”

Sheng Wang stared at the pen in his hand for a few seconds, and slowly stuck out a middle finger at the room door. He then scrambled back to his room to continue the showdown against the physics paper.

A smooth sailing student like him certainly did make mistakes before, but this was the first time he did not even know how to start. Students his type all have a bad habit, if they could not logically fill up the paper they would lose sleep over it.

He switched between many trains of thought, every time he would cross them out after he was halfway through with a method. People who practiced enough would have instincts like this——they may not arrive at the right conclusion, but just one glance and the wrong ones were obvious enough.

Sheng Wang was sunken in the whirlpool of errors. After twenty minutes of distress, he finally tossed his pen aside.

All his attention was on tiny balls, water droplets and viscosity, only when he got up then he heard movement outside the door. He wondered if Jiang Tian left his room.

Did he come out for a stroll after driving himself insane with studying?

Sheng Wang hesisted momentarily, and went to grab his door handle once more.

Humid air came gushing at him the moment he opened the door. Sheng Wang was briefly swept away, before he noticed that Jiang Tian just left the bathroom opposite his room. He changed into an oversized gray short-sleeve shirt, his half dried black hair was neatly combed to the back. It was evident that he just showered.

He held the towel in his hand, shook his head to get rid of the water in his ears, then looked up towards Sheng Wang, and asked: “You still need something?”

Sheng Wang turned on his heels, and went straight for the stairs: “I’m going down for some water, you just go and shower.”

He dug out a bottle of ice water, twisted the cap open, realised that it was undrinkable, and could only go back upstairs and back into his room with his tail between his legs.

Sheng Wang pressed the bottle to his forehead, and slumped over the table for a while, till drowsiness nearly started coming for him, then did he finally managed to convince himself——They were definitely going to be sharing the same house for the near future, they could not keep this awkwardness up forever, there had to be a way out for them.

This physics question would be that way out.

Sheng Wang stood up for the third time, and determinedly grabbed the paper with him this time round. Either go big or go home.

He was finally mentally prepared and was about to go knock on the door next to his. Yet, the moment his door opened, Jiang Tian was already leaning against the wall next to him. His left hand was half-heartedly

occupied with drying his hair with a towel, his right hand was holding his phone, his eyes lowered as he swiped at his screen, poker-faced as usual.

“Why are you at my door?” Sheng Wang was startled.

“Waiting for the rabbit by the tree stump.” (5)

Sheng Wang: “.....”

If it was not for the fact that he did not look very happy either, Sheng Wang would have suspected that he was joking.

Jiang Tian placed the phone back in his pocket, and asked: “You already went in and out for quite a couple of times, what exactly do you want?”

Sheng Wang hid the test paper in his hand right behind him, and did not manage to squeeze out a single word even after a long while. In the end he said a: “Is that any of your business?” before shutting the door.

A man’s face is bigger than the sky.

Sheng Wang for the first time ever deeply related to this statement. He gave up on that question at last, and collapsed onto the bed in frustration. Right before he slept, he could not help but recall that in the moment he closed his door, Jiang Tian seemed like he took a brief glance at his fingers. He did not know if he saw his paper.

Sheng Wang was woken up by the soul-searching alarm clock at 6.10am. He dragged himself out with much difficulty.

His room came with his own bathroom, and did not need to go opposite to fight for a slot with Jiang Tian. Therefore he did not waste much

time on washing up and getting himself dressed. It was only when he finally got everything together and went downstairs with his bag then he realised that he was the one who woke up the latest.

Back then when he got up, the only moving living creatures in the house were him and the housekeeping lady.

He was a little unused to the abrupt increase in population, the morning temper on his face was a giant capitalised word, “confused”. He only came back to himself when Jiang Ou came out of the kitchen with a bowl in her hands.

Jiang Tian was currently changing his shoes at the entryway. It appeared that he woke up earlier than a chicken, probably for the sake of minimising unneeded interactions, and thus avoiding having to go to school together with Sheng Wang.

In fact, Sheng Wang thought of that himself too, as he brushed his teeth he was contemplating how to stagger the timings in which they enter school with. But when the other person did exactly that, he was slightly annoyed. He was in the Jianghu for sixteen years, even though he did not form any deep connections due to the frequent moving, he always had a good relation with people in general.

Jiang Tian was the first one to be this repulsed by him.

While he zoned out, the phone Jiang Tian left on the shoe cabinet vibrated a few times in a row, he straightened up, grabbed the phone and took a look.

In that instance, the look on his face subtly changed, both stiff and a little hesitant.

Next, his fingers quickly tapped on the screen, wore the other pair of shoes and said without even looking up: “Ji Huanyu transferred money to me, I just transferred it to you.”

Sheng Wang was bewildered before he realised that Jiang Tian’s words were aimed at his mom.

Jiang Ou’s hand that was scooping porridge for Sheng Wang stopped, she looked up at the wall clock and asked in astonishment: “What day is it today? He transferred money to you at six plus o’clock?”

Jiang Tian’s movement paused, Sheng Wang saw his brows furrow, as if he was extremely against this topic.

“No, I was just saying.” Jiang Ou sensed her son’s displeasure, and immediately changed the topic: “Are you heading to school now? You’re not waiting for Xiao-Wang?”

“Mm, I have something on.” Jiang Tian lied straight through his teeth, and left without a single glance back.

Sheng Wang was still under the influence of low blood sugar from having just woken up, his reactions were a little slow. His brain was still stuck on the part with “Ji Huanyu”. He thought that this name was somewhat familiar for some reason, like he heard it from somewhere before.

Only when he reflexively received the bowl, and got his tongue burned by the first mouthful then he abruptly remembered. Sheng Mingyang once mentioned a very long time ago that Jiang Ou’s ex-husband was named Ji Huanyu.

Wasn’t that…...Jiang Tian’s father then?

According to Sheng Mingyang, when Jiang Ou divorced her ex-husband it was all very peaceful, there were no particularly violent conflicts, neither were there any disgraceful back and forths. Despite their son’s young age, he was mature to the point of being precocious, he did not even try to stop them at all.

And so the people who lived together for 13 years went their own ways. Ji Huanyu went overseas with his friend for a business venture, Jiang Ou raised her son, and their lives no longer intersected.

Sheng Wang did not know what was the exact situation like, but for now at least, Ji Huanyu still remembered to transfer money to his son at regular intervals, and Jiang Ou did not display any resentment or grievance. That was already the best out of a bad situation. Yet, from Jiang Tian’s reaction, he did not seem to like his dad very much? He even...loathed him a little?

Ultimately though, that had nothing to do with Sheng Wang. He only vaguely thought about it, and then left it at the back of his mind.

He never did intend to accept Jiang Ou’s attempt to become close to him, but he still could not do a thing like to hit someone when they are smiling at you. Thus, that breakfast was particularly hard to get through, and he endured it like he was having his last meal.

He finally forced the porridge down with much difficulty, and left after saying goodbye without looking up.

Xiao-Chen coincidentally arrived from sending Sheng Mingyang to the airport, and managed to fetch Sheng Wang on the dot. From the front seat, he asked in puzzlement: “Sheng-ge told me to bring both you and Xiao-Jiang to school, where is he?”

“Long gone.” Sheng Wang rolled his eyes, and urged: “Let’s go already uncle, I still have a question I need rescuing for.”

Classes for year twos at Fuzhong start at 7am, but most students would arrive in class twenty minutes earlier, those who had to rush their homework rushed, those who were checking their answers against each other checked.

Sheng Wang always entered class on the dot as the school bell rang in his previous school, today was the first time round he was this enthusiastic.

The classroom was as noisy as a market, not a single person was properly staying put in their seats, if the person in front was not already putting their head together with the person behind, they would go across tables to find a helper even further away. There were even more unruly ones who roamed everywhere, like enjoying a water banquet. (6)

The person in front of him, Gao Tianyang, was a member of the water banquet. At that moment, he had scuttled all the way to the group on the other side of the class. As for the one behind Sheng Wang...forget about it.

In short, he had nobody to gather with.

Just as he was holding the paper and fretting, Jiang Tian’s chair behind him suddenly made a noise, and a tall figure stood up next. When he walked past him, his fingers tapped on Sheng Wang’s table with a ‘du’.

What?

Sheng Wang was baffled, but Jiang Tian did not even stop in his steps, and went out of the front door straight to the office.

Until his figure finally disappeared from the corridor, then did he realise that there was a post-it the size of a palm on his desk. A bunch of formulas and steps were written on it.

Sheng Wang spent a few hours last night chipping away at the question, at that instant he knew that these were the steps for solving the last question in the physics paper.

Only, other than this, the bottom of the post also contained a single line. The handwriting was thin but untidy: Next time, please mind your own business and don't open your big mouth.

Footnotes:

1. Ethical play as explained by baike, a type of realistic story telling on tv etc etc, basically your soap operas.

2. To call someone older/your age/most people really your "grandson" is an insult 99% of the time, unless they are truly their grandson lmaoo

3. It means ‘top quality’ originally, but internet slang could also use this to mean ‘outrageous/annoying on the extreme’

4. The ‘face’ of chinese culture again, or dignity really

5. Idiom used here: to guard a tree stump, waiting for rabbits. To wait idly for opportunities. Basically, Jiang Tian fully expected Sheng Wang to come out and was waiting for/ambushing him lol

6. The term used was three words like this in chinese: “water-flowing banquet”, or “Water banquet”, a type of banquet where the dishes are continuously served one after another. Try relating that to continuously approaching one table to another for answers to the homework.

Chapter 008 - Petty

You Are Doing This on Purpose Aren’t You???

All I did was give you a shout at a critical time, do you really have to go so far that you even hold a grudge now?

Sheng Wang glared at that last line for a while, wanting to throw the post-it back straight away. However, out of his respect of knowledge, he lowered his hand after raising it, smoothened out the crumpled up post-it, dug out his phone and took a picture of the solution.

Just as he stuffed his phone back into his desk, Jiang Tian returned from the office, a thick and heavy book in his hand.

He did not manage to get a clear look at the title. Sheng Wang only aimed for the exact moment Jiang Tian returned to his seat, and threw the crumpled ball of paper behind him.

Jiang Tian stood at his seat, his tall figure casting a shadow. He casually placed the book onto the table, opened that crumpled post-it note and looked. An extra new line was added at the bottom of the note: ——

Do you think I really care for that answer of yours?

He scanned through this line of doggy-crawl handwriting, crushed the note and chucked it into his desk. He then pulled out his chair to sit down, and shot a question at the back of a certain someone’s head, asking plainly: “Then what did you take out your phone for?”

After he spoke, the tip of the ears on the person in front of him gradually reddened.

Fuck.

Sheng Wang closed his eyes on the pretense of keeping his poise, and felt that his face was utterly destroyed.

In an ultimate moment of embarrassment, there was always that one angel or two out to save the day.

The angel's name was Gao Tianyang, he just came back from the water banquet. He scampered to Jiang Tian's desk and spoke: "You're finally back at last, quick, lemme take a look at the last question for physics! I got three different answers after checking with everyone else, nobody is quite sure of what the last answer is."

His volume summoned a bunch of people, and they all descended upon Jiang Tian.

Class A students had a relatively high average rate of correct answers, if A did not know the answer B would, if B got it wrong A would have definitely gotten it right. To sum it up, under normal circumstances two different students only needed to compare their answers and the answer key would basically be out. If a question managed to cause an entire group of people like this to even feel unsure, then it was truly too difficult.

Yet, Sheng Wang still felt the disparity from their words——

His previous teacher also did assign them olympiad questions, but the ones who could solve it were the minority, and Sheng Wang was one of

them. Yet, in this class, all they yammered on about was the last part, indicating that most people did fine for the first two parts.

Sheng Wang shifted his seat, and opened up a path for the students flocking there. He internally went: as expected of Class A whose average score for physics is 104marks.

Just as he lamented, the scholars of Class A howled: “What the fuck ——it can’t be, this is already the fourth answer!”

Gao Tianyang was at a loss with his paper in his hand: “Then should I change my answer or not?”

“Up to you.”

Even though Jiang Tian was damn good, there were more than forty people in this class, when he was the only one with this answer, odds of him being wrong was really much higher.

Students who made it into Class A would easily be the top student in any other class, they more or less were a little conceited. It would be too much to ask from them for them to easily accept that their answers were wrong.

And so just as the crowd came in like the tide, after some gabbling, they also receded like the tide, the number of people who changed their answers was less than ten.

Jiang Tian did not mind that his answer was not commonly accepted, he merely clearly disliked the feeling of being surrounded by people. As the crowd dispersed, his tightly knit brows finally relaxed a little.

Before Gao Tianyang went back to his seat he took a quick look at the book in his hand: “A Guide to Lyrical Writing?(1) You bought this yourself?”

“Why would I even buy this.” Jiang Tian shoved it into his desk without even flipping the book open, “I got it from the office.”

Gao Tianyang was lost for a bit before he suddenly realised: “Oh, did Beckon Money give it to you?”

The “Beckon Money” from his words was a slightly plump female teacher with a round face, she was in charge of teaching Class A language. Due to her cat-like lips that made her look like a maneki-neko, she got such a wealthy sounding nickname.

“What did she give you for?” Gao Tianyang asked.

Jiang Tian was completely uninterested in chit chatting, and ended the conversation with three words: “I don’t know.”

Gao Tianyang said an “Oh”, and finally properly went back to his seat.

Their year had five periods of class each in the morning and afternoon, this morning Class A had two periods of math, one period of chemistry, and two periods of language. For the afternoon, there would be a PE lesson right in between physics and English.

Other than physics as they already went through the paper during night self study, the other subjects were basically all going through the weekly test.

For the first three periods, both Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian became infamous,(2) the former was because of his super strong study ability, the latter was because he was that good.

In this weekly test, Jiang Tian only lost three marks in total from his three sciences——he missed out an answer for ‘select the correct answer(s)” in chemistry, and missed out a “solved” for maths.(3)

The two teachers praised them as they could, and praised them when they could, somehow forcing down 130 plus minutes of soup of forgetfulness(4) straight. Only when the language teacher Beckon Money entered then did the situation change.

It changed mostly Jiang Tian’s half of the situation.

Beckon Money(5) got the first student of every group to pass the paper down to the back, she herself held on to the teacher’s desk as she summarised the situation for this week’s test: “The total score for language is 160, our class’ average is 109, do you know what this means? This means you only scored 5 points higher than physics, that has a total of 120 points. Are you kidding me?”

The whole class was as quiet as chickens. (6)

The top students who were as threatening as can be with all fangs and claws when it came to the three sciences could only keep their tails between their legs whenever they were confronted by Zhao Cai and Yang Jing.

In all honesty, as the top class, they weren’t too unbalanced in their proficiency for various subjects, otherwise their total score(7) would not fare well either. Comparatively still, their results for language and English were not as outstanding, and even drove their teachers up the wall once in a while.

“Yes, the test now is a little harder than usual, it was too easy for your essays to go off topic, the overall score for the second comprehension passage across the entire year is very low, as for poetry appreciation...forget about it. I never held any hopes for your poetry appreciation, but you can’t just make things up?”

“Now, I will heavily commend the new student. Even though he just transferred here and was behind, his foundation is very good. I recall he did not lose a single point for poetry appreciation as well as comprehension, his essay was also very well written——”

Everyone likes good looking guys, even more so for good looking guys who are good at studies. Beckon Money was not stingy at all when it came to praises, the moment she praised an entire paragraph came out.

Sheng Wang’s soul was dancing, yet his face maintained a basic level of meekness and calmness. He leaned back against his chair, the pen between his middle finger and ring finger tipped up and down, and lightly tapped on his test.

Just as he was feeling good from head to toe from all the praising, Beckon Money suddenly added a line: “It’s just that that handwriting of yours still needs some work. You don’t need to make it particularly pretty or anything, you only need to try your best to make sure they are upright, and not crawling.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

The guys in class started cackling, the girls were slightly more reserved, some lowered their heads and laughed till their faces turned red, and then sneakily turned back to look at him amidst the chaos.

Beckon Money thumped the table: “What are you laughing for? You have the gall to laugh? Just this essay alone, I would dare say that out of the entire class only his and the rep’s works could be counted as scoring well, what are the others even made of? And also some students need to watch out, the question was asking for you to write lyrically, can you please add a little more emotion into your words? Don’t make them as dry as your formulas, can you please fluff(8) it up a bit? I won’t specifically be calling anyone out, right Jiang Tian?”

Sheng Wang suddenly recalled the “A Guide to Lyrical Writing” that Jiang Tian brought back in the morning, and could not help but laugh. The whole class cackled again.

He slightly turned his head to look, the reprimanded person in question appeared to be unaffected, nobody knew if he was truly aloof or he could not let go of his dignity and was pretending to be aloof.

After Beckon Money attacked everyone with precision for ten minutes, she finally started going through the answers. Even as she went through the answers, she did not neglect dragging certain students out to attack them again.

As she reached the comprehension passage, she looked up and scanned around, and called: “Jiang Tian.”

Sheng Wang heard the chair scraping against the floor as it moved. The person behind him stood up.

“Look at the first question, what do you think is the correct answer?” Beckon Money questioned.

With a period down Sheng Wang already figured out this teacher’s style, she would call on whoever got the question wrong.

Maybe it was out of the need to respond to that post-it note earlier on, or maybe he was merely opening his peacock feathers again, Sheng Wang shifted his paper to the left a little for some mysterious reason.

He got everything correct for this comprehension passage, Jiang Tian would be able to see the right answer if he lowered his eyes, as long as he was not blind, he should see that the right answer for the first question was C.

Sheng Wang sent a glance to Jiang Tian, and coincidentally met his eyes too. He instantaneously sat up straight, and yet he felt slightly relieved on the inside——this meant that Jiang Tian saw the paper.

Instead, in the next second, he heard Jiang Tian say: “A.”

Sheng Wang: “???”

Beckon Money’s eyes narrowed as expected: “You’re choosing A? Take a look and tell me which one you should choose again?”

Sheng Wang shifted his paper even more to the left, and yet he heard Jiang Tian correct himself, even more undisturbed: “D.”

He could not resist and turned back, this good's original answer, "B", was marked with a cross.

Sheng Wang: "....."

You are doing this on purpose aren't you???(9)

Footnotes:

1. A type of essay requiring the students to express their ~feelings~. I would say emotional writing but apparently lyrical writing is already an "official" term.

2. Yes I am aware of the meaning, the original text's phrasing also had a negative connotation.

3. Apparently they need to write that, or they get marks deducted. Supposedly it was to show that this was where they put down their workings.

4. A potion that makes one forget their past live, fed to you by Meng Po in the underworld before you can proceed to your next life, meaning that the students are completely going ????????. Can also be used to refer to words that mystify people.

5. I will unfortunately stick to beckon money being a proper noun here because i did the same for big mouth xu/dean xu previously...cries

6. I would use mice if I intend to localise this a bit more, but chicken??? CHICKEN???? Either ways they are Quiet. Edit: it came from internet slang (sigh) that supposedly describes fans being quiet as hell when their idols don't perform as expected. alternate origin also includes: prostitutes being quiet as hell whenever the police busts their den or something

7. Calculation of eng+lang+math as one, + 3 sciences + some quality/value thing (which is an overall rating of all their subjects)

8. Respectful you is used here, she's being sarcastic

9. Respectful you is used here, Sheng Wang was being sarcastic

Chapter 009 - Dine and Dash

Come and Pay Ransom for That Dine and Dasher Boy of Yours

The classes in the morning flew by.

When Beckon Money got to the last model essay, Gao Tianyang suddenly reclined. His back touched Sheng Wang's desk as he whispered: "Beckon Money never drags her lessons."

"Hm?" Sheng Wang leaned forward, and asked in confusion: "Class ends on top, so what?"

"Then we can head to the canteen on the dot," Gao Tianyang stated, "Friendly reminder, you should identify the general direction to the canteen, and sprint the moment the bell rings. This is how you can still get a hold of the edible stuff in the canteen."

A question mark slowly appeared on Sheng Wang's face, "Why do I need to run? Didn't we only need to walk just yesterday?"

"Like you said, that was yesterday," Gao Tianyang sighed, "From today onwards, our good days are over, because the year ones finally entered school. Now there's twice the number of people fighting for food."

Gao Tianyang wagged his finger, “Life is full of hardships, after experiencing this just once, you would know that that bunch of year one monsters can run faster than dogs.”

Before Sheng Wang could reply, Beckon Money suddenly thumped her desk, “Gao Tianyang!”

Sheng Wang touched his nose as he sat up straight, the person ahead of him already standing up in embarrassment.

“Try to vy for attention with me, aren’t you?” Beckon Money asked curtly,“What are you blah-blahing about? You even had to drag Sheng Wang in.”

Gao Tianyang scratched his head: “Nothing much really.”

“You think you’re coaxing a ghost?” Beckon Money jerked her head as she propped against the desk, “The time is almost up anyways, come, share with us what you said just now.”

Gao Tianyang moved his lips, the spitting image of a mosquito’s whine.

“You got a toothache?” Beckon Money said, “Repeat it three times! We end class whenever you are done, if not, we'll just wait this out.”

Forty plus heads whipped around, Gao Tianyang boomed, “I said, that bunch of year one monsters can run faster than dogs!”

Beckon Money: “.....”

Sheng Wang internally thought that this punishment was quite something.

Beckon Money pointed at Gao Tianyang, “Shut up and sit down. Copy the three model essays today once, and hand it in during night self study. And then—lesson’s over!”

After she spoke, the slightly round female teacher deftly sidestepped and opened up a path.

Only the chorus of chairs scraping against the floor could be heard. The classroom was basically empty before Sheng Wang even stood up.

The scholars of Class A shot towards the stairs like avalanche and tsunami. Around more than half way through, the school bell rang, and more people joined the group, a majestic sight as they all madly ran for the canteen.

What legendary level of starving wolves is this?

Sheng Wang was left gaping, and that was when he heard Beckon Money raise her voice: “Eh? Why aren’t the two of you running?”

“The...two of us?” Sheng Wang only noticed the “two” behind him when he turned around.

Not only did Jiang Tian not rocket off, he was even doing a practice paper.

Beckon Money could not help but feel moved when she saw a corner of the script, “Yo, did the sun come out from the west today? You’re really doing your corrections so seriously? Let me see, which question are you stuck on that it’s taking you so long. Is there anything you don’t know?”

“Nope,” Jiang Tian crooked his left index finger and touched his nose, yet the pen in his right hand did not stop, the speed of writing even

increased.

According to relevant experts, touching your nose is a sign of guilty conscience.

Sheng Wang snuck a look, heh, it’s a physics paper.

Beckon Money stepped down from the teaching platform (1), Jiang Tian at the very same moment also substituted in and simplified the final equation. His pen marked the final statement with a full stop, and swiftly stuffed the paper into his desk. He stood up before Beckon Money reached him, and said,“I’m going to eat now, teacher.”

After he spoke, he immediately left the classroom.

Sheng Wang let out an “Um”, and also waved at Beckon Money, “I’ll be heading downstairs too, teacher.”

“Oh sure, go ahead,” Beckon Money was baffled by both of them, and in the blink of an eye, the two teens exited one after another.

“Did they see a ghost or something, why were they leaving so fast?” She mumbled. She walked to Jiang Tian’s table and peered. A corner of the paper was sticking out from the bottom of the desk, Jiang Tian’s concluding statement was written on it: We can thus tell that the ball received equal force, and was travelling at a constant velocity of Vt on a straight line.

Beckon Money: “……”

She dashed to the backdoor with a bow-and-arrow-step(2), and roared, “Jiang Tian! Show yourself at my office for a face to face chat during night self study!”

The spacious uniform of teens briefly flashed at the corner of the stairs, and soon vanished.

The air condition was especially strong in the classroom. Sheng Wang only realised that he ran away too quickly, and forgot to even take off the school jacket by the time he dilly-dallied his way to the first floor. The person doing a physics paper in the middle of language class wasn’t even him, who exactly was he following after and what for.

He did not really feel it yet after he just went down, but the moment the sun reared its ugly head, sweat belatedly started steaming from him. Sheng Wang could not stand it a second longer, he took off the jacket and grabbed it instead.

Jiang Tian was a few steps ahead of him.

It was as if this person could not sweat or anything, he did not even take off the uniform, he merely rolled his sleeves till the elbow. A student frequently bent over their desk would easily end up with a hunchback if they were not careful, and yet there was not a single thing wrong with him. He stood tall and straight, like a walking stick of ice-cream under the sun.

Good looking guys always attract attention no matter where they go, not to mention it was two of them this time round.

Quite the number of groups of girls all turned to look at them when they walked past, and jostled each other with stifled giggles. A couple of

them were not careful, and were almost pushed into Sheng Wang by their friends who were teasing them.

Sheng Wang sidestepped, and smiled at them amidst non-stop apologies of “I’m sorry”, and then caught up with Jiang Tian in two steps.

“Oi, any tissue?” He asked as he wiped at the sweat gathering on his forehead.

The fountain at the school parade square was not switched on. Jiang Tian descended along the steps of the fountain, and turned a deaf ear.

“I’m talking to you,” he said again.

Jiang Tian remained selectively deaf.

Sheng Wang “tsked”, and peeved: “I only ran down with you because I was implicated by you, why won’t you even spare me a piece of tissue?”

Jiang Tian finally responded this time round, he said: “Learn how to address someone properly first before you come asking me for tissues.”

Sheng Wang stared at the back of his head in annoyance, his mouth wordlessly moved, before he unwillingly dragged his voice: “Student Jiang Tian, can you please lend me a piece of tissue, polite enough yet?”

It was only then Jiang Tian finally dug out a packet of tissues from his school uniform’s pocket and tossed it to him. Sheng Wang reached out to catch it, and took a piece to wipe his sweat.

“Can we still make it in time with our speed?” Sheng Wang looked all around him, as compared to the hurrying crowd, the two of them were truly a whole other sight altogether.

In all honesty he did not want to eat with Jiang Tian at all. It was clear with the naked eye alone that Jiang Tian did not want him to tag along either, just imagining that scenario was awkward enough to the point of suffocation. Yet the competitive spirit of boys was ever present for some mysterious reason, in a situation like this, it seemed like whoever backed out first lost. Sheng Wang did not want to be the one who chickened out, and so he forced himself to walk shoulders to shoulders with Jiang Tian……

Two minutes later, he realised that he was getting further and further away from the canteen.

“Hold on, the canteen’s over there, are you not going to eat?” Sheng Wang asked.

“You can eat the plates if you go to the canteen at this time,” Jiang Tian shot a glance at him, “If you want to you can go there yourself.”

Sheng Wang certainly did not want to eat plates. He followed Jiang Tian bypassing the basketball court and a small half of the ‘Garden of Conduct’, and entered a convenience store at the side of the school’s west gate.

There were three convenience stores located within Fuzhong’s campus, one was close to the canteen, the other next to the dormitories, and the one right here.

The shop's name was 'Xi Le', from the colour scheme of the area above the entrance it appeared to be copying 'C-Store',(3) everything about it screamed that it was about to get a crack down by the 315 for being a knock-off. (4)

This shop was in the direct opposite direction of the canteen, and it could barely be counted as near to the teaching blocks, so there were hardly any students around at noon.

The boss' name was Zhao Su, he was a tall and thin middle-aged man, his eyes were slightly bugged out like a praying mantis. When he peered over the top of his thick glasses, he was the image of shrewdness.

"No more food in the canteen?" Boss Zhao asked.

Sheng Wang nodded, "We're too late."

"There—" He pointed at the side of the counter with his lips(5), "we have cooked food and dimsum and oden and all, pick what you want, my hands aren't free at the moment."

A giant basket with washed cucumbers sat on the table, at the side was a stack of newly opened disposable paper boxes, and also a roll of cling wrap.

Some strange looking person was curled up opposite his table. That person looked like he was in his fifties, was scrawny looking, and his upper back stooped like a prawn. He appeared to be a hunchback.

He wore a white singlet, and there were two moth-bitten holes at the back. Below was a pair of greyish blue cotton shorts, the needle-thin legs that stuck out were tanned bronze. He was all bones.

As if he was ashamed of how he looked, when Sheng Wang entered, he retreated behind the shelves. Maybe he was afraid of scaring people. Yet, when he saw Jiang Tian, he grinned. Meaningless noise came out of his mouth, and gesticulated with his hands.

Sheng Wang let out a light ‘ah’ internally. The man was mute.

Jiang Tian nodded at the mute, he was not very warm either. Still, the mute was rather happy, and gesticulated at Boss Zhao again.

His gestures were clearly not proper sign language, he was purely running on instincts. In any case Sheng Wang understood none of that. However, Boss Zhao did.

He said: “Yeah yeah yeah, he really is quite tall, nowadays kids shoot up like it’s nothing. Don’t gesture anymore, wear your gloves first. I’ve already been waiting for half the day.”

The mute instantly behaved, and earnestly wore his gloves. Boss Zhao placed the cucumber into the box after some selection, and he would help him wrap it up in cling wrap. He was not a particularly nimble helper, but he was a helper nonetheless.

After observing a round, Sheng Wang felt that either Jiang Tian was a frequent visitor, or he knew Boss Zhao and the mute at the start.

As he zoned out, Jiang Tian suddenly said to him: “You can eat here first, I’ll be leaving.”

“Wh….you’re not eating?” Before Sheng Wang knew it, the convenience store’s glass door chimed with a *ding-dong*, and Jiang Tian’s

figure had already disappeared beyond the door.

“He doesn’t eat here,” Boss Zhao casually pointed behind, “he eats outside of school.”

Sheng Wang was more confused than before. Fuzhong required a permission slip to leave campus in the day. He did not see any teacher signing Jiang Tian’s slip at all.

“Outside of school where?” he asked.

“In the family zone,” Boss Zhao spoke with the harshness of a senior speaking down, “What, you can’t eat by yourself? Why do you bother about him? You don’t have long for noon break, quickly go back to class after you eat.”

Sheng Wang recalled the stack of papers he had to do, and stopped talking. He got two dishes and sat down with a dining plate. The sparrow may be small, but all the vital organs are there. (6) Even though this shop looked like a knock-off, it had everything a convenience store ought to have, most importantly the food was surprisingly good too.

Sheng Wang was not picky with his food for once, and ate it all without complaints. He placed the dining plate back at the return area, and slightly revised his opinion on Jiang Tian. At least, he brought Sheng Wang to this shop, he did not have to squeeze with people, nor did he have to starve.

“You’re done?” Boss Zhao removed his gloves and asked, “How’s the taste, is it better than the canteen?”

Sheng Wang was very generous when it comes to praises, he flattered: “It’s even comparable to my home’s.”

Boss Zhao laughed out loud, he was very pleased by the sweet talk. When the laughter stopped, he stuck out his hand and said to Sheng Wang, “Money.”

“Oh right, I almost forgot.” Sheng Wang’s smile hung on his face as he felt around in his pocket, and as he smiled his face eventually turned pale.

Boss Zhao asked perceptively, “Anything wrong?”

Sheng Wang gave an empty laugh, “I forgot my money.”

He did not have cash, his phone was also stuffed in the bag inside his desk, he was penniless.

Boss Zhao grabbed his hand on the spot, “That won’t do, you can’t leave if you can’t pay.”

“How about you put it on my tab first, I’ll pay you back together with tomorrow’s lunch?” Sheng Wang suggested.

“No way,” Boss Zhao rejected.

“Then I’ll quickly go back to class and get it?”

Boss Zhao said once more, “No way.”

“Be a little flexible with me.”

“No.”

“Why are you so stingy!”

As noon break was about to end right before his very eyes, Sheng Wang who was trapped felt like breaking down.

The boss thought for a bit, “It’s urgent? Sure then.”

He dug out his phone and called someone after finding a certain number, he then placed it on the table with speaker mode turned on.

The dialing tone rang for a good while before the phone was finally picked up, Jiang Tian’s voice rang out from the phone, “Is there anything you need, Zhao-shu?” (7)

Boss Zhao said, “Yes, bring money here for a bit, and pay ransom for that little dine and dasher boy of yours.”

Jiang Tian went silent momentarily. Next thing, he hung up with a click.

Footnotes:

1. The teacher’s desk was actually elevated on a platform at the front of the class. Fun fact: the raws have been referring to that area as ‘platform’ for most of the text

2. Dance step

3. Sigh here we go: “C-store”’s cn name is □□□, “xi shi duo” which sounds like “many good things/news”, however imo it looks like a knock-off 7-11, and also also it apparently has an english name called C-store, probably short for convenience store. Xi Le also means joy and I decided to retain the name in this form instead, because it really is way more generic as a name.

4. 315 - world consumers’ rights day

5. I can easily visualise using the lips to point in a certain direction, kinda like using your thumb but with the corner of the lips instead. Is this universal? At least some research tells me it may not be. Also found this video on it lmaoo

6. Chinese saying for though something may be small, the details are complete/sufficient

7. 'Shu' as a suffix is Uncle

Chapter 010 - WeChat Account

You and . Are Now Friends, You May Start Chatting

The moment Boss Zhao looked up after he kept his phone, he heard that dine and dasher say in all seriousness, “Just kill the hostage.”

The boss was amused, “That won’t do, I’m just a small business, I can’t afford to kill this particular hostage.”

Sheng Wang looked up and let out a long sigh of “ah—”, and sat down on the floor hugging his head.

He was never willing to go outdoors under the sun, his skin was a shade of pale comparable to Jiang Tian’s. The moment he even felt a trace of embarrassment it was especially obvious. The boss wanted to laugh even more when he saw the back of his neck reddened all the way to the tip of his ears, “Ay, is it really that bad?”

Sheng Wang let out a sarcastic laugh, and said, muffled, “I have a thin skin.”

Fortunately Crab did not hear that line coming out from him, or else he would spit at him.

When this handsome guy chooses to be thick skinned, he’s absolutely undefeated, when needed he could act unreasonable and shameless without even changing his face, “thin skinned” when applied on him was already an act of shamelessness in itself. Although the rate of his awkward moments these two days were really a little too high.

After much searching, it was still Jiang Tian’s fault.

That ten plus minutes felt like a century. Boss Zhao gave his shoe a kick, “You can stand up now, the person paying has arrived.”

Sheng Wang immediately stood up the moment he heard.

He stuck his head out and peered, Jiang Tian was turning in from the path in ‘Garden of Conduct’. The glass door with the sensors opened with a *ding-dong*. Sheng Wang, leaning against the counter, had his eyes downcast and pretended to look dignified. The flush on his neck and ears had already long faded when he stood up, his pretense really did look legit.

“You sure are capable.” he heard Jiang Tian say.

Sheng Wang looked up at him, and gave a dry laugh, “I was in too much of a hurry when I left, didn’t expect to leave both my wallet and brains behind too.”

He was a loyal purporter of the belief: ‘If I apologise quickly enough, nobody would bear to fight me’. Along that face of his which had an extreme ability to cause someone to lose their train of thoughts, it had never gone wrong for so many years.

Who would have thought that Jiang Tian was not receptive to that technique at all. After he listened to his sincere self mockery, Jiang Tian scathingly went, “I also didn’t expect to have to chauffeur someone around when they want to eat.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He opened his mouth and wanted to retort right back, only to see Jiang Tian move past him, and scanned the QR code to pay at the counter. He was still wearing his school uniform, the sleeves were bunched quite high up, enhancing the length of both his arms and legs.

Boss Zhao asked him, “Want anything else?”

He glanced at Sheng Wang.

Sheng Wang: “?”

Jiang Tian was a little taller than Sheng Wang, one could hardly tell when they were both sitting in class. But as they stood like this in close distance, especially as his gaze swept downwards from the corner of his eyes, that few centimetres of difference became super obvious.

Jiang Tian looked like he was losing patience, “He’s asking you if you are taking anything at all.”

Sheng Wang mused, slid to the fridge at the side, scooped out two bottles of water and placed it on the counter in deference, “Thank you.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Xi Le convenience store was relatively far from the teaching block, it was a good ten minutes walk away. Jiang Tian took a look at the time, put his phone aside, and walked at a speed that was neither fast nor slow.

Sheng Wang did not realise what was going on at first, and also followed him back to Mingli Block calmly and unhurried.

As a result the moment they entered the classroom both the math teacher and them just stared at each other speechlessly.

The math teacher’s surname was Wu, he was that balding middle aged man who summoned Jiang Tian for a chat during night self study that time.

Fuzhong year two’s noon break was a one and a half hours in total ——the first half was for food, the last half was for napping, the middle half all belonged to Old Wu. Every noon he would arrive on the dot to give out practice papers, specifically to practice the additional math question, and immediately collected once upon 30 minutes.

Old Wu eyed the wall clock on the wall at the back of the class, and asked Sheng Wang, “There’s still 15 minutes left, are you planning an insurrection or something?”

“Fuck, I forgot,” Sheng Wang was the face of bewilderment, and said it unconsciously.

“I don’t know whether you forgot about the fuck, I only know that it’s probably too late for you,” Old Wu spoke with an accent, every line sounded like it was an unhurried one straight out of a play. He even used his index finger and tapped on Sheng Wang in the air, the combined visual and auditory effect was seriously quite the sight.

The whole class guffawed.

Sheng Wang carried the bottles with a hand, and sheltered his face with another. He scurried back to his seat, that bastard Jiang Tian remaining completely unhurried as he followed behind.

“You have to be doing this on purpose?” he turned to glare at the person the moment he sat down.

Jiang Tian, while still under his forceful look, used his pen to point above him.

Sheng Wang followed the direction of the pen tip. The minute hand of the wall clock moved two degrees, there was only 13 minutes left.

Fuck me.

Though Student Sheng could write quickly but sloppily, maths was not just copying the textbook after all. He was as busy as a bee, and ultimately managed to do only more than half of it.

The bell rang, Old Wu clapped and called for a stop, getting the last students to collect it to the front.

Jiang Tian stood in front of Sheng Wang while he held onto his own script, and waited for him for five seconds. He watched his deathbed struggle as he attempted to finish writing that last number in that question, and then ruthlessly whisked that shitty piece of paper away.

“You wait a bit,” Sheng Wang said, his face solemn.

Jiang Tian stopped in his steps, he thought that he had some legitimate issue. This human instead reached out with his claws and pawed at his script, his mouth muttering, “You really are vicious enough to sabotage me at all costs, you would let eight hundred of your own die in order to kill the enemy’s one thousand, I want to see exactly how many questions you can do in 13 minutes.” (1)

The result of that pawing was truly despairing. Jiang Tian, this screwed up person, actually finished it all.

“Are you using hacks?” Sheng Wang could not help but say.

Maybe it was that his expression was too lifeless or something, Jiang Tian let out a laugh as he held Gao Tianyang’s script. However, that laugh was so brief that it was too difficult to tell if that was a jeer.

Old Wu completed yet another mission of trashing the noobs, and walked away with the practice papers in satisfaction.

The remaining students kept their paper and stationery, swept away everything on their table, and all rested their heads to prepare to sleep. They already long adapted to this time division, almost to the point of it being biological. Some people started lightly snoring the moment they rested their heads.

Sheng Wang half turned and knocked on the table behind him, the sound as light as a paw scratch.

Jiang Tian was placing his pen pouch into the desk, when he heard that he lifted his gaze and asked lowly, “What again?”

“Give me your WeChat,” Sheng Wang replied beneath his breath.

Jiang Tian: “?”

“I’m paying you back,” Sheng Wang immediately explained. He paused for god knows what reason, and then added, “If not, your Alipay account will do too, pick one, quick.”

Jiang Tian did not speak as he looked at his open palm, as if he was contemplating which one was more appropriate.

Waiting caused by any reason at all would all give the wrong impression that he was nervous. After Sheng Wang's palm lay splayed open on the table for a while, he was uneasy for some ineffable reason. He took a look at the wall clock again, waggled his finger and urged, "Quick, I still want to sleep."

Jiang Tian brought out his pen again to write a string of numbers, and also stuck the post-it note onto his palm.

Sheng Wang 'tsked', and mumbled, "You stuck it on my hand."

He turned back and removed the post-it. That string of numbers was evidently a phone number, usable for both WeChat and Alipay.

Sheng Wang curled his lips. He lied down just like the other students, his forehead touching the table. His two hands instead fumbled with the phone inside the desk.

He hesitated between two icons, and chose to open WeChat and searched for that number.

The app immediately displayed the search results.

This person’s WeChat nickname was only a full stop, aloofness and perfunctoriness came leaping at him. It was clear that it was Jiang Tian himself. His profile picture however was not so distant, it was a cat looking down at people as it sprawled on top of the wall.

Sheng Wang raised his eyebrow, and tapped to add as a friend.

He waited for about two minutes, and did not receive the notification that the other person accepted. He could not help himself and looked back. That bastard was already resting his head on the table and asleep.

Jiang Tian’s sleeping position was constant, his right hand always moved behind his head, his slender fingers naturally crooked and rested on the back of his neck.

Most of the students were already asleep, the remaining were only half-conscious. The sound of breathing as well as light snores were not in sync, as they mixed in the low hum of the air condition, it was not completely silent at all, and yet it was more quiet than anything.

An environment like this was easy for people to daydream. Sheng Wang zoned out for quite a while as he looked at Jiang Tian’s finger. Suddenly, he found a scar at the back of his neck.

That should be a scar that was left from a long time ago, it was round, and the skin around the area was not particularly smooth either, as if he was burned by something. The dangling fingers happened to block that spot.

Sheng Wang was startled, and immediately withdrew his gaze.

He rested his forehead on the table again, and played with his phone with his head buried for a bit. Before he slept, he opened Alipay, keyed in Jiang Tian’s number, and transferred the money for lunch and the two bottles of water over.

He just transferred the money when the bottom of the desk behind him rang out with a *bzz*.

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He stiffly turned back, discovered that Jiang Tian did not wake up, and let out a breath he was holding. He whisked out a bottle from the two in the table, placed one next to Jiang Tian’s desk, and then softly and lightly rested on his table, cursing “stupid app” under his breath.

For some reason, for a good half of the day later on, his thoughts constantly drifted back to that burn scar on Jiang Tian, even though it certainly had nothing to do with him.

Only after he returned to lay down on that giant bed in his bedroom at night, did that image get temporarily chased away by another matter——

At this moment, he was clutching his phone, and attempting to play a game up till the last second before he had to sleep. His phone suddenly vibrated, resulting in his fingers to get a little numb.

The notification panel on top indicated that there was a new message in WeChat.

It was already two plus past midnight, which insomniac ghost sent a message to him? This did not match Crab’s sleeping hours either?

Sheng Wang opened his WeChat in confusion, and discovered that that message was not because someone messaged him, but rather someone accepted his friend request.

There was now another person at the top of his conversations, the interface displayed: “You and . are now friends, you may start chatting.”

Footnotes:

1. Chinese saying, to cause damage to others even at great cost of oneself

T/N: to ask for wechat is kinda like asking for your number (it basically is) and wechat is also social media other than wallet...if Sheng Wang wanted to be completely impersonal he could have added only Alipay straight away and not bother about WeChat, alas the gay is already showing lol. Also i swear sheng wang is so confused like 99% of the time dsnvvsnsnv

Also made some changes to punctuations for dialogue here! Will go back and change the rest eventually aaaaaaaa

Chapter 011 - Sick

If You Keep Typing Without Actually Sending Any Goddamn Thing, I'll Go Knock on Your Door

Sheng Wang was someone who did not enjoy chatting on WeChat at all, as typing was really too troublesome.

He would not bother with opening notifications like "Friend successfully added", not to even mention actually sending a message to 'start chatting'. Really, if you are already on good terms, you would not care about these steps, if your relationship is just so-so, the moment you speak, the remaining steps would be as follows—

You would first warm the scene with a couple of emojis, and then an entire series of small talk, stretching the conversation on with fluff to make yourself seem close, and when it's stretched to the point of being utterly cringeworthy, you may then exit after a sending a couple of stickers or something.

This procedure would take at least 20 minutes, or even up till half a day. He saw it plenty of times from Sheng Mingyang, looking at it alone was already tiring.

It was currently 2.33am, Beijing time. Only idiots would choose to make small talk at this time.

As Sheng Wang thought so, he already exited from the WeChat interface, and switched back to a new round in his game. Maybe his feel for the game was interrupted, or maybe he reached the point of drowsiness, he was sacrificed to the heavens only after three minutes.

Sheng Wang lost the mood to game. Still, he did not want to put his phone down. He dully went through the applications on his phone like he was the emperor on an inspection tour. After he inspected all his frequently used apps, before he knew it, he was on WeChat again.

The chat for that full stop next door over was still taking up the top spot of his chat list, and yet when he tapped on it it was completely barren.

The emperor, sprawled on his stomach under the blankets, bit his lips. After some pondering, he opened up the emoji section, and did not find a suitable one after a long while of picking through. He closed the emoji section unenthusiastically, and instead tapped on the profile picture.

Jiang Tian's personal information was very simple, he only had a punctuation for his nickname, his WeChat number was still the default keyboard smash it came with, and there was not a single Moment posted. (1)

It was simple to the point of looking like an abandoned account, a single glance and he got all the information there was. It was boring.

The emperor yawned, and was about to sleep. Before he could exit the app, his phone suddenly *bzz'd*, the notification panel stuck its tongue out, displaying '. has transferred money to you.'

Sheng Wang: "???"

Any drowsiness he had was scared away by this. Sheng Wang opened his Alipay. He was not seeing things, the person next door was not sleeping in the middle of the night, he really transferred money to him.

He jolted up, glared at the wall they shared for a few seconds, and opened his WeChat.

Canned: What are you doing?

The sound of slippers shuffling around could be dimly heard from next door, he probably walked from the table to the bed.

Sheng Wang's phone vibrated again, the chat was now filled with another line.

. : ?

Canned: Why are you transferring money to me in the middle of the night?

. : Water money.

Canned: What water money?

Sheng Wang did not catch what was happening at first, and glanced at the wall in doubt. The footsteps next door stopped. Perhaps Jiang Tian was standing at a random area and looking at the message, or he was purely just speechless.

. : The water you placed on my desk.

Sheng Wang started keying in: It’s just a bottle of water, do you really need to pay? I

He was halfway through typing the reply when he stopped. He abruptly became aware that he was not anywhere near to being familiar with Jiang Tian. In school, they only just became classmates for four days, and for the past three days they did not even meet each other’s eyes. Then when it came to being at home…… that was way more awkward. No matter how he looked at it, it was not the type of relationship where they could silently acknowledge that it was a treat, it was only natural to return the money.

Sheng Wang deleted the words he already typed, and replied: Ok.

He then saw the top of the chat display ‘the other person is typing……’. He switched to sitting cross legged, and propped his elbow on his lap and waited.

The other person typed for more than ten seconds. The status then disappeared, and there was no new reply in the chat.

Canned: ?

. : ?

Sheng Wang stared at the two question marks, and felt that maybe there's something wrong with him. But, it was not like the person next door was any better either. He rolled his eyes, and typed word by word: Whatever, it's nothing, I'm going to sleep.

The top of the chat once again displayed 'the other person is typing……'

Sheng Wang said internally: if you keep typing without actually sending any goddamn thing, I'm going to go knock on your door.

A few more seconds later yet again, there was finally a new message in the chat.

. : Mm.

Sheng Wang wanted to hit someone.

He lowered the air conditioner by three degrees in order to cool his fury, and went back on his stomach in his bed, continuing the emperor's inspection tour. The inspection went on all the way up till he was about to sleep and that was when he could not resist it anymore. He tapped open the WeChat information of the person next door, and changed the personal remark to 'Jiang Tian'. (2)

When that person chatted with that full stop as his name alone, he was asking for a beating a hundred times more than usual.

The morning next day, Sheng Wang woke up from the freezing cold alone.

After an entire night of the AC blasting at 18 degrees, the young master's head was aching, his nose was clogged up. He sneezed four times in a row, his hair messily stuck up everywhere, and the tip of his nose was red. He sat, dazed out and cloaked by his blankets for five minutes straight, then ferociously spat at the direction of the person next door over.

For the first time ever, he willingly put on his school jacket. He swiped away the alarm clock in his phone that was squawking non-stop, took two pieces of tissue and headed downstairs.

Sheng Mingyang's business ran into some minor trouble, and he did not return from his business trip yet. However, the house was unexpectedly lively this early in the morning.

Sheng Wang stuck his head out to look below—

The housekeeper, Auntie Sun, was early today. She was following Jiang Ou while wearing a pair of gloves. The two of them went in and out of the kitchen, and would sometimes make small talk. Sheng Wang listened for two lines; it seemed as if Auntie Sun was teaching Jiang Ou to make something.

Jiang Tian stood next to the couch, and was placing the practice papers and pencil pouch into the bag.

Just as Sheng Wang was about to step downstairs, he heard a sudden loud crash in the kitchen, like something was broken. Next, he heard Jiang Ou let out a low hiss.

"Aiyoyo, go run it under cold water, quick," Auntie Sun's voice spreaded over. "This is scalding hot. You go ahead and run it first, I'll get

some ointment for you.”

Jiang Tian tossed away his bag, and strided into the kitchen. From Sheng Wang’s angle, he could see half of his figure from the back.

He heard Jiang Tian ask, “Are there any blisters?”

Jiang Ou replied with a smile, ‘It’s not that bad, I just accidentally touched it because I wasn’t careful enough. Auntie Sun even reminded me earlier to not touch it with my hands, I zoned out for a bit, and forgot.”

“Why are you suddenly baking this?” Jiang Tian asked, perplexed.

“It isn’t exactly sudden, it’s just that I was chatting with your mom and I casually mentioned that Xiao-Wang likes this particularly much, back then—” Auntie Sun rushed over with a small round jar, and said, ‘Come, let’s apply this. This ointment is very useful, I bring it wherever I go, I use it every time I get burned and I always healed.”

As she applied the ointment, she also softly spoke, “His mom always made that for him when he was a kid, Ou-jie said that she wanted to learn.”

Jiang Ou was a little embarrassed, she sighed, “I’m not very adept at this, I can’t really grasp it.”

Sheng Wang’s foot, about to step down, shrunk back. He was a little dumbfounded as he stood at the top floor. In that moment his emotions were a little complicated, he could not tell what he was feeling.

The bedroom door behind him was left ajar, a night’s worth of built up cold air came gushing out, and embraced him from behind. He suddenly felt a little empty on the inside.

Jiang Tian’s voice tightly followed up, and it reached all the way upstairs, “Why are you copying other people.”

That line from Auntie Sun seemed to have offended him somehow, his tone was both cold and curt.

Jiang Ou was startled, “Huh?”

“I said—” Jiang Tian’s brows tightly knitted together, his shoulders and back were extremely tense, just from his sideview alone one could tell how displeased he was.

After he said those two words, he momentarily paused. His fingers, dangling at his side, clenched and unclenched, cracking sounds could be heard. One could tell he was somewhat agitated.

A while later, he said, “Whatever, I’m going to school.”

Jiang Ou awkwardly patted his shoulders, and then quickly turned to wink at Auntie Sun, attempting to diffuse the tense atmosphere.

Jiang Tian’s eyes were downcast. He strided back to the sofa, grabbed his bag and headed to the entryway.

When he changed his shoes, his peripheral gaze caught view of the staircase. He briefly paused while lacing his shoes.

Sheng Wang stood there in the jacket, the spacious school uniform on top of the white t-shirt. The rolled up sleeves made layers and layers of wrinkles, highlighting the unique lithe and slender body of a young man in his growth spurt.

Jiang Tian looked up at him for a moment, and retracted his gaze again. His lips pursed into a straight line.

He stood up the next second, grabbed his bag and went straight out of the doors.

The weather in this city in August was unpredictable, a few flashes of lightning could lead to a torrential downpour. Sheng Wang dimly heard the low roll of thunder outside the house. He rubbed the tip of his nose as he headed downstairs, feeling like he was going to fall sick again.

Footnotes:

1. Function of wechat to post about your life, aka like posting a tweet or a post on facebook

2. Wechat function, a personal remark in case you can't keep track of who's who, like 'co-wroker'/'do not reply' etc

Chapter 012 - Alleviate

Canned: Do You Have a Shortage of Beatings???

It was early morning, the smell of food emanated throughout the classroom,

The study rep, after correcting the last two math questions, wrinkled his nose and sniffed everywhere, “Which shameless bastard sneaked in fried chicken? Are you trying to stop us from studying in peace? Gao Tianyang was it you!”

Gao Tianyang smirked, and flaunted an entire box of fried chicken that he dug out from his desk. “Hungry? Want to eat it? Exchange it with your English practice paper.”

“Fuck!” There was a chorus of cursing, “I almost forgot that there’s still English!”

“Quick quick quick, some kind soul help me!”

Yesterday, the English teacher Yang Jing left them three practice papers for homework, a total of 150 multiple choice questions. Most people fell asleep before they could finish it, and this morning they end up wailing because of that.

“I just knew that the few of you definitely did not do it,” Gao Tianyang turned around while hugging the box. “I also know that our Mr

Handsome over here is so damn good in English, he definitely finished everything, therefore I even prepared my bribery.”

As he clamoured, he turned around and instead saw the sight of Sheng Wang lying on the table. The sleeves that were usually rolled to the elbow were let down, and were snuggly hugging his wrist instead.

A good half of the class was scampering all over the place for homework, only he alone was asleep.

“Eh?” Gao Tianyang hovered around Sheng Wang with the box of chicken in his arms, “Broski? Morning class hasn’t begun yet and you are already sleepy broski, can you sleep after you save lives?”

Sheng Wang remained sprawled across the table. He used only a hand to feel around the inside of his desk, and later dug out three practice papers and smacked it onto the desk.

“Thank you for your gracious help.” Gao Tianyang settled the box of fried chicken on his desk, “This is my breakfast that I(1) am offering up to you, do you want a taste?”

Sheng Wang said stuffily, “I’m too full.”

“What’s up with you? Why do you sound so stuffy?” Gao Tianyang copied Old Wu’s accent, and said slowly in a dramatic voice, “Could it be that you’re crying?” Not only did he not stop at that, he even poked Sheng Wang with an Orchid Finger.(2)

Sheng Wang silently looked up, and stared at him expressionlessly, “Your grandma’s the one crying.”

Gao Tianyang kept his mischievous finger the moment Sheng Wang lifted his head, “What the fuck? You look terrible, are you sick?”

“A little, I think. I forgot that I lowered the temperature for the air condition last night.”

“You still say a little with the way you are now?” Gao Tianyang said, completely done. “Your face screams that you’re sick right now, do you want to get some medicine from the sick bay?”

“Where’s the sick bay?” Sheng Wang asked.

There were many people in the classroom, and the air condition was usually strong. He was already feeling unwell when he left the house in the morning, lying down here worsened it. His lazy voice was getting hoarser.

Gao Tianyang said, “There’s a hill by the school’s west gate, climb up the stairs and the sick bay is right there.”

Sheng Wang said, “Where’s west?”

“.....”

Gao Tianyang scratched his ears, and in that exact moment he saw someone pass by, and casually grabbed, “Tian-ge, where’s west?”

It was business as usual whenever Jiang Tian got called to the office before class started in the morning, there were always plenty of teachers looking for him, everyone was used to it. He placed the stack of papers he brought back from the office on the study rep’s desk, turned around and asked Gao Tianyang, “What’s where’s west?”

Sheng Wang eyed him, and his gaze accidentally met with Jiang Tian’s downcasted eyes.

Maybe they were still affected by the incident in the morning. They both broke eye contact the moment they met.

Gao Tianyang was completely unaware of minor details like this, and was still talking to Jiang Tian, “The west as in north south east west, I was just saying to Sheng Wang to go to the west gate, and yet he asked me where’s west, and now I’m lost too.”

Sheng Wang did not look up again, and kept his eyes down, all tired and sickly. It is difficult for anyone to be in high spirits if they are unwell, it was particularly obvious when it came to him.

Thunder rolled outside the classroom, the sky was pitch black. The lights were switched on, Jiang Tian’s shadow was casted onto his table, a cloud of overlapping dark gray.

“The west is at—’ Gao Tianyang arm’s reached out and attempted to point in that direction.

Before he could find the correct position, Sheng Wang heard Jiang Tian say, “The gate where Xi Le is.”

His volume when he talked was usually not high, it was low and rumbly, with a little croak left over from changing his voice during puberty. His voice descended upon him.

Sheng Wang let out an ‘oh’, and nodded to show that he understood.

It was Gao Tianyang who instead was slow on the uptake, “What’s Xi Le?”

A few seconds later, he abruptly realised, “Ah, I remember now. Yes, the convenience store by the school’s west gate is called Xi Le, I don’t usually go there. Only for PE class then I’ll buy a couple of bottles of water there, it’s closer to the parade square. You know that place?”

It looked like Sheng Wang fell asleep again, he only responded a few seconds later, “I ate there before.”

“How come I never knew that we can eat there?” Gao Tianyang as the PE rep was usually stupidly fast when it came to running. Even though he always grumbled about the year one monsters taking up the canteen, he was able to fight for food right from the tiger’s jaws, and had never felt the pain of being forced to go to the convenience store.

“Mm,” Sheng Wang responded.

With this, even someone who’s bad at noticing things like Gao Tianyang realised that something was wrong.

While Sheng Wang did not look up, Gao Tianyang made use of that opportunity to point at him, and mouth exaggeratedly at Jiang Tian: He looks like he’s in a bad mood, don’t know which fucking idiot pissed him off.

After he said so, he discovered that Jiang Tian did not intend to gesture back at him at all, he only looked at him with a poker face.

Gao Tianyang continued to ‘speak’ exaggeratedly: Why do you look so grumpy too? Were my gestures too ugly?

Before Jiang Tian could respond, he suddenly had a revelation: Could it be...your fault?

He’s screwed, he called Jiang Tian a fucking idiot.

A myriad of emotions came over Gao Tianyang’s face, he eyed Jiang Tian’s expression, and tested the waters: Was it really because of you?

With Gao Tianyang’s understanding of Jiang Tian, he would definitely nod if he was the one behind it, if it wasn’t him he would certainly say “that has nothing to do with me”.

But this time, he only watched Sheng Wang, with not a single sound coming out of him.

What the hell!

Gao Tianyang muttered, and did not dare to blabber anymore.

He poked at Sheng Wang who was giving in to sleep again, “You already know where’s the west gate, maybe you should go to the sick bay when you’re free later?”

“It’s too far, I’m not going.” Sheng Wang sniffed, the feeling of having his nose clogged up made him frown in irritation.

He flipped up the collars of the uniform, grabbed at the lapels, and zipped all the way up.

The lapels of the Fuzhong school uniform was navy blue, when it was completely lifted up it covered the lower half of his face, below his nose. The contrast made his skin look pale.

As he bit at the top of the zip, he dragged his sleeves and went back to resting on the table, and said, muffled, “Wake me up when it’s class.”

And the two bastards Gao Tianyang and Jiang Tian did not wake him up for class.

The first two periods were English, and they would be going through the 150 practice questions from last night. The English teacher, Yang Jing, was already tall enough, she even liked to walk on ‘stilts’. The moment she stood on the platform with her high heels, she would get a good view of every action made by all 40 plus people in class.

She caught view of Sheng Wang with a single look, her index finger knocked on the desk, “What’s going on? The student lying down, you think that you can get away just because of your high score in English?”

Upon hearing that, all the students looked over.

Gao Tianyang raised his hand under the feeling of countless gazes, Yang Jing gave him a head nod, “Speak.”

“He’s sick,” Gao Tianyang explained.

“Oh,” Yang Jing nodded, “sure then, let him lie. When he’s awake, please inform him to come see me for a chat during noon break.”

Gao Tianyang: “.....”

What kind of cruel joke was it to chat with Yang Jing? When that woman got angry, even the principal was scared of her.

The weekly test the week before last week, the broadcast system spoiled during listening comprehension for English, and wasted 20 minutes of the students’ time. The vice principal and Big Mouth Xu was in charge of patrolling around for year twos. The two middle aged men managed to get yelled at by Yang Jing in the corridor for ten minutes straight, and did not manage to get a single word in. They even started sweating as a consequence, and had to borrow tissues from the class monitor in Class A who was next to the windows.

Gao Tianyang regretted, “Then I should probably still wake him up.”

Yang Jing raised an eyebrow, “You dare?”

Gao Tianyang shrunk into his uniform, “Nevermind.”

Jing-jie’s temper was always unpredictable, Class A had a both love and hate relationship with her, nobody dared to piss her off.

Yang Jing reached her hand out to a boy sitting in the first row, “Here, pass me your paper.”

That boy’s name was Qi Jiahao, he was the English rep for Class A. He was super concerned about his ‘face’, he had a build of a giant, and from

body type alone he should not be in the first row. Yet, his vision was really too poor, after a month of badgering the homeroom teacher, he finally badgered his way to the first row.

Yang Jing never liked to use the example answers when going through papers, she would take the paper from the rep every single time. Class A students were already used to it.

To Qi Jiahao, having his paper commandeered by Yang Jing was an extremely thrilling thing. On one hand, all his mistakes would be directly exposed to her, and she had no qualm when it came to scolding him, but on the other hand, he felt as if he was receiving special treatment, and could not help but feel a little proud.

Qi Jiahao presented his script, after a glance however Yang Jing changed her mind again, “Nevermind, I’ll spare you for today, I’ll get a different person to commandeer instead.”

Everyone tensed up, and all lowered their heads, terrified that Jing-jie would spot them in the sea of people.

Everytime this lady reached a difficult question that people usually got wrong, she always dragged Qi Jiahao in public(3), and just Qi Jiahao alone wasn’t enough. She would call on everyone one by one to get them to explain the grammatical concepts and train of thought behind the question, if they could not say it they would have to stand. There were more than 40 people in class, there could be more than 30 all standing up at one point, who wouldn’t be scared?

She looked up, her gaze circled Sheng Wang twice, and finally landed on the person sitting behind him, “Jiang Tian.”

Everyone first let out a sigh of relief, and then looked over in unison.

Jiang Tian was still wearing that expression of his, he was not nervous at all. Just as he took the papers on his desk and was about to stand up, Yang Jing suddenly said, “Hand me the paper of the person sitting in front of you to me.”

Jiang Tian shot a glance at Sheng Wang’s head, “The practice is inside his desk, he’s in the way.”

Yang Jing said, “Oh, then just dig it out.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian did not come out of the student affairs’ office, he did not have the ability to search through other people’s desks. He felt a little headache coming on as he looked at the unconscious person in front of him. He propped his arms against his desk.

He took a look at Yang Jing, walked to Sheng Wang’s side and reached into the desk.

Sheng Wang ‘s uniform looked like he filled it up completely, but in actuality, it was all empty at the edges. When Jiang Tian’s arms brushed past the fabric, a partially formed thought materialised in his mind—

This person was really a little thin.

He managed to find the three practices inside the desk, and just as he was about to retreat, someone suddenly caught hold of his wrist.

The person once lying on the table moved a bit, and raised his head from the crook of his right elbow. His fringe was slightly messy from being pressed on, his eyes were half opened, a pale crescent of light was reflected in his eyes.

“What are you doing?” Sheng Wang asked, his sleepy and hoarse voice was tinged with the annoyance from being woken up.

Jiang Tian’s finger curled a little.

He shot a glance at Yang Jing, who was standing on the platform, and said in a low voice, “Class started.”

After he spoke, he withdrew his hand, straightened up, and passed the practices to Yang Jing.

Sheng Wang buried his head for three seconds, and suddenly bolted up. He covered his face and leaned against the table behind, and mumbled, “For how long?”

Jiang Tian’s voice came from behind, even when it was lowered it could not change the frosty quality to it, “40 minutes.”

Sheng Wang was the image of confusion, “???”

Only until Yang Jing waved his paper, “The rep would usually get four to five questions wrong for this kind of practice paper, let’s see if student Sheng Wang could match that standard or not.”

Qi Jiahao casted a glance at him.

Yang Jing said, “Ok, let’s look at the first question.”

Sheng Wang took a while to digest it, and finally understood this meant that lesson just started.

He pulled a long face as he sat for a while, and dug out the phone inside his desk. He pulled up Jiang Tian’s WeChat, and sent him 50 eye rolls.

Canned: Do You have a shortage of beatings???

T/n: changing the y in you to a capital y to emphasise the respectful You, we'll see how this goes(???). Also I imagine that this is the sticker he would use:, wang-zai rolling his eyes :D

Footnotes:

1. He uses the my/I that is used when addressing a superior. Archaic. He’s copying ancient speaking manners

2. Orchid fingers, or □□□, a hand move that is made in chinese opera/shows, supposed to be graceful but has feminine connotations depending on how you look at it. How it looks like:

3. As I translate the next chapter, the person here is more likely to refer to Gao Tianyang rather than Qi Jiahao, the same factoid was repeated in the next chapter and is probably an error/adjustment on the author's part.

Chapter 013 - English Practice

Go Ahead And Write, Otherwise You Are Too Unoccupied

Yang Jing talked for five minutes with the practice paper in her hands before she noticed that the one who was sick was twirling his pen, his ruler, and his eraser. In any case, everything within his reach, he could twirl.

This was probably a problem among teenage boys in general.

She eyed him a few times and finally recalled, “Sheng Wang?”

“Mm?” The one who was called on gripped his pen.

“I almost forgot, do you not have a paper to look at now?” Yang Jing said.

Sheng Wang laughed dryly, and internally went: you didn’t almost forget, you indeed forgot.

When Yang Jing commandeered Qi Jiahao’s paper, she never cared about the after-sale service. Qi Jiahao would shift his chair and share the paper with a classmate next to him, all he needed was a pen and a notebook.

The students of Class A could be separated into two factions, one would be the “checking answers with everyone after exams” faction, the

other would be the “I’m done the paper can perish for all I care” faction. Qi Jiahao belonged to the former.

The members of this faction all had “photographic memory”, as long as they did the question, they could recite everything from the steps to the answers, including essays. With practices like these English practices involving multiple choice questions, memorising them was a piece of cake.

Therefore even if the paper he was looking at was someone else’s, Qi Jiahao still knew which question he got correct and which he was wrong on, he only needed to do corrections on his notebook.

As for Sheng Wang…….

A single look and it was obvious that he belonged to the “I’m done the paper can perish for all I care” faction.

Yang Jing could not stand to see students being all unoccupied, not even if they got the answer correct. With a jut of her chin, she directed Sheng Wang, “Find someone to share with you.”

Sheng Wang replied with an ‘okay’.

Was finding someone to share supposed to be a challenge? He stood up, and was going to shift his chair forward until he heard Yang Jing add on, “Carry your chair behind, and just make do with Jiang Tian’s, alright?”

Not alright.

Sheng Wang internally said the person behind him still owes him a beating, he did not want to share with him at all.

However, the reasoning Yang Jing gave was very adequate, “I reckon that your rate of correct answers is probably around the same as Jiang Tian’s, it would be just nice if the both of you could share. As for Gao Tianyang…...save some face for him, ha.”

Jing-jie must drag Gao Tianyang during class, that was already daily business as usual, there was no stopping it.

Sheng Wang dragged his chair to the last row, and sat on Jiang Tian’s right. Even though he did not remember his own answers, he still performatively brought along a pen.

Initially, he kept to himself more. He sat a *chi* (1)away from the table, and he had to lean over when he wanted to see the paper.

Jiang Tian shot quite a few glances at him, and finally he could not help but to say, “Are there nails on the table poking at you?”

“There aren’t,” Sheng Wang absent-mindedly replied. Another two seconds, then he realised that the person was mocking him for his posture.

Sheng Wang side-eyed him, and shifted his chair a step forward.

With one, there would definitely be two and three. In the next five minutes, Sheng Wang nudged, and nudged again, and soon enough both his arms were on the table.

Yang Jing was not slow in going through the answers, but there were three papers and 150 questions after all. Those who got many answers wrong were really busy, those who did not were extremely bored otherwise.

Sheng Wang was already dizzy and light-headed from being sick, along with Jiang Tian's paper being almost impeccable, he started feeling drowsy after listening a short while. His whole body slumped lower and lower, the territory his arms took up got bigger and bigger.

He had his elbows on the table as his hand propped up his chin. As he dozed off, his head nodded to the left a couple of times, and to the right a couple of times. Suddenly, his elbow slipped, and his forearm bumped into another person. The warmth of body heat was transmitted through skin to skin contact. Sheng Wang leaned against it in all muddle-headedness until he woke up with a start.

Teenagers often get uneasy easily. A certain line, a certain glance, a certain contact would all cause someone to be subdued, for no reason, for no idea at all.

Sheng Wang's elbow shrunk back, and Jiang Tian changed his pose too, the elbow near him was simply removed from the table.

The other person was too obvious in his avoidance, the young master was displeased again. He internally said: will a little touch poison you? How fast of you to give way.

Coincidentally, Yang Jing reached the end of the second practice. Sheng Wang, who was restless all over, finally found a wrong answer.

He had something doable at last. He uncapped his pen and marked the paper with a cross, and did his correction with a practised ease. He even made a line of notes.

Sheng Wang gave the last ‘g’ a magnificent giant tail. When he looked up after he drew, he saw Jiang Tian staring at him, a red pen in his hand, his expression complicated.

Sheng Wang said, “What, got a toothache?”

Jiang Tian said, “My paper.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He lowered his eyes towards the paper, the doggy-crawl handwriting was especially ostentatious due to how conspicuous it looked. Its presence was extremely strong, and even slanted upwards.

Sheng Wang capped his pen sheepishly, and let out an “oh”. As he was sick, the way he looked was extremely deceiving, when he lowered his eyes a trace of loneliness could be found.

In actuality, he was just zoning out in complete boredom.

He zoned out for only a few seconds when he suddenly heard a light rustling noise from the table. He looked up, and the paper he pushed away was back to his front once more.

Jiang Tian tossed his red pen to the side, and leaned backwards against the chair, looking as if he gave up on listening.

He whisked out an English olympiad question bank, and said to Sheng Wang without even lifting his eyes, “Go ahead and write, otherwise you would be too unoccupied.”

Yang Jing was very good with pacing her lessons, two periods was just enough for her to go through all the answers.

Sheng Wang deigned himself to help JXXXX TXXX mark and correct his answers, and even helped him calculate his score out of impishness. He only made a mistake for five out of 150 questions, when the total score was readjusted to 120, he would lose only four points.

Jiang Tian was done with a page of olympiad questions. After he checked the answers, he folded the page's corner. When he looked up from his book, he saw a brilliant red number on his practice paper: 116.

He did not even need to look to know where this ugly thing came from. Jiang Tian looked away as he pursed his lips, and seized his stolen red pen back from Sheng Wang. He gestured at his front-desk, inviting him to scram.

Sheng Wang dragged his chair back to his seat. Yang Jing was summarising her own thoughts about the practice. She dug out her own red pen, and marked Sheng Wang's paper as she crouched over the table. As she marked, she said, "Overall it's still passable. He only got seven to eight answers wrong, when placed in a formal exam setting the rate of accuracy is still viable. Still, there's still quite a bit of distance from being the best."

The students shrunk. With the difficulty level this time round, only getting seven to eight wrong was awesome enough, at the very least they would be top five within Class A.

Yang Jing kept her red pen, and lifted her chin at the subject rep Qi Jiahao, asking, “How ‘bout you? How many?”

Qi Jiahao retracted his gaze from Sheng Wang, and smiled at the teacher, “four.”

“Oh,” Yang Jing asked again, “Jiang Tian?”

“Five.”

“Good enough.”

Qi Jiahao raised his eyebrow, and sat up straight. Yang Jing shot a glance at him, and said to everyone, “I’ll be printing some papers later, English rep, please remember to go collect the homework from the office this afternoon. Alright, class dismissed.”

The moment the bell rang, Gao Tianyang’s head slowly turned behind. He said to Sheng Wang, his own paper in hand, “It’s wrong!”

Sheng Wang was on the way to catching up on his sleep. He half-heartedly asked, “What’s wrong?”

Gao Tianyang said, “You didn’t get seven to eight questions wrong!”

Sheng Wang did not really care, “Didn’t Jing-jie say so?”

“I copied all 150 answers from you, you didn’t get seven to eight wrong at all. You are super damn good wow you —” Gao Tianyang wanted

to continue when the sound of high heels clicking came close.

With a twist of his head, he saw Yang Jing walking towards them with Sheng Wang's papers. This person instantly went silent, winked at Sheng Wang, and sat back down in all propriety.

"Here—for you." Yang Jing slapped the paper onto his table.

Sheng Wang took a look. There were three giant ticks on three pieces of paper, and not a single cross.

All correct?

Sheng Wang paused for a bit, and finally understood why Gao Tianyang was going on non-stop.

But, if he did get everything right, why did Yang Jing say that he got seven to eight questions wrong?

As he puzzled, Yang Jing clapped his shoulders, "Follow me to the office while it's still the long break."

The long break in Fuzhong was after the first two periods in the morning, a total of 30 minutes. For Monday, it would be the flag-raising slash public reprimand assembly, for Tuesday to Friday it would be jogging, and for the weekend it was free time.

Heaven was not cooperating this long break today, the thunder rolled for an entire morning, and finally became the pouring rain. The jog was

cancelled and the 30 minutes became free time. The students both upstairs and downstairs behaved like rats in a rice vat, and went absolutely wild, causing a few teachers to chase them down for scoldings.

When Sheng Wang entered the office, only Yang Jing was there.

She sat at the office desk, and used her feet to hook a stool over. She said to Sheng Wang, “Sit.”

“Did you get a clear look at your score for the practice papers?” Yang Jing asked.

Sheng Wang nodded, “I got it.”

“Confused? Everything was clearly right, and yet I said you got seven to eight wrong. Are you glum?”

“Do I answer honestly?”

“If not what else?” Yang Jing said, exasperated.

Sheng Wang said, “Then I’m not glum, I did not need to copy as many questions that I got wrong for, why should I be glum.”

Yang Jing raised a brow and looked at him, and bursted into laughter. When she raised an eyebrow she gave the feeling of being domineering, and yet when she laughed it was the exact opposite, “Sure, your mental fortitude is good. Then do you know why I said you got seven to eight wrong?”

Quite a few students zipped by outside the windows, chasing each other towards the toilets.

Sheng Wang gave a look, retracted his gaze, and mused, “I roughly know.”

Yang Jing was slightly surprised, “You do? I want to hear it.”

“I just transferred over for a few days so far, I haven’t truly blended into this class yet. The ones that I’m close to so far are just Gao Tianyang and……” Sheng Wang’s brain jammed up.

“And what?” Yang Jing asked.

“Nothing else, roughly just Gao Tianyang. But the reason why we are close is because he’s naturally familiar with people, and easy to get along with, it doesn’t mean that I’ve been accepted by this class yet. In reality, most classmates still see me as an outsider, like they were just watching me for fun. If I score too badly, I would not fit in anywhere in this class. If I score too well and take up some spots from some classmates, I would be excluded. Therefore, matching up to Class A without being the top is the best way to go. Am I right, teacher?”

Yang Jing was briefly stunned, and properly sized him up once more, “Who would have thought, you even think of these issues?”

Sheng Wang sniffled, “Not really, I thought of it just now.”

“Sure, it is roughly like this,” Yang Jing said. “The ecosystem in the top class can be both simple and complex. As the average standard is roughly the same, birds of the same feather are more likely to flock together. Yet, there is still competition between friends. Most students are quite simple, but there are a few who are too competitive, and they would be more heavily guarded.”

Sheng Wang nodded.

Yang Jing continued, “I’ve already discussed this with Old He and Old Wu and the rest. You are behind for three subjects, you generally can’t avoid seeking help from your classmates. If you get some people on guard, then it would be difficult for you to get help. That’s why, as you said just now, to keep up excellent grades while not reaching the point of attracting jealousy from other people would be the best. Just like that paper just now, only you need to know how good you are, while in front of other people you can conceal some of your true ability, and stay low-key. What do you think?”

Sheng Wang gave a dry laugh, “I think You are right, but—”

Yang Jing said, “But what?”

Sheng Wang let out an ‘um’, and said, “There’s a possibility I can’t stay low-key with those papers just now.”

Yang Jing said, “Mm?”

“The classmates passed it around before morning class.”

“How many?”

Sheng Wang recalled Gao Tianyang’s sphere of radiation, and conservatively estimated, “Eleven to twelve I guess.”

“.....”

Yang Jing felt like she was suffocating, she internally went: you wasted this old lady’s efforts.

Just as expected, with the span of a single long break, the entire class knew that Sheng Wang scored full marks for 150 questions in the English practice papers.

Footnotes:

1. Chi - a chinese foot. Length: officially ⅓ of a metre

Chapter 014 - Alibi

Jiang Tian: I’ll be Home Late Tonight.

The rain was too strong, and half the corridor got wet. The students once loitering outside instantly vanished, and all went back to home base. Only Sheng Wang alone wanted to go out for a breath of fresh air.

He stayed on his seat, feeling like he was the newly imported monkey in a zoo. The tourists flocked around him in all directions, and surrounded him tightly.

Gao Tianyang was the tour guide, “It’s 150 questions, are you even still human?”

He sat on his own table. His voice automatically came with a loudspeaker, and he was noisy enough for the entire class to hear.

The group of people who indirectly copied his homework was on the frontlines, and joined in one by one, “Seriously, let’s not talk about all correct, I’m already happy if I get less than 10 wrong, really.”

“10 wrong answers are already asking too much from me, 20 it is. I’ll be exhilarated if I get less than 20 wrong out of 120.”

“How aspiring of you!”

“The cruel reign of English has caused the people to suffer for too long—as long as gaokao do away with English, Tsinghua and Peking U will both be fighting for me!” (1)

“Bleh, go have your Spring and Autumn dream!” (2)

Everyone in this group was more shameless than the last, they bragged till the point that the study rep Song Sirui could not bear to listen anymore. He pushed apart the crowd, squeezed in and started dragging people. After he dragged them he said to Sheng Wang, “Grass, let’s discuss something.” (3)

Sheng Wang sneezed twice in a row. He took a piece of tissue and asked questiongly, “What are you cursing me for?”

Song Sirui was stumped by his words, and replied as if he did not know if he should laugh or he should cry, “No, the day you came I said Xu dug out a school grass(4) and brought it here, when I call someone I usually use only a single character, so I called you that on a whim.”

Sheng Wang gave two dry laughs, “Your way of thinking is quite unique, can you change it?”

Song Sirui replied, “Sure, then Sheng it is.”

“Then I’m kidney!” (5) Gao Tianyang gave him a slap, and sniggered, “You could call him Wang too.”

“Fuck off, you’re the one who’s a dog.”(6) After Song Sirui cursed out Gao Tianyang, he looked woefully at Sheng Wang, “Why is your name like this?”

Sheng Wang was amused, “I’m so sorry, it’s too late now. You can make do with that.”

“Sheng-ge, Sheng-ge should be alright right?” Song Sirui said.

Sheng Wang was just chugging down water with his cup in his hand, after hearing that he grinned, “I’ll gett a little full of myself here if you’re

like this.”

“First rule of Class A, whose grades are good who gets to be Ge, we do not care about where you came from,” Song Sirui casually pointed behind, “just like the one behind you, everyone has to call him Ge when they see him.”

Sheng Wang was leaning against his seat, he did not stop drinking his water, but his gaze shot towards the corner of his eyes.

The desk was as empty as can be as seen within his peripherals. Jiang Tian was off to god knows where. 20 minutes had already passed for the long break and he was nowhere to be found right from the start.

Song Sirui called him Ge a few times, and then continued to proper matters all naggingly, “Can you not give your paper to people like Gao Tianyang next time round? Our homeroom teacher said it before, telling me to keep an eye on everyone and put an end to the bad common practice of copying homework, every time I catch one I have to report one.”

“Then did you report?” Gao Tianyang’s laugh was especially wretched.

“I noted it all down, and I’ll report it on a quarterly basis, just you wait.”

Song Sirui was not tall, in any class he would be assigned to the first row. When he rolled up his sleeves and reprimanded people he looked especially much like a show poodle. Regardless of gender, people in Class A liked to tease him. He did not really put up false airs either, he never did go through with it every time he threatened to tell on someone.

He nagged at Sheng Wang for half a day, only to hear the other person reply with some ‘mm mm’, and then come back to himself and asked, “What did you just say?”

“.....”

Song Sirui even felt like jumping off the building.

“Sheng-ge, are you messing with me?” he asked, on the verge of breaking down.

Sheng Wang retracted his gaze from the back, and sincerely apologised with his cup in his hand, “Sorry, I zoned out for a bit.”

Song Sirui’s butt plumped down onto Gao Tianyang’s chair, and gave a long sigh, “I can’t stay any longer in the study rep position, whoever wants to do it should do it. I’m resigning after this quarter.”

Sheng Wang’s face was full of remorse.

Gao Tianyang mouthed: It’s an old habit, just let him say it.

Song Sirui would make ruthless statements like this every few days, but when it came to a new round of elections, every student other than him would choose him, and forcefully trapped him in the position of study rep. He could not even escape.

Gao Tianyang had good relations with people, so did Song Sirui. They brought their pack of friends and chatted next to Sheng Wang for a good portion of the long break. As Sheng Wang listened he remembered Jing-jie’s words—the top class was both simple and complex.

He felt that from what he saw so far, this group of students were all quite simple.

When the long break was almost over, the people around Sheng Wang all dispersed.

He still felt dizzy, and his nose was agonizingly blocked. He did not want to do questions or read either. So, he just rested his forehead against the table, and his two hands remained hidden on the inside, playing the no-brainer games on his phone.

After two rounds, someone passed by his table.

He saw out of the corner of his eyes a familiar pair of shoes, next to it was a folded umbrella, dangling down. The rain drip dropped down as it followed the tip of the umbrella, forming a line of water on the floor.

Sheng Wang was still controlling the tiny person parkouring on his screen when he heard Gao Tianyang say, “Where did you go, Tian-ge? You still went outside with such a heavy rain?”

The pair of shoes stopped, Jiang Tian’s voice rang next to him, “Took a trip to the sick bay.”

Sheng Wang’s hands paused.

The sick bay???

He silently lifted his head, and saw Jiang Tian holding an umbrella in one hand, the other holding a plastic bag with the sick bay's logo printed on it. The mouth of the bag was extremely narrow, he could not tell what was inside.

"Why did you go to the sick bay?" Gao Tianyang asked, baffled.

Yeah, why did you go to the sick bay?

Sheng Wang side-eyed that plastic bag, some very ridiculous thoughts started forming in his head.

Can't blame him for thinking like this, it was mainly because Jiang Tian was all alive and hopping and definitely not sick, and he even talked about the sick bay with Gao Tianyang this morning. With these two factors, it was honestly a little too coincidental.

……...It can't be?

Sheng Wang looked up at Jiang Tian.

Honestly, after interacting with him for the past two days he could tell that this person though appeared to have a shitty temperament on the surface, he was really quite soft on the inside, at least towards his mom.

Maybe…...he was also like this to other people?

If, Sheng Wang thought so internally: If Jiang Tian really did go to buy medicine, next time Sheng Mingyang make him call him Ge, he could

reluctantly give a little face.

Of course, it was limited to only that scenario.

Maybe he was bored from being sick, Sheng Wang's thoughts were running extremely wild in his head. Just as he was setting up the scenario, he heard a rustling noise from the plastic bag. Jiang Tian let Gao Tianyang, who was overly curious, take a look, "My mom scalded her hand this morning, I went to get two jars of ointment."

Sheng Wang gave the content of the plastic bag a scan, and just as expected there were two small dark green round jars inside the bag, the exact same ones as the one Auntie Sun applied on Jiang Ou this morning.

He was momentarily stunned, let out an 'oh' on the inside, and the scenario he imagined half way through was gone without a trace.

Gao Tianyang chatted a bit with Jiang Tian again, Sheng Wang did not really listen.

A short while later, Jiang Tian closed back the opening of the plastic bag, and turned back to return to his seat. The moment he lifted his foot, his line of sight mysteriously tilted for some reason, and met Sheng Wang's.

The moment their gazes met, Sheng Wang lowered his eyes.

The tiny person in his phone had long since fallen to death. He tapped to restart, and his two thumbs slid back and forth on the screen.

The sky was pitch black outside, the cold white incandescent lights were switched on in the classroom, casting some square shaped bright spots on his phone. Half of the screen was occupied by the soundless jumps of the tiny person in between the jagged cliffs, the other half reflected the person beside him—

Jiang Tian maintained that position for two seconds before he returned to his seat behind.

For the rest of the day after this, Sheng Wang had pretty bad luck in gambling. He would also die in any no-brainer games the moment he played, he got pissed off to the point of shutting down his phone and tossing it into the most inner region of his bag.

Night self study still ended at 8pm, with another batch of students, the night became much more lively than before. The homeroom teacher, He Jin, entered the classroom as class ended on the dot, and hurriedly pasted the new school bus schedule. When she left, most people in year two block had already left.

Sheng Wang was done packing his bag and was about to stand up when Gao Tianyang suddenly tapped him, “Eh, are you free tonight?”

“I’m doing my papers, why?” Sheng Wang said.

“Anything other than doing papers? Nothing else?”

Sheng Wang nodded.

Gao Tianyang snapped his fingers, “Then follow me. Old Qi’s older brother opened up a barbeque store outside the school’s north gate, today is

the first day of opening, and he planned to call a bunch of people to warm the place up a little. There aren't that many papers tonight anyways, it's so rare we get to relax a little. Are you going?"

Sheng Wang actually did not have any appetite due to being affected by the cold, but recently he was in the state of not exactly willing to go home. Today was especially bad, mostly because he did not want to meet Jiang Ou.

The other person's gesture of goodwill made him feel a little helpless. He could not make himself to make other people look bad and not give any face, but to accept other people and to even get close to her, he could not make himself do it even more.

Therefore, he ran his options for a bit, and said to Gao Tianyang, "Sure, then let's go. Who else?"

Gao Tianyang casually swept his hand, the people who were still dilly-dallying in class all grabbed their bags, "Me, you, study rep, class monitor, Old Qi, monkey, Big Flower—"

"Okay enough," Sheng Wang said, exasperated, "even if you continued I still can't match the names up."

"There's roughly 12 to 13 of us, just nice for a big table," Gao Tianyang said.

Song Sirui wore his backpack properly on both his shoulders and came over, asking, "Are we leaving?"

"We are," Gao Tianyang greeted, "Qi Jiahao and some went to the toilet, let's walk from there and wait for them."

Sheng Wang draped his bag onto his shoulder, and shot a glance at a certain empty seat, asking, “Aren’t you quite close to Jiang Tian? You’re not inviting him?”

Gao Tianyang said, “Not quite close, very close. The two of us are childhood friends.”

This was the first time Sheng Wang was hearing this, “Childhood friends?”

“Yeah, the same residential zone,” Gao Tianyang said. “He never participated in activities like this, he has too many things to be busy with.”

As he went on he also raised an eyebrow, “But the fact you actually asked about him, I’m rather surprised.”

“Surprised about what?”

“Didn’t the two of you have beef with each other the first day you arrived? For these two days, other than the time the two of you were forced to share the same paper, I didn’t really see the two of you talk. I thought that you aren’t familiar with him at all, and would wish more than anything that he wouldn’t go.”

Sheng Wang nodded, “We aren’t familiar indeed.”

Other than having to enter the same door every night, they really were not familiar with each other.

While he chatted with Gao Tianyang, he also switched on his phone. The moment the screen was unlocked, a few notifications popped out from

WeChat. Gao Tianyang did not think too much, he stuck his head over and asked, “Do you want to inform your family first?”

Sheng Wang pursed his lips. He never did have to inform his family, he only needed to inform the chauffeur, Uncle Xiao-Chen.

Just as he opened WeChat and was about to look for Xiao-Chen, he saw a red dot from the chat at the top of the conversations list, indicating that there was a new message. The person’s remark was written as: Jiang Tian.

Sheng Wang opened it without thinking, and finally discovered that Jiang Tian sent him two messages, before night self study ended.

Jiang Tian: I’ll be home late tonight.

Jiang Tian: If there’s questions, just say that it’s supplementary for the olympiad.

It’s time for a celebration, certain people finally knew to get his cover story straight beforehand, and yet Gao Tianyang who was at the side was already spooked to death.

Footnotes:

1. □□□□□□: It roughly translates to: the cruel reign of the Qin dynasty had caused the common people to suffer for too long, hinting that it was time to end it. The speaker was playing around with this quote and replaced ‘Qin’ to ‘English’.

2. □□□□: unrealistic idea, literally ‘Chunqiu/Spring and Autumn dreams’. This refers to the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history, while the other states were still living in lala land, one state was ~~studying the blade~~ thinking of invading and conquering them all. The other states were thus leaving their heads up in the clouds and having unrealistic dreams of continued prosperity.

3. Grass = cao = fuck (they are homonyms)

4. School grass, or school idol/hottie/ the best looking guy on campus. A version i saw translated this into school prince.

5. Kidney is *shen* in chinese, so if sheng wang was Sheng Gao Tianyang was joking that it sounds like kidneys

6. Wang is also onomatopoeia for dog barking

Chapter 015 - Tattletale

IMPT NOTICE: i fucked up and misread Gao Tianyang's (who you might previously see as Gao Feiyang before this update) name all along. I already went back and made changes, so uh don't be spooked by the Gao Tianyang that appears from now onwards.

He’s Right Here. He’s Drinking Right Next to Me.

The moment Sheng Wang spotted Gao Tianyang opening his mouth, he hooked his arm around his neck, covered his mouth and dragged him out of the class. “Don’t shout, the moment you make a sound you’re dead.”

Gao Tianyang nodded after he took roughly a century to digest what he saw.

“I’m letting go then,” Sheng Wang looked up and shot a smile at the people inside the classroom after he spoke in a low voice. The rest had no clue what was going on, and only thought that they were playing around.

Gao Tianyang nodded again.

Sheng Wang finally released him and stood up straight.

Gao Tianyang looked like he was in need of oxygen after receiving such a huge scare and being suffocated for a good while. He weakly leaned against the corridor railings, and fanned himself with his collar. A moment later, he finally squeezed out, “What’s even going on between the two of you?”

Sheng Wang did not exactly treat his own family situation as a taboo topic, if someone asked he would just say that he belonged to a single-parent family. However, this did not mean that he was willing to talk about

everything to other people. He was also unsure if Jiang Tian was willing or not.

People at this age were usually both proud and sensitive. Sheng Wang prided himself as half the classic example of one. As for Jiang Tian, he felt like this person was double that.

Therefore, he pondered before saying to Gao Tianyang, “It’s a little too complicated for explanations, just think of this as the two of us splitting rent. Go ask Jiang Tian for the specific details.”

Since he was a childhood friend, Gao Tianyang should more or less already know about Jiang Tian’s family situation. He would not end up touching all of his sore points.

Gao Tianyang said ‘oh’, sounding like he only half understood what he said, and did not carefully think about the meaning of ‘splitting rent’. He only followed up with, “Why did you still say that you’re not close to Tian-ge then?”

He recalled even further, and felt like he was lied to even more, “My god, so the two of you share a house at night, and pretend to not know each other in the day? For what? Underground celebrity romance?”

“Bullshit,” Sheng Wang said, “he stays in his room, I stay in my room. Will you be close to your neighbours?”

“I will,” Gao Tianyang said, “I live opposite my grandparents.”

“.....”

Sheng Wang wanted to toss the annoying pest downstairs.

“The two of you even have each other’s WeChat,” Gao Tianyang felt even more woeful as he spoke, “I knew Tian-ge for more than a decade, I only got his WeChat a few years ago, and yet it only took the two of you a couple of days.”

Sheng Wang replied with an ‘Oh’.

Two seconds later, the young master suddenly realised that something was wrong and slapped Gao Tianyang’s back. “How many years has it been since WeChat came out?!”

Gao Tianyang doubled over with laughter against the railing. He rubbed the area where he was slapped, “Aiyo, no way, I’m going to Tian-ge and tell him. Why are you so easily tricked.”

As this person spoke he really dug out his phone. Sheng Wang rolled his eyes, lifted his foot, and walked.

The people inside the classroom came out chattering, the group of people joked and shoved each other around as they walked towards the staircase, exactly meeting up with the two who just came out of the toilet.

Qi Jiahao just washed his hands. The moment he saw Sheng Wang, he momentarily froze in the midst of shaking water droplets off his hands.

That instance of awkwardness was actually quite obvious, but the lighting in the corridor was too dim and everyone was jokingly and playfully shoving each other around. Nobody really noticed.

The next second, he already reverted back to a normal expression, and flicked a bunch of water in Gao Tianyang’s face. “Not bad, you managed to

scam in a God of Studying!”

In actuality, only English was outstanding above the rest for Sheng Wang, he did not even pass a single one of the three sciences. To call him a God of Studying was an over-exaggeration. Young master Sheng Wang was very self aware, he would receive all sorts of normal praises without any questions, but for overly grandiose flatter like this, he could not digest it very well.

The praise caused goosebumps to break out all over him. He subtly shook it off before he heard Qi Jiahao talk to Gao Tianyang again, “You only abducted this one? Who else did you call, where’s my Tian-ge?”

The goosebumps Sheng Wang just shook off sprouted out like spring bamboo shoots after rain once more.

He even said ‘my Tian-ge’. Not even Gao Tianyang says it all the time. He silently mocked in his head, that this student Qi Jiahao was a little slimy when it came to his words.

Gao Tianyang said, “Don’t say your Tian-ge, your Tian-ge will never join degenerate activities like this.”

“He’s really not coming? Can you try asking again later?” Qi Jiahao said.

“We’ll see,” Gao Tianyang said.

Sheng Wang felt that his observation skills were very strong. He already sorted out the relationship amongst these people with two to three lines alone — like how Gao Tianyang was truly on good terms with Jiang Tian, Qi Jiahao seemed like he was trying to worm his way into being friends with Jiang Tian.

With the departure of a few school buses, more than half of the teaching zone was instantly empty, yet there were still a few lecture theatres brightly lit up.

Sheng Wang followed them to the north gate, and occasionally glimpsed behind. He asked, “Isn’t night self study until eight o’clock, why are there still people having class, year threes?”

“Mainly year threes, and also some year twos and ones, but not as many,” Song Sirui stuck out his finger and pointed in a circle, “the three lecture theatres there are for year threes, the one here is for year twos, and the smallest one here is for year ones. These are all boarding students, they have an additional period of night self study compared to us.”

“Now it’s supplementary period. We end classes at eight, they end at nine. When school officially reopens, we end at nine thirty, they end at ten thirty.”

Fuzhong was in the urban area and for the present they did not engage in secluded style schooling(1), they have way fewer boarding students as compared to other schools. The school bus was convenient for traveling to school anyway.

“Treasure it now, it’s the last year. Wait till we’re year three, the teachers will have lengthy heart to heart chats, one by one, to suggest to live in the school. By then, the majority will choose to stay in the dorms, and some over there.”

Gao Tianyang pointed at the residential zone outside the school with his chin. “There, that place is nearly an external school dorm, everyone there are all accompanying parents and those who need tuition.”

“Why is night self study held inside the lecture theatres then?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Well, that’s because there’s no exact numbers for the number of on-campus students per class, some will have more and some will have less. Look at our class, we don’t have any at all. Class B downstairs only has four in total, how shall night self study go on. So the student affairs office made this rule that all boarding students will go to the lecture theatre for night self study, those in the same year will share a lecture theatre. Teachers from all subjects will be on duty to answer your questions.”

Sheng Wang nodded pensively.

Gao Tianyang said, “No wait, Sheng-ge, why does it feel like I’m seeing temptation on your face? Don’t tell me you seriously want to stay on campus?”

No seriously, he really did kinda want to.

He boarded for both middle school year three and high school year one. He thought that Sheng Mingyang would stay at home for a bit more when he went back to his old ancestral home, that’s why he chose to be a day student. However, the other person went for business trips more

frequently than before, leaving him, Jiang Ou, and Jiang Tian awkwardly facing each other at home.

If he boarded, then all the awkwardness and conflict and struggles would no longer exist, everything would be much easier.

"If I want to stay on campus, when do I apply?" Sheng Wang asked.

"Before school officially starts. There should be an announcement. You just need to ask Little Carp here." Gao Tianyang pointed at the girl in a ponytail right next to him, "she's the class monitor, she's usually the first to know when it came to announcements like this."

The class monitor's name was Li Yu, her name was like a boy's. In reality however like her nickname, she was a cute and lovely girl. Though her results may not surpass the bunch of screwed up people like Jiang Tian, she won at being obedient and earnest, and would not piss the teachers off.

God knows how difficult it was to find an actually obedient student in Class A, therefore she became the class monitor.

"Sure, I'll let you know when I receive the notice." Li Yu could not help but say, "We are all quite unwilling to board, there's no way it's as convenient as living at home. You really want to stay here?"

Sheng Wang gave a half hearted reason. "It's lively, that's why. It's so awfully boring to fret over the papers alone. If there's a hundred plus more people around me who are in even greater distress, wouldn't it be a little better?"

Gao Tianyang sucked in his breath. "This seems kinda legit."

The other people bellowed with laughter, saying that he could easily brainwash easily swayed people. Qi Jiahao alone was the one who said, “It may not necessarily be lively, our class has a special privilege.”

Sheng Wang looked at him. “What privilege?”

“Big Mouth Xu said so. Class A don’t need to go to the lecture theatre, we can do night self study in our own classroom,” Qi Jiahao said, “they probably trust our self control more.”

His tone was very neutral, sounding like he was mentioning it by the hand, and yet the trace of sense of superiority could not be hidden.

Li Yu was a guileless girl. She said with a face full of worry, “Do our class really have self-control? Think about your phones and PSP hidden inside your desks. It’s only because Dean Xu doesn't conduct checks that often, otherwise we would all be caught red-handed.”

Everyone, including Sheng Wang, silently stuffed their phones deeper into their pockets.

Qi Jiahao went on again, “The infrequent spot checks are because we are Class A.”

The BBQ shop Gao Tianyang mentioned was quite nearby, it was situated right in the residential zone at the north gate. The boss bought two apartments from the block facing the street, removed some walls and made a dining room. He also placed open air tables and chairs right in front of the door. It was pretty lively.

“You’re all Xiao-Qi’s(2) classmates, right?” The boss was a young man, his facial features were all proper, and if he tidied up a bit he could be considered a handsome guy. But as he was wearing a white work singlet,

beige coloured bermudas, a pair of slippers, cigarettes in his mouth and ‘sloppy’ written all over him, the word handsome instantly disappeared by half.

He squinted amidst the smoke, and gave a generous wave. “Those who came to show support are my friends, if Xiao-Qi calls me Ge, then the rest of you are my Didis.”(3)

The three girls’ faces twitched a little.

He then added, “And Meimeis(4), mainly because I’ll look like a hooligan if I call you Meimei the moment we just met, I should probably just call y’all gals.”

“There—I left the best spots for y’all. Today, the alcohol is all on me, feel free to drink what you like. There’s a QR code on the menu on the table, you just need a scan.” The boss nodded up invitingly. He probably wanted to act a little more gentlemanly, but the singlet and the pants dragged his score down. “Who’s that, Xiao-Hei, serve this gang of little siblings of mine some cold dishes(5) and drinks first.”

While he spoke, he held his cigarette in his mouth and puffed, like a human incense burner. Sheng Wang was already unwell, with the fumes from this incense burner, he squinted and coughed for quite a while.

“Ay, I apologise,” the boss took out his cigarette, “I’m so busy with opening my business that I haven’t slept in two days. I was relying on it to stay awake. I didn’t mean to suffocate you on purpose.”

As he spoke, he sized Sheng Wang up and down and all over for a few moments, muttering, “Did I see you from somewhere else before or something, you look quite familiar.”

“Ah?” Sheng Wang took a serious look at him, and said sincerely, “Sorry, I have facial blindness.”

The boss laughed, and waved it off. “Nah, I was just saying. You should go order food. I have a lot of people here, I’m afraid that I can’t take care of you guys as well. Xiao-Qi, look after for a bit.”

Qi Jiahao raised his hand, “Oh yeah, no problem Ge!”

He turned around and beckoned his classmates, “Let’s go let’s go, let’s go sit down. Let me just tell you guys that this Gege of mine is super awesome. His name is Zhao Xi. Have y’all heard of Zhao Xi?”

The gang shook their heads.

“Tsk, don’t you guys ever look at the wall of honour in the administrative block? The one that features them by batches,” Qi Jiahao said, “he’s right inside. He was in the class of 2006, and won many prizes. He was also the top of the city for gaokao.”

Everyone was baffled, the way he bragged they would have thought he was the one who was the top scorer or something.

“Just this? Top scorer?” It was not that Gao Tianyang looked down on him, rather it was more like he did not expect that at all.

“Ay, don’t just look at this,” Qi Jiahao said, “he was overseas previously and only just came back recently. He probably is already a foot in for a job, either ways he’s definitely super badass. I think he’s on a break for now or something, when he came back he ended up helping a friend to set this BBQ shop up, it’s all for fun.”

“Oh, so he isn’t the real boss then?” Gao Tianyang said.

They sat down at the table. There was an AC pipe and an electric fan already set up at the side. Even though the seats were open air, it was neither hot nor did it attract mosquitos. They could even enjoy the lively atmosphere at night, it was indeed a very good spot.

Qi Jiahao was not truly so close to Zhao Xi to the point that he knew more details. Everyone else did not ask more questions, and could only exclaim how kickass Zhao Xi was.

At this age, jealousy and adoration came all too easily. The former was for good grades, the latter for overly good grades.

Soon enough, a waiter called Xiao-Hei brought peanuts, edamame, and a plate of Bo Bo chicken(6). He even served ice beer for everyone and said, “Xi-ge’s treat.”

Qi Jiahao acted like a host, and distributed the beer to everyone. Sheng Wang let out an ‘Ay’, and said, “I won’t be drinking this, is there any water?”

“God of Studying, how could you be like this? The three girls didn’t ask for water either, and yet you’re asking for it first? That can’t be good.”

Qi Jiahao would not stop going on about God of Studying, Sheng Wang could not feel comfortable with it at all.

But he could not handle even more was “incapable”. (7)

Gao Tianyang was always straightforward, he retorted right back. “He's unwell, that’s all. Don’t get him into trouble.”

As he said he attempted to remove the mug in front of Sheng Wang, but was stopped by Sheng Wang’s paw.

“Don’t move it, I’m not switching anymore,” Sheng Wang said.

It was still that saying, men’s dignity is bigger than the sky, the young master was capable of everything ever. He silently estimated the volume of the beer, and reckoned that he could probably down two mugs.

Qi Jiahao huddled with some other people as they ordered food. Sheng Wang had nothing to do, and so he held the mug’s handle and waited for the food.

Yet, the fake boss called Zhao Xi returned with three cans of coconut juice, and said to Li Yu and the girls, “There, I brought some drinks.”

Li Yu bashfully received the drinks, and shared it with the two other girls.

In the midst of conversation, Qi Jiahao urged Gao Tianyang again, “We’ll order a wave of dishes first. Do you want to ask Tian-ge again? Just to check if he wants to come.”

Gao Tianyang mumbled something, and dug out his phone to look for Jiang Tian’s WeChat.

Sheng Wang held the mug in his hands. His gaze drifted over to him for a moment before retracting it again, only to see the three girls opposite all staring at Gao Tianyang’s hand, the two of them with especially obvious blushes.

Sheng Wang: “ ……”

He’s quite popular, isn’t he.

He tsked internally.

Gao Tianyang held the phone up to his mouth, “Tian-ge, are you busy tonight? We’re munching on skewers at the north gate, are you coming?”

The next second, his phone rang with a new message.

Sheng Wang shot a glance, and saw four words: I’m busy, not going.

Gao Tianyang displayed his phone for one entire round. “See this yet?”

The three girls were visibly a little disappointed.

“Why is Jiang Tian always so cold,” one of the girls could not help but to say.

The fake boss Zhao Xi was about to leave when he heard that and stopped in his steps, he sucked in air through his mouth before he said, “Oh, you guys are classmates with Jiang Tian?”

Gao Tianyang was surprised. “You know him?”

“I do, we are quite tight.” Zhao Xi spoke, and suddenly shifted his gaze to Sheng Wang. He pointed at Sheng Wang, and said, “Oh—I remember now.”

Sheng Wang said, “ah?”

“You’re the dash and diner boy that Jiang Tian had to rescue last time, right?” Zhao Xi said.

After he said that, the atmosphere across the entire table turned stiff, maybe out of either shock or surprise.

Sheng Wang was even stiffer, why did he have to expose him like this, did his pride not matter any more??

Zhao Xi got a hearty laugh for a good while upon seeing his expression, and said, “When I went to the shop I already saw the two of you walking towards the teaching block, my dad runs the shop.”

As Zhao Xi went on, he immediately started calling someone.

Sheng Wang did not immediately realise what he was doing, but not even two seconds later he understood—

He saw Zhao Xi speak to the person on the other side of the phone, saying, “Jiang Tian, your friend is already here, you’re seriously not coming?”

“Which friend? The one that you brought to my dad’s shop for lunch.”

“Yeah, he’s right here. He’s drinking right next to me.”

Sheng Wang looked at the mug in front of him, and silently let go.

He was somewhat incredulous., Zhao Xi was already so old, he really blindly tattled on people for fun???

Footnotes:

1. Secluded-style schooling; imagine you get food shelter class activities all in one spot, you never need to leave the school. Basically, boarding school, which is a common schooling format amongst middle and elementary schools.

2. Friendly way of calling Qi Jiahao :”), by adding a xiao to the Qi

3. Little brother

4. Little sisters. Also why he couldn’t call them that is because they aren’t close/barely met each other, it would sound like he was demeaning them or coming onto them.

5. Usually served as appetizers

6. https://www.chinesefoodwiki.org/Bo_Bo_Chicken

7. Same wording could refer to being bad in bed. Same phrasing as ‘that can’t be good’ as mentioned by QJH earlier.

Chapter 016 - Drunkard

I’m Very Precious, I’m Picky With The Medicine’s Brand.

Beyond the markets were lights that criss-crossed and blended into each other, and the stream of people that intersped each other’s paths. The electronic bikes and private cars honked to greet each other from afar across the alley’s corners, and in the next instant they were drowned out by the bustle of the human world.

This BBQ shop had a very un-BBQ name, it was named “In Those Years”, full of pretentious literary fineness. Too bad the customers both in and outside of the main dining area acted as if they just left Liang Mountain. People were hollering, competing over drinking and laughing heartily, to the point that they could be heard from all the way on the other side of the long street.

Zhao Xi made the call in the middle of this chaotic bustle—

“Oh right, I forgot. Sure, then I’ll let you go for now. All you know is ‘en’, would it hurt your mouth to say two more words?”

“Ah?”

Jiang Tian must have said something on the other side, Zhao Xi suddenly questioned, and shot a glance towards the table. His gaze was too

brief, Sheng Wang was unsure if he was looking at him, or the group of people seated at the table.

“Sure, I got it,” Zhao Xi nodded, and did not continue chatting, “that’s all for now, I’ll hang up then. I still have a bunch of hungry customers to feed, I’m so goddamn busy.”

This fake boss kept his phone and looked back, only to see the entire table staring intently at him, like they were waiting for a result.

He was instantly amused, and waved with a cigarette between his fingers. “Eh, don’t bother waiting. He’s really busy and won’t be coming.”

“Ah……” A few people dragged their voice in disappointment, a bolder girl even chorused in, her disappointment was fully demonstrated in that sound.

Sheng Wang poked at the peanut shell in front of him.

Maybe he was influenced by other people’s low spirits, in that instance, he even felt a little down too. Not to the point of disappointment, no, but it was just that he suddenly felt that the ten plus people at the table were less lively than he thought.

There was suddenly a clang right in front of him, Sheng Wang abruptly snapped out of it. He looked up, only to see Zhao Xi settling a cup of water in front of him.

“I heard it from someone you’re unwell, right?” Zhao Xi said, “No way you’re drinking ice beer when you’re sick, behave and drink your water.”

Sheng Wang was stuped, “Who said that?”

Zhao Xi flicked off the cigarette ashes, “Who do you think.”

Sheng Wang recalled the phone call he made just now, “Jiang Tian?”

Zhao Xi replied affirmatively.

Sheng Wang was unable to speak for that moment, he could not tell if he was surprised or something else.

If he guessed that Jiang Tian specially asked Zhao Xi to not let him drink…...there’s no way that happened. He probably casually mentioned it, and Boss Zhao was the warm hearted kind of person who knew how to treat people well.

Sheng Wang mused, and said with extreme sincerity to Zhao Xi, “I’m really not that close to him, the meal last time was just…...whatever, either way we really aren’t close. As for the ice beer, he’s not even here, he can’t tell me what to do.”

Could he really tell him what to do then!

After Sheng Wang spoke, he wordlessly hugged the beer mug in front of him, looking as if nobody stop him until he’s drunk out of his mind or something.

Zhao Xi did not know if he should laugh or cry. He stuffed the cigarette back between his lips, and slurred with his eyes narrowed, “Sure, if you brats don’t suffer for a bit you wouldn’t learn. If you get sicker don’t come looking for me to take responsibility, that’ all.”

Boss Zhao left without doing anything else, and went to take care of other friends with a smile. Sheng Wang sent him off with his eyes and turned back, only to see the entire group of classmates looking at him with curiosity in their eyes.

“Did the menu grow on my face or something?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Nah, it didn’t.” Everyone laughed. Gao Tianyang hurriedly waved his hand, and got the waiter to put down the dishes they ordered.

The skewers were served one bunch after another, the fragrant smell of freshly grilled meat emanated, and the meat was sizzling with oil.

The appetite of human beings was so magical, that usually one would be satisfied with ten sticks, but with so many people fighting for food, twenty or even thirty was not enough. The meat on the skewers got inreasingly tastier, increasingly more beer got drunk, and so did voices get increasingly louder. The entire group of people would be laughing till the point they were slapping the table and their knees, the next moment their mugs would clink together.

Sheng Wang heard plenty of gossip from them, some about their teachers, some about other students.

For example, their homeroom teacher, He Jin, was married to the perfect male teacher who was specifically in charge of supplementary classes for math olympiad. The both of them used to be Fuzhong students, and were even deskmates. They were well known as the class couple back then. They ended up in the same city for university, and after they graduated they both went back to their alma mater, and now they were both well known teaching professionals in the city.

For another example, the boy sitting next to Sheng Wang's right was the student life rep. He wore glasses with black frames, and had a gentle temperament. Other than eating skewers he enjoyed joking around with everyone, and had the exact opposite personality from his dad.

His dad's surname was Xu, aka the administrative head who people called Big Mouth Xu. As an act of respect to his dad, the students of Class A called him 'Small Mouth'.

Gao Tianyang clung onto him and fake sobbed with the aid of alcohol. "Small Mouth, my phone is still locked in your dad's drawer, are you bold enough to help me pry it open?"

Small Mouth Xu swallowed his meat, all refined. He dabbed at the corner of his mouth with a tissue before saying, "I don't dare to, mine is still locked inside."

Gao Tianyang said, "You never fail to meet up to expectations!"

Small Mouth Xu said, "You too, you too."

Everyone sniggered.

Yet another example would be the two girls from Class 7 known for their fiery personality. The moment they were free or had an excuse they would head for Class A, sometimes they would even gather a group of friends, just to look at Jiang Tian.

They asked people to deliver notes, snacks, all sorts of festive gifts on their behalf. Unfortunately Jiang Tian was either at the office or catching up on his sleep. The notes were useless, the snacks and gifts were all returned. They already kept it up for a year, and until today they did not get the ice statue to even defrost.

As Sheng Wang listened while drinking from his beer mug, Gao Tianyang the loudspeaker suddenly nudged him, and teased, “I ran into the sports rep from Class 7 on the school bus yesterday. He said that one of the girls from that duo looks like she might have a change of heart lately, saying that she has fallen for the new handsome guy in our class. What do you feel about this?”

Sheng Wang finished the last mouthful of beer in his mug, and thought as he held the handle. “Did our class get another transfer student?”

Gao Tianyang: “.....”

He took a look at the empty barrel of beer at the corner of the table, and asked Small Mouth, “What’s the number of drinks does this make?”

Small Mouth gestured with his hand to say four.

Gao Tianyang sucked in a breath of cold air, and attempted to take away Sheng Wang’s beer mug, “You’re still sick my Gege!”

Sheng Wang said in annoyance, “I know, I don’t plan on having a fifth one.”

He enunciated properly, his face was not red either. Other than his pupils turning darker and sounding more nasally, his external appearance basically did not change at all. Gao Tianyang could not figure out if Sheng Wang was still sober at the moment either.

“You guys continue, I’ll head to the bathroom for a bit.” He informed them, got up, and headed towards the dining area.

Gao Tianyang took special note of his footsteps, and could not tell that there was anything wrong. He could not help but ask other people, “Is he drunk or not?”

Li Yu said all sincerely, “He looks quite normal, it’s just that he’s not as talkative as before. I’ll be honest, you look more drunk than him.”

Gao Tianyang, completely done, shrunk back.

Everyone was a little tired of eating, the three girls were the first to put down their chopsticks. They rested against their chairs, and as they listened to the remaining people brag, their eyes followed Sheng Wang.

This transfer student’s appearance actually did not lose to Jiang Tian’s at all, it was just that they belonged to different types. His features were clean and tidy, both his eyelashes and pupils were deep in colour. When contrasted against his pale skin, he was good looking like a vivid painting on a white canvas. When he smiled it was like the spring winds brushing at the face, and when he did not he appeared a little aloof.

One of the girls looked until she blushed. She nudged Li Yu, and the three of them huddled together and gossiped.

They gossiped until Qi Jiahao called out to them, “I heard that they are picking the Tri-Quality Students of the City (1) soon, right class monitor?”

Li Yu looked up when she was interrupted, “You sure have your sources. They only notified us yesterday after a meeting.”

“What’s the quota for our class this time?” Qi Jiahao asked again.

“Three people.”

“What are the conditions?”

An achievement like the Tri-Quality Students of the City was somewhat useful at a crucial time, they boost the high school portfolio, they add more competitiveness when top schools open up advance admissions. But its effect was both significant and not, and was not much compared to olympiad results. So some people cared about it, some people left it up to fate.

Qi Jiahao was obviously one of those who cared.

Li Yu said, “The school’s suggestion is to give a quota according to good grades, one from the class committee, and another round of anonymous votes based on popular sentiments.”

Qi Jiahao laughed as he said, “Well, since it’s according to grades and class committee members, I suppose there’s no hope for me anymore.”

“Hey, don’t worry, there’s still a voting slot.” A few other people consoled him.

Qi Jiahao immediately chortled and joked, “Sure! With these words alone, the meal today is on me. When it’s time to vote please give me a little help. I don’t count on winning, just that I would die a more graceful death.”

He raised his hand to call for the waiter. He opened up Alipay on his phone and said, “I just ordered another round of food, please serve it quickly.”

The waiter checked it against the menu ordering tablet. “Table 2, right? I’ve already added in the new dishes, they should be on the grill by now.”

“That’s quite fast.” Qi Jiahao waved once more, and said suavely, “Pass the bill to me then, I’ll pay first.”

However, the waiter said, “The bill for this table has already been paid.”

Qi Jiahao said, “Huh? Who paid?”

Sheng Wang walked over as they talked. He took a piece of tissue to wipe his hands, and sat down next to Gao Tianyang.

The waiter pointed at him, “There. He just paid.”

What…...the fuck.

Qi Jiahao froze on the spot, his face changed like a chameleon. Still, everyone’s reactions were a little slow especially after eating food, they were all zoning out. Nobody noticed him.

Everyone downed another mug of beer to go along with the new wave of skewers. The effect of alcohol finally started kicking in. Quite a few people were flushed, and unsteady on their feet.

There was still five minutes until it was ten at night. The degenerates finally decided to disband on the spot, and parted on their own ways.

Gao Tianyang drank until his neck was all red. He supported himself against the table as he said, “I need to go to the bathroom. I’m scared that I can’t make it all the way home when the vehicle gets too shaky.”

A boy beside him whistled with a devilish smirk on his face, and his mouth was instantly pinched shut by Gao Tianyang. “Keep on whistling and you can wash my pants.”

Each of them brought someone and planned to go to the toilet in a group. They asked if Sheng Wang wanted to go, but Sheng Wang tactfully declined their offer.

“I’ll sit here for a bit.” Sheng Wang was deep in thought as he rubbed his temples.

After seeking death for the whole night, what was destined to happen happened—his nose was extra congested, it felt like his head was stuffed with cotton. He even felt a little light on his feet. His cold seriously got worse.

What was I trying to do?

He rested as he rubbed his temples, and felt a little drowsy thanks to the effect of alcohol.

All of a sudden, he felt fabric brush past the arm he was propping himself with. Someone walked and stopped right next to him.

Before Sheng Wang could react, he heard fake boss Zhao Xi’s voice closing up on him. “Eh? Why did you come here? Didn't you say at least

10.30pm?”

Sheng Wang furrowed his brows and digested that information for a bit. He turned and opened his eyes.

He was only able to see the familiar Fuzhong uniform with his direct view due to how close the person was standing to him. The sleeves were rolled up to the elbows.

Sheng Wang stared at the fingers dangling at the side for a long while before he finally raised his head……

It was Jiang Tian who came.

From his perspective of looking up at him, he could see his clearly defined jaws as well as the Adam's apple that came jutting out during puberty.

Sheng Wang suddenly touched his own neck.

Jiang Tian lowered his gaze to look at him for a while. He asked Zhao Xi, “You gave him alcohol? How much did he drink?”

“I did give him water!” Zhao Xi said, completely done. “He didn’t want it, I can’t exactly force it down him? He probably didn’t go easy on the alcohol. I saw a few empty barrels on their table, everyone probably drank four mugs at least.”

Sheng Wang retracted the hand caressing his own neck, shot Zhao Xi a glance and said, “Wrong, five mugs for everyone.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Zhao Xi shrugged, and used his thumb to point at the back Sheng Wang’s head. He mouthed: I think he’s a little drunk, what do you think?

Did he even need to think?

Jiang Tian wiped his forehead. His thumb hooked onto the strap on his shoulder, and pulled his bag upwards. He said to Sheng Wang, “Time to go back, can you still stand?”

“You really think I drank too much?” Sheng Wang replied in annoyance, and genuinely properly stand up. He glanced left and right, and spoke clearly, “Where’s Gao Yangtian and the rest? Did they fall into the toilet?”

Zhao Xi raised an eyebrow. “Yo, not bad. I take back what I just said, he probably isn’t drunk.”

Jiang Tian deadpanned, “The one who went to the toilet is called Gao Tianyang.”

Zhao Xi: “.....”

Jiang Tian always did things promptly. He switched on his phone screen, opened WeChat and speedily sent a message, and then said to Sheng Wang, “I just informed Gao Tianyang, you can go now.”

Sheng Wang replied with a ‘Mm’, and grabbed his bag, wearing it on one shoulder. He then said, “Other people who went to the toilet includes Song Sirui, Qi Jiahao, Xu Small Mouth—”

Jiang Tian got a headache. He directly cut him off, “You said it all.”

“Sure.” Sheng Wang nodded, and was finally able to leave without any concern. He followed Jiang Tian out.

Students got to go home early during vacation. The residential area was much quieter. As they left the area near the BBQ shop, the bustling noise of people dissipated like the fog in the night.

One could not tell Sheng Wang’s footsteps were unsteady as he walked, neither did he meander around the alley. His footsteps were just very light, and his speed was rather slow. He constantly stayed half a step behind Jiang Tian, like a leader on patrol.

The leader was nosy after he drank. He pointed at the plastic bag Jiang Tian held in his right hand, and sprung a surprise inspection on him. “What’s that that you bought?”

Jiang Tian was in the midst of calling for a car. He side-eyed his hand upon hearing him, and said, “Cockroach poison.”

The leader’s lips curled, and did not say a word. He did not look particularly satisfied.

The end of the alley led into a wide street, there were both public transport and a taxi stand. Even further away, there was the metro entrance. The moment they left the alley, the sound of traffic at night came pouncing at them.

The car Jiang Tian called for came very quickly. Sheng Wang ducked into the backseat out of habit, and planted himself in the usual spot he sat in. He saw Jiang Tian open the door to the front passenger's seat. He was about to sit down, but he changed his mind at the last minute.

He took a look at Sheng Wang, and switched to the backseat. Still, the two of them were not that close to each other, and they were separated by an armrest.

The city at night was still illuminated with light, coldness and warmth intertwined into an expanse.

As Sheng Wang sat, he eventually slumped, like how he usually slumped in Uncle Xiao-Chen's car. His head rested against the window glass, and he looked very drowsy.

Just as Jiang Tian thought he was already asleep, he suddenly spoke, "They all think that I'm very familiar with you."

Due to his cold, his hoarse voice was also nasally. It fit into the quiet atmosphere in the car.

Jiang Tian briefly froze, and turned to look at him. "Who's them?"

Sheng Wang did not sit up straight, and continued lazily leaning against the window. His fingers curled as he counted, "Gao Tianyang, Zhao Xi, and Zhao Xi's dad. Today the few classmates there kinda counts too, because Zhao Xi said right in front of them that you brought me to eat at his dad's."

He paused before he continued, “Sheng Mingyang thought that we could be brothers, these people think that we are super close in private. And yet, we barely said anything to each other. Isn’t that kinda funny.”

When he talked like this, it was almost as if he was completely sober. The lights outside the car windows streamed past like water, and casting a patch of moving shadows on the side of his face, the outline like gentle velvet.

Jiang Tian looked at him for quite the while, and said, “Actually—”

After only a word, he heard Sheng Wang grumble, “I’m so terribly sick, and you didn’t even bring any medicine for me.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian’s thin lips parted and closed again. In the end, they pursed into a straight and narrow line. He was speechless.

Moments later, he untied the plastic bag in his hand, and switched on the lights in the roof of the car. “There’s plenty of medicine here, and none of it can be taken with alcohol. You can ask about the medicine when you finally flush the alcohol out of your system.”

Sheng Wang turned to him. “Didn’t you say that it’s for cockroaches?”

Jiang Tian said, “You’ll believe it just because I said it?”

Sheng Wang eyed the bag as he said, “I’m very precious, I’m picky with the medicine’s brand.”

Jiang Tian said, “Are you eating it or not?”

Sheng Wang ran through his options for two seconds, and grabbed at the entire bag.

Footnotes:

1. Tri-Quality Students of the City: An award given by the city, I think? The Tri-Quality is a translation of "□□□□", if you were here for the tragic earlier version of the TL, Three Good of the City, that's sorta what it roughly translates into. By "Three Good", it referred to how the students must excel in three ways: their grades, their moral character/conduct, and their "body", which can take on various other meanings in other places, perhaps referring to good physical results like sports etc etc. Basically, be a good well-rounded student, and it appears that in this case it is also a significant award that will give one an advantage when it comes to entry into higher institutions of learning.

T/L notes: hey i worked on these in lieu of the first audio drama episode :") listen to it here!

and also if you haven't watched the PV with music...what are you waiting for? that's literally 99% of the reason why i started tling

Also life has briefly taken over soz for the brief disappearance...but hey here's two chapters. And so we are 3 chapters away from finishing book 1, Mint.

Also also the formatting on this site is so cursed I'll probably shift to wordpress at some point. When I have the energy to. Sighs.

Chapter 017 - Half-Sentence

I Said We Could Give It A Try

The car stopped at the entrance to White Horse Lane.

Jiang Tian paid and exited the car first, yet Sheng Wang did not for a long time. He went around to the other side before he realised that this ancestor was quietly waiting for someone to open the door for him, a bag of medicine in his hands. Clearly, the chauffeur spoiled him.

Jiang Tian, completely done, opened the door. Sheng Wang then elegantly stuck out a leg, and even gave a polite smile. “Thank you.”

He had his bag hanging off one shoulder, and medicine in his hands. It was not exactly easy for him to get out of the car.

Jiang Tian almost could not stand it anymore as he held onto the car door. He stuck his hand out and said, “Give me the medicine.”

Sheng Wang very courteously replied, “No.”

Jiang Tian, “.....”

He could only offer another suggestion. “Wear your bag on both shoulders.”

Sheng Wang said, “Uncool.”

Jiang Tian gave up.

Sheng Wang stubbornly insisted on the pose of carrying his bag on a single shoulder while carrying a bag of medicine in his hands. The moment he left the car he went into the depths of the alley like it was nobody's business. He was not clumsy in a hundred ways like the other drunkards. If some girls from Fuzhong saw him, they would probably compliment that he was pleasing on the eyes while blushing.

…...It was just that he looked a little lonesome.

For a brief moment, Jiang Tian somewhat suspected that this person was not really drunk, but rather he was acting unreasonable and shameless with the excuse of alcohol. If he was truly drunk, he would not care about his image this much.

Yet, Sheng Wang who already went quite a distance suddenly turned to look at him, and went all the way back to the start.

Jiang Tian thought that the other person was waiting for him to go together. Unexpectedly, Sheng Wang nodded up at him and said, "Where's your phone?"

"Why?"

"Take it out and take a video."

"Video of what?" Jiang Tian's brows furrowed and was perplexed. Still, his hand reached into his pants' pocket, and hesitantly dug out his phone.

He swiped at the screen, and the screen switched to the camera.

In the shot, Sheng Wang stood beneath the street lamp, and his shadow was stretched longer by the light. The tip of his foot kicked at the

uneven ground, saying, “This shitty road is so bumpy and full of potholes, and yet just now, I was walking in such a straight line. Did you catch that?”

Maybe the hoarse and nasally voice that uniquely came with a cold was too good at swindling people or something. Jiang Tian, while holding the cold expression that said ‘I don’t actually want to talk to you’, was speechless for a moment before he said, “I caught that.”

After he spoke he turned around to double-check —

Thank the heavens, the driver that sent them back had long since disappeared. It was just him and Sheng Wang in this entire alley. This stupid conversation did not happen with other people around.

“What’s the point of only catching it,” The leader delivered his order once more, “film it down.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian speechlessly stared at him for a good while. His thumb swiped at camera mode, and said in a light voice, “I’m convinced you’re truly drunk now.”

The distance from the entrance of the alley to the Shengs’ ancestral home was less than 300m. They walked for twenty minutes, and a certain person went back and forth three times. Jiang Tian’s half a lifetime supply of patience was all used here.

The commotion that accompanied their entrance into the courtyard was a little much, the people inside probably heard them. Soon enough, the door was wide open, and Jiang Ou stuck her body out of the door while wearing a knitted cardigan, saying, “The two of you are back at last. Why are the both of you so late? I thought — why are you holding up your phone?”

“Who knows.” Jiang Tian mocked under his breath, and kept his phone back in his pocket.

He followed the request and filmed the entire journey, now that there was another person, he really could not afford to lose face over it.

“Hurry in, okay. Why did the both of you come back together? I heard from Xiao-Chen that Xiao-Wang went for a meal with the classmates.” Jiang Ou side-stepped and gave way, Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang entered the house one after another.

Sheng Wang was stable in his every move, aside from the one time he swayed a little while changing his shoes, one could barely tell that there was anything wrong. However, Jiang Ou did manage to smell that something was wrong as soon as she saw. She turned to glare at Jiang Tian as she asked, “You brought him to drink?”

“You think that’s possible?” Jiang Tian said.

“That’s true.” Jiang Ou was as familiar as she could be with her own son. He might not even show up for meal gatherings like this, there was no way he would bring Sheng Wang and challenge him to drinks or something. “He drank it himself?”

“Mm.”

Sheng Wang squatted as he untied his shoelaces. His fingers were clean, slender, and pale, there was no clumsiness that came from being a drunkard to be found. It was just that he was overly slow and leisurely as he did that. The plastic bag full of medicine was set aside next to his feet. Jiang Tian bent over to go take it, but Sheng Wang covered it with quick reflexes.

“I’m just taking something,” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang looked up at him. Maybe it was because they were too close to each other or something, he only swept a glance before he looked down, said an ‘Oh’, and his hand uncovered half of the bag.

Jiang Tian took out two small dark green jars, stood up straight and passed it to Jiang Ou.

When she got scalded, it was this ointment that Auntie Sun applied on her. She had a deep impression of it, and recognised it with a single look. She stared at the small round jars for quite a while, before she finally looked up and tenderly said, “You got out of the way to buy it?”

Jiang Tian changed his shoes with the support of the door frame. He said without even looking up, “It was on the way.”

“Stubborn.” Jiang Ou grumbled, and then looked at Sheng Wang, full of worry. “Speaking of medicine, I thought that he definitely had a cold when he left the house this morning then. Listen at that nasally voice of his. I already got some medicine, but he drank so much, he can’t take it now either.”

“Forget about it,” Jiang Tian shot a glance at Sheng Wang, “wait until he’s sober.”

Sheng Wang stood up with a drag of his slippers, and did not forget to bring the plastic bag along either. Jiang Ou saw ‘Fuzhong School Hospital’

printed on top, and asked Jiang Tian in some disbelief, “You bought it for him?”

“He bought it himself.”

Jiang Tian lifted his school bag’s strap, and was about to head upstairs.

“Eh? Don’t run away yet.” Jiang Ou did not think too much about it, she only tugged at him and said, “Bring Xiao-Wang to go sit on the sofa for a while, I’ll go make some honey water.”

The items in the kitchen were all arranged by Auntie Sun. Jiang Ou only moved in a short while ago, and was still not used to it. She unconsciously opened the leftmost cupboard door, and stuck her hand inside for a jar of honey, only to realise that this cupboard held an unused electric stove and a pot.

She was stupefied for a moment, and stood in front of the cupboard for a long while.

She actually did understand Jiang Tian’s many levels of discomfort, as even she herself was unable to completely adapt to living here yet. She met Ji HuanYu when she was fifteen, got together with him when she was eighteen, got married when she was twenty-two, and got divorced when she was thirty-four. Only six years later did she then move away from the place they had lived in for years.

How could one simply change the habits they got from living in a place for such a long time on a whim.

Yet, she was relatively lucky too. They got a divorce due to a divergence in ideology, and no heavy damage was dealt. Jiang Tian was mature enough that he did not need anyone to fret over him at all, and Sheng Mingyang was incredibly respectful towards her. Even Ji HuanYu continued to do his duty as the birth father.

At least, she did not waste 40 years of her life.

Jiang Ou searched everywhere in the kitchen, then she remembered that Auntie Sun once mentioned that she placed the honey on top of the fridge.

There was water she set to maintain the temperature at 40℃ in the kitchen, intending it for Sheng Wang's medicine. She made a cup of honey lemon, took a spoon with a long handle and stirred as she walked towards the living room.

The lights were not switched on in the living room, only the floor lamp at the side of the sofa was lit. The warm light made a circle of light, and the two boys sat right beneath that light.

Jiang Tian's long legs were curled up, his knees reached above the sofa and the coffee table. He reached over to whisk out a book from the bag at his legs, and flipped through it in complete boredom. The lapel on his spacious school uniform sagged, revealing the t-shirt inside.

Sheng Wang sat next to him, with a distance of half a person. It was neither near nor far.

He sat cross-legged with a cushion he randomly grabbed on his lap. One arm propped his head against the cushion, the other hand was squeezing a corner of the cushion.

He stared at an empty space, at the boundary between the kitchen and the balcony. He was zoning out.

Ever since they moved in, this was the first time Sheng Wang was this relaxed in front of people.

Jiang Ou was incredibly self aware. She knew that this way of relaxation was definitely not because of her, but rather, more like a form of subconscious habit—

Sheng Wang was used to sitting cross legged at the corner of the sofa like that, like he had been waiting for someone for a long time.

Jiang Ou paused in her steps, suddenly unsure if she should even go over anymore.

It was still Jiang Tian who caught a glimpse of her through the corner of his eyes, and lifted his head.

He let the hand holding the book dangle down, and asked, “Done?”

“Mm.” Jiang Ou then walked again, stirring the honey water as she did so.

The long handle knocked against the glass of the cup, making light clinging noises. Sheng Wang finally came back to himself after the long daydream on the spot. In that moment he turned around, his eyes were red.

Even Jiang Tian was startled.

“Xiao-Wang?” Jiang Ou softly called.

Sheng Wang hurriedly lowered his eyes. He wore his slippers, grabbed his bag and that bag of medicine and mumbled, “I’m super sleepy, I’m heading up first.”

“Eh?” Before Jiang Ou could say anything, he already went upstairs. The footsteps that went all the way into his room alternated in light and heavy steps, and with a click of the door locking, there was no more movement.

Jiang Ou held the cup in her hands. Moments later, she sighed, “He probably missed his mom.”

Another while later, Jiang Tian finally retracted his gaze from the staircase. His lips moved, but he did not say anything at all.

“Still, he has to drink the honey water somehow, if not the hangover tomorrow morning will give him a run for it.” Jiang Ou muttered. “How about I’ll just bring it up for him.”

However, she was still a little hesitant.

Boys at this age were especially concerned about their personal space. They always tried to separate themselves from their seniors. One cannot go inside as they feel like, one cannot touch their things as they feel like, the world upstairs and downstairs are two independent worlds.

As she fretted, the cup in her hand was taken away by someone.

Jiang Tian held the cup in his hands, and slung his bag over his shoulders. “I’ll give it to him, you go sleep first.”

*

Sheng Wang changed a place to sit cross-legged at.

He sat on his bed, and stared at his opened bag and the plastic bag with medicine for a long time. He could not recall what it was he wanted to do.

Just as his legs were going numb from being crossed, something sticking to his thigh vibrated.

Sheng Wang digested that information for a while, and took the phone out of his pocket.

There was a new message on WeChat.

Jiang Tian: .

Sheng Wang held the send button, and said lazily: What for—

He suspected that the other person was making sure he was still alive.

Soon enough, the next message came.

Jiang Tian: Is the door locked?

Canned: “Nope— ”

Jiang Tian: I’m entering then.

Sheng Wang, “???”

He stared at the chat interface, and before he realised what just happened, he heard someone knock on his bedroom door, unlocked the door and came in.

This ought to be the first time Jiang Tian ever entered this bedroom. But, he did not look around, he did not express any curiosity about the interior decor. He only walked straight to the bed, and settled the cup down on the bedside cabinet.

“Drink this.” Jiang Tian said.

Maybe it was the overwhelming silence of the surroundings in the middle of the night, maybe it was because he was very close to him. The pitch of his voice was low, and yet he could clearly hear the grainy texture in his voice.

Sheng Wang rubbed his right ear and said, “Oh, I’ll drink it later.”

As a result, Jiang Tian did not leave.

Sheng Wang stood off against him for a while. Due to the increasing weight of his eyelids, he lost the stand off entirely by himself. He took the glass cup, and chugged it down by the mouthful, all properly.

“What’s this water? It’s too sweet.” He only remembered to show his distaste after he finished it.

“Dish water, for curing hangovers.” An answer like this came bouncing out of Jiang Tian.

Sheng Wang, “???”

“Forget it,” Jiang Tian stuck his hand out, “give me the cup.”

“No.” Sheng Wang dodged his hand. He grasped the cup, and frowned as he said, “Hold on for a bit, I still have something to do.”

“What?”

“I don’t know. It’s been a long while and I still can’t recall.”

“.....”

Sheng Wang maintained this position as he contemplated for a good while. Out of his peripheral view, the hand Jiang Tian stuck out retracted, and rested on the back of the chair at the side of the table. He was waiting for him with what little patience he had.

Sheng Wang suddenly lightly let out an ‘oh’, and said, “I remember now.”

“Speak.” Jiang Tian lifted his chin.

“Did you not finish your words back on the car or something?”

“Did I?” Jiang Tian said.

There really was barely an expression on his face. It was hard to tell if he really forgot, or he was asking that on purpose.

“You did.” The drunkard’s brain was quite functional at this moment, and he could even repeat the details, “I said other people all thought that we are familiar with each other, but in reality we barely spoke to each other. You said an ‘actually’, and then there was nothing.”

Sheng Wang’s wrist rested on his knee, his fingertips loosely holding the cup. He looked at Jiang Tian, with the light from the desk lamp reflected in his eyes, it gave people the illusion that he was sober.

“Actually, then what?” he asked.

The fingers Jiang Tian were propping against the back of the chair lightly tapped twice. He lowered his eyes, as if he was recalling.

After a long time he finally spoke. “I said we could give it a try.”

“Try what?”

“Try to be more familiar.”

Chapter 018 - Homework Spotcheck

He’s The One Who’s Dead, He Did Not Do A Single Subject At All

That night, a certain drunkard went to sleep perfectly satisfied.

The second morning, he woke up with a start.

The time on his phone showed that it was 5.37am, there was still more than 30 minutes until his daily alarm rang. The air condition hummed at a low speed. Sheng Wang rethinked his life as he sat on his bed, hugging his pillow.

There were three major laws for Newton, there were two major conflicts for socialism. 16 years of his life, and there was only one thing he could not figure out—

Why do people drink?

He drank five mugs last night, and lost his entire lifetime supply of face because of that.

Let’s recall what he did. The killer would be what he said to Jiang Tian. Were those even words of a human? Words like that, even if someone gave him ten thousand dollars, he would refuse to let it leave his mouth at all.

He wanted to smother himself to death on the bed. However, after trying for five minutes, his phone vibrated. He groped around all zombie-like, and hauled it over. It was a notification about a transfer into his bank account, the transferer was his dad.

Who knew what international time zone Sheng Mingyang was living with right now, he gave him money for some mysterious reason that early in the morning.

Sheng Wang switched to WeChat, wanting to send his dad a voice message. However, the moment he went in he saw Jiang Tian, who was all the way at the top. The last message was at 11+ last night, said content was still that ‘Then I’m entering.”

With a shake of his hand, he left the app again.

In the end it was still Sheng Mingyang who sent a message first. Sheng Wang directly accessed it from his notification panel.

His dad’s message was a forwarded message with much middle age energy to it, saying that the weather had been erratic lately, young people who often stay in air-conditioned rooms for a long time would often run into all sorts of minor health troubles, it should be flu season now.

Sheng Wang sniffled, thinking that his dad probably acquired clairvoyance.

With his cold and hangover, his throat was parched to the point of cracking open. He was guilty enough to not dare send voice messages, and so he could only type.

Canned: Dad, why did you suddenly send me money?

Encyclopedia of Good Health: I sent it the moment I recalled. Why are you up so early today?

Canned: Hardworking.

Encyclopedia of Good Health: [thumbs up]

Encyclopedia of Good Health: Then you should be leaving for school already. Remember to eat your breakfast.

Canned: Okay.

Sheng Wang closed his WeChat, and saw that it was 5.45am on his phone. Comrade Sheng Mingyang gave him a new way out. Though he lost his face, weren't his legs perfectly fine? While nobody's up at this time, he could probably sneak to school!

He took action the moment he decided. Sheng Wang immediately jumped off the bed and rushed into the bathroom, took a quick shower and thoroughly blow-dried his hair with a quiet hair dryer. 5.53am, he grabbed his school jacket, grabbed his bag and was about to leave.

His hand was already touching the doorknob before he pouted and retreated back to the bed. That bag full of medicine was quietly lying down beside his pillow. He grabbed his bangs, and fretted for a while before deciding to toss the bag into his bag anyways.

With this back and forth, he was delayed by two minutes, and young master Sheng finally met his retribution—

The moment he opened his bedroom door, he saw Jiang Tian walking out next door with a bag in his hands.

Shit.

Sheng Wang's mind went blank, and instantly shut the door again. He squatted behind the door, burying his face in his palms, feeling like life was too unpredictable.

What was most unpredictable was that he only squatted for two seconds before someone knocked on his bedroom door. If this was yesterday, there was no way this would have happened. Jiang Tian would have eaten something wrong before he would even go knock on his door.

But today…...everything was possible.

Look, didn't that just happen—

Sheng Wang's phone vibrated once, causing goosebumps popping up all over his body. When he opened it, it was a new WeChat message.

Jiang Tian: ?

Sheng Wang rubbed his face until his face went out of shape, and silently brokedown for a moment before he finally typed.

Canned: Diarrhoea.

Jiang Tian: ……

He didn’t know if the other person bought into his bullshit, either way Sheng Wang hoped he bought into it. For the sake of extra realism, he ditched his slippers, and quietly snuck into the bathroom while barefooted. He flushed the toilet.

Only when he heard the footsteps go downstairs, Sheng Wang then tossed his bag, and sat at the edge of the bathtub.

If he could, he would like to spend the rest of his life there. Still, he had to go to school.

Sheng Wang managed to sit at the edge all the way until 6.15am. Judging from the usual schedule, Jiang Tian should have finished his breakfast by now, and would leave after packing his bag.

He dilly dallied for a few more minutes, and was finally sufficiently mentally prepared. He slung his bag on his shoulders, and calmly left the bedroom. Just as he went down, he heard Jiang Ou ask, “Is there medicine for diarrhoea at home?”

Auntie Sun replied, “Let me think, there should be. I prepared all commonly used medicine, I’ll go find it.”

She walked towards the storage from the kitchen, and came face to face with Sheng Wang who just came downstairs.

“Xiao-Wang, you’re here now?” Auntie Sun said, “Aiyoyo, look at that look on your face. Is your stomach still hurting?”

Her voice was not soft, it was enough to attract other people’s attention in the house.

Sheng Wang subconsciously shot a glance at the living room sofa, only to see Jiang Tian's hand, previously packing his bag, stopped, and lifted his head to look at him. Sheng Wang was that close to escaping back upstairs from being looked at.

"Xiao-Wang, come have some porridge, put something in your stomach."

Jiang Ou poked her head out from the area with the dining table, and waved at him. She had learned her lesson today, and wore a pair of heat-proof gloves. She looked more gentle than before. Sheng Wang initially wanted to say that he wasn't really hungry, but when he thought of the specially made honey water last night, he ended up sitting at the table after a moment of hesitation.

".....Thank you, auntie." Sheng Wang's throat was tight, his voice was stiff.

Sheng Mingyang had always been trying to get him to accept a new 'mom', a new 'older brother', but he could only make himself call her till that degree.

Unexpectedly, Jiang Ou was clearly overjoyed.

She settled the porridge in front of Sheng Wang, gave a small laugh and said, "Calling me that is fine."

Sheng Wang paused.

Jiang Ou said, "Hey, you and Xiao-Tian are classmates after all, thinking of me as your classmate's mom or neighbour will do. Auntie is just carrying out your dad's request, and will take care of you a little, and feed

you when he’s not around. If I put it like this, do you feel a little better now?”

The sunlight in the morning was pale, and the juxtaposition added a sense of gentleness for a person. She still closely resembled that person who passed away, and Sheng Wang did not dare to keep on looking. He lowered his eyes and scooped the porridge.

As long as he did not look…...it was like it really wasn’t that hard to accept anymore.

Sheng Wang busied himself with drinking a few mouthfuls, and replied with a low ‘mm’.

Jiang Ou smiled again.

Ah, women, when she’s in a good mood you could never tell what she would be capable of — Sheng Wang was right in the middle of eating porridge, when he suddenly heard Jiang Ou ask in the direction of the living room, “You’re changing your shoes now?”

Sheng Wang knew who she was talking to, but he did not want to look up. He only shot a glance from the edge of the bowl.

Jiang Tian stood at the entrance hall with his bag. It looked like he planned to leave already.

Sheng Wang internally said, good, hurry up and leave.

However, Jiang Ou said, “It’s already this time, why don’t you wait for Xiao-Wang?”

Sheng Wang did not manage to swallow the spoonful of porridge that just entered his mouth yet, and became solid on the spot.

Jiang Tian’s movement paused a little, and seriously let go of the door knob after a moment of hesitation. He leaned against the cabinet at the entrance hall, dug out his phone and started scrolling through it. Even though he did not reply, his position said everything he seriously started waiting for him.

Fuck.

Sheng Wang choked, and coughed until he nearly passed away.

6.40am, Sheng Wang finally finished the last mouthful of porridge, and could no longer delay anymore. He boarded the car with Jiang Tian.

It was the first time he managed to drive the two of them at once, Uncle Xiao-Chen was incredibly excited. He talked non-stop the moment he started driving, and only after talking for five minutes later, then he realised that something was wrong.

The mood in the backseats was extremely heavy. Young master Sheng Wang usually slumped on the seats like a quadriplegic, in whatever position that made him feel the most comfortable. Today however, he sat all proper and upright, staring straight ahead.

Xiao-Chen had no clue what was going on, and sat up a little straighter.

The car ran into a mild traffic jam near the school. Sheng Wang's fingers tapped on his knee, counting by seconds. He had never felt that the road to school was this long.

Jiang Tian was sitting right next to him. From the corner of his eyes, he could see a white earpiece stuffed in his ears, and his head was lowered as he browsed through his phone. Judging by the colour of his screen, it was probably a certain English newspaper.

How fascinating, that even though he did not become extra friendly or anything, Sheng Wang could feel that his entire person seemed to be different.

While in the jam, he flipped through two more pages, and the English newspaper finally reached its end.

The traffic started moving again. Xiao-Chen spun the wheel, and the car took a turn into Fuzhong Road. The sun moved from the back to the right, and shined in through the car window, draping all over Sheng Wang.

Jiang Tian, who was next to him, suddenly opened his mouth and asked, "Sober now?"

Sheng Wang let out an 'Mm', and said, "Yeah."

"Do you still remember what happened last night?" Jiang Tian asked again.

"It's all blank afterwards." Sheng Wang sheepishly said.

The car was silent for a good while, and no one said a single word. Xiao-Chen shot them a glance via the rearview mirror, Sheng Wang shifted his gaze to look out the window.

He licked his lips as he squinted. He suddenly felt that the sunlight was too piercing, and it was annoying.

Yet a few more seconds later, he finally heard Jiang Tian toss out a line, in a voice that was neither hot nor cold, “I just knew it.”

The moment his words ended, Uncle Xiao-Chen braked. They stopped outside the school gates, and Jiang Tian exited the car, his bag in his hands, and not a single glance back.

Sheng Wang and Uncle Xiao-Chen could only look at each other in dismay in the car.

Xiao-Chen said, “What got him mad?”

Sheng Wang gave a dry laugh, “It’s my fault.”

He actually was mentally prepared that Jiang Tian had an eighty-ninety percent chance of being upset with that statement. Yet, the moment he really saw the person freeze back up, he felt a little regretful all of a sudden.

His face or Jiang Tian, one had to go, right?

Logic told him, keep his face.

Sheng Wang went into Mingli Block via passing through the shade of the parasol trees. Before he even entered the classroom, he already felt the strange atmosphere.

There was still five minutes until 7am, under normal conditions, Class A was basically a noisy market. There should be a boiling cauldron of noises, and extraordinary liveliness, yet today was exceptionally proper.

The moment he entered, he finally knew why—

The first two periods of today were English. Jing-jie usually entered the class right on the dot. However, she made an exception for today, and came by early. She did not stand at the teaching platform, instead, she stood in between the tiny walkways separating the tables. The forty plus mischievous kids did not go for the water banquet, and all remained properly in their seats. It was just that some were sitting, and some were standing.

What is even going on? They were practising standing pose before they even start class? (1)

Sheng Wang sneaked into his seat, and looked around in a loss. Jiang Tian would be ignoring him for the time being. He patted Gao Tianyang's shoulder, hoovered slightly over his desk and whispered, "How long has Jing-jie been here?"

Gao Tianyang's back touched his table as he replied lowly, "Right before you, by like two three minutes."

"What's she so early for?"

"I don't know who tattled, she's here to conduct a spotcheck for the homework."

Gao Tianyang aspirated, “I’m gonna die, I didn’t do English.”

Sheng Wang, “.....”

He’s the one who’s going to die, he did not do a single subject.

Just as he was suffocating on the spot, Yang Jing had already reached their group, and started checking one by one from the front. As she checked, she said, “Some students’ have the wrong way of thinking, thinking that just because you are in a science class, you just need to be good in the three sciences. You think you can just blunder your way through language and English, and make do. As long as they don’t pull your score down it’s no big deal. People with this way of thinking, well, your brains have probably been polished, it must be especially smooth now.”

A few people could not hold themselves back, and let out a snort. Seeing how the atmosphere was they instantly stopped it in the tracks.

“You have the nerve to laugh?” Yang Jing said, “”I beg you, please get it straight. You’re not just a normal science class, you are Class A. All the best teachers, the best resources go to all of you. Who are you trying to disgust by getting mediocre scores in the end? I know, we each have our own strengths, and some people genuinely aren’t good with English, I understand. I’m not a yaksha — quit trembling, why are you trembling? All of you always acted as if you’ve seen a ghost when you see me, you think I don’t know what you’re thinking?”

“What I want is an attitude. As long as I can see your effort, no matter your scores I’ll find a way to praise you. But did you give it? Hell no! Some

people, I could tell that he definitely didn’t do it even without checking. Right, Gao Tianyang?”

Yang Jing finally arrived in front of Gao Tianyang, took a look at his paper, and gave a cold laugh. She knocked on his table as she said, “Take some initiative, stand up.”

“And some students, I don’t even need to check to know that he definitely did it—”

As Yang Jing said that, she walked to Sheng Wang’s table and took a look. It was all blank.

Yang Jing looked down, “.....”

Sheng Wang looked up, “.....”

At that moment, the classroom was no different from the cemetery.

The next second, Yang Jing said softly and gently, “My face hurts, can you feel that?”(2)

Sheng Wang did not dare to move.

Yang Jing flicked his empty paper, saying, “Take this thing, grab a pen, and go stand outside the classroom.”

Sheng Wang covered his face, took his paper and a pen, and went out without any protest.

The moment he left, he heard Yang Jing saying from the inside, “Aiyo, I’m so pissed now, I can’t be bothered to check anymore. Those who didn’t do your paper, show some initiative, and be like him. Take your pen and get out to do it. Don’t bother lying, I look past it if you go out on your own. If you choose to stubbornly stay inside the class and let me catch you, your week’s night self study belongs to me now.”

The instant after she spoke, the classroom rang with the noise of chairs shuffling around. A bunch of people filed out, and all came to accompany Sheng Wang.

Just as he was counting how many people there were, there was suddenly a commotion in the classroom, like they were shocked at something.

The people walking outside all looked back. Sheng Wang was also a little curious, and looked inside via the window. Then, he froze—

Because Jiang Tian stood up too, he grabbed his paper and joined the very end of the line.

That commotion just now must have been for him.

Good news stays at home, but bad news spreads a thousand miles.

First period of morning class had not even started yet, and the whole level already knew the two insanely hot school princes were chased out of the class by the teacher. There were around 10 people in a row, and of the two of them, one stood at one end, the other person at the other. They had zero interaction, and were clearly on terrible terms.

Footnotes:

1. A pose in chinese martial arts in general, considered one of the most basic forms for plenty of martial arts. To stand as sturdy as a wooden log.

2. What was not said was that that sentence implied she was ‘hit/slapped in the face’, meaning that she was proven wrong. Chinese internet slang: to be hit in the face is to be proven wrong.

Chapter 019 - Delicious

(1)

Canned: It’s My Bad

There’s usually two types of people when it comes to those who did particularly well in English in high school.

The first type would be able to dissect the sentence into subject, verb, object, modifier, adverb and complement much precision, and thoroughly analyse the essential parts of each sentence. Whether they knew which answer to choose for which question, and how they got their answers correct and incorrect, they knew it like the back of their hands.

And the other type relied on five words: a feel for the language.

Yang Jing only needed a single look at the paper to know which student belonged to which type, as the former enjoyed circling and underlining, with many marks on the paper, while the latter basically only had ABCD.

The students she was in charge of were rather distinctive. Jiang Tian, Qi Jiahao as well as the rank B study rep and class monitor, were all the grammar type. Sheng Wang, otherwise, was the rare feel for the language type.

Yang Jing did mention during class before, that she would rather Class A practise their feel for the language more heavily instead. With a good feel for the language coupled with a good grasp of grammar, they

could finish their questions at twice the speed. Still, most of these questionable kids did not care.

As it was common knowledge that Class A students were known for their speed at completing questions, that any student from any other class would most definitely be overwhelmingly defeated against them, why should they bother wasting their energy on that?

A few shameless braggards even flaunted themselves as ‘Dugu Qiubai’, and half of these ‘Qiubais’ were now left out to dry in the corridor. (2)

After locking up the classroom door and windows, Yang Jing started her lesson. The students who were chased out of the class all started doing the make-up for their homework against the wall.

Sensibility Block was famous for its good lighting. The scorching sun rays all hit their backs. Merely a few minutes later, quite a number of boys started frantically wiping away their sweat.

“Chili meimei, do you have some tissues? Lend me some please.” Gao Tianyang borrowed tissue paper from a girl all the way across two other people.

Girls weren’t as shameless as them. When she passed the tissue over, she asked, “Did Jing-jie mention when she’ll be letting us back in?”

“She didn’t, we probably get to go back in whenever we’re done.”

“That’s doable, the future is right in my hands,” a boy, knowing that Jing-jie could not hear him, bragged as he wrote, “let’s not talk about other things. When it comes to speeding through the papers, who could do it faster than me? Not a single person!”

Gao Tianyang could not not bear to listen anymore. “Eh, turn around and take a look at who’s standing right next to you. Do you not feel diffident when standing in that spot?”

The boy whipped his head around. Right next to him was Jiang Tian’s expressionless side view.

“I’m sorry, Tian-ge.” He did not hesitate for a single second. After chickening out, he turned back around and said to Gao Tianyang, “Can Tian-ge be counted as a human? No. Therefore what I said just now wasn’t wrong either.”

Sheng Wang had just finished a page, and took the gap in-between flipping through the paper to sneak a glance at that other side.

Jiang Tian stood at the other extreme end. Due to his looming height, he was especially outstanding in the group of people, and was not hidden at all. He kept doing the paper, and did not even look up when people next to him teased him to the heaven and beyond.

Was this because he was aloof…...or was it because he was in a bad mood?

Sheng Wang held the pen cap in his mouth, and felt a little guilty.

As he zoned out while eyeing that side, Jiang Tian just flipped the first paper to the other side. At that moment, his thin eyelid seemed to have raised a little.

Sheng Wang immediately retracted his gaze. He grabbed his pen and filled in a C in the bracket.

After filling it in he scanned the question, and crossed out the C and changed it into a B with a poker face.

Gao Tianyang, who was at the side, did not notice these minor little movements. He was currently tilting his head and looking into the classroom, and ruefully went, “Today, both Tian-ge and Sheng-ge aren’t there, so Old Qi’s the only king in there now.”

Jing-jie’s lessons were like setting up wooden stumps as usual, she did not spare the rest just because the class was ten plus people less. Only Qi Jiahao managed to sit back down after being called upon every single time.

“Speaking of Old Qi, do you still remember when he just came to our class?” the boy who just bragged about his speed at doing the papers asked.

“Oh, yeah, if you didn’t bring that up I would have forgotten. He came up from Class 5, right?” another person replied.

“I remember it quite well, the mid-term exam in year one semester one, he came into our class then, and never left ever since.” As Gao Tianyang spoke he suddenly started laughing. “Eh! Speaking of speed at doing papers, Old Qi seriously made me laugh at the start. When he just came, he was in the same row as I did. There was a pop quiz that day, I think. After I finished a page, he finished half a page. When I was done, he was still stuck on the second page. In the end I don’t even remember what’s the score, either way when the lesson ended his hands were shaking as he asked me, if I was the fastest at finishing the papers in Class A. I said no, I’m one of the last few. He nearly cried.”

The few boys guffawed. “The fact that he’s this fast now with practising is also rather awesome.”

“Yeah, now it’s our turn to chase him,” Gao Tianyang said, “have you seen him do English papers? Now that’s what I call fast! Didn’t Jing-jie say so before that with the difficulty level in her English practices, with 150 questions, as long as we could finish it within two hours, we would have plenty of time when it comes to gaokao. Old Qi that bastard could finish it in one and a half hour, I timed him before.”

“How bored were you?”

“I even timed for Tian-ge before,” Gao Tianyang was unbridled with his words knowing that he was his childhood friend and he was far away from him. “That time, Tian-ge was faster than Old Qi by five minutes, he’s not human either!”

“Shit, with this level of difficulty he finished nearly 20 questions within 10 minutes?”

“Yup.”

“I want to quit school.”

“I want to too. Every single day sitting in front of him is so damaging to my psyche. Look at the entire level. With this speed, can you even find a third one?!” After Gao Tianyang finished his bold proclamations, he then remembered the new friend who scored full marks next to him.

“Oh wait, there’s still Sheng-ge, Sheng-ge should be pretty quick too.” As he spoke he stuck his head out to look, only to see that Sheng Wang was already on the second paper.

Gao Tianyang froze for a bit, and silently looked at his own paper — the first page on the first paper.

He took a look at the people around him again, they were either at the tail end of the first half of the first paper, or the start of the second half of the first paper.

He dug out his phone to check the time again. From the time they started catching up their overdue work, it had been 20 minutes, and Sheng Wang already finished 58 questions……

“What the……” Gao Tianyang’s jaw dropped, “fuck?”

“What are you cursing me out for?” Sheng Wang said.

With just this sentence alone, his dark orbs moved as he finished reading a question, and wrote a D in the bracket.

Gao Tianyang, “???”

Sheng Wang finished three questions with the natural ease of flowing water, before he finally turned around, puzzled.

Gao Tianyang said in a completely monotone cadence, “Father, You memorised the answers didn’t you.”

“I don’t have a son like you.” Sheng Wang said, completely done, “Do you suffer from ultraviolet ray poisoning or something? Speak normally.”

“No wait—” Gao Tianyang was breaking down, “How do you get the answer with only one look at the question? Don’t you need to analyse it or something?”

Sheng Wang thought for a bit before saying, “I’ll underline if the sentence structure is especially complicated.”

“There’re simple ones in these?”

“Um.”

“What do you mean by ‘um’!” Gao Tianyang had the expression of valiantly dying for justice as he said, “Just give me a quick death already. Tell me, how long do you usually take to finish Jing-jie’s 150 questions?”

“An hour.” Sheng Wang never actually did try to time before, he just gave a rough estimate. As he saw the gradually distorted expressions from this line of people, he wanted to add 20 more minutes.

In the end, the moment he opened his mouth, even Jiang Tian swept him a glance.

Out of some unknown mentality, Sheng Wang’s voice paused, and opened his peacock tail on the spot. “Yeah, roughly an hour.”

“Fuck!”

The Catching Up with Overdue Homework in the Corridor group all cursed in unison. Only Jiang Tian did not show much emotion, and coldly retracted his gaze to continue doing his papers.

There was a monkey scratching its head in bewilderment in Sheng Wang’s head. He suddenly felt that this tail opening of his was really quite pointless, it was freaking stupid.

The classroom door opened amidst the group of people cursing. Yang Jing stuck out half her body and said, “You think I couldn’t hear you? You even started swearing while doing your late homework?”

Gao Tianyang poked his head out and said, “No, Jing-jie, we’re just expressing our thoughts on Sheng Wang’s speed at doing questions.” After he spoke, he quickly shrunk back.

Yang Jing gave a cold laugh, lifted her chin and said, “When I told you guys to practise your feel for the language, you did not, and now you can feel your distance from him?”

“How do we practise this, teacher?”

“Listen, read, and speak more.” As Yang Jing followed the train of conversation to that point, she asked, “Sheng Wang, have you stayed overseas before?”

“Nope, I didn’t,” Sheng Wang said, “but my dad has a few foreign friends, one of their sons came over for exchange for a few years. Back then he stayed in my house, nowadays we would voice chat once in a while. Maybe that had an impact.”

“No wonder.”

After Yang Jing mumbled, she started acting fierce again. “That’s why, you clearly could easily finish this, and yet you still dare to hand up an empty piece of paper. Keep staying outside then. Stay for the entire two periods, nobody will be allowed to come in at all. If I don’t show you some colours, you wouldn’t know how to spell ‘terrified’ at all!”

“We are already very terrified, teacher.”

Yang Jing laughed derisively, and locked the door.

When class ended, the top floor of Sensibility Block was extraordinarily boisterous.

Not only did students of Class A come out for a tour, every single class from the twelve classes downstairs all had someone heading upstairs, there were even quite the number of students in the year one block opposite crowding against the windows.

Even the teachers in the office could not stay put anymore, and all came out to mock them. Old Wu, who taught math, went to the hot water room twice within ten minutes. The math rep could not bear to look anymore, and asked, “Teacher, You really have to drink so much hot water during the hottest parts of summer?”

Old Wu leisurely said, a cup in his hands, “I’m here for a tour.” He had zero intention to cover up his interest in joining in the chaos and was just there to watch the world burn.

The students of Class were always a little cheeky, and these teachers were already used to it. As long as it wasn’t lesson time, they could make all sorts of jokes. After Old Wu spoke, he even stuck out his fingers, pointed at the three girls passing by in the corridor, arms looped around arms, and said, “There, the three gals there, from class 8, right? I’ve seen them go back and forth for like three to four times. Eh, is the second floor toilet spoiled?”

“Yeah, yeah, we had to queue.” The three girls blatantly fibbed, and ran away like a wisp of smoke. Even as they ran they did not forget to sneak a look. When they passed by Jiang Tian they giggled and blushed, when they passed by Sheng Wang they also giggled and blushed again.

It was not that young master Sheng Wang had never experienced being a tourist attraction before, it was just that today's was really too embarrassing.

He pinched the paper and covered his face. He nudged here, he nudge there, there was truly nowhere to hide.

The school bell finally rang. The tourists entered like the tide, and receded like the tide. The tourist attraction was left stuck there.

Sheng Wang let down his paper, and let out a sigh of relief. He grumbled, "Is Fuzhong really this free after class?"

After he spoke, nobody answered him. He turned to look, only then he realised that the King of Showing Support, Gao Tianyang, had lost him. Right now, standing next to him was Jiang Tian.

He seriously shuffled all the way from the front door to the back door of the class.

The sun remained scorching hot. The ten plus of them were steaming like buns that just left the tray, any closer to each other and the sticky warmth would annoy them.

Jiang Tian also had sweat gathering at his sideburns. Under the glow of sunlight, his Adam's apple was adorned with a layer of moisture. Still, he looked like he was ice cold, like drinks that just left the fridge. There may be condensation covering him all over, but he was still ice cool.

Sheng Wang also turned around, and spreaded his paper against the wall. Yet, he did not rush to finish the remaining questions.

Jiang Tian's progress was not that different from his, with a span of a class period, he already finished more than 120 of them. There were plenty of circles and marks on the paper, along with the sentence structures he labelled along the way. His letters were messy, but nice.

Sheng Wang hesitated a little, and softly called him, "Jiang Tian?"

The person's pen stopped for a bit.

"How did you end up not doing it?" Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian casually wrote a dot next to the answer, and his gaze already moved onto the next question. He did not even lift his eyelid.

Oh no, he's really ignoring him.

The monkey scratching its head in Sheng Wang's mind came out again.

Just as the monkey was really getting into scratching, a girl's voice rang next to his ears, "I think he forgot to bring the practice home."

Sheng Wang was stumped, "He forgot?"

The one who spoke was the girl whose nickname was 'Chili', "I went to the administrative office last night, when I came back, all of you had already left. When I switched off the lights and locked the doors, I think I saw the practice inside his desk, right Jiang Tian?"

Sheng Wang turned around to look at that popsicle again.

“Mm.” The popsicle answered. Even though he did not look up, at least he did not act deaf.

Fine, he would respond to other people, and ignore him alone.

Sheng Wang almost started scratching right along with the monkey.

Chili, who was next to him, mumbled, “Why are you still so late this morning then? I thought you would come over early to finish it.”

After all, Jiang Tian was not someone who did not do his homework.

When she was done speaking, Jiang Tian did not have any reaction, but Sheng Wang froze.

Yeah, if he forgot his paper, he could just finish it in the morning. With Jiang Tian’s speed, he could finish a paper within twenty plus minutes before class, the rest he could catch up with when Yang Jing went through the papers. He only needed to ensure that he could do it at a faster rate than her going through it.

And why did he not arrive early?

Because someone was being prissy and dilly dallying, and somehow forcibly took that long to leave the house. Sheng Wang silently cursed himself.

In the next forty minutes, a certain person tried to use his gaze to get Jiang Tian’s attention. It failed. He also tried to use other people’s conversations as a jumping board to joke around with Jiang Tian. It failed.

He even attempted to drop his pen cap next to Jiang Tian’s feet, and it still failed.

The opponent did not react at all, but young master Sheng Wang almost busied himself to death.

This state lasted all the way until English lesson ended. It did not turn for the better when chemistry started either.

When Sheng Wang returned to his seat, he was still a little listless, he was so listless to the point that Gao Tianyang nearly thought that he got a heat stroke.

“Do you want heat stroke medicine?” Gao Tianyang asked him.

“Thanks, but no need.” Sheng Wang said dryly.

He needed a cure for regret even more.

The homeroom teacher, He Jin, entered the classroom on the dot. She waved an application form in her hands as she said, “Maybe you have already heard this, but the Tri-Quality Students of the City is up for nomination again. Up till last night, we had three nomination slots in the class. This morning, after sitting in the administrative office for an hour, I managed to open up yet another slot.”

“This is still important to all of you, it can affect your advanced admission into top schools later on. If you could go for it, you should still go for it. Our class’ selection method is transparent, you know the rules. One for good grades, this is hard power. One will be picked amongst class reps, as they had worked hard for a year, they deserve a little treat, right? And there’s one with democracy, the entire class gets to vote. Any objections?”

“As for the new slot that I asked for, us teachers discussed this for a bit, and we decided to give this to the student who shows the greatest improvement. After all, hard work is also a form of capital, and it’s the capital most deserving of affirmation. How do we quantify improvement then? We do have a weekly test this weekend, and another week would be your monthly test, which is the first major test when school officially starts. We’ll judge from the performance in these two exams, okay?”

Most people were destined to never get the Tri-Quality Students of the City initially, so they weren’t too bothered. But now the additional slot gave too many people a fighting chance, quite a number of students shot up straight.

Sheng Wang gave it a listen, and temporarily shifted his attention.

Soon, He Jin kept the form and officially started class. Sheng Wang’s thoughts drifted back to the starting point.

He half heartedly took notes.

For a moment he even thought whatever, if he could not appease him then just let it be, leave it up to fate. After all, he had to pick one between his face and Jiang Tian. But, he could not lose this much face either. He was only sixteen, there was still plenty of time left in his life.

In the end, before he even made it for a minute, he crouched over and took out his phone.

He squeezed his finger, and opened up Jiang Tian’s WeChat.

Keep a hold on yourself.

He told himself, and then sent Jiang Tian three stickers of a tiny person crying while kneeling in a row.

He Jin was going through a major difficult sample question, and got a discussion on-going in class. It was like there were forty plus bees in class, it was not quiet at all.

Sheng Wang heard the three buzzes behind him amidst the bustling chatters.

However, a reply did not pop out in the chat. Sheng Wang closed an eye, jerked his leg, and started typing.

Canned: It's my bad

Canned: I didn’t blank out

Canned: I just thought last night was too embarrassing, that’s why I didn’t want to talk about it

The vibration behind was abruptly cut off by someone. The words ‘The person is typing…’ finally appeared at the top of the chat. Sheng Wang stopped, and silently waited for a reply.

A few seconds later, a new message finally popped up in the chat.

Jiang Tian: Continue acting like you have amnesia then.

Canned: no

Canned: I can’t lose my face and even act like my head has issues too

Jiang Tian: ……

The conversation was no longer one sided at last. Even though the other person treasured his words like gold, coming from Jiang Tian, the word count was already impressive. Sheng Wang was getting a little ahead of himself all at once. He felt that the mood was appropriate, and so with the attitude of taking a foot after winning an inch, he sent another two lines.

Canned: How about you get a little selective amnesia?

Canned: You can just forget about the stupid things I did, pretend you weren’t there. We can just remember the good things, how does that sound?

After he sent it, he heard a light snort behind him.

Sure, even replying was enough to make him full of himself.

Sheng Wang twisted around to shoot a glance at Jiang Tian, only to see the person’s hand loosely dangle beneath the table. Judging by his posture, he probably settled his phone on his thigh. His other hand was seriously still able to take notes while distracted.

He finished writing a line without ever lifting his pen off the paper, leaned his entire body against the chair, and looked up at Sheng Wang.

At the very same time, Sheng Wang’s phone vibrated four times in a row.

He looked down in confusion, there were indeed four more messages in the chat.

Jiang Tian: Sure.

Then he sent three videos in a row.

Sheng Wang sneakily stuffed in a wireless earpiece, and opened the first one.

The clip featured an alleyway that wasn't really wide. The street lamp stood at the corner, showering the area with a dusky yellow. An idiot in school uniform walked in a straight row beneath the street lamp. He turned around and asked at the camera, "Did you catch that clearly?"

Fuck.

Sheng Wang nearly threw his phone out.

The back of his chair smashed against Jiang Tian's desk, making a loud clang. He Jin frowned as she looked over, asking, "Is there something wrong?"

Sheng Wang quickly plucked out his ear piece while the angle was convenient. He stood up and said, "I nearly fell off."

"Oh." He Jin nodded, "When it's class, don't rock your chairs. I've already said this many times."

When Sheng Wang sat down, he heard that bastard let out a rather low laugh.

Fine.

He dug out his phone again and typed a few words.

Canned: Are you happy yet?

Jiang Tian: What do you mean.

Canned: You’re pretending, just keep pretending!

Jiang Tian: Put down your phone, it’s time for class now.

Sheng Wang stuffed his phone into his bag on instinct, and properly looked up and gripped his pen. The next second he then realised that he was too obedient. Therefore, he slowly raised a middle finger at the person behind him with his hand behind his back. Said finger was knocked down by the person’s pen.

It was like from this lesson onwards, he really did get a little closer to Jiang Tian.

Footnotes:

1. Reference to chinese meme in which a dude proclaims that the noodles he ate were delicious after saying that he would not eat it no matter what at the start. Has now become a reference to acting in a way that is hypocritical to what that person proclaimed earlier.

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dugu_Qiubai, fictional character in well known Jinyong novel emphasis: His full name thus roughly translates to "Loner Who Seeks Defeat". It represents his status as an invincible swordsman who is haunted by solitude as no one can defeat or equal him in swordplay.

Chapter 020 - Revision

And with this, we mark the start of book Hawthorn, or book 2, or the friendship arc!

T/N: Decision to change White Horse Lane → White Horse Alley

After some additional research on my part, I would like to say that I'll be changing White Horse Lane to White Horse Alley. Specifically, the housing and buildings SW and co lived in are called □□s (longtang), a type of traditional housing in the likes of shanghai area etc, similar to the hutongs in beijing. They are marked by narrow paths, which is why I felt that 'alley' would be more appropriate than 'lane', I suggest searching Chinese alley to get a better look. Though there are also different types of longtangs and some have mini residential blocks, plenty of variety and stuff. When you see this chapter, I'll likely be making changes and edits to various terminologies in earlier chapters too, like changing wutong to parasol tree for poetic purposes.

Jiang Tian: Is the Door Locked?

Young people don’t learn from their mistakes.

Two days had passed, and the homework catch-up army with Gao Tianyang in lead only remembered that BBQ meal and those few barrels of beer. Other than the rare few who were still puzzled over who tattled to Yang Jing, most students of Class A had already shifted their focus to the weekly test.

In the past, actually, they would not have bothered so much about the weekly test. After all, all they saw every single day were tests. With a single major exam per week, anyone would be desensitized. Other than the ‘screw-off style streaming’ applicable only during midterms and finals, the atmosphere of exam preparation would not be too thick in Class A.

But the weekly test this time round was slightly special.

Firstly, this test entailed the chance to get a nomination for Tri-Quality Students of the City half a month later. Secondly, would be the new regulation pushed out by the school.

About the new regulation, this was what the form teacher, He Jin said: “In order to ensure that you can keep your calm when it comes to gaokao and face it with a normal attitude, we put in the system of having one major

test per week. And yet, to our chagrin, aren't you guys a little too unperturbed?"

"Especially the students in our class! The school leadership has already named and shamed, saying that some of our students are a little fake when it comes to putting in effort. What did they mean by fake? It's when you only put in effort for midterms and finals, these two major exams give very pretty results, but when it comes to weeklies and monthlies there is not a care to be found, some people even fall to the level's average for the level positions. To put it into words, it's almost the 200th place"

Although she did not name anyone, her gaze already swept past a few people.

"Therefore, in order to maintain a healthy sense of reverence towards examinations without adding on to stress, the school has decided that from this weekly test onwards, your seats in exams will be determined by your level position. Our class has 45 seats, and 46th place will go to B class, and then the rest go Class 1-2-3-4-5-6 in order, all the way to Class 12. Your position in the last weekly test, will be the seat number you sit at. If you did well, go ahead to the front. If you screwed up, please head to the other classrooms."

The new system was way too hardcore, 10+ students in Class A lost it on the spot.

The moment He Jin left, Gao Tianyang collapsed backwards right then and there, dying a heroic death on Sheng Wang's desk.

He was the classic diligence for only midterms and finals type.

“Now I’m screwed, I’m totally screwed. With that dogshit score of mine last week, I’m definitely out of the first 100 places.”

“Shut up, 100th place is already good enough, I even scored 5 marks lesser than you!”

“I’m definitely beyond 150th place.”

“150th place definitely isn’t the worst, when Old Jin mentioned nearly 200th place, I made eye contact with her. My heart stopped beating on the spot.”

Gao Tianyang lifted his chin up with great difficulty, “All of you, get out of my freaking way, nobody’s got it as bad as me! I messed up an entire chunk when shading the answer sheet for English last time, and 30 marks went down the drain just like that. I thought I already moved on from that.”

“Don’t move on, move back.” Study rep, Song Sirui, antagonized him with zero mercy, “Even if you didn’t shade it wrongly, the 30 marks would probably go down the drain anyways.”

“Scram!” Gao Tianyang flared up at him.

He said to Sheng Wang in the midst of groans of despair, “Sheng-ge, those bastards are rubbing salt into my wounds, I probably need to go to Class 4 for my test, I need consolation.”

Sheng Wang leaned against his chair, and looked at Gao Tianyang in complete apathy.

“Sheng-ge, why are you looking at me like this?” Gao Tianyang was still fake crying.

“Because you are crying about your grades to the last place in class,” Sheng Wang faintly replied.

Gao Tianyang was stumped for two seconds with his ugly crying face, and finally realised — he nearly forgot, Sheng Wang should be the one who wants to cry the most in class. He only managed to study for a single day before the weekly test.

Despite his pretty decent grades for language and English, they still could not fill in the gap that was the three sciences, either way…….he was in deep trouble and that’s all he could say about it.

Jiang Tian just came back from the bathroom, his hands absentmindedly folding a long and narrow slip of paper.

His footsteps stopped right next to Sheng Wang’s desk. He shot a glance at Gao Tianyang’s body that flopped motionlessly on the table, knocked on Sheng Wang’s desk and said, “Old He’s looking for you.”

Gao Tianyang scrambled up from Sheng Wang’s desk in a startle, asking, “Old He? For what?”

Jiang Tian said, “Not you.”

“Oh.” Gao Tianyang turned back without any fuss, and sprawled over his own desk.

Sheng Wang was also a little uneasy. “What does she want from me?”

Jiang Tian said, “To go to the office for your results slip.”

Fuzhong will always calculate the class and level positions every exam, as to how and whether they were openly published, it was all up to the form teachers. He Jin had always been the gentle type, she would individually select out everyone's result. A long slip of paper would contain their names, their scores for each subject, total score, position et cetera. If they wanted to know it, they could go claim it themselves, but they would not be able to know others.

Now with the new regulation in regards to the examination rooms, He Jin's method no longer had any meaning, therefore she needed to give out the remaining result slips in her hands.

Which was the one Jiang Tian's hand was currently holding.

He appeared to not particularly care about his results. As he spoke, he already made many folds on the slip.

The dangling of the whie thin slip of paper strongly stirred up Sheng Wang's burning curiosity. He could not help but to ask, "Can I take a look at yours?"

Jiang Tian released his hand, the slip landed on his desk.

His index finger pushed at the end of the slip, all the way to Sheng Wang's front, and then Sheng Wang saw a line of 1s:

1st in class, 1st in the level, exam seat #1.

Normally when people saw a result slip like this, they were either jealous or envious. Sheng Wang's response however, was a little unusual. He was…...a little reluctant to part with it.

When Jiang Tian whisked the result slip away, he acted like he was selling his children.

"Is there any problem?" Jiang Tian couldn't stand the sight anymore.

"Nope," Sheng Wang's gaze was still stuck on the slip, "my grades in the past used to look like this too, I'm just reminiscing with yours."

"....."

Sheng Wang finally shifted his gaze away from the result slip. He looked up to see Jiang Tian looking at him like he was some 'flower of Langhuan'.

(t/n: Sit in tight because I'm cobbling from various sources at once. Original term: □□□□. □□: han mythology, where the heavenly emperor used to keep his books, evolved to also mean where precious books are, and also the mystical fairy realm in general. □□ is 'wonderful work' according to baike, originally meaning strange but pretty flowers, basically exotic. To be a flower from that lang huan probably means you are truly 'one of a kind', and now □□ is an internet slang also used commonly, sarcastically, to mock outlandish weirdos. Jiang Tian in this case is looking at him like 'some unique brand of weirdo'.)

"Pass the pen." Jiang Tian moved his index finger, motioning him to pass him the pen.

"Why?" Sheng Wang was a little puzzled, but he did it anyway.

Only to see this anger-causing creature strike out his name on the result slip with a generous stroke of the pen, and write down the characters 'Sheng Wang'. Then, he pushed the slip along with the pen towards Sheng

Wang, saying, “Please remember to get rid of the trash after you’re done reminiscing.”

After he spoke, he went back to his seat to study, both hands empty, leaving Sheng Wang in a stare-off against the paper.

Gao Tianyang accidentally listened to the entire exchange, and his shoulders quaked as he tried to stifle his laughter. As for Sheng Wang…...the young master wanted to bite someone.

Therefore, only a few seconds passed before Jiang Tian received a beating from Canned via his WeChat screen.

The way they acted around each other had became a little strange—

In the morning, Jiang Tian would browse through the English newspaper as he waited for Sheng Wang to get ready for school, but he would never demonstrate any ‘forward initiative’ in front of Jiang Ou and Auntie Sun. When Sheng Wang went downstairs, he would be packing his schoolbag in his living room. Only when Jiang Ou said “wait for Xiao-Wang”, he then put down his schoolbag as if it was perfectly logical, and sat on the couch to use his phone.

When they entered the classroom, that constrained feeling would finally vanish into thin air.

They behaved the same way they would behave around classmates. When Sheng Wang ran out of pen ink he would borrow from Jiang Tian, Jiang Tian would tap on his shoulder to urge him to hurry up and pass the paper to the back. They did not talk particularly often, but it was not particularly little either. They would occasionally chat, but more often than not they annoyed each other.

Every lunch and dinner time, most students would reenact the tale of the hungry wolves. Gao Tianyang was forever the one who ran the fastest. He attempted to bring Sheng Wang along, but Sheng Wang would reject him, saying that he was frail and weak with no strength in his limbs, he could not wolf it up at all, he should go pursue this dream on his own.

In reality, Sheng Wang just felt that running was incredibly unflattering and it was too much effort, besides, he was too lazy to do so and he hated sweating, that's all.

And thus the logical conclusion was that he and Jiang Tian became the only two who did not fight for canteen food, and could only accompany each other.

They would travel together for a while, pass through the Garden of Conduct and beneath the shade of the wutong trees outside the fences of the sports field. Sheng Wang would then head to Xi Le Convenience Store, Jiang Tian would head out of the west gate.

Sheng Wang was actually a little curious as to where he ate his lunch, but out of some unknown mentality, he did not voluntarily ask him. He did not ask, and with Jiang Tian's personality, he did not say anything on his own either.

Therefore, they could only be considered as half a meal buddy.

Jiang Tian disappeared at night as usual, but he learned how to set his cover story up. He would send Sheng Wang a message before night self study ended, and Sheng Wang then go back by himself.

If he did not send the cover story, he would go home together with Sheng Wang. Sometimes, they would just fiddle around on their respective phones in the backseat of the car. Sometimes, they would chat a little.

And no matter the topic, no matter if they were done, they would stop the moment they step foot into the house.

The courtyard gate of White Horse Alley was like a boundary, they both had a silent understanding.

Gao Tianyang already roasted the parts he could see, saying, “Now I truly believe that you’re not familiar at all, seriously. The way the two of you behave is no different from splitting rent, you guys have an extra layer of being normal classmates at most.”

The infamous loudspeaker genuinely managed to keep his mouth sealed about this entire affair, probably out of fear of upsetting Jiang Tian.

But what Gao Tianyang did not know was that in somewhere he could not see, the volume of WeChat messages between Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian in a week had already exceeded the volume between his and Jiang Tian’s in a semester.

The night before the weekly test, Sheng Wang curled up in his seat before his study table, and revised through the questions he made a mistake on.

Only at that moment, then did he realise how many test papers and questions did he do in this week. Class A had progressed towards the material in the second semester of year two. He had to learn new content for each subject from the teachers in the day, and he also had to catch up on

what he missed after finishing his homework at night. Other than the one time he drank, he did not manage to sleep before 2am on a single day.

First Young Master Sheng was petty, he could not stand to see other people in joy while he had to suffer. If the people around him had to go through such tortuous abuse too, he would feel much more balanced.

It was quite late into the night by the time he was done with the collection of questions he made a mistake on for mathematics and physics.

White Horse Alley was situated in a splendid residential spot, even though it was in the midst of the city centre, the criss-crossing of the narrow paths resulted in not much of noise passing through at all. At this timing, it was truly complete quietude.

Sheng Wang briefly checked his phone, the screen displayed 2.10am. Pen cap in his mouth, he turned around to covetously stare at the wall behind him.

Normally, at this time, the person next door should be sleeping already. He would hear a bunch of light shuffling noises that came from slippers, that would travel from the person’s study table to the bed, and peace and quiet would descend once more.

At this point, Sheng Wang would also be heading to bed, therefore he would not be jealous anyway.

Today however was different, he still had a corrections collection for chemistry to go through.

(t/n: Chinese studying methods: gathering all the questions you made a mistake on and looking through them specifically, some people choose to cut and paste out said questions directly. I decided to give it the name of ‘correction collection’ because typing out the entire descriptor every time took too long. Besides, they do kinda have a noun for this, □□□.)

He stared at that wall for around half a minute, probably, and the familiar shuffling noise was heard once more.

See, he was indeed going to sleep.

He was the only night owl left in White Horse Alley.

Sheng Wang’s head crashed against his table, and secluded into himself for a while. The shuffling noise was heard again, this time from the be to the study table.

Hm? Sheng Wang blinked, and looked up in uncertainty. He kept an ear out and waited for a while, and did not discover any further movement. He finally ascertained that Jiang Tian was not asleep yet, there was a second living person in White Horse Alley at 2am.

Gratification flowed through his veins. He took out a piece of scratch paper, and started calculating for the corrections.

However, he only finished two pages before he heard more commotion from next door over.

Sheng Wang once again listened intently and stared at the wall. After listening while holding his breath for a while, he reckoned that the person

was only searching for something through his bag. Therefore, he relaxed and continued going through his corrections.

This repeated for three to four cycles before he finally exploded.

Sheng Wang heavily jabbed at his phone screen, jabbing his way into WeChat's app interface, tapped on topmost person and started typing —

What the hell are you walking back and forth for???

After he typed out the three question marks, Sheng Wang hesitated, and did not send the message. It was because he reread the message, and felt like he was like a pervert.

His forehead rested against the table as his two hands held his phone, and fell into deep thought. Two seconds later, he deleted that line, and retyped: Are you still not asleep yet? Auntie Sun placed a bowl of red grapes in the fridge, I'll share some with you?

That's not it, that's too fake.

Sheng Wang deleted this line again, and started editing the message for the third time: You're this hardworking today?

He silently read through a few times, and felt that it was passable. He was about to send the message before his phone suddenly vibrated.

Sheng Wang was startled. He stared at the phone, and there was unexpectedly a new message in the chat.

Jiang Tian: ?

Sheng Wang's clumsy hands nearly sent the message. He deleted the typed out message in a fluster, and replied.

Canned: ???

The next second, Jiang Tian tossed him a screenshot. He cropped out the chat from his perspective, the top displayed 'The other person is typing……"

Jiang Tian: It's already a while, you're still not done typing?

Sheng Wang swore 'fuck' internally, and felt embarrassed from feeling like his inner thoughts were being peeked upon or something for some inexplicable reason. However, since the other person already knew, he no longer needed his face. Anyways, he already lost his face a countless number of times in front of Jiang Tian.

The First Young Master decided to go straight to the main topic with a shut of his eyes and a kick of his legs.

Canned: What time are you sleeping

There was a crying little person kneeling down attached to the end of his sentence, his intention was obvious enough.

This time round, it was Jiang Tian's turn to be 'now typing……', a moment later, there was a jump in the chat.

Jiang Tian: How much are you left with?

Canned: One corrections collection……

Jiang Tian: Which one?

Canned: Chemistry.

Jiang Tian: Is your door locked?

T/N: now consider, how long was Jiang Tian staring at wechat before he sent sheng wang a message?

Chapter 021 - Correction Collection

Jiang Tian Got Me to Pass This to You, He Said That You Left It in His Bag

Sheng Wang was a little stumped.

He truly wanted to know when Jiang Tian would sleep only, he did not expect the other person to reply with that at all. The development of events went way out of hand, the young master was caught completely off guards.

Even more off guarded, was that there was soon a knock at his room's door. Sheng Wang froze for two seconds, and quickly went to open the door with a shuffle of his slippers.

Jiang Tian stood outside of the door, the hand that knocked was holding a loose leaf notebook, the other hand was scrolling through his phone.

It's already so late, yet he had plenty of official business to deal with, Sheng Wang thought idly.

Like last time round, Jiang Tian did not look left and right when he entered. He was talking to someone about something, and walked straight to the table as he typed.

Sheng Wang followed right behind him.

He finished typing the last few words right next to the table before he finally locked his phone and tossed it into his pocket. He turned to look at Sheng Wang's corrections collection and asked, "Where are you stuck at?"

Sheng Wang laughed dryly, "I wasn't."

Jiang Tian shot a glimpse at the wall clock, "You're not stuck but it's already 2.30am?"

"What's this look of yours." Sheng Wang wanted to hit someone. He was at the risk of losing his face. His finger knocked against the notebook as he said, "I'm self-studying, this speed is already not bad."

Jiang Tian casually flipped through a few pages with his eyes lowered, "Then what did you want to ask?"

Sheng Wang couldn't squeeze any question out.

He wanted to say 'I actually didn't mean it', but if he seriously went with that, he dreaded that Jiang Tian would instantly walk away with a poker-face, and he would never have that patience ever again.

That means that he would have to spam him with tiny people on WeChat again.

Sheng Wang thought about the consequence, and felt he could also have this 'meaning'.

"How about—" he rubbed his neck, putting his face at stakes and said, "how about you help me sort this out, what's the typical difficulty level in the weekly test? I've only ever taken the test once, I can't quite grasp it yet."

Not so long ago, this was what other people always said to him, he had never ever thought in a million years that the reverse would happen.

He thought that Jiang Tian, as a lucky person who had the fortune to hear this coming from him, should go buy a lottery ticket. After all, this line would only ever appear once, there was no way he would say it a second time.

Sheng Wang thought, self importantly.

There was only one chair in the bedroom. He graciously gave it up to Jiang Tian, and sat at the edge of the table with much familiar ease. He reached to the other side of the desk and fished out an empty notebook. He spun his pen as he said to Jiang Tian, “Done, you may begin.”

Jiang Tian eyed his improper sitting position, and his thumb pressed down on the pen as he asked, “Can I draw on the collection?”

“Up to you,” Sheng Wang said, “it will be torn out in the end anyways.”

“Torn?”

Sheng Wang explained, “I'll just strike a question out if I have no more doubts after doing it two times, and then tear the page once it’s filled. Saves me from wasting the few seconds it takes to sweep through them again next time.”

He himself was already this sloppy, Jiang Tian did not bother with being courteous anymore. He roughly looked through the collection, clicked his blue pen, and drew giant brackets around some questions.

As he drew, he said, “These few pages are key points.”

“Don’t need to look at the main question for these two pages.”

He crossed out a few pages with zero mercy while saying, “This part is not really useful.”

“When you have time, give the remaining ones a look, if you didn’t it doesn’t really affect much anyway.”

This person said four sentences in total. Out of 20+ pages, he folded five pages, bracketed six key questions, and passed the notebook to Sheng Wang. “Got it?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He actually really did get it. He did have top-notch studying and understanding abilities after all, all he needed was a slight nudge. When Jiang Tian highlighted, he could already tell that the six key questions were the most synthetic questions, if he completely grasped them, he would not need to be terrified of the major questions in exams at all.

As for the remaining questions, they were basically repeating certain parts from these six questions, therefore he did not need to waste his time on them.

For objective questions, Jiang Tian picked those with a strange angle. There was no need to worry about objective questions during the exam at all. If he could figure out a coherent line of thought for these weird questions, then there should be basically no more issues.

Sheng Wang may have understood, but he still wanted to laugh.

He reached out to receive the booklet, and the other hand raised two fingers in pretense, “I have a question.”

When this young master spoke, the long legs dangling at the side of the table lightly playfully swayed, just a look and one could tell he was up to no good.

“Speak.” Jiang Tian’s hand, which was delivering the notebook, paused in its journey.

“Have you seriously not been beaten up before when you went through the questions like that?” Sheng Wang started laughing halfway through as he spoke.

Jiang Tian just knew that he did not have any pleasant thing to say. The moment he heard, he immediately drew the notebook back.

Sheng Wang missed the notebook, and instantly behaved, he let out an ‘Ay’ and said, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, please don’t take it away. The book is mine.”

Earlier on, in order to save time he did not even bother with drying his hair. At this moment, it was already thoroughly dried. The hair was uncombed, and with these two actions and a fuss it was messier than before.

Sheng Wang was able to grab the corrections collection with a reach of his hand, and sat back at the table again. His finger combed his hair for a while, blew the hair in front of his forehead, and finally started looking at the questions with his head down.

There was no longer anyone speaking, the room was abruptly quiet. The stillness in the late night in White Horse Alley slowly, quietly, submerged the room, like the rising tide. Behind Sheng Wang was a giant glass window, in some random bush outside, bugs stayed hidden, and distantly, muffledly chittered.

Out of his peripheral gaze, Jiang Tian did not get up to leave. He took his own loose leaf notebook from the table, leaned against the back of the chair and flipped through it. Sheng Wang took a quick look at him before retracting his gaze, and did not chase him back to his own bedroom to do so. Neither did he ask him how long it would take for him to finish it. He only drew a pen out from his pencil case, and started scribbling on his scratch paper.

After Jiang Tian's bold and decisive chops and cancellations, he went through the corrections collection at an extremely speedy pace. He only took 10+ minutes from the start to end. Even so, it was nearly 3am.

The two people did not stay up so late before, both their eyelids were heavy at the end, they were basically competing to see who was sleepier. Even the notebooks and pens were kept in its entirety. After Jiang Tian returned to his room, Sheng Wang flopped onto his bed. He buried himself within his blankets in half-alive-half-dead state for a while, before he groped for his phone as if he remembered something.

He used his finger to pull at his eyelids, and mustered up his energy to open up the chat window with Jiang Tian. He bit the tip of his tongue as he sent a 'oh yeah thank you' with much hesitation, and locked his phone the moment it was sent. He tossed the phone aside and went back lying down again.

His consciousness almost immediately blurred out, even until the moment he completely fell asleep, he did not hear the phone vibrate at all. He reckoned Jiang Tian probably fell asleep faster than he did.

Second day, early in the morning, Jiang Ou and Auntie Sun went in and out of the kitchen as usual. Around 6.20am, the shuffling of footsteps could be heard from the staircase. Sheng Wang went downstairs with bleary eyes at the usual timing right on the dot.

Jiang Ou settled a bowl of shredded chicken porridge down on the table, and beckoned Sheng Wang to come sit down, while saying on instinct, ‘Xiao-Tian, wait for him a bit.”

Sheng Wang followed the voice and looked towards the living room, and saw not a single person. He looked towards the entryway, and there was still no one next to the shoe cabinet.

He paused for a moment, and was just about to ask before he heard Jiang Ou slap her hand to her head, and said, “Ay, this head of mind, Xiao-Tian isn’t down yet.”

She pushed the bowl of porridge towards Sheng Wang, and could not help but mutter, “How strange, he didn’t dawdle in bed before, what day is this even?”

At that moment, Sheng Wang had the guilty conscience of a thief for some reason.

In the end, Jiang Tian went down later than he did by two minutes. Sheng Wang glanced at the staircase as he listened to the footsteps, and then

drank his porridge to the sound of Jiang Ou muttering, nearly burying his entire face inside.

*

The exam teachers pasted seat numbers for Class A and B and the other 12 overnight. This morning, when Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian entered the classroom, their seats were already filled with unfamiliar faces.

Their tables were at the back, one 44 and the other 45, and just nice both were taken by students from other classes.

The moment the boy who sat at table 45 saw that it was Jiang Tian's table, he immediately rubbed his hands together, "What the heck is this godly seat, if I touch it a couple of times, can I score better?"

Jiang Tian was bending over to retrieve the things he needed for the exam from the inside of the table. After he heard, he stood straight and glanced at his hand, his face completely written with 'Why are you so prissy.'

When this person wasn't smiling, he emanated enough frost to freeze the heavens and ice the ground, and he still had an air of arrogance coming right out of him.

That boy instantly shrunk his hand back. Yet, even if he did not have the guts to touch the table, someone did. Gao Tianyang, while holding his pencil case, brazenly pushed Sheng Wang over there as he said, "Here, the two of us get a touch each, maybe next exam we wouldn't be exiled downstairs.

Sheng Wang praised, "Good idea."

Gao Tianyang said, “You go first, I’ll follow up.”

Sheng Wang echoed after Gao Tianyang for the sake of it, he did not actually have the intention to touch at all. In the end, the moment he looked up and saw Jiang Tian’s indescribable gaze, for some reason, he suddenly was in the mood to tease. He reached out for a touch, and after a touch he escaped.

Gao Tianyang chased after him, and exclaimed, ‘Aiyo what the heck this is hilarious, you didn’t catch it, but my Tian-ge’s face……”

These two were roughly peas of the same problematic pod, they both had to head downstairs. Gao Tianyang’s seat was #2 in Class 3. Sheng Wang was worse off, he was #8 in Class 5.

Though he only just transferred over, his face was already relatively famous, when he entered Class 5 he even caused an uproar. It wasn’t only because he’s hot, it was also because everyone knew he came down from Class A.

The reason for his bad grades was known to Class A, but that did not mean that other classes knew too. He just sat down in his seat when he vaguely heard two people’s whispering, to his rightish-front, “This score is pretty bad, how did he even make it into Class A?”

“There’s discount for inter-school transfers?”

“That works too? If only I knew I wouldn’t have tested for Fuzhong, I would have gone to Erzhong, made my way into the strong class, and transferred. Maybe I would have been in Class A by now.”

Sheng Wang dug out his pencil case from his bag, and treated these as a joke.

He wasn't a particularly modest type of person, as he heard he gave them corrective remarks in his head, his mouth even sprouted, "Can you guys be a little softer? It would be so terribly embarrassing if I end up hearing you."

Two girls at the side 'pffted' into laughter, the few gossipy ones instantly went red in the face, whipping around and saying, "Who's embarrassing?"

Sheng Wang said, "Not me for sure."

"Fuck." Those people were incredibly frustrated, and yet they knew they were the ones who were in the wrong, and could only keep it to themselves.

"Why are you so amusing," the two girls giggled.

Sheng Wang thought they vaguely looked familiar, but due to his facial blindness, he could not recall where he saw them from.

The girl close to him suddenly covered her mouth, pointed the few boys and said breathily, "These are the boys well known for their scumminess in the level, they would do any stupid thing. If you run into them in the next exam room, you should stay away from them, saves you some trouble."

Sheng Wang laughed, and played along by covering his mouth, "Next time round, I definitely wouldn't be in the same exam room."

“Why are you so unhumble?”

As they spoke, the other girl suddenly frantically slapped at this girl’s arm, saying “Outside the door, outside!”

“What's outside the door?”

Sheng Wang looked up with this girl, only to see Jiang Tian’s figure flash by, leaving from the classroom entrance.

“Jiang Tian?!”

“Why is Jiang Tian here?” The two girls muttered.

Sheng Wang suddenly recalled why they were vaguely familiar then. The two girls came over to stuff small gifts and notes to Jiang Tian during PE lesson, but they were both rejected.

A boy who just entered made his way over in a light jog, a familiar looking loose leaf notebook in his hand.

Sheng Wang focused, and internally said, isn’t that my correction collection?

Just as expected, that boy placed the notebook on his desk and said, “Jiang Tian got me to pass this to you, he said that you left it in his bag.”

The two girls, as well as the students who heard this, all violently whipped their head around.

Sheng Wang was more confused than they were.

Chapter 022 - Old Man Ding

First paid chapter! And it was a 3 in 1 too...anyways please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you could! buymoumoutoday

Young Master Sheng Wang’s Mental State Collapsed On The Spot

The world of secondary education was very simple, as long as one was slightly outstanding in certain areas, they could become one of the popular kids, well known throughout the school. Those with good grades could make it there, those with good looks could certainly too. Jiang Tian perfectly occupied both conditions, his name becoming much more mystical as a result.

From the moment the boy who delivered the notebook spoke till the moment the test officially started, the people around were in a state of both curious and yet afraid to gossip, like a mosquito with its wings pinched together, only daring to move the mouth and not make a single sound.

Sheng Wang thought it was kind of funny.

To think back then I was also quite the popular one, at least there wouldn't be any idiots around who would say ‘this score is pretty bad’ right in front of me, Sheng Wang said internally.

Soon enough though, he felt that whatever, constantly reminiscing about the past was no fun.

He had always felt that he had a heart and lungs of iron, he would just show a paper with only 60-70 marks to other people, and he could even make a joke out of it. Everyone gets a little kick out of it, and the issue would be considered over.

Only till this moment, when the people who couldn't keep their mouths to themselves bury themselves into the test with distress, and the school bell gradually stopping its final sound, with him sitting in the classroom and listening to the cacophony of the cicadas outside, he suddenly realised albeit late—

This feeling of dropping from the clouds to the mud, he really did not like it at all.

Nobody would ever like it.

There was a tiny piece of paper pasted at the left corner of every table, with the name, class, exam registration number and the seat number written on top. The invigilator quietly walked off the teaching platform, a form in his hands, and approached the students to get them to sign it individually.

He soon approached Sheng Wang. After double checking against the information, he pressed the form against his desk, and whispered, "Sign here."

279 was his seat number this time. Fuzhong's niche was in the sciences. In year two, other than Class AB, the top 7 were all science classes. His ranking this time wasn't really desirable. Sheng Wang clicked his pen, and signed his name after that number.

He should set himself a small target, like…...jumping 100 places from 279.

The first test, mathematics, went on from 7am to 9.30am, afterwards they had a half an hour of break to adjust. The second subject, physics, went from 10am to 11.40am.

After these two papers, the person basically perished.

The moment the bell rang, a huge wave of living dead poured out from the classrooms.

Gao Tianyang was only a class away from Sheng Wang, the moment he handed in his script he waited outside Class 5, in the corridor.

Sheng Wang's face was full of astonishment as he held his bag, "You seriously didn't go straight for the canteen?"

"We don't need to fight for the canteen food for today, did you forget?" Gao Tianyang realised the moment he spoke, "Oh, yeah right, you didn't know. Our school has a rule, for days with weeklies, the canteen will open up for meals two times, there's no need to fight at all. I reckon they are scared that when students need to compete with their physical capabilities after going through the beatings of the tests, they would lose it. What if they go leaping down from the observatory, that would have a bad effect."

"Besides, there's not going to be many people eating at the canteen today," Gao Tianyang gestured with his head towards the classroom, "there, look, there's a bunch of them staying here."

There were indeed people who remained behind, a rough count showed that there's 10+ of them. People were not allowed to eat cooked

meals with aromas, they all dug out from their bags biscuits, breads, and ham sausage.

“This hardcore? Sheng Wang recalled that the last weekly test did not go like this, but then again, last time round he took it in Class A. The people in their class were usually quite hardcore, when it came to the day of the test itself they treasured themselves plenty enough, even in the canteen they picked to make sure they ate the good stuff.

Gao Tianyang said, “Didn’t the system change, right? It’s really quite the provokation. Nobody wants to go further back the more they test. Let’s go, hurry up, let’s go, hurry up and eat.”

“Eh wait hold on—” Sheng Wang stopped in his steps as he hooked his arms around the staircase railing, and looked upstairs. Class A was near the staircase, most of the group had already left, there was only a small wave of people going downstairs in sparse groups.

Earlier, he wanted to say if we weren’t heading to the west gate, I’ll need to let Jiang Tian know or something, only to see a figure coming down from upstairs, his hand audaciously holding a phone.

“Tian-ge, we’re here.” Gao Tianyang lifted his hand to signal.

Jiang Tian lifted his head and gave them a look, his thumb rapidly tapped at the screen, like he was deleting something.

“What the heck, you’re not even trying to hide, aren’t you afraid of running into Big Mouth Xu once you go around a corner or something?”

Gao Tianyang said.

“He’s patrolling the year ones today.” Jiang Tian tossed the phone back into his pocket. Before the screen turned off, Sheng Wang thought he briefly caught a glance of a vertical row of red dots, like WeChat’s interface.

His mind ran, and for some reason, he thought that Jiang Tian was about to send him a message just now.

“You’re not heading to the west gate today?”

“Mm,” Jiang Tian pointed at Gao Tianyang, “he didn’t tell you?”

“Tell me what?”

“Tell you that we’re all eating in the canteen today.” Gao Tianyang dragged his voice, sounding done, “Do I even need to say it, ge. He will find out when I drag him here to wait for you anyways.”

It was the first time Sheng Wang met someone who spoke through his actions in this manner, and asked in bewilderment, “What if you didn’t manage to make me stay?”

“I run faster than dogs, tell me how I can lose you?” Gao Tianyang said.

Sheng Wang was speechless, and gave him a thumbs up.

“Why not the west gate today?” Sheng Wang followed Gao Tianyang downstairs. Next to him was the stream of humans quickly filing past them, and Jiang Tian was behind him.

He actually meant to ask Jiang Tian, but Gao Tianyang enthusiastically answered instead, “Because the west gate is so far, going back and forth alone will suck up 20 minutes, and when you factor in eating that’s so much time wasted. Do you know what’s being tested this afternoon?”

“Language, right?” Sheng Wang said.

“Yeah, language,” Gao Tianyang said, “language is so terrifying, I still haven’t memorised two pieces of classical texts, if I get it all wrong, Garfield will hang me up and whip me. Tian-ge, did you memorise?”

Sheng Wang turned behind, and saw Jiang Tian say, with a ‘coffin face’, “No.”

Gao Tianyang asked again, “Did you memorise the 8 tricks to poetry appreciation?”

“You’re really getting into it, aren’t you?”

Sheng Wang especially wanted to laugh. He nearly forgot, this influential figure wasn’t omnipotent either, the moment he saw language his face was written with “I am Unwell”.

Gao Tianyang was getting a kick out of asking, Sheng Wang also joined in. He turned around and said, “Did you read Garfield’s lyrical writing guide?”

Gao Tianyang even chorused, “Did you read?”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

The moment he saw him brake in his steps, Sheng Wang immediately ran down the stairs three steps at a time, slipping away faster than even Gao Tianyang.

They stood next to the fountain to wait for Jiang Tian. Gao Tianyang was bent over in laughter, and as he laughed, his expression changed, and asked Sheng Wang, “You freaking ran even faster than I did, you’re telling me you’re frail and have no energy in your limbs at all?”

“Sometimes, sometimes.” Sheng Wang used the back of his hand to wipe at the sweat gathering at the corner of his forehead, and fanned himself with his own collar.

Reckless, unbridled youth were always attractive to people. When he ran over, the girls he passed by all turned their eyes to him. At the moment, he felt that he was too high key, and immediately started playing dead by propping himself against his knees.

Gao Tianyang side-eyed him in displeasure.

“What are you looking at?” Sheng Wang said, “I really can’t run at all, if not for the sake of exams today that I ate a few extra mouths for breakfast, I usually don’t have the strength to even fight a chicken. I’m super unhealthy, even.”

“Quibble.” Gao Tianyang started sprouting nonsense, “You just want to eat with Tian-ge, you don’t want to eat with me.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Look at the kind of bullshit he was sprouting.

The young master gave a sardonic laugh, he didn’t bother replying at all.

There was suddenly a ruckus from the crowd nearby. Sheng Wang heard someone cursing ‘Damn beggar get out of the way! Eh fuck my new shoes—”

He frowned and looked, only to see a familiar, bronze figure tumble down from the flight stairs with the fountain. A blue bag on his shoulders fell onto the floor, the small watermelon rolled on the floor and cracked open. The red flesh faced skywards, sweet and saccharine juices spilled out.

Gao Tianyang yelled, “The mute!”

Sheng Wang suddenly recalled, this was the mute he saw at Xi Le, the convenience store.

“What’s going on?”

“Who’s that person?”

“I think he’s the scraps picker from the west gate.”

The girls gasped in alarm, and retreated a few steps out of fear. The crowd was full of furtive whispers.

“Isn’t that Class A’s Sheng Wang?”

“And that’s their sports rep, aiyo, what the, is his shoulder made of metal?”

The student who was shoved aside grumbled.

Sheng Wang and Gao Tianyang helped the mute up. Due to the hunchback on his back, his stature squished short and small. When they helped him up, they basically lifted him up.

The mute seemed to be still late on the uptake, his palms were put together, praying and grunting with grunts and whines, like he was apologising.

Sheng Wang grabbed his arm and inspected it. His kneecaps were scraped in two places, revealing red, bleeding flesh.

When a person reaches a certain age, their mannerisms are always a little similar. The mute was only 50+ years old, yet he had the mannerism of a 70-80 years old. The way he closed his eyes and panted reminded Sheng Wang of his maternal grandpa who passed away. When he was in the hospital, down with a heavy illness, he also grunted and whined with his eyes closed, just like this.

He was suffering a great deal from the pain, yet other people who couldn’t help take on the pain.

Gao Tianyang straightened up and asked, “Who pushed him?”

Most people were hesitant, and did not say a word. Their gazes however all shifted to the same spot. A girl with a fiery tone spoke in the silence, “Who else could it be, ZhaiTao, duh!”

Sheng Wang’s brows furrowed as he looked up, following the crowd’s gaze towards a certain area. A guy had his arm slung around another student, his right foot lifted up and he was wiping his shoes, mouth mumbling something.

Enemies are fated to meet and clash, it was the same person who mocked Sheng Wang in Class 5's exam room.

"Fucking damn it, it's you again," Gao Tianyang cursed, "which dog went blind, and pooped out something that reeks like you?"

Zhai Tao violently tossed away the tissue in his hand, "Fuck! Cuss me out one more time?"

"I can look past you being trash, but you even create more garbage." After Gao Tianyang sneered, he said, "I'm still cussing you out, whatchu going to do?"

Zhai Tao was posturing, trying to head down the steps. The students beside him tried to hold him back, but he shook them aside.

"Why are you fighting the one with the surname Gao, he's famous for being all brawns and no brains!" that student called, "there's only two of us here, it's not worth it."

Gao Tianyang hung the taunt on his face, "Ay, here! I'm afraid you're too cowardly to fight. This is the first fucking time I've heard an idiot from a normal class say to Class A's student's face that they're all brawn, who are you kidding?"

With this, both of them could not stand it anymore. Zhai Tao rushed down the steps in a couple of steps, and shot straight at them.

Gao Tianyang clenched his fist and was ready to face them head on before he saw a flash of something before his eyes.

Before he could react, Sheng Wang already unloaded his bag, and with a lift of his hand he flung it out.

The schoolbag brushed past his ears, he could still hear the ‘whoosh’ of wind.

Gao Tianyang’s jaws dropped, he saw the schoolbag make a solid smack on Zhai Tao’s face, he could even hear the loud ‘whack’ when it did.

The bag dropped on the floor, Zhai Tao covered his face and bent down with a long ‘ow’, his mouth open as he wheezed.

“What the……” Gao Tianyang looked at him, and turned back to look at Sheng Wang, slowly squeezing out, “fuck?”

He couldn’t be blamed for this shock, it was all because Sheng Wang looked like someone who wouldn’t resort to physical fights at all.

Zhai Tao’s face was imprinted with two lines that came from the zipper, looking sort of funny. But when matched with him having conniptions and raging on, he was still a little terrifying.

Then he picked the line Sheng Wang hated hearing the most to yell over, he said, “Fuck your mom!”

Sheng Wang’s expression instantly chilled.

Gao Tianyang didn’t quite get the trigger, but he could see the change in Sheng Wang’s mood with his naked eye.

In the midst of bewilderment and confusion, there was yet another commotion from the front. He looked up.

Zhai Tao, who just insulted someone, was kicked from behind. He lost his balance and fell to the ground.

Jiang Tian approached from the back, and grabbed the bag along the way. He looked at Zhai Tao, who looked completely disgraced, and said, “Apologise.”

“I’ll rather apologise to your-”

(t/n: When translated directly, it’s ‘i apologise your mom’, but that’s not very grammatically correct. Instead, I have to come out with an insult that made use of ‘mom’ at the later line.)

Before the word ‘mom’ could come out of his mouth, Jiang Tian’s hand holding the schoolbag raised up.

Zhai Tao hugged his head on instinct.

“Apologise.” Jiang Tian said.

“I—” Zhai Tao was so pissed that his face reddened, “who am I apologising to?!”

“You’re retarded?”

(t/n: That's the literal word in cn. Unfortunately plenty of terms and insults would be ableist by western standards. They are also only calling the mute 'the mute'.)

“I……”

Zhai Tao was on the losing hand here, and it was weekly test period too, the usual bros he commanded around were all getting their asses whipped by education, and were not with him then. With the attitude of ‘a wise man knows better than to fight when the odds are against him’, he did not continue asking for a beating.

He climbed up from the ground with a stiff look on his face. As he swept the dirt off his shoulders, he rotated his neck. At last, he squeezed out a line, “I’m sorry, okay? Fuck.”

With that, he limped up the stairs, snatched over the school jacket in his classmate’s hands, and walked away with a long face.

The one who stirred trouble was gone, and conflict roughly ended there.

The crowd dispersed with a whoosh, some people discussed as they headed towards the canteen, some people went back to the exam room. Some people may even be headed to the staff office or the students affairs office.

Whatever, they can do what they like, Sheng Wang didn’t care.

“You should probably still head to the school hospital?”

“Yeah, better disinfect the wound too.”

Two girls gave a reminder, one of their voices was the exact same as the one who reported against ‘Zhai Tao’.

Sheng Wang turned to look, and realised it was someone he knew. This time round, he no longer had facial blindness, and recognized them as

the girls who reminded him to not get on Zhai Tao's bad side from the same exam room.

He didn't know their names, but Gao Tianyang knew. After all, these two girls would go visit Jiang Tian in Class A every once in a while like they were clocking in. They barely managed to speak to Jiang Tian, and ended up getting to know other people from Class A instead.

"Ay, don't hang around when guys fight, it's quite bloody." Gao Tianyang said to the girl with a baby face, "Little Dimples, hurry up and drag your Xue Qian away. Her looming presence here with her height is scaring me."

The girl beside was at least 1.7m, and wore a high ponytail. When she heard what he said, she scoffed, "I'm not even looking at you, the heck are you worried for."

"Yeah yeah yeah, I'm the ugly one, fine?" Gao Tianyang responded.

Still, Xue Qian did not bother lingering around either, she pulled Dimples and went straight from the canteen. Before she left, she even openly directed at Sheng Wang, "Eh, you were quite hot just now!"

Sheng Wang, "....."

"I told you, one of these girls had a change of affection!" Gao Tianyang winked at Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang, receiving two 'scram' in return.

With these interruptions, Sheng Wang's expression was no longer that cold anymore.

He rubbed his face, and squatted down before the mute. He pointed at the wounds, and said with exaggerated mouth movements, “You really need to clean the wound up, so many tiny pieces of stone got in.”

“Let’s go, the school hospital it is.” Gao Tianyang said.

The Mute gestured with some grunts, he pursed his lips and just shook his head.

Gao Tianyang said, “Uncle, don’t gesture anymore, I don’t understand you.”

Sheng Wang subconsciously looked at Jiang Tian. If he recalled correctly, the mute seemed to know Jiang Tian.

As expected, Jiang Tian said, “He said he’s not going to the school hospital, there’s disinfectant cream at home.”

Sheng Wang had much insight with being sick, he was especially selective when it came to medicine too. He immediately asked, “What kind of cream? How long has it been there? Is it expired yet?”

The Mute: “?”

Gao Tianyang was amused, “Why are you so selective?”

Jiang Tian followed, without thinking, “He’s precious.”

A question mark slowly appeared over Sheng Wang’s head.

As for Gao Tianyang, he stared at the back of Jiang Tian’s head, looking as if he had just seen a ghost.

The west gate in school was always quite empty. The parasol trees intersected with each other, creating shade for the entire path. The sunlight leaked through the tiny gaps amidst the thick shade.

In front of the gate stood a residential block in an alley. It had a name that befitted the scene, called, ‘Beyond Parasol Trees’.

Gao Tianyang said that he and Jiang Tian stayed here when they were kids.

Beyond Parasol Trees was the oldest residential block in Fuzhong. Gao Tianyang’s paternal grandparents, as well as Jiang Tian’s maternal grandmother, were all teachers who taught in Fuzhong back then.

“The primary school opposite is quite famous, so I moved in around five-six years old, and stayed here all the way until I graduated from primary school.” Gao Tianyang pointed at Jiang Tian and said, “He’s earlier than me though, he came here around three years old, I think? He moved away before he graduated from primary school though.”

Sheng Wang looked at Jiang Tian curiously. He was supporting the mute and did not even look up. He only said “Mm”.

They were rather familiar with the people in Beyond Parasol Trees, especially elderly seniors, due to their lengthy stay before. A few people called out to them on the way, and they even tugged at Gao Tianyang, saying, “It’s been a while since you’ve came, right?”

The mute's house was in the depths of the alley. It wasn't in the residential block, it was that kind of older house with a courtyard.

Sheng Wang's first reaction was: "It's quite big."

There was a giant tree next to the house, the slanted branches half covered the rooftop, like a natural umbrella. It was even quite cooling.

To his surprise, Gao Tianyang pursed his lips out and said, "He's only occupying this room."

The hall in the west side of the courtyard was left to be supported by only a single pillar, there wasn't even a door. Inside the hall was filled with bundles and bundles of waste paper, used books and even plastic bottles. Next to the pile of old items, was a house of around a little more than $10m^2$, it was where the mute stayed.

This included a bed, a wardrobe, a table, an old television as well as a bathroom that could not get any smaller even if it tried.

Sheng Wang was beyond speechless as he looked, but he did not show it.

"How about the opposite?" He pointed at the other side of the courtyard. The structure on the other side was roughly the same as the one here, but that hall had a door, and there was a Four Immortals table inside.

(t/n: Traditional chinese furniture, a square table meant for exactly four. There's a version for six and eight.)

A short and low kitchen was connected to one end of the hall, and another end to a bedroom nearly the same as the mute's.

“Old Man Ding is the one living opposite, he’s a famous lonely old man in Beyond Parasol Trees.” Gao Tianyang said, “Tian-ge is on good terms with him, he always ate his lunch here. I couldn’t, mostly because when I was young, I accidentally made holes in his roof when I climbed up the tree. The old man holds a grudge, he’ll take a broom every time he sees me.”

He pointed at a gap on the rooftop, and yet Sheng Wang was completely distracted, his gaze could not help but constantly drift towards the hall.

The reason why Jiang Tian always disappeared beyond the west gate, was because he came here to eat?

Why?

As they talked, the door from the room opposite opened with a creak. An old man with sparse hair walked out. He looked alert and in robust health, his shoulders were set super straight. It was just that the wrinkles on his forehead were particularly set into his head too, with a raise of his eyebrows three creases instantly appeared.

Gao Tianyang instantly let out a ‘Fuck’, and ducked behind Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, “Tian-ge, you set me up, isn’t he not supposed to be here today?”

“Since when did I say he wouldn’t be here?”

“Didn’t you tell him that you’re not coming over for lunch today? Then why isn’t he taking his afternoon nap at this time?” Gao Tianyang started kicking up a fuss again.

Despite Old Man Ding's old age, his vision was very good. The moment he spotted his enemy, he turned around to grab the broom leaning against the wall.

The mute opened his tongueless mouth, and cackled at the side.

Gao Tianyang shot out with a bow-and-arrow step, saying, "Don't hit me! I'm just sending Uncle mute back, I'm leaving now! Goodbye!"

This ridiculous idiot cupped his fist, and escaped out of the door in a flurry.

(t/n: Or hold fist salute, as explained by baike. It's a way of showing respect. Image here.)

"You're really leaving?"

"Does the broom look fake to you?" Gao Tianyang said, "The two of You have to suffer for a bit, I'll go to Xi Le for a meal now. After I'm done I'll head straight back to the classroom, see ya later!"

(t/n: Not sure if I mentioned it, but when I capitalize the y in you or italicize it, just know that the character used the respectful you.)

Old Man Ding was like an elderly owl, and stared at the door in full alert. Only when he made sure that stinking brat really escaped, he finally slowly settled the broom down.

He wore black cloth shoes, and walked towards them via cutting across the courtyard, asking, "What's going on with this?"

The Mute grunted and gestured.

Old Man Ding sighed, turned around and looked at Jiang Tian, “What’s he saying, Xiao-Tian?”

“He fell down in school and scraped his knee.” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang raised up the blue cloth bag in his hand, saying, “Two watermelons cracked open too, there’s only one good one left.”

Old Man Ding’s owl eyes stared at Sheng Wang again, after he gave him a once over, he asked, “Whose kid is this?”

This question was an awkward one.

According to theory, Jiang Tian had to say, “My house’s.”

Sheng Wang gave a dry laugh, and fought to answer before Jiang Tian could, “I’m his classmate, hello Grandpa Ding.”

Generally speaking, when handsome guys act obedient nobody could withstand them, but Old Man Ding did not go the common path.

His eyes bulged as he glared, “Who said my surname is Ding!”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He gave a sheepish smile at Old Man Ding, a face full of innocence. The moment he turned around he stared Jiang Tian down.

Thank goodness the other person did not abandon him to die. He pointed at the courtyard door and said, “The one who just ran away taught him that.”

Old Man Ding hmmphed, and said, “Brat only knows how to sprout rubbish!”

Jiang Tian let Gao Tianyang shoulder all the blame without even blinking. Old Man Ding’s attitude towards Sheng Wang visibly became much better. He said, “You sent mute back with Xiao-Tian? Don’t you two still have papers today?”

Sheng Wang said, “Mm, there’s enough time.”

Old Man Ding felt that he was sensible, he nodded and said, “So the two of you have already eaten?”

Sheng Wang gave a look at Jiang Tian.

“What? You don’t even know if you already ate?” The old man had strong observation skills, he exposed him on the spot, not bothering to give him a way out.

Sheng Wang internally thought that I’m just letting Jiang Tian take the lead for the conversation out of courtesy that’s all! He was ultimately an outsider, if he said he didn’t eat, the old man would make them stay and eat, Jiang Tian would have to agree even if he didn’t want to, how awfully inconvenient that would be.

He kept the slight smile on his face as he slowly lifted his toes, and stepped on Jiang Tian’s foot, indicating Jiang Tian to save the show.

Jiang Tian said, “.....haven’t.”

Sheng Wang was stumped, and looked at him in astonishment.

Jiang Tian said, deadpan, “Lift your foot up first.”

“Oh oh oh, sorry.” Sheng Wang sprung away.

Old people’s elation were just like kids’, it all showed on the face. Old Man Ding suddenly became happy, and fanned himself with a palmetto fan as he walked towards the kitchen, head swaying. “Aih, I just knew that you two didn’t eat! I’ll whip something up.”

The moment the old man left, they supported the mute into the room.

Jiang Tian got two bottles down from the top of the wardrobe with much familiar ease, along with a bag of cotton swabs.

After he dealt with the wound, the mute gestured, indicating that he wanted to get up. Jiang Tian pressed him down and said, “Don’t move, let me do it.”

He held the blue bag in his hands, and brought Sheng Wang outside.

There was a well in the courtyard, a white tin bucket next to it. The handle was secured with a rope to the well. Jiang Tian placed the only undamaged watermelon inside the bucket, held the rope, and lowered the pail into the well.

Sheng Wang was earnestly looking at the entire process while propping himself against his knees. When it was over, he asked, “What are you doing? Washing the watermelon?”

“Chilling it.” Jiang Tian said.

“Why not put it in the fridge to chill it?”

Jiang Tian was half-squatting. Upon hearing that, he looked up at him, a little like...he was looking at a fool.

Sheng Wang was sensitive, he exploded, “What?”

Jiang Tian pointed at the bedroom with his chin, “Did you see a fridge just now?”

Sheng Wang lowered his head, “Oh.”

He thought a little, there seriously wasn’t any.

He was too used to having it good, he nearly forgot, some people from all sorts of street corners were not having it good too.

His eyes were fixed on the pitch-black well, and for a moment he zoned out.

Jiang Tian suddenly dragged the rope to pull the bucket up again. After the dunk from the well water, the watermelon skin was clean to the point of gleaming. The bucket crashed against the wall of the well, the water splashing all over.

“Try it.” Jiang Tian nodded at the watermelon.

Sheng Wang was lost, but reached out to touch it anyway. There was still half a bucket of well water, and it was shockingly cool to the touch.

“Well water is this chilly?” Sheng Wang retracted his claws with a whoosh.

“Mm.” Jiang Tian settled the bucket down once more. He stood up straight, shook away the water droplets on his fingers and said, “It’s as good

as a fridge.”

Sheng Wang said an ‘oh’, and his mood became better again.

“Eh?” Sheng Wang was a little curious, “Just asking, I saw that other people don’t understand his hand gestures, how did you understand?”

“I only half understood, half of it is guesswork too,” Jiang Tian said, “the only one who could chat with him is the boss in Xi Le.”

Sheng Wang nodded, internally thinking, no wonder the mute always went to Xi Le. Sometimes he would help Boss Zhao carry stuff, sometimes he helped to sort out the packaging. Sometimes he would go collect scraps, sometimes he would just stay there.

If there was only a single person in the world who could hear you talk, then they would be more important than anyone else.

Old Man Ding’s food was already cooked, when people came all he needed was to heat it up a little. Jiang Tian said before that he wouldn’t be coming. His and the mute’s appetite were both small, so he only made a dish and a soup. He was worried that it was too monotonous, and made stir fried pork slices with green peppers on the spot, and served it up like he was presenting a treasure.

Before entering the hall, Jiang Tian tugged at Sheng Wang.

“Is there something?” Sheng Wang asked in confusion.

Jiang Tian hesitated a little, saying “Maybe you should still go to Xi Le.”

“Huh?” Jiang Tian suddenly changed his mind, Sheng Wang almost couldn’t react in time.

He looked at Jiang Tian, stopped for a while, and then softly let out an ‘Ah’.

He still wasn’t used to letting outsiders into his life, he guess? This place was where Jiang Tian came to every day, but he never voluntarily brought it up to other people before. Other than childhood friends like Gao Tianyang who knew everything about him, he probably did not like anyone to ever get a peep into his private life.

He could understand.

It was just that he felt a little disappointment at being left out of the door.

Sheng Wang smiled as he said, “Sure, I’m up for whatever. Then you can help me explain to Old Man Di…...um, what’s his surname again? You can help me explain, and tell him that I have an emergency and have to go.”

When he spoke, Jiang Tian kept looking at him, his brows slightly furrowed, thinking god knows what.

Sheng Wang tugged at his bag, and lifted it up.

Just as he was about to turn and leave, Jiang Tian spoke again, “Forget it, take it that I said nothing.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

“You really didn’t get beaten up before with the way you are?” Sheng Wang couldn’t hold himself back.

Just as the young master was seriously about to explode already, Jiang Tian added, “The elderly don't care so much when it comes to cooking, I don’t know if you can bear it.”

Jiang Tian’s brows were still furrowed, “Would you rather stay here, or would you rather go to Xile?”

Sheng Wang stared off against him for a while, and finally understood what he meant. “You took so long just to explain, that you’re afraid that I can’t stand the food here?”

Jiang Tian was momentarily silent, and stiffly squeezed out, “I don’t want wastage when the food’s already served.”

Sheng Wang raised an eyebrow, looking at him in suspicion, “Where did you learn this awkward way of yours?”

Jiang Tian’s handsome face was stiff as he pointed at the door, seeing him out, “You should just go to Xi Le.”

“Nope.”

Sheng Wang’s down mood went up again, he lifted his foot and headed to the hall. As he walked, he said, “What kind of misunderstanding do you have of me, that I’m that picky?”

Jiang Tian dug his phone out on the spot, and opened up his gallery.

Sheng Wang at that moment thought, that’s bad, the drunk footage was still in this asshole’s hands, he held him down and said, “Fine fine fine, I’m picky, I’m super super super picky, happy yet?”

Quite obviously, Jiang Tian was not satisfied at all.

He switched away from the gallery, and opened WeChat under Sheng Wang's questioning gaze. He speedily swiped down a few times, opened an avatar, and shoved the chat records right in Sheng Wang's face.

Sheng Wang saw the remark: Xi Le - Zhao Su.

What an aloof nickname style. As he ridiculed in his head, he read the few paragraphs, and was instantly dumbfounded.

The chunks of words came from Boss Zhao, of course.

Middle age men were addicted to WeChat, they often liked to type chunks of mini essays like this, disregarding if the other person was interested in reading at all. Either way, they keyed in whatever they liked.

He saw Boss Zhao spam and nag as below:

Xi Le - Zhao Su: Mute says that there will be fresh watermelons 2 days later, if you're free after school, you can come claim one. It's probably a crisp one. Do you eat slushy ones or crispy ones?

Jiang Tian: Anything's fine, thank you.

Xi Le - Zhao Su: In the end, you're easier to keep. That boy that you brought over for meals is way too picky with his food. After many days of

observations, it turns out, he doesn’t eat carrots, nor does he eat spinach. Scallion, garlic, coriander are okay just for flavouring, if he could tell they exist he wouldn’t eat them. He would eat white radish if it’s diced up, but not in chunks. He doesn’t eat green pepper in slices, but he would bear it if it’s in julienne strips. If the potatoes are too crunchy, he wouldn’t eat them. If the watermelons are too slushy, he wouldn’t eat them. If the strawberries are sour, he wouldn’t eat them. If the grapes are too sweet, he wouldn’t eat them.

Xi Le - Zhao Su: If I have a son like this, I’ll starve him for 3 days first.

Xi Le - Zhao Su: Whatever, I won’t go on anymore. My son isn’t any good bird either.

Jiang Tian: ……

Sheng Wang could already feel Jiang Tian’s numb shock and speechlessness all the way from the screen, but Sheng Wang was even more asphyxiated.

He wanted to say, are all these middle age people so gossipy? Why do they tattle for everything! Was a meal this deserving of a rearing report?

But he thought, Boss Zhao was the same person who said “That boy of yours is dine and dashing, come save him” after all, what would he stop at?

Sheng Wang helped Jiang Tian switch off the screen, saying, “He’s slandering me.”

“Who’s slandering you?” Old Man Ding scooped the rice and served them. “Hurry up and sit, this Xiao— Xiao what?”

He asked Jiang Tian.

“Xiao-Wang.” Jiang Tian reported his name according to his habit, after he spoke he paused for a moment.

A pet mame like this coming out from his mouth was indeed a little weird. Sheng Wang’s dangling fingers squeezed his joints in discomfort, saying, “Xiao-Sheng, Xiao-Wang both work too, as long as You’re happy.”

Old Man Ding said, “Xiao-Sheng, how much do you eat? Is this bowl enough?”

“Enough.” Sheng Wang hurriedly said.

“Then I’ll go scoop some for you.”

“Let me do it.”

Unfortunately the old man was quick on his feet, he ran away with the rice scoop in hand.

Sheng Wang could only sheepishly keep his hand back, and sat down at the Four Immortals table. Perhaps he was genuinely hungry, though the dishes on the table were simple, they really did smell delicious, smelling even better than the ones made by chatterbox Boss Zhao of Xi Le.

His stomach rumbled. In order to cover up that uncool sound, he coughed, and asked Jiang Tian, “Why does Gao Tianyang call him Old Man Ding?”

Jiang Tian’s lips moved. With a sweep of his gaze he saw Old Man Ding carrying the rice in, and pulled out his phone and opened the memo instead.

Sheng Wang leaned in, a face full of questions.

He saw Jiang Tian tap the pencil, and drew an oval on the memo. Within the memo was the word Ding(□), and then two round eyes, three lines of wrinkles on his forehead.

Then, he started typing. His two thumbs were thin and lengthy, the speed he tapped at the keyboard was even faster.

Sheng Wang saw another line of words appearing on the memo:

There’s a nursery rhyme, called There’s an Old Man Ding, have you heard of it?

(t/n: Watch this clip, has english subs and ads (that you must wait to skip))

Next was another line:

Look alike yet?

“Alike.”

Sheng Wang buried his head and started laughing, and Jiang Tian deleted the memo with a poker face.

Thanks to the simple doodle, Sheng Wang had a hard time holding back his laughter during the meal, his mood became unusually good.

Maybe nobody would believe it if he told them that the most relaxing and happy meal he had eaten during recent times, was seriously the one with Jiang Tian.

He suddenly felt that, if he did not have that level of awkward relations of being ‘false brothers’ between him and Jiang Tian, and they managed to normally meet each other, normally become classmates, normally become front and back deskmates, then they would certainly have become pretty good friends.

But soon he erased that thought, as he was on the way back to the exam room, Sheng Wang suddenly remembered what happened in the morning.

He asked Jiang Tian, “You planned to go to the canteen this noon, since we would have met at noon, why did you go through the length of passing me the correction collection?”

Upon hearing that, Jiang Tian’s brows slightly furrowed, “You didn’t look through it before the exam?”

Sheng Wang was incredibly confused, “I’m doing math and physics, why would I flip through the chemistry collection?”

There was a moment of blankness on Jiang Tian’s expression, like he did not consider the possibility of this situation at all. He paused for a while, before he frowned again and asked, “You didn’t see WeChat either?”

“You sent me a WeChat?”

Sheng Wang snatched his bag and started digging for his phone, as he dug he said, “Don’t you always switch off your phone before exams?”

Jiang Tian’s expression was blank for a moment once more. He said, “I put it on silent.”

Sheng Wang opened his phone before they reached the exam hall, and as expected he received a WeChat sent from this morning.

Jiang Tian: Take a look at the correction collection.

Sheng Wang was about to go dig out his notebook, but Jiang Tian stopped him, “Whatever, don’t look anymore.”

Sheng Wang asked, “Why?”

Jiang Tian said, “Your mental state will collapse.”

(t/n: mental state collapsed on the spot --> □□□□, originated from LOL gaming, meaning frustration, but evolved to be internet slang to include the ‘mental state’ part, so ‘my mental state has collapsed’, see this as ‘i died on the inside’ lol)

Sheng Wang: “???”

The more he put it that way the more he must take a look at it! He dug out the correction, and before he could flip it open, a piece of paper slipped out.

It was a page casually torn out from a certain assessment book, the edges were rough. There was a question underlined in red by someone, marked with an bombastic pentagram star.

Sheng Wang picked it up and gave it a careful look, and discovered that it was a physics question. The question type was very familiar. Though it wasn't exactly the same, it was close to the last major question in today's physics paper.

Jiang Tian said, "This revision question has been practised by the entire batch, other than you."

"....."

Just as Jiang 'fake fortune teller' Tian predicted, young master Sheng Wang's mental state collapsed on the spot.

(t/n: The term originally used was □□, specifically used to describe someone who scams via religion, aka overcharging for false exorcisms and stuff like that. But, when used here it's more about the property of someone who can do some magic shit/tell the future, so I just used fortune teller for now. May change my mind in the future.)

Even though Sheng Wang was a little dazed from that blow, his strong professionalism caused him to come back to his senses in the afternoon papers, and converted his despair into power. The last three papers were smooth sailing.

Fuzhong had always been quick at marking the papers and calculating the results. The second day, a rumour started spreading within year two, saying that the new transfer hottie spent a single week, and raised his overall score by nearly 50 marks. His level positioning shot forward by nearly 100 places.

The whole batch was in an uproar, the rumours continued spreading for an entire night of self study, and were subsequently dispelled by the

teachers of each class during the second period. The teachers also corrected that information on an official level.

The real result of that weekly test was: Sheng Wang raised his overall score by 62, and chemistry alone shot from 60+ marks to 90, his level position raised up by 127 places.

More people lost it.

T/N: Decision to change White Horse Lane → White Horse Alley

Also a note on keeping Xi Le convenience store as Xi Le vs its english meaning of ‘joy’ as I felt like ‘Xi Le’ is more namish, while ‘Beyond Parasol Trees’ works well enough as a name for me too. That’s all.

Chapter 023 - Punishment

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you could!
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Sheng Wang Repeatedly Gave Himself A Mental Pep Talk, And Finally Reached His Claws Out Towards The Neighbouring Bedroom

That night, Sheng Wang became the main discussion topic of the whole level.

The ones who lost it the most were Class A students. These top students clearly had high scores by themselves, and yet they behaved like they had not seen the 100th+ place for eight lifetimes. They were acting as if they were high on laughing gas, and gathered around Sheng Wang's desk and crowed.

Gao Tianyang led the crowing, study rep Song Sirui assisted him.

The main character himself, Sheng Wang, instead had his eyes downcasted as his hands rested inside his desk, tapping on his phone. He couldn't shut the two jokers' mouths, he could only let them act out as they wanted.

"Look at the entire level, who else dares to jump a hundred places in a week?" This was Gao Tianyang.

"No one!" This was Song Sirui.

"Sheng-ge, out with it, do you want to steal the study rep position from our Old Song?" This was still Gao Tianyang.

“???” Song Sirui was baffled, and added on, “I can bear to part with this.”

“Respectable!” Gao Tianyang flashed a thumbs up at him.

“Magnanimous!” Song Sirui also gave himself a thumbs up.

Inside the desk, Jiang Tian had just sent a WeChat telling him no need to wait for him after night self study. Sheng Wang was bored anyway, and sent him several stickers in a row.

Canned: A question, is there any way to make this two unable to speak?

Jiang Tian: No.

Canned: Aren’t you Gao Tianyang’s childhood friend why can’t you handle him.

Jiang Tian: ……

Jiang Tian: Not his mom.

“No wait, Sheng-ge, why are you laughing?” Gao Tianyang really couldn’t help sticking his head out to steal a glance. Unfortunately, the angle was off and the table was in his way, he could not see anything at all.

“Nothing.” Sheng Wang casually replied.

Gao Tianyang narrowed his eyes and started smirking. Song Sir wagged his finger and said, “Something’s up Sheng-ge—”

“What do you mean something?” Sheng Wang did not even pay attention to them at all. He closed a few more apps, then withdrew his hands from the desk.

As his expression was truly lost, Gao Tianyang stopped smirking as he lost his enthusiasm, saying, “Forget it, let’s talk about grades. Seriously, your jump this time round is way too high, even after my many years in the pugilistic world, I’ve never seen such a leap. Your position increasing by 100 was even faster than our Chili meimei’s weight going above 100.”

(t/n: They were measuring in □, in this case it means 50kg. No I’m not converting that to pounds :))

“You don’t want to live anymore?” Sheng Wang looked at him incredulously.

Instantly, a cry exploded from Chili at the side, “SAY THAT ONE MORE TIME GAO TIANYANG?!”

Chilli, as a legend who could squeeze into the top five of the level, was well-liked by everyone. She mixed in well, and proved herself to be a troublemaker too. Everyone included her in their jokes. Out of everyone, Gao Tianyang was the most insufferable with his words, and would often end up getting beaten up by her.

The moment her voice stopped, Chili’s book flew directly straight at them through the crowd.

Gao Tianyang said a “fuck”, and ducked to avoid it. Sheng Wang closely followed, tilting his head out of the way. It was after that then did he realise that oh no, the book was flying towards Jiang Tian’s face.

Just as he realised, he heard a ‘smack’ behind him. Jiang Tian managed to stop the book.

He grabbed the book, and wordlessly looked at Gao Tianyang. The latter immediately bowed to him with his palms together, and respectfully passed the book back to Chili. Once the person who led the crowing escaped, the other people scattered like birds.

They ran away like they were utterly defeated, Sheng Wang managed to laugh with this sight alone, leaning against his chair.

“Quiet now?” Jiang Tian’s frosty and plain voice suddenly rang from behind his ears.

This person’s voice was too gravelly, when he spoke softly he always caused his ears to itch. Sheng Wang replied with an ‘Mn’, and could not help but pinch his earlobe.

Jiang Tian said next, “Then move your table forward a bit, don’t quake against my table.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Fine, whether his ears itched depended on the content too.

Though they weren’t through with crowing to their hearts’ content, the students of Class A silently acknowledged one thing — at least two slots for the Tri-Quality Students of the City list had been booked, one would be Jiang Tian who was firmly first in the level, the other was Sheng Wang who was on a rocket.

To use the class monitor, Li Yu’s words, it would be “Congrats, the two of you can start celebrating in advance.”

In the end however, the second day results were released, the two were congratulated into the students affairs office.

The one responsible for passing the message was Small Mouth Xu, he was dragged in by his dad as hard labour, and carried a stack of exercise booklets into the classroom. The thing he said upon entering was, “Jiang Tian, Sheng Wang, head to Duxing Block, Dean Xu’s looking for you.”

(t/n: Duxing --> 'Application' - Word here could mean: the last stage of learning, where you sincerely put what you have learnt to use. Might change all building names to follow pinyin names at this rate. edit: I did :))

He was probably one of the most decent students in Class A, he never called his dad dad in school, and obviously he did not dare to call him Big Mouth either. He always called him Dean Xu in all propriety.

“The two of us?” Sheng Wang turned around and faced Jiang Tian in dismay, he asked Small Mouth, “Did he say anything?”

“He didn’t.” Small Mouth replied honestly, “In any case he was smiling as he said that, I guess it should be a good thing? Maybe it’s about the Tri-Quality or something.”

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian went to the office in half-disbelief. The moment they entered they saw Big Mouth Xu, whose smile didn’t reach the eyes, as well as Zhai Tao who was standing with his head hung low.

You’re telling me this could fucking be the Tri-Quality Students of the City??

Sheng Wang wanted to dice Small Mouth Xu up right there and then for getting the critical information wrong.

Big Mouth was all smiles as he sized Sheng Wang up, and looked towards Jiang Tian too. A few seconds later his expression abruptly changed. Saliva droplets flew everywhere as he roared, “Getting too big for

your britches, aren't you?! Fighting on the day of the weekly test itself! You even picked the fountain square that has the highest human traffic! Tell me, what exactly were you thinking?! Ah? Putting up a show?!"

After he paused for a breath, a vigorous voice rang from the office entrance, "Reporting in!"

Big Mouth Xu jumped, and looked at the entrance in annoyance. Sheng Wang shifted his gaze there too, only to see Gao Tianyang standing there, Small Mouth Xu in tow. The one who just yelled was Gao Tianyang.

"Why are you even back here?!" Big Mouth Xu was still pissed off, he showed no leniency towards his own son either.

"Reporting in," Small Mouth Xu began in an orderly manner, "Class B's exercise books are still here, I got Gao Tianyang to help me."

Big Mouth Xu said, "You think I don't know what Gao Tianyang's like? Going on about getting Gao Tianyang to help you some more, it definitely has to be his request to come here, he just wants to join in the action."

Small Mouth Xu sheepishly pursed his lips, "It isn't really that either."

"Is your curiosity sated yet?" Big Mouth Xu said, "Get the exercise booklets and quickly leave!"

However, Gao Tianyang did not move. He shot a harsh glare at Zhai Tao, and said to Big Mouth Xu with righteous insistence, "I fought too, why wasn't I summoned!"

"Did you hit anyone?"

“I did!”

“Hit, my ass!” Big Mouth Xu pointed outside the windows, “You think the security cameras in this school are dead? Don’t blindly join in, get out! Otherwise, I’ll increase the punishment, believe it or not.”

Gao Tianyang still wanted to say something, but he was dragged out by Small Mouth Xu who was well-versed with Big Mouth Xu’s temper. “Don’t retort, he’ll just get angrier.”

The office door was slammed shut by Big Mouth Xu, Zhai Tao couldn’t hold it back anymore, “Reporting in.”

“Speak.”

“I Fuc—” Zhai Tao wanted to cuss on instinct, the words left his mouth before he remembered where he was, and he unwillingly swallowed it back, “I didn’t hit anyone either! Why am I here too?”

He’s the fucking one who got beaten up from the start to the end, the scar still hasn’t faded from his face!

When Big Mouth Xu was severe, he did indeed carry the dignified air of an administrative Dean. He stared at Zhai Tao for a good while, and no longer used the roaring voice, “You really don’t know why you’re standing here now?”

He clearly was using a neutral tone, but it was more unnerving than roaring.

“Don’t know.” Zhai Tao impatiently said, stubborn.

“Though our school may not be the top of the province, we are a famous school with a hundred years’ worth of history after all. We spent a hundred years getting rid of the dregs, extracting the quintessential, we may not be the most forward, but teaching and educating people is enough. You’ve been here for at least a year, and all you’ve learnt is to call people a damn beggar, and to push people down the stairs?”

Zhai Tao heavily breathed as he pursed his lips. A moment later he denied, “I didn’t—”

“I’ve said, the cameras aren’t dead. The crowd that day has eyes and ears yoo.” When Big Mouth Xu saw the way he was acting, he couldn’t be bothered to waste his energy anymore. He waved his hands and said, “Fine, fine, I’m not here to argue with you either. Since I’ve already summoned the few of you here, I’ve already got my evidence from multiple sources.”

“For you, I don’t want to go on anymore, you know it in your heart.” Big Mouth Xu turned to Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian again, “As for the two of you, I know you meant well, but!”

His tone got harsher, “There are hundreds of ways to deal with this, why did you have to resort to physical action? Fighting in front of the entire school makes you especially cool, right? Ay, your bag flew so far ahead, right?”

Sheng Wang stared down at his feet, looking as if he was deep in soul searching.

He was born clean and neat, the ends of his eyes were elongated, with slight droop towards the end. When he smiled he nearly glowed, when his eyes were downcasted it was incredibly deceptive, with 30% innocence and

70% bookishness, Big Mouth Xu stuttered two times when he looked at him.

“I remember telling the other teachers the day you came, that you look like the type of student that’s especially well-behaved, and now?! You proved my words just like this?!”

The more Big Mouth Xu thought about it the more he got worked up, he gulped two mouthfuls from his thermos on the table, spat the tea lead dregs, and said, “The few of you like being spectated on, right? You like showing off in front of the entire school, right? There — Road #3 in the teaching zone, it passes through the teaching blocks, the canteen, the residential blocks, a stage like this is fancy enough, right? Sweep the parasol fluff, save our cleaning staff some effort.”

He lifted a finger, and said, “It wouldn’t take too long, just one week. This week, report with a broom in hand during the morning long break, I’ll get someone to watch over you. You bunch of brats, if you don’t lose face a few times round you’ll never know exactly how much longer life is! After finishing everything in a week, come over here and receive the outcome of your official punishment.”

Dean Xu finally quelled his anger, the three fight participants thus went onto the path of sweeping the streets.

Just after two days, Sheng Wang already wanted to quit.

Contrary to expectations, it wasn’t because it was shameful. The students had to go to the parade square during the long break, as long as

they avoided the crowd at particular timings, Road #3 would be quiet and void of anyone, naturally it wouldn’t be shameful.

What really got to Sheng Wang was the parasol fluff itself, can this thing even be swept by fucking humans??

The moment he finished sweeping, a gust of wind the next second would result in another layer on the ground, even flying on top of people. The worst wasn’t even irritating the face, it was when it got into the eyes and that’s the meaning of true despair.

The wind was strong today, Sheng Wang was poked in the eyes for multiple times, his eyes were red from rubbing from the entire week, once in a while he had to hold on to the broom while pinching at his eyelids. When the young master was irritated, he shut the world out, he even tuned out his five senses, and was in a state of, hear nothing, see nothing, acknowledge nobody at all.

The Nth time he was poked in the eyes, he vaguely heard someone say to him, “Don’t move, there’s grass in your hair.”

Sheng Wang did not realise who was speaking, he retorted the moment he opened his mouth, “None of your goddamn business, I grew it myself.”

His left eye started tearing up as he blinked, and finally got the irritant out. Just as he sighed in relief, he suddenly realised that the one who spoke seemed to be Jiang Tian……

Sheng Wang paused for a second, and turned around with one eye squinted, only to see Jiang Tian retracting his hand from the top of his head.

“What were you saying again?” He sheepishly asked.

“I wasn’t saying anything,” Jiang Tian lifted his chin, “Keep growing it.”

Sheng Wang immediately tilted his head in Jiang Tian’s direction, “I’m sorry I’m so sorry, help me remove it, I can’t go back with a head full of grass.”

Zhai Tao, who was at the side, violently thumped the ground with the broom, cursing, “Fuck……”

Just as he was cussing up a storm, someone walked towards them, high heels clicking. “Sheng Wang? Jiang Tian? What are the two of you doing?”

Sheng Wang straightened his head back from Jiang Tian. He looked up, and the English teacher, Yang Jing, was walking in their direction with a stack of paper in hand. Her delicate brows furrowed, and she was displeased. “I was just looking everywhere for the two of you, what are you acting like a living Lei Feng for?”

(t/n: Name of a person that has become synonymous of a selfless model citizen, promoted widely by the government)

“Teacher,” Sheng Wang laughed dryly, “Not living Lei Fengs, the two of us are getting punished.”

All he ever said was “the two of us’, as if Zhai Tao at the side was just thin air. The ‘thin air’ nearly exploded in anger.

“Punishment?” Yang Jing”s brows knitted even tighter, “Which bumbling idiot picked such a good timing?”

There was no right answer no matter how Sheng Wang said it.

“Ah, don’t worry, I’ll scold whoever, you just answer whoever.” Yang Jing said.

“Dean Xu.” Sheng Wang replied, “Because the two of us fought the day of the weekly test.”

“I’ve heard.” Yang Jing nodded, “What a choice location, it has a bad influence, the punishment is indeed deserved. But why now? How many days do you two have to sweep?”

“One week.”

“This week?” Yang Jing raised her voice.

“Yup.”

“Go.” Yang Jing stuffed a stack of test papers each into Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s arms, and stomped in her heels domineeringly, “I’m going to speak with Big Mouth Xu!”

“Huh? This can’t be too good, teacher……” Sheng Wang quietly mimed a victory sign at Jiang Tian, and caught up to Yang Jing in two steps, “Why are you going to speak with him?”

“I was counting on the two of you to practise for your English Olympiad during the long break, he’s messing with my plans!”

Yang Jing was truly the woman who fought against all the school leadership, she stormed into the student affairs office in a fury, closed the door, and was all lightning and thunder as she yelled.

In the end she left Big Mouth Xu with a line: “The English Olympiad is next week, the two with the most potential to get a good placing are both outside. If you insist on punishing them this week, go take their places for the competition, if you can’t get a trophy I’ll hang myself at your office entrance, do as you see fit!”

“.....”

Big Mouth Xu was agape and had zero power to fight back.

Under Yang Jing’s pressure, he retreated again and again, and in the end countered with a condition.

He said, “Then I have two requests, one would be there must be substantial showing for the competition, the second would be there must be an improvement of at least 50 places for the monthly test this weekend.”

Jiang Tian, who was first in the year: “???”

Fortunately, in the next second with all his sensibility back, Big Mouth Xu added on, “Sheng Wang, I’m talking about Sheng Wang here, Jiang Tian couldn’t improve even if he wants to.”

Sheng Wang had been eavesdropping for a good while, he finally couldn’t keep his mouth shut and stuck his head in after cracking the door open, asking, “Dean Xu, you know it gets more difficult to increase the level position the higher I go, right?”

“I do! Would it still be a punishment otherwise?” Big Mouth Xu was righteous.

Sheng Wang wanted to slam the door in his face.

“You either meet these two requirements, or continue sweeping the streets for me, and there will be demerit points for fighting, you can even forget about the Tri-Quality Students of the City !” Big Mouth Xu delivered a critical hit.

There was no dignity upon facing great pressure.

In the middle of the night, the second day. Sheng Wang repeatedly gave himself a mental pep talk, and finally reached his claws out towards the neighbouring bedroom.

Chapter 024 - Awakening of Insects in Summer's End

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Sheng Wang’s Heart Skipped A Beat.

Last time round, it was Jiang Tian who knocked first, it should be his turn this time. Gifts should be reciprocated, everyone understood this norm.

I’m not being shameless, I’m just polite, Sheng Wang internally chanted two times, before righteously knocking on the door.

Footsteps shuffled in the bedroom, with a light creak, Jiang Tian appeared behind the door.

The words Sheng Wang prepared tumbled around in his mouth, and when it left it became, “My room’s air con’s spoilt!”

Jiang Tian was stunned.

…...What’s wrong with you???

Sheng Wang cursed himself internally.

He had such a good excuse to go with but he had to drag in something so stupid like the air con? Great, now he couldn’t take it back. This level of falsehood, all Jiang Tian needed to do was to go over to expose it, he basically offered his face to the other for slapping.

Sheng Wang imagined that scenario, and almost passed away on the spot.

Still, his mental fortitude was generally quite fine, he wilted for two seconds before he was bold again. He looked at Jiang Tian, internally saying: If you really dare to go check, I'll jump from the second floor window.

Fortunately Jiang Tian had both intelligence and humanity.

His eyes lowered, scanned around, and spotted the bag in Sheng Wang's hands. He didn't ask any further questions, and side-stepped to open up a path.

Sheng Wang silently let out a sigh of relief, and entered the bedroom.

Upon his first step, he subconsciously paused a bit. That was his reaction only when entering other people's territory, just like when acting as a guest, a person would scan around first before putting on the slippers. Sheng Wang never would have thought that he would have this reaction in this bedroom.

Teenagers always were quick to feel, a single line was all it took to stir a fight, a single line was also enough to bury the hatchet. The first second they might be quarreling and fighting, the next second they could also be inseparable, the turning point could be everything simple —

A note, a can of drinks, or maybe a set of homework.

Not long ago, he was still grumbling about his house being taken over by a certain grandson to Crab, but now he had silently acknowledged this room as Jiang Tian's territory.

The world sure is strange.

Sheng Wang thought internally.

He was similar to Jiang Tian, he did not like poking his head here and there in other people's bedrooms. First was out of courtesy, the second was…...that behaviour was uncool. Still, he couldn't help it when the room was too simple, he didn't need to particularly look around in order to take everything in at once.

This bedroom was side by side to Sheng Wang's, their orientation and decor were both similar. Both bedrooms had a desk by the window, with the bed opposite. The wall the two rooms shared was a wardrobe, the difference being that Sheng Wang had an additional independent bathroom next to his wardrobe.

Sheng Wang stared at the wall for ages, before quietly asking, "You can hear it from here when I turn on the taps, right?"

"Hm?" Jiang Tian closed the door after him.

Sheng Wang turned around, discovering that Jiang Tian's ears were still stuffed with a wireless earpiece, the white ends lightly pressing against his thin lobes.

"What did you say again? I couldn't hear anything, you're too soft." Jiang Tian removed an earpiece with a tilt of his head.

"I said—" The cogs turned in Sheng Wang's head, what if the moment he asked, this person would say "I didn't notice, if you're worried we can go over and test it out", then the embarrassed one would still be him! His air con was still hanging there, perfectly fine after all.

“Whatever, it isn’t important.” Sheng Wang was holding his bag as he said, “Lemme mooch on your aircon for a while, I still have four pages left in my topical exercise.”

Upon hearing that, Jiang Tian went past him to go clear his table.

There was a stack of test papers on his table, next to it was an exercise book, a black pen, and a red pen. This was all there was, the table was simple to the point of being nearly empty, it was drastically different from Sheng Wang’s own street-vendor style clutter.

“Eh? Don’t need to tidy it, I’m ok without a chair too.” Sheng Wang followed over.

“Where would you sit without a chair, on the table?” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang’s leg was already lifted before he sheepishly put it down, his entire face spoke of the guilt of being caught red handed. “I didn’t say that I’m sitting on the table, I can stand too.”

This was clearly nonsense. Jiang Tian shot him a glance, capped his two pens, and tossed it into the pencil case in his bag.

“You can just sit on the chair, I don’t need it.” He kept the paper in his bag, and sat at the spacious window sill. His back was facing a wall at the side of the window sill, a leg half-bent, and an exercise book in his lap. His other leg dangled from the window sill, touching the floor.

“You really don’t need it?” Sheng Wang asked.

“It’s long finished.”

“Even Jing-jie’s paper?” Sheng Wang was a little confused, “I just saw your empty paper.”

Jiang Tian lifted the exercise book in his lap, “The anwer’s in here.”

Sheng Wang stretched his neck to look, and indeed spotted the answers to the English homework in the notebook. There were five in a row, from afar the handwriting was powerful and clear, from proximity however all his words were written with a single stroke. He couldn’t be bothered to even cross out his wrong answers, a cross needed two strokes, he used a red pen to mark it with a single slash instead.

Next to the slash was the correction, for some there was only a clause, for others the correction went on for several lines. What he was looking at was these.

“Why don’t you just write it on the paper?” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian said, “Saves effort.”

“There may be some slight differences between our idea of ‘save effort’.”

Jiang Tian was stumped, probably because nobody would ask him about the logic behind his actions before. His fingers played with a page before putting it down, and said in resignation, “Jing-jie is good at picking questions, the papers she compiled are all quintessential, one question is as good as ten. Doing it once on the notebook, and marking the ones you get wrong on the paper, you just need to do the question you made a mistake on the second time you do the paper, and not get affected by the original

answer. Roughly two rounds is enough, you wouldn’t need to do an endless amount of questions like this.”

He paused, and stated the thesis albeit speechless, “Efficient, saves effort. Got it?”

“Got it.” Sheng Wang raised his left hand, only to see his three fingers miming a ‘seven’, saying, “This is the most I’ve ever heard you talk, there’s 87 words.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

The window sill was right next to the table, where Jiang Tian sat. It wasn't too far from Sheng Wang, he was within his range of attack.

Upon seeing the other person straighten up, Sheng Wang quickly shielded his face as he nudged the chair to the other end, only to see Jiang Tian helping him switch on the table lamp with the aid of his long arms, and ruthlessly said, “Shut up if you’re not done.”

Sheng Wang side-eyed him, and tutted, “You sure are bossy.”

Jiang Tian looked up coldly, Sheng Wang immediately made a cross in front of his lips with two pointer fingers, indicating a cease fire.

Sheng Wang was fidgety when he did his homework, a proper sitting position would cause his brain juices to not flow. Back in his own bedroom, he could go from the table, to the window sill, to the bed and carpet all while doing his questions.

Motion is the mode of existence for the matter. So was Sheng Wang when he studied.

(t/n: https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/d/i.htm reference to this aspect of marxist theory here)

While he's over at Jiang Tian's, he still exercised some restraint at the start. As he progressed, the mood to fidget around increased, with both feet on the horizontal bar beneath the chair seat, two out of four of the chair's legs were thus lifted off the ground. With a stretch and a crook of his legs, the chair began rocking.

After rocking for roughly 10 minutes straight, he abruptly recalled Gao Tianyang's reminder that when he was in front of Jiang Tian, he should do anything but rock his chair like this, Jiang Tian would get irritated.

Sheng Wang reflexively kept his leg back. There was a round carpet in front of the desk, when the chair landed on the carpet it barely made a noise. He ruefully sneaked a glance at Jiang Tian, only to see the thin end of the corner of Jiang Tian's eyes also lightly twitched.

His pupils were pale beneath the light, as though there was a thin layer of crystals on top of it. When he casually scanned around, that gaze of his was much like a careless glance.

Nearby, a car passed by the exit of the alley, the headlights shone in through the windows from afar, sliding from left to right.

Maybe he was startled by the sudden glow or perhaps it was something else, Sheng Wang swiftly retracted his gaze, lowered his eyes and started reading.

He unhurriedly fiddled with the corner of the page for a good while before he could truly absorb that line of words. After what seemed like ages, he finally grabbed his pen and started calculating.

The questions after that was as if an invisible force was helping him, it was incredibly smooth sailing, much faster than usual. Sheng Wang took an hour to finish four pages of questions, and Jiang Tian actually managed to take an hour to look through the exercise book too.

He was even still flipping through the exercise book after Sheng Wang closed his book, and was stretching around.

“You’re not done yet?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Still a bit more.” Jiang Tian finally could bear to close the book, and looked up. He asked, “You’re done?”

“All done.” Sheng Wang dug out his phone to check the time, “It’s not even 1.30am yet, I seriously finished it.”

“Any questions?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Nope.” The young master draped himself over the chair with the excuse of stretching around, pride hanging on his face

He thought that there would be questions at first, if not he wouldn’t have tried to come over to Jiang Tian’s with an excuse. However, he was truly in good condition today, giving him enough face. Questions that were usually a hot potato became especially well-behaved today, the rate of accuracy was shockingly high.

Sheng Wang pondered by himself for a while, and concluded, “The feng shui here is kinda good, it nurtures the brain.”

With this nonsensical reason alone, he mooched Jiang Tian’s air con in his bedroom for two days straight.

Everytime Sheng Wang knocked it would be already midnight, barely past 12. Jiang Ou who was downstairs would long be asleep. Half the house was completely silent, their rooms were the only ones with the lights still turned on, and words were occasionally exchanged.

At the start, they did not realise anything was amiss.

Until Friday that day, an accident disrupted the pattern — Sheng Mingyang finally squeezed out some free time out of his heavy workload, and made a trip back home.

The chauffeur, Xiao-Chen, went to fetch him at the airport. By the time he reached home it was past 12. With the mindset of not wanting to disrupt his family’s sleep and study, Sheng Mingyang didn’t inform anyone at all.

This weekend was the first monthly test. Sheng Wang did not attempt any new questions tonight, and instead circled out the challenging points in his notes and topical exercises, preparing to go through it and discuss with Jiang Tian.

When he knocked on the door next door over, there was suddenly a beep that came from the unlocking of the password guarded door downstairs, next was a light click from the keys turning in the second door.

Sheng Mingyang often smoked while he's out, and would occasionally dry cough. Sheng Wang had heard this for more than 10 years, he was way too familiar with it, he could tell from even a door away.

When Sheng Wang heard his dad's dry cough, he froze. He tunneled inside the room like a fish, and closed the door in a panic.

He kept an ear out for the sounds of activity downstairs with his back against the doors, when he looked up again, he was met with a towel hanging on Jiang Tian's neck, his fingers holding a glass of water by its rim, standing a step away from him.

He showered a little later than usual today, his hair was still moist, droplets quietly crystalised at the ends of his hair, and slid down along the curve of his neck, dampening the edges of the collar of his grey t-shirt.

He darted a look in the direction of the door.

Sheng Wang said in a low voice, "When I entered, my dad just came back."

Jiang Tian retracted his gaze from the door, and instead shifted it to Sheng Wang. He was quiet for a moment, before suddenly asking, "Why were you panicking?"

The night was still and quiet. A cicada on a random tree abruptly dragged its call. It was clearly summer's end, but it was like the awakening of insects in spring.

Sheng Wang's heart suddenly skipped a beat.

(t/n: awakening of insects:This solar term in the Chinese calendar. Associated with spring. Guess what spring is associated with.)

Chapter 025 - Capsize

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Sheng Wang’s Online, And Bluffing His Way Through.

Yeah, what’s there to panic about?

Sheng Wang didn’t speak.

He was a little shaken, he appeared to be unable to produce an explanation either.

Sheng Mingyang already closed the door downstairs, the keys lightly jingling as he settled it on the cabinet in the entrance hall cabinet. He changed into a pair of soft domestic slippers, and his footsteps were muffled as it travelled from the living room to the kitchen.

A short while later there was the sound of another door opening, and there was another pair of footsteps in the kitchen.

Maybe it was due to the quietude of the night, or maybe because Sheng Wang’s back was against the door, he could vaguely hear Jiang Ou’s voice despite her low volume.

“Why didn’t you say anything when you’re back, everything’s settled?” Jiang Ou asked.

“Not yet, I still have to go back,” Sheng Mingyang said, “it’s a little troublesome.”

“Have you eaten your dinner yet then?”

“Made do with some airplane food, now I’m a little hungry, I wanted to find something to tide me through.”

“There’s chicken soup, let me heat up for you?”

“No, that’s too much noise.”

Sheng Mingyang lowered his voice and said something, probably along the lines of not wanting to disturb Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian who were upstairs. Following that, Jiang Ou’s voice also lowered, and their voices were no longer intelligible, the buzzing of human speech sounding both so near and yet so far.

Sheng Mingyang took something out from the fridge and dealt with his hunger, a short while later they returned to the bedroom, and tranquility was restored to this house once more, everything’s back to normal.

A water droplet dripped down from the hair in front of Jiang Tian’s forehead, he grabbed an end of his towel and rubbed it.

Sheng Wang’s shoulders slowly relaxed, that moment of panic was like flickering lights and shadows, disappearing in a jiffy. He could not figure out a reason, and casually came up with an excuse instead, “My dad’s naggy, if he knew that I’m not asleep yet, I’m definitely getting nagged at — why aren’t you asleep at this timing? Did you delay your sleep because of your homework or getting too caught up with playing?”

Sheng Wang lowered his pitch and copied his dad, that tone of his was remarkably true to him. He walked to the table, and settled the paper down with familiar ease. “If you say that you haven’t finished your homework, he would instantly ask if it’s too difficult or too much, is it that way to everyone or just you? If you say that you’re just revising for the monthly test, he’s gonna ask how’s the revision coming along, are you

confident or not. After he asked he would say it’s okay to feel pressure, but not too much, and then start to pour chicken soup down your throat.”

(t/n: Remember ‘chicken soup for the soul’? Chinese netizens use chicken soup to represent cheesy motivational stuff. A fun article on it.)

This routine was overly familiar, making its appearance in too many parents. When Jiang Tian got to the later half he couldn’t help but let out a laugh, causing Sheng Wang to start laughing too, “Your head will start buzzing too, right? If it’s you you would panic too.”

Jiang Tian settled that glass of plain water on the desk, and took the towel from his neck to dry his hair. “He’s this talkative?”

“Not really. It’s just that he’s usually too busy to ask, when he gets the rare chance to, he gives it his all, it's sort of a—” Sheng Wang pursed his lips and deliberated, “compensation, you know?”

The hand drying his hair briefly paused. He shot a glance towards Sheng Wang’s face, only to see the other person busy flipping through to find the pages marked out in the topical exercises, there weren’t any signs that he was emotionally affected when he said that.

“But, Sheng Mingyang is a little different from many parents when it comes to one thing. He actually never did ask much from me in terms of grades, neither would he reprimand me. After forcing chicken soup on me, he would praise me too.” Sheng Wang looked up, mimed at Jiang Tian while holding a page, “Our Sheng Wang is capable, papa trusts you.”

Jiang Tian walked to the corner of the room amidst his grumbles, tossed the towel into the laundry net and straightened up, saying,

“Shouldn’t he be saying Wang-zai.”

“.....”

Sheng Wang was instantly silenced, a myriad of expressions on his face.

A few seconds later, he pointed at Jiang Tian and squeezed out a single line, “You shut up.”

Since ancient times, it was usually Jiang Tian who told people to shut up, it was an extremely rare sight for someone to say this to him. He raised an eyebrow, and nodded, indicating that he could grudgingly play along.

Sheng Wang was very satisfied.

He pulled open the chair and sat down. He asked Jiang Tian, topical exercise in hand, “Eh, have you tried similar question types to these two?”

Fuzhong did not have a recommended set of guidebooks, it was all up to the teachers of each class to recommend some to students according to their capabilities.

The few teachers of Class A all did not recommend an excessive amount of doing questions, there has to be a certain degree of being well-read, but there was no need for constant repetition. When they recommended them, they would sometimes talk about various pros and cons of different guidebooks, and got them to pick it themselves

Guide books usually had the same sort of content, they differed along the lines of the compilation as well as level of expertise in the questions.

The teachers all said that getting a couple of them was enough, weighing the pros and cons, there was no need to do every single question.

Therefore for some challenging questions, just because a student had encountered them doesn’t mean that the other student did too.

Jiang Tian swept a look at the book at his hands, and sat down at the window sill as if he was minding his own business.

Sheng Wang waited for an eternity and yet there was still no reply. He kicked at Jiang Tian’s slipper, “Oi.”

Oi went deaf.

Sheng Wang kicked again, “Jiang Tian.”

Jiang Tian also went deaf.

Sheng Wang: “.....top student?”

The top student was still deaf.

Sheng Wang lowered the hand holding the book and dangled, he propped against the knee and began sighing.

“Don’t keep your mouth shut anymore, open your golden mouth already.” He was already very familiar with this sequence of events, when he spoke he was completely carefree, “Fine, I’m sorry, I’m in the wrong.”

Jiang Tian finally recovered his hearing, he stuck his hand out. “Let me take a look.”

Sheng Wang pressed the book into his hands, and motioned with his lips, “Question 12, 13, I marked an asterisk beside it.”

“I’ve done it before,” Jiang Tian only needed a single look to know, “the last part?”

“Mn, I’m a little lost.” Sheng Wang said, “I got stuck after I wrote down the formula.”

“It’s normal to get stuck, the last question was a little out of syllabus, you need to cal a bit.” Jiang Tian said.

“What ‘cal’? Which ‘cal’ are you talking about?” Sheng Wang did not realise yet.

“The cal in calculus.” Jiang Tian said.

“Hold on.” Sheng Wang asked, “Is it the same calculus I’m thinking of? The one in university?”

“Yes.”

“.....”

There’s a ‘what the fuck’ stuck in Sheng Wang’s throat.

“There’s not enough time tonight, so don’t need to look through it.” Jiang Tian was blunt, “At least, it isn’t getting tested for this monthly test. The other classes are still rushing through the syllabus, but at the moment they aren’t as deep in as Classes AB yet.”

“At least? That means it’s getting tested in the future?” Sheng Wang asked.

“As long as it appeared in gaokao before, the school dares to test it” As Jiang Tian spoke he flipped through the answer analysis behind. He said, “This left out too many points, why did you buy this one?”

“This book was more cohesive in terms of connecting basic knowledge to challenging points, it’s better for self study.” Sheng Wang said, completely done, “Please show some understanding for a citizen of Les Misérables. Still, this book is indeed lacking in difficult questions, they just brushed past it. In any case I’m done with this book, I’ll buy another book to make up for it next time round.”

After some thoughts, Jiang Tian settled the book down and walked to the front of the wardrobe. He opened a door, pulled open a storage box and searched around. He took a collection with a blue cover, passed it to him and said, “This book delves deeper.”

Sheng Wang received the book, but his attention wasn’t in his hands, but in the wardrobe.

Jiang Tian’s wardrobe was very strange, the horizontal bar was full of clothes hangers, but not a single piece of clothing. There were two boxes below, one contained a transparent storage box, the other held a suitcase.

The suitcase was open, the clothes Jiang Tian often wore were all inside, in neat folded stacks. It was so neat that as long as he closed the suitcase, the owner of these belongings could make a swift and clean departure, leaving not a single trace behind.

“You……” Sheng Wang was stumped for several moments. He looked up at Jiang Tian, “Why are you packing your luggage?”

He suddenly recalled what he had dimly heard at the start — Sheng Mingyang said before that Jiang Tian wanted to stay in the school, it was just that the school hadn’t opened applications for dormitory stay that he made to stay back then.

Back then he wished for nothing more than for Jiang Tian to leave, but now he suddenly went back on his words.

He did not know precisely when it was on which day which moment that he changed his mind, he only knew that the instance he saw the suitcase, an indescribable feeling welled up in him.

It was like the summer he experienced as a kid, everytime he was having the time of his life playing in the theme park in the outer edges of the city, there would be all sorts of phone calls made to Sheng Mingyang’s phone. His joys screeched to a top, and he had to obediently follow the adult home.

Even though he knew that he would be able to go again soon, he would still feel disappointment in that moment.

…...It was the type of disappointment that would be forgotten as long as he was full of mirth, but would suddenly well up in a moment of a single turn.

“Are you leaving?” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian followed his gaze that landed on the suitcase, for that few seconds he did not talk. A few moments later, he said, “I didn’t start packing, it’s always like this.”

These words sounded even more like he was deliberately coldly alienating him, Jiang Tian paused before adding on, “Personal habit.”

“Persona habit?” Sheng Wang came back to his senses, “Don’t tell me you’re like this in your own home too?”

“Mm.” Jiang Tian nodded, with a neutral look on his face.

“Why? Was it mysophobia, or OCD or something?”

“Convenient.” Jiang Tian said.

He didn’t actually want to discuss this particular topic, Sheng Wang could tell, and did not keep asking. He opened the collection Jiang Tian gave him, inside was unexpectedly clean. Other than some red circles drawn around some symbols in some questions, there weren’t any marks at all.

“You didn’t do it?” Sheng Wang changed the topic.

“I didn’t directly write on it.” Jiang Tian said, “Go ahead and use it, looking at those with circles will do.”

There was no doubt about Sheng Wang’s capability, but with Jiang Tian trimmings that got rid of unnecessary parts and kept the key points, his revision was incredibly efficient, and his speed was faster than ever before.

On the first day ever since he transferred to Fuzhong, he slept before 1am.

He thought that this was a good sign, foretelling that this monthly test would be smooth sailing, but when he came to that bridge, he ended up capsizing.

(t/n: To capsize, which is also to suffer setbacks or defeat. Decided to keep capsize for the whole boat metaphor thing, and also the ‘came to that bridge’ was originally □□□□□□□, literally “the boat will straighten out upon reaching the bridge”, pretty cool equivalence huh)

The monthly exam in Fuzhong was more formal than the weekly test. It was split between two days, the first day was language and mathematics, the second day was English and the two electives. Sheng Wang capsized on the second morning.

The exam starts at 8am, he followed his usual habits and was already seated there seven in the morning. As he was sufficiently prepared, he was in a relatively relaxed state of mind, such that he did not notice that something was amiss in certain things.

Around 7.20am, an unfamiliar boy stuck his head in and asked, “Sheng Wang’s here, right?”

Sheng Wang looked up from his notebook.

That boy waved at him, saying, “The English teacher’s looking for you.”

Sheng Wang tossed the notebook into the desk, got up and went to the door, asking, “Jing-jie’s looking for me? What for?”

“I don’t know.” That boy said, “About the English Olympiad or something? She told you to get a new test to do.”

“Now?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Yeah.”

He turned to look at the wall clock at the back of the class, made sure that there was enough time, and prepared to go upstairs without any doubts.

That boy interrupted, “Not upstairs, she’s by the printing room.”

He pointed in the direction of Road #3, “It’s the one in front of the Garden of Conduct.”

“Isn’t there a printing room upstairs?” Sheng Wang was a little confused, “Why go to the one in front of Road #3?”

He only discovered later that the two suspicious looking rooms beside the top floor’s office were filled with printers, specifically for Class A teachers to print test papers in during competition season.

That boy shook his head, “I don’t know why either, maybe the printer spoiled or something. Just go already, I’m heading to my exam venue.”

After he spoke he went to the end of the corridor.

Sheng Wang muttered, and did not delay anymore. He sped downstairs.

In order to save time, he took a shortcut. He decided to cut through the Garden of Conduct, but this shortcut was where he messed up. He was ambushed by two boys in the path in the garden, the two of them didn’t wear school uniforms or the school tag, they exuded the aura of a diseased chicken all over. One look and it was clear they weren’t from Fuzhong, more like some bum loafing around in a random corner.

Crew Cut scratched his head, saying, “Eh, you’re Sheng Wang, right? You know why I’m here today?”

He probably wanted to intimidate him first, when Sheng Wang replied with a “I don’t know”, he would tell him as he stirred trouble.

Unexpectedly, Sheng Wang didn’t play right into his hands. He nodded, and calmly said, “I know.”

The crew cut was stumped, and then asked viciously, “You know? Oh, then tell me, what am I here to do?”

Sheng Wang grinned, and then his face instantly darkened as his knee jerked upwards, “You’re here for a beating.”

Crew Cut howled, and kneeled down as he covered his crotch. He instantly lost all fighting power, and spasmed as he curled up into a ball. The other person upon seeing him cursed out a ‘fuck’, and his fist shot towards Sheng Wang with a gust of wind.

Sheng Wang said internally, his luck with exams was truly something, he had to fight every time there was one. To think he made a declaration everyday that he was totally weak and helpless.

Even though he managed to get rid of right at the start, Sheng Wang could not quickly get away either.

He stood off against the other person in the Garden of Conduct for a very long time before he finally managed to shake him off. The other person had bruises all over, and his nose bled. Sheng Wang’s uniform was stained with mud, and the side of his cheek got scratched by the tree.

He delivered a last kick to the other person, took off his uniform and madly sprinted straight towards Mingli Block. No matter how he rushed he was still late by 12 minutes in the end.

"Reporting in." When Sheng Wang entered the classroom, the invigilator's eyes nearly bulged out of the sockets with a glare. Asking, with a stern look on the face, "It's the monthly exam and you're still late?! What were you doing?"

The English listening comprehension was already at the last part, Sheng Wang wiped at the side of his face and said, "I went to the doctor."

The invigilator was stunned, "Huh? What's wrong with you?"

"It's my brain." Sheng Wang said, and asked, "Reporting, may I return back to my seat?"

The invigilator, either out of anger or shock, did not speak despite opening the mouth. Sheng Wang entered anyway.

The shitty event this morning caused a simmering pot of anger to boil inside of him, he couldn't be bothered to act obedient.

He messily stuffed his uniform into his drawer, grabbed a pen and began looking through the paper.

There were a total of 20 marks for 20 questions for listening comprehension, he improved his score by 60 marks last exam, but now with this he dropped by a third.

What the balls shitting fuck.

Sheng Wang cursed in his head, and began a magical journey.

The first section of conversation was all independent, a set of dialogue for one question, he couldn’t deal with them for the moment. Therefore, he flipped to the second page straight away, and began sorting out his thoughts.

The second section contained dialogue that served as the basis for two to three questions. He grabbed his pen and immediately underlined repeated terms in the question, the wording for the two to three questions was enough for him to roughly guess the content of the dialogue. Coupled with nouns that appeared at higher frequency, he could figure out the main points in the dialogue. With this as a foundation to guess the answers, his rate of accuracy became much higher.

He finished the last 15 questions with this method, and flipped back to the first page. He sighed, and began to bluff.

Chapter 026 - Standing Up For Him

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It’s Exactly This Coincidental.

The bell rang, the invigilator started collecting the scripts. When it was Sheng Wang’s turn, the invigilator intentionally stopped by his table for a few seconds more, probably wanting to see what kind of nonsense the late student came up with in his bluffing.

“You might as well pick C for all, at least a few would be correct then. If you don’t get a single one correct by blindly guessing, you’ll end up crying yourself to death.” The invigilator could not help but say this after whisking away his paper.

“Teacher, you teach English?” Sheng Wang was bad with faces, he did not know basically any of the teachers out of Class A.

“No, I teach geography.” The invigilator replied.

“Then have you seen the answer sheet for this test?”

“No?”

Sheng Wang said an “oh”, and next, “It’s fine then.”

The invigilator: “.....”

The student in front snorted out loud, and made himself grave again after a piercing look from the invigilator.

The invigilator glared at Sheng Wang in annoyance, “No matter your reason, don’t be late for your next exam in any case. You have to answer for all your effort, don’t let it go down the drain just because of some poor habits.”

“I won’t anymore, thank you Teacher.” Sheng Wang said.

The other venues collected their scripts quite quickly, the bustling sound of human talk poured out like water from a dam, spilling into the corridor. Gao Tianyang improved substantially for his weekly test too, he jumped forward by 50+ places, and his exam venue shifted from Class 3 to the tail end of Class 1. He was only a wall away from Sheng Wang, the flight of stairs right next to them.

He had long since scuttled out of class, and was waiting at the stairs. However, even after Jiang Tian arrived, he still didn’t spot a single trace of Sheng Wang.

“Where’s he?” Jiang Tian went down the steps, and looked towards Class 2.

Gao Tianyang shrugged, “Dunno, their class is so freaking slow when it comes to collecting their scripts, the doors still aren’t open even now.”

Immediately after he spoke, the doors to Classroom 2 opened. The invigilator walked out hugging a stack of neatly sorted out scripts, and a huge wave of students streamed out following behind. Their exchanges and discussion buzzed non-stop, like a group of geese that got their nests bombed.

“The fuck, he even dares to skip English listening compre, it’s 20 marks, oh my god.”

“He’s OP, what can I say.”

“Didn’t he get nearly full marks for last week’s English?”

“I think so, was it 117 or 118?”

“Then he’s done for this time, going down by 20 marks straight.”

“Not for sure, what if he guessed correctly for some?”

“Didn’t you hear the invigilator mock him, saying that he should have just filled in all Cs? He probably just blindly wrote AABCD or something like that. He likely never had to guess for English before, he surely lacks experience.”

“Quit bullshitting, even if he loses 20 marks his English will still score better than mine, I want to shut down.”

……

Gao Tianyang hissed, he nudged Jiang Tian and said, “Eh, why does it sound like something’s off the more I listen.”

That group of people were chatting up a storm as they walked towards the staircase. There was someone Jiang Tian happened to know in the middle, he tapped the person’s shoulder and asked, “Who lost 20 marks straight?”

“Aiyo what the heck you scared me,” The person held his hand to his chest and said, “God Jiang, why are you here, Yang-ge!”

He greeted Gao Tianyang too.

“We’re waiting for our meal buddy.” Gao Tianyang asked, “Who were you talking about just now?”

“It’s the Sheng Wang who improved by a 100+ places from your class.” The person pointed to the classroom behind him with his thumb, “That guy there was late for his English exam, he missed out the entirety of listening compre.”

“Late?” Gao Tianyang yelled in shock, “No way! Tian-ge, you guys were late this morning?”

“No.” Jiang Tian said, “Already here by 7.”

That boy had no idea what they were talking about. He could not particularly understand why it was Sheng Wang who was late, but Jiang Tian was the one who Gao Tianyang asked instead. The other classmates started rushing him impatiently, and the boy hurriedly bade his farewell before leaving with his friends.

Disbelief was written all over Gao Tianyang’s face. “This subject is English, Sheng-ge has the greatest advantage in this one, why would he be stupidly reckless enough to be late?”

Jiang Tian looked past him. into Class 2. Most students had already left, and the classroom was empty enough such that his view was unobscured. From this angle, he could see a partial side view of Sheng Wang’s face. He was stuffing his school jacket into his bag, his eyes lowered, the look on his face indiscernible.

Jiang Tian gripped Gao Tianyang’s shoulders, and gave him a push towards Class 2.

“What?” Gao Tianyang trudged forward by two steps.

“Go ask.” Jiang Tian said.

“.....”

Is there double-sided tape on Your mouth? Gao Tianyang wanted to ask this childhood friend. Still, he didn’t have the guts to in the end, and entered the classroom without any protest.

“Sheng-ge!” Gao Tianyang was a walking loudspeaker, he had no idea how to control his volume. With this cry, all the ‘left behind youths’ who were munching on their rations in class all turned to them.

t/n: Left behind youth, a spin from □□□□ - left behind elderly, a phenomenon in China where the elderly are often left back in countryside villages with barely any support after their children move to the cities to live and work.

Sheng Wang was attempting to fold the dirty side of the jacket inwards in order to prevent it from staining the bag. When he saw Gao Tianyang and Jiang Tian entering one after another, he gave up on wrestling with it. He messily stuffed the jacket in, pulled the zip up, and called it a day.

Just as he was about to say “Let’s go eat”, he heard Gao Tianyang declare with the tone of an eunuch reading the imperial decree, “Tian-ge has delegated a question for me to ask, did something happen to you this morning?”

Jiang Tian was behind him by a few steps when he entered the class, and was going past some tables and chairs towards them. Upon hearing that, he immediately came to a halt and stared at the back of Gao Tianyang’s head.

If the gaze could become tangible, Gao Tianyang would already be a corpse.

Sheng Wang looked at him.

“He’s making things up.” Jiang Tian denied with zero hesitation.

Yet a few seconds later, he looked down and gave his nose a light pinch, and completely gave up. “Fine.”

When this sort of reaction was carried out by him, it was sort of amusing. Sheng Wang couldn’t hold it back and a laugh escaped him, the anger simmering in him for the entirety of the morning instantly vanishing.

“Let’s go already.” He swung the bag behind his shoulders, and pushed them towards the door. “I’m gonna die from starvation. We’ll talk about it later, I don’t want to host a news conference.”

They made a late arrival, most students had already settled down in the canteen and started eating. One look all over and there were only a few seats scattered here and there in the sea of dark heads, there were basically no seats for a table for four.

Just as they were looking around, someone waved at them, “Old Gao — Over here!”

The one who waved was Song Sirui, beside him was Qi Jiahao, Small Mouth Xu and co. The five of them occupied a table for eight, there were still just nice three spots left empty.

Gao Tianyang picked the window with the quickest moving queue with ample experience, and soon enough they collected their food.

Sheng Wang sat down at an empty seat when he heard Song Sirui ask, “Sheng-ge, I’ve heard that you didn’t make it for listening compre this morning? What happened?”

Gao Tianyang let out an audible sigh, and gulped down a few mouthfuls of the ice cola he just opened before saying, “We were just asking him, so what exactly happened?”

“Got sabotaged.” Sheng Wang was grumbling about being hungry the whole journey here, but didn’t rush to eat when he got his food. Instead, he was slowly picking out the julienned carrots strip by strip.

“What do you mean?” Gao Tianyang stopped munching on his ribs, his eyes nearly popping out of the sockets as he waited for Sheng Wang to speak.

“Someone told me to go get Jing-jie’s Olympiad practice papers, so I just went.” Sheng Wang pushed the pile of carrots to the corner of the stainless steel divider plate, and started picking out the green pepper slices. “In the end I got ambushed when I got to the Garden of Conduct.”

“The fuck? Ambush? Who?”

“Don’t know. Not from this school, probably some hooligan loafing around on some random street corner.”

“There’s a fight?” Small Mouth Xu asked.

“If not what else, they’re here to greet me happy new year?” Sheng Wang said. “Either ways I was delayed by them for quite a while, by the time I went inside listening compre was a goner.”

Qi Jiahao asked, “How did you come back? You beat them up?”

“Nope,” Sheng Wang pointed at the scrape on the side of his face and started putting on a pitiful act, “how would I even manage to defeat them, look at how I’m injured here. Got a bunch of mud on my school jacket and had to stuff it into my bag, the only reason I made it back is because of how quick I ran.”

“Pause!” Song Sirui stated, “You’re gonna say you don’t have the strength to even truss a chicken, go ask the Zhai Tao from last time and see if he agrees.”

Sheng Wang said, “Even if he doesn’t agree I still don’t have the strength to truss a chicken, it’s all because of the bag. See, I didn’t have my bag this morning, that's why I failed.”

“Speaking of Zhai Tao, that idiot —” Gao Tianyang thought, and said, “Did you start a feud with the hooligans outside of school? Probably not, then why did they hurry into school just to pick a fight with you? This doesn’t make any sense, right? Therefore it definitely has to be the work of Zhai Tao, that grandson.”

Other people felt that this was quite probable too, Small Mouth Xu was the only one who injected, “I’ll go find my dad later, see if you can take a make-up for your listening compre.”

“Will your dad be willing?” Qi Jiahao said, a little worried, “I think it’s not very likely, how about we all go?”

“Don’t, my dad hates power in numbers the most, I’ll go ask just in case.” Small Mouth Xu said.

Sheng Wang was startled.

Usually, whenever Small Mouth saw his dad it was like a rat meeting a cat, getting him to go to talk to his dad about something was like asking him to die, he didn't expect him to really take the initiative to help him out like this today.

"Much appreciated." Sheng Wang jokingly cupped his fist at him, "But you shouldn't go find him. Firstly, he would ask about the process, then I'll be involved in a fight again. I'm still in a sensitive period, it's probably better if I behave myself. Secondly, there's no security cameras in the Garden of Conduct, how am I supposed to prove that I was ambushed?"

"That's true, there's a magpie bridge there and all, if there's cameras there the couples would have long since flown away."

Small Mouth Xu wavered, and in the end he compromised. "Sure, I'm not letting my dad know first then, we'll see according to the situation."

Everyone was a little sullen.

They soon sunk into a round of passionately 'paying respects' towards Zhai Tao, Sheng Wang was constantly amused as he listened. Just as he pushed aside the last pile of garlic bits, he suddenly heard Jiang Tian, who was sitting opposite of him, ask, "What do the hooligans look like?"

t/n: Pay respects, to send someone a greeting, but when used in this context they were clearly insulting him like mad

His voice wasn't loud, Gao Tianyang and the rest who were running high on excitement didn't notice him. Only Sheng Wang heard him.

“There’s a crew cut, and there’s a blondie with short hair.” Sheng Wang tried to recall to the best of his ability, but could only remember these two features. “I have facial blindness, I don’t remember what they look like the moment I look away.”

After hearing this, Jiang Tian thought for a bit, and said, “Ok.”

Sheng Wang’s hand, who was picking apart the vegetables, paused. He looked at him in suspicion and asked, “What are you planning?”

Jiang Tian glanced up and questioned back, “What plan?”

Sheng Wang wanted to say “Don’t tell me you want to get back at them for me”, but if he said it it made him look like he was thinking too highly of himself. A person who loves to keep his face like him, certainly wouldn’t land himself in an awkward situation on purpose.

Besides, logically speaking, can a crew cut and a blondie even count as information? There are plenty of crew cuts and blondies in the world, with these two features alone, how would he even find the right person. Furthermore, Jiang Tian appeared to not plan to ask anymore questions, he probably really did ask on a whim.

“Nothing much, I’m gonna eat.” Sheng Wang said.

Most people were done with over half of their meals when he finally deigned himself to eat the first mouthful. Thus, it could be seen that Boss Zhao of Xi Le was already merciful with his words.

Sheng Wang initially thought that the food in the canteen was passable, but ever since he ate Old Man Ding’s food, he could barely make

himself swallow the food on the giant metal plate.

The taste of garlic in the water spinach was way too heavy, the knife used to cut the watermelon slice definitely sliced an onion before that, the beef was too old, the trotters were too tough. Young master’s journey of eating his food was extremely strenuous, but in the end barely any food entered his stomach.

They returned the plates and went back to Mingli Block. When they went past the fountain square, Jiang Tian pointed in the direction of the sports field and said, “I’m making a trip to Xi Le.”

Sheng Wang immediately looked up and stared at him. Gao Tianyang asked, “Why are you going to Xi Le at this time?”

“Buying a bottle of ice water,” Jiang Tian waved his phone, “and taking something along the way.”

Sheng Wang recalled the message Boss Zhao sent to Jiang Tian from before, he did ask him to go take a watermelon or something. However, Sheng Wang never did see him bring it back before, he probably took it to Old Man Ding’s house.

The two subjects in the afternoon were physics and chemistry, Jiang Tian couldn’t lose marks even if he tried, therefore no such thing as hugging the Buddha’s legs at the last minute. Therefore everyone bade him farewell, and entered the exam venues on their own.

t/n: to hug the buddha's leg at the last minute - Panic measures upon desperation

Noon was when the school was the emptiest, there was not a single person to be found on Road #3. Jiang Tian cut through the Garden of Conduct, checking left and right as he walked, and entered Xi Le Convenience Store after going around the sports field.

The doorbell chimed with a ‘ding dong’, Boss Zhao looked up after taking off his presbyopic glasses from behind the counter. “Aren’t you having your exams? Why are you here at noon?”

“Buying water.”

Jiang Tian went directly to the fridge, grabbed a bottle of ice water, and casually took a box of bandaids from the point-of-sale display rack at the side when he paid at the counter.

“Uncle Zhao, are the cameras in the shop still in use?” he asked.

“In use? Of course they are, a tiny business like mine still gets thieves all the time, who could even stand it.” Boss Zhao said.

“How about the two outside the door?” Jiang Tian pointed at the entrance while carrying the bottle, “The one facing Garden of Conduct, and the one facing the school walls.”

“Also in use! Thieves love to come in from there especially much.”

Jiang Tian said, “Can I look at the footage between six to eight this morning?”

“Huh? Why?”

“Looking for people.”

*

The exam began at two in the afternoon. When Sheng Wang arrived in the classroom it was barely 12pm. He spent half an hour looking through the physics notes once over, when he realised that it was still early, he sprawled on the table and prepared to catch up on his sleep.

Most people usually sleep lightly in class, a light commotion and one would be startled awake.

Sheng Wang felt like he just dozed off when he heard the light sound of the window opening next to him. He scratched his head, squinting as he looked up from the crook of his arm. Jiang Tian was standing outside the window, the sleeves of the blue and white uniform rolled up to his elbows. Jiang Tian's back was facing the blazing midday sun, burning so bright that his eyes hurt from looking.

Sheng Wang turned around to look at the wall clock subconsciously, there was still more than half an hour until 2pm. Most of the people in the classroom had slumped over and gave in to sleep, those who weren't sleeping were burying themselves in their notes instead.

The entire Mingli Block was quiet, the type of quiet could only be found in the noon breaks in schools.

"Hm?" He was still trapped in drowsiness, his hoarse voice forming a lazy question.

Jiang Tian's slender fingers reached in, and settled a box of bandaids on the window ledge.

"Got it along the way." After he said that, he cut through the corridor, a bottle of ice water in hand, disappearing around the corner of the stairs.

That night, Sheng Wang heard a piece of gossip from between Song Sirui and Gao Tianyang, saying that Zhao Xi's BBQ shop caught two hooligans who were stirring trouble, and received a beating after being held down by several people. They were then strong-armed into the police station with purple and black bruises on their faces.

The gossip also mentioned that those two hooligans trespassed into Fuzhong that morning, and were caught by the security cameras belonging to Xi Le Convenience Store.

Chapter 027 - Extorted Confession

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Canned: Thanks.

Gao Tianyang's Wechat profile picture was a ray of light in the universe, his nickname was '*Boom*', declaring himself as roughly the origin of all things.

According to Song Sirui's explanation, this person's first nickname was the English version of the Big Bang, but he ended up clashing names with someone. After compromising by taking half of it out, he named himself '*Bang*', which had a double meaning to it, of being both explosive(ly cool) and awesome. In the end, he got pissed off and changed his name when Song Sirui and co sweetly called him 'bang bang'.

t/n: Bang is also hanyupinyin/romanisation of □ meaning superb/wonderful etc etc, but also said name 'bang' was in english that why I italicized it. Could also mean (wooden) rod. It's read more closely to the 'bung' in bungalow

Sheng Wang was also a peacock, he couldn't really stand other people tooting their own trumpets right in front of him, so he changed the additional label to this person as 'Unassuming Gao Tianyang'.

At that moment, Unassuming Gao Tianyang sent him a voice message.

Sheng Wang opened it by accident, and howling laughter came bursting from his phone. Both Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou turned to look at him.

The heck.

He hurriedly muffled it, switched away from the voice message and changed to text.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA I saw the pictures, Xi-ge sent them to me, hold on I'll send them to you.

The next second, Sheng Wang's screen was taken over by a disgraceful picture.

The two hooligans were hugging their heads as they squatted in a corner of 'In Those Years' BBQ shop, in a wimpy state of being all pissed off and yet too cowardly to fight back. This picture was likely taken by Zhao Xi, he took the pictures from north south east west, 360 degrees, fully presenting their miserable state.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: Sheng-ge look at the faces, it's the two idiots who ambushed you right

Canned: I don't know the faces

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: …….

Canned: Looks like it from the hair though

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: Fk

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: Why did you still take a huge breath to say it, idc, I'm laughing at them today!!!

Sheng Wang actually felt especially good, but he didn't care to laugh with Gao Tianyang. He was thinking how there wasn't such a coincidence

in this world, those two idiots sabotaged him in the morning, and got hit by karma by night.

He suspected that this had to do with Jiang Tian, but he had no proof.

“What were you talking about?” Sheng Mingyang opened a can of drinks for him, “One moment you’re laughing and the next you’re serious.”

Ever since Sheng Wang entered Fuzhong he had never eaten his dinner at home, the only time was the day he first met Jiang Tian. It ended badly and he even starved for the whole night.

The meal today was the first dinner truly shared together. Sheng Wang, Sheng Mingyang, Jiang Ou were all seated, waiting for Jiang Tian.

After the chemistry paper, Jiang Tian was called away by an unfamiliar looking teacher. People say that that teacher was part of the school’s admin team, the school internet was handled by him and Jiang Tian. Every time there was any problem, he would call Jiang Tian over.

Before Jiang Tian left he did let Sheng Wang know, saying that he would be going home slightly late, no need to wait for him for dinner. But Sheng Mingyang was insistent — those two kids had agreed to have dinner as a table of four for the first time, why would they ever start eating before everyone arrived.

For this period of time Sheng Mingyang was always on a business trip. He didn’t actually understand why the relationship between Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian warmed up, still, this didn’t get in the way of his happiness either, the excitement was clear on his face. It also manifested in how while he usually didn’t look at Sheng Wang’s phone on his own accord, he didn’t notice today, and he huddled closer to take a look.

It’s been ages since Sheng Wang was this close with his dad, was it a couple of years or three to five? He could no longer tell.

He wasn’t the healthiest as a kid, he was bones all over and barely weighed a thing. Sheng Mingyang often lifted him over his head, letting him ride on his neck, telling Sheng Wang’s mom, “Did we get the wrong kid? Even your dad’s cat is heavier than him, if they start fighting, Wang-zai might not even win.”

And then Sheng Wang would pull at his ears, he always feigned pain and went ow ow ow.

He was busy and also careless, when he played with Sheng Wang there were often bumps and bruises. Yet, every time he came back from a business trip, Sheng Wang would bring him his giant slippers, and squat at the entrance hall like a cat, waiting for him to put it on and come in.

This closeness lasted until Sheng Wang was 10, those two years they sort of lived like they only have each other. When Sheng Wang felt upset on the occasions he dreamt of his mom, he would hug his blanket and squeeze into the same bed as Sheng Mingyang in the middle of the night, as though having someone next to him would make him feel a little better.

And later on…...Maybe it was because it was puberty, or maybe it was because Sheng Mingyang got busier, that form of closeness became difficult to maintain.

Sheng Wang would still be startled awake in the middle of the night, but as he opened the door to the bedroom next to his, a blanket in his arms, he no longer found anyone he could squeeze with. The houses he lived in

became bigger and bigger. He wandered from upstairs to downstairs. He drank water, he ate food, he couch surfed, he played his games. In the end he would fall asleep on the couch, curling up into a ball all by himself.

Once it's been long enough, he no longer needs to be close to anyone.

He started marking out boundaries at a frequent rate — Don't come upstairs if it's nothing, don't knock on the door if it's not important. Better not to get too involved over trifle matters too. He rarely threw a tantrum as that was really unseemly, but for many things one could feel his displeasure even without throwing one.

Therefore, a gap grew between the father and son from who knows when. Some people thought that this was called being 'open-minded', but Sheng Wang understood what was between him and Sheng Mingyang was 'politeness'.

Just like all he needed to do was to look up, and Sheng Mingyang would retract his gaze from his phone screen, smiling it off as he said, "Aiya, sorry, dad's so happy that he forgot himself, didn't mean to peek on purpose."

Sheng Wang didn't lock his phone screen. The chat interface between him and Gao Tianyang was right there, all up for his dad to see, but Sheng Mingyang didn't lean over anymore.

"This one's a Class A classmate?" Sheng Mingyang casually asked.

"Mm." Sheng Wang didn't look up either, his thumbs flew as he typed in the chat.

The roaring laughter from Gao Tianyang that leaked out was enough to demonstrate that they were on very good terms. Sheng Mingyang was gratified as he said to Jiang Ou, “This kid is quite awesome in this aspect, he’s quick to adapt no matter where he goes, and a few days is enough for him to make many friends.”

Sheng Wang’s fingers paused, as if he was thinking of something. Still, he soon quickly typed again, and tapped on ‘send’.

Canned: Did Xi-ge say how they were caught

Canned: Isn’t this too coincidental, was someone helping

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: I was just chatting with Xi-ge, he didn’t know that these two hooligans sabotaged you this morning, he was even quite shocked when I told him, it’s probably a coincidence

As he spoke he even sent a screenshot of a conversation. In the screenshot, Zhao Xi behaved as if he wasn’t older than them by more than ten years, and sent several memes in a row to express shock.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: See this yet, this is called justice sent from the heaven

……

Sheng Wang scrolled through the chat, his attention was caught by a certain thing all of a sudden.

He opened the picture containing the two hooligans once again. One of the pictures captured the shoes of the surrounding spectators, both near

and far. The one furthest away was standing behind a certain table, nearly out of the picture, if he paid any less attention he wouldn’t catch it at all.

Sheng Wang abruptly felt that the colour scheme of the shoes was a little familiar. He zoomed in on the picture, and could finally ascertain that it wasn’t just familiar, he really did see it before. It was right in the shoe cabinet in the entrance hall.

Sheng Wang stood up and went to the living room without a second word.

Sheng Mingyang let out an ‘Eh’, and followed up, “Is there something wrong, you’re not eating anymore?”

“I’m eating.” Sheng Wang turned into the entrance hall without a single look back, “These slippers aren’t comfortable, I’m changing it.”

Considering how picky he usually was, Sheng Mingyang wasn’t baffled by the sudden action of changing his slippers.

Sheng Wang opened up the shoes cabinet. Just as expected, the pair of shoes in the picture wasn’t there, they were worn by a certain someone today.

Just as he was zoning out while staring at that empty slot, the beeping sound of a passcode being keyed in a door away was heard. Sheng Wang lightly froze, and instantly came back to himself.

His phone vibrated. He looked down at it, Gao Tianyang was still forming phrases with the word ‘heaven’. He pursed his lips as he hurriedly typed.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: The heaven has eyes

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: Heaven’s nets have wide meshes and one can never escape

Canned: brb

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: k, something’s up?

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: Mm

Canned: Heaven just came in

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: ?????

t/n: Gao Tianyang’s phrases: ‘The heaven has eyes’ → the guilty won’t get away, ‘heaven’s net has wide meshes, but nothing escapes from it’ → can’t run from the long arms of the law, all □□s containing the word for heaven. BTW heaven here is more complex in cn.

Jiang Tian didn’t expect anybody to be standing at the entrance hall, when he entered he nearly ran right into Sheng Wang’s face.

“Why are you standing here?” He came to an abrupt halt, and frowned as he asked.

Sheng Wang opened his mouth but before he spoke, he sneaked a glance behind.

Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou were joking around and chatting. The dining hall was far from the entrance hall. It was barely night, far from

being dead quiet yet. They didn't catch the sound of Jiang Tian opening the doors.

Sheng Wang unintentionally lowered his voice, "Have you heard about the two hooligans getting arrested?

Jiang Tian raised his phone, "Gao Tianyang has been giving me a live report."

The loudspeaker truly lived up to his name,

"He told me too," Sheng Wang stared at his pupils that turned into a light colour from the lamp at the door reflecting into it, "were you the one who found them?"

Jiang Tian half squatted to switch into slippers, "What do you mean if I found them?"

"The two idiots who sabotaged me," Sheng Wang said, "were you the one who found them?"

Jiang Tian's gaze tilted up before it lowered again to continue untying his shoes. "Where would I find the time."

"You didn't go to the BBQ shop?" Sheng Wang asked again.

"No." Jiang Tian was clear cut in his answers, "Just came out from the com lab."

Sheng Wang said an 'oh', and silently zoomed in on a picture. He bent over, propping himself against his knees, and presented the phone screen directly in front of Jiang Tian, asking, "Zhao Xi sent Gao Tianyang

the pictures, and Gao Tianyang sent them to me too. I think that this pair of shoes is quite cool, won't you take a look?"

The moment Jiang Tian looked, he couldn't untie his shoelaces anymore.

He let go of the shoelaces, looked aside and sighed with much speechlessness. He then straightened up, and faced Sheng Wang with his eyes heavy, generally having the air of 'as long as I don't want to talk not even the whole world can make me talk'.

Sheng Wang suddenly wanted to laugh very much.

His first impression towards Jiang Tian was B-king, later on it was cold and aloof and disliked talking. Now, he felt that though he was cool he was really a little amusing.

Sheng Wang stifled his laughter as he stood off against him for several seconds. After shooting a glance at the dining hall, he straightened up, hooked his arm around Jiang Tian's neck and dragged him outside.

"Tell me again, was it you who found them?" Once they're out, Sheng Wang's voice wasn't as soft as before.

Jiang Tian was a little taller than him, when he was hooked like this he could only slightly bend over and bow his head. His eyes were looking down, and saw Sheng Wang pointing at him, laughter evident in the eyes that were crescent with a smile.

"Let go first." Jiang Tian was stiff.

“No way.” Sheng Wang’s was super gutsy, as if he was certain that the other person wouldn’t get pissed off, “Are you spilling or nah? If you’re not we’re just going to wait this out to death right here.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian was all headaches, after a long while later he awkwardly tossed out a line, “Xi Le caught the footage, the friend that Zhao Xi is running the BBQ shop with happens to know a lot of people, I just sent the footage while I’m at it.”

“I just knew it.” Sheng Wang looked like he had all his questions answered.

Jiang Tian was thrown off. He actually didn’t quite understand why Sheng Wang was so certain that he “knew it”, after all many people who were supposed to be closer to him would rarely say to him “I just knew it”.

“I should change your personal remark.” Sheng Wang finally released him, he waved as he said, “To do good deeds anonymously, I should change your personal remark to Living Lei Feng of the Present Era.”

t/n: Living Lei Feng origins.

Jiang Tian stretched around while holding his hand to his neck, and coldly said, “You dare.”

“What wouldn’t I dare, let’s leave and go have dinner.” As Sheng Wang spoke he dug out his phone, and started typing as he ducked inside the house.

Jiang Tian followed behind him, and coud properly finish changing his shoes at last.

His phone suddenly vibrated twice. Jiang Tian took it out, and saw two additional new messages, all coming from the person ahead of him walking towards the dining hall.

Canned: Thanks.

Canned: Felt especially good watching them get beaten up, really.

After Jiang Tian thought for a bit, he wanted to reply: Can also check the security camera in the school corridor, can see if it was Zhai Tao who’s behind this.

But this hasn’t been done, there weren’t any results yet either. If he told too early it made him seem like he was asking for recognition or something. Jiang Tian swept a glance at the entire line and felt a little childish, he pressed backspace and cleared the input box.

Although the WeChat messages in the chat were solely from Sheng Wang for the day, Jiang Tian treasured his words like gold as per normal, Sheng Wang still felt a change.

He almost could understand some things from that cold face of Jiang Tian’s. Just like he left quite a few eyes in the bushes in a game, and suddenly opened Jiang Tian POV.

Chapter 028 - Crash And Burn

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Canned: You Got Old Man Ding To Take Care Of My Lunch?

Fuzhong students had very complicated feelings towards the monthly test. On one hand, the exam itself was more painful than death, but on the other, as long as they gritted their teeth and endured past it, they would get two days for a monthly break.

Ever since Sheng Wang added Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui, Sheng Wang's WeChat main interface was filled with an additional bunch of group chats, with group chats like [Mingli Giant Melting Pot], the chat for Fuzhong year twos, [Most A on Earth](the chat with no teachers), Year 2 Class A One Big Family (hello teacher), as where as all sorts of three to six people tiny groups.

Once the monthly break started, the WeChat group with the teachers remained dead quiet at the bottom of the screen, the groups without teachers exploded otherwise. No matter when he checked it was always 999+ messages.

Sheng Wang put every chat on 'Do Not Disturb', but he could not prevent others from tagging him.

The chattiest one was the Melting Pot chat, there were all sorts of people from all classes, any topic of conversation could and would start and continue. As the social butterfly of Class A, Gao Tianyang was especially active in this chat. Song Sirui, Qi Jiahao and Little Chilli were determined to not be outdone either.

Sheng Wang almost thought that Gao Tianyang had announced the news about the hooligans to the people in the giant group chat, when he opened it up then he raised that they were discussing about the monthly break.

Two students with the prefix Class 9 in front of their names were complaining that the homework the teachers assigned for them was totally impossible to be completed within two days. The other classes also echoed the same sentiments one after another. Only Gao Tianyang came out to pull aggro, and said: “Old He and the rest decided to spare us this time, they didn’t assign anything at all,” causing the million people to collectively spit and curse.

Then Qi Jiahao popped up, saying: I’m envious.

Class 7 - Xue Qian: Aren’t you Class A too what are you even envious for?

Class A - Qi Jiahao: I don’t have 2 days of break, only 1.5

Class A - Gao Tianyang: The few of them have to participate in the English Olympiad on Tuesday afternoon

Class 9 - Chen Di: What the, the troubles of top students

Class A - Qi Jiahao: I was looking forward to the monthly break so much, half a day is gone just like this……

When Sheng Wang scrolled to here he couldn’t hold it in, he kinda wanted to laugh. Their class rep’s every line was filled with ‘please shower me in praises’, after he said that, the group chat was filled with a long

awkward silence. The next time someone spoke, the message even indicated the time above.

Class 7 - Xue Qian: @Boom, who else is participating?

Class A - Gao Tianyang: @Canned @. @Rainbow Koi, four from our class. Other than Old Qi there are also Sheng-ge, Tian-ge, and our class monitor Little Carp.

Class A - Qi Jiahao: Jing-jie let me see the participants list the other day, there's also Class B's He Shu and Class 9's Ma Shi.

Class 7 - Xue Qian: Both Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian are going?

Class A - Qi Jiahao: [Sweats]

Class 7 - Xue Qian: Suddenly regretting not studying hard for English.

Class 7 - Gong Xin Yue: Suddenly regretting not studying hard for English.

Class 8 - Li Jue: Suddenly regretting not studying hard for English.

……

t/n: These names are girls' names/names associated with girls

The entire chat was filled with more than a hundred of this like they were spamming.

Gao Tianyang couldn't stand it anymore. He popped up to copy paste the same message, and then tagged Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian once more, stating "If I studied hard for English, maybe I would have gotten this many girls to line up for me too."

With him starting, he caused the guys to start spamming yet again, and so Sheng Wang was tagged many times over.

At this moment he was curled up in Jiang Tian’s room and going through Jing-jie’s Olympiad papers, their phones both vibrated at the same time.

After he got a rough look through the chat records, he shook the hand that was numb from all the vibration and said, “Where did your Fuzhong find this many repeaters from?”

“Don’t know.” Jiang Tian swept a look at the screen, he planned to ignore those people.

Sheng Wang did not plan to reply either, but Qi Jiahao suddenly tagged him, Jiang Tian and the class monitor Li Yu and asked: Oh yeah, how are you guys getting there the day after tomorrow?

The English Olympiad is held in different locations every year, last year it was Fuzhong by chance, this year it isn’t here anymore. Instead, it would be held at Erzhong, that school was miles and miles away from the city area, with its back facing a pond full of reeds, and was well known for being desolate.

This time, class monitor Li Yu finally spoke.

Class A - Li Yu: I’m ok with anything, let’s go together?

After speaking she also tagged Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian.

Li Yu was quite nice, Sheng Wang didn’t have the heart to leave her with an awkward silence. Therefore, he quit playing dead and nudged Jiang Tian. “The class monitor’s asking how we are getting to Erzhong the day after.”

“I have something on with Beyond Parasol Trees in the morning, after I eat I’ll take the train directly from there.” Jiang Tian replied.

Sheng Wang initially wanted to get Uncle Xiao-Chen to send them both, after hearing what Jiang Tian said he quickly changed his mind.

“What’s that station called again?” Sheng Wang opened the map app.

Jiang Tian’s gaze slightly shifted. He looked up from the paper, glimpsed at Sheng Wang’s screen and asked, “Why are you asking this?”

“I’m going with you, can’t I.” Sheng Wang said.

His thumb hovered over the keyboard as he waited for the other person to report the name of the station. Jiang Tian was slightly stunned for a moment. “It’s just called Beyond Parasol Trees.”

Sheng Wang soon picked the right location on the map, when he turned away he discovered that Jiang Tian’s gaze was still on him.

“What are you looking at?” Sheng Wang snapped his fingers at him.

Jiang Tian’s line of sight shifted back to the paper. He twirled the pen for two rounds before looking again up, “Have you taken the train before?”

Sheng Wang: ……

Who are you looking down on?

He lifted his foot and aimed at Jiang Tian, “Giving you a chance, say it again.”

Jiang Tian pointed at his phone with the pen. “Reply your message first.”

“Oh yeah, I nearly forgot from being too pissed at you.” Sheng Wang fished over his phone, and tagged Li Yu: I’m taking the train.

Class A - Li Yu: Okok sure.

Class A - Qi Jiahao: @. How about you, Tian-ge? Shall we meet in school before going together?

“He’s asking you.” Sheng Wang said as he held the phone.

‘I don’t want to talk’ was written all over Jiang Tian’s face. “Just help me reply.”

“Sure.”

Therefore, not even past five seconds of being Qi Jiahao tagging Jiang Tian, Class A - Sheng Wang popped up with a ding: He’s taking the train too.

After Sheng Wang replied he tossed his phone aside and continued studying, not knowing that after he spoke the thousand-strong group chat was silent for ages, followed by a bunch of girls all starting to spam question marks in unison.

*

They did not skimp out on doing questions over the monthly break, the only good thing was that they could sleep until they naturally awakened. However, Jiang Tian did not wake up too late, after all the biological clock shaped over a long period of time would not simply be stopped within a couple of days.

He woke up once before it was even 6am. He could vaguely hear the sound of washing up from the bathroom next door over, the sound of the glass cup being settled on the ceramic shelf, the light buzz of the electric toothbrush.

If that person lazed around for only an extra 10 minutes, it was already considered not bad for him. Waking up this early on a holiday? No way, he definitely got the day wrong.

Jiang Tian lazily guessed in his drowsiness.

His eyes remained shut, the fingers resting at the back of his head grabbed at his hair before letting go again, like he did a partial stretch. Next, he heard a bunch of a burst of chaos, Sheng Wang switched off the source of water noises, and indistinctly swore “shit”.

The Adam's apple of the boy curled up on his side on the bed slightly moved up and down, a low noise coming from the bottom of his throat. It was hard to tell if he was laughing or jeering.

Soon, the cup next door over clanged, bearing the grumpiness and the dissatisfaction of its owner. The half-dead shuffling noise of slippers travelled from the bathroom back to the bed. He probably went back to sleep, afterwards there wasn't any sign of movement.

Jiang Tian actually did not have the habit of sleeping in.

No matter what time he woke up in the morning, he always opened his eyes and got out of the bed within a few minutes. Despite his face looking as if he was facing a snowstorm when he was washing up and getting dressed, his movements were always swift and clean.

Today, however, he slept again unprecedentedly.

When he woke up for the second time, the sun was already high up in the sky. The ray of light shone in through the gap between the curtains, hurting his eyes when he looked at it. The time displayed on his phone was 8:36, he woke up three hours later than usual.

This was the first rare occasion he got a sleep in in years.

Next door was completely peaceful, he clearly was still sleeping in. Jiang Tian briefly washed up, kept the paper, grabbed his bag, and went downstairs.

As compared to upstairs, downstairs was in a state of soundless bustle.

The breakfast was already prepared, Auntie Sun was sweeping the living room. Jiang Ou wasn’t used to standing around while other people worked, so she just followed behind Auntie Sun at a distance that was neither near nor far. Sometimes she would tidy up the remote on the coffee table, sometimes she would pick up the withered leaves that fell from the flower vase.

Sheng Mingyang however was on a phone call outside the glass door on the first floor.

Jiang Tian paused in his steps on the stairs. He tugged at his bag, and silently watched this entire scene with his eyes downcasted.

It was a sort of a cruel joke, he seriously spotted some of the ease and comfort usually present in other normal families, this was something he had never witnessed for the past ten and more years.

As though there was a wooden frame framing these three people, when he walked in, the painting would be ruined.

Jiang Ou spotted him first, she waved at him. “Come down for breakfast, there’s a small tray of steamed crystal shumai today.”

“Not eating anymore.” Jiang Tian said as he hurried downstairs, “Got things to do in school, I’m running late.”

“You shouldn’t go hungry even when you’re running late.” Jiang Ou couldn’t convince him otherwise, so she pulled out a piece of food safe plastic bag, picked four shumai dumplings from the still hot steaming basket, and placed the bag into Jiang Tian’s school bag. “There’s still four left for Xiao-Wang.”

Upon hearing that Jiang Tian shot a glance upstairs. He suddenly realised that it wasn’t just him who was outside the painting just now.

Of course nothing was up with school.

Jiang Tian walked past the north gate of Fuzhong, and ducked into the residential area sitting right outside of school. He first went to look for Zhao Xi in Block 6, asking about recent developments in regards to the two hooligans, got two shumai stolen by Zhao Xi, and then went around to Beyond Parasol Trees outside the west gate, walking into Old Man Ding’s courtyard.

Once a person reached old age, there were much less activities they could do for entertainment. Old Man Ding never did like to chit chat with other people by the neighbourhood flower garden, his only joy was found in watching television. Military affairs, agricultural affairs, and the news. It's been like this for the past several decades, just these three.

Last night, his darling television suddenly stopped working, he couldn't switch it on no matter what. The old man abruptly felt like the sky had just caved in, he clumsily made a call to Jiang Tian with an elderly phone.

Jiang Tian promised to come fix it for him this morning.

In Gao Tianyang's words, the old man was incredibly narrow minded, and incredibly bad tempered too. He was especially guarded, the entire world to him was dubious as hell, only Jiang Tian was sensible and reliable.

"Eaten breakfast?" Jiang Tian put down his bag.

"The hell with breakfast, I'm not in the mood to cook." Old Man Ding stared at the television resentfully.

Jiang Tian gave the last two shumai to him. "Give the mute one."

The old man obediently went to split it equally with his opposite door neighbour, and soon came back with a shumai in his mouth. He asked, "How did the television spoil just like this! Know how to fix it?"

Jiang Tian internally said, how would I know.

He had never fixed a tv before, it was just that when he received Old Man Ding's panicked call, he honestly couldn't make himself say the words "Don't know".

The old man was lonely for his whole life, Jiang Tian was the only one who ever only stayed, he basically treated him like his own flesh and blood grandson. Therefore he had to know how to, even if he didn't know he still had to know. As such, he checked the manual on how to fix the tv for the whole night before this, summarised quite a few methods, and planned to try them out today.

Unfortunately, he didn't manage to say anything pleasant to the ear when prompted. The old man asked if he could fix it, his reply of "Up to fate" earned him a light slap from him.

Fortunately however, his efforts did not go to waste. His luck was pretty decent, after struggling for half an hour, the television quickly flashed after being connected to the electric outlet, and the screen started working once more.

Old Man Ding's grin nearly broke his face, he bluntly praised, "Ay our Xiao-Tian is still the most capable one after all! Knows everything!"

With the television coming back to life, the old man also found the motivation to cook. He was busy with cooking from 10am to 11.30am, and awarded the key player with five dishes and a soup.

The key player took a quick glimpse at the dishes. The green pepper was julienned, the potato was stewed soft and flavourful, the meat consisted of mostly ribs, it was neither too fatty or too lean, and there were even crunchy bones.

After two mouths, he suddenly began a conversation out of nowhere. "I have to leave at 12.10pm."

“So rush?” The old man took the bait hook line and sinker, he asked in accordance.

Jiang Tian said, “There’s a competition this afternoon, I agreed to meet with someone to take the train here.”

“Oh--” Old Man Ding found it novel. After all, he rarely saw him together with people. other than Gao Tianyang that up to no good, mischievous brat. Old Man Ding asked, “With who?”

“The freeloader from last time.”

Old Man Ding said, annoyed, “Oh, Xiao-Wang! How is that freeloading, kid’s so obedient and well-behaved, he’s so likeable. Why didn’t he come again later, he hated my cooking?”

“No,” Jiang Tian said, “He thought the canteen food is worse than yours.”

“What do you mean worse than mine.” Old Man Ding argued, displeased, “So you’re saying he thinks my cooking is great?”

The elderly are weak against praises. You praise that his food is good, and he would want nothing more than to treat the entire world to a meal.

Just as expected, Old Man Ding said, “Then why didn’t you bring him here?”

Jiang Tian said, bewildered, “You didn’t ask me to.”

Old Man Ding tsked, and gave him another clap. “Kid’s some state banquet’s guest of honour or what, I have to be the one inviting him? If I didn’t tell you to you wouldn’t? Do you make friends by being like this in school? To think back then we—”

“Whatever, I’m not going on anymore. You kids don’t like it when old people nag at you.” Old Man Ding curled his lips. “Tell him, he can come here when the canteen’s food is bad, he gets to order and it’s definitely filling!”

Jiang Tian lowered his eyes as he swallowed his food. He dug out his phone and said, “Say that again.”

He tapped open Sheng Wang’s WeChat, and switched to voice message mode. He held the button down as he moved the phone next to Old Man Ding’s mouth, waiting for him to speak.

“Why are you making me say this again?” Old Man Ding played a wild card, he asked that instead.

“.....”

Jiang Tian released the button without realising, and the recorded voice message whooshed out.

Great, the entire segment collapsed.

At this point Old Man Ding finally caught on, he straight away went to grab Jiang Tian’s phone, fiddled around, and clumsily held the button down as he yelled: “Uh that Xiao-Wang! Don’t eat at the canteen anymore,

you can come here for lunch from now onwards, want to eat anything just say it, grandpa will make it all for you!”

After he spoke he let go, and the second message also whooshed out.

Jiang Tian couldn’t retract the message at all, he could only start releasing cold air on his own.

He thought that he must have committed many sins in his past life, that’s why he attracted a bunch of monsters specifically out to get in his way.

Merely a few seconds later, Sheng Wang replied.

Canned: You got old man Ding to take care of my lunch?

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Whatever, he doesn't care anymore.

Chapter 029 - Grades

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A list of some changes made in TL:

Changing School Building Names To Pinyin

□□□ → Sensibility Block → Mingli Block

□□□ → Application Block → Duxing Block

Changing of Other Terms:

Three Good of the City → Tri-Quality Students of the City

Form teacher → homeroom teacher

Adding soon:

A character + location page for reference (because god knows I'm losing track of my choices lmao)

Edits to the previous parts of the TL to reflect these changes

With that.....[hits u with a quadruple update combo] what's up

In The Eyes Of The Other People In The Exam Venue, His Silhouette Was ‘Arrogance’ In Full Capital Letters.

During the monthly break, Fuzhong welcomed its rare peace and quiet.

Li Yu stood at the first floor of Duxing Block as she waited. Qi Jiahao came in from outside, a phone in his hand, and said, “Jing-jie will arrive soon.”

He Shu of Class B and Ma Shi of Class 9 nodded in apprehension. “You also have Teacher Yang’s number?”

“Mn, for sure. Sometimes she would get me to help her grade the papers, transcribe the scores and stuff. It’s more convenient to be in contact.” Qi Jiahao said proudly.

Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang chose to fly solo, but the few of them still decided to gather in school first as Qi Jiahao said that he contacted Yang Jing, who would be doing some pre-competition coaching.

Soon enough, Yang Jing appeared with a plastic bag in her hand. She opened up the bag and said, “Passed by the convenience store and got you guys some drinks. One can for each person.”

A Yang Jing outside of class still had an intimidating aura, everyone was overwhelmed by her show of favour, and accepted the rewards in

trepidation and reverence. They followed behind her like ducklings.

"Teacher, why are you at Duxing Block today?" Qi Jiahao was the only one who was more daring, he even had the guts to start chatting with her on his own accord.

"Marking scripts, duh." Yang Jing lifted her chin at the staircase. "The exam for this monthly test is a combined effort between four schools, we are grading each other's papers. I've been cooped up here for two days marking Yizhong's scripts."

Student affair's Dean Xu entered the block as they chatted. Yang Jing shot a brief glance at him, and increased her volume on purpose: "You guys are really treating this quite seriously, you know to talk to me before the competition. Unlike some higher ups, who only know to care about math, physics and chemistry. Is English not a main subject? Our Olympiads are treated with barely any care."

Things like taking only one week to prepare for a competition will never happen for math, physics and chemistry Olympiads. Class A of Fuzhong typically prepared and entered everyone into these competitions, and would get into a full swing as they went along. In comparison, affairs like English, composition, biology and computing were much more quiet.

The utilitarian higher up was ragged on out of the blue, he could only sheepishly say: "Ay, it's about the cost-performance ratio. Students have limited energy after all, we have to consider the cost-performance ratio. As long as they clinch a provincial level bronze award and above for math-physics-chemistry, they could already get an admission ticket for advance admissions. What about English then?"

Yang Jing hmphed, and refused to back down. “For our province, the top 40 will do too.”

“Please count how many top 40 came out within these few years.”

Within the city, each key school has their own strengths and weaknesses. Fuzhong’s niche was in math and physics. As for English…...the top few were essentially reserved by Yizhong every Olympiad, all the other schools basically couldn’t squeeze in at all.

(t/n: Yizhong: □□, First High School)

“You all don’t place much importance on it, whose fault is it?” Yang Jing said.

“Ok ok ok.” Big Mouth Xu raised both his hands in surrender, and then bowed to motion her to proceed. “Go mark your scripts, comrade Xiao-Yang.”

Yang Jing led four students upstairs and entered the grading office. English teachers from each level were sparsely spreaded throughout the table, scripts with their names sealed away laid beside their hands on the table.

Qi Jiahao nosed around, wanting to get a sneak peak at how grading was going.

“Quit looking.” Yang Jing brought them to the corner, far away from the grading table. “Those aren’t your scripts anyway, no point looking at them.”

“Teacher, who’s marking our scripts?” Li Yu asked.

“Nan Gao I think.” Yang Jing said with much schadenfreude, “They are strict with their grading and harsh in deducting marks, you guys are in for a ride.”

“.....”

Li Yu internally said, *might as well don’t ask, after asking their state of mind crumbled.*

(t/n: Nan Gao is short for Short for South High Schooll)

The male teacher at the side interrupted, “They’re harsh, but we’re harsh too. We’re harsh, but Yizhong wouldn’t let up either. One sabotages the other, everyone can cry together.”

No matter what kind of mindset this bunch of teachers had, the four students’ faces all turned green either way at this.

“In any case, the score for this English exam isn’t getting too high anywhere. The test is difficult, and the marking is strict.” Yang Jing turned to reply to him. “I was on the phone with that Yang Ziwen from Nan High yesterday, he said that there are very few who scored over 100 marks for this English exam, there’s only like 2-3 of them who scored 110 and above. Apparently there’s one they could tell has a decent foundation in English, but everything came crashing down at the MCQs. The name is all sealed up, so they don’t know who it was either.”

That male teacher gave a hoarse laugh. “Probably your class’ Sheng Wang, he missed listening compre.”

Yang Jing sighed. “I get pissed whenever I think about this. What was that brat even thinking.”

“Right, where’s said brat?” She interrogated Qi Jiahao, “Why isn’t he here? He’s scared I’ll scold him?”

Qi Jiahao was caught by surprise by that question, and nearly jumped out of his skin. He squeezed out, “We tried to get him to come yesterday, he said he’s not coming.”

Yang Jing’s eyes bulged. “That kid’s getting full of himself or?”

Li Yu gave Qi Jiahao a quick side eye, and hurriedly explained: “Teacher, we didn’t mention that we’re looking for you yesterday. Sheng Wang didn’t know, he said he will take the metro there, so did Jiang Tian.”

“Oh, that’s fine then,” Yang Jing was like Empress Dowager, “when you see him this afternoon remember to pass the message, tell him that the grades for the monthly test are out tomorrow, get him to behave himself, I’ll speak with him at any moment.”

(t/n: Original term here was □□□□□, “to be like a queen mother/the emperor’s mother”, the wording didn’t suggest that it was precisely empress dowager, but □□□ was a common enough nickname that I opted to use this here. #funfacts)

The people did not dare to disobey her orders, they nodded obediently.

“Tell him after the competition, I don’t want his mood to get affected before that.” Yang Jing said.

It was supposed to be pre-competition coaching, but she didn't actually go through the questions, rather, she went through what to look out for.

Yang Jing appeared to be dominant and overbearing, but she actually took note of each and every students' strengths and weaknesses. She told Li Yu to keep calm and keep track of the time, Qi Jiahao to treat this with a normal mindset, not get too caught up over frivolous matters, and learn to know when to give up on questions.

Around 12pm, the group of four left Duxing block, and walked to the nearest train station, Beyond Parasol Trees.

As they walked out of the west gate and through the residential zone, Li Yu suddenly let out an "eh" and said, "Isn't that Jiang Tian?"

"Where?"

They followed the direction of her voice, and saw a tall boy standing next to the metro entrance, wearing a simple white T-shirt, continuously attracting the eyes of various passerbys.

He tugged at the bag strap with one hand and his head was lowered as he fiddled around on his phone, paying zero mind to the attention he was receiving.

"Wasn't he planning to take the metro?" He Shu asked a dumb question.

"Yeah," Li Yu pointed at the sign at the side, "isn't this the metro?"

"....."

“Sure, after all that fuss turns out he’s boarding from here too. Why didn’t he go with us then.”

Ma Shi was also one of the girls who would blush upon seeing Jiang Tian. She glanced over there as she said, “Since when did you see him buddying up with anyone?”

Qi Jiahao said, “He’s a boy, he wouldn’t be like you all, he doesn’t need to find someone to accompany him even just for a trip to the bathroom.”

After he said that he was immediately slapped in the face——another familiar figure came in from the street corner.

He was also wearing a loose fitting T-shirt with short sleeves, a gym bag slung across one shoulder. The black bag with a logo written in alphabets slung from his left shoulder to the right side of his waist, the image of a fresh and handsome young man.

“Hey, Sheng Wang!” Ma Shi called again, and turned around to sneakily say to Li Yu, “It’s so worth it no matter if we get a prize or not this time, this is truly a feast for good-looks lovers.”

(Original internet slang here: □□, “dogs attracted solely by physical attractiveness”, often use in self mockery, that’s the rough meaning.)

As they waited for the red light at this end, they watched Sheng Wang weave through the crowd to go behind Jiang Tian.

He reached out to snap his fingers at Jiang Tian’s left ear, and then speedily dodged to his right. Unexpectedly, Jiang Tian refused to play into

his hands, and turned to the right straightaway, directly catching him in the act.

Judging by his mouth movement, Sheng Wang said a “Fuck.”

Jiang Tian placed his phone in his pocket. After the two of them exchanged a few words, they walked towards the entrance of the metro.

The traffic light for the sidewalk turned green, Qi Jiahao along with three other people hurriedly chased over.

*

When Sheng Wang was going through the security check, he heard someone calling his name. He turned around in surprise, and saw the students sprinting over.

“Eh? You guys are here too?”

“Yeah, we came over from the school, and happened to see the two of you here too.” Qi Jiahao said.

“You guys really did gather in school?” Sheng Wang thought that he was kinda like a tour guide, it was a little funny.

“Jing-jie summoned us to do pre-competition coaching,” Qi Jiahao said, “she even asked about you, asking if you’re hiding from her.”

“Why would I hide from her?” Sheng Wang asked blankly.

Qi Jiahao laughed dryly: “That……”

Sheng Wang then recalled the miserable matter of this monthly exam. He let out a very soft “Ah”, and said: “I nearly forgot I flunked it.”

Jiang Tian’s brows briefly furrowed.

He probably really disliked having too many people around, or maybe he simply did not feel like chatting at all. He dug out his phone and started scrolling through it again.

Yet, Qi Jiahao opened his mouth again: “Jing-jie said to not put your mind on the monthly exam, settle the Olympiad first, she’ll probably look for you for a chat tomorrow.

“Huh?” Sheng Wang asked, confusion evident on his face.

Li Yu hurried: “Tell him that after the competition!”

“Oh oh oh, sorry.” Qi Jiahao said, “Let’s not talk about this now, competition first.”

The conveyor belt at the security check slowly rolled out. Jiang Tian bent over, grabbed the bag and said to Sheng Wang, “Let’s go.”

Upon saying that he went straight ahead without any further notice, his expression as if he just ate a ton of salt. As long as you are human, you could tell he wasn’t feeling particularly pleased.

Sheng Wang was briefly dazed. When he discovered his bag was already taken away by him, he didn’t bother about other people and quickly chased after him.

After running a few steps he was shoulder to shoulder with Jiang Tian. He retrieved his bag from his hands, slung it behind his shoulder, and grumbled under his breath: “I have a question that has gone unanswered for a long time.”

Jiang Tian’s expression hadn’t phased out from ‘Freezing’, he lifted his eye a little lazily.

“The rep has been studying in Fuzhong for so long, are you sure he hasn’t been beaten up before?” His befuddlement was incredibly sincere, thus increasing the mockery in his question by several levels.

Jiang Tian’s expression finally started defrosting, he swept a neutral look behind him as he said, “If he continues being like this, soon.”

Sheng Wang gave two short chuckles, yet he soon turned stern: “Unacceptable, good students shouldn’t talk behind people’s back.”

Jiang Tian rolled his eyes at him, and increased his stride. Sheng Wang refused to lose, and increased his stride too.

The two of them soon arrived with the advantage of their long legs. Coincidentally, there was a train already waiting for them with doors wide open. They crossed over with a single step.

There weren’t particularly many passengers boarding from Beyond Parasol Trees in the monthly break, and so Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian sat on the empty seats.

He winked at Jiang Tian, and waved his phone with a little craftyness. He then casually opened up the Olympiad group chat of six made by Li Yu right in front of Jiang Tian, and keyed in a sentence at a speed that was neither too fast nor too slow.

Canned: Where are you guys, are you on the train yet?

And then tagged Qi Jiahao in all propriety.

“Childish.” Jiang Tian mercilessly commented, and the moment he turned away a corner of his lips briefly jerked.

Qi Jiahao and the rest just came down from the escalators, as they were prepared to run for it, they heard two beeps from the train doors, and so the doors closed right in their faces, the train hurtling past them.

Qi Jiahao: “.....”

He was a little unhappy. He replied in the chat, “You two were too fast, we didn’t manage to catch up. We’ll wait for the next one.”

Abou 30 minutes later, when they were only one stop away from Erzhong, the group chat buzzed with a new message.

(t/n: □□, --> Ezhong, Second High School)

Canned: The signal’s pretty bad in the metro, just saw the message.

Canned: We already left the station, we’ll wait at the exam venue.

These two messages were sent in quick succession, nobody could cut in at all.

Li Yu and the rest weren’t the epitome of happiness either, they grumbled at Qi Jiahao, “Told you to not say it before the exam! Look at how awkward it is now.”

“.....”

Qi Jiahao carved a ‘fuck’ in his heart.

He thought that Sheng Wang was a people pleaser with barely any temper, or the type to try to keep things harmonious on the surface no matter what. Who would have thought that he has his ways of letting everyone know he wasn’t particularly pleased, and you would not even be able to find a gap to argue right back.

(t/n: original term for people-pleaser here was, □□□ closer to “one who never tried to offend anybody”)

The English Olympiad ran a total of 2.5hours, which was basically just answering questions. Other than the slight increase in level of difficulty and the number of traps, to Sheng Wang, this was barely any different from the monthly exam.

His state of mind towards exams was always pretty decent, he already worked hard before the test, whatever the result was it was all up to fate.

Whether fate was stressed out at all he wouldn’t know, either way he wasn’t stressed.

The more difficult the language was, the more the number of questions, the more obvious his advantage in speed.

15 minutes before the exam ended, he put down his pen. For exams like this, he never got tied up about the answers. Past experience told him that as long as he was feeling conflicted, his first choice based on instincts has the highest rate of accuracy.

His so called checking of script was just a quick scan, as long as he didn’t make any low-level mistakes or miss out a question, it would be fine.

And so…...he handed in the script ahead of time under the stunned gazes from everyone, and waited outside as he fiddled around on his phone, leaning over the corridor railing.

In the eyes of the other people in the exam venue, his silhouette was ‘Arrogance’ in full capital letters.

The invigilator endured for a while before they couldn't hold it back anymore. They stuck their head out, and softly said, “Student.”

“Hm?” Sheng Wang turned around and politely asked, “Is there anything, teacher?”

“Don’t wait for people here, they will be taking a while more, you can’t loiter here.” The invigilator said.

Sheng Wang replied, “Um, I wouldn’t be staying here for long actually.”

As he spoke he shot a glance at the teacher’s desk, the invigilator was full of questions, and followed his gaze too……

And saw yet another one who handed in his script ahead of time.

Fine, whatever.

The invigilator said internally, *you can’t even stay put for 15 minutes, I’m going to see what kind of results you can get!*

Of course, Sheng Wang wouldn’t know what this teacher was internally mocking. He waited for Jiang Tian to come out with his bag, and the two of them left together.

In the eyes of the other examiness, that was remarkably ”swaggering away”!

The second day, the duo who “swaggered away” were both dragged by Yang Jing to her office for a face to face chat.

Other people’s chats flowed both ways, Madame Yang’s chat was a single sided series of scoldings from her side.

“Got too big for your britches, and now you’re acting cool in the exam venue, huh?” Yang Jing rapped the table. “Didn’t I warn again and again to try not to hand in ahead of time, to try to be more imperturbable? Didn’t I say this before, huh?”

Jiang Tian moved his lips: “Tried.”

Yang Jing: “.....”

It was the first time Sheng Wang witnessed how he conversed with teachers…...he was really damn good at it, he took only a single line to make the teacher explode from anger.

Jiang Tian was an incredibly proud person, the first time Sheng Wang met him he could already tell. In actuality, most teachers have great tolerance towards top students like him, they could smile for the entire day from his grades alone. Still, that did not get in the way from wanting to smack him in other times.

Sheng Wang hurriedly tried his best to salvage the situation, he lowered his head as he said: “We are sorry.”

Yang Jing: “.....”

She’s more pissed off than ever now.

By chance, He Jin walked into the office with the monthly exam’s scripts in hand. “Come, come, come, scripts fresh out of the oven. Claim it now and critique it ASAP.”

Yang Jing received the English scripts with a dark look on her face, as she flipped through it, she said, “Here, I want to see just exactly what did the two misbehaving people score for the monthly exam, especially you! Sheng Wang! Let me tell you I haven’t even approached you yet, you ——”

Before she finished speaking, she reached their scripts.

Jiang Tian scored 115, Sheng Wang danced at the edges, 110. He got 7 questions wrong for listening compre, and had 3 marks deducted for his essay, one of which was because of his poor handwriting.

Other than that, Class A had no other script that began with a 11.

As for the student who crumbled according to Yang Ziwen of Nan High, how unfortunately, it was the English rep himself.

For some unknown reason, he was totally out of it during the exam, more than 20 marks were deducted for multiple choice, and he only scored a 92 in the end.

Yang Jing stared at the scripts with her hands on her hips. She didn't know if she should laugh or rage first. After she remained frozen in a female demoness state for a good while, she didn't keep it up by herself anymore.

She looked at Jiang Tian who was neither servile nor overbearing, and Sheng Wang who pretended to apologise, and waved, "Scram, scram, scram! I'll settle this when the results of the competition comes out! Get out!"

"Aye!" Sheng Wang replied with a barely concealed laugh, and ran away as he pushed Jiang Tian along.

"Hold on!" Yang Jing called them again.

Sheng Wang was already out of the door, he stuck his head in again and said, "Your command?"

Yang Jing felt her stomach ache just at the look of him pretending to be obedient. She stifled herself for a while before she managed to say with a poker face, "Get Qi Jiahao to come over for a bit."

Chapter 30 - Shop's Closed

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He Said: Nothing Is Going Favourably Today.

Qi Jiahao did not return for a long time, even after the long break ended he remained nowhere to be seen.

After Li Yu attended the regular meeting for class monitors, she returned to the classroom with a notebook and a pen. Gao Tianyang, who was always on the lookout, called out from his seat: “Little Carp, what did they say at the meeting? Any good news?”

“Why are you so concerned over every little thing?” Song Sirui was seated right next to Li Yu. He himself was stretched over trying to take a look at Carp’s notebook, cutting remarks against Gao Tianyang still flowed out of his mouth nonetheless.

Li Yu had a good temperament, she really did report what was recorded on the notebook for Gao Tianyang’s benefit. “Something about residential stay, and the adjustment of night self-study when school officially reopens. Also, our class’ timetable will be slightly readjusted, Teacher He will probably brief us on that. The Tri-Quality Students of the City’s name list is also going up for submission too.”

Song Sirui aimed his words at Gao Tianyang as he said, “Either ways, none of your business.”

“Nah it’s my business! How could there be nothing.” Gao Tianyang jabbed his thumb in the direction of Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, “Tri-Quality Students of the City’s name list has been taken up by at least two out of the three of us here, I’m in charge of sharing the honour.”

Song Sirui was incredulous. “How can someone as shameless as you exist in this world?”

Just as Gao Tianyang was about to retort, he felt his thumb being pressed back down by someone.

The someone was Sheng Wang.

“Keep it, don’t point at random,” Sheng Wang said, “my future is still unclear.”

“How could it be,” Gao Tianyang was completely unaware, “don’t be modest, even though your English scores this time round may be a little tragic, your improvement has to be the largest between the weeklies and the monthlies, there’s zero room for doubt!”

Sheng Wang then realised that he had never spoken a single word about the condition Big Mouth Xu gave him, about improving by 50 places.

Just as he was about to explain, as well as casually mention how his English results was nothing to be sorry about either, Li Yu approached with two pieces of paper.

“Didn’t you ask about staying in school before?” She settled a piece of paper on Sheng Wang’s desk. “There, this is the application form, all you need to do is to fill in your student info.”

“Thanks.” Sheng Wang gave her a quick smile, lowered his head and started reading the form. He started spinning a pen out of habit, as if he was about to fill it up at any moment.

Immediately after two spins, Jiang Tian's low voice came from behind his ears: "You're staying in school?"

Sheng Wang suddenly felt a little guilty.

"Hm?" He denied out of instinct, "No, I just casually asked the class monitor last time."

Upon finishing his words he turned behind to look at Jiang Tian. Just like the last time he hid from Sheng Mingyang, he didn't know what he had to feel guilty about, he only desperately wanted to know what Jiang Tian's reaction was.

Jiang Tian's gaze landed on his finger, Sheng Wang glanced at it along with him. He realised that his hand was still holding onto the pen. He was quiet for two seconds, and then threw the pen away with a smack.

Li Yu stood next to the table, feeling that there was a slight tension in the air.

Her sixth sense told her that now is not the best time to continue to talk to Sheng Wang about this matter. Therefore, she used the remaining piece of paper to cover half her face, silently moved a table forward until she was next to Jiang Tian's, and carefully placed the paper on his desk.

Both Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang looked at her at the same time.

Li Yu suddenly regretted her actions a little, but she could not simply run away due to her responsibilities. As such, she gestured at the second

form: “Um…...Jiang Tian, you mentioned this to me before too, this is the form. You, uh, the two of you fill it up as you please, you just need to pass it to me on Friday that’s all.”

Sheng Wang’s gaze shifted onto Jiang Tian’s face.

Jiang Tian did not look up, his lowered eyelids were quite thin, the corner of his eyes formed a long and yet graceful curve. The way he looked at the surface of the table was especially serious.

Li Yu felt as if she accidentally stirred some major trouble, and scampered away.

The moment the outsider left, the mood became even stranger. A long while passed before Sheng Wang glimpsed at the form in Jiang Tian’s hand. “Are you filling in the form?”

Jiang Tian instantly put his pen down.

That action of his was nearly reflexive, the exact mirror of Sheng Wang’s earlier.

Sheng Wang suddenly felt that it was kinda funny. He pursed his lips, trying to look all serious for some moments before he finally couldn’t keep it up anymore, and started muffling his laughter as he leaned over the back of the chair.

“Stop laughing already.” Jiang Tian crooked his pointer finger and knocked on the back of his hand.

Sheng Wang’s eyes, crescent with laughter, shifted up. He saw Jiang Tian teetering on the edge of laughing and not laughing, and so his laughter got more hysterical.

“Enough already.” Jiang Tian lowered his voice, but when he reached the last word he finally completely gave up, and started laughing along.

Gao Tianyang was the face of confusion, why did the two people behind lose it all of a sudden?

“The hell? What are you two doing, why aren’t I invited?” It was the first time he has ever seen Jiang Tian laugh uncontrollably with his head looking aside. It was a little novel, but he was more bewildered than anything.

Jiang Tian gave a cough, by the time he turned back his expression was under control once more. Still, a trace of laughter remained at the corner of his eyes.

“None of your business.” He said.

Gao Tianyang sat back down feeling as if he was wronged. He wistfully sighed, how time flies and people become unrecognisable, 10+ years of childhood friendship changed like a fleeting thought.

His lament was too obvious, Sheng Wang felt the remorse of stealing his bro for some mysterious reason. Even though this remorse made zero sense at all, he went on to explain anyways: “It really wasn’t anything, just something kinda awkward.”

“Awkward?” Gao Tianyang couldn’t help himself, “You guys managed to laugh this hard over something awkward? Did you two eat something wrong?”

“Yeah yeah yeah, super wrong.” Sheng Wang waved him off, and turned around again.

Jiang Tian scanned the form that was still on his table, and abruptly asked: “Why did you want to stay?”

“When I asked the class monitor about this, I wasn’t exactly getting along with you.” Sheng Wang half jokingly said, “I was just scared that you get annoyed whenever you see me and launch a sneak attack on me at night. Who would have thought……”

Time barely passed, yet Jiang Tian somehow became the person he was closest to in Fuzhong.

That wasn’t exactly it either, “closest to” wasn’t the most accurate term. Gao Tianyang spoke to him more, joked around with him more, and when they messed around they were absolutely unbridled. They fit the traditional description of “close” even better, but that was just in school.

In other more private places, in the spaces beyond test papers and reports, where the classmates and teachers didn’t exist, Jiang Tian was still there.

If he had to define it, then it would only be “special”.

Jiang Tian was the most special person to him that he got to know in Fuzhong.

“Then do you still plan to apply?”

Sheng Wang snapped out of his thoughts, he briefly paused before he said: “Nope, can’t think of a new reason.”

When he grinned as he spoke he was the image of fresh and cool, unrestrained energy of youth flew off between his brows. He was like the birds that leapt around the tree branches during summertime, he always had the ability to make the people around him brighten up and become genial too.

Jiang Tian listened, and nodded after a while.

"You?" Sheng Wang asked, "You also asked the class monitor a long time ago?"

"Mn." Jiang Tian grunted.

"Then do you still plan to apply?" Sheng Wang asked again.

This time round Jiang Tian did not immediately answer. As he lowered his eyes, staring at the form, the black pen on his table already made its way back within his fingers at some unknown time. His pointer finger shifted, and the pen spun one round without warning.

After what seemed like ages, he said: "It will probably be filled up at some point in the future."

Someone left a window half opened in the classroom, the wind snuck in with the remnants of the summer heat, fiery and stiflingly hot. Sheng Wang's throat was parched all of a sudden. He dug out a can of cola from the stomach of his desk, his head lowered, pulled open the can tab and took a drink.

When he bought it in the morning, there was even a layer of frost outside the can. Two periods of classes passed by, and the frost melted into water, dampening a good portion of the inside of the table. The ice cold

drink was no longer ice cold, when he drank it it was neither exhilarating or thirst quenching, there was only a sticky sweetness.

Sheng Wang was momentarily silent as he held the aluminium can, and let out an “oh”.

*

Qi Jiahao only came back to class with his head hung low when the school bell rang for class to start. After that, he did not speak a single word to anyone for an entire morning. Gao Tianyang and co were all mystified, and their tongues wagged. Despite calling him “Old Qi” for a while, they did not manage to cheer him up.

The English paper came back in the afternoon, and it was then that they knew the reason behind Qi Jiahao’s low spirits. Out of the famous three bigshots of English in Class A, he was the only one who flunked so disastrously, to the point that other people didn’t even know where to start to comfort him.

“This is completely different from what I thought I’ll have to do.” Gao Tianyang said to Sheng Wang, “I’ve always thought that you’ll be the one who needs comforting, I freaking even planned my speech, and you’re telling me you scored 110?”

“OP!” Song Sirui admired him to the point of nearly prostrating before him.

“You didn’t even, fucking listen to listening compre, and your English score, is seriously 8 marks higher than mine?” Gao Tianyang received a giant blow. “Did I learn, my fucking English, with my feet?”

“You’re so OP!” Song Sirui said again.

“Screw off, scram, leave.” Gao Tianyang kicked him aside. “No wonder Old Qi wanted to shut himself down, who wouldn’t?”

With Sheng Wang’s score, anyone would have happily passed away with a smile, and yet out of all things, he was the face of calmness when he received his paper. Not only was he calm, he looked like…...he wasn’t feeling particularly pleased.

It wasn’t only him who was acting unusual, Jiang Tian was acting off too. This person scored the highest for 4 out of 5 subjects out of the entire level, yet he looked like he came in behind everyone in the level.

The PE lesson in the afternoon was taken over by the homeroom teacher, He Jin, for the first official class meeting in September.

“How did it go? I see that everyone is looking a little down.” The moment He Jin entered, she could feel how dispirited the entire Class A was. She spreaded the notebook wide open on the teacher’s desk, and flattened it with her hand. “Pull yourself together a little, yeah? Theoretically, new term, new beginnings. Every bigshot here should be showing me, the homeroom teacher, a little face for my sake, right?”

Bits and pieces of laughter came from the class, and finally things looked a little lively again.

“Let me quickly go through some things.” He Jin said as she gave a quick glance at the notebook: “The first thing would be about the Olympiads, in this upcoming semester that just began——don’t give me this mocking look, I know you already had lessons for the past month or so, please try to play along.”

Song Sirui led by giving a round of applause, a bunch of boys said with a forced smile: “Yay, school finally started, I’m so happy. Teacher, please continue.”

“Shoo!” He Jin waved in annoyance. “Either way, this semester, the preliminary competition for math, chem and physics will all come one after another. Same old rules, our class is Class A after all, Class A is also known as the competition class, so every single one will be participating, that’s all. Those who make it past the preliminaries, there will be some training camps in the winter and summer breaks, winter camps summer camps and stuff. After the camp, you will be going to the semi finals.”

“According to past observations, the minimum requirement for application for advanced admissions into top schools would be the second prize. Remember, second prize. Don’t seriously listen to that student affair’s office’s Dean Xu run his mouth. It’s not that there aren’t schools with a minimum requirement of a third prize, it’s just few in numbers, and I figure that you guys wouldn’t happily settle for those either.”

The tall stage that Dean Xu built outside was completely dismantled the moment He Jin shut the classroom doors. Class A’s teachers were all individually someone to be reckoned with, they were all well known in the city, none of them was afraid of the school leadership.

She observed the looks on the students’ faces, then smiled as she said: “When I said that a second prize is the minimum, most people turned green. How about this, let’s talk about data——”

“I’ve been in charge of Class As for six years in total, if I recall correctly, for competitions on the provincial level every year, 90% of the students have gotten a second prize, 9.99% of the students got the first prize.”

The entire class was shocked for several beats, and commotion began to stir.

“Spot the problem now?” He Jin said, “That’s right, I’ve only ever seen two third places up till today. What does this imply? This means that after our series of training, scoring a third prize is much more difficult than scoring into Tsinghua and Peking U, whoever that manages it would be a clown.”

The whole of Class A guffawed, even Sheng Wang started laughing along.

He Jin winked at him in the midst of chaos, and retracted her gaze again as she said: “Therefore, youths, let’s work hard.”

“No problem.” Class A’s bigshots all dragged their voices in reply.

“These three Olympiads would be our class’ major task for year two. As such, from this semester onwards, every last lesson in the afternoon would change into pre-competition coaching. Monday-Tuesday: Physics. Wednesday-Thursday: Math. Friday-Saturday, Chem. We would arrange for some special teachers to help, I’ll pass out the timetable as well as the list of teachers in a while, so you will be prepared.”

“The second thing would be about the Tri-Quality Students of the City nominations.” She made five copies of the timetable, and got every

student at the front to pass it behind. She then picked up a stack of blank slips and said: “I’ve said it before, one would be based on their grades, one from recommendations within the class committee, one from the degree of improvement, and one from a democratic election. Fill these up now, I’ll get the class monitor and the study rep to count later, and settle on the list today, ok?”

Actually, a democratic election would be super easily affected by the mood of the day, different days may produce different results.

Most students of Class A were relatively simple, but they actually brought a lot of factors into consideration:

There were plenty of people who generally got along with everyone in class, but Jiang Tian was nailed in the first place of the level, Sheng Wang was improving at a frighteningly speedy pace, Gao Tianyang, Li Yu, Song Sirui were under the rank of class comm members, a whole other battle altogether. Therefore, the votes of the democractic election would have to go to the people who belonged to neither three categories.

For example, Little Chilli, the bigshot unemployed person who was in touch with the common people, Small Mouth Xu who was a people pleaser, or even the person who made it in all the way from the normal classes, the somewhat smarmy but not unforgivably flawed person, Qi Jiahao.

The votes were mostly concentrated amongst these three people, and in the end, due to how pitiful Qi Jiahao was today, he won some sympathy votes, and defeated Small Mouth Xu by a small margin.

At this point, Qi Jiahao finally smiled for the first time that day.

“Ok, then the first Tri-Quality Students of the City has basically been settled.” He Jin led by clapping, “Then let us welcome our English rep, do you want to come up here and make a small speech?”

“No need, no need.” Qi Jiahao grinned as he frantically rejected, and yet he was sent out of his seat by a kick from Song Sirui beside him.

He stumbled, and managed to go onto the stage. He cleared his throat with his hands behind him and said: “Um, I didn’t think I'd get this slot either, thanks guys.”

When he got to that part, he revealed a trace of how pleased he felt at last. The score of 92 for English was left at the back of his mind, Yang Jing’s words went out of his ears. He scanned around; most people were happy for him, with the exception of two of them——

One was Sheng Wang. He lazily clapped his hands, but his eyes were on his table instead, like he was analyzing the timetable. What’s so good about that dumb timetable anyway.

The other one was Jiang Tian. This person did not even clap at all, he just coldly glared at him with his back leaning against the chair.

Qi Jiahao’s heart skipped a beat, the smile on his face turned stiff for a second before he quickly recovered from it.

No matter what, he got a nomination in this competition first. As for other matters? They all aren’t important.

He returned to his seat in a chorus of heckling. After He Jin finished going through some other matter, she finally started to give out the thing

most students were the most concerned about: the monthly exam's result slips.

The first student of each group took the slips, found their own and passed it behind.

Sheng Wang was analyzing the timetable. There would be two weeks of extended physics this semester, starting from next Monday onwards. The teacher's name was labelled next to the timeslot. The teacher's name was Zhao Xi, the exact same first and surname as the Boss Zhao from the BBQ shop, "In Those Years".

Just as he was puzzling over it, Song Sirui let out a soft "ah" next to him.

"What's wrong?" Sheng Wang looked up and asked.

Song Sirui passed the slip to him, saying: "Badass, your total score went up by 40+ marks, if you convert your score for physics and chemistry they should be A grade by this point, your level placement went up by 47."

As Sheng Wang expected, the higher up he goes, the harder it would be to jump.

Song Sirui was still helping him do the math next to him: "If you didn't miss English listening compre, you could have gotten 7 more marks…...lemme think, I just saw Chen Cheng's result slip, he scored 4 more points than you, and there was a equal sign next to his placement. I reckon that with your 7 marks, your placement could have gone up by 8-9 more."

No such thing as ‘what-ifs’ in the world.

The reality was he spent an entire week busy working hard, and yet he did not meet Big Mouth Xu’s requirement of improving by 50 places. His nomination for the Tri-Quality Students of the City went up in flames.

He didn’t care for the nomination itself, he just didn’t particularly like the feeling of wasting his efforts all for nothing.

That night, Jiang Tian, who usually never bothers looking at friendship circles in WeChat, spotted a red dot in the early morning. He tapped on it for the first time ever, and the interface changed for a few seconds before it refreshed. At the very top, a new status appeared, coming from the person next door over, posted a minute ago.

He said: Nothing is going favourably today.

Jiang Tian tapped into the chat, the other person’s profile pic changed from a small red can to a patch of darkness. His WeChat name became ‘Shop’s Closed’.

Jiang Tian sent a question mark over. He waited for 20 minutes, but there wasn’t a single response.

The shop really was closed.

Chapter 31 - Change

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The Only Difference Was That He No Longer Came Over To Mooch Off The ‘Study Room’ Anymore.

Jiang Tian completed all the practice papers at 11.30pm, and finished 3 major questions each from maths, physics and chem olympiad questions. He then took out all the further extension papers, and went through his mistakes for the second time.

As he really barely made any mistake, this part only took less than 10 minutes.

12.40am, and he already had nothing left to do.

The neighbouring room remained dead quiet throughout.

Sheng Wang did not shuffle around in his slippers, nor did he show any signs of intending to buddy up to study. Last week, he even joked that Jiang Tian’s bedroom became a study room he took over by force. In the end, the moment the monthly exam ended, the ‘study room’ lost its purpose.

Jiang Tian stood in front of his bag, his fingers picking through its content. He already read everything he could read. After two rounds or so of picking through, he took out a thick book with a poker face, the cover had the words ‘A Guide to Lyrical Writing’ written on it.

He stared at the cover for a couple of seconds, it was hard to say if he was pondering over what exactly he was doing, or if he was pondering if there was any point in reading that.

Maybe there was a point after all, because he went to sit at the windowsill with it in the end.

This mini unit was talking about the clever use of parallelism in sentences, two minutes later, Jiang Tian already zoned out.

The White Horse Alley at this time didn't have the particular type of tranquility found at 2am yet. People occasionally passed by the lane once in a while, casting fleeting shadows in between the walls. The main street in the distance also had some traffic, sometimes, it would be utterly quiet, and the other times, there would be the light sound of car tyres rolling past the surface of the road, like the sound of waves that the wind occasionally carried over.

His phone suddenly buzzed, and Jiang Tian retracted his gaze from outside the window. The lines of his lips and brows shifted on a miniscule level, like the moment he heard the vibration, they instantly relaxed a little.

He closed the guide that he couldn't bring himself to read, and scooped over his phone——

It was Gao Tianyang's message.

Jiang Tian: "……"

Boom: Are you still awake, Tian-ge?

Jiang Tian: Still am.

Boom: Great, have you seen the olympiad questions Old He sent in advance?

Jiang Tian: Yeah.

Boom: I just knew you won’t wait until next week,

Boom: I have 3 questions.

Jiang Tian: Speak.

Boom: May I ask

Boom: How do you do

Boom: The three questions

Jiang Tian: ……

Gao Tianyang sent several memes about life being rough, and explained that the questions this time round were much more troublesome than before, there was too little information given, and he didn’t know where to begin.

A portion of physics questions were all like this, at first look the question said nothing at all, they dared people to find an answer without any condition given.

Boom: The hell with answering, I can’t even list a damn formula.

Jiang Tian was already idle anyway, he dug out the practice paper he completed from his bag, and took a picture of the question. He used a black pen to underline 10+ parts.

He sent the picture to Gao Tianyang, and said: Just need to find all the hidden conditions.

Which term represents an additional force, which term represents that a certain state can be set at a certain value, which other term represents the limitations etc etc. They were all hidden in the parts he underlined.

He Jin mentioned before that at this stage, physics would be testing them on their attention to details. When they consider all given factors completely, one would be hard-pressed to even make a mistake. The three questions she gave this time were classic examples, they have to search for the conditions all on their own, managing to cause an entire class of students to nearly vomit over trying to find it.

Boom: There's so many hidden conditions???

Boom: Fuck, I missed out 4, no wonder there’s something wrong no matter how I tried to calculate

Boom: Where did Old He find these questions

Boom: Speaking of which you’re acting quite abnormal today

Jiang Tian: What kind of abnormal?

Boom: Didn’t you usually skip the steps in your questions in the past? I can’t believe you seriously wrote all of them down today

Boom: This is literally the answer key holy shit

Boom: [buff guy covering his face]

Boom: Are you telling me you wrote it so completely on purpose? Just waiting for us butt citizens to ask? Touched.

Jiang Tian’s eyelid briefly lifted up. It remained dead quiet next door, who knew if he skipped doing these questions or he already finished them all with no trouble.

He typed a few words to remind Gao Tianyang: It’s already 1am.

Boom: Oh oh yeah right, it's time for your normal bedtime

Jiang Tian hesitated, deleted the four words “screw off and do your work”, and changed it into a “Mn.”

If it wasn't for Gao Tianyang he would have forgotten, other than having extra matters after night self study, 1am was his normal bedtime.

Boom: Then you should go sleep then, Imma tinker around with the questions

Jiang Tian: Sure

His words said ‘sure’, but when he quit WeChat he opened up ‘A Guide to Lyrical Writing’ again. Tonight, he spent a whole hour on the guide to composition writing, if Beckon Money knew she would die from joy…...

Or possibly be scared to death too.

Six in the morning the next day, Jiang Tian was packing his bag after he washed up. He suddenly received two messages on his phone. Due to the fact that his phone was on his blanket, the vibration wasn't particularly obvious. His screen only abruptly lit up twice, but he still spotted it instantly.

He pulled the zip on his bag all the way to the bottom in one shot, and his long arm reached over to grab his phone.

The person who was dead all night finally gave a reply.

Shop's Closed: Accidentally fell asleep last night, just saw the message

Shop's Closed: What's wrong?

Jiang Tian looked at the screen next to his bed, his eyes lowered.

He already typed the answer out on the keyboard, but did not send the message.

He wanted to ask "Why did you change your profile picture and personal nickname out of the blue", but he did know the actual cause all along. The question mark he sent last night fit the occasion, but overnight, it became meaningless.

And the first message in the chat always reminded him of the "Signal's bad, just saw the message" that he replied Qi Jiahao with before the English Olympiad.

Jiang Tian was silent for a moment, and replied: Nothing, come out for breakfast.

He grabbed his bag and walked out of the bedroom. He started reading the news in English as he leaned against the staircase railing, waiting for the boy named ‘Shop’s Closed’ to get up.

*

Even though Sheng Wang changed his WeChat name, he acted the same as usual.

He would do the practice papers as he listened in class, and after class he would still banter and joke around with the people around him. When his pen ran out of ink, he would ask to borrow the ink refill from Jiang Tian, when he found something entertaining he would try to scam Jiang Tian into laughing along too, sometimes he would hide his phone inside the desk and complain via WeChat.

There was still five minutes before the last lesson in the morning ended. Jiang Tian sent a message to the deskmate in front of him: Let’s go to Beyond Parasol Tree for lunch?

Sheng Wang was busy with doing his chemistry paper. As his right hand speedily calculated, his left hand reached into his desk, grabbing hold of the lightly vibrating phone.

A while later, he finally took his phone out and looked down.

Boys at this age have wide shoulders, but they were of hardly any substance. Any minor movement would cause the fabric of the shirt to highlight the contours of the scapula.

Jiang Tian received a reply a couple of seconds later.

Shop’s Closed: Sure, I’m starving to death already.

The mute went to Xi Le to help out at noon, Boss Zhao took care of the meals. Jiang Tian initially thought that there would be only three people in that courtyard that day in Beyond Parasol Trees, he did not expect twice that number, not even in his dreams——

Just as they turned around the corner of the lane, they saw a mini truck parked in front of the empty space in front of Old Man Ding’s front door, a giant cardboard box as well as some foam packaging against the wall, like they just unpackaged a giant piece of furniture.

The moment Jiang Tian entered the house, he saw two people in dark blue jackets carrying a silver-white refrigerator into the hall, there was also a man in a similar uniform connecting the circuit boards.

Upon spotting him, Old Man Ding scurried over, and gave his arm a slap. “*You* bought this?!”

Jiang Tian shook his head. He wanted to say something, but the moment he opened his mouth he turned to look at Sheng Wang as if he abruptly remembered something, the old man followed along.

He hated owing people favours of any kind in his life the most, and he disliked receiving benefits from other people for no good reason at all. His temperament was as stubborn as a mule, even to the point that when Jiang

Tian tried to give him something, he needed the excuse of “I can’t just freeload”, he wouldn’t even accept a single penny from other people at all.

Old Man Ding treated Jiang Tian like half a flesh and blood grandson, when he had no other choice he could use his hands. But that did not apply towards Sheng Wang, after all, that boy was a guest, and he seemed like he wouldn’t withstand a hit.

He asked Sheng Wang with a stern face: “You bought it?”

Sheng Wang copied Jiang Tian, he shook his head as he denied: “No.”

Old Man Ding’s eagle eyes were bulging as he ferociously glared: “Who else would dare to buy me this, say that again!”

The old man was enlisted as part of the army before, he had never lost to anyone in terms of aura. People like Gao Tianyang who were beaten up by him before, would dissolve into panic as soon as he glared at them. Yet, out of all people, the one who looked clean and tidy and unable to withstand a single hit, appeared to be thoroughly unintimidated by him.

Sheng Wang let out an “oh” and said: “Then…...take it as I’m the one who bought it then.”

Old Man Ding internally said *what kind of bullshit is this*, but the person who spoke looked rather sheepish, he didn’t have the heart to be harsh with him.

The old man glared at him for a good while, before that aura of his deflated like a balloon and asked: “Why did you buy this for?”

Sheng Wang broke out into a smile: “*Y*ou wanted to take care of my lunch right? I’m just contributing to food expenses.”

“What do you mean food expenses? I’m not keeping that!” Old Man Ding said, “I’m just providing food, that’s all, do I really need such a big fuss over it? Y-y-y-you get rid of it soon, send it back to wherever it came from.

Sheng Wang let out yet another “oh”, and said: “That’s fine, then I’ll be leaving with the fridge.”

“Wait!” Old Man Ding said.

“Sure, I’ll wait.” Sheng Wang lowered the hand that was about to wave the people over here, looking especially obedient.

The old man nearly spat out blood.

He walked in circles over and over again, downed two mouthfuls of cold tea, and then pestered Jiang Tian as he reached his wits’ end. “Are you gonna do anything about the classmate you brought over?!”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Sheng Wang was amused by that line, “Not even my dad can control me.”

Old Man Ding spat out the tea leaf bits and said: “What kinda temper a kid like you even has?”

“Mule temper, around the same as Yours.” After Sheng Wang said that, he covered half his face, the manner of someone who was defending himself from getting hit.

The old man was so angry that he laughed.

He put his hands on his waist and played the role of the obstinate mule in the courtyard. Several minutes of being obstinate later, he finally admitted defeat. He grumbled a “stinkin’ brat” under his breath, and entered the kitchen, reaching a compromise.

Old people have the same mentality as kids, they may say “I don’t want” for all they like, but when he actually kept it he was more happy than anyone.

Old Man Ding was too used to being hard headed, he couldn’t let go of his pride. He wanted to touch the fridge, but he was too embarrassed to. Therefore, he kept finding excuses. One moment he would say that it doesn’t appear to be functioning, the other he would say the powerboard was messy. With the effort of making a single lunch, he already went back and forth to the fridge 7-8 times.

The two younger people were well aware, neither of them exposed him.

Jiang Tian grabbed a stool out from the room in order to make sure everyone got a seat, and saw Sheng Wang leaning against the door, eyeing Old Man Ding as he played a game on his phone, laughter barely restrained at the corner of his lips.

Jiang Tian settled the stool next to the table, and walked towards him, asking: “When did you buy it?”

Sheng Wang didn’t look up from his game. “Just two days ago.”

He turned on the scope, sniped someone, and spoke again: “The day you said to take care of my meals.”

Jiang Tian’s fingers, dangling at the side of his body, lightly twitched.

Sheng Wang happened to finish one round, before he spoke he flexed the outcome of his battle in front of him. “Cool, right?”

He really appeared to not change at all on the surface. They went to school together, went to eat lunch and the convenience store together. If you treated him a little nicer, he would dig out something even better in repayment.

The only difference was that he no longer came over to mooch off the ‘study room’ anymore.

Chapter 032 - Absence

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He Jin Said In Exasperation, “Did You Two Plan This?”

Putting a subtle change like this aside, the days in White Horse Alley House 7 were still relatively harmonious, but that harmony only lasted for several days.

The problems Sheng Mingyang ran into were yet to be solved, and a new issue popped up in his business. Friday morning, Sheng Wang went downstairs, and stumbled into a quarrel between him and Jiang Ou.

The contents of that quarrel were quite simple, actually. The general gist was that Jiang Ou felt that she could lend a hand, but Sheng Mingyang would rather she stay at home and take care of the kids.

Jiang Ou had a gentle temperament, Sheng Mingyang wasn’t hot tempered either. It was precisely because of this that when they argued, when neither of them were willing to back down there was a flavour of helplessness and pent-up feelings.

“What do you think I barely sleep for?” Sheng Mingyang propped himself against the ceramic counter in the kitchen, saying as he pinched the middle of his brows.

“But——”

Sheng Ou was just about to rebut when he added another line. “You told me about what happened with Xiao-Tian before, I’m sure you wouldn’t want to be like that again.”

Jiang Ou’s mouth was open, but it was as if her tongue was pinched. She recalled something, and all fight went out of her, her eyes were downcast as she quieted.

Sheng Mingyang had his hand on her shoulder as he said: “So, just listen to me this time, yeah?”

Quite a while later, Jiang Ou nodded.

……

Who knew who spotted Sheng Wang who was standing by the stairs first, the two of them quickly changed their expressions back to normal. Sheng Mingyang pulled open the glass door and left the kitchen, Jiang Ou shot a hurried smile at him, and started scooping out the porridge into a bowl.

“What happened?” Sheng Wang didn’t actually catch the argument clearly. He looked at Jiang Ou’s figure, and quickly glanced at the stairs.

Fortunately, Jiang Tian left two practice papers behind and went back in to take it, he did not catch any of that. Otherwise, who knew what kind of response he would have.

Sheng Wang sometimes felt that Jiang Tian and his mom’s dynamics were a little strange.

If he said that they were on bad terms, many details would reveal how protective Jiang Tian was over her. No matter what, as long as Jiang Ou

opened her mouth, he couldn’t bring himself to reject her.

But if he said that they were on good terms…...he couldn’t help but feel that something was missing.

Sheng Mingyang’s phone started buzzing in vibration. He answered in a rush, and also turned around to tell Sheng Wang: “No big deal, it’s just that I still have to go on a business trip for a few more days, I’ll be heading to the airport later.”

Sheng Wang had long been used to the way he had to fly everywhere all the time, he wasn’t surprised at all. “How are you getting there?”

“Hello?” Sheng Mingyang greeted the person at the other end of the phone, and squeezed out the time to reply to his son. “Xiao-Chen will be sending you and Xiao-Tian to school, I’ll be getting there with another car instead.”

“You can just get Uncle Xiao-Chen to send you, we have the school bus.” Sheng Wang said.

“What bus?” Sheng Mingyang could only ‘care for the head but not the ass’, he was trying to juggle both sides at once, and didn’t manage to catch his son clearly.

“.....”

Sheng Wang waved his hand. “Just make your phone call, I’m gonna eat.”

Sheng Mingyang crooked two fingers to motion kneeling down to apologise, and pulled open the glass door to the patio outside.

By the time he looked back to the house after the extremely urgent call of his, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian already finished their breakfast and left, with Xiao-Chen still waiting outside the courtyard for him.

*

Every old street in this city was lined with parasol trees, they stood there for decades amidst the flowing traffic and the sea of people. The thick branches and leaves intersected with each other, blocking out the heavens, blocking out the sun.

Sunlight could only shine through the cracks and gaps, leaving behind spotted patches of light on the ground. The pedestrians weaved through the lights and shadows.

There were plenty of mobile food carts along the street outside of White Horse Alley, and in front of these carts were steaming white fog as well as the lines of people queuing up.

Sheng Wang dodged around the crowd, and waited for the green light at the sidewalk near the corner. He took a quick glance at the old street, and said to Jiang Tian: “I was an especially fussy kid back then, I would often cause a ruckus and wake everyone up early in the morning.”

“And then?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Then I would come to this street, and survey the circumstances of the common people,” Sheng Wang said, “I had to walk from that end of the street to this end, and when I saw that everyone was living a safe and peaceful life, I could go back to sleep without any worries.”

Jiang Tian was amused as he listened. “Why this street.”

“It’s lively.” Sheng Wang said, “People are only interesting when they are all talkative.”

He finished talking, caught the look on Jiang Tian’s face that instantly went dead, and instantly doubled over in laughter. “Eh wait, nononono, I’m not laughing at you for being boring, you’re fine being your frozen self too, I was just saying.”

“But really,” Sheng Wang’s eyes were crescent as he faced the traffic lights, “if you were here a few years earlier, I would have definitely welcomed you.”

“Why?” Jiang Tian asked again.

The way he chatted these two days changed a little, he no longer replied with the terminal “Mn” or “Oh”, he actually learnt to reply with a hook.

“Because, for a period of time, I wanted a brother quite a lot. Whether he’s older or younger is fine with me, younger is better though.” Sheng Wang answered his question, and suddenly tapped Jiang Tian hurriedly. “Green light now, hurry up. When’s the school bus arriving?”

“6.30.”

“That’s fine, we can still make it.”

Sheng Wang checked the time on his phone, and crossed the sidewalk with Jiang Tian. They stood and waited at the stop at the other side of the street, the topic about brothers never came back.

To be honest, Sheng Wang was a stingy little brat when he was young. He disliked any living creature who dared to try to take his toys, his limelight, and his snacks. If he really did have siblings, they would probably end up tumbling around all day in fistfights.

Later, the grandpa that would bring him out to survey the streets was no longer around, the mother who called him “Wang-zai” everyday was no longer around either. Slowly, gradually, Sheng Mingyang stopped being around often too, and he no longer was so stingy anymore.

Those two years, he desperately wished that there were more people in the house or something. Best be a brother, who’s a little younger than him, who would stay a little longer too.

On a certain day later, he suddenly realised that even if they’re brothers it didn’t mean anything.

What comes will always go.

*

6.30am, the school bus arrived at the stop right on the dot.

The moment Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian boarded, the girls in the bus all burst into excited whispers, causing Sheng Wang to nearly retreat back to the stop.

Upon seeing that they’re unfamiliar faces, with the uproar they caused, the driver instantly awakened his professionalism. He used his mouth to point at the machine next to the driver’s seat. “What year? Where’s your card? Take it out and swipe it.”

Sheng Wang had never taken the school bus before, he didn't understand the instructions at all. He was momentarily stunned, and asked: "What card?"

"School card, what else." The driver said.

Fuzhong's card and the nametag were one item, containing both the student's information as well as money, which meant the card was especially important for residential students. Meals, and activating the shower all relied on this, but to Sheng Wang it might as well not exist.

Xi Le convenience store allowed for mobile transactions, furthermore he long since bidded farewell to the canteen, he never even thought of remembering to bring his school card every time he left for school.

"Forgot to bring it?" The driver asked in suspicion.

Sheng Wang sheepishly touched his nose, just as he was about to say "I think I'll just alight", he heard Jiang Tian's voice behind him. "Brought it."

He reached forward from behind, going past Sheng Wang to swipe on the machine, and then stuffed the card in his hand.

"When did you even take it." Sheng Wang had astonishment written all over his face.

"When you snuck out of the house like a thief." Jiang Tian also brought his own card over and tapped it against the machine.

Some people wouldn’t stop going on about taking the school bus, they may be faster than anyone else, but their hands may be emptier than anyone else’s..

“Where did I put the card?”

“The cabinet at the entrance hall.”

“Boarding passengers, don’t block the entrance.” The driver was clearly half a metre away from them, yet he insisted on broadcasting it to the entire bus with a horn. “There’s empty seats at the back!”

“Sorry.”

Sheng Wang hurried forward. Out of the corner of his eyes, he spotted two girls whose faces were thoroughly red at the first row, whispering god knows what to each other.

White Horse Alley wasn’t that far from Fuzhong. At this stop, the school bus was close to being completely filled. There were few empty seats, with some of them being solo seats scattered all around. The last row was the only one with two connecting seats.

The vehicle soon started moving, Sheng Wang shot a quick look at the last row as he held onto the back of a seat, and said to Jiang Tian: “Let’s sit there.”

He sat down in the third row, saving the empty seat in the second row for Jiang Tian. Afterwards, he stuffed in his earpiece, lowered his head and started using his phone.

The string attached to the school tag was intertwined around his finger in circles and loops.

The boy beside him was in the same class as the two girls in front, he kept chatting as he leaned forward against the back of the chair. They seemed to be the history-politics class under Dean Xu, they received news slightly faster than other people.

Sheng Wang heard them mention something about the parent-teacher meeting.

He internally said, *please don't tell me*……

Parent-teacher meetings gave him the most headaches in school, unrivalled by any other thing. He always had to explain why his parents couldn't make it.

At one point, he suspected the involvement of dark forces at work when it came to this matter, somehow they managed to pick precisely whenever Sheng Mingyang wouldn't be around.

The two classes in the morning were physics lessons. Young Master Sheng wasn't even in the mood to do practice papers. Instead, he focused all his energy on praying, hoping that He Jin would dispel the rumour when the lesson ends.

In the end, the moment the second period ended, He Jin said: "Just letting you guys know, this Sunday afternoon, there will be a parent-teacher meeting for year 2s, it will be held in Xiude block's hall. Year 2 is a pivotal year after all."

Gao Tianyang mumbled, "You all said that in Year 1 too."

“Yup, every year is pivotal.” He Jin said as her patience ran out. “No matter what, the school still has to communicate with the parents. When you go home, make sure to let your parents know. The year’s general assembly will be held from 3-4pm, attendance will be taken. 4pm onwards, everyone will return to their own classes. The other teachers and I will be talking to your parents about your individual performance, including all your strengths and weaknesses, future development etc etc.”

He Jin finished speaking, and finally tossed out *the* line that Sheng Wang was afraid to hear the most: “This is compulsory for everyone, if you really have special circumstances, come find me after class.”

Sheng Wang’s head dropped onto the table with a bonk.

He pursed his lips as both hands sent Sheng Mingyang a message hidden under his table.

Shop’s Closed: Are you off the plane yet

Encyclopedia For Healthy Living: I’ve alighted.

Encyclopedia For Healthy Living: I’ve already said Xiao-Chen can send you guys, why did you run away without a word. Are you angry with dad?

Shop’s Closed: No

Shop’s Closed: when are you returning?

Encyclopedia For Healthy Living: Hard to say, probably around next Thursday-Friday.

Encyclopedia For Healthy Living: Why?

Shop’s Closed: just asking

Encyclopedia For Healthy Living: Really nothing?

Shop’s Closed: no

Shop’s Closed: i’m gonna go run

When Sheng Wang finished typing he turned off his phone’s screen, buried his head and started fretting.

Sheng Mingyang was busy with work, he couldn’t afford to care about the weather back home, otherwise he would have realised that rain started pouring at 8am.

And his son understood this very well, that’s why he didn’t even bother with coming up with a reasonable excuse when he lied.

Sheng Wang was sprawled over for a few moments. He dug out his phone and earpiece, and went to the other end of the corridor from the classroom.

There was a corner next to the washrooms’ right side, the angle was extremely tricky. Class A students loved to go there whenever they had to make a call, as long as they weren’t caught blatantly waving their phones around in their hands, they would hardly ever get caught.

Sheng Wang stuffed in his earpiece and started to look for driver Uncle Xiao-Chen’s name in his recent contacts list.

Abrupt coughing noises exploded from the corridor, sounding strikingly like Big Mouth Xu. He nearly jumped out of his skin, and messily switched off his screen. He placed his phone back in his pocket, and waited for the other person to pick up.

The dial tone was longer than usual, it meandered on.

Ages later, there were a bunch of light rustling noises before the person finally picked up.

Before the other person could speak, Sheng Wang headed straight to the main point: “Uncle Xiao-Chen, it’s parent-teacher meeting again. The Jianghu is in trouble and needs your help, can you help me pretend again?”

The other person for some reason didn’t reply, instead falling into silence.

A moment, and Jiang Tian’s voice passed through his earpiece. His voice was low as he said: “I think you got the wrong number.”

His voice was lowered especially softly, like the wind of pine trees caressing the strings of music. Perhaps it was because it was too quiet in the earpiece, it even sounded a little gentle.

Sheng Wang suddenly felt as though he was put on the spot.

It was like a person who was calm and unflustered on the outside, the moment they heard their parents ask “Are you okay” when they stepped into their home, their nose started getting all stuffy.

It was only a few simple words, that’s all.

For that few seconds Sheng Wang did not speak, neither did Jiang Tian hang up.

Class A was at the west of the corridor, the corner of his was at the east. They were less than 10m apart. If a classmate yelled, he could hear it both inside and outside the earpiece.

Yet another while later, Sheng Wang said: “I’ll hang up and call again.”

Jiang Tian said: “Ok.”

He reached into his pocket and pressed the button at the side twice. He lowered his head and looked through his recent contacts over and over again. In the end, he didn’t make that second call.

Gao Tianyang came over to the washroom, and said hi to him with his arm around his shoulders. Sheng Wang plucked out his earpiece and said, “Go do your business, I’m gonna head to the office.”

“What for?”

“Informing Old He about special circumstances.”

He passed through the classmates chasing each other around in the corridor, walked to the office and yelled “reporting”.

He Jin waved her hands at him. “Come in, what's the matter?”

“Teacher, my dad can’t make it for the parent-teacher meeting.” Sheng Wang said.

“The school set it on Sunday especially to avoid clashing with weekdays.” He Jin did not reproach him, she only tried to fight for it. “Can you get your dad to adjust the timing? This parent-teacher meeting is quite important, if he really couldn’t make it for the one in the hall, showing up only for the one after 4 will do too. Just half an hour is enough.”

“He really couldn’t make it.” Sheng Wang said.

“How about 20 minutes?” He Jin said, “If he comes, I could chat with him first.”

Boys at this age are all tall and lanky, a growth spurt and suddenly they would be taller than a bunch of teachers. When He Jin was seated in her chair, she had to look up when she talked to him.

She saw Sheng Wang’s downcasted eyes, and his finger touching his nose, like he was in a silent standoff.

He Jin’s son was still young, he was nothing alike with Sheng Wang. Yet when she looked at the boy in front of her, her heart ached a little.

She thought for a bit and said, “How about this, next weekend, please kindly bother him to come here for a bit, I’ll be waiting here for him.”

Sheng Wang gave a tired smile. “He’s on business trips quite often, it’s kinda hard to catch him. I’ll send him here when I manage to catch him,

is that ok?”

He Jin understood, this means that he might not even make it next weekend either.

She almost couldn’t bear to ask anymore.

She could tell that Sheng Wang did not want to spend a single second longer on this. But she had her responsibilities, she couldn’t just not care about this at all.

She deliberated. Just as she was about to speak again, another “reporting” rang from the door to the office.

Sheng Wang heard that voice in his earpiece just now, he was plenty sensitive towards it. He turned around to look behind, to see that Jiang Tian was standing tall and straight at the door with his school uniform wide open.

“Come in,” He Jin asked him, “what’s the matter with you too?”

Sheng Wang watched Jiang Tian walk in and stand next to him. His voice was cold and plain as usual when he said: “No one could make it for the parent-teacher meeting, I can’t participate.”

He Jin: “.....”

Sheng Wang lost any awkwardness he had, and stared at him with question marks all over his head. Jiang Tian didn’t even look up.

He Jin said in exasperation, “Did you two plan this?”

“Sure.” He Jin nodded. What else could she do?

The first in the level and the one who improved the fastest both couldn’t attend the parent-teacher meeting, what else was she supposed to say?

“How about you two just partner up, when you go home discuss this with your parents, whenever everyone’s all free, I’ll hold a three-way mini parent-teacher meeting and have a quick chat, how about that?” After He Jin spoke, she didn’t give them the room to argue. She waved them off and said, “So that’s set, hurry up and leave.”

The two were chased out of the office, but they didn’t manage to make it back in class. Instead, they were ambushed on their way back.

The one who ambushed them was students’ affairs Big Mouth Xu. His expression was solemn as he waited around the corner with his hands behind his back. He waved at the two of them. “Follow me to Duxing block.”

“Me?” Sheng Wang pointed at himself.

“The both of you.” Big Mouth Xu said.

“I didn’t get into any fights recently,” Sheng Wang was a little lost, but he did not forget to add, “he didn’t either.”

These words jabbed at a sore spot on Big Mouth Xu's body somewhere somehow. His expression turned uglier than ever, but it seemed that his anger wasn't directed at Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian.

"About your absence from the listening compre exam last time…...that time when Jiang Tian pestered me for ages to get us to check the security cameras at the corridor, we checked it." Big Mouth Xu said, "These two days I also asked quite a few people, and there's finally an outcome. Today, I'll be giving you two a proper explanation."

Chapter 033 - Impulsive

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Translator's notes:

- I'm still trying to sort out text conversation styles because while they are teenagers, cn also doesnt have stuff like caplocks or a lapslock typing style, and I myself am unsure how to really handle it, and neither do I want to go back to change the previous conversations until I really settle on a method. So, y'all gotta have to bear with me a little here :")
- Formatting for WeChat names will probably be revised too because the reappearance of Sheng Wang's ex-dormmate/deskmate, StarAniseCrab/Pang Xie reminded me that I went with a different style earlier...so yeah
- and enjoy! <3

Sheng Wang Suddenly Felt Especially Exhilarated.

On the way to Duxing Block, Big Mouth Xu talked their ears off. Out of the self awareness of being an ‘obedient’ student, Sheng Wang was incredibly receptive. Once in a while he would reply with a “Mn”, but in reality he did not absorb a single word.

He eyed Jiang Tian quite a few times before he couldn’t help but ask: “When exactly did you badger Big Mo- Dean Xu?”

Jiang Tian replied resolutely: “I didn’t.”

Big Mouth Xu was walking in front of them by a few metres, his hands behind his back. Logically speaking, he should not be able to catch a conversation at this decibel. However, as an expert in catching rule-breakers as well as having taught for many years, he had cultivated amazing prowess and his ears were sharp enough to catch a needle drop.

He instantly turned around and shot a glare at Jiang Tian, pointing at his own nose as he said, “You still deny it? You’re saying that I was talking rubbish?”

Jiang Tian immediately halted, his upper body leaned slightly backwards in order to avoid the saliva droplets that came exploding out of this middle age man’s mouth.

Big Mouth Xu hadn’t gotten a kick out of chewing people out yet, he said to Sheng Wang: “The school internet broke down that day, right? The computer room was waiting for him and Teacher Sun to go fiddle with it. He was so obedient, he went out of the way to bring Xiao-Sun with him to speak to me about the security cameras first. Were you holding the school internet as a hostage or?”

Jiang Tian: “???”

His expression was so entertaining that Sheng Wang suspected, if the person standing opposite him wasn’t the administration dean, he would probably ask if the person was an idiot.

He did witness the way Jiang Tian spoke with teachers before. He was truly both cold and proud, frantically asking for trouble.

Just as expected, Jiang Tian stiffly replied: “Mingli Block is in the north and computer room in the south, we have to pass through Duxing Block. We just happened to pass by, how was it out of the way?”

“You still dare to be impertinent?”

“.....”

“Dean,” Sheng Wang reminded, “I think we’re the victims here.”

Big Mouth Xu’s anger doused out with a “poof”, and said in exasperation, “I know, I’m just worked up about it now, it wasn’t directed towards the both of you. I couldn’t keep a hold on my anger, that’s all.”

“Ok.” Sheng Wang dragged Jiang Tian behind him, and used himself as a shield between the other two. “Please save more of it, You can let it all out at the offender later.”

Big Mouth Xu laughed sardonically.

The doors and windows in Duxing Block's third floor office were all tightly shut, even from a door away one could feel how tense the situation was inside.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian locked eyes, and followed behind Big Mouth Xu as he twisted the knob open.

There were already people in the classroom, a little more than what Sheng Wang expected—

Two young men stood by the window, one of them was in a black T-shirt and jeans, sitting casually by the windowsill. Upon seeing the door opening, he even cheerily greeted in their direction.

It was the Zhao Xi from 'In Those Years' BBQ store.

The other person sported an extremely short haircut, at first glance it appeared to be quite business-like if it wasn't for his hair that was dyed ash gray. He was talking while standing next to Zhao Xi, he only turned around to look at the door when he heard it open. He gave them a simple nod.

Sheng Wang covertly poked the back of Jiang Tian's hand. He whispered, "Who's that even."

"The boss of the BBQ shop." Jiang Tian's fingers crooked before they relaxed once more, a few words jumped out of his mouth.

"Duh, I already knew Zhao Xi." Sheng Wang said.

"I'm talking about the other one," Jiang Tian said, "Lin Beiting."

Sheng Wang recalled that the BBQ shop was managed by Zhao Xi and his friend, the Lin Beiting over here should be the real boss, he supposed. Somewhere along the line, he thought that the boss should be wearing singlets and shorts, a pair of flip-flops on his feet, and smell like smoke and flames along with skewers. He absolutely did not expect this style out of all things.

Other than the two from the BBQ shop, there was also a Yang Jing quietly existing in the office.

She sat behind an office table, her slender brows tightly knitted together. She looked peeved as she stared at the three boys standing in front of the table.

All three of them wore Fuzhong uniforms, at first glance their silhouette looked nearly alike. One of them kept his head down all the way, the other two were more thick-skinned, and still had the guts to peep around.

“What are you looking at?” Big Mouth Xu immediately erupted upon entering the office. He pointed at the students peeping around: “Zhai Tao, do the math yourself. How many times has it been for this month that you are found standing here, do you even know how to reflect upon yourself?!”

To Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, he could be said to be an old acquaintance. They were not surprised to see him in a situation like this at all.

As for the one standing next to him, Sheng Wang only felt that he was a little familiar-looking. He couldn't recall precisely where he saw him from before though.

He poked Jiang Tian again, whispering, "Who's that in the middle, do you know him?"

Before Jiang Tian could open his mouth, Big Mouth Xu dragged his hand across his face and said, completely fed up, "It's him! The one who told you that Teacher Xiao-Yang got you to go take the practice papers! Are you really the victim?"

Sheng Wang did not dare to accept that praise, he hurriedly waved as he said: "Sorry, I didn't remember the face."

Zhao Xi let a sound of amusement escape him by the window, that student's face turned even more sour.

In an attempt to cover up his impropriety, Zhao Xi cleared his throat as he walked over from the window. "I see Xiao-Sheng is quite lost, Dean Xu, didn't you tell him what's going on?"

"Not yet, do you want me to let the whole school know if I just fill them in right there and then on the road?" Big Mouth Xu said, irked.

"Oh, then let me give a simple explanation." Zhao Xi pointed at Lin Beiting as he said, "That day in the shop, Lin Beiting and I caught the two hooligans who were stirring trouble, this you do know, right?"

Sheng Wang gave Jiang Tian a quick glance, and nodded. "Yeah, saw the pictures too. Thanks, Xi-ge."

“Ay, no big deal.” Zhao Xi said: “My dad has security cameras over there in any case, those two hooligans climbed over the walls from the residential block into the school 7.10 in the morning, and laid an ambush right there at Magpie Bridge——”

Big Mouth Xu turned purple: “Mag what pie again?!”

Zhao Xi immediately changed his wording. “No, Garden of Conduct. They waited to ambush him in the Garden of Conduct. Slightly before 8.20am, they came tumbling out with mud all over and blood dripping out of their noses. What they did were pretty obvious, in any case they were quite clear in their explanations in the police station. They said that their little brother was humiliated in Fuzhong, they refused to sit there and just take it, therefore they came to ambush Sheng Wang for the sake of their pride.”

He pointed at Zhai Tao. “There—the little brother of a different surname who was humiliated.”

Zhai Tao’s surname was Zhai, the crew cut who kneeled after a knee from Sheng Wang had the surname of Wu, the other blonde who could fight had the surname of Lu. The older and younger ‘brothers’ all knew each other from the corners of the streets and the depths of dark alleys.

Boys at this age were in the ‘golden period’ of teenage rebellion, they were always on the fight for some attention and clout. Zhai Tao wanted some respect but got none, wanted some importance and got none too. He was nowhere near outstanding in all areas at all, yet he was especially vain. He could only rely on a bunch of older and younger brothers and sisters of the same feather to make him look good, and somehow forced himself to become the ‘gang leader’ of Fuzhong year twos.

Still, his title of ‘leader’ wasn’t something worth boasting about as quite a number of people in the level turned up their noses at him. Those people cared more about grades, and in that field, Jiang Tian was number one.

He wasn’t able to build much resentment between Jiang Tian and him, and he still wanted to recover his pride. Upon much pondering, he set his eyes on Sheng Wang alone as he was a transfer student.

No one would stand up for the transfer student, this was a basic fact.

Every school would have the same situation, no reason why it would change in particular for Sheng Wang.

The day he was sent to sweep Road #3 as a punishment by Big Mouth Xu, he knew that Yang Jing wanted Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian to participate in the Olympiads. Zhai Tao had never participated in any Olympiad before, but he knew the routines of the teachers like the back of his hand. There could be nothing else rather than solving questions, solving questions, and solving more questions. Every couple of days they would have to go take new practice papers.

He knew that Sheng Wang was on good terms with Jiang Tian and Gao Tianyang. But Sheng Wang was only here for a few days, no matter how good their relations were, how close can they be? At any rate, there has to be a time where he was left alone.

Therefore, he thought of a scheme that he personally felt was brilliant. He planned to pick the day Sheng Wang was alone, and use the English Olympiad as an excuse to get Sheng Wang to go to the garden. There

weren’t any cameras there, and there wouldn’t be any revealing information if he got people to beat him up there.

Zhai Tao often heard people of Class A joke around that Sheng Wang was utterly weak, along with his refined and fair looks, the aura of a young master emanating off him, he deduced that the other person didn’t know how to fight. He would probably cry after like two punches. As such, he didn’t bother calling for more people. He only got two ‘older brothers’ he knew from outside the school, and figured that it was more than enough.

The one who was responsible for guiding Sheng Wang to go there was Ding Xiu, he was also a transfer student. He was slightly better off than Sheng Wang in that he wasn’t from a different province. When he transferred over it was year 1, second semester, and entered the physics-biology class without a change in level.

The days of being a transfer student weren’t easy. An unfamiliar pacing along with falling behind in all sorts of areas, he was left flustered and helpless all by himself. It wouldn’t be hard for anyone in that position to have a mental breakdown.

Ding Xiu was a classic example.

After staying for one semester in Fuzhong, his grades took a rock dive to the bottom few of the level, his exam venue was nailed to Class 12. That was why he found someone to boost his confidence——that person was Zhai Tao.

He became one of the many ‘brothers’ Zhai Tao had.

When Zhai Tao approached Ding Xiu about this matter, he was actually fearful, and yet, he agreed in the end. On one hand, he was scared of making Zhai Tao unhappy, on the other…...it was because he himself was resentful.

They were both transfer students, why the huge difference.

A few days ago, Big Mouth Xu managed to suss all these out from the clues provided by the hooligans and the security camera in the corridor. He thought that that was the entire story. However, just as he was prepared to take disciplinary action on Zhai Tao and Ding Xiu when he called them into the office, Zhai Tao sold another person out, and pushed all the blame onto that one person.

“I only planned to scare him a little at first, I didn’t mean to make things this bad.” Zhai Tao said, “Just ask if you don’t believe me! Ask Ding Xiu! Ask Wu Cheng and Lu Yuanliang! I was the one who said there’s no need to beat him up if he’s scared, right? Just go and ask! It was all because of that guy’s idea, he’s the one who said that this monthly exam was especially important for Sheng Wang that fu- for Sheng Wang. If he messed that up he would be beyond disgusted, way more useful than just scaring him.”

Dean Xu was angry to the point of nearly smashing his teacup into pieces. He got people to summon the “that guy” in Zhai Tao’s words to the office.

When Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian entered the office, Dean Xu just confronted all three of them again. Until now, they still hadn’t reached a consensus.

Zhai Tao and Ding Xiu were cornered rats, they refused to concede and admit to their own fault in this fiasco, as if they were the righteous ones, the others were the real idiots. As for the third student, no matter what the other people around him said or did, he kept his head hung low all the way.

There appeared to be two hair whorls on the top of his head, but classmates close to him would know that one was a true whorl, the other one was a scar that resulted from being hit by a hard object. Sheng Wang does not remember people by faces, nevertheless, he had deep impressions of that scar.

His brows furrowed before relaxing. He moved around to that boy's front, stared at him unblinkingly for a while before he softly said: "It really was you, Old Qi."

The other person didn't lift his head.

From Sheng Wang's angle, he could only see that the corners of his pursed up lips violently twitched, as if he was slapped by someone, both unsightly and embarrassing. Not long ago, he was even cheerily saying on the stage, hand tugging on his sleeve, "Thank you! Thank you everyone for showing me so much face!"

Perhaps it was because Sheng Wang lingered in front of him for too long, after several decades of him pinching the cuff on his school uniform, he suddenly spoke. "It's not me, it has nothing to do with me at all! I barely even spoke to them! They themselves did a bunch of fucking stupid things, now that they are facing the music they're blaming it all on me!"

Zhai Tao was the image of an old fox. “The hell! What do you mean barely spoke? When you were in Class 5 you played plenty of basketball with me! Not even recognising me now that you’re in Class A? Do your classmates know how self-interested you are? Besides, there're so many people in the level, why the hell would I push it all on you in particular?!”

“WHY THE FUCK WOULD I KNOW WHY?!” Qi Jiahao roared back, his neck already red. “WHAT HAS IT GOT ANYTHING TO DO WITH ENTERING CLASS A? I FINALLY SAW YOUR TRUE COLOURS AND DIDN'T WANT TO PLAY WITH YOU ANYMORE, ALRIGHT?!”

“THE FUCK WITH SEEING ME!” Zhai Tao cursed, “WHEN YOU’RE BEATEN UP INTO BLOODY MUSH WHO’S THE ONE WHO TREATED YOU NICELY? YOU GOT AMNESIA AFTER GOING TO A BETTER CLASS? MOTHERFUCKING IDIOT. JUST TELL ME—”

He pointed at Sheng Wang: “WAS IT YOU WHO TOLD ME THAT THE MONTHLY EXAM IS IMPORTANT TO HIM?!”

“I DIDN’T!” Qi Jiahao said.

“THE FUCK?”

“Enough!” Dean Xu smacked his table with much force. He pointed at them: “Did I call all of you here to perform street insults?”

Qi Jiahao still wanted to defend himself, until he heard Yang Jing, who had been gravely silent for a long time, open her mouth.

She said: “Class rep.”

All fight left Qi Jiahao at once, his head hung low again. Out of the whole office, the person he was the most terrified of looking at was Yang Jing.

“When Old Xu said that Sheng Wang could only qualify for Tri-Quality by improving 50 places in the monthly exam, there was only me, him, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian in the office.” Yang Jing said, “Although I’m not the homeroom teacher, I also know who’s on good terms with each other, and who couldn’t stand each other. Not even Gao Tianyang knew about this, and I reckon that Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian didn’t bring it up to anyone else either. It could only be you.”

“The time when I looked for you to print some practices, I casually mentioned it when I was chatting with you.” Yang Jing had her eyes on him as she said, “You’re the only one who knew, after all. If you didn’t bring it up, where else would Zhai Tao and the rest get their info from?”

She was overbearing when she chided people on an ordinary basis. For this, however, her tone wasn’t fierce at all. There was only disappointment.

For students like Qi Jiahao, what they couldn’t bear to face the most was disappointment.

He struggled for a bit: “I really didn’t……”

Thus he never spoke again.

The office fell into silence. A while later, Dean Xu rubbed his face: “The whole situation is roughly something like this. Some things we won’t get a clear answer just by asking around. Only the few of you will know what happened deep down inside. No matter what was your intention, the final result was that you caused a student to miss his listening compre. You may think, *oh, the monthly exam isn’t a big deal, if he couldn’t make it this time round there’s still next time*. But what if we didn’t get to the bottom of this? He would lose his chance at Tri-Quality, and then because of this missed opportunity he didn’t manage to meet the qualifications of the advanced admission most suitable for him, and then what?”

Dean Xu asked with his hands behind his back, word by word, sentence by sentence: “Even though gaokao isn’t the finish line, it still affects a certain part of your life. You messed up a portion of another person’s life, what can you even do to make up for it?”

He looked at Qi Jiahao as he said, “You yourself spent so much effort on fighting for Tri-Quality, you know how important it is. You destroyed other people’s efforts just like that? You think this is deserving of the title Tri-Quality Student?”

Qi Jiahao clenched his jaws, the joint at the side of his face twitched.

Dean Xu straightened up. “Either way, I do not think you’re worthy.”

He turned to ask Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian: “Did you class only settle on him for the name list for Tri-Quality?”

Sheng Wang didn’t speak, Dean Xu didn’t count on them to open their mouths either. He said, “Your Teacher He can hold another election, remove Qi Jiahao’s nomination from the list. Zhai Tao, Ding Xiu and Qi Jiahao will get demerit points.”

After dealing with the three of them, he turned to Sheng Wang: “As for your Tri-Quality nomination, your improvement throughout the past two exams is indeed the largest in the entire level. I’ve also asked Teacher Xiao-Yang, if you managed to fully listen to your exam, it’s very unlikely for you to lose any marks. Along with those missing marks, improving 50 places is no problem at all. Therefore…...how about this, forget everything about my previous condition, and the nomination for Tri-Quality still goes to you, how does that sound?”

Sheng Wang did not reply right away.

He did not care much for the Tri-Quality nomination, truthful speaking. What he truly cared about was if his results were proportionate against the effort he put in.

Before, this nomination logically should have gone to him, yet it was gone on a whim. Now that he already silently acknowledged not wanting it, there came someone who insisted on forcing that nomination upon him.

For what reason? Does it look like I need this?

Sheng Wang gave it some contemplation, and said to Dean Xu, “I don’t want it anymore.”

Big Mouth Xu’s eyes instantly threatened to pop out of his sockets. Even Zhai Tao, Ding Xiu and Qi Jiahao all whipped their heads around.

Only Jiang Tian by his side snorted, full of pride in the exact same way.

Sheng Wang suddenly felt especially exhilarated.

He said, “I honour my words, I still didn’t meet the condition of improving 50 places. The nomination for Tri-Quality? I don’t want it anymore.”

Did it feel fantastic? Feeling fantastic alone was enough.

Chapter 034 - Corner

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What Closely Followed Was Jiang Tian Telling Li Yu, “I’m Not Handing In Either.”

Sheng Wang did feel fantastic, Dean Xu nearly became a pufferfish from sheer anger.

What was even more infuriating was that as he was chugging down cold tea while rubbing his head, saying, “Now there’s three empty slots for the Tri-Quality nominations, other than Jiang Tian the #1 permanent resident, right?”

Jiang Tian replied to him with: “Nope, now all four slots are empty.”

Dean Xu choked on his tea, and nearly coughed his lungs out.

“Whatwasthatsaythatagain?” Dean Xu asked, glaring.

“We fought together, received the punishment together, but I’m the one who gets to keep the nomination while he loses it. It’s unfair.” Jiang Tian said.

“Am I the one who made him lose that?! Huh!” Big Mouth Xu was on the verge of eating someone alive.

Yet, after he gave it some careful thought, he realised to his dismay that in theory it really was him.

He sheepishly closed his mouth and touched his head. He was almost bald from fretting.

16-17 years old boys were proud and arrogant, they often acted emotionally, and would often attempt to seek their own ideas of justice on some strange issues. He could never understand it, and could never bring himself to agree. It was the same way that the vivacious youths in school would never understand his dignity in old age and experience, as well as his overcautiousness.

Some people could be convinced even across the chasm, some couldn't.

Therefore, Big Mouth Xu chased all of them out as he slapped the table, and confidently declared, "There will be a time where you two brats will be crying in regret! I'll be waiting!"

The third period in the morning was English. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were late for 10 minutes, but so was Yang Jing herself. The three of them entered the classroom together, the students in class didn't think too much of it. They simply thought that Yang Jing just had a routine chat with them.

Gao Tianyang alone was much more perceptive.

He looked left and right before stealthily asking Sheng Wang: "What happened?"

"Hm?" Sheng Wang was digging out his notebook from his bag.

Gao Tianyang's mouth twitched. "You, Tian-ge and Old Qi were called away one after another. You two are back now, but Old Qi's seat is still empty. What happened?"

Sheng Wang looked up, took a cursory glance and lowered his head back to digging through his bag again. He replied with giving Gao Tianyang a meaningful look instead.

Gao Tianyang said: “No wait, what do you mean by blinking?”

“He means that you should be standing up.” Yang Jing’s clear voice came from the stage. She asked, “Gao Tianyang, are you tired from talking with your neck twisted up like this?”

Gao Tianyang was startled.

He hurriedly sat up straight and concentrated on the test paper in front of him, pretending that he was paying much attention. Unfortunately, Yang Jing did not let him off. She said, “You, stand up.”

Gao Tianyang kicked his chair aside and stood up without any protest. “Teacher, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, what should you be sorry for? I happened to be looking for someone to cooperate with me anyway. Didn’t you want to talk? Here’s your chance—” Yang Jing continued, “Today I’ll be summarising the situations in which the active voice is used to represent a passive event as well as the passive voice representing an active event and their meanings. List an example each for me, don’t even think about sitting down until you can list all of them.”

Gao Tianyang was going to die.

Sheng Wang couldn’t bear to see how pitiful he was, and brandished his notebook on the spot. He himself didn’t usually look through his notes most of the time in actuality, but whoever asked a question, he was always capable of instantly flipping to the corresponding page.

Not only did he flip to the precise page, he was accurate enough to the point of picking out the exact position. Which note was scribbled down in the top left corner, which one was in the bottom right corner, which was written with a red pen, which one was written with a blue pen. He had impressions of all of them.

He flipped to the summary of active and passive voice with a single turn, used his pen to draw a giant bracket, and passed it to Gao Tianyang under the table.

Gao Tianyang gave his good bro a thumbs up behind his back, and then he looked down at the book……

His good bro had a shitty handwriting and still had the nerve to write without lifting his pen off his paper, he could not read a single sentence.

“Let me tell you guys, you should come up to the platform when you have the chance to too, just once and you will understand. From this angle, I can see every single tiny movement you make down there.”

Yang Jing leisurely flipped through her teaching plan while propping her hands against her desk. “Trying to pass notes right under my nose? It’s alright, Gao Tianyang, read with all your might, if you can understand Sheng Wang’s dog scratch handwriting, I will let you sit down straight away, no questions.”

The entire class roared with laughter, Gao Tianyang even laughed along.

Sheng Wang pretended to be in deep thought via propping his head against his palm. Due to his extremely pale skin, the girls at the side could see that handsome face of his slowly turn red in high definition, and so there was yet another round of heckling.

Shit, misfortune out of nowhere.

Sheng Wang said internally.

“I heard the level gave you guys a nickname, the Three Bigshots of Class A English.” When Yang Jing said three big shots, there was a short pause in her words, disappointment briefly flashing across her face. She speedily recovered from it, and said, “Since you are all bigshots, can your handwriting please strive towards the one sitting behind you, ah? Sheng Wang?”

“Don’t play deaf.” Yang Jing refused to spare him.

Sheng Wang stood up unwillingly, and said with mixed feelings, “Understood, teacher.”

“A few days ago your language teacher was even telling me that if you are willing to practice your handwriting, you could probably get a few more marks.” Yang Jing said, “You thought the two points you lost were for your ugly handwriting? The deductions were made only when the person marking reached their last straws.”

“Ok.”

“Go back and work on your handwriting, got it? Don’t torture your teachers anymore.”

Another wave of the class pummeling their tables in laughter.

Sheng Wang replied with an “Mn”, his smile was full of resignation.

The phone in his bag abruptly vibrated, covered up by the hysterical laughter by the whole class. He was the only one who felt it.

He sat down, dug out his phone, gave it a quick sweep, and saw that said person sitting behind him in Yang Jing’s words sent him a message.

Jiang Tian: Zhao Xi is asking for us to join in for lunch.

Sheng Wang paused, and kept typing with his head down.

Shop’s Closed: when?

Jiang Tian: after class, noon

Shop’s Closed: their BBQ shop opens this early?

Jiang Tian: ……

A few seconds later, the other person directly replied with a screenshot from a chat.

In the screenshot, Zhao Xi sent his location over, set at the hotpot restaurant at the corner from Fuzhong’s north gate. He told Jiang Tian to get Sheng Wang to come along.

Shop’s Closed: that place is full of lines all day long, by the time it’s our turn, do we even need to do Old Wu’s 0.5h timed practice anymore?

Jiang Tian: they’re going first

Shop’s Closed: them?

Shop’s Closed: oh, the Lin guy is going too?

Jiang Tian: yeah

Shop’s Closed: the real and fake boss were both Fuzhong students?

Jiang Tian: Zhao is, Lin isn’t.

Sheng Wang thought of the scene in the office earlier. Zhao Xi was very familiar with Big Mouth Xu, Lin Beiting was much more polite.

Jiang Tian: saw the competition coaching timetable yet?

Shop’s Closed: yeah, there’s Zhao Xi

Jiang Tian: there’s also Lin Beiting

Sheng Wang was astonished, but he suddenly heard Yang Jing say, “Sheng Wang, what are you doing with your head down? Come save Gao Tianyang.”

His heart skipped a beat, and guiltily stood up after stuffing his phone into his back, pretending that he was paying attention. He didn’t even

bother with taking his notebook, the moment he opened his mouth all sorts of scenarios in which the active and passive voice were used came out.

He looked at Yang Jing, internally saying, *you may start praising me now*.

However, in the very next second, he could already tell that there was something wrong with the mood. The whole class fell into an eerie silence. Just as he was confused over it, he heard Yang Jing say, “This *part* was already finished several minutes ago, were you listening?”

“.....”

If there was a hole by the window, Sheng Wang would have leapt out.

Yang Jing shot him a glare, and called, “Jiang Tian, come save Sheng Wang.”

Sheng Wang heard a clatter from the chair at his back, the person behind him also stood up.

A few seconds of silence later, Jiang Tian’s voice rang behind him. “I wasn’t listening either.”

Commotion stirred in the entire class, the ones like Song Sirui who was unafraid to die already gave them a thumbs up, he turned around and mouthed: “Impressive! Suave! Hella thick nerves!”

Sheng Wang strangely felt like he was caught red handed, it was even a buy one get one free.

Thanks to the two bigshots, this English lesson became the most blissful English lesson Class A had ever experienced. Yang Jing got internal damage from her sheer anger at them, and didn't bother calling on any other people anymore. Even Gao Tianyang was granted a special pardon and got to sit down.

The two of them were the only ones who stood up the entire lesson, one before the other.

*

The hotpot place at Fuzhong's north gate was only open for a month, they took up the most popular spot in the area, and there were always long queues in the night market. It was slightly better at noon. They used northern style copper pots here, the smell wasn't too strong, and there were also students and teachers from Fuzhong who sneaked out here for lunch during the noon break.

(t/n: □□□□ - northern style hotpot and what it looks like)

Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting were already waiting for them.

The two of them picked a seat near the second floor's windows. After Sheng Wang sat down, he gave a brief glance at the view outside. He could see the unending stream of people by the crossroads.

"The change is pretty big." Zhao Xi looked all over, and said to Lin Beiting, "Right?"

"Mn, there was barely anyone around back then." Lin Beiting said.

"What?" Sheng Wang questioned.

“We’re speaking of this shop.” Zhao Xi pointed at the bottom of his feet. “When I was in high school, this storefront was a legendarily toxic spot, whoever came will have to shutter down for business eventually. There wasn't anyone who could last more than three months. These two years, it somehow became lively, whoever opened their store here, whoever gets to roll in cash. It’s quite magical.”

Lin Beiting uncapped the drink and poured some into Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s cups, and opened a can of beer each for him and Zhao Xi. “Wasn’t this store still empty when we rented the store space?”

“Yup,” Zhao Xi said, “Both spots were open for rental back then.”

“Then why didn’t you rent this one?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Because we were aiming for the other storefront all along.” Zhao Xi grinned, and clinked his beer can against his cup, “When I went to school, there was also a BBQ store over there. The first time I met Lin-zi was over there, afterwards every time the groups gathered up to eat were all over there too.”

“I heard from Jiang Tian that Lin-ge wasn’t from Fuzhong?” Sheng Wang asked curiously.

“Yup,” Zhao Xi pointed in a random direction, “he’s from Yizhong, the ‘gang leader’ of Yizhong back then, right Lin-ge?”

He teasingly lifted his chin at Lin Beiting.

Speaking of gang leaders, Sheng Wang thought of Zhai Tao.

When Zhao Xi saw his expression he could already tell what he was thinking. He clarified in a hurry, “He wasn’t the type of gang leader with a questionable IQ, he was part of Yizhong’s competition class, his grades were fantastic and he was full of airs——”

As he spoke, he received a warning look from Lin Beiting, he laughed as he gave in. “Either ways, a lot of little girls were chasing after him, and so a lot of guys were jealous of him. Yizhong was much wilder than Fuzhong, every couple of days someone would come looking for a fight with him. You have to note, he’s also someone who couldn’t be arsed to chitchat, if words didn’t work he would just fight them. Thus, as he fought, he somehow became the gang leader of the legends.”

Lin Beiting used the perforated spoon to scoop something and dumped it in his bowl, saying, “You may stop now.”

“See, he did these things himself but he didn’t want to let anyone speak about it.” Zhao Xi’s personality was clearly the uncontrollable type, he was really getting into telling stories, nobody could stop him at all.

“Don’t tell me you and Lin-ge met because of a fight?” Sheng Wang guessed.

“Ay, smart.” Zhao Xi pointed at Lin Beiting: “The two of us were both participating in an Olympiad, was it chem or physics, I can’t remember. The preliminary exam was in Fuzhong, after the exam I came with a bunch of people here to the BBQ store for skewers, he was dragged here by a few classmates. Then the few idiot classmates of his drank too much, and insisted on fighting with Fuzhong to see who’s better, and they got into a disagreement. What did they say after that again?”

He looked toward Lin Beiting, having forgotten some of the details from years ago.

Lin Beiting side-eyed him, and said, exasperatedly, “I forgot. Either way, you all were already fighting by the time I came back from the washroom, you threw a punch at me without even looking.”

Zhao Xi laughed with a cup in his hands, “How was I supposed to know, everyone who wasn’t in Fuzhong’s uniform were all opponents, that’s all.”

Lin Beiting shook his head.

Sheng Wang could roughly tell at this point that just from the way Zhao Xi acted alone, he was probably a tyrant himself in school back then. After all, it takes two hands to clap.

“Then you became friends after a fight?” He asked.

“Of course not.” Lin Beiting said, “We fought at least ten rounds, and finally reluctantly made peace in the end.”

Zhao Xi: “Due to our decent results for the physics Olympiads, we entered the province team, and stayed in the same dorm. Afterwards we mysteriously became on good terms.”

“Then you entered the same uni?” Sheng Wang felt like he could imagine an entire trajectory himself.

Contrary to expectations, Zhao Xi gave a quiet laugh with his eyes downcasted. “Nope, we didn’t go to the same uni, for a few years we didn’t really stay in contact either. It’s only later that we both went overseas by fate, and got in contact again. A while ago the two of us returned one after

another, and happened to hear that that storefront was open for rental. We decided to take over, run a BBQ store, and reminisce about our dumbass teenage lives back then.

He spoke with a flavour of carelessness, as if everything was just for fun. Sheng Wang felt that the two of them were quite cool for some reason.

“When I heard you rejecting that prize today in the office, I felt that your temper matched up to my taste very well.” Zhao Xi pointed at Sheng Wang, and said to Jiang Tian, “You, however, gave me a scare.”

“Why?” Jiang Tian rarely cut in earlier, he probably already knew about the past Zhao Xi was talking about. Now that he was called on by Zhao Xi, he finally looked up.

“You looked like you lack that youthful vigour all the time, I thought you’ll put more consideration into this.” Zhao Xi took a large swig of his beer, “tsked”, and refuted himself, “But yeah, I remembered you kiddo back then because I felt that you were especially proud. You were so quiet usually, I nearly forgot.”

Jiang Tian drank an iced drink with a frosty look on his face, bringing Zhao Xi some mirth.

Sheng Wang gave it a little thought and said, “I figured that you will think that we are rash and idiotic.”

Zhao Xi laughed for a long while. “Nah, I won’t. After all, I’ve tried similar things back then. Rationality speaking, it was quite stupid, there will be a lot of people telling you that you wil regret it in the future.”

Sheng Wang asked: “Then did you regret anything?”

Zhao Xi said: “Do I look regretful to you?”

Sheng Wang started laughing along. He really liked these two people now.

“I only know to do whatever you want to do at whatever age you are. If you don’t go wild when you ought to go wild, you are probably more likely to regret not doing anything.” He said, “There will be decades in the future for you to be overcautious, why the rush?”

Sheng Wang’s thumb wiped away the condensation on the glass cup, from the corner of his eyes, he saw Jiang Tian retract his gaze from outside the window. His eyes were lowered, zoning out a little. Who knew what was going on in his mind.

The crowd at the crossroads was at its peak for the noon, the stream of people flowed endlessly, unending they came, unending they went.

*

Qi Jiahao only returned to class during the long break this afternoon. His head was lowered all the way, refusing to speak to anyone at all.

He was probably terrified that Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian would spread the incident to everyone in class. He was freaking out for the entire break, occasionally shooting a glance at the back of the class.

Yet, Sheng Wang had zero time to even think about him at all, because the class monitor, Li Yu, came to carry out her responsibilities with

a form in hand again.

She hesitated before Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian's desks, saying, "Um, the application for dorms is ending soon, are you two still submitting the form?"

This question was more like a reminder. The previous second Sheng Wang was still laughing from Gao Tianyang's clownery, the next he stopped smiling.

He questioned before he quickly reacted. He drank a mouthful of water and apologised to Li Yu with all smiles, "I'm not submitting it anymore, go ahead and ask other people already."

Li Yu silently looked at the "other people" behind Sheng Wang.

Sheng Wang casually whipped out a book from his desk, and flipped through it with his head down, his feet on the bar under the table. He flipped through four pages before he realised that he was looking at the physics notes that he had long since finished studying.

His finger paused, and quietly drooped.

What closely followed was Jiang Tian telling Li Yu, "I'm not handing in either."

When was it that Li Yu left, Sheng Wang had no clue at all. He only recalled that when he came back to himself, he felt the person behind him tap on his back with a pen.

He leaned backwards on reflex, his back touching the table.

Next, he heard Jiang Tian ask him behind his ears, “When is the shop reopening?”

Chapter 035 - Overseer

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By The Time The Overseer Finally Nodded, He Was So Drowsy That He Couldn’t Even Find His Own Bedroom Door.

At the front of the classroom, Song Sirui said something terrible that must have gotten on the nerves of a huge group of people, Gao Tianyang took the lead by pressing him onto the table, putting him in a stranglehold as well as clawing at his waist. One person after another all piled on top of Song Sirui’s back, nearly suffocating him.

Li Yu couldn’t understand braindead games like these, as she did her work she shook her head and giggled uncontrollably. Little Chilli was cheering on at the side, she even dug out her phone and recorded the entire process as though she was filming a movie. She even tried different angles and zoom-ins in imitation.

Song Sirui was squeezed until his face and neck were flushed, and spat in difficulty, “I’m fucking sorry, please?!”

“I’m gonna die, help me——”

“What’s wrong with all of you!”

……

The classroom was full of chaos, but Sheng Wang heard Jiang Tian’s words crystal clear.

He mused and said, “I have a pretty bad temper and a petty mind, I stay angry for a long time too.”

Jiang Tian’s upper body was slightly leaning forward, a pen between his fingers. When he listened to him, his gaze was slightly lowered, his fingers pinched the two ends of his black pen, slowly spinning it around.

He nodded, and replied, “Mn, so?”

So if I reopen just because you told me to, wouldn’t I look pathetic?

The leg stepping on the horizontal bar under the table relaxed, the chair rocking backwards settled back onto the ground, the back of the chair no longer touching the edges of Jiang Tian’s table.

He tossed the totally useless physics book back into the desk. Just as he was about to make some bold declarations, Gao Tianyang who was at the front returned in victory, asking him from afar, “Sheng-ge! What got you so happy?”

Sheng Wang: “Happy? Your ass.”

Gao Tianyang: “???”

He did not understand how did a “happy?” from him became all about his ass, he could only see Jiang Tian shaking in laughter laughter.

Young Master Sheng Wang’s dignity was priceless, even if he was to lose it it wouldn’t be now. Therefore, he forced himself to not give in for an

entire afternoon as well as three periods of night self-study, and somehow endured all the way until it was the middle of the night.

He was in the midst of calculating for the final physics question when his phone vibrated three times at his side, there were a few WeChat messages.

Normally, Jiang Tian would be the only one still up at this hour. Sheng Wang subconsciously peered at the wall behind him, and opened up WeChat. Unexpectedly, the conversation most on top wasn't the person next door, it was his ex-deskmate slash roommate, Pang Xie.

StarAniseCrab: I JUST SAW YOU ON THE INTERNET SHENG-GE!!!

StarAniseCrab: as expected, if you're handsome there will always be people taking pictures of you no matter where you go

StarAniseCrab: it's only been like 5 seconds, there's already people lining up wanting to confess to you

Sheng Wang was thoroughly lost, he jabbed three punctuation marks in reply.

Shop's Closed: ???

StarAniseCrab: eh? ur still awake?

Shop's Closed: aren't you awake too

StarAniseCrab: that's true

StarAniseCrab: life in Jiangsu sure is bad, it literally forced our Sheng-ge to burn the midnight oil every single night

Shop’s Closed: don’t even mention it to me

Shop’s Closed: my kidney hurts

StarAniseCrab: are you still doing homework? exactly how much homework do y’all have?

Sheng Wang casually snapped a picture of the paper he was doing and sent it over.

Shop’s Closed: last question, if your message came any later I would have slept.

The other person didn’t reply instantly, Sheng Wang didn’t bother to wait either, he stuffed in his earpiece and continued to figure out the formula. Around five minutes later, just as Sheng Wang completed the last section, his phone suddenly vibrated again.

StarAniseCrab: I just read through the questions

StarAniseCrab: I think my worldview kinda collapsed

StarAniseCrab: I literally can’t do a single question????

Sheng Wang wheezed, he replied with a voice message straight away. “Don’t crumble yet, who would even test this on a regular basis? It’s compulsory for everyone in the class to participate in the Olympiads here, this is the practice paper, I’m struggling my way through it too

StarAniseCrab: can’t tell that you’re struggling

StarAniseCrab: no wait HOLD ON!

StarAniseCrab: aren’t you still catching up? How are you already doing competition papers?

Sheng Wang sent a smiley face that was asking for extra beatings, saying, “Already caught up.”

StarAniseCrab: ……

StarAniseCrab: it wasn’t even one month???

StarAniseCrab: fk

StarAniseCrab: I shouldn’t have came to seek heart attacks in the middle of the night

Speaking of his arrival in his chat, Sheng Wang recalled the first sentence in this conversation. He asked, “You said you saw me on the internet just now? What do you mean?”

StarAniseCrab: oh, hold on, I’ll send it to you

Next he tossed a screenshot over.

The screenshot consisted of a status of a person’s QQ space —— someone named “Fuzhong’s Confession Page” posted a picture. It was Sheng Wang, standing by the sports ground.

It was likely taken after a jog during the long break, he wore a white T-shirt, a school jacket hanging over his left shoulder, a hand grabbing a

bottle of water, the other hand wiping at the corner of his mouth. There were traces of sweat by his sideburns, and he was smiling as he talked to someone.

StarAniseCrab: you haven’t seen the QQ chat for a while now, right?

StarAniseCrab: I saw a few girls talking about it in the class chat last night, saying that their first love flew away, and is now receiving confessions from girls in other schools

Shop’s Closed: ……

Sheng Wang didn’t know what to reply to him either, he sent two stickers about how he didn’t know if he wanted to laugh or cry, and scrolled down from the screenshot.

Below that post was a series of replies so long that the screenshot didn’t capture all of them. Some were lining up to send tiny hearts emojis, some typed out his name, some said he was both handsome and valiant. There was even one who focused on a particularly strange area, saying: Whose hand is it from the left side of the picture? I think that he’s probably a major hottie, you can tell from the fingers alone.

Another person replied: if he's a major hottie, then I’ll put a blind guess and say that it’s Jiang Tian.

Sheng Wang said internally, *don’t need to blindly guess, it is Jiang Tian.*

He zoomed in on the picture. That hand was svelte and neat, next to the prominent outline of his wrist, was a tiny little mole.

There were two PE lessons during the supplementary lessons over the summer break. The girls of Class A hated going under the Sun, they always found excuses to stay behind in the classroom and do their work. The boys, otherwise, were pretty enthusiastic. They generally went to the equipment room, grab a basketball, and play half-court, with the teacher as the referee. Sheng Wang was more of the lazy type, but he did show Gao Tianyang, the PE rep, plenty of respect. He went on court for both times and coincidentally ended up on the opposite team as Jiang Tian for both times too.

Jiang Tian usually wore a wristband to play basketball, when he dribbled the basketball, that tiny mole would be under the edges of the wristband, appearing and disappearing along with his movements.

It was really…...pretty handsome.

His phone buzzed again. Sheng Wang blanked out for a moment before he realised that he seriously stared at Jiang Tian's hand for such a long time.

He averted his eyes at once, hurriedly closed the picture, gulped two mouthfuls of water from the cup on the desk, and finally went back to WeChat as he licked the corner of his lips.

StarAniseCrab sent a few messages again, Sheng Wang gave all of them a brief sweep, but he already lost any interest in chatting. After two simple lines exchanged with Crab, they both let each other know that they would be going to sleep.

There was soon complete silence from Crab's end. However, Sheng Wang did not intend to sleep yet.

He stuffed the completed physics practice back into his bag, and looked up to check the time—it was 1.07am.

Ever since he caught up with the syllabus, he no longer needed to stay up to 2am every night. Perhaps it was because he has yet to readjust from his previous schedule, he was clearly quite drowsy, but he felt like he should be doing something.

He rummaged through his bag again—the homework was all completed, he did the practice for math-physics-chem Olympiads, he already memorised all of the classical texts, so maybe he should take a look at the vocabulary list?

He may be thinking of that, but his finger already tapped on WeChat’s icon. He entered and left the personal info page for three times before he decided to change his profile picture and nickname in the middle of the night when nobody is awake.

He found a picture of Hot Kid cupping his fist, changed his profile picture into that, and then entered the four words: “Open For Business”.

t/n: the name was actually a standard congratulatory phrase used to celebrate a business' grand opening, meaning "good fortunes for opening of the business" roughly. Fanart of the profile picture here.(third pic))

Not even two minutes since he made the change, there was a knock on his bedroom door.

There was a ceiling light switched on in the second floor’s corridor, it wasn’t particularly bright. It casted a halo on the floor between the two bedrooms. Jiang Tian’s hair was already dry from his shower, the warm yellow light from above erased his sharpness in his features, making him appear gentle.

He raised what he was holding in his hand. “Opening gift.”

“What’s that?”

Sheng Wang received it with confusion, and turned it over……

The fuck, a copybook.

(t/n: A copybook is used to practise the handwriting)

“Are you trying to pick a fight?” He asked, annoyed.

Jiang Tian declined to comment. His fingers retracted a little, saying, “Want it? If not, I’m taking it back.”

Sheng Wang talked under his breath for a moment before he asked, “Did you practice your handwriting to this?”

“Roughly.” Jiang Tian said.

“What do you mean by roughly?”

“I followed it twice.” Jiang Tian said.

“You call that practicing when you only did it twice?” Sheng Wang said, completely done, “Why don’t you just say that it’s innate.”

Jiang Tian even had the guts to agree.

Sheng Wang nearly rolled his eyes out. “I’ve confirmed, you’re here for a beating.”

Laughter rumbled in Jiang Tian's throat, he said properly again: "Practicing is pretty quick, actually."

Sheng Wang wasn't exactly convinced. "It has to take one year minimum, no?"

"No need."

"Don't hoodwink me." Sheng Wang deadpanned, "This, I still know. You might not believe me, but I did practice my handwriting as a kid, I did it so seriously—"

He stuck out two fingers. "For two years."

This time round, Jiang Tian really did laugh out loud.

His wrist was propped against the door frame, and laughed with his head looking aside, his Adam's apple slightly trembling along.

"The hell you're laughing at." Sheng Wang said stonily.

Jiang Tian turned to face him. "Do you want a crash course?"

"Duh!" Sheng Wang eyed him warily after saying that. "Don't tell me…...you even have tricks to practising your handwriting?"

"It wouldn't be particularly refined, but it's at least readable." Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang suspected he was launching personal attacks, but beggars can't be choosers. On the basis of the copybook, he would just suck it up. "Readable is all I need, I'm not planning to master calligraphy anyway."

Jiang Tian stuck out his palm, his pointer finger beckoned, “A pen.”

Sheng Wang pushed him straight into the room next door.

The table here was already tidied, the chair was empty, but Jiang Tian did not sit. He took out a red pen from his bag, stooped and circled a few words on the copybook.

“□(country), □(liao), □(stream), □(Qin/Tan/deep), □(crow), □(oxygen).....” Sheng Wang read out a few as Jiang Tian circled, he couldn’t spot a pattern.

Jiang Tian flipped through more than 10 pages, and circled less than 30 characters. He settled his pen down. “You just need to practise these, copy them a few times every day, pay a little more attention when you write on a normal basis, and that’s all.”

“Really?” Sheng Wang had his doubts. “What’s so special about these words?”

“Fully enclosed, half enclosed, top-down, left-right structures. I’ve picked out a few classic examples for all.” Jiang Tian said, “It’s like how you do your work, when you master these few, you master all of them.”

(t/n: Right so the reason for putting the CN characters in the earlier part is because Jiang Tian was talking about the structures of the characters, □ is fully enclosed, □ is top down and has a lot of straight lines, □ is half enclosed ish with a right slanting downwards stroke. A localization would be “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog”. According to wikipedia, a literate college graduate would know between 3k to 4k Chinese characters, which is honestly a lot if you want to practise your handwriting for all. The words Jiang Tian picked also consisted of a variety of strokes.)

Sheng Wang's eyes swept around the surroundings. “Do you have a blank notebook? Lemme try.”

Jiang Tian found one for him, and even threw in a pen for free.

“Just write, I’ll memorise my texts.” He grabbed the language textbook that was facing down at the side of the table, and sat at the windowsill just like the many nights before.

The few night insects at White Horse Alley started crying out again, in chirps and screams. Sheng Wang briefly paused before the table. He finally pulled out the chair, sat down, and started writing the characters circled out on the copybook, stroke by stroke.

Five minutes later, he let out a long sigh of relief. He dangled the book right in front of Jiang Tian’s face. “I’m done, take a look. I feel like I’ve vastly improved.”

Jiang Tian gave it a quick scan, and that handsome face of his instantly went dead.

He didn’t bother with his book anymore, he settled the notebook in front of Sheng Wang again, hoovered over the table, and demanded like an overseer: “Rewrite it.”

“.....”

Sheng Wang silently swore in his head, feeling like he was in kindergarten again.

The young master never saw it coming, not in a million years, that he seriously stayed up to 2.30am just to practise his handwriting. By the time the overseer finally nodded, he was so drowsy that he couldn’t even find his own bedroom door.

In the end, he couldn’t even remember what kind of fuss he kicked up. He only knew that when he opened his eyes in the morning, what he saw was the ceiling in Jiang Tian’s room.

Chapter 036 - Childhood

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As Though He Wasn’t Close To Anyone, As Though He Wasn’t Wanted No Matter Where He Went.

Boys at this age usually find themselves in an awkward situation whenever they wake up in the morning.

Sheng Wang subconsciously curled into a ball with the blanket. He blearily stared into blank space for a few seconds before he suddenly realised that something was wrong—he easily hogged the blanket, it did not feel like there was anyone tugging it on the other end.

Where’s Jiang Tian???

He was nonplussed, and rolled over to sit up straight. The cooling blanket cocooned him, the room was empty. He did not see the other person. He ran his hand through his hair that was slightly messy and curling up from sleep. Just as he was about to shed the blanket, someone opened the door to the room.

When Jiang Tian entered the room, he was slightly taken aback. He glanced at the wall clock before saying: “Up so early?”

It was barely six. The sky already brightened up, but the sunlight remained pale, vaguely hinting at the start of autumn.

The hair in front of his forehead was slightly damp, his eyes were clear. When he bent over to grab the school jacket at the foot of the bed, he had the cooling scent of mint. It was obvious that he just washed up.

Sheng Wang grunted, his voice was slightly hoarse, with the type of nasalness that came from having just awakened.

The hand about to lift the blanket from him stopped, and he silently covered himself with the blanket again.

Jiang Tian caught his movement, he seemed to slightly raise an eyebrow, but didn't react any further. He went straight to the windowsill to pack his bag. Sheng Wang grabbed his hair again, and small-talked: "You really slept? Why didn't I feel anything when you woke up."

"I did." Jiang Tian tossed the language book into his bag. He said without even looking up: "You can black out even without drinking?"

Sheng Wang argued: "Extreme drowsiness has the same effect as being slightly tipsy."

"I learn new things every day." Jiang Tian mused before he turned around to award him with a glance. "You call that *tipsy*?"

He even put special emphasis on the word "tipsy".

"....." Sheng Wang brazenly brought his knee to his chest, the blanket settling around his waist. His elbows were on his kneecaps as he rubbed his face until it nearly went out of shape. "A little more than slightly tipsy then."

Last night, *someone* resorted to unscrupulous means in order to sleep, the moment he touched the bed he collapsed, refusing to move another step. The way that he sprawled on the blanket was as if he was glued to it, nobody could tear him off even if they tried.

If he was being spoken to, he would cover his head with a blanket. Any more, he would add a pillow. Anyone could leave, as long as it wasn't him.

He only knew what shame was when he woke up in the morning.

"How about you get amnesia." Sheng Wang suggested.

"Impossible." Jiang Tian was blunt with his reply.

Sheng Wang was sullen. His eyes, however, caught sight of the bedsheets and the pillow on the other side of the bed. There wasn't a single crease on top, it really didn't look like someone just slept on it.

"Where did you sleep last night?" He asked in bemusement.

Jiang Tian zipped up his bag and wore the school jacket before he replied in exasperation. "Where else."

True.

Sheng Wang felt that his question was kinda dumb, they were both boys, there was no need to sleep on the floor. Besides, if there was really such a big fuss over it, there was no way he would have zero memory of it.

He said an "Oh", and his head lazily drooped again.

Jiang Tian gathered the copybook, notebook and pen Sheng Wang used yesterday and placed them all at the corner of the table before straightening up. “Change and go eat breakfast?”

Sheng Wang moved his leg, saying, “Give me a moment.”

Jiang Tian glanced at him before looking away again. He didn’t say anything.

Sheng Wang then realised what happened, and wanted to seal his mouth shut.

In that instant, the room was dead quiet. It was as if the switch of the mixture of birds chirping and cars driving unique to early morning had been turned on, it flooded the room from outside the window.

The air condition automatically reactivated after resting for a long time, the temperature in the room wasn’t lowered yet. It was a little stifling.

The curtain swayed in front of the vent, it flew up and went down again.

“I left my phone at the sink.” Jiang Tian suddenly said that, and went out of the room with his slippers.

The bathroom door opposite opened and closed again. Sheng Wang finally stopped rubbing his face, lifted the blanket and hastily retreated back to his own bedroom.

Why is this even happening.

He scratched his head and went to brush his teeth in his ensuite bathroom. He was vexed as the electric toothbrush vibrated, and yet he felt that it was kinda funny.

They were 16, who hasn’t done anything stupid and said some stupid things before?

When he stayed in the forms back then, those idiots dared to do anything. The dorm leader, in order to get Crab that scoundrel to wake up for morning runs, would often stick his hand under the blanket, squeeze, and run away in Crab’s wails and howls, a bag in his hand. There was even one dormmate who would sit on his bed, and say, extremely composed, “You guys go ahead first, I catch up after I lower my flag.”

Therefore, no need to panic, everything is perfectly normal.

Young master told himself.

After he washed up and changed the short sleeved t-shirt he slept in into a clean one, he took his phone. He thought about it, and changed his personal info in WeChat again—the profile picture became a Hot Kid that was sprawled out, his personal nickname became “Sticker”, symbolising the him who tyrannically took over the bed last night, meaning that he was mocking himself.

(t/n: the wang-zai he used was probably something like this, marurut's fanart (also featured) in the home page actually provides cute illustrations of Sheng Wang's various icons :D 4th pic i think)

As a result, the moment he stepped into the classroom in the morning he received Gao Tianyang's questions. "Sheng-ge, you sure change your profile picture at a high rate recently."

Sheng Wang put down his bag, and replied without even thinking: "What ulterior motive do you have by paying so much attention to me?"

Gao Tianyang justified, "I wasn't the one who discovered it, this morning Little Chi—"

Before he could finish his words, his chair received a kick from Little Chilli beside him.

"Fine fine, ok." Gao Tianyang raised both his hands to surrender. "I have an ulterior motive, I'm the one who's keeping an eye on his WeChat, ok?'

Little Chilli already buried her head in her book, ignoring him.

Gao Tianyang was still running his mouth. "Sheng-ge is not only rich, he's also so awesome, where else can you find someone as good as him? Ay, shit, the more I say the more this makes sense. Sheng-ge, how about you turn gay for a bit, and let me experience the feeling of puppy-love?"

Sheng Wang pretended to not see Little Chilli, whose ears were reddening, and calmly said to Gao Tianyang, "Get lost."

The first two periods this morning was the homeroom teacher, He Jin's physics. However, she did not rush to start her class, she took half a period to announce some things.

“There will be another election for the Tri-Quality, roughly the same as last time, anonymous votes. I’ll pass down the voting slips later, you guys promptly fill it up, and we can promptly tally it up. Don’t need to vote for the student picked last time round, ok?” He Jin’s tone was normal, at first listen one would think that there was going to be another nomination slot for Class A, and thus needing another democratic election or something.

Sheng Wang made eye contact with Jiang Tian, and went back to his usual expression as he received the voting slip.

He completely understood He Jin’s actions. Year two just began, even though Qi Jiahao did a bloody foolish thing, as homeroom teacher she still had to consider the general situation. She wasn’t going to point at him and say, “You have to alienate him, and turn him into an outcast.”

This type of student would forever be the kind that would give homeroom teachers the biggest headaches.

The students weren’t all idiots either, after some whispers here and there, they started filling up the slip.

Just as they were writing down names, He Jin suddenly dropped a 20 ton bombshell on them.

“Another thing, I will be holding a mini meeting for the other conditions for Tri-Quality, such as class comm eventually. The two other conditions are based on results and improvement, as everyone knows. It is also common knowledge that our class’ Jiang Tian has been taking up the spot of #1 in the year for ages, and you can see how quickly Sheng Wang

improved too. Logically speaking, the two nominations should have gone to them. But—”

She paused, her gaze sweeping over Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, “These two students are firstly more confident, and secondly, they wanted to give more classmates opportunities. As such, they willingly renounced their nominations.”

The classroom was dead quiet for an instant, and next it was followed by an uproar.

40+ pairs of eyes all shot towards them. For that moment, Sheng Wang really felt that he and Jiang Tian became living Samaritans.

He Jin continued, “With that, the nomination will go down to the next in line. Li Jia's total score for the past two exams has earned her a second place in the level, her votes last time were quite high too. Anyone disagree with giving one of the nominations to her?”

Little Chilli looked up, utterly dazed.

She never ever thought that the nomination she so narrowly missed would end up back with her again. She made a long noise of questioning: “Huh?”

Gao Tianyang whistled, and led by slapping his desk, the other students started joining in, dragging their voices as they said, “No problem __”

There were a few voices saying “Damn, I just wrote her name!” in the tidy chorus.

And then the whole class was sent into a fit of laughter again.

“Why didn’t you say so earlier, teacher!” Song Sirui striked out the name on his slip.

“I am saying it right now!” He Jin said.

She was stern for quite a while, and finally smiled again at this time. She went back and said in all seriousness, “And also, Gao Tianyang has improved by 64 marks in total across these two exams, his level placement went up to 78th place this time, he’s the one with the second highest improvement in our class. Let’s give the other Tri-Quality nomination to him, alright?”

She especially liked to add an “alright” at the end of her sentences, her tone gentle and open for negotiation. Still, nobody dared to say “No, it isn’t alright.” Furthermore, Gao Tianyang was the one who got along with everyone the most in general in class. Naturally, no one objected.

Sheng Wang watched the person sitting in front of him heckling Little Chilli, losing himself more and more in the whistling. In the end, he choked half way through and nearly died.

He was stunned for several moments. He turned around to say to Sheng Wang, “Fuck?”

“Don’t fuck anymore,” Sheng Wang said, “clap.”

The other people gave a thunderous round of applause, the ones heckling started howling. Song Sirui even threw a pen cap behind that smacked Gao Tianyang back into reality.

His hand behind his head, his face red from heckling, he cupped his fist at Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, saying with much gusto, “Thank you! Thank you for your graciousness!”

He Jin rolled her eyes on the spot, the entire class doubled over in laughter again.

Thanks to Jiang Tian and Gao Tianyang, Sheng Wang had never felt any particularly obvious discrimination and bullying as a newbie. It was only until this physics lesson then he realised that this group of people had long since treated him as one of them.

Wasn’t there a saying that goes like this, that when you and someone are no longer overly courteous, able to share both troubles and honour with them, you are friends.

In the end, there were four people who were nominated for Tri-Quality. Li Jia, Gao Tianyang, Li Yu out of the class committee, as well as Xu Tian Shu who was democratically elected (that was Small Mouth Xu’s proper name).

Dean Xu was barely holding in his joy as he placed the names of the Tri-Quality students up to the Wall of Honour. The moment the name list was announced, some people discovered that there was something off: Qi Jiahao’s name wasn’t there.

As such, rumours began to spread in the level; about Zhai Tao, about Qi Jiahao.

However, Sheng Wang didn’t care about these. He had never bothered wasting his energy on people he disliked. He wasn’t gracious either, as long as he knew the other person wasn’t living too comfortably, his mind was already at ease.

This noon, he went with Jiang Tian to Old Man Ding’s to freeload as usual. The old man’s mood was a little unusual, however, when he ate he kept zoning out, he seemed to be unhappy about something too.

It wasn’t the childish kind of peeved that old people tend to get into, it was the kind where he was clearly unhappy but still tried to act as if he was perfectly fine.

Sheng Wang was usually pretty heartless, but he was actually quite sensitive towards mood changes like this. He probed two times at the dining table, and both attempts were thwarted by Old Man Ding. Only when Jiang Tian was the first to finish his food and went to wash the dishes did Old Man Ding wave Sheng Wang over, his nose wrinkled.

“What happened?” Sheng Wang leaned over, softly asking.

“Nothing much,” Old Man Ding pointed his chin at the direction of the kitchen, and aspirated, “Don’t let him hear, it’s irksome.”

This has to do with Jiang Tian?

There was a little worry mixed with Sheng Wang’s puzzlement.

During the noon break, math teacher Old Wu came as usual to give out the half an hour timed practice. Jiang Tian ended up not managing to do it. He was only five minutes into writing when the teacher from administration came looking for him, after negotiating with Old Wu at the door, Jiang Tian was called away, something about the upgrading of the school's internet.

Sheng Wang had never been this quicker in completing the practice. He handed it up in 20 minutes, and snuck out of the school's west gate with the excuse of going to the washroom.

Ease and relaxation emanated out of Beyond Parasol Trees in high noon, the elderly gathered beneath the trees, drinking tea and chatting, or setted up a table and chairs, playing Chinese chess. Other than those spots, everywhere else was doused in the drowsy summer heat, the kind that signalled autumn is coming.

In this environment, any sort of accident would be extra noticeable.

Sheng Wang rushed to go to Old Man Ding's house, his pace speedy. When he went around the corner, he nearly bumped into someone.

That was a tall man, due to his handsome looks as well as his immaculately dressed outer appearance, his age was a little indiscernible. Sheng Wang instinctively felt that he was roughly the same age as Sheng Mingyang, possibly because they had the same vibe, or perhaps it was the fatigue in his brows.

That person apologised to him, and walked away, lost in his own thoughts. He barely walked a few steps when he even shook his head,

mumbling something to himself under his breath.

Sheng Wang pondered, and figured that he was saying something like “stubborn old man”.

He couldn’t help but turn around in curiosity, but that man already reached the other end of the alley. He disappeared around the corner.

Stubborn old man? Who was he talking about?

Sheng Wang muttered, puzzled, and continued to go straight ahead. When he saw the doorway to Old Man Ding’s courtyard, he suddenly realised that that man appeared to have come out from here earlier.

He stepped into the courtyard with questions on his mind, and just as expected, the old man was busy keeping to himself by the bedroom door.

That bamboo chair was ancient, any tiny movement and it would start creaking. Old Man Ding was wearing presbyopic glasses, and holding a vintage looking photo album, seemingly mumbling something under his breath too.

“Grandpa?” Sheng Wang tiptoed over.

Old Man Ding was startled. “Why are you here? Aren’t you supposed to be taking your nap in school?”

“I didn’t sleep, I handed in the paper early and came out first.” Sheng Wang said, “What are You looking at?”

His eyes lowered and gave a quick sweep. The page the old man was looking at had four photographs, one of which was a group photo. A few adults with 7-8 kids. The photo was exposed to moisture, the surface was blurred. It was hard to tell the faces. The three remaining pictures featured the same little boy.

“Old photos, these are from bygone times. You all don’t develop photographs anymore these days.” Old Man Ding grumbled.

Sheng Wang pointed at the three pictures. “Who’s that? Looks kinda familiar.”

“They are two people.” Old Man Ding said, a little annoyed.

“Ah?” Sheng Wang saw that he didn’t mind, so he bent over to take a closer look. He discovered that there was indeed a difference between the two boys, the boy in two of the pictures had lips that naturally turned up at the corners, looking a little like he was grinning all the time. The other picture featured a boy with his lips pursed into a straight line, and the photo did not belong to the same era either.

He stared for a while, and really did see a few traces of Jiang Tian in that straight line. He asked with much doubt in his voice, “Is this Jiang Tian?”

“Mn!” Old Man Ding grinned and nodded.

The boy in the photo was roughly five to six years old, he hadn’t grown into himself yet, but his features were already remarkably exquisite, especially his eyes. He was looking up while standing next to the door, his eyes on the cat lying down on the short courtyard wall.

Sheng Wang took a few more looks before he identified from the pattern that it was the cat in Jiang Tian's profile picture, just that it was much tinier.

"He was still so small back then." Old Man Ding said.

If this is Jiang Tian, then the other two with the boy that shared a resemblance with him……

Sheng Wang guessed: "Is that Jiang Tian's dad?"

The smile on Old Man Ding's face immediately vanished, his cheeks instantly sagged, his old age even more obvious. His eyes were lowered as he looked at the photo, and sighed, "Mn, his father, Ji Huanyu."

Sheng Wang was a little sheepish, from his tone alone he could tell Old Man Ding didn't like Jiang Tian's dad.

The old man jabbed at the photo: "This Ji Huanyu, he's a terrible person, Xiao-Tian was so pitiful as a kid."

Sheng Wang's heart skipped for some reason, he asked, "He didn't live well when he was small?"

"Not well at all, he was no different from being homeless." Old Man Ding said, "When he was a kid, Xiao-Ji…….Ji Huanyu and Xiao-Jiang were both busy, so busy that he barely even got to see them. So they just left him here to stay with his grandmother. As you know, when people are old, the body acts up in funny ways."

(t/n: Maternal grandmother, aka Jiang Ou’s mom. Old Man Ding was also using "Xiao-Jiang" to refer to Jiang Ou, and "Xiao-Tian" for Jiang Tian, just to be clear)

He tapped his temple. “His grandma’s head wasn’t particularly right here, she had some dementia. Sometimes it was fine, sometimes it wasn’t. She would even forget to cook for the whole day. Xiao-Tian was so small back then, he didn’t particularly know how to cook either. Me? I couldn’t bear to see it anymore, I would try to coax him over every day, give him some food, and he can eat it together with his grandma.”

“Later on, his grandma’s dementia completely took over, she didn't recognise him. She kept mistaking him for some other people’s kid, she would lock the door from the inside and refuse to let him in. She’s old after all, it’s hard to blame her. So Xiao-Tian just came here.”

“He didn’t have a thick skin, he was too awkward to say that he couldn’t go home. But I could tell, I knew all along.” Old Man Ding said, “I would just say that I need his help here every time, ask him to come over, and get him to sleep here.”

“Not even two years later, he was gone. He was sent to stay with his father.” Old Man Ding added, “His parents didn’t work together, they were separated in two different cities, they travelled back and forth. Whoever had more time on their hands, whoever took care of Jiang Tian. He didn’t stay for long anywhere he went.”

“I watched him bring his belongings to this house and that house over and over again, as though he wasn’t close to anyone, as though he wasn’t wanted no matter where he went.”

Chapter 037 - To Stay

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He Heard The Other Person Say, “Jiang Tian, Let’s Stay In School Together.”

10 years ago, this courtyard was even more cramped than the present.

The residential block outside of Beyond Parasol Trees had just received a fresh coat of paint, on first glance they appeared to be neat and pretty. The juxtaposition caused the few old houses around the corner to look especially dilapidated. Old Man Ding was the one who stayed in the most dilapidated house.

Back then however his head hadn't shrunk, he had plenty of energy as well as a decent amount of strength. He would pile up all sorts of porcelain and chinaware at the corner of the house, take care of all sorts of plants, and even kept a Dragon Li cat named “Leader” in order to get rid of rats in his house.

(t/n: Dragon Li cat)

“Leader” was the easiest cat Old Man Ding had ever kept, it understood humans even better than dogs could, it would hit whatever he told it to. Jiang Tian was originally lured into the house thanks to it.

When Jiang Tian was five-six years old, he disliked talking like the way he was now, he was always quiet and sullen. Nevertheless, he was still young. It was easy to get his attention, and easy to get him to let down his

guards too. As long as “Leader” laid down on his feet, there was nothing else he could do.

The residents of Beyond Parasol Trees were all neighbours who had been staying here for decades, they knew each other inside out. Old people didn’t have much variety in entertainment, they just loved to meet up, chitchat, and play chess. Whatever that went on in homes were all conversation topics in these casual chats.

Old Man Ding didn’t like to gossip, but he was obsessed with playing chess for a period of time, and so as he played he got to know about the full situation with the development of Jiang Tian’s grandmother’s illness. He already personally knew the Jiang family, and liked Jiang Tian very much too. With this and that, he treated him basically like a grandson.

The old man often gave “Leader” commands, “Leader” would lie waiting on the wall, the moment Jiang Tian walked past, it would leapt off the wall like a tiger leaving the mountains, and went to ‘accidentally’ bump into people.

Jiang Tian would suddenly find a cat descending upon him as he walked. He clearly already braked in his steps, but that cat would still fall onto his shoes, a soft ball of fur spreading on his feet.

Old Man Ding took special joy in watching that—the kid was bewildered and at an utter loss of what to do. He couldn’t stay, but he couldn’t just leave either. He could only stay frozen on the spot in a silent stand off against the cat. At this time, he would go rescue Jiang Tian with some hollers, and conveniently drag Jiang Tian into the courtyard.

Sometimes, it would be wonton and dumplings that were already wrapped, sometimes, it would be plain and simple porridge with some dishes, sometimes, he would steam two fishes or cook some soup. The old man tried all sorts of methods to give Jiang Tian something to eat.

The kid was thin-skinned and stubborn too, if you asked him if he ate, he would nod and quietly say, “I ate.”

Ask him why isn’t he going home, he always had the face of someone who hated fun as he said, “Playing outside.”

The old man’s deepest impression was of an evening. Soon after he heard that the Jiangs’ grandmother couldn’t recognise people anymore, Jiang Tian appeared outside his courtyard walls next.

He was so thin back then, his arms and legs were long, revealing traces of what he would grow to be as a teen. He carried his bag, the lanyard with the keys hanging on his neck twirled around his fingers, his mind conflicted. He could tell he had taken it out before, but didn’t manage to use it.

Old Man Ding clapped his shoulder, crouched over and asked him, “Have you eaten?”

It was the first time there was hesitation on his face, but in the end, he still nodded as he said, “I ate.”

The lamps switched on at night in the alley, the aroma of food drifting out from various homes. It was the time of the day when the smell of smoke

and fire and human activity was the heaviest.

Yet, he was standing outside someone else's walls, asking, "Grandpa, may I look at the cat?"

*

Old Man Ding zoned out for a long while before he fingered the corner of the photo album that curled up. "You know Xiao-Tian's personality, it's super tedious to get him to even open his mouth to ask for things. He has always been like this."

"When he told me he wanted to look at the cat, that means that he truly didn't have anywhere to go anymore."

The sunlight at noon ought to be glaring and eye-piercing, but when it reached this courtyard, other than the few square metres, it was dull gray everywhere else.

This was the most unremarkable corner in Beyond Parasol Trees, it was the only place Jiang Tian was still willing to go near, it was also the only place that wanted him, that kept him for that certain long period of time.

Sheng Wang suddenly immensely upset.

This was the first time that he fell into a nearly lonesome mood due to what happened to other people.

The person in the photograph was frozen in that period of time, completely unaware of what was happening outside the photo. Yet, Sheng

Wang was silent as he stared at the picture. He finally spoke, “Auntie Jiang is quite nice, she’s pretty gentle, I thought……”

“You’ve seen Xiao-Jiang?” Old Man Ding asked.

Sheng Wang didn’t speak for a noticeable amount of time before he said, “Auntie Jiang is staying with my dad. Actually, I’m not just classmates with Jiang Tian, our families are living together now.”

“Oh oh oh.” Old Man Ding suddenly understood everything, he then grumbled, “I say, Xiao-Tian isn’t the type to bring outsiders here. No wonder, no wonder. You two are brothers then?”

For that moment, Sheng Wang felt that the term “brothers” didn’t mesh well with him. How strange, he himself clearly said to Jiang Tian earlier that he once wanted a brother.

But he really couldn’t find another description.

He hesitated for a couple of seconds, and nodded. “Roughly, I guess.”

After that, he added on, “Either ways we’re pretty close.”

Old Man Ding started smiling. When he was putting on a face on a usual basis, he resembled birds of prey, like eagles and falcons, with a 70% of fierceness. The moment he laughed, his compassionate and friendly demeanour revealed itself, with a hint of childishness even.

He asked, “Who’s older, you or Xiao-Tian?”

“Him, probably. I’m born in December.” Sheng Wang said.

“Oh, he’s at the start of the year.” Old Man Ding said, “Then you have to call him ‘Gege’, why haven’t I ever heard that from you?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

The old man frowned, pretending to be displeased.

Sheng Wang coaxed: “Next time, I’ll definitely do it next time.”

Old Man Ding: “You kids are full of lies.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

The elderly male, after teasing him a little, went back to reminiscing again. He recalled: “Xiao-Jiang would be quite fine if she changed her family. I did sort of watch that girl grow up too, she worked especially hard in school, and was eager to excel. When she was 20+ years old, she was energetic, and did things with guns blazing. When she got older, she ended up being more mellow instead, like she didn’t have a temper anymore, all thanks to her issues at home.”

“Her father was addicted to gambling and was in heavy debt, her mom was a teacher, how would she earn enough to pay everything back? The debt was only settled afterwards when Xiao-Jiang got into business. Later on, there was something wrong with her mom’s brains, her body wasn’t doing well either. She needed to pay for medical bills, and there was still a kid that needed to be raised. How should she ever stop?”

“She had a lot of guilt when it came to Jiang Tian, there were two times when she came to fetch her kid, her eyes were puffy like walnuts from all the crying.” Old Man Ding tsked again and again, “I’ve never seen

her cry this much in the past 20 years. That time, she was actually doing better than Ji Huanyu, but Ji Huanyu, as a person, tended to overthink, and had a fragile pride."

He jabbed the boy in the photograph, an identical portrait to Jiang Tian as he said, "He was actually living in quite a bit of suffering as a kid too, he had no mom, no dad. Eventually…...eventually he was picked up by someone along with a kid, and they were raised together under a roof."

"Orphanage?" Sheng Wang asked.

"Not so proper." Old Man Ding shook his head, "It was more like picking up a kitty cat or a dog, seeing how pitiful they were, giving them some food, and taking care of them. His name was given by that person, his surname followed the person who picked him up. Many years later, there was a crackdown and everything had to stop due to restrictions. The kids all left, only Ji Huanyu remained in this area."

"He was going to go to middle school, I think, he kept staying in school. In high school, he somehow ended up getting together with Xiao-Jiang, and after graduating from university they got married. He was bullied as a kid, he would often think about becoming successful, he wanted to leave the province, the country, and make something out of himself. Therefore, he wasn't satisfied with having to stay home to take care of the kid."

"Either way, because of Xiao-Tian, they already fought a few times, but nothing major came out of it." Old Man Ding said, "There was a period of time where Ji Huanyu had a change in character, he didn't just cause Xiao-Tian to have to move around so much anymore, he came to Beyond

Parasol Trees to accompany Xiao-Tian for a year. Back then, Xiao-Tian hasn't graduated from primary school, Jiang Tian's grandmother just passed away, so it was only the father and son staying here."

"At the start, it was alright, at least Xiao-Tian wasn't stuck in a situation where he couldn't go home anymore. Afterwards however it all went wrong." Old Man Ding said, "Ji Huanyu, that useless person, didn't know how to take care of people. Xiao-Tian started to come over to my house again. Once, I saw a burn at the back of Xiao-Tian's neck, he stayed here for two days and was feverish and vomiting. Eventually, Xiao-Jiang fetched him, and not long later I heard Xiao-Jiang had a divorce with Ji Huanyu."

Sheng Wang recalled the scar at the back of Jiang Tian's neck, he frowned as he asked: "Could it be Ji- his dad who burned him?"

"I did ask him, Xiao-Tian said it wasn't, and it wasn't the kind where he was pretending. I could tell if he was." Old Man Ding said, "Ji Huanyu may be a terrible person, but he wasn't really the type to do this."

"Then how did it get there?" Sheng Wang did not understand.

"I don't know." The old man shook his head, "Xiao-Tian was extremely stubborn, his mouth tighter than anyone else. If he didn't say anything, nobody would know. I didn't dare to bring it up either, if I brought it up he would get upset. He didn't have an easy life, it was rare for him to be happy. Why would I ever upset him?"

Old people were long winded, when they talked about the past, it was fragmented, and a little incoherent. Still, Sheng Wang managed to glean a

corner of Jiang Tian’s childhood.

He finally understood why Jiang Tian’s dynamics with his mom was so strange. It was because of his lack of sense of belonging. He may understand Jiang Ou’s pain and guilt, which was why he always defended her. At the same time, he wasn’t able to treat a place with Jiang Ou as home either.

If they were both unhappy, Sheng Mingyang only had to worry whether Sheng Wang would ignore him. Jiang Ou had to worry whether Jiang Tian would leave.

Because he was always leaving.

Sheng Wang suspected that to Jiang Tian, no matter if it was his previous residence or White Horse Alley, none of it would make him feel a sense of belonging as much as the school dorms. At least, in the dorms, he had a clear understanding of how long he could stay, he knew when he needed to pack his suitcase up again when he unpacked.

Someone rode past the door to the courtyard on a vintage bicycle, when they turned into the alley they rang the bell on the bike.

Sheng Wang finally came back to himself and stood up straight.

The phone in his pocket suddenly vibrated. He dug it out and saw that someone added him as a WeChat friend via the class chat, the verification message said ‘Li Yu’.

Sheng Wang clicked accept, and the other person immediately sent a message.

Rainbow Koi: Sheng Wang, where are you? There’s a teacher coming around to check for attendance, I’m on duty today.

There was a rule in Fuzhong’s noon break that students aren’t allowed to randomly leave the classroom. Every once in a while there would be a teacher on patrol, if they were caught, discipline points would be deducted.

Sheng Wang then recalled that the noon break was almost over, it had been half an hour since he snuck out.

Sticker: sorry, class monitor, be back in a jiffy

Rainbow Koi: hurry up

Rainbow Koi: I said that you went to the sick bay for medicine because you were feeling unwell, don’t mess it up

Sticker: thx

Sheng Wang initially wanted to keep his phone, but he remembered something else in the last minute.

He asked: class monitor, can I still apply for the school dorms?

Rainbow Koi: ……

Sticker: im begging

Sticker: I know this is sorta asking for a beating

Rainbow Koi: S u r e……

Rainbow Koi: but your room will probably be at the last

Sticker: ok

Sticker: thank u

He said goodbye to Old Man Ding and hurried to go back to school. A step out of the door, he retreated back in again to ask, “Grandpa, where’s the cat named Leader?”

“Not here anymore.” Old Man Ding said, “It was an old cat.”

Sheng Wang’s eyes were downcasted as he nodded.

He stuffed his phone back into his pocket and flew towards the school.

Coincidentally, when he went past Duxing Block he saw a familiar figure. Jiang Tian just left the computer room, and was walking in the direction of Mingli Block.

A stray cat darted out from the bushes in front of Duxing block, and jumped up to the windowsill with some leaps. Jiang Tian’s footsteps momentarily paused. He turned to look at the stray cat.

In that moment, it was as though Sheng Wang was looking at the Beyond Parasol Trees from 10 years ago, the unaware boy in the photograph travelled through time, and abruptly came to life right in front of him.

It was just that the cat who would scam him into making him stay had long since been gone.

Sheng Wang halted in his steps, and then quickened his pace to run towards Jiang Tian.

That day, the school was tranquil as usual. The bell signaling the end of noon break had yet to ring, even the birds were tucked away under the shade of the trees, nodding off. The person who pounced from his back was the only vivid presence in this dull silence—

Jiang Tian felt someone hooking an arm around his neck, and he faltered out of inertia. The two of them stumbled a few steps. He turned around, astounded, and saw Sheng Wang’s brilliant smile.

He heard the other person say, “Jiang Tian, let’s stay in school together.”

Chapter 038 - Mix-Up

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Translator's note: Imma be honest I have no idea why google sites is acting up with the copypasting today, so the formatting for the next few chapters is gonna be a little wonky because I am literally doing my best to imitate whatever happened for the earlier chapters.

I’ve Caught Plenty Of Young Couples Already

Staying in school didn’t go quite well. The moment it was brought up, they were met with all sorts of opposition. By ‘Opposition’, it referred to Sheng Mingyang, Jiang Ou as well as the nanny, Auntie Sun.

Sheng Mingyang sent three video call requests in a row. Sheng Wang accepted one, and hung up on two. With that, he was still nagged to the point that his head was buzzing.

It was already one in the morning. The ‘Encyclopedia For Healthy Living’ wasn’t living ‘healthily’ at all; he assiduously sent new messages.

With an earpiece stuffed into his ears, Sheng Wang tapped on the 10+ voice messages in quick succession. They were father and son after all, he knew what the other person would say with the beginning alone—

“Something must have made my son unhappy, why else would you want to stay in the dorms when everything is fine and dandy?”

“Wang-zai, talk with dad, please?”

“Don’t keep it to yourself, you can say whatever that you want to say. People your age always think that us parents are old-fashioned and rigid in

our thinking. We aren’t all like that, actually.”

“Is it dad’s fault or your Auntie Jiang’s?”

……

Sheng Wang was someone with a good upbringing. Until now, he had never ever seen him losing his temper at anyone. Yet, at the same time, he had an extremely dominant nature. It was just that his dominance happened to be wrapped in his moderate use of language, it would be difficult for ordinary people to tell.

Those who dealt with Sheng Mingyang would often unwittingly end up following the plan he charted out for them. He would always be able to convince you but it would be challenging for you to even change his mind.

That was what was exactly happening right now. He stubbornly insisted that his son chose to stay in school due to unhappiness with the current arrangement; he even proved his point from various angles, despite the multiple “I’m not angry” Sheng Wang stated over and over again.

It was useless no matter what; it was as though there would never be an end to this ordeal if he didn’t admit according to his words.

The last voice message lasted for an entire 60 seconds. Sheng Wang stopped it after five.

He removed his earpiece and tossed it onto his desk, restless and irritable. After hanging on the chair with his head skywards, he finally couldn't help himself.

He pressed the voice message button: "I've said that it isn't because I'm angry, I'm not angry, can you please listen to me for once."

Sheng Mingyang replied almost immediately: "I'm listening, really. Dad will only know some things when you say them out loud, dad is scared that you're unhappy."

Sheng Wang's irritation threatened to break out from him with greater force. Still, he was a little similar to Sheng Mingyang at the fundamental level; he wouldn't start screaming and yelling in an ugly manner, that would be way too unsightly.

Even at this moment, his tone was slightly harsher, his talking speed slightly increased.

“I’m oversensitive, selfish, and have a terrible temper. There are plenty of times when I’m truly pissed off, when have I ever not told you any of them? Have you ever helped with any of them? I said I didn’t need some new family members, I’m fine with being on my own and you dealing with your business all over the place. Tell me when you’re coming back ahead of time, and I can wait. Did you actually listen? You found Auntie Jiang.”

“Afterwards, I got over it. My mom isn’t around anymore, there’s still decades ahead. I will fall in love and get married when I’m an adult, and you can’t just be by yourself forever. You can find someone new, I’ll accept anything, as long as you don’t let her replace my mom, anything goes. In the end? You let the person move into where I lived as a kid, sleep in the room where my mom used to stay in, use the kitchen where my mom cooked, cook the dishes she loved to cook.”

“You totally did it on purpose.”

“You deliberately found someone alike to my mom, you knew that I wouldn’t know what to do with her. As long as she had a good temper and a decent personality, I wouldn’t be able to get mad at her or take my anger out

on her. You planned it all out, you figured that I will have to accept her sooner or later."

"Fine, I've already accepted her."

Sheng Wang's back remained leaning against his chair, the phone by his lips. His dark eyes stared at the lamp above his head.

In order to ensure he stays awake when he studies, he especially got Auntie Sun to switch the fluorescent light into one with a cold tone. He couldn't tell on a regular basis, but now that he had been staring at it for a while he then discovered how harsh it was on the eyes.

It was so harsh that it caused his eyes to puff up, reddening for some strange reason.

He said: "When I was drunk, she made me honey water. When I was sick, she searched all over for medicine for me. The dish I haven't eaten for a long time, she learned how to cook it for me. Nobody can replace my mom, but I can accept two more at home."

"I've told you, I'm not bothered by Auntie Jiang. I could treat her as part of the family. I'm on good terms with Jiang Tian, super good terms in

fact. I wasn't mad at anyone, nobody pissed me off. I just felt like staying in school, that's all."

"Can you *please*, listen to me for once."

He let go of his fingers, sent the last voice message, and tossed it behind him. It soared in an arc, silently crashed onto the bed, sinking deeply into the blankets. From then on, he couldn't hear it no matter how many times it vibrated.

He dazedly stared at the lights for a while, closed his eyes and muttered, "Fuck."

Between him and Sheng Mingyang, there was usually only one person who spoke in paragraphs. This was the first time it happened in reverse, all for a tiny matter like staying in school……

It seemed kind of prissy.

He felt a little upset when he had to say these to Sheng Mingyang, in all honesty. What was undeniable though was the tinge of exhilaration he felt within the upset. It was as though after being stuffed in a cramped and narrow bag, there was finally a tiny slit torn open.

*

Jiang Ou's objections were slightly different from Sheng Mingyang's; she had too much guilt towards Jiang Tian, even her opposition was silent and timid.

Jiang Tian was a little thirsty when he woke up in the middle of the night; he decided to get some water. As he went downstairs, a glass cup in his hands, he realised that there was light in the living room. Jiang Ou was curled up on the couch all by herself. The floor lamp encased her in a dusky yellow glow, the television was switched on. It was playing a random old movie, the actors were laughing and joking around in the scene, but there was nothing but silence in the living room.

Jiang Tian stopped at the foot of the staircase.

After a while of looking from afar, he walked over with an empty cup.

When Jiang Ou heard the footsteps, she turned around vacantly. A few seconds of confusion later, she said, "Why are you up?"

"Mn." Jiang Tian replied, shot a glance at the television before asking, "Why are you sitting here?"

“Can’t fall asleep, so I’m watching a bit of TV.” Jiang Ou said mildly.

“Watching the television without the sound on?” Jiang Tian continued asking.

“It was a little loud.” Jiang Ou said.

The couch she was sitting on was a long couch, there was a huge stretch of empty space next to her. Jiang Tian bent over to settle the cup down, and yet he sat on the single person chair.

This was honestly just something he did subconsciously, he didn’t intend to make anyone uncomfortable at all. It was precisely because of that however that made her even more hurt.

Jiang Ou looked aside and rapidly blinked her eyes. When that sour, aching feeling was finally suppressed, she finally turned to face Jiang Tian and asked, “Xiao-Tian, were you having a bad time staying here?”

Jiang Tian was momentarily silent. He said: “The dorm’s convenient.”

There, even though she asked him straight to the face like this, even though the answer couldn’t be any more obvious, he still chose the phrasing

that would break people's hearts the least (despite his stiff and awkward tone).

As Jiang Ou watched the soundless images on the television, her nose was a little flushed. Quite a while later, her voice was a little hoarse as she spoke: "I've been thinking for the past two years, exactly how many things did I mess up on before."

"If I wasn't so competitive, if only we both took a step back, or maybe I should have been the one to take more steps back, spend a few more days away from work, spend more time at home and not send you to your grandma's, spend more time accompanying you, would it all turn out differently?"

"I had a dream the other day. I dreamt of you as a kid, were you two or three? Around when you just entered kindergarten, I think. Back then, I was especially terrified of you keeping your eyes on me. Whenever you did that, I couldn't leave. So everytime I left the house, I had to wait for you to be asleep."

In those days, Jiang Ou had a blouse that had a ribbon around the cuff. It was usually tied up in a knot, but there were a few times the knot was untied for some mysterious reason. She was pretty puzzled about it.

She only discovered later that it was because of Jiang Tian.

Jiang Tian was so small back then, she would sit beside him when he took his afternoon nap, a hand propped at his side. Before Jiang Tian shut his eyes, he would grab that ribbon and wind it around his fingers.

When Jiang Ou first discovered it, she thought that this was a little kid's strange sleeping habit, the need to grab onto something in his sleep.

A certain day later, when she prepared to leave the house while Jiang Tian was asleep, the ribbon tightened as she stood up. As she watched the ribbon about to slip out of his grip right in front of her eyes, the child, who was asleep, suddenly opened eyes.

It was only that day when Jiang Ou knew that that wasn't any strange habit, it was just that the child wanted to hold onto her, wanted for her to stay a little longer, wanted to know when it was that she left, and not be unable to find her anymore the moment he woke up.

Jiang Tian wanted to say “I don’t remember anymore”, but saying this would probably hurt her. Therefore, he merely pursed his lips, and quietly listened.

“Your Uncle Sheng told me stories about Sheng Wang as a kid. Sometimes, as I listened, I would think that he was actually a little similar to you as a kid. Maybe all children are the same, he was brought up into that, I caused you to be like this.”

“Sometimes, when I see how he’s all smiles as he chatted, joking around with his dad, even throw little tantrums, I would think: if I’ve used a different method to take care of you, will you be a little happier, laugh a little more, throw little tantrums and joke around too?”

Jiang Tian didn’t look at her.

He had never been good at dealing with people on the verge of crying, especially a Jiang Ou on the verge of shedding tears. His gaze landed on the television screen. He was quiet for a moment before saying, “There’s no need to think about these.”

Jiang Ou suddenly stopped her dialogue.

“You’ve said before, you want to go back to work when you have the time.” Jiang Tian said, “That’s pretty good.”

Jiang Ou didn’t open her mouth for a period of time. She was competitive in her nature, and somehow was eroded away into this state by various things. She changed from someone who was constantly on the move to a person guarding the kitchen and the television everyday.

“There’s still time for me to go back to work.” She finally spoke. “I don’t want to see my son carry a suitcase by himself, and move into another place again.”

She said: “I’ve seen it too many times, my heart aches.”

There was yet another period of silence in the living room. The lights from the television brightened and dimmed again, the characters came and went.

“It’s not the same this time.” Jiang Tian finally retracted his gaze from the silent movie.

Jiang Ou didn’t react in time. She was stunned before she questioned: “What’s not the same?”

Jiang Tian swept a look at a certain area upstairs. He said: “I’m not alone.”

This time, there’s someone with me.

*

Sheng Wang slept all the way until the sky turned bright before he finally groped around for his phone at the corner of his bed by following the sound of his alarm. He slightly hesitated before he opened WeChat in the end.

Sheng Mingyang, who was usually long-winded, didn’t speak for the entire night. He only sent an “Ok” at around the time he would wake up in the morning.

He said: “I’ll listen to you this time.”

They were late for their application to stay in the school dorms, the school replied that the year ones were going through military training and they invited two vehicles worth of military instructors over. They were temporarily staying at the boy’s dorms and already have filled up the

remaining space. The students who applied late could only move in when this wave of military practice is over and the dorms are vacated.

(t/n: School culture: new students entering middle/high school and university often end up having to participate in a couple of weeks of military training (from actual instructors) to train them for determination and other Positive Qualities. Here's a wikipedia article on it.)

Therefore, the two stayed in White Horse Alley for an extended period of time.

Sheng Mingyang finished a portion of his business at last, and could finally come back home for a few days to rest. The father and son both mutually decided to move on from the late night voice messages that time, both taking half a step back. They got along pretty harmoniously.

There was also a subtle change to Jiang Ou and Jiang Tian's dynamics, maintaining a different sort of balance.

Due to the two's decision to stay in school, Jiang Ou no longer needed to be at home every day. She brought up how she could help out again; this time, Sheng Mingyang took a step back. The two came to an agreement on the schedule. In Fuzhong, the residential students had breaks on a monthly basis, they just needed to ensure they were home for those few days.

With this, there was less remorse and guilt, and somehow they ended up feeling like there was an increase in the time they got to spend together.

This family that was put together like jigsaw pieces seemed to have found the perfect dynamic, to the point that in some moments, there was even a hint of joy and harmony amongst everyone.

For this period of time, Sheng Wang was in a great mood. It wasn't simply because of relations at home becoming better, it was more because of Jiang Tian.

Ever since the day he said to stay in school together, he grew even closer to Jiang Tian.

Of course, student Jiang Tian was used to being frozen, he wouldn't put the words "I'm overjoyed" on his face, when his words ought to be toxic they were toxic as usual. He continued to brazenly be the type to say one thing but actually feel the other, and yet he would reveal a tinge of indulgence in the details of certain things. It wasn't as obvious as the mountains and rivers; it was still a sort of hidden intimacy.

Sheng Wang didn't know if Jiang Tian was like this towards Old Man Ding and towards the cat named "Leader" too. There's probably a little difference.

Regardless, he was enjoying it plenty much.

Once youth is in a good mood, light will always seem to emanate from the tip of their brows and the corner of their lips.

Gao Tianyang mixed around with him every day, he would be hard-pressed to even ignore it. Once, after the jogging exercise, he joked with his arm hooked around Sheng Wang, “Just this state of yours alone, it’s definitely on the level of the Four Major Happy Events back in the ancient times. Rain after a long draught, running into a close friend in a faraway place, wedding night, or excelling in the imperial exams. Which one out of these are you, Sheng-ge?”

Sheng Wang was completely baffled by the question.

His head was drenched in sweat after the run and was about to go snatch Jiang Tian’s ice water. Upon hearing that, he was bemused. “What state? Which state? You’re drunk this early in the morning? Why are you speaking nonsense?”

Gao Tianyang, this idiot, was extremely cooperative. He crazily shook his head on the spot and acted like a mad drunk.

Sheng Wang didn’t understand what he meant. It wasn’t just Sheng Wang, even Gao Tianyang himself just said it on a whim.

The summer heat was extremely drawn out at summer’s end, it was humid and stuffy. Until the last third of September with the arrival of an autumn rain, the weather then abruptly changed for the cooler.

The year ones’ military training reached its end, they took up the sports ground for the entire morning to carry out their display performance, their shouts were heaven deafening. The jogging exercise during the long break for the year twos and threes were cancelled for the day, many students watched the show for fun outside the wire fence, sipping on their drinks.

Sheng Wang went to Xi Le to buy water, on his way back he was captured by Gao Tianyang, Song Sirui and the rest, and somehow was dragged into the army of spectators.

He wasn’t particularly interested in the performance, he gave it a couple of looks, let out a yell, and busied himself with chatting with Jiang Tian on WeChat.

Jiang Tian: The dorms are allocated

Sticker: really? how did you know?

Jiang Tian: Old He gave me the keys

Sticker: which room?

Jiang Tian: Block 2 - 601

Sticker: what does it look like?

Jiang Tian sent a picture of an envelope containing a key. “Block 2 - 601” was written on it.

Sticker: ……

Sticker: does it look like I don’t know what these words look like?

Sticker: i’m asking about the dorms

Jiang Tian: I don’t know

Jiang Tian: You can skip the physics lesson next period and go take a look

Sticker: ……

Sticker: skipping physics? do i look like i want 2 die

Sticker: the keys are already here, when are we moving in?

Jiang Tian: During self-study tonight

Sheng Wang sent three “violently shaking his head” memes in a row.

In the midst of chatting, he briefly looked up and happened to meet Song Sirui's curious gaze. There wasn't curiosity, the desire for gossip burned within too.

Sheng Wang raised an eyebrow at him, and swept a look at the sports ground again. His thumbs flew as he typed.

Sticker: i'm kidnapped by Gao Tianyang and Old Song, they're forcing me to watch the military exhibition performance

Jiang Tian: What performance

Jiang Tian: Black people doing goose-steps?

(t/n: I have...no idea how that was supposed to be a joke. Maybe it's about the year ones getting overly tan from all the military training. I tried to check if there was a viral meme or reference but there didn't seem to be one. Closest i found was a video.)

It was rare for him to joke, Sheng Wang was doubled over in laughter for quite a while. Just as he was about to reply, he was suddenly elbowed by someone.

"What?" Sheng Wang looked up, only to see Gao Tianyang burying his head in his palms. "Too late."

The next second, a hand dove in from a tricky angle and snatched Sheng Wang's phone away at lightning speed. Sheng Wang resisted on instinct, but he wasn't successful. He only managed to lock the screen by pressing the side button.

Oh shit.

Big Mouth Xu!

The administration dean popped up from god knows where, and Sheng Wang's phone was right in his hands.

"How bold of you!" Big Mouth Xu laughed coldly, "So ostentatious with your phone on the road, you're scared that I can't see you, right?"

He was caught red handed, there was no use in finding excuses.

Sheng Wang sheepishly smiled as he touched the tip of his nose, and was prepared to give in and apologise.

Unexpectedly though, Big Mouth Xu walked a few steps away from the crowd, and beckoned him. "Come over for a bit."

Sheng Wang obediently followed over, all the way to a random corner opposite the boulevard, then did Big Mouth Xu stop in his steps.

Both his hands were behind his back, his head tilting slightly upwards. His gaze was judgemental as he stared at Sheng Wang; Sheng Wang's hackles were raised from that alone.

“What is it, teacher?”

“Are you in love?” Big Mouth Xu’s expression was solemn.

Sheng Wang: “Huh???”

(t/n: "are you in love": The term used here is □□, which means early dating, usually applied to relationships between students while they are still in school (highly discouraged and even outright banned in chinese schools). I rephrased it because the sentence would be too clunky otherwise.)

Big Mouth Xu looked at him in suspicion, as though trying to look for any revealing clue from his face. A while later, his expression turned back to normal, and his tone relaxed: “You all are now at the stage where everything is fresh and new to you, and you want to try everything, more ignorant too. For you, there’s no need to mention your looks, everyone can appreciate beauty, you do get more attention than others on your own, and for some girls, hmm, they can be more gutsy and also in a stage of rebellion too. They might show some attraction to you, and we do not lack excellent girls here.”

Sheng Wang was full of question marks as he listened.

Big Mouth Xu was still going on, “.....the teachers also survived this age, we do understand, but—”

“Nowaitteacherholdon,” Sheng Wang stopped him, he was a little unsure if he was supposed to laugh or cry, “who tattled, are they blind?

Why would they think I’m dating someone?”

Big Mouth Xu narrowed his eyes. “Who were you sending messages to just now then?”

Sheng Wang choked back his answer on instinct. “Just someone.”

Big Mouth Xu’s expression turned even stranger.

Sheng Wang finally stated: “Jiang Tian.”

“Impossible, I’ve caught plenty of young couples already.” Big Mouth Xu was ready to swear to the heavens, “Don’t try to be slippery with your teachers.”

Sheng Wang was briefly stunned.

So Big Mouth Xu saw the state he was in as he chatted, and mistook him to be dating and in love?

Upon that realisation, Sheng Wang felt that it was a little absurd. But a few seconds later, when he digested that information, his heart abruptly skipped a beat. It was like accidentally taking a step into thin air when climbing the stairs, and also like someone giving his palm a light tickle.

“Unlock your phone and let me check.” Big Mouth Xu presented his phone to him.

Sheng Wang’s fingers, dangling beside him, slightly crooked.

“Hurry up, boy.” Big Mouth Xu urged.

Sheng Wang lifted his hand and pressed, the screen quickly lit up along. The screen was still at his WeChat conversation with Jiang Tian, the top clearly displaying the other person’s name.

“Fine, it really was Jiang Tian.” Big Mouth Xu relaxed. “I’ve wrongfully blamed you, but what I said can still serve as a reminder. Students ought to put their studies as their main priority. You are incredibly brilliant, I hope you can successfully spend your last two years in high school with no regrets, and don’t let other things get in your way.”

He had good intentions, he was sincere as he passed on many heartfelt teachings. He also left with his phone in the end.

But Sheng Wang didn’t move at all.

The wind swept from the tip of tree branches, bringing with it the coolness of the start of autumn.

Gao Tianyang made a small jog over from the edge of the sports ground. He tapped Sheng Wang’s shoulders. “Why are you daydreaming,

Sheng-ge? Big Mouth’s gone?”

“Hm?” Sheng Wang just came back to himself, and appeared to be startled by him, but soon he quickly relaxed again, saying, “Yeah, he left.”

Chapter 039 - Brothers

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What Did He Say They Are Again???

“Where’s your phone? Confiscated?” Gao Tianyang looked at his empty hands.

“Mn.”

“Big Mouth is truly public enemy #1!” Gao Tianyang lamented on his behalf, and clutched his own pocket with lingering fear in his heart. “Oh yeah, who were you chatting with just now?”

Sheng Wang was slightly lost. He didn’t reply; instead, he asked, “Why?”

“Did Big Mouth see the chat? If you’re chatting with someone outside of school it’s no big deal. If it’s someone in our school, like Tian-ge or whoever, then Big Mouth is probably in his way to confiscate another phone.” Gao Tianyang said.

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He cursed out loud, and headed straight for the classroom.

The students walking along Road #3 were doing so at a leisurely pace, girls had their arms hooked around each other’s as they happily chatted away. Sheng Wang nearly bumped into people, he weaved around them as he said “Excuse me”, yet his footsteps were unrelenting.

He turned into the flower patches in order to take a shortcut, the edges of his school jacket were lifted up by the wind, and in a blink of an eye he disappeared at the end of the path.

Gao Tianyang was too late and didn't manage to stop him. He vigorously waved at the sports ground and yelled, "Old Song! We're leaving!"

And then he chased after him.

Gao Tianyang was well known in the entire level for his role as a sports rep. He participated in the sports carnival in year one, and all the events he participated in, he came in first in all of them. He brought up the overall points for Class A with his own sheer power.

Even with this, he spent a hell lot of energy just trying to catch up with Sheng Wang, to the point that he only caught the corner of Sheng Wang's jacket as he headed to the second floor while he only reached the first floor of Mingli Block.

"Big Mouth really caught it?" Gao Tianyang climbed the stairs three steps at a time, closely following Sheng Wang. "Who?"

"Jiang Tian." Sheng Wang replied.

“Seriously?! No way—” After a run like this over such a long stretch, even Gao Tianyang was panting, “My Tian-ge, earned his own allowance, there’s no way, we’re gonna, let his phone, get confiscated!”

*

In the classroom, Jiang Tian checked WeChat again. The conversation stopped at “Black people performing goose steps”, and after that Sheng Wang was quiet ever since; maybe he was too absorbed in the performance or something else.

He switched off the screen, and tossed the phone as well as the envelope into his bag. Out of the corner of his eyes, he spotted a figure dashing into the classroom.

He was startled by it enough to look up, and saw Sheng Wang charging straight towards him, only braking when his palm landed on his table. The gust of wind followed by his actions was warm from his body temperature and the remnants of summer heat lingering outdoors.

“Did Big Mouth come by?” Sheng Wang panted with both hands propped against his table, beads of sweat appearing at the corner of his forehead.

“No.” Jiang Tian did not understand what was going on. “Why were you in a hurry?”

Just after he spoke, Gao Tianyang came charging in closely behind, saying, “Tian-ge, Big Mouth already confiscated your phone?”

“No.” Jiang Tian instantly understood and turned his eyes to Sheng Wang, “Yours got confiscated?”

Sheng Wang nodded, but his expression was one of relief.

“That was so freaking tiring, even more tiring than 3000m.” He looked as if a great burden had been lifted off his shoulders; he slumped over as he tried to catch his breath. The lines of his neck shifted as he breathed, his lips however were pale to the point of turning white.

Jiang Tian took out a bottle of water from his table, uncapped it and passed it to him. “You ran all the way from the sports ground?”

“Yeah.” Sheng Wang didn’t bother with formalities and was about to drink the moment he received it.

He already took Jiang Tian’s water plenty of times on a usual basis, there was nothing much to fuss over between boys. If they were aware, they

would pour it into their mouths instead, if they didn't then it wasn't an uncommon sight for them to just directly drink from the bottle.

"I was in the midst of typing, and Big Mouth randomly popped out just like that." As Sheng Wang said his chin was already lifted up, his lips already touching the mouth of the bottle. He suddenly paused.

His gaze travelled from the end of his eyes, swept across Jiang Tian's face and went back again. He had a moment of hesitation, wondering if he should lift the bottle up a bit.

"You ok?" Jiang Tian asked.

Sheng Wang snapped out of it. He shook his head, "Nothing."

His finger twitched, but he didn't change anything in the end. He frankly took a few giant gulps of water.

Ultimately, Big Mouth Xu was merely mentioning it in order to scare students, he was just casually listening to it, that's all. No need to think any further into it. It's the same as that gust of wind by the sports ground, it's over and that means it's over.

At the very most…...maybe it would occasionally rear its head like a flicker of light, in those extremely rare occasions.

Gao Tianyang collapsed into his seat, and mumbled, “He seriously let Tian-ge go? Did Big Mouth have a change in personality?”

As he spoke, the bell to start preparing for class rang, the students in the corridor all streamed into the classroom. Sheng Wang also returned to his seat. Just as he was prepared to dig out his physics paper, Song Sirui rushed in at the exact timing of the school bell. The moment he entered he yelled, “Alert, alert! Big Mouth Xu is on his way up here to confiscate phones with two teachers in tow!”

“I saw him too!” Another classmate who came in right behind him yelled, “He’s now at the third floor and he’s already collected an entire bunch, all in plastic bags.”

“The fuck?” The entire class collectively swore.

Everyone’s first reaction was to bury their phones into the deepest recess of their bags, the second reaction was to chuckle.

“He’s really using a plastic bag? Then how much did he even collect, that’s so sad?”

“It’s the first time I’m so glad that we’re on the top floor.”

“The top floor’s great, we get heads ups.”

“Many thanks to the allies downstairs. I think other than Old Gao, not many people really got their phones confiscated, right?”

“Don’t say it, Sheng Wang just sacrificed his.” Song Sirui said, “Why else did we sprint back for? Everyone, stuff your phones inwards as much as possible, don’t make any moves if the enemy isn’t doing anything, as long as we don’t act guilty, we—”

Before he finished his sentence, a student zoomed into the classroom from the direction of the staircase. “HOLY DOGFUCKING SHIT! BIG MOUTH BROUGHT A METAL DETECTOR!!!”

Everyone: “???”

There were plenty of teachers who confiscated phones, but it’s the first freaking time they see one with a metal detector!

Sheng Wang was astounded: “Is Fuzhong’s administration office seriously this dramatic?”

Class A, who was pretty collected earlier on, instantly broke out into cold sweat. They could do nothing but fret and scratch their heads in their seats.

“How now?”

“Sneak out of here with your phone!”

“To where? The bell for class already rang.”

“The toilet, just say you’re urgent!”

“The entire class in the toilet together? You think the teachers are idiots?”

“Hurry! Big Mouth is at Class B already!” The student who sat near the back door slipped out to check and came back in again.

“Hurry? But where can we hurry?!”

Sheng Wang was born with a face of a well-behaved student; he was also good at coming out with good ideas on the spot in emergencies like this. He grabbed his bag from the inside of his desk, unzipped his bag wide open and said to Jiang Tian: “Toss in your phone.”

Jiang Tian had no idea what he was doing. “Why?”

Sheng Wang used his mouth to gesture at the window.

Before other people realised what was going on, Jiang Tian understood. He lifted his hand and said, “Wait.”

He took off his school jacket in two clean moves, rolled it up and stuffed it into Sheng Wang's bag, pressing it into the very bottom, and then threw in his phone.

Sheng Wang held up his bag: "Who else has their phone, toss it all in, hurry!"

Even though he didn't figure out what was happening, Gao Tianyang enthusiastically responded to his call and handed his phone over without a second word. Next, 12-13 other people all zoomed over and messily stuffed the "booty" into Sheng Wang's bag.

"Faster! He's here, he's climbing the stairs!" The student at the back door called out again.

There were still a portion of students still unsure, but Sheng Wang didn't have the time to wait anymore. He rushed to the window at the side of the classroom, pulled it open and tossed the bag out.

Everyone was stupefied.

The students by the window all gathered closer to look outside. At this side of Mingli Block, there was a giant patch of greenery, they used soft

mud all over the place. Even if someone jumped from the fourth floor, the landing on the soft mud would at least make sure they stay alive.

At this point, Sheng Wang's bag was already chilling within the shrubs on the soft mud, blocked by the broad leaves.

Everyone understood his method then, and immediately used another bag, the remaining students threw in their phones too.

Immediately after as they pulled open the window and sent the bag downstairs, they heard a cough from Big Mouth Xu. He brought the metal detector as he entered from the back of the classroom. The entire class was sitting upright and was completely still, not a single peep was heard from them.

"I'm telling you, Class A is a major disaster zone." Big Mouth said.

Two other teachers followed behind him, a plastic bag each in their hands. There were at least 30-40 spoils of war in them.

Big Mouth dug out yet another plastic bag from his pocket, as he unraveled it he made eye contact with Jiang Tian, and said: "Some students in our class think that just because of good grades they can get away with everything. Today, I especially saved a plastic bag and didn't use it just for

all of you! I reckon your class alone can fill up the bag. Here, let me check __”

As he spoke, he started walking around the classroom with the detector.

The entire Class A was silent, acting so convincingly obedient as their eyes followed him walking through the first group, the second group, the third…...his face turned greener and greener.

Big Mouth Xu completed all five groups and came back with not a single grain of harvest.

He examined the detector in extreme seriousness, suspecting if this thingy was malfunctioning.

He also went around Jiang Tian three times in all earnesty, and the detector did not make a single sound.

Big Mouth finally realised that he had been tricked by these brats.

His finger quivered in anger as he pointed across Class A, in the end landing between Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang, bobbing up and down, “So a

ghost was the one who sent a message if you didn't bring your phone, right? You two stinkin' brats just you wait, if I catch you next time I'll—"

"What are You doing?" He Jin arrived late into class with a stack of physics paper in her arms, the moment she entered she sized up Big Mouth's get up. "How grand, Dean Xu."

These top class teachers were infamous for being unafraid of the school leadership. Big Mouth said with irritation, "I'm having heart pain!"

He Jin side-stepped, making way for the back door. "Then you should probably go back and rest."

The dean's face turned even greener.

He kept the plastic bag, and left the classroom, livid.

The moment he left, He Jin shut the back door, scanned across the entire class and asked, "Tired from holding it in yet?"

The entire class "pffted" upon her words, and collectively burst into laughter at last.

"How were the phones hidden?" He Jin asked again.

“That’s for us to know.” Song Sirui led by grumbling, “We’re counting on this to survive.”

He Jin rolled her eyes and said, “Sure, either way everyone did something bad as a collective, right? Everyone stand up, if I can’t sit down for this lesson you aren’t either.”

Li Yu cleared her throat, and cutely said, “Class, stand up.”

The entire class stood up straight. “Thank you teacher!”

He Jin said, unamused, “Out of control and shameless, these words fit you guys. Do reflect on this.”

The entire class snickered, and after their snickers they felt that the sound was overly ridiculous, and everyone doubled over in laughter again.

Sheng Wang lifted his chin amidst the laughter at Jiang Tian. “Am I clever or what?”

“Incredibly so.” Jiang Tian replied without thinking.

Sheng Wang clicked his tongue, and turned back.

A moment later, his hand went behind his back, his palm facing Jiang Tian.

“What?” Jiang Tian slightly leaned forward.

Sheng Wang leaned backwards a little, with his eyes on the teacher's desk, he said through a narrow opening of his lips: "I saved your phone at the very least, where's the thank you gift? Some self-awareness please."

That paw of his behind his back was really getting into it, it beckoned like a fan, intending for teasing only.

Unexpectedly, only after a few beckons his fingers were squeezed by someone.

Jiang Tian's seat happened to be directly in front of the air condition, it could be said to be the spot with the lowest temperature out of the entire class. Along with how he never left the classroom at all, the temperature of his digits was a little low.

His squeeze was feather-light, the feeling of skin against skin was especially distinct.

Sheng Wang's eyelids were briefly lifted before they lowered a little again, a movement so minor it was as though his eyelid trembled.

He felt something metallic stuffed onto his palm. Next, Jiang Tian backed away with his fingers still being squeezed.

“No thank you gift, only a key to the dorm.” Jiang Tian said.

“Ok.” Sheng Wang kept his hand and stuffed his key into his pants’ pocket. “Sure.”

He Jin went through the question non-stop at the front; only when he heard the part where he needed to take down notes, he then removed his hand from his pocket, grabbed a pen and started writing.

*

When the physics lesson ended, two students flew downstairs to retrieve the bags they tossed. Everyone passed the phones around, in the end nobody suffered any damage, other than Sheng Wang.

He didn’t particularly take the matter of his phone being taken to heart, Jiang Tian and Gao Tianyang were more concerned than he was.

The moment class ended Gao Tianyang pestered Small Mouth Xu. Jiang Tian was even more iconic, with the self-assurance that he wouldn’t get beaten up because of his top grades, he went straight to the office to ask Old He “How to claim the phone back from confiscation”.

Old He was blunt too. “Either write a report until Dean Xu is satisfied, or get the parents to claim it from the administration office.”

Sheng Wang internally thought: he's basically screwed, he pissed off Big Mouth Xu quite a few times recently, writing a report to his satisfaction is probably kinda impossible. As for getting the parents…...that was even more impossible.

Where would Sheng Mingyang have the extra time? Compared to spending a few hours on talking to him and educating him, he would likely prefer to just transfer a sum of money into Sheng Wang's phone and let his son buy a new one.

Sheng Wang ran through the prices in his head, and planned to drag Jiang Tian to the west gate during dinner time to shop around. There was a commerce street near the subway station, *Beyond Parasol Trees*; retail stores of various mobile phone brands were located there.

He could buy one to tide over first.

In a twist of events, the moment they just exited the school they received a call from Uncle Xiao-Chen, saying that his car was already outside the school gate. He initially thought that Xiao-Chen would be the only one delivering their luggage to move into the dorms, but when the car

doors opened, the first to exit was seriously Sheng Mingyang who “did not have the extra time”, followed closely behind by Jiang Ou.

When was the last time Sheng Mingyang came to school to look for him? Sheng Wang nearly couldn’t recall.

He was stunned for quite a while before he walked over, asking, “Didn’t you have a flight to Shenzhen at noon?”

Jiang Ou gently said: “Your dad spent an entire morning on the phone to push everything to tomorrow morning, we changed our flight to 11.30 tonight.”

Sheng Mingyang used to have to attend a lot of social dinners, he always drank and there was a period of time his body wasn’t doing well, so he rarely burned the midnight oil, and usually wouldn’t buy a flight at this timing either.

Sheng Wang found it a little hard to adjust to, he didn’t manage to speak a single word after a long while later.

Sheng Mingyang pulled his luggage along, when he walked past him he patted his head. “I’ve spoken to your Auntie Jiang for a few times now,

the two of us have been doing some self-reflection. Can the leader now inspect the outcome?”

Sheng Wang didn’t speak. After a while, he finally went into the school with Jiang Tian, following the two parents from a distance that was neither too near nor too far.

As he stared at Sheng Mingyang’s silhouette, he grumbled at Jiang Tian: “How old is he already, still reflecting?”

Jiang Tian called He Jin to request for a leave from tonight’s self-study. The family dragged their luggage towards the boy’s dormitories, Block 2, and attracted second looks from various passerbys along the way at a high rate.

It was common knowledge that Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were on good terms, it wasn’t an uncommon sight to see them walking together. But now with two adults in front of them, this sight dealt much visual impact.

Friends? Relatives? Or long time friends of the family?

As long as the person who walked past was human, their eyes would be full of the desire to learn the gossip.

It’s been a long time since Sheng Mingyang last entered a school, this was the first time he ever received so much unabashed attention that came from young people. He entered the dormitory’s yard, and when registering at the counter he couldn’t help but ask: “I’ve spotted quite a few people registering to move in today too, and there weren’t just a couple of people dragging their luggage along. Why are there so many kids staring at us?”

Sheng Wang: “I’m hot, that’s why.”

Sheng Mingyang: “.....”

If the person wasn’t his son, he would have asked if the other person was truly this shameless; he also felt at the same time that it was quite interesting.

With this change in topic, they didn’t take a close look when registering at the counter, and were under the illusion that there would only be Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang staying in Block 2 room 601. By the time they realised, the family had already carried the luggage up six flights of stairs. Room 601’s door was wide open, people were already unpacking inside.

“Wrong room?” Sheng Wang murmured. Just as he was about to back out, he heard Jiang Tian knock the door, saying, “Not wrong. There’s a name list here.”

Sheng Wang looked up. There was indeed a table pasted on the door, with their name and class printed on it.

The dorm could hold up to six students, there were three double decker beds. 601 wasn’t fully occupied, there were only four people's names on the table.

The other two consisted of someone named Shi Yu from Class B, and a Qiu Wenbin from Class 11.

The two of them were early, and already occupied two lower decker beds. Sheng Mingyang politely greeted them, and then stood in front of the only empty bed, sizing it up. He turned around and said, “Xiao-Tian is a little taller, it’s probably better for him to stay in the lower bunk. Wang-zai, you stay upstairs, how about that?”

“I’m fine with anything.” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang said an “oh”, and grumbled, “I’m still growing, what if I’m the taller one later?”

Jiang Tian shot him a look and said, “Forget about it, it’s faster to saw off my legs instead.”

“Fuck.”

Sheng Wang wanted to help him saw it off on the spot.

Jiang Ou took two wet tissues and was laughing as she wiped the cabinet. After she was done laughing, she asked, “Where are you putting your luggage?”

Sheng Wang subconsciously looked at Jiang Tian, and replied, “We can handle it ourselves, you two should hurry back. Don’t you have a flight to catch?”

Jiang Ou was a little hesitant, Sheng Mingyang went to the balcony to receive a call. After a few quiet words exchanged with her, he said to Sheng Wang: “I just spoke to your Dean Xu, he said your phone is with him? Let’s go to the office later.”

“Just go already,” Sheng Wang waved, “remember to ask for my phone back, that’s all.”

Boys at this age would always get embarrassed about having their parents stay for too long, as though whoever has their parents help out more, whoever lost. So most parents came in a hurry, and left in a hurry.

Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou were no different than the rest, it was only what they said before they left that caused the two other residential students to have their jaws drop wide open.

Sheng Mingyang said: “Then you brothers should take care of each other.”

He said it without any intention.

The boy named Shi Yu was settling a bunch of books on his top bunk, as he heard that he nearly fell off the stairs.

He made eye contact with Qiu Wenbin, both their eyes nearly popping out from their sockets.

Qiu Wenbin mouthed exaggeratedly: “What did he say they are again???”

Brothers???

Chapter 040 - Address

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“What Did You Call Me?”

Fuzhong’s dorms have sufficient space; Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin’s beds were at the same side, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s bed as well as a line of closets were on the other. In the middle was a long table enough for six people to use, as if it came straight from the library.

The moment Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou left, Shi Yu tumbled out from the upper bunk, sprawled over the table and asked: “You two are *related*?”

Sheng Wang nodded. “Mn.”

“Real brothers?” Shi Yu was dying of curiosity.

“What kind of real are you talking about?” Sheng Wang said.

“Biological brothers?”

“Nope.” Sheng Wang shook his head.

“I knew it, you two totally don’t look alike. Are you cousins or?”

“Nope.” Sheng Wang shot a glance at Jiang Tian, and upon seeing that he wouldn’t particularly mind, he said: “We both came from single parent families, got it now?”

Since they would be staying in the same dorm, they would have to know sooner or later. Besides, with how Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou already came around just now, there wasn't any particular need to hide it.

With Sheng Wang's explanation, Shi Yu instantly understood.

He had a decent EQ and knew when to stop talking, so he stopped this conversation topic. He said: "When I saw the name list at the door today, I was like, damn, goddess of fortune must be smiling down on me. I'm Shi Yu from Class B, last-last week our classes even played a basketball match together for PE, remember?"

"I do, I know who you are."

Though Sheng Wang was bad with faces, he really did have a deep impression of who this new dormmate was. He was the tannest person out of the entire basketball court, his style of playing was too wild, when he played he charged everywhere like a bull. Sheng Wang asked Gao Tianyang who the hell was that person right there and then, and remembered his name.

"You seriously know me?" Astonishment was written all over Shi Yu's face. "I thought I'm quite lowkey in Class B."

“I wouldn’t know if you’re lowkey in Class B, either ways you are pretty highkey on the court. I’ve played half a match, and you’ve stepped on me six times in total.” Sheng Wang lifted up his right leg and slapped it. “All on this foot, I can’t forget about you even if I tried. Couldn’t you at least switch to a different foot to step on?”

Shi Yu: “.....”

Jiang Tian witnessed how terrible Sheng Wang was with faces before, hearing that he knew who Shi Yu was came as a little surprise to him. Now that he knew the reason, he looked aside.

Sheng Wang instantly turned towards him. “You’re laughing?”

Shi Yu closely followed Sheng Wang’s gaze and looked over too. Sheng Wang must have grown an extra pair of eyes, how else would he manage to tell that Jiang Tian was laughing from the back of his head alone?

“When I wore my shoes the next day, my right shoe felt tighter. Visually, it was no different, but it felt like I’d grown pig trotters.” Sheng Wang continued.

Now, even Shi Yu could tell that Jiang Tian was laughing from the side view from the back, His Adam’s apple bobbed twice.

“Damn? You can actually laugh?” Shi Yu was sincerely, wholeheartedly, shocked.

Upon hearing that, Jiang Tian’s head whipped back, his brows furrowed. The look on his face said “What kind of bullshit are you sprouting”.

Shi Yu sheepishly shut his mouth. Sheng Wang, however, burst into laughter.

He had always found joy in teasing Jiang Tian until his expression changed, but it appeared that other people did not agree.

While he was still laughing, Shi Yu immediately cupped his fist in an apology: “Soz for accidentally stepping on you six times, I’ll be careful the next time we play together.”

(t/n: □□/cupped his fist: make an obeisance by cupping one hand in the other before one's chest. It’s used in a joking way in this context. Images here.)

Sheng Wang replied: “It’s alright, we’re in the same dorm after all. I can leave the court and repay it all back.”

Shi Yu cracked up.

The atmosphere in the dorm warmed up quite a bit with that, Qiu Wenbin finally found a point to cut in. “Um, I’m Qiu Wenbin, from Class 11.”

As compared to Shi Yu, he was much more bashful and inarticulate. When he was listening to his few dormmates chat, he laughed along too, but was too awkward to join in.

He indistinctly said: “You are all gods, you probably don’t know me.” (t/n: Cn internet slang to refer to people who are super good at doing something)

Unexpectedly, Jiang Tian was the one who said “I’ve seen you before.”

This time round, it was Sheng Wang’s turn to not see it coming.

Truthfully, Jiang Tian actually knew quite a lot of people. He was the exact opposite of Sheng Wang, even if it was just a random passerby he had seen once he would still be able to recognise them. He simply chose no to mention it, that’s all.

For him, if they weren’t close enough on a certain level, whether he knew them or not made no difference.

Situations like him saying “I’ve seen you before” on his own accord was rarer than rare, Sheng Wang turned to look at Jiang Tian with a little surprise in his eyes.

“He was in the same exam venue as Ding Xiu.” Jiang Tian slightly lowered his head, and explained.

After hearing that, Qiu Wenbin’s face flushed. Just as he was about to add on a line of “My grades are especially bad”, he heard Sheng Wang ask blankly: “Ding Xiu? Who’s that?”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

He simply had no words for that while. He asked Sheng Wang again: “May I ask if you even still remember who Zhai Tao is?”

Those words of his carried quite a flavour of mockery. Sheng Wang awkwardly laughed, finally recalling how he was sabotaged for his English listening compre last time.

“Oh, yeah right, I remember now. Ding Xiu was the one who lured me to go find Jing-jie.”

Jiang Tian’s pointer finger tapped at his temples. “If you couldn’t recall, I would recommend you to go to the hospital for a check-up.”

“Screw off.” Sheng Wang said.

He turned around and was mystified yet again. “It’s normal for you to know Ding Xiu, but you even know those in the same exam venue as him?”

Jiang Tian stared at him, the look on his face was frozen in an enigmatic manner, stuck on whether he wanted to speak or not.

Sheng Wang then reacted with two “Ohohs”, indicating that he remember now: “You’ve went to Dean Xu to check the security footage before.”

When he said that, he discovered Jiang Tian’s expression becoming even more enigmatic; he coaxed: “Wait, no, it wasn’t you who went to find him. It was Dean Xu who went up to you by himself, and badgered you to show you the security footage.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

“Just shut up.” His lips moved, a single line came out of him.

Sheng Wang spent a while doubled over in laughter with a hand on his shoulder, saying, “Ok, my bad, we won’t speak of this anymore. So you spotted him in the footage?” He pointed at Qiu Wenbin.

“Mn, did Dean Xu find you at one point?” Jiang Tian said.

“Ah?” Qiu Wenbin was stumped before he realised that Jiang Tian was speaking to him. “Right, yeah, yeah. Dean Xu did find me before. It wasn't just me though, in fact there were two other students. He asked us when Ding Xiu left the exam venue, and when he came back in again. He was just checking.”

Although Big Mouth Xu only made a brief announcement on disciplinary action taken against Zhai Tao, Ding Xiu and Qi Jiahao during a certain flag-raising ceremony afterwards without going into the details of what happened, there were still quite a number of people in the level who were called over for questioning.

With the combination of rumours here and there, a good half of the truth was already reconstructed.

Sheng Wang nodded at Qiu Wenbin, saying, “Thanks then.”

Qiu Wenbin was startled. “For what?”

“Didn’t Big Mouth find you guys for questioning? If it wasn’t for your confirmation, that incident wouldn’t be solved, and I would have been sabotaged for nothing.” Sheng Wang said with a grin, “Therefore, I ought to be thanking you.”

He was actually exaggerating a little; after all, the key to understanding what happened was with Jiang Tian and the security footage, those were enough to firmly nail what happened down. Qiu Wenbin and the rest assisted at the very most, if he didn't ask them he would have asked someone else.

But, with the way Sheng Wang phrased it, Qiu Wenbin felt as though he had accomplished a good deed for some strange reason.

His skin was pale and he was also a little fat, when he was a little uncomfortable he seemed especially honest and sincere. "It was nothing much, we're in the same dorm after all."

Probably because of this appreciation Sheng Wang, after unpacking his luggage he went over to help Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian until he was sweating profusely. He even went to find the administrator to ask for two copies of the guide on residential stay.

"Each dorm is supposed to have one, it's supposed to be stuck behind the door." Qiu Wenbin said, "We're late to move in, I think our copy is lost."

Sheng Wang received it.

The guide was full of information like the telephone number for maintenance of the dorm room, management, as well as the service centre. They even drew a map, indicating where the hot water room as well as where the laundry room were,

The moment he saw the laundry room, he instantly said to Qiu Wenbin: “You’re literally a saint.”

“How?” Qiu Wenbin was a little lost from all the praise.

Sheng Wang lifted up the bag that had been lying down at the corner all along, and displayed the mud at the bottom of the bag. “I have been looking for the laundry room all along.”

Fuzhong’s dormitory services were pretty decent, not only were there a row of washing machines that operated via scanning the QR code, there were even laundry ladies who provided laundry service. For items that were not exactly suitable for the washing machine and were yet also too troublesome to hand-wash, they could all be registered for this service with the laundry ladies.

Sheng Wang sent his bag over.

*

Jiang Tian was the only one left in the room. Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin went to fetch hot water. He was cramming the last book into the cabinet. When he looked up after he finally finished tidying everything, he realised that Sheng Wang already returned from the laundry room.

He was peering inside the closet as he held onto a closet door.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Tian straightened up and asked.

“Nothing, just looking around.” Sheng Wang looked towards him, he appeared to be in a great mood.

Jiang Tian was a little puzzled, he went over.

The closet was the one he didn’t shut just now, an entire row of clothes neatly hung inside, at the bottom was the suitcase he hadn’t closed up yet.

For a long period of time, that suitcase of his was always fully filled, everything inside was crammed neatly according to their types, he could leave any time. It was efficient and convenient, nearly becoming a pretty good habit of his.

To the point that he himself nearly forgot how did that habit form in the first place.

Until this moment, when the empty suitcase was spreaded open right in front of him, he had an instance of unfamiliarity. In that brief instance, he realised that he had never truly settled down in a place for ages now.

Someone else really noticed what he himself didn't notice.

"You're not closing the suitcase?" Sheng Wang mumbled.

He paused, bent over and shut the suitcase. He zipped it shut, locked it up, and pushed it into the corner of the closet. He looked up, and saw Sheng Wang leaning by the closet door, elation tucked away at the tip of his brows and the corner of his lips.

He has long shapely eyes, but they weren't narrow at all. His eyelashes casted a shadow at the corner of his eyes, the light from above criss-crossing with the shadows. He saw a boat, mooring in the shallows, clear and bright.

Jiang Tian was lost in that instant.

The language teacher, Beckon Money, had read out a model essay from a classmate in a composition class at one point. She said, *sixteen-*

seventeen years old youths are always glowing. He was doing a math question then; in the midst of calculation, he only vaguely caught this line.

There was zero context to the sentence, he wasn't paying any particular attention to it. Yet, he recalled it on this day, such a long time later.

*

The dormitory became rather quiet at a certain moment. Sheng Wang saw Jiang Tian's thin lips move a little, as though he wanted to say something. However, the sound of speech came from the corridor, Shi Yu's voice which was coarse from puberty was quite distinguishable.

"Hey? Out of the way please, there's a hell lot of hot water." He came back with Qiu Wenbin, a kettle in his hands. Sheng Wang side-stepped to let them enter. By the time he looked back, Jiang Tian already took out a data cable from the closet, walked to the side of the table, switched on the power socket and started charging his phone.

They had asked for leave from night self-study, they didn't need to go back to the classroom.

Sheng Wang touched the tip of his nose, and he too dug out two books from the cabinet. He pulled out the chair and sat down.

The side facing Qiu Wenbin already had a row of books piled up. Sheng Wang took a scan, there were seven to eight collections of questions as well as a stack of practice paper from some random subject. There was a rechargeable table lamp by the books. He made himself a cup of tea, shot an apologetic smile at Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian and sat down.

“You actually study these books?” Shi Yu looked at Jiang Tian in astonishment.

Jiang Tian removed an earpiece and returned his gaze with even greater astonishment. His brows were furrowed as he said: “What else would I study?”

“Nonono, I didn’t mean that.” Shi Yu said, “Wasn’t there a rumour, saying the few psychos— I mean, the gods of Class A are super legendary, they can get full marks even without listening in class?”

Jiang Tian didn’t like to entertain people in the first place, upon hearing that he felt even more unamused. In the end, he replied with: “That is pretty insane.”

After speaking, he stuffed in his earpiece, spun his pen around and read the question.

Sheng Wang laughed for a while at the side, and said to Shi Yu: “If by not listening you mean ignoring language lessons to do maths, ignoring maths lessons to do physics, then there are plenty of these people in our class.”

Shi Yu said: “Then Class A is much more hardworking than I thought. My class has quite a few who literally don’t listen in class at all, including me to be honest. The lesson was taking too long and we couldn’t keep it up anymore, we would play on our phones inside the table or something, our grades are also just so-so and passable.”

When he said “so-so and passable”, he was honestly being way too modest. After all, Class B has the best grades in the classes other than Class A.

When the time came for students to move from middle school to high school, there was an advance admission test held by Fuzhong, it could be said to be an exam for direct admission into the school with a different name. Those who passed the exam wouldn’t need to participate in

Zhongkao, and started lessons for high school an entire semester in advance.

(t/n: Zhongkao: High School Admission Examinations)

It was precisely this group of people who formed the two classes, Class A and Class B. Class A consisted of the first 45 places, Class B of the last 45 places.

"Ah." Sheng Wang nodded. He made a thumbs up at him and said, "Awesome."

Shi Yu was a slight misfit against the three people studying in front of him. After fiddling around in complete boredom, he walked into the bathroom with the school card and said: "I'm gonna shower then, otherwise there would be a queue later."

The dorms in Fuzhong came with their own shower, hot water would come out upon sticking the school card into the card slot, and money would be automatically deducted.

Shi Yu usually took quick showers, but he slowed down today. Anyway, the other people weren't in a rush for the time being. The conversation with Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang got him to suddenly chill out. He had always thought that the top few in Class A were all monsters,

they could just casually study and it would be enough to leave others behind in the dust. Now…...they were only just that, nothing much.

He had pretty decent grades, his level position lingered between 60 to 70. As compared to the ones in Class A whose grades were basically a rollercoaster ride, he was much more stable.

And so far, he wasn't even particularly trying.

Sheng Wang was a transfer student, with some effort, he was already able to score into the top 100 places from the last half of the level. He had a higher starting point than Sheng Wang at the very least, right? What if he put in a little effort too?

Shi Yu thought: *putting other things aside, I probably a good chance of entering Class A.*

*

Sheng Wang didn't exactly bother with revising for today. Now that his grades in every subject were making rapid progress, he was making fewer mistakes and doing his work at greater speed, he no longer needed to stay up to 2am.

Jiang Tian was studying competition questions next to him; he was just gilding the lily.

Sheng Wang was also gilding the lily; he was practising his handwriting.

He persevered with Jiang Tian’s method for a little more than half a month. It was as though he had unclogged his conception and governor vessels, his words have at least changed from ‘crawling’ to ‘walking upright’.

(t/n: Exactly as translated from the original text. They control the movement of yin and yang energy of the body, and if i were to put it in another way it would probably be something like ‘unblocked all his chakras’, anyways it’s all metaphorical for exaggeration purposes. You can read about the two vessels here.)

There weren’t any particular pieces of homework that needed to be submitted for marking, so Beckon Money and Jing-jie didn't realise. Otherwise, they would have to praise him for sure.

As Sheng Wang pondered, he finished a page of the copybook. The moment he lifted his eyes, he saw Qiu Wenbin also copying an entire chunk of words.

He gave it a brief scan, and asked: “You’re practising your handwriting too?”

Qiu Wenbin was silent for a moment. “I’m doing my corrections collection.”

Sheng Wang: “.....Sorry.”

Jiang Tian, that asshole, made watching him make a fool out of himself a personal goal everyday. The earpiece was still stuffed in his ear, he wasn’t even looking up, but he still snorted anyway.

Qiu Wenbin’s huge and round face was thoroughly flushed as he said, “I’ve made a lot of mistakes, so I have to copy over a lot too.”

Sheng Wang hurriedly waved his hand. “No, I’m not laughing at you or anything.”

If he was in the same exam venue as Ding Xiu, then he had to be the last few in the level too. His heart was probably in pain from having to face the first in the level, Jiang Tian. Sheng Wang couldn’t help but feel glum on his behalf.

He glimpsed at the opposite side twice, and really couldn’t help it anymore. He asked: “Do you copy all the questions you got wrong like this? You copy the entire question?”

Qiu Wenbin looked up vacantly. “Yeah, the teacher said to make a collection, this way it would be much clearer.”

“Er……” Sheng Wang was deliberating on how this was clearer at all.

Perhaps he made too much commotion in his deliberation, or Jiang Tian grew eyes at the back of his head. He didn’t just watch by the side, he removed his earpiece and asked Qiu Wenbin plainly, “With how you copy, you sure you can finish copying everything in the same day?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

How are you this good with your words?

Qiu Wenbin’s face turned pig liver red on the spot.

Sheng Wang hurried: “He didn’t mean anything else, he just wanted to say—no wait, I also wanted to say—that this is way too inefficient. When I just came here, I made just as many mistakes as you did, there’s no way I could finish copying everything.”

Qiu Wenbin was stunned. “How else do I copy?”

Sheng Wang didn’t know if he should laugh or cry. “Don’t copy.”

“Huh?” Qiu Wenbin was more lost than ever.

“I’m more casual, and I don’t treasure my books and papers this much either. I cut them out.” Sheng Wang said, “Cut out the question, find a notebook and paste them according to their types. That, will be your correction collection.”

Sheng Wang pointed at Jiang Tian: “For him, he does everything in a notebook the first time round, and makes a mark next to the question he got wrong. Second time round, he goes straight for the wrong question. It’s all up to you, in any case it’s best not to copy. You can save so much time to do other things by not copying.”

Qiu Wenbin was dumbfounded for a moment. He reached enlightenment.

“What’s this look of yours?” Sheng Wang kinda wanted to laugh when he looked at him.

Qiu Wenbin scratched his head. “I felt like I fell into a cave and found a rare book on martial arts.”

(t/n: Common storytelling trope: u fall into a random cave/down a random cliff and you find a secret book of martial arts/magic and suddenly you win at life)

Young people often get hotblooded for strange reasons in their youths, Qiu Wenbin now felt a little that way. Even though he hasn’t started

anything yet, he felt as though a door to miracles was slowly opening up to him.

He became impulsive which was rare for him. He asked: “If—if I couldn’t do a question, can I ask you guys? My grades are too terrible now, my parents don’t even want to look at me. I want to improve by a bit.”

Jiang Tian thought a little, and asked: “What’s your level position now?”

“.....”

Qiu Wenbin turned pig liver red again.

Sheng Wang went to muffle Jiang Tian with his hand straight away. He said to Qiu Wenbin, completely emotionless, “My Ge isn’t good with his words, don’t lower yourself to his level. Please treat him as a mute.”

He meant to joke, but Jiang Tian didn’t seem to get it.

He pawed down Sheng Wang’s hand a little, and his gaze swept over from the end of his eyes. He asked, with an eyebrow raised, “What did you call me?”

Chapter 041 - Honour

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He Shot a Grin at Yang Jing. “Jing-jie, Are You Still Settling Scores With Us?”

“What do you mean what did I just call you?” Sheng Wang played dumb. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to answer on purpose, it was just the “My Ge” that came out so smoothly towards other people, he couldn’t bring himself to say it towards Jiang Tian no matter what.

Probably out of the inexplicable competitive spirit of boys, Sheng Wang thought.

Jiang Tian was still looking at him with his brows half-raised.

Sheng Wang wanted to standoff against him, but not even half a second passed before he conceded. He removed his right hand from Jiang Tian’s fingers. “I called you *didi.*”

(t/n: didi means Little brother, hence implying him to be of a lower ranking/hierarchy)

Pure boy Qiu Wenbin giggled as he witnessed their conversation. Sheng Wang, who was on the losing end, finally became the general who was gaining the upper hand at last. He lifted his chin, pleased with himself, and said, “Ok, no more playing around, let’s study.”

He squeezed the joints of his right hand as though he was messing around; he lowered his head, and started focusing on studying.

Out of his peripheral vision, Jiang Tian finally looked away and stuffed in his earpiece after a beat. The water-based pen soundlessly spun between his fingers. Occasionally, it would stop, and scritch-scratched against the notebook.

Qiu Wenbin, who sat opposite him, started to figure out the correction collection with a frown on his face. He took out a pair of scissors from his pencil case, and didn’t manage to bring himself to start cutting.

The homeroom teacher of Class 11 was old fashioned, there was no such thing as turning a blind eye. No phones in the classroom, and they meant it. Qiu Wenbin was a good student who followed the rules, and under the oppression of his homeroom teacher, he had developed the good habit of not playing on his phone. He was better than 90% of the students in this regard, but he had gone slightly overboard with it.

After struggling by himself for so long, he finally recalled that the phone is a tool too. He peered at the two top students in embarrassment before realising that those two had not even looked up at any point, too

engrossed in what they were doing. Therefore, he hurriedly dug out his phone and searched for a highly efficient method towards compiling a corrections collection. He downloaded a camera scanner app for the time being, and started taking pictures of the questions he made a mistake on.

This method was indeed much less troublesome than copying over. There was a self-service printer in the residential block, all he needed to do was to print out the questions and redo them on a regular basis.

The questions that he used to spend an entire night on copying, he only took five minutes to back them up today.

God knows how long it has been since he felt the satisfaction of finishing a task ahead of time; this was the first time he felt exhilaration when it came to the matter of studying ever since he entered Fuzhong.

Qiu Wenbin wanted to express his gratitude towards Sheng Wang for reminding him, but he also felt a little awkward about it.

He quickly glanced at the other person a few times. Just as he was about to open his mouth, he saw the bigshot suddenly relaxing his fingers, grabbing the pen that had been lying idly for twenty years now, and started writing on the notebook.

Qiu Wenbin was befuddled for several moments when he finally remembered: Oh yeah! Wasn't the bigshot practising his handwriting? Then what exactly was he concentrating on for so long? The copybook?

A question mark gradually rose over Qiu Wenbin's head.

He suspected that the bigshot zoned out, but he had no proof, and neither did he dare to ask him.

Shi Yu came out from the bathroom. His hair was only slightly longer than a buzzcut, a few rough wipes with a towel and it would already be 70-80% dry. As he cleaned the water out from his ears, he said to the others, "I'm done, who's next?"

Sheng Wang replied with an "Mn". After he finished writing two characters he then looked up to ask him, "What time is lights out in Fuzhong?"

"11.20pm, I think," Shi Yu said.

"Oh, I'm not rushing then." Sheng Wang was done with today's workload. He kept the copybook, and yet he also dug out another book.

Shi Yu sat down by the bed; he replied a few messages, and played a round of games. He stood up when he felt that his hair was all dry. He was

spurred on by tonight, and he wanted to feel what it was like to be diligent for once after so long.

But he had already completed the papers given out in the day by rushing them before night self-study. Despite how his language homework was copied, his English was also half-copied, was he seriously going to take them out and redo them all over again?

He had been doing the bare minimum for such a long time now, that other than these, he genuinely couldn't figure out he could at that moment.

Shi Yu went one round around the room, stopped by Jiang Tian and tapped him. "Tian-ge."

Jiang Tian's brow lightly scrunched up for a moment, and removed an earpiece. He disliked the feeling of having his train of thoughts being interrupted by people; his expression, which wasn't warm in the first place, became more and more colder.

Shi Yu was a little sheepish, but he still asked, "What's that that you're reading?"

Jiang Tian lifted up the cover of the book, indicating that he take a look himself.

“Oh, this one,” Shi Yu straightened up, “our physics teacher recommended this one too, saying that your class uses this one for competition preparation. Is it good? If it’s good I’ll go buy one too.”

Jiang Tian: “It’s so-so.”

Shi Yu: “.....”

They could feel him freezing to death from a table away.

As Sheng Wang said internally “I’m such an angel”, he added on in the midst of studying, “That book really is so-so, Old He picked like 10+ questions from it, and we’ll be switching over to a new book after we’re done with those.”

“This book is already useless after only 10+ questions?” Shi Yu was stunned, “What else do you guys use then?”

“Quite a lot, actually. But we only pick a bit from every book.” Sheng Wang asked, “Do you want to do it? The books are all in the cabinet there, you can take down the names if you want.”

Shi Yu waved his hands. “I’m not the type to work hard, I’m just asking.”

Sheng Wang only smiled.

He initially wanted to say that the competition preparation classes in Class A were open to everyone; recently, more and more people from Class B had been gatecrashing the lesson. If you really wanted to participate in the Olympiads you could come too.

However, judging from Shi Yu's reaction, he felt that there was no need to mention that.

Shi Yu was standing next to Jiang Tian at the start. As he chatted, he had shifted all the way to behind Sheng Wang.

"What's this that you're doing? English?" Shi Yu was much more casual when conversing with him; he probably felt that he had a good temperament and his grades weren't so good to the point of being intimidating.

Sheng Wang: "Yup."

He too was also starting to get impatient. As he swept through the questions, he replied perfunctorily, "Jing-jie said the Olympiad results will be out soon, I'm studying first."

“Olympiad?” Shi Yu was briefly stumped before he realised. “Ohohoh, you’re talking about the English Olympiad from before”

“Mn.”

“Uhh He Shi from my class went too,” Shi Yu spoke while waving his phone, “I was just chatting with her, I was like why was she so nervous.”

Sheng Wang’s expression was akin to having amnesia. He remembered that other than Qi Jiahao and Li Yu, there were two girls from other classes who participated. However, as to who’s who, he had never figured out clearly.

“The competition is already over, what are you still studying for?” Shi Yu was even more mystified.

Sheng Wang replied mindlessly, “Maybe there’ll be a semifinal.”

Semifinal?

In the midst of bafflement, Shi Yu’s phone vibrated once again. He Shi replied to the previous teasing message he sent; she didn’t appear to be in high spirits.

Shi Yu took the chance to ask: that English Olympiad of yours still has a semifinal?

This time round, He Shi was much quicker to respond: Yeah, why are you asking this?

Shi Yu eyed the questions Sheng Wang was doing again, and typed: do u need some preparations or sth? I've just seen a pretty decent competition book, want it?

He Shi: ……

He Shi sent a meme: [You're fucking kidding me?]

Shi Yu: who's fucking kidding you

Shi Yu: really, do you want it?

He Shi: How about you go check the conditions for entering the semifinals?

Shi Yu: too lazy to, what are they?

He Shi: Top 40 in the province

He Shi: You know what does it mean to be top 40 in the province?

He Shi: It means nothing you'll understand

Shi Yu: ……

Shi Yu did not expect ridicule from simply asking a question; even though this was the girl he liked, he was also a little put on the spot.

His thumbs slammed as he typed: I’m just asking, if not forget it

He Shi: Your questions bring nothing but heartache……

Seeing that she sent a crying emoji, Shi Yu softened up again. He replied: I didn’t mean to do that, I saw Sheng Wang preparing, and I wanted to help you out with a set too.

He Shi: Sheng Wang is preparing for semifinals???

He Shi: ……

He Shi: He came in from other province, he probably didn’t exactly understand the system here

She sent quite a few emojis that said she didn’t know if she should laugh or cry.

Shi Yu pondered: is top 40 really that difficult?

He Shi: Duh

He Shi: Haven’t you discovered that our school silently acknowledged that there wouldn’t be a semifinal? Did you see anyone else preparing for that?

Shi Yu: nope

He Shi: Our school hasn’t seen anyone entering the top 40 in years, English is Yizhong’s homeground.

He Shi: If only I went to Yizhong instead...I’m no good at Fuzhong’s STEM niche

Afterwards, no matter what she said, Shi Yu was inattentive in his replies.

As he read the message, he was hesitating if he should remind Sheng Wang. After all, it wouldn’t feel good to prepare for nothing.

Sheng Wang certainly didn’t know what he was talking about, he could only hear how his phone was vibrating non-stop, while Shi Yu was scratching his head like a black monkey.

“Do you want to say something?” Sheng Wang couldn’t help it.

“Ah,” Shi Yu gave a hoarse laugh. He pointed at his phone. “No, I was just chatting with He Shi. I wanted to buy her an Olympiad assessment book, she said she definitely wouldn’t be entering semifinals and therefore has no use for it. Is the semifinals really hard to get in?”

Shi Yu was like a long legged heron, he started testing the waters with his legs. He was much more tactful than Jiang Tian, he even knew to create a natural lead-in.

(t/n: Probably referring to this meme, the caption says “at the verge of seeking death”.)

Sheng Wang was rather calm on the contrary. “A little, Jing-jie said top 40 in the province is all it takes.”

Shi Yu: “.....you knew?”

Sheng Wang: “?”

“Nothing,” Shi Yu pointed at the book, “do continue.”

After he spoke his thumbs flew as he typed in WeChat: Sheng Wang knew the conditions for semifinals

He Shi: Huh?

Shi Yu: he probably thought that he could create Fuzhong history

Shi Yu: confident

Shi Yu: badass

Shi Yu: can’t wait to see it

He Shi: …...

Shi Yu didn’t actually dislike Sheng Wang, neither was he targeting Sheng Wang on purpose. It was just that he was a little unused to an overly frank personality like his.

He himself wasn’t exactly hardworking on a normal basis, every time there was an exam or a competition he would modestly say, “I’m screwed, I didn’t really prepare, I’m just here to pad the results.”

This type of person had seen too many people similar to him, upon seeing someone who seriously said “I think I’ll be fine”, one would think that the other was kind of too full of themself. It was likely the mindset from teenage rebellion stirring trouble or something, he wanted to see the madman mess up.

At the beginning, they all viewed Jiang Tian like that too. However, Jiang Tian was too stable and not once did he ever mess up, he even brought them to their knees. His usual gaming, drinking, and sports bros called Jiang Tian “cheat mode” behind his back.

Never would he ever think that the heavens had sent a Sheng Wang.

According to the rules of probability, he would definitely mess up this time, Shi Yu thought.

There was no way that cheat modes come in buy one get one free!

Three days after this conversation, the results for the English Olympiad came out.

Yang Jing was in a black skirt with a golden rim as she walked into the classroom. Even as she opened the doors, it was followed by a gust of wind. She slapped the papers she was about to go through on the table, and propped herself against the edge of the table with only one palm. She looked down on the entire class from above.

Her face remained stony, the students below started panicking.

Gao Tianyang leaned backwards with his back kept ramrod straight, whispering to Sheng Wang, “Why does Jing-jie’s face look like someone died? The Olympiad got screwed up?”

Sheng Wang’s lips nearly didn’t move at all, the words came out more like a hum. “I don’t know, the group of teachers have a tight mouth. Until today, I haven’t heard a single thing either.”

Gao Tianyang: “Then did Jing-jie give you and Tian-ge any orders? You two have the most potential to get a prize, right?”

Sheng Wang thought a bit, and said, “She did.”

Gao Tianyang: “What was it?”

Sheng Wang said, “The two of us handed in ahead of time, she declared last time to tell us to watch out, she’ll settle scores with us when the results are out.”

Gao Tianyang: “.....”

Yang Jing pursed her lips, her already horizontal lips even sunk a little.

Just as the atmosphere in Class A was about to turn solid, this madame finally deigned to open her golden mouth. “The outcome of the Olympiad is out, let me just talk about it for a bit.”

Her tone was breezy, the students didn’t dare to breathe either.

Yang Jing stuck out a slender pointer finger, saying, “I have two certificates in total with me, one second prize, one first prize.”

Most of the students heaved a sigh of relief, internally saying, *a prize is all we need, if not Jing-jie will take everyone down with her.*

Gao Tianyang went all the way to directly slumping over, he shot a thumbs up behind him, saying, “Good sign, now all we need is to see who’s the second and who’s the first prize here. To be honest, there’s not much of a difference here, a prize is good enough.”

Sheng Wang raised an eyebrow, and his hand quietly snuck into his bag.

Last time round, Sheng Mingyang went to the administration office. He wasn't sure what kind of scolding Big Mouth Xu went through, either way he returned his phone the next day, and warned: don't let him catch him for a second time.

Therefore, Sheng Wang became much more well-behaved—he changed all notifications to silent in all propriety; the screen would light up, but it wouldn't vibrate. He even forced Jiang Tian to change too.

He jabbed into Jiang Tian's WeChat, and speedily typed: wanna bet?

Jiang Tian: what?

Sticker: who's first who's second

Jiang Tian: stake

Stickers: I want skewers!

Jiang Tian: ok

Sticker: do you want to guess what prize you'll get?

Jiang Tian: not the second for sure

Sticker: .....

Sticker: what a coincidence, I too also don't think I'll get the second prize

Just as he was one-sidedly fighting Jiang Tian with memes, Yang Jing spoke again.

“First, let us congratulate the rep.” Yang Jing said, “Qi Jiahao has performed within expectations, and has gotten a second prize.”

The entire class was momentarily quiet, before a few sparse claps came in from here and there. A sizable portion of the class all turned to look at the back row, including Gao Tianyang.

“The heck’s happening?!” Gao Tianyang mouthed exaggeratedly, “One of you didn’t get it???”

Sheng Wang pressed his fingers, indicating him to chill out a little.

The moment Gao Tianyang turned back, he sent a new message to Jiang Tian: ok, now we can guess if you’re ded or I’m ded

Jiang Tian: I don’t think I’m ded.

Sheng Wang one-sidedly picked a fight via memes again.

The sparse applause stopped, Yang Jing continued, “Then let us also congratulate our class monitor, student Li Yu. The class monitor gave me a

pleasant surprise this time round, but I wouldn't call this a performance out of the ordinary. You just get nervous too easily, as long as you plan your time well and relax, you deserve good grades. See, you surpassed the rep this time. You, have gotten a first prize."

Li Yu was cute and had a nice personality, her classmates all quite liked her too. Normally, there would already be table slamming and cheers, but there was none today. Even Li Yu herself didn't manage to feel excited.

Because everyone all turned to look at Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian in that instant.

Gao Tianyang's eyeballs were nearly falling out of his sockets. "No way, you two……"

Sheng Wang felt a little wronged, but was also rather surprised at the same time. In his honest opinion, he thought he did pretty well, otherwise he wouldn't hand in ahead of time. As for Jiang Tian...he was a little conceited when it came to exams, but he definitely wasn't the type to mess around; he ought to have done well too.

It was at this time that Yang Jing opened her mouth again. "I've just said, I only have two certificates with me. One first prize, one second prize.

I’ve finished announcing which prize goes to who. But there are four people who participated in our class, so what’s going on when the remaining two didn’t get their certificates?”

Yeah!

40+ pairs of eyes were all on her, waiting for her to continue.

Yang Jing took a dramatic pause, and said, “That’s because they will need to participate in the next round of exams.”

The entire class was completely thrown off, and next it all dawned upon them like a comet, the buzz of discussion was like boiling water entering hot oil, and it all exploded.

“Yes, the top 40 in the province will be participating in a training camp, and after the training camp, will be the semifinals. If you can still get a placing, it will be on the national level. If not, it will be the first prize in the province instead.” Yang Jing pointed at Jiang Tian, “You, 11th place in the province.”

She also pointed at Sheng Wang, “You, 5th place in the province. You two only have a difference of two marks, the brats in the middle were all

from Yizhong. But, that's okay—"

Yang Jing finally couldn't keep it up anymore, she cracked into a grin, and lifted her chin as she said, "Each of you already earned a voucher for advance admission. It's the first time that our school has two top 40 at once from the same batch, you literally made history. Therefore, you definitely have a spot on the wall of honour!"

She raised her pitch, and smiled as she asked, "Is our class badass?"

"BAD—ASS!!!"

The entire block could hear Class A's ghostly howls, Class B even felt as though their ceiling was about to collapse.

The other classes all received a scare, and as they all knew from their teachers of this, the entire block reached boiling point.

Gao Tianyang grabbed Sheng Wang's shoulders and shook him back and forth; he was jubilant.

Sheng Wang pushed through his dizziness with an iron will and sent his deskmate from the back last two messages—

Sticker: we’re equals

Stickers: therefore, two meals of skewers!

After he sent that, he shot a grin at Yang Jing. “Jing-jie, are you still settling scores with us?”

Yang Jing scolded with a laugh, “To hell with settling! Don’t pretend that you aren’t happy!”

Chapter 042 - Asking For it

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“Is Your Face an Attraction? I Need to Buy a Ticket to Look at It?”

The moment class ended, nearly everyone crowded around them.

“One, two, three—” Song Sirui pinched the thin air and shook his head as if he was a music conductor, everyone drawled and hooted, “Treat us to a meal! Treat us to a meal! Treat us to a meal!”

“You’re even counting the freaking beats?” Sheng Wang nearly choked to death as he drank water.

“Yeah, it’s more imposing when it’s in sync.” Song Sirui was still gesturing according to the beat, Gao Tianyang was nearly losing his mind from laughing at the side.

“Were they always this dumb?” Sheng Wang turned to ask Jiang Tian, “Were they like this when you got a prize too?”

Jiang Tian said, “Depends on the situation.”

“What situation?” Sheng Wang asked.

Two boys at the side howled in laughter as they said, “Depends if Old Gao is willing to die. If Old Gao is daring enough to yell to treat everyone, we will yell along. If Old Gao is too scared, we will just yell ‘Tian-ge’.”

“???” Sheng Wang glared at them, “Then why are you guys so bold today?”

“Aren’t you here now?”

“Damn, you’re preying on the weak?” Sheng Wang said.

Song Sirui started chanting without any other care in the world. “Sheng-ge—”

It was as though other people planned this beforehand, they followed, “Handsome!”

Song Sirui: “Tian-ge—”

Other people: “So suave!”

Song Sirui: “Sheng-ge—”

Other people: “OP!”

“Tian-ge—”

“Cheat mode!”

“.....”

Shit, they’re all insane!!!

The people in the corridor downstairs all came up to spectate already, Sheng Wang hurriedly whisked a book out to block his face. “I’ll treat I’LL TREAT, don’t yell anymore.”

“Damn, you’re really treating?” Gao Tianyang laughed till he perished and came back to life again, “Didn’t you notice how well practised they were?! It’s the usual flow of events for them already, you’re the only one who actually gave in after so many rounds of yelling!”

“I concede, I want my dignity.” Sheng Wang laughed as he raised his hand, “After this week’s test, ‘During Those Year’ BBQ store at the school entrance, my treat. Let’s eat the boss out of stock!”

A huge group of people began to cheer, “Eat Lin-ge broke! Eat Xi-ge broke! Eat the entire shop broke!”

“I hope you burst from all the food!” Little Chilli or maybe someone else jokingly cursed along.

It was the first time Sheng Wang had ever encountered such crazy classmates, but he really did like this class more and more. No, wait, *most* of the people in this class. He said it before himself, that he was petty and held on to grudges. He was in no way benevolent, so the people who sabotaged him before were still dumbasses.

Laughter and jokes went on non-stop as everyone crowded around the last row, Qi Jiahao alone sat beyond the crowd.

Initially, he said it before he had poor eyesight, and after badgering the homeroom teacher for a while then he managed to get a seat on the first row. Recently, the entire column shifted, he went to the fifth column, Sheng Wang and the rest were at the first.

He was diagonally across from where the crowd was, the furthest possible distance in the classroom.

He remembered the day he fought his way into Class A from Class 5: the classroom was just as boisterous too, a giant group of classmates he only half knew surrounded him, and teased to get him to treat everyone just like that too.

Before that, he had only ever seen the people of Class A along the corridors and at the sports ground. He barely knew them, let alone speaking to them; he knew their names anyway, because every single one of them was a target he intended to surpass.

Therefore, the first time he was met with this teasing, he was both arrogant and timid, terrified and pleased with himself at the same time. By the time he struggled through his conflicted feelings and was about to agree, the crowd had already dispersed after they were through with joking around.

From that day onwards, Qi Jiahao became Old Qi of Class A.

He discovered that the people in this class were all a little naturally friendly, as though as if they were pleased, all it took was a single line to befriend someone.

He was somewhat envious, and a little jealous at the same time too. He was jealous of their natural confidence; for what reason do they get to be like that? He supposed that they were raised on flatter and praises.

Unlike him, who had a father that accomplished nothing and yet was full of bombastic sentiments, and a mother who projected all high pressure onto him stemming from her own failure in school. If he did well in exams, his mom would deliver cut fruits all the way to his mouth. If he messed up, any biting and cutting words would leave her mouth.

All his relatives said that he had to be smart because of the two whorls on his head. But he knew, only one of them was real. The other one was from getting caught for skipping tuition class in primary school, a scar left by the clothing pole his mom used to hit him with out of sheer anger.

Sometimes, he felt like he was a worm who made his way into dragons by a fluke; sometimes, he also felt like he was a sole dragon slayer, waiting for his rewards from the heavens.

He started to mimic Class A students, mimic the way they were sociable, calling everyone his friend here and there, as though he was naturally a warm person. In actuality, he disliked a lot of people.

He disliked Jiang Tian, for he could score full marks as easy as breathing, the way he firmly occupied the first place as casually as drinking water. He also disliked Gao Tianyang: his grades were the worst in class, yet he could get along well with anyone. There was also Xu Tianshu: if his dad wasn't the administration dean in Fuzhong, just with his mediocre self, there was no way he would be getting the grades he had today.

……

But who he disliked the most was Sheng Wang.

He was undoubtedly someone who came in halfway though, his grades were undoubtedly thousands of miles away from everyone else, he didn't even deliberately express any sort of cordiality either, and this class still accepted him so easily. On what basis did he earn all these? On the basis that he didn't need to work diligently, and already possess the same—or even greater—self confidence as those in Class A?

Qi Jiahao personally felt that he was met with heavy competition no matter what subject, other than English. Only in Yang Jing class, then did

he become a true Class A student. He had never worried about getting called on, hell, he even wished that he would be called on. His script could nearly be the answer key, other people fought to copy his notes, even Jiang Tian nearly had to concede to him.

Yet there came a Sheng Wang out of the blue, and all his ‘nearly’ became ‘definitely’.

In Class A, for the subject, English, Sheng Wang was definitely the answer key. Jiang Tian definitely had to bow down to him.

How would Qi Jiahao like a person like this.

He sat on his chair, his face lowered as he flattened the newly acquired certificate, and carefully slipping it in between the A4 exercise book. He placed it inside his bag, waiting to please his parents after night self-study. Ever since he lost the Tri-Quality last time, his mom had been displeased.

Other students were still talking as they surrounded Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian. If it wasn’t for that incident, then he would still be part of that treatment too.

He was slightly regretful, and the sour feeling of being wronged creeped up on him too. He thought, *the camaraderie of Class A is only like this, huh.*

Who hasn't made any mistakes? Just this once, and from now on, he had nothing to do with the bustle, nothing to do with the cheers, nothing to do with the glory. Did they really have to go this far?

He was still in Class A; simultaneously, it was as though he was already disqualified.

……

*

Jiang Tian made a phone call to Zhao Xi on Friday morning. He was genuinely concerned that the starving wolves that were his classmates would really eat the BBQ shop out of stock. He wanted the boss to be mentally prepared for that.

Sheng Wang sat backwards on the chair, half-listening to the conversation with his chin resting against the back. The baby birds waiting to be fed, or rather Gao Tianyang and co, were checking their answers against his. However, the more he listened, the more something was off.

"It's not Xi-ge?" Sheng Wang asked the moment Jiang Tian hung up.

“No,” Jiang Tian replied as he stuffed his phone back into his bag, “it was Lin-ge who picked up. They had to go to Beijing for some issue, he was holding onto Xi-ge’s phone for the time being.”

“Beijing? What for?” Sheng Wang was curious.

“Don’t know, they just said an issue,” Jiang Tian recalled: the other end of the phone was quiet at all, Lin Beiting was at a public space with plenty of chatter, as well as a digital voice reading off a number. “Probably at the bank or the hospital.”

Sheng Wang: “Hospital???”

Jiang Tian said, “Uncle Zhao underwent an operation before, he has to go back for check ups once in a while. They probably brought him to Beijing, he wasn’t at Xi Le yesterday.”

“What’s the diagnosis?”

“Stomach cancer.”

Sheng Wang paused.

He then recalled how he felt Boss Zhao was like a giant praying mantis the first time he saw him; his eyes were slightly bulging, and he was indeed a little too thin too. Perhaps it was due to how he experienced loved ones dying before, Sheng Wang was slightly sensitive towards issues of life and death.

Jiang Tian’s voice paused for a bit, and then added, “It’s been 7-8 years since the operation.”

Sheng Wang still hasn’t realised. “What about 7-8 years?”

“The doctor said that as long as he doesn’t relapse for five years after the operation, then everything is fine. He just needs to go for regular checkups.” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang’s mind was empty for a moment. He recalled once again that other than his appearance, Boss Zhao in no way resembled an ill patient at all. When he laughed and scolded, he was more energetic than anyone else. He finally heaved a true sigh of relief. When he came back to himself, he met Jiang Tian’s eyes; maybe it was because his eyes were lowered, he appeared a little gentle.

“What are you looking at me for?” Sheng Wang rubbed the back of his neck, and straightened up.

Jiang Tian’s brows swiftly furrowed before relaxing, his expression reverting to his normal state. He took a sip of water from his bottle, and said, “Is your face a tourist attraction? I need a ticket to look at it?”

Sheng Wang let out a cold laugh, and glanced at the bottom of the desk. Jiang Tian’s basketball shoes today were white. Hence, without a

second word, he made a mark.

Jiang Tian: “.....”

They were all boys, they knew what would cause the most pain by defiling.

Gao Tianyang immediately let the public know about Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting’s absence, causing a chorus of wails.

Class A’s competition classes had begun for a while already, they were both invited to teach. A few idiots who came to Class A to gatecrash were shocked. “Aren’t they the bosses from the BBQ shop outside of school? Which nutjob got the skewers men to teach us physics?”

He Jin happened to be entering the class from the backdoor with a booklet in order to observe. Her face was stony as she said, “I did.”

The few students nearly went back where they came from out of sheer terror.

When the physics rep projected the introduction slides onto the screen, and Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting’s substantial resumes were displayed right in front of everyone, the group of idiots let out a “wtf” before their mouths were shut by the gloriousness.

When Zhao Xi went up to the stage, he even cracked a joke. “When teacher He Jin told me this, Lin-zi and I—no wait, teacher Lin—were both overseas. We haven’t detoured into the crooked path of roasting meat. Don’t look at the face she’s putting up now, she’s full of regrets on the inside.”

He Jin laughed and cursed from the back, “Damn you.”

“See, now she’s getting emotional,” Zhao Xi said.

He didn’t speak at a particularly high pitch, but his eununciation was good. The way his words were full of mirth was a little roguish, and easygoing at the same time too. He said, “Relax, Lin-zi and I are just here to be a guide, we’re here to show what it’s like if you keep going down the path of physics. In its core, we’re just chatting. We won’t be polluting the understanding of physics in your heads.”

Lin Beiting was somewhat more solemn than him, but he also cracked a tiny joke at the end of the class. He pointed at Zhao Xi, who was sitting in the last row. “Let me get one point straight: learning these wouldn’t cause you to turn bald for sure, as long as you don’t do it in the UK.”

After that, the entire level knew that two hot guys came in to coach Class A for the Olympiad, one of them was even an alumni of Fuzhong. Rounded up, they could call him their senior.

The other classes were already like this, Class A even more so. Everyone liked them incredibly much. When they said to go for skewers as a treat, their real intention was to eat with Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting. Now that the both of them weren't around, they couldn't enjoy the meal to their hearts' content.

Lin Beiting said they would only be back after National Day, therefore this meal that Sheng Wang was supposed to treat was delayed too.

It took only an instant for the weather to turn for the cooler. At the tail end of September, Fuzhong's sports carnival came in first.

Gao Tianyang finally had the spirit of a class comm member; during every single long break, he was all over the classroom, trying to recruit athletes.

Class A students were lackadaisical when it came to the matter of the sports carnival, mostly because the events were truly inhumane.

"What the heck is a 8 X 200?" Sheng Wang asked.

Gao Tianyang, the bastard, forcefully enrolled Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian into quite a few events on the basis that he was on good terms with

them. One of which was this.

“Mixed gender, four guys and four girls, the order’s up to us, and it’s a test of both our stamina as well as strategy.” Gao Tianyang made it sound profound.

Test? More like your dad.

Sheng Wang’s face was full of despair.

There were only eight girls in total from here and there in Class A, out of the eight girls, only Chilli could run. The others were just there, and all puked after the 800m run; three of them even failed it, who are they trying to kill here?

Sheng Wang looked at Jiang Tian as he said, “Is it still too late if I jump down from the upper bunk and break my legs tonight?”

Jiang Tian said, “It’s faster if I break it for you instead.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Chapter 043 - Bet

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How about you call me Ge once?

For the majority of the students, the true meaning behind the sports carnival wasn't for the competition amongst youth and the chance to display vitality; but rather, it was the rare chance to relax and take a breath amidst the mountain of exams. There weren't any classes for these two days, which was basically a monthly break. The entire school was excited, and were abnormally diligent in their preparation. In contrast, the teachers were much more unperturbed.

He Jin said that there weren't any requirements for the minimum number in the audience. If they want to spectate, they could go. If not, they could stay behind for self-study too.

The bigshots of Class A had always put their studies first!

……

You have to be a fool to stay behind for self-study.

When He Jin returned from the office for a tag, not a single soul was left in the classroom.

"That bunch of brats," she laughed as she cursed too, and walked towards the sports ground with the other homeroom teachers. Though in its

core, the sports carnival was primarily for relaxation, friendship comes first and competition second etc etc, the moment they truly entered the place the competitive spirits of these middle-aged people all came out as they got caught up in this heart-racing atmosphere.

The teachers all appeared to be humble as they said “Our class can’t make it”, deep down they hoped that their students surpassed everyone else.

As He Jin entered as part of the formation of teachers, she nearly blacked out upon seeing Class A in the grandstand.

The top of their class had a giant banner, and the class slogan was written in white, on top of the red fabric. Everyone else had some inspirational line like ‘charge forward bravely, hot blooded youthful energy, second place at least and fight for the first, overcoming all difficulties’ etc etc, their class however looked like this:

Year 2 Class A, win or lose, it’s ok! Life is painful and brief, it’s over and that’s a relief!

The entire formation of teachers was doubled over in laughter.

He Jin charged over here as she covered her face, caught a boy nearby and asked, “Whose good idea was it for the slogan?”

“Oh, it’s Gao Tianyang’s.” The boy sold his bro out with zero hesitation.

Over there, Gao Tianyang was giving out team uniforms to the participants. Upon hearing his name, he turned around and gave a toothy grin. “Teacher! Look, we even got a uniform!”

The T-shirts were good T-shirts, the two vertical lines of dark blue at the side added a shapely outline to the shirt. The front of the shirt was an absolute ‘A’, behind was an even more absolute ‘Super A’.

(t/n: A is for ‘Alpha’, they have taken to use the letter ‘A’ alone to represent alpha, use in contexts like an alpha vibe, etc etc)

He Jin felt like she picked up a ghost.

(t/n: A take on ‘picked up a treasure’, usually meaning that the person has found something good by accident. The spin here using the word ‘ghost’ suggests that it’s probably the opposite lol)

Just as she was about to distance herself from them in order to not lose face, she was stopped by Yang Jing who strolled in, fashionably late. Today, Yang Jing had a completely different style from usual. She wore a white slim fit shirt and a sports skirt. She also wore a high ponytail and a white baseball cap, unexpectedly giving her a degree of vivaciousness. Class A students nearly couldn’t recognise her, and next they all turned agape one by one, their mouths couldn’t be closed.

“What are you guys even doing? Trying to copy administration’s Old Xu?” Yang Jing raised an eyebrow and turned her nose up at them. “How unsightly, shut it.”

The group of students near here all obediently shut their mouths.

“Hereherehere, let’s take a picture with the banner.” She beckoned He Jin who no longer had any will to live, and her long legs made its way to the top.

“It’s too silly, what’s the point?” He Jin said, exasperated.

“To post it in the friendship circle,” Yang Jing said, “flex our treasure of a class.”

He Jin ‘pffted’ into laughter.

“Holyshitwho’sthat?” Just as Sheng Wang was wrangling with Gao Tianyang about the dumbass uniform, he was given a scare by Yang Jing the moment he looked up.

The way he was thoroughly lost was so funny that it completely amused Yang Jing. She looked down, and saw another person sitting by Sheng Wang, his long legs propped up. He had his white earpiece stuffed in his ears, and his back was hunched over as he used his phone.

“How brazen, you’re this audacious with your phone in the public eye?” Yang Jing asked.

Sheng Wang’s dangling fingers furiously knocked on Jiang Tian’s shoulders. “Wake up! Keep your phone!”

Jiang Tian’s eyes lifted up as he shot a glance at Sheng Wang’s meddling fingers before he looked at Yang Jing and He Jin, saying, “Teacher.”

Class A students all knew that as long as they weren’t using their phones in the middle of class or get caught by Big Mouth, nothing would happen if the other remaining teachers saw. Jiang Tian was already cold and unfaltering, he barely reacted at all when the teachers came. He even swiped across the screen twice after he greeted them.

“Who pissed him off? He seems pretty upset,” Yang Jing asked.

“He’s shutting the world out,” Sheng Wang said, holding back his laughter, “Gao Tianyang’s uniform was too cringey and he refuses to wear it even if it kills him.”

Jiang Tian played deaf with his earpiece stuffed in.

Yang Jing trembled with laughter as she saw the way he was, and then left after taking a few pictures with He Jin.

After Sheng Wang had his fill of admiring Jiang Tian's aloof head from the back, he suddenly wanted to tease him.

He was also completely unwilling to wear the shirt, he even wanted to beat Gao Tianyang up. But, upon seeing Jiang Tian's state, he couldn't help but change his mind—

He waved at Gao Tianyang. "Come here, give me two."

Gao Tianyang was overjoyed at this twist of events. "Hm? You've finally discovered the artistry in my taste?"

"The hell is your artistry," Sheng Wang mercilessly judged.

"Then why did you change your mind suddenly?"

"My skin is itching."

My skin is truly itching for a beating, Sheng Wang internally said, but his hands dangled the shirt in front of Jiang Tian anyways.

Jiang Tian looked up, removed his earpiece and asked, "What?"

Sheng Wang said, "I suddenly felt that this shirt is passable."

Jiang Tian looked at him with an expression that said "Did your aesthetics cells all die".

“Take a closer look,” Sheng Wang said.

Jiang Tian gave a cold laugh; he wasn’t interested.

“C’moon, it’s the sports carnival, you gotta put hot-bloodedness first,” Sheng Wang did his best to not laugh, appearing particularly sincere. “It’s normal to be a little chunni and stupid, Old Gao has already put in so much effort anyways.”

(t/n: Chunni, an explanation but also, cn internet adopted it as a slang too)

“Therefore?” A single word jumped out of Jiang Tian’s deadpan face.

Sheng Wang started to stick his head into the verge of asking for a beating. “Therefore I kinda want to wear it.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian’s gaze travelled over him. “You wear it then.”

Upon seeing that he was about to stuff in his earpiece again, Sheng Wang grabbed his wrist, saying, “It’s too embarrassing if I wear it alone.”

Jiang Tian’s expression screamed “I fucking knew it”, and numbly said, “I’m not wearing that.”

“With a close of your eyes and a kick of your legs, put it on you and tada, it’s all over,” Sheng Wang said.

“No.”

“Just one day.”

“No.”

“Ge.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian also felt like he picked up a ghost.

A few minutes later, under the shellshocked gaze of everyone else in Class A, Sheng Wang walked down the grandstand with him pushing Jiang Tian’s shoulders. He suppressed his laughter behind him, and even motioned an ‘ok’ at Gao Tianyang behind his back. As for Jiang Tian…...his aura was so chilling he nearly froze into an ice sculpture; every single cell in him from head to toe was a ‘I reject’ in capslock.

It was rare that everyone could see Jiang Tian taken down a peg like this, they instantly whistled and howled. They blindly kicked up a ruckus.

Sheng Wang used his pointer finger to shush them, and said laughingly, “Don’t you dare scream, don’t mess this up for me. I shed blood, sweat and tears to finally coax him down here. If he gets angry and goes to sit on the rooftop, are you gonna do the coaxing?”

Jiang Tian halted in his steps, his brows furrowed as he looked at him.

Sheng Wang instantly went, “I’m sorry, I’m not speaking anymore.”

Everyone planned to watch the show at first, but when they legitimately changed and came back...oh my god, they look so good?

Gao Tianyang was like a giant monkey that was bouncing up and down. He pointed at the two walking signboards and said, “Look! I was totally right! The effect is super explosive! The shirt is so wild and savage and dashing, who the hell still dares to say my taste has died?! Who!”

“Unbeatable!” Song Sirui made a huge stride forward, whisked a shirt from Gao Tianyang’s hands and ran.

With merely a few seconds, the classmates who previously would rather die than give in had collectively switched sides; the team uniforms were instantly all gone, there was even someone who didn’t need to participate attempting to snag one for himself amidst the chaos, and was instantly caught red handed by Gao Tianyang. “Eh, fuck off! If you take even this one I’ll have to go up in my birthday suit!”

The troublemaker boy retracted his hands with a grin. “Fine, fine, that’ll be an eyesore.”

As seen from the evidence, Gao Tianyang’s taste was really passable. The clothes looked chunni as hell, but the effect was exceptional upon being worn. All the athletes of Class A did at roll-call was to stand together,

and the year one classes closest to them all exploded into commotion. The girls exchanged excited whispers, and the booklet containing the register of the athletes that every class got a copy of was nearly fell apart from all the flipping. The girls were all looking for the events Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian would be participating in, and there were even some calls of “Gao Tianyang” mixed within.

Gao Tianyang was jokingly called a tyrant of Class A by other classes, because this creature could continue to score first place after a consecutive round of 1500m followed by 3000m. At the finishing line, he didn’t even need to rest to catch his breath before he was off to summon his friends to go play ball. His stamina was simply inhumane.

Sports carnival in Fuzhong ran on point accumulation. There were 12 classes in year two, the first six places in each event will all get points. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd place gets 15, 10 and 5 points respectively. The 4th-6th place gets 3-1 points in descending order.

“Old Gao scored three 15s last year, thus managing to drag our class to 6th place by force,” Song Sirui said.

“Is the 6th place supposed to be phenomenal?” Sheng Wang wasn’t exactly clear on how good the other classes were.

Song Sirui explained everything with only a single line. “Let’s put it this way: if not for Old Gao last year, we would probably score a total of 15 points for last year, and end up last in the level.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

His first reaction was to look at Jiang Tian, his expression a little incredulous.

Jiang Tian didn’t exactly care about these sorts of things initially, but upon seeing Sheng Wang’s questioning gaze, he couldn’t help but add, “Don’t look at me, I wasn’t here last year.”

“Oh, yeah,” Gao Tianyang said, “I think he was in a training camp, therefore not in school.”

Sheng Wang let out an “oh”, and said, “Exactly my thoughts, you don’t look like the type to not score after all.”

“What place did our class come in for the relay race last year?” Sheng Wang said, “Give me a good estimate.”

Gao Tianyang dryly laughed. “We came in last.”

“But! This year! Let us strive for 6th place minimum and fight for the top three? Everybody, put your all into it!” Song Sirui yelled.

2.30pm, afternoon. Roll-call had begun for the 8 x 200 event. Before entering, every class' order of relay was constantly changing. All the other classes were attempting to get the other class to divulge their strategy, trying to figure out their opponent’s formation. That is, except for Class A. All the girls surrounding them were just there to scream about how hot they are, there wasn’t a single spy. It was the most blatant display of condescension from other classes.

“Whatever, let’s just go in this order!” Gao Tianyang said, “I go first, and try to create as much distance as possible. Next is Old Song and Little Carp, you two just do your best. Sheng-ge, you go in the middle, and try to make up for these two’s distance a bit. Little Chilli is decent at running, so 5th leg goes to her. Next is Qiaona and Dai Xiaohuan, um….don’t feel too pressured about this, not puking is already victory. And then Tian-ge for the last leg, we’ll take whatever position you can get.”

Soon, everyone was in place. One round around the track was 400m, two legs made up one round. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s exchange zone happened to be together, so before their turn, they stood next to the track with each other.

Sheng Wang's hand was propped against the tent; he squinted as he watched the starting point.

The sun at the start of autumn was not as eye piercing as the one in the height of summer, hanging high up in the sky. The air was filled with the fresh scent of turf from the football field. He saw Gao Tianyang bending over at the starting point, and the teacher raising the starting pistol at an even further spot.

The moment the shot was fired, Jiang Tian, who was next to him, suddenly spoke. "Wanna bet?"

It was rare that he took initiative, Sheng Wang felt somewhat surprised. "We're on the same team this time, did you forget?"

Jiang Tian: "That's why I'm betting."

Sheng Wang asked, "Bet what?"

"Bet if we can get 1st place."

"The stake?"

Jiang Tian's brows were lightly knitted as he pondered. "I haven't thought of one yet."

Sheng Wang “tsked”, and said, “What’s the point of betting then?”

Gao Tianyang was sprinting along the track in the distance, as swift as the wind. Sheng Wang watched him leave all 11 people from the other classes behind him, and then pass the baton to Song Sirui. Class A’s cheers could be heard from across the grass field, causing everyone’s hearts to race.

As Gao Tianyang shook off his sweat while he walked over here, Sheng Wang waved at him.

Just as he thought nothing was going to come to fruit of the topic of gambling, Jiang Tian’s gaze suddenly returned from the distance. He took a glance at him and said, “How about you call me Ge once?”

Translator’s notes:

The class slogan: □□A□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□! ← the fully translated meaning is actually: Year 2 Class A, let’s not care too much about winning or losing! Life is painful and short, we can just forget about it after participating! The original language was rhythmic and actually rhymed, so I kinda racked my brain to come up with a Eng tl version that sorta rhymed and could work as a slogan/chant/battle cry. The more you know.

Chapter 044 - Stranger

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“And This Student Is..?” Ji Huanyu’s Head Tilted; He Was Clearly a Little Curious About Sheng Wang.

The sunlight cascaded down upon the tip of the grass, the greenery verdant and replete. Sheng Wang was dazzled to the point that he had to squint, and heat washed up from the front of his forehead, as well as the back of his ears.

He suspected it must be the hot air that Gao Tianyang carried over; he fanned himself twice with his collar before saying to Jiang Tian, “How can this be the stake? No matter what, I lose.”

Jiang Tian raised an eyebrow, refusing to comment. He was quiet for several moments before he said in half resignation, “You didn’t feel like you lost when you set me up though?”

“Duh, that’s totally different.” When Sheng Wang laughed, he felt like the heat wasn’t as suffocating anymore; the cool breeze swept by, and it was still the clear and crisp autumn weather once more.

He said in full righteousness, “You’ve already said so, it was a set up.”

“What set up?” Gao Tianyang took a bottle of water from the student in charge of logistics, and chugged as he walked.

“Nothing, we’re just talking about the hugeass hole you dug for us,” Sheng Wang pointed at Jiang Tian’s clothes, and casually replied.

Their gaze focused on the track once more.

Before the competition, Sheng Wang was already sufficiently mentally prepared; he already predicted that Song Sirui wouldn’t be running at a decent speed judging from his height and legs alone, but he never knew that he could be this slow…..

“You better tell me that Old Song is just saving up his strength and he’ll be sprinting at the end,” Sheng Wang pointed at the person being gradually overtaken by the other classes as he said.

Gao Tianyang laughed hoarsely. “There’s a need to save strength for 200m?”

As they spoke, a girl from Class 8 had overtaken Song Sirui. He struggled for a bit with his short legs, but to no avail.

“His fastest speed was only at the starting point,” when Gao Tianyang snubbed Song Sirui, he was merciless. “At the last 50m, you will discover how fast his legs can go. Have you ever seen a hamster ball? It’s that effect. Visually, you think that he’s sprinting, but in reality nothing changed. It’s quite illusive.”

(t/n: The language used in the original text seemed to suggest this for Song Sirui's legs.)

Just as he said, Song Sirui scampered his way to the exchange point in the way Gao Tianyang described. By the time he passed the baton to Li Yu, the advantage that Gao Tianyang bought was all gone. From the first and far ahead of everyone to the 5th place from the back, all it took was 200m.

“Maintain your pace, don’t break down. Think about our class’ slogan.” Gao Tianyang pointed at the ostentatious red banner as he said, “Year 2 Class A, win or lose, it’s ok! Life is painful and brief, it’s over and that’s a relief!”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

“Why did I agree to come up here to embarrass myself like this?” Sheng Wang asked Jiang Tian wholeheartedly.

Jiang Tian said monotonously, “I was just thinking about this too.”

“To the nobility of friendship.” Gao Tianyang raised his bottle of vitamin water.

The three of them were in a pretty good place mentally, but Li Yu, who received the baton, broke down. She was already inept at running, and was only here to make up for the numbers due to her role as the class monitor. After this round, the last 5th place had completely transformed into the last place.

The referee over here raised the flag, and the students in charge of the fourth leg all stepped onto the track. Sheng Wang was one of them. He had warmed up prior to this, and was now doing a few quick bounces on the spot. Then, he got into position and waited at the exchange zone.

Students came charging in, and they received the baton one after another. There was still 10+m until Li Yu arrived.

Jing-jie often said she had a shaky psyche, she would easily get stressed out and anxious. This point of hers was magnified by many degrees on the sports ground, where her adrenaline soared to new heights—

She ran to the point that tears were exiting her eyes too.

In her blurred vision, Sheng Wang was already lightly jogging along the track. He was a clean and yet striking silhouette on the track.

The moment she passed the baton to him, she heard him say, “Ay, don’t cry.”

The next second, the boy shot out like an arrow that left its bow.

Radiant youth moved people’s hearts the best; when he sprinted, he ran through the very passage of time itself. But in that instant, nobody would think of mushy things like this. There was only the most direct reaction: the entire of Class A had gone ablaze, and screamed their throats hoarse at the track.

They discovered almost immediately that it wasn’t just Class A who was screaming, the other classes had lost it way more than they did.

“WHAT THE HELL—YOU GUYS TOTALLY BOUGHT HACKS!!!” The sports rep of Class B did not participate in the relay, and shouted at Class A from his seat.

“GO BUY IT YOURSELF!” A girl yelled back with no holds barred.

Sheng Wang had overtaken Class 8, Class 6, Class 3, and Class 9……

With every person he overtook, there was another wave of screams from the grandstand, every single class was screaming.

Next, it was Class 12, Class 7, Class 2, Class B.

The first few in the relay for Class B haven't left the sports ground yet, and were following the competition in real time by the grass. Amongst them, was Shi Yu from the same dorm as Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian.

Ever since the results of the English Olympiad came out, he was in an incredibly awkward state for a long time. Even though Sheng Wang didn’t know that he was waiting for him to clown himself, he still felt like his words came back to bite him in the ass, and was too embarrassed to see him.

Perhaps it was because of the many days Shi Yu used to praise Sheng Wang, or maybe it was the competitive spirit of boys, but Shi Yu had suddenly entered ‘competition mode’, and treated Sheng Wang as his opponent. He quietly started comparing himself against Sheng Wang in many ways, all one-sidedly.

Sheng Wang did an entire week of Olympiad practice, but he only scored 10 points higher than him for physics and chemistry in the weekly

test. That’s all he amounted to.

Sheng Wang had seriously memorised the ancient poetry and texts, and did his assignments himself on a usual basis too. Yet, he only scored 126 for the weekly test’s language exam. That’s all he amounted to.

Sheng Wang’s English…...his English was probably because that’s his natural talent.

Well...humans will all have a couple of things they are good at, Sheng Wang used his for English, Shi Yu spent it on sports.

Shi Yu had always felt that he was naturally outstanding in terms of his physique compared to other people. His speed, his explosive energy, his jumps were all amazing. He made everything look as easy as breathing. He had always felt that catching up to natural talent was an impossible task, it’s all due to destiny. This was also why he copied homework, played games, and chit chatted whenever he wasn’t revising.

But in this moment, he found his deep-rooted belief of many years suddenly shaking in its foundations.

He watched Sheng Wang surpass 12 people with his very eyes, and come closer and closer to the second place. Just like that, he was the most unbridled, dazzling presence on the entire track, and abruptly he felt that even his own so-called talent wasn’t as outstanding anymore.

“Holy shit, that’s too iconic!” The few people of Class B couldn’t help to exclaim. One of them even hooked an arm around Shi Yu’s neck, saying, “You’re quite something too, do you even know how badass your roommate is?”

Shi Yu awkwardly laughed, and finally stopped thinking “that’s all he amounted to”. He answered, “How about you tell me?”

When Sheng Wang reached the exchange zone, he was shoulders to shoulders with the second place, and was only two steps behind the first.

He didn’t manage to break his momentum after passing the baton to Chilli, he only managed to gradually stop after continuing for 7-8m. The gust of wind that followed came leaping at Chilli’s face.

The next moment, Chilli dashed out with her face entirely flushed.

The two legs in the middle were largely boys. Class A students thought that they were about to lose their advantage once more, but never would they think that everything is possible when girls go insane!

“Oh my god……” The sports rep of Class B didn’t know what to say anymore.

Class A was stunned for a moment, and then they were on fire once again, as though they could put Chilli on hacks through sheer volume alone.

“Chilli’s new name from today shall be Wind-and-Fire Wheels!” a boy shouted. Other people figured that it was indeed quite fitting, and then they were losing their minds from laughing.

(t/n:, or the wheel of fire that goes zoom zoom thus creating much wind, iconically wielded by Ne Zha. It looks like this.)

This girl legit surpassed another person, and after 200m Class A was first in place again. There were many boys in the class, and when they cheered their pitch was clearly different, and the gusto of it all was earthshaking.

And then, the journey of heart attacks began—

Sheng Wang was drinking a bottle of water by the side, and after a few seconds, he decided to not drink anymore; he was afraid he would choke to death here.

First it was Zhao Qiaona, the sixth leg, who slipped and stumbled a few steps. 7-8 students whooshed past her like the wind.

With that, she panicked, and soon she lost track of the rhythm of her breathing, becoming terribly out of breath after 100+m. With her relay, Class A was in 11 place.

Next, someone bumped into the 7th runner, and nearly fell down. Both her hands were already on the ground before she straightened up to catch up……

And caught up to the last place.

Not even roller coasters are this hardcore.

Sheng Wang saw that the situation was going out of control halfway through, and ran to Jiang Tian from all the way across the other side of the field.

At this time, the teacher had already raised the flag. Jiang Tian was standing at the exchange zone. Gao Tianyang made use of the fact that they haven’t chased him away yet to down chicken soup right into his ears. After spending ages doing so, he discovered Jiang Tian was zoning out, and not a single word made it into his ears.

He followed Jiang Tian’s gaze, and saw Sheng Wang by the side of the track.

“Ok fine, You have a hella steady mental state, I’ll just take my leave!” Gao Tianyang cupped his fist.

Just as Sheng Wang was about to step onto the track, the teacher at the area had begun shooing people away. Gao Tianyang ran over, crestfallen. “They aren’t allowing anyone there anymore. If you wanna say something, just yell.”

Sheng Wang froze; he suddenly realised he himself didn’t know what he wanted to say. Why did he come all the way here then?

Just to stand by the side? Just to…...take a look?

“Oh, I thought you figured out a strategy or wanted to warn him about some things from the way you ran like your ass is on fire,” Gao Tianyang waved generously. “Then, let us both just do our jobs and cheer him on! Tian-ge—run well!”

Jiang Tian was rotating his ankles at the moment, his plain and clear gaze traversed from the tracks to here.

The 7th baton had already come around from the corner of the track, Class A was at the very back.

Sheng Wang's brows furrowed, his face screamed that he was concerned.

Just as he looked away from the far distance, he saw Jiang Tian give him a thumbs up, then turning to his side. His hand reached out, waiting for the girl charging from behind.

Sheng Wang suddenly felt reassured.

That day, Class A students felt as though they were aboard the roller coaster ride of death, they received heart attacks again and again, again and yet again.

In the end, when they saw Jiang Tian surpassing everyone one by one, they collectively got excited, and decided to might as well start counting along.

When they counted to 13, the relay race was finally over. Jiang Tian was the second across the finish line, and Class 4 was first. The gap was so narrow that one could barely tell them apart.

Class A was ecstatic. 2nd place was enough to cause them to howl. After all, they were usually the last place in the previous relay races.

The language rep even prepared the broadcast speech. Unexpectedly, the referee made a hand gesture, and summoned a few students who were

by the corner to ask them something

A few minutes later, a number was added to Class A's total score: a full 15.

"What happened???"

Class A students all thought that there was a mistake, only to hear Gao Tianyang, who just returned, yell, "Class 4 broke the rules by bumping into people, and they are disqualified. The other classes move forward by one place accordingly, and now our class is first!!!"

Jiang Tian was out of the loop, and was walking back from the finishing line, his arm dangled as he held a bottle of water.

He rolled the t-shirt sleeves up to his shoulders, and heat was dissipating off him. Suddenly, he heard someone run up to him from behind, and throw an arm around his neck, saying, "We're first!"

It's Sheng Wang.

Other than him, nobody else would dare to plaster themself onto him like this.

Jiang Tian lowered his head to go with the momentum, and stumbled two steps with his back hunched. He opened up the bottle of water,

appearing completely unruffled.

“Did you hear me? We’re first place, the first!”

Someone was given an inch and took a mile; not only did he dare to reign his neck, he even dared to ruffle his hair.

“I heard,” Jiang Tian replied, with his lips touching the mouth of the bottle. He took a few more gulps before he put it down, revealing a smile.

They wanted to go to the back of the grandstand to do a registration. However, just as they turned around the corner, Jiang Tian abruptly came to a stop upon seeing something in front of them.

Sheng Wang still had his arm around his shoulder; he watched with his very own eyes how any trace of his smile disappeared from his face, and his expression chilling.

He was taken aback, and followed Jiang Tian’s gaze.

One would have to go through Road #3 to travel from the west gate to the sports ground. In the middle of the way, there was a flight of steps. An immaculately dressed man was walking down from the steps, and when he saw Jiang Tian he stopped in the middle.

Sheng Wang's first reaction was that he felt that the other person was kinda familiar. It was rare for him to remember people's faces, but as long as he had an impression, there must be something special about the person.

He was briefly stunned before he realised: that person was special in how his face was somewhat similar to Jiang Tian's.

Next, he also recalled how he had seen this person before: outside Beyond Parasol Trees, in the alley near Old Man Ding's home.

"Xiao-Tian," the other person called.

Sheng Wang knew that this was Jiang Tian's father who had never appeared up till now, Ji Huanyu. He recalled Old Man Ding's narration of Jiang Tian's childhood, and suddenly he found himself loathing this person's outstanding airs..

Jiang Tian didn't reply.

Sheng Wang saw Ji Huanyu's gaze dart towards him. Before he could react, he felt Jiang Tian already straightening up.

The action of having an arm around his shoulder suddenly didn't feel as natural anymore. Sheng Wang monetarily froze, and released him.

“And this student is..?” Ji Huanyu’s head tilted; he was clearly a little curious about Sheng Wang.

Upon asking that, Jiang Tian finally opened his mouth and bothered to respond.

“None of your business,” his tone was icy cold. After that, he lightly tapped on Sheng Wang’s shoulder, saying, “What are you standing here for. Let’s go.”

Chapter 045 - Stubborn Donkey

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“Between the Wheelchair and Being Carried on the Back, I Choose to Be Carried.”

Ji Huanyu didn’t leave just simply because of the cold treatment.

He descended from the stairs, and followed behind Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang. Occasionally, he called Jiang Tian’s name a few more times, carrying the resigned tone of “I don’t know what to do with you”.

This tone made him gain the upper hand. In the ears of ignorant passerbys, it was like a cultured and refined father who was trying to coax his temperamental son.

Sheng Wang felt more irritated the more he listened to it.

Behind the grandstand was the script collection area for the broadcast, the roll-call area as well as the assistance area. Students and teachers milled around the area, and curious looks came from the surroundings again and again. Yet, they were only brief in lieu of Jiang Tian’s icy expression.

“The 8 x 200 event, right?” The teacher at the roll-call waved at them from afar.

Everyone knew the people of the hour. The teacher didn’t ask any further questions, and went straight to taking out a form, pointing to an

empty spot and saying, “There’s only the two of you left in your class who haven't registered, please sign your name here.”

Jiang Tian received the pen, and wrote his name expressionlessly.

Sheng Wang lightly nudged him. “Help me sign too, the artistry in my handwriting is too much, I’m afraid the teacher couldn’t cope.”

The way he spoke was too full of himself, the teacher hmphed in annoyance.

Jiang Tian’s motion of settling the pen down stopped for a moment, and his expression relaxed in that instant. As he signed Sheng Wang’s name, he said, “Didn’t you practise.”

Thank goodness, thank goodness. He wasn’t pissed off to the point of not speaking.

Sheng Wang internally heaved a sigh of relief, but his mouth continued anyways, “I mean, I did practise, but I gotta hide my true powers. I plan to give Jing-jie a scare during midterms.”

The two of them chatted as if there was nobody else around, Ji Huanyu was waiting approximately 2 steps away. The roll-call teacher looked up, and exchanged civilities. “Here as a parent to watch your kid?”

Ji Huanyu nodded, remorse and guilt hidden in his light smile. “It’s rare that I have the chance to look.”

The teacher then politely expressed that hey, everyone gets busy, it’s understandable. It was as though all and any problems were so easily swept aside with this casual line.

The upturned curve of Sheng Wang’s lips instantly disappeared; he pursed his lips and shot a glance at Ji Huanyu.

By the time he turned back, Jiang Tian’s face chilled once more.

Sheng Wang looked at the teacher sourly, internally saying, *I just freaking cheered him up and you screwed it up for me.*

Jiang Tian settled the pen down, straightened up and asked, “You’ve been stalking us for half a day now, spill it.”

Ji Huanyu was still smiling; one couldn’t find any trace of awkwardness or unease in his smile. He was excellent at keeping up appearances, but Jiang Tian knew that he already was starting to regret following them over.

He was vain and was thin-skinned. He always had the need to appear charming and appropriate in front of other people, he disliked to lose

control in any case.

The teacher at the roll-call felt a little awkward, but someone had to man this area. He couldn't leave, but he couldn't exactly stay either. He could only force a smile at the three of them.

Ji Huanyu pointed at the empty spot in the distance. "The teacher still has to attend to other matters, let's go there?"

"Out of the way," Jiang Tian replied.

Ji Huanyu sighed, and called him yet again. "Xiao-Tian."

Jiang Tian still remained ice cold, and was completely unmoved.

The roll-call teacher was watching with increasing stress, and Ji Huanyu finally gave up. Even up till this point, he still kept up the appearance of polite and refined. He smiled and said, "Sure, let's not talk about any unhappy things today. I happened to hear that there's a sports carnival at Fuzhong today, and planned to take a look, that's all."

"Then just watch it by yourself."

After Jiang Tian spoke, he tugged at Sheng Wang, and the two of them entered the sports ground without looking back.

Midway through, Sheng Wang turned back to take a look, and discovered Ji Huanyu seriously went up to the grandstand. He found a seat by the edge of the parents' zone and sat down. He greeted the person next to him and started watching the competitions quietly.

This afternoon ought to be the highlight of the sports carnival, most of the competition on the tracks was concentrated here. The events where Class A had a chance to score were included within too.

Gao Tianyang surpassed the second place by an entire round for the 1500m event, and a round and a half for the 3000m event. Chilli got 2nd place for both the 200m and 400m event. Li Yu and Zhao Qiaona performed better than usual at the three-legged race, earning them 3rd place. Other people more or less earned a few positions too.

Class A students were basically living in heaven for this half-day. They watched how their accumulated points jump higher and higher, and suddenly they were 3rd in the level. They were only 10 points away from the second place, Class 5, and only 18 points from the first place, Class 7.

Everyone's last hopes rested on Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang. The former was participating in high jump right now, the latter in hurdles.

The high jump was at the southeast corner of the sports ground. Due to how there was a need to run-up, the site was thoroughly cleared. People could only wait by the grass patch 10m away. Most of the people in Class A disappeared from the grandstand, and nearly everyone crowded over.

The site manager had no other choice but to bring over a few white metal barriers, forming a straight line. A huge group of people stood beyond the barrier.

Song Sirui eyed the surroundings and asked, “Since when did our class have so many girls?”

Gao Tianyang let out an “Ay” in a sigh, and said, “Dream on, if we really have this many I will die of happiness here and now.”

A group of girls from the other classes giggled, saying to him, “We do want to enter, but your Class A don’t want us.”

Gao Tianyang threw his arm around Sheng Wang’s shoulders, asking, “Then, are you here to watch my Tian-ge or my Sheng-ge?”

The girls all nudged and pushed each other as they giggled, but refused to answer too.

The crowd was bustling and lively, but Sheng Wang was completely out of it; Jiang Tian no longer smiled for the whole afternoon.

As the horizontal bar increased in height, Jiang Tian ran up to the bar again and again. He leapt as he turned around; he had a tall height and long legs, the moment he went across was honestly attention grabbing.

The crowd always held their breath whenever he started to run, and burst out into cheers the moment he landed, becoming more and more keyed up than before.

The more heated the surroundings were, the colder he appeared by contrast.

The group of girls at the side seemed to even eat this exact type up well, a girl whispered to her pal, “I can't believe he actually sweats, I feel cold just from looking at him.”

Sheng Wang caught the main gist of it, and didn’t know if he should laugh or cry.

The sound of a whistle pierced through from the near distance, the broadcast at the sports ground started to summon the participants for hurdles for roll-call. Sheng Wang shot a glance over there: boys from all over the place walked to the back of the grandstand with their number bibs.

The girl at the side suddenly cried out in surprise. Sheng Wang turned around, and saw that Jiang Tian didn't go back to the starting point after going across a bar. Rather, he came towards the barrier.

Gao Tianyang asked, "Tian-ge! Tired?"

Jiang Tian stood by the barrier, and took a bottle from Sheng Wang. "I'm fine."

Class 3 and Class 9 were pests; nobody was disqualified yet after going through three heights with him. Sweat had already gathered at his forehead and next to his temples. The beads of sweat rolled down from his lower jaw to his neck; when his head was lifted as he drank water, even his Adam's apple was dripping wet.

Sheng Wang's eyes quickly narrowed as he squeezed the bottle cap, and abruptly tore himself away from the sight.

"Are hurdles about to begin soon?" Jiang Tian suddenly asked.

"Hm?" Sheng Wang briefly stopped; he didn't react on time.

Jiang Tian passed the half-drank bottle back to him, lifted his chin at the broadcast area and said, "I heard that roll-call is starting."

“Oh, yeah.” Sheng Wang put the cap back on, saying, “I’m going over now.”

Jiang Tian nodded. “All the best.”

The white wooden hurdles were already placed on the tracks. A portion of the spectators also followed Sheng Wang to the tracks, but the majority still remained by the southeast corner; Sheng Wang’s finishing line was there too.

As he warmed up, he could see from this distance that the high jump increased in height once more. The boy from Class 9 couldn’t succeed after three tries, and had already left the competition venue. The one from Class 3 was still on his second try.

Sheng Wang lifted his leg, and rolled up his sleeves next. He leaned downwards.

The moment the starting pistol was fired, the boy from Class 3 couldn’t make it pass after three tries too, and was also disqualified.

Sheng Wang grinned, and leapt over the second hurdle.

It’s usually difficult to create a giant gap for 100m races in the school sports carnivals, especially for the men’s events. There was only a mere difference between first and second place. However, hurdles was different. Some people were used to it, some people couldn’t. The difference was clear in a moment.

After three hurdles, Sheng Wang had arrived at the first segment. The segment consisted of only two people: him, and the sports rep from Class B.

Prior to this, the sports rep had practised on the tracks for an entire week. He had way more practice than Sheng Wang, and he was smooth in his leaps too; never did he make a mistake.

Perhaps it was the way Sheng Wang was too stunning in his performance in the mixed relay race, he felt overwhelming pressure all of a sudden. When it came to the point of the formal event itself, he ended up fumbling in his leaps, and knocked over quite a few wooden hurdles.

At the last hurdle, a wave of screams suddenly burst from the corner of the sports ground nearby. Gao Tianyang’s hoarse shouts travelled particularly well. “TIAN-GE, YOU’RE BADASS—”

He won?

Sheng Wang shot a glance at that corner subconsciously, and could only see how the crowd gathered around there, the girls were animated.

As evidence shows, karma easily comes for people who don't concentrate on what they are supposed to be doing. He took less than a second to zone out, the sports rep from Class B was spooked by the cheer, and fell down to the ground along with the hurdle. He fell face-down, dog-eating-mud style onto Sheng Wang's track.

Sheng Wang wanted to avoid him on instinct, however, his legs were already in thin air.

He only had time to internally swear, "fuck", and then he was back on the ground.

With a loud "crack" in his left ankle, he knelt down straight away.

In that instant, Sheng Wang was stupefied from the pain.

There were instantly cries of alarm from the grass patch, someone was panicking, someone was calling his name. He couldn't hear them clearly; all he knew was the buzzing in his ears, and the clamour outside of it.

Soon, the tinnitus that came from the pain faded away like the tide. He opened his eyes with his hands clutching his ankles, only to hear that beast from Class B clutching his butt, going “OWOWOW”. This scene seemed pretty ridiculous to him—the first and second place both fell into a mess, how embarrassing.

Sheng Wang frowned, but he couldn’t help to start laughing too.

“You’re *laughing*?!” A voice descended on him.

Sheng Wang looked up, only to see Jiang Tian to have come over from the high-jump area at some unknown time, and squatted down right in front of him.

“Don’t squat anymore, hurry and pull me up—” Sheng Wang hooked onto him all at once, and stood up with one leg using him.

Jiang Tian didn’t know what sort of no good Sheng Wang was up to. His brows were knitted as he glared at him. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“There’s still a few metres left, I’ll continue after I hop over!” Sheng Wang let go, curled his left leg up and hopped forward.

“You!”

He didn’t even need to look; from this word alone he could already tell that Jiang Tian wanted to hoist him up and whack him.

The people in other classes were initially quite far behind them, and they all stopped for a bit by this abrupt twist in events. By the time they reacted and kept running, they were only delayed by a little bit.

“Shit!” As Sheng Wang cursed through the pain, he watched the person from Class 9 shoot pass him, becoming the first to break through the finishing line.

When he jumped, he gave off the vibe of being both light and valiant. Even if he was performing “golden rooster on a leg”, the distance in his jumps were larger than other people’s. Soon enough, he was arriving at the finishing line.

(t/n: golden rooster on one leg - It is a famous taichi posture, but also commonly used to describe standing on one foot)

The people at the grandstand thought that he would be the last place for sure; they never saw any of this coming, not in a million years, and instantly started cheering for him. The cheers from Class A were thunderous.

The person from Class 2 brushed past him, and arrived first.

Sheng Wang made another jump, and finally caught up. The white stripe on the ground streaked past the bottom of his foot, and from then on the dust had settled. The next second, he saw Jiang Tian entering from the side of the venue, and supporting him right on the dot.

“Fuck, that was so painful!” Sheng Wang draped his entire body weight over him with zero restrain.

The sports rep from Class B initially planned to just lie down there and give up, but was provoked by him enough to get up again and stumbled his way across the finishing line. He seriously made it to 6th place, gaining 1 point.

“You’re so goddamn badass!” He sat his ass down on the track, yelling at Sheng Wang as he dealt with his scraped knee.

“You’re goddamn not bad too!” Sheng Wang copied his tone and heartily laughed back. The moment he turned back after that reply, he was met with Jiang Tian’s expression that bore resemblance to a corpse in a coffin.

“.....”

Sheng Wang's smile immediately died down, and he acted obedient again. He even curled his left leg, saying, "Ow ow ow."

"Ow you ass." Jiang Tian said, with a stony face, "Let me take a look."

As he spoke, he already squatted down. Sheng Wang rested three fingers against his shoulders for balance.

"Can you move?" Jiang Tian asked.

Sheng Wang tried to move using his left ankle. "It's fine. It hurts, but not to the point that—"

As he spoke, he jammed up halfway through; Jiang Tian's fingers light pressed on his ankle joint twice.

"What are you hiding for," Jiang Tian looked up, asking, "it hurts now?"

Sheng Wang felt as though the entire school was watching his foot, a pale red flush started to appear on his neck. "I'm fine, you get up first. We'll continue when we're back at the grandstand."

“What do you mean grandstand!” Gao Tianyang rushed over with He Jin as well as a group of classmates.

“Straight to the sickbay you go,” He Jin’s expression was stern as she said, “Just you try to act tough next time!”

“No, eh wait hold on, don’t pull my hand.” Sheng Wang felt an entire chain of people wanting to support him, and instantly leaned closer to Jiang Tian while feeling particularly mixed feelings. “Him supporting me over is good enough, you all still have events after this, no need to join in the crowd here.”

A group of people squeezed and shoved their way onto Road #3. Sheng Wang had finally convinced most people. They gave concerned advice for a long while, and finally dispersed back to the sports ground.

Jiang Tian took a look at the distance of Road #3. “I’ll carry you on the back.”

Sheng Wang hurriedly waved, “No need, it’s embarrassing enough to go lame, I don’t want to be spectated by passersby all the way too.”

Gao Tianyang also said, “We can take turns to carry you, it doesn’t take much energy.”

Sheng Wang immediately let go, and hopped on forward by himself. “Goodbye, I’m going on my own now.”

Gao Tianyang called, “Is your zodiac a donkey? So stubborn and for what?”

Sheng Wang: “Correct.”

Jiang Tian sped up in two steps and caught him. He turned around to say to Gao Tianyang, “I’ll bring him over, you go back first.”

Gao Tianyang wanted to say something else, but stopped. In the end, something occurred to him and he said, “Sure, you two go ahead first. I’ll bring something good and will be over soon.”

Sheng Wang hurriedly hopped forward by a few steps again.

It actually wasn’t that far from the sports ground to the sickbay. Judging by the distance alone, hopping his way there doesn’t seem nigh impossible. But, the road wasn’t completely flat; from the forked path out from Road #3, there was a winding road on a slope, going two entire rounds before they reached the sickbay.

Sheng Wang draped on Jiang Tian as he hopped the entire way there, and argued the entire way there too. All for “to carry or not to carry”.

Just as they were about to reach the top of the slope, Sheng Wang heard the sound of wheels rolling behind him.

He turned around in confusion and saw Gao Tianyang. This big bro was pushing an even bigger thingy in his hands, giddily saying, “Sheng-ge, I asked for a wheelchair for you. If you really don’t want to be carried, then sit on the wheelchair!”

Sheng Wang was dumbstruck.

“Is it a bit too ceremonious?” After being dazed for a good while, he then pushed Jiang Tian, saying, “Finefinefine, you turn around.”

Upon finishing his words, he hooped his arms around Jiang Tian’s neck, and sprawled onto his back with the momentum. “Between the wheelchair and being carried on the back, I choose to be carried.”

Chapter 046 - Sick Leave

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It Was Funny When He Thought About It; He Appeared to Be…...Missing Jiang Tian a Little.

Gao Tianyang’s brilliant suggestion went unused; he shook his head and muttered under his breath as he went to return the wheelchair. Jiang Tian carried Sheng Wang up the slope.

This was one of the quietest corners in school; there were two rows of lush and verdant trees by the sides of the path, the vines of flowers would often reach out from the shrubs, hanging in various lengths along the road.

Sheng Wang still felt a little uneasy. Jiang Tian didn’t even need to look back to already know that his expression must be hilarious.

“Why didn’t you want to be carried?” he asked.

Sheng Wang slightly shifted. “Embarrassing.”

Jiang Tian didn’t quite get the logic: it’s not embarrassing to fall down in front of the whole school, but it’s too much to get carried on the back after breaking his leg? But, these are the words he ought to keep to

himself; if he said anything, the peacock on his back will immediately end himself by taking a swan dive off the slope.

He actually did understand that his words were a little too blunt sometimes, but he couldn't be bothered to change. Sometimes, it was to tease someone on purpose, but more often than not he simply did not care.

The person on his back moved again. He added to his explanation, "Either way, it's out of a man's competitive spirits."

"Since when do you have so much manly competitive spirit." Jiang Tian deadpanned.

"Isn't this quite normal? Don't you have it too?"

"No."

Jiang Tian's reply was as resolute as iron. It didn't matter if he had it or not, in any case there was no way he was agreeing.

Just as expected, Sheng Wang was choked to the point that he didn't speak for a long while. He then tightened his hug, saying, "Your neck is now in my hands, can you think before you speak?"

Jiang Tian was stuck to the point that he had to look up. He calmly expounded, "Your entire person is in my hands."

Maybe it was the way his Adam's apple moved as he spoke, thus causing the other's person's wrist to feel a slight discomfort. He could feel Sheng Wang quieting for a few seconds, and his arm released a little. Not only that, his entire upper body straightened up, as though he was trying to minimise contact.

Jiang Tian's brows quickly lightly furrowed, so brief that not even he himself noticed it.

"Tired?" Sheng Wang asked.

"Wouldn't be if you quit moving around," Jiang Tian said.

"Ok," Sheng Wang sheepishly replied.

The wind blew around the corner of the winding path, the spray of flowers sticking out from the side lightly swayed along. Jiang Tian's head moved aside, avoiding it. For some mysterious reason, he suddenly spoke, asking, "Are you tired?"

"Me?" Sheng Wang didn't realise what was going on. He asked, befuddled, "Why would I be tired?"Jiang Tian slightly tilted his head, and swept a glance at him from the corner of his eyes. "The way you're holding your neck so stiffly, aren't you tired?"

Sheng Wang had no words. Jiang Tian turned around again, his gaze meeting straight ahead. His pace was leisurely, his footsteps landed on the patches of light and shadows casted by the tree branches and vines.

Yet another while later, the boy on his back gradually relaxed. His chin rested on the crook of his shoulders, like a sloth hanging from the tree.

Jiang Tian’s gaze lightly swept to his right, and kept it back again.

He suddenly recalled the days of childhood where he would go through the alleyways of Beyond Parasol Trees; “Leader” would descend from above without a single warning, and roll in front of his feet. Its slender and pointy tail was soft and furry as it danced across his ankles.

The feeling at this moment was particularly ineffable.

He only felt that time had slowed down, leisurely marching along, and the road ahead was both long and easy.

*

There was already someone in the sickbay; a tall and good-looking male teacher in glasses with a refined air was sending messages on WeChat with his head lowered. Upon hearing the door open, he looked up and over.

The male teacher’s name was Zhuang Heng, Fuzhong had invited him over from another school. Ever since he entered the school, he had never switched levels. Every single year, he would only teach year 3 Class A chemistry. In the troop of teachers primarily dominated by middle-aged people in Fuzhong, his handsomeness was honestly overly prominent; many students called him their male god, plenty of girls tried their best to score into Class A all for his sake.

Sheng Wang had heard some gossip from Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui, saying that he appeared to be wooing Yang Jing. However, he was more of the reserved type, and Jing-jie’s cells capable of love were all extinct; there weren’t any major progress after a year of wooing her.

“Hey, what happened?” Zhuang Heng kept his phone, strided over and supported him. Sheng Wang jumped off from Jiang Tian’s back, and hopped his way to the chair with only one leg.

Sheng Wang gave two hollow laughs. “I was crossing hurdles, but the hurdles ended up crossing me instead.”

“You’re really……” Zhuang Heng shook his head.

“Teacher, where’s teacher Lu of the sickbay?” Jiang Tian asked.

“She went behind to help me fetch some medicine,” Zhuang Heng said, “she’ll be here soon.”

As they spoke, the sickbay’s female teacher, who was short and stout, walked over from the corridor. She passed two boxes of anti-inflammatory medicine as well as a pack of lozenges to Zhuang Heng, and then turned around to ask Sheng Wang, “You’re unwell?”

“Nope, just sprained my ankle,” Sheng Wang patted his left leg.

“Let me see.” She squatted down, and lightly pressed Sheng Wang’s ankle. Her technique was roughly the same as Jiang Tian’s actually, but Sheng Wang didn’t feel itchy, and neither did he shy away.

“It’s already swollen.” She demonstrated a movement. “Does it hurt when you move it like this?”

Sheng Wang moved it up and down as shown. “It’s still ok.”

“How about rotating it?”

“Hiss—” Sheng Wang sucked in a gust of air. “I can’t really rotate it.”

“That’s fine, at least your bones probably aren’t affected,” teacher Lu said.

She still made Sheng Wang go to the other end of the corridor for an X-ray before she confirmed, “Your bone is alright, you just need some rest. I’m giving you some medicine: these two here are for anti-inflammation, take it twice a day. This box is for blood circulation and getting rid of bruises, take it thrice a day. Also, there’s a tube of cream here, apply it in the morning and at night.”

Sheng Wang carefully studied the label for the medicine. When he was done, he asked, “Is one tube enough? Teacher, can you give me another one?”

It was the first time teacher Lu had ever seen a student that treasured himself this much. She said, in both amusement and slight despair, “You just need to apply one round around your ankle, it’s not like it’s body lotion that you need to spread everywhere. There’s no way you’ll use it up this quickly.”

But, seeing how the boy was a pleasure to interact with, she gave him two tubes in the end, and took up a form to fill it up.

“May we go now, teacher?” Sheng Wang stood up.

Zhuang Heng had been waiting there, and was prepared to help Jiang Tian support him too. Yet, he heard teacher Lu say, “Where do you think you’re going? I’m signing off a slip for you, you know.”

“What slip? Sheng Wang may be lame, but he wasn’t staying in his lane. He hopped back with Jiang Tian’s support.

“Can you behave yourself?” Jiang Tian said, “I’ll help you look.”

“Nuh-uh, I have the rights to stay in the know.” Sheng Wang hopped to the table, and saw Teacher Lu writing a doctor’s note.

He stared at the mysterious handwriting on the paper before he sincerely asked for Jiang Tian’s help. “Oh no, I’m illiterate.”

Jiang Tian moved his lips. Moments later, he read, “Recommendation: the student to go home and rest for 15 days.”

“Go home and rest?” Sheng Wang rejected without even thinking. “No way, I like staying in the dorm.”

“No? What do you mean ‘no’?” Teacher Lu glared. “Let me ask you, what floor do you stay on?”

“.....” Sheng Wang opened his mouth, and answered sheepishly, “Sixth floor.”

“*Oh.* From how reassured you sounded, I thought you stayed on the first floor. If you don’t go home, how else do you plan to go up 6 floors, tell me?”

He actually wanted to say that *I’m ok with hopping*, but Jiang Tian definitely wouldn’t let him hop. Besides, he also didn’t want Jiang Tian to have to carry a wholeass person like him up so many stairs.

“And then, tell me what do you plan to do about going to the toilet, showering, and changing your clothes? Your dormmates are going to wait on you?” Teacher Lu said without any mercy. “There’s only showers in school. Even though our tiles are anti-slipping, but what if? What if you fall from your golden rooster pose? It’s no big deal if you fall into the ground or against the door, but what if you fall into a pit?”

Sheng Wang hurriedly got her to stop. He touched his nose as he said, “I was only just saying.”

“Ddin’t you quite love yourself when you asked me for the cream? Now you aren’t doing it anymore?” Teacher Lu said, exasperated.

Zhuang Heng persuaded, “It really is more convenient at home. I’ve heard from Ya- your English teacher that you live in the city?”

“Mn.”

Sheng Wang nodded, and looked at Jiang Tian again.

The other person was silent most of the time. The moment their eyes met, Sheng Wang’s instincts inexplicably thought, that Jiang Tian appeared to be reluctant about him going home too.

However, Jiang Tian still dug out his phone to make a phone call in the end.

“What are you doing?” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian said, “I’m getting Uncle Xiao-Chen to fetch you.”

Zhuang Heng’s gaze swept between the two of them. “You two are really part of the same family?”

Sheng Wang answered, “Mn.”

“No wonder you’re so close.” After Zhuang Heng spoke, he couldn’t help but laugh at Sheng Wang’s withered, listless state. “If other students get to have 15 days of break, they would be jumping with joy even with a broken leg. Why are you so reluctant in 800 different ways?”

When he asked that, Sheng Wang himself didn’t understand why either. In any case, he didn’t exactly want to go home. By the time he realised, five days flew past.

Sickbay’s teacher Lu was right though; staying at home was much more convenient.

The nanny, Auntie Sun, made all sorts of nourishing soup for him for all three meals. Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou bought flight tickets back the very day itself, and from then on Sheng Wang no longer needed to even go downstairs.

Jiang Ou and Auntie Sun would bring anything he wanted to eat or drink upstairs, the fruits were even washed and cut and presented with a fork. Sheng Mingyang was much more sloppy, but Jiang Ou was meticulous; she remembered how to take each type of medicine and how often well in her heart, and would urge Sheng Wang to do so punctually.

If not for the young master’s firm stance on the issue by covering up his feet at all costs, she would probably apply the cream herself too.

Sheng Wang was pretty moved, but he still felt that she was slightly overreacting. That was, until he unintentionally caught Jiang Ou zoning out

at Jiang Tian's bedroom. That was when he realised that she was compensating.

For what she owed her son in his childhood, she was doing her best to return in magnitudes. To Jiang Tian, and also Sheng Wang.

In that instant, Sheng Wang suddenly understood why Jiang Tian couldn't bear to be harsh with her.

If it was him, he would be soft too.

Sheng Mingyang still had the traces of rationality of being a father left in him. Other than staring at Sheng Wang's foot, he also remembered to ask, "You're going to be behind on your schoolwork again, right?"

This was also the problem Sheng Wang thought of at first.

Funnily enough, he wasn't worried; it was only 15 days, even if he was behind by an entire book he could still catch up. It wasn't like he didn't try before.

Soon, he found out that he overthinked it. The night self-study the day after the sports carnival ended, he received voice recording from teachers from all subjects. The recordings made up the day's worth of content, not a single bit was left out.

On the basis that he was on good terms with Yang Jing, when he received the English recording he replied: Jing-jie, you don’t even bring your script for class, you seriously remembered to record?

Yang Jing first snarked back: Begone, you’re itching for a beating?

Sheng Wang was amused, he sent: Thank you, teacher.

However, not a single moment later, he received three messages in a row from Yang Jing.

Yang: I’m more careless, I didn’t even think of recording in the first place. It’s Jiang Tian who came into the office to ask me, it’s him you should be thanking

Yang: Oh yeah, same family

Yang: Even if he’s your gege, you still got to thank him.

Jiang Tian was completely unaware that he had been sold out once more. Sheng Wang knew he was obstinate when it came to his words, so he managed to tease him for an entire night in a roundabout manner. In the end, he nearly got injured for the second time by laughing so hard he was on the verge of falling out of bed.

He probably went overboard with the teasing that day, student Jiang didn’t really pay any particular heed to him for the next few days, his aura was icy cold. Sheng Wang was both amused and frantic, and built a way out while frantically scratching his head. Until yesterday night, then the person finally deigned himself to step on the way out he built for him.

The phone buzzed until nearly 1am, today was quiet again.

This day was Fuzhong’s weekly exams. Sheng Wang received special considerations and did not need to attend. However, Jiang Tian and the rest were basically locked up in the exam venue for the entire day, their exams took place from morning to night.

No recordings, no papers, and suddenly there was a giant blank in his schedule.

Sheng Wang did a few practices himself, and curled up in bed to game for quite a while. He watched a movie for a bit, and even managed to chat with Crab for two hours straight as he had a weekly break. Yet, he was still a little dull.

Even Crab could tell that he was out of it. He asked: are you in a bad mood?

StarAniseCrab: aren’t you usually quite happy during breaks?

Sticker: i don’t know

Sticker: i can’t put my finger on it

Sticker: i just felt that its kinda boring

He clearly survived well like this for the previous breaks, but these few days felt empty, like he was missing something.

The sky darkened outside. Sheng Wang sat in front of the table, the uninjured foot stepped on the table’s bar, slowly rocking his chair.

This season’s evening was both clear and bright, causing the streets and alleys to appear as though they were encased in brilliant glows of lights. There was clearly the sound of people in White Horse Alley, but he still felt that the surroundings were too quiet; the second floor was too empty.

The clock on the wall pointed at seven o’ clock. Sheng Wang shot a look, thinking, *the exams at night have begun.*

He left the chat with Crab, and opened Jiang Tian’s. He rocked his chair and he slowly typed.

Sticker: i’ve told you, i don't wanna go home

Sticker: i’m so booooored

Sticker: i’m rotting away

He sent quite a few grumbles jokingly, not a single line was thought out. By the fourth message, he suddenly paused.

It was because the messages in the chat were truly too mindless.

He typed: what are you doing

Sheng Wang snorted at himself self-mockingly. He mumbled, “are you an idiot”, and then deleted these few words.

He zoned out at the window while swaying back and forth for several moments, the trace of smile on his face slowly faded away.

He suddenly realised: it wasn’t that the second floor was too empty or that outside was too quiet, it was that someone was missing next door.

It was funny when he thought about it; he appeared to be…...missing Jiang Tian a little.

Chapter 047 - Mis-entry

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“Wow, There’s So Many People Here. No Wonder It’s Called Magpie Bridge.”

The on-going construction of a new train station cable had accidentally severed the electric cables. Around evening time, Fuzhong was suddenly faced with a blackout.

The school actually had its own backup electric generator, and yet, coincidentally, it malfunctioned and was thus unable to deliver any electricity. Each level had a short meeting and decided to cancel night self-study for the day, and give them a night of break. The students were overjoyed.

The day students shot out of the school, bag in their hands. Due to the difference in their school cards, the residential students couldn’t leave, and could only go back to the dormitories to obediently wait for the electricity to come back.

The weekly test was just over, nobody was in the mood to calm down and study. After going two rounds in the dormitories and receiving a couple of calls, Shi Yu finally managed to put down his pride and asked Jiang Tian, “Tian-ge, I’ve heard that you can mimic the teachers’ signatures very well.”

Jiang Tian happened to be chatting on WeChat as he sat by his bed. Upon hearing that, he frowned. “Who said that?”

The rumour had a long history to it, Class A students more or less mentioned it at one point. It was mostly because Jiang Tian had a nice handwriting, and both his messy scrawls and proper handwriting were comparatively decent. According to the rumour, he only needed a single look at the teacher’s signature and he could copy it to a great degree.

Shi Yu didn’t know who started the rumour, he only knew he was at his mercy, therefore he had to play according to the actual circumstances. Hence, he pondered for two seconds, and answered, “Sheng Wang said so.”

Jiang Tian pursed his lips, and said an “oh”.

Shi Yu let out a sigh of relief, and felt that he was already halfway there.

Jiang Tian lowered his head to start typing again.

He appeared to be in a decent mood; at the very least, his eyebrows were relaxed, and were not as frosty. Shi Yu was a little curious about who’s on the other end of the chat, but he didn’t dare to peek.

There were so many girls who were wooing Jiang Tian in Fuzhong, that as a roommate, people would often ask him for his WeChat. Odds are, this was one of them, and finally managed to make this ice statue melt after trying all her might to hug it.

Shi Yu took out an ‘exit slip’, wanting to take advantage of Jiang Tian’s good mood to get him to copy Big Mouth Xu’s signature. However, the moment he passed it out, Jiang Tian flashed his phone screen at him.

The screen was of a WeChat chat interface, the top was the other person’s nickname, called Sticker.

Shi Yu internally said, *wtf, you’re telling me you’re chatting with your freaking brother all along???*

Just as he silently cursed in his head, he saw the few messages at the bottom—

Jiang Tian: You’ve told people I know how to mimic teachers’ signatures?

Sticker: no wtf

Sticker: i swear 2 god

Sticker: which creature is spreading slander about me?

What is called public sentencing? This would be it.

The rumour spreading creature knelt on the ground as he hugged the bed frame. He was miserable as he said, “Tian-ge, I’m sorry, Tian-ge, please do a kind deed and sign his name, Tian-ge, I wanna go out and play……”

“Sign it yourself,” Jiang Tian said.

Upon seeing how he had utterly failed due to a factor in the end, he went to the balcony to make a phone call with his head hung low.

Jiang Tian didn’t care. He went to the table, pulled out a chair and sat down. He whisked out a book from the stack of question collections, and asked Qiu Wenbin, who sat opposite him, “Can you lend me your portable lamp?”

Qiu Wenbin nodded, “Please, go ahead.”

Jiang Tian turned on the light, and started writing away after opening up a notebook.

Qiu Wenbin was already lying down on his bed; he did not want to do anything at all tonight, and the blackout was a marvelous excuse. It was totally understandable that he took the chance to have the day off.

But the first of the level was furiously working away, on what basis did he have to slack off? Qiu Wenbin instantly felt as though he was sleeping on a bed made of iron nails. He tossed and turned a few times before he sat upright as if he completely gave up.

It was when he sat opposite of Jiang Tian then he realised that this #1 in the level bigshot wasn't studying; he flipped through several pages at once, his gaze would hurriedly sweep across, and then note down the page and question number.

"Deity, what are you doing?" Qiu Wenbin couldn't help but ask.

"Compiling." Jiang Tian said.

"Compiling what?"

"Interesting questions."

Qiu Wenbin glanced at the question he marked down, and internally said, *us mortals can truly never understand the joy of top students, as long as You're happy I guess*.

Of course, Jiang Tian wasn't doing this for fun.

Before yesterday's papers, He Jin said that this weekly test was the last warm-up; midterms would be here soon, and Class A's "screw off style streaming" might be changing. In order to increase the sense of urgency, the streaming style will become much more *exciting*. It's no longer just the matter of being the last three in class.

The exact regulations weren't out yet, but Jiang Tian felt that Sheng Wang was in no way safe. Despite his improvement of 200 places in the recent two months to the point that even the teachers have nothing but admiration, his current ranking was 79. He's still at risk.

Gao Tianyang and the rest joked that Sheng Wang was running on hacks, but it takes time for hacks to level up too; one cannot simply max out their level in a day. Jiang Tian wanted to cut down the time it took for him to level up.

Furthermore……

Someone had been babbling non-stop in his WeChat for the whole day, saying that he's so bored that he's rotting away.

Jiang Tian wanted to compile a set of level up questions for him to spend his time on; they were all selected from the questions he recently did, and extracted the finest from the crude.

Shi Yu made two more phone calls, and left the dorm with a face that said he's throwing caution to the wind. Qiu Wenbin was fighting the question to his death while biting the pen opposite him. Jiang Tian was done with the first book and was just about to select the second before his phone screen quietly lit up a few times.

He took his phone and sure enough, it was still the one who's rotting away.

Sticker: Jiang Tian

Sticker: Jiang Tian

Sticker: Jiang Tian

Jiang Tian: ……

Jiang Tian: here

He felt that Sheng Wang's tone was a little exuberant for some mysterious reason.

Sticker: is the electricity back yet

Jiang Tian: not yet

Sticker: oh yeah, didn't you say you have something on tonight

Jiang Tian: yeah

Sticker: what is it?

Jiang Tian glanced at the book by his hand. He casually mentioned it yesterday, and this was what exactly he was referring to: to help Sheng Wang compile top questions. However, his bad habit of not easily admitting to things was deep-rooted; there was no way for him to be straightforward about it. It made him seem pretentious, and even like he's trying to ask for credit.

Before he answered, another line popped up in the chat—

Sticker: do you have to do it out of school

Jiang Tian hadn't thought of an excuse, so he played along: yeah, to Beyond Parasol Trees

Everyday, he would go to Old Man Ding's with Sheng Wang for food. They had communicated this with Big Mouth Xu before, and the other person left a long-term exit slip at the school security at the entrance so that he wouldn't have to bother him for his signature everyday. They only needed to ensure that they were back in their dorms before the teachers conducted the room checks.

Sticker: then you go do your thing, Imma eat now

After he said that, he quieted down.

The screen had not lit up for a while now, Jiang Tian felt a little unused to it. As he picked out the questions, he would occasionally glance at his phone. Picked a few more questions, and yet another glance. It’s been nearly half an hour, and still no movement on Sheng Wang’s end.

Nothing was happening around him, and there was nothing to talk about. Jiang Tian’s gaze landed on an abnormally troublesome question, and just as he was thinking whether he should take a picture and send it to him as bait, the other person finally sent him a message.

Sticker: i’m done eating, are you still busy?

Jiang Tian: done

Sticker: so fast???

Jiang Tian: why?

Sticker: nothing, you’re back in school already?

Jiang Tian shortly deliberated between “yeah” and “not yet”, and picked the one with more words.

After he sent that, he also added on: I’m on my way back

Sheng Wang replied to him with a sticker of a smile that didn’t reveal teeth, like he was up to no good; it’s a little cheeky.

Jiang Tian was briefly confused.

Two minutes later, Sheng Wang sent: You’re at the west gate now?

Jiang Tian: I just left the alley, I’ll be at the west gate after I cross the road.

The other side was quiet for yet a few more seconds. Jiang Tian’s brows slowly began to furrow; something was definitely wrong the more he thought about it.

Suddenly, the fluorescent light above flashed, and the cold white light encased the room without any prior warning. The surroundings changed from darkness to brightness, and Jiang Tian was dazed enough to squint.

The phone screen lit up again at that moment.

Jiang Tian blocked out the white light, and lowered his eyes to look. He saw two new messages from Sheng Wang—

Sticker: you’re really at the west gate?

Sticker: why am I not seeing you???

Perhaps it was because of how dazzling the light was, when Jiang Tian saw those two messages, he fell into a moment of stupor. By the time he realised, he was already going downstairs with his phone in his hand.

Qiu Wenbin’s voice came out from upstairs, asking in confusion, “Deity, where are you going?”

“Fetching someone,” Jiang Tian said.

The whole school was attempting to shed off the darkness; the teaching block and the office block at one side of Road #3 gradually lit up, room by room. The milky white light pierced through the glass, tilting out of various floors and casting onto the ground.

There were quite a number of staff and students who weren’t back in the dorms; they gathered in small groups, and were chatting and strolling. They also instantly halted in their steps the moment the lights came back on.

Jiang Tian weaved through the crowd. His skin was pale, and when he sweated upon doing physical activities like running and jumping he even

gave off an impression of coldness, causing the girls who were passing by to turn around to stare at him, and yet too afraid to approach.

*

After much wheedling and cajoling, Sheng Wang finally convinced Uncle Xiao-Chen to leave. He stood by the security guard booth outside of the west gate, his bag slung over a single shoulder.

These two days, he could finally manage to walk, but he was still unable to put too much weight on his left foot; even as he stood, he put most of the weight of his body on his right, and so he wasn't exactly standing upright. He appeared to be lazy, and a little casual.

His back faced the school entrance, and his front faced the entrance of the alley at Beyond Parasol Trees. He typed with one hand, furiously reprimanding a certain somebody. Just as he was halfway through his message and didn't manage to send it out yet, a phone call cut in.

Jiang Tian's name jumped on the screen. Sheng Wang slammed the button, and instantly said, "You scammed me?!"

He shot another look at the alley entrance: there were only two old people slowly shuffling past as they supported each other, there was no one

else to be seen.

“I’ve been standing here for ages, the security uncle even thought that I was striking up a pose. You only need to cross the road before you reach the west gate, right? So where are you?”

Just as he asked, he suddenly heard footsteps coming closer to him from behind. Someone was running over here. He turned around, and saw Jiang Tian stop in front of him.

Maybe it was because of how fast he sprinted, his breathing was a little heavy. His slender arms dangled by the side, and a slightly protruding green vein could be seen near his inner wrist.

He lowered his head to catch his breath, and then removed an earpiece, saying to Sheng Wang, “I’m here now.”

Sheng Wang didn’t know what to say all of a sudden.

He met Jiang Tian’s eyes, spaced out for a moment before he abruptly looked away, let out an “oh” and said, “Well, seeing how fast you made it here, I can be more magnanimous.”

“Why are you suddenly coming back to school?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Why else.” Sheng Wang said, exasperated, “I get to move around a bit if I come to school; back at home, they refused to even let me out of the bedroom. You go back and lie down for five days and you’ll know how much it sucks.”

Jiang Tian took his bag from him. Initially, he desperately wanted to save face and refused to give it to him. Afterwards, he realised how long Road #3 went and gave in—going back on his own legs was good enough already, he could make do without the extra weight.

“Also, can you believe that Auntie Sun literally made braised pork trotters for me for all three meals every single day?” Sheng Wang nagged as he grumbled, the moment he opened his mouth he could list countless reasons why he was forced to come back to school out of resignation. “Other people get tube bone soup, the heck does she mean with pork trotters?”

Jiang Tian said, “It means you gain what you eat.”

“Scram.”

As Sheng Wang spoke, he turned around with some apprehension, asking Jiang Tian, “Did I change anywhere?”

Jiang Tian: “Yeah.”

Sheng Wang stared at him. “Think before you speak.”

Jiang Tian nodded. “You’re fatter now.”

Sheng Wang was instantly a little depressed; however, before he was depressed for even two seconds, he caught a glimpse of Jiang Tian looking aside.

“.....”

He freaking knew it, he’s lying!

Sheng Wang reached out, wanting to rein in his neck. “You can’t live without mocking me for even a single day, can you?”

Jiang Tian wasn’t really trying to avoid him, probably worried that he would break his leg again from overexertion. As the two of them messed around, they looked up and realised they subconsciously ended up taking the shortcut near the Garden of Conduct.

The garden in the day was quiet and tranquil, they would often go through there and not feel like anything was wrong. But, the garden at this timing was slightly different; it took Sheng Wang only a glance to see two figures holding hands in the near distance, walking amidst the woods and quietly exchanging private words. Even further away, a boy put on a brave

act and was boldly putting his arm over a girl's shoulders, and used his forehead to brush against her cheeks.

The atmosphere in the woods was overly suggestive; Sheng Wang felt that he was thoroughly out of place there, feeling an indescribable sense of unease at the same time too.

He wanted to say, "How about we take a different path", but the moment he turned around and met Jiang Tian's gaze, he felt his heart beat a little faster for some strange reason, even though this was clearly no different from usual.

He abruptly retracted his gaze, licked the corner of his lips that was drying up, and said, "Wow, there's so many people here. No wonder it's called Magpie Bridge."

Jiang Tian's gaze had already shifted aside; he seemed to be looking for the fork in the path to get out. His low, throaty voice rumbled next to Sheng Wang's ears, "Mn."

Translator's notes:

A quick refresh: magpie bridge carries a romantic connotation because of its role in the folk tale, *Cowherd and the Weaver Girl*. It was the bridge that

a bunch of magpies formed in order for the cowherd and the weaver girl, who were lovers forced to separate, to reunite for a day on what people designated as Qixi, or Chinese valentines. Earlier in the story, there was a mention of the garden being nicknamed this due to it being a popular dating spot for young couples.

Also tbh I still can’t believe I did chapter 42-46 all on Sunday lmao

Chapter 048 - Exchange

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you could! buymoumoutoday

Happy first update of 2021! Anyways I think I'll probably revise Pang Xie's or StarAniseCrabs's wechat name to 'Bajiao Crab' after some belated realisations and a change in the naming style I have for wechat at some point, thank u!

"We’re Switching Beds, You Sleep Down Here.”

“Magpie Bridge” had an endless amount of snaking pebblestone paths, when seen from above, they looked like a complicated tangle of vines and tendrils. Nobody knew what exactly went on in the head of the person who designed that, but it was indeed convenient for the young couples in school.

Sometimes, Big Mouth Xu would bring people with him to patrol the area. However, there were too many diverging paths, he could block one end but not the other. Looking aside other qualities, the brats were super alert for sure; they disappeared faster than the wind, it was hard to even catch them. Along with the fact that non-couples would take shortcuts from here too, he couldn’t come to a definite judgement even if he caught some. This caused Big Mouth Xu headaches aplenty, and so he could only get homeroom teachers from each class to collectively educate the students.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian picked a forked path closest to them, and left that patch of woods in a hurry.

When they were nearly out of that place, Sheng Wang briefly peered around him. Coincidentally, he spotted two figures strolling, shoulders to

shoulders in the far distance, the boy wearing a T-shirt with wide strips. That piece of clothing looked familiar, but Sheng Wang couldn’t recall, and neither was he in the mood to think.

He didn’t talk much on the way back.

It wasn’t that he didn’t feel like chatting, it was just that no matter what topic, it seemed a little out of the blue, and kinda stupid too. Jiang Tian was also rather quiet; his slender fingers were stuck in his pocket, a bag slung on his left shoulder. It wasn’t even his things, but he made it appear perfectly natural.

……

He always seemed so natural; only, he would occasionally lower his eyes, his expression unreadable.

This was the first time Sheng Wang had realised how long Road #3 was. They had walked a literal century and yet there was still not an end to be seen. Fortunately, they bumped into someone when they passed by the sports ground, and they were rescued from this strange atmosphere between them at last.

“Jing-jie,” Sheng Wang greeted.

Yang Jing wore a high ponytail, and walked over from the side of the sports ground while dressed in sportswear. She waved at them while she removed the sweatband she wore on her forehead.

“It’s only been a few days, and yet you came rushing back. You want to come to school this badly?” Yang Jing asked.

Sheng Wang had yet another legitimate reason. He hurriedly replied, “Yep, I’m afraid half a month of break will set me back all the way to zero.”

“No way.” Yang Jing knew he was acting obedient, and rolled her eyes as she said, “The foundation and the brains are both there, even if you didn’t study it can’t go that badly.”

She had always been straightforward with her words, but she still added, “I don’t mean to let you two slack off, okay? Working harder when you ought to work hard is still better than not working hard at all, right?”

“For sure,” Sheng Wang replied.

“Don’t you act tough either.” Yang Jing looked down at his ankle, and doubted, “Last semester, I sprained my wrist and had to recuperate for more than a month, until now it still acts up whenever I mark too many scripts. Now with you walking around for fun without recovering, try not to leave

any lingering problems. I’m telling you, if you don’t fully heal from it, you will sprain it for the second time as easy as breathing. Repeat this a few more times, and you’ll be hobbling in the future.”

Sheng Wang’s face turned slightly green from everything she said.

“Hey, don’t scare the students,” a voice cut in. Sheng Wang whipped his head around, and saw the male teacher they met in the sickbay, Zhuang Heng. He was also wearing a jogging suit, and had two bottles of water in his hands. He came over from the direction of Xi Le.

Yang Jing took a bottle of water from him, and said, “Who’s scaring him. In which way am I wrong, how about you correct me?”

The school leadership didn’t even dare to correct her, not to mention Zhuang Heng. He hurriedly said, “No need, no need. Your teacher Yang is correct—”

He gave a cough, and turned to say to Sheng Wang, “You should still be careful, otherwise your leg will be beyond salvation after you sprained it too many times. It would be such a pity if this handsome face of yours is

matched with a limping pair of legs. Think about it, doesn't it work like this?"

"....."

There's no way Sheng Wang was thinking about it.

He looked at how teacher Zhuang, the stalk of wall grass changing sides like the wind, and only felt how Gao Tianyang's roast was absolutely true: dating couples, or people about to be dating, more or less have something wrong with their brains.

(t/n: wall grass/grass that grows by the wall: An easily swayed person)

Yang Jing knocked on Zhuang Heng's arm with the bottle, saying, "I asked for iced, does this look iced to you?"

There was not a single bead of condensation on the bottle, it was clearly room temperature.

Zhuang Heng said, "The shop is sold out of iced ones, and has just replaced them with a new batch when I went in. I already helped you take the innermost one."

Yang Jing looked at Zhuang Heng in doubt; Zhuang Heng was completely unruffled.

Sheng Wang internally said, *bullshit!* Xi Le is next to the sports ground, its bestseller is iced water, and they constantly keep the fridge

filled; they would never be out of stock. Jing-jie is no fool, is she seriously going to buy this at all?

Contrary to expectations, Yang Jing domineeringly looked him in the eyes for several moments, eyed the room temperature water in disgust, and twisted the cap open in extreme reluctance. “Fine……”

Sheng Wang: “?”

In that moment, he saw “The tenderness of manly men” in that lady.

(t/n: A very specific description of men, of how the burliest/toughest looking man can have a soft and tender side, especially towards loved ones. Usage of this on Jing-jie was an intent to add humour.)

Perhaps Sheng Wang’s expression of popcorn munching at the side was too obvious; Yang Jing took two mouths of water and felt a trace of uneasiness all too late. She lifted her chin at Road #3, and said to the two male students, “That’s it, if there’s nothing else then hurry up and scram! The electricity’s already back, go study if you have to. I’m telling you, don’t toil away at physics and chemistry all the time. Especially Jiang Tian, giving a bit of your time to English wouldn’t kill you.”

Jiang Tian did not expect to be personally named and shamed of all things despite doing nothing at all. He had zero intention to reflect, and

counted saying an “oh” as him having heard it.

“The hell with ‘oh’, you’re gonna change after you said the ‘oh’? Not at all.” Yang Jing snarked at him with zero mercy, “In any case, the training camp is next month, and the exam comes straight after that. Now that you’re in the semifinals, bring me back an even better prize. If not, watch out.”

“Understood. We’re going back to the dorms then, teacher.” Sheng Wang touched Jiang Tian’s arm, indicating him to hurry and leave.

A few steps later, Sheng Wang analysed like a scientist, “I suspect that Jing-jie got bashful, and was trying to cover it up.”

“Sheng Wang, what did you just say!” Yang Jing asked acutely.

Shit, she heard him.

Sheng Wang was prepared to flee, but the moment he lifted his foot he remembered that “I am Unwell”. Therefore, his attempt at running away became a single-legged hop, Jiang Tian even played along and helped to support him.

(t/n: □□□□: used in earlier parts of the text too, meaning “i am unwell” but using the royal pronoun, can also be euphemism for having some...unspeakable medical condition.)

His desire to survive was overwhelming, but unfortunately reality dragged his footsteps. This scene was overly comical, and thinking too much about it would simply be unwise. After he hopped past the corner of Duxing Block, Jiang Tian couldn’t hold it in anymore and laughed, blooper style. Sheng Wang completely gave up and sat down by the edges of the shrub, and laughed until he nearly tumbled into the bush.

His entire body shook with laughter with his head lowered and his hand propped against his knees, and only managed to stop his laughter with a swear at the end. He pointed at Jiang Tian, “Close your mouth, don’t you dare laugh. It’s all your fault, why couldn’t you hold it ub?”

Jiang Tian got his face back under control, but mirth was still in his eyes. He tugged at the bag strap, and his eyes were lowered. “Who’s fault is it, say that again?”

“You, duh.” The young master didn’t turn red at all when he started acting shameless. “Aren’t you supposed to be aloof? What kind of aloof person would laugh this easily. I don’t see how your funny bone is so easily tickled usually, and yet it all went wrong when it came to me. What’s up with you?”

Jiang Tian was a little resigned. He looked aside and gave a short, brief chuckle, and turned around to ask, “Are you going to be reasonable?”

Sheng Wang shrugged, indicating that he wouldn’t.

Jiang Tian laughed derisively.

Sheng Wang’s mood instantly changed for the better; the boredom and listlessness he felt from being cooped up at home for the past few days were all gone at once.

He followed along with laughter of his own too, and then his smile slowly faded away. Because, he abruptly realised that he would be happy as long as Jiang Tian took on the expression of having no idea what to do with him.

It’s probably because Jiang Tian was too cold and unfeeling towards other people, that these reactions seemed incomparably special; as for him, he enjoyed this special treatment particularly much.

Why?

Is it because there had always been too few people he could get close to? Or for what other reason?

There were only two lamps lit up in the top floor of Duxing block, the darkness was thick in the garden in front of the block. So thick, that he could see tiny dots of firefly lights twinkle in the bushes. Maybe he was seeing things.

Perhaps they were worn out by laughter, but the both of them did not speak. Yet another while later, Jiang Tian tore his eyes away from thin air, glanced at Sheng Wang's lowered eyes, and asked after he was quiet for a moment, "Done resting?"

Sheng Wang was slightly lost in thoughts, he stilled for a while before he looked up. "Hm?"

"We're going back to the dorm after you're done resting," JT said.

"Okay."

Sheng Wang replied, and saw Jiang Tian reaching out to him, his head turned away as he said, "Let's go already."

His palms were big, but it wasn't substantial; his digits happened to be both long and straight, bringing about the sensation of both dryness and slight coolness. The fingers on Sheng Wang's hand, propped against his knee, curled a bit. He got up by pulling himself up using Jiang Tian.

Jiang Tian did not immediately let go of him, and steadily helped him for a part of the road. Only when he heard the clamorous noise of the people inside the dormitories, and huge swaths of light crashed into his view, did Sheng Wang abruptly come back to himself...

He took his hand back and changed his position, clutching onto Jiang Tian's arm instead. He said, in the gaze that the other person aimed at him, "Support me for a bit later. Thank god we're going up six levels, and not down. I've discovered that this foot is okay with going upstairs, and hurts a little if it's down."

"Did you bring your swell reduction medication?" Jiang Tian asked.

"I nearly forgot on my way out, Auntie Jiang had to grab my bag and stuff it in," Sheng Wang said sheepishly.

Jiang Tian had a face that said 'I knew it'.

The moment the dormitory door opened, Qiu Wenbin hurried over. "Why are you back?"

Sheng Wang joked, "What, I'm not welcomed? I've interrupted your three man stay?"

"Nonono." Qiu Wenbin said, "I want you back more than anything."

After he said that, he pondered for a bit, and realised that this line could be taken the wrong way, as if he couldn't stand staying with Jiang Tian and Shi Yu.

Therefore, this wooden club with a dumb mouth added, "Everyone wished more than anything that you would come back."

(t/n: wooden club, specifically the kind people used the bash/wash clothes with back then: Means simple-minded person, ineloquent, terrible with words etc)

It sounded even weirder now.

Qiu Wenbin thought a bit, and added yet another line. "Just now, when deity knew you're coming back, he whooshed downstairs."

Jiang Tian: "....."

He finally couldn't hold it back anymore; he turned to stiffly say to this idiot, "Have you showered? The electricity's back."

Implying that he should scram.

Qiu Wenbin took his clothes, and ducked into the bathroom with his tail between his legs.

*

By the time Shi Yu came back, it was already quite a bit past 11, near to when the room checks would be conducted.

Sheng Wang received a call from Sheng Mingyang, and listened to him nag on about his trotter. He ended with half joy and half wistfulness, “Seeing how you and Jiang Tian are on better and closer terms, dad and Auntie Jiang are both quite happy.”

“Yeah, we’re especially glad.” As Sheng Mingyang went on, he added, “But, don’t get him to do your bidding just because of your broken leg. He’s your ge, not your nanny.”

“Okayyyyyy” Sheng Wang replied without putting any heart in it. He walked back from the balcony, when he saw Shi Yu he let out an “Ah”, and said, “So it’s you that I saw just now? I was saying, why was that T-shirt so familiar.”

Shi Yu seemed to be in a pretty good mood, upon hearing that he froze up, asking, “What is me?”

“Were you walking in the Garden of Conduct just now?” Sheng Wang asked.

Shi Yu was confused for a moment, and then his face instantly flushed, just like cooked prawns. “Huh? Um that…..ah. I had something and needed to look for He Shi.”

Sheng Wang saw his reaction, and it hit him like a truck that he was accidentally prying.

He hurriedly waved his hands. “No, don’t get nervous, I was just saying.”

Shi Yu’s face turned even redder, he defended, “I’m not nervous, who’s nervous.”

In order to prove this, he instantly replied with a question. “To think you’re asking me, how about you? Why were you there?”

When he said that, it was as though he found the main point in gossiping. He instantly smirked, “Who lured you there?”

Sheng Wang gulped subconsciously; for some reason, he didn’t instantly answer, but glanced at Jiang Tian instead.

It was Qiu Wenbin, the guileless man who said, “He came back to school, and deity went to fetch him.”

The moment Shi Yu heard that, he pursed his lips, and said with much disappointment, “Che…...I thought you are in a situation too.”

The word “too” was pretty allusive, he immediately realised what he just said when he finished saying that. He turned around, dug through his closet for a towel and a T-shirt, saying that he’s going to shower.

Qiu Wenbin, the idiot slowly realised. “Oh yeah, Yu-ge, you went to chat with a girl at Magpie Bridge??? You’re dating someone?”

“The heck with dating!” Shi Yu finally became angry from all the embarrassment, and ducked into the toilet with everything above his neck turning crimson, slamming the door.

Qiu Wenbin scratched his head, and dully said to Sheng Wang, “Sheng-ge, do you think I should remind him?”

“Remind what?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Early dating affects grades,” Qiu Wenbin said in all seriousness.

“.....”

Sheng Wang didn’t know what to reply for the time being. He laughed dryly, “True, but you’ll probably get hit.”

Qiu Wenbin sighed.

Sheng Wang sort of wanted to laugh upon seeing him act like that. Yet he felt uneasy for some strange reason. He wanted to turn around to talk

to Jiang Tian, only to see that gege of his, who was good at freezing people up, move the pile of items on his bed like his PSP, earpiece, notebook, foldable lamp as well as other miscellaneous items down.

"What are you doing?" he asked, totally lost.

Jiang Tian grabbed his notebook from his table and tossed it up the bunk along the way, answering, "We're switching beds, you sleep down here."

Sheng Wang glanced at Jiang Tian's bed, saying without thinking, "There's no need, I think? I've already made it up six flights, a few metal rods aren't going to scare me?"

Rationally speaking, he really shouldn't be sleeping in the upper bunk. He just climbed six flights of stairs, and his ankles threatened to swell up and inflame once more. But, he couldn't help to be stubborn with his words, indicating that he was very tough.

In the end, his ge didn't give him a chance at all—

He saw Jiang Tian asking, completely calm, "You think I'm asking?"

Sheng Wang: "....."

Ummm, it doesn't seem so.

That night, maybe it was because it’s a new bed or for some other reason, Sheng Wang couldn’t fall asleep for once.

Chapter 049 - Strange

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also tw: Gao Tianyang makes a joke involving suicide in this one just a headsup

The Two Discussed and Settled on Not Leaving the Dorms for the Three Days of Break.

The sky still lit up relatively early in this season. It was just past 5am, and the clear morning rays slowly seeped into the balcony, the window pane as well as the metallic railing gradually turned brighter. The reflection bounced onto Sheng Wang's face.

The temperature in the morning wasn't high; a hint of the autumn chill was hidden within. He had always been a messy sleeper, only half of his blanket stayed on him, his arms as well his lower leg were both exposed to the outside. He finally felt the cold after tossing and turning for the whole night.

He flipped over, and shrunk his hands and legs back into the blanket. The soft fabric wrapped him all the way under his chin, like a cat tucked away on its belly.

Jiang Tian used the same body wash as he did: the fragrance of wood mixed within sea salt. It was a type of scent that was both light and refreshing, but upon coming into contact with two beds, it was stained with different smells, a smell that was both familiar and yet special.

Sheng Wang was enveloped by this scent, and squinted his eyes against the reflection caused by the railings; he finally felt drowsy at last. However, just as he was about to lose consciousness, he was awakened by the painful swollen feeling in his ankle.

Sheng Wang was thoroughly displeased, and sulked away, wrapped up in the blanket. Finally, he sat upright, having completely given up. His ankle throbbed in incredible pain. He lifted up his blanket, and just as expected, it swelled up again.

Auntie Sun's logic of making up from what you eat had some truth to it, he truly grew pork trotters now.

There was suddenly a bit of movement from above. Sheng Wang covered up his pork trotter and turned to look, and saw Jiang Tian coming down from the upper bunk.

The other two in the dorm were still snoring. Sheng Wang asked, using his breath, "Did I awaken you because of my turning?"

"No." Jiang Tian said, "I just happen to wake up."

Jiang Tian did not look bleary-eyed indeed, as though he had been awake for a while now.

Sheng Wang asked in shock, “So early?”

Jiang Tian moved his lips. “Body clock.”

Sheng Wang grabbed his phone to check. 5.20am.

The hell with body clock.

There were no morning classes for Fuzhong’s residential students, it took less than five minutes to walk from the dorms to the classroom, with the cafeteria right smack in the middle. He Jin did mention before that those who wished to sleep in a little more could bring food into the classroom, as long as they weren’t too brazen with it. Therefore, the best part about staying on campus was that they could sleep earlier, and wake up later too.

It wasn’t like he had just moved in for two days; the body clock from before ought to have long changed.

Sheng Wang shoved the screen right into Jiang Tian’s face, and immediately exposed him. Jiang Tian merely glanced, grabbed his phone and brought it away with him.

“You’re even getting angry from embarrassment?” These words left Sheng Wang’s mouth, and next he also lowered his voice, asking “Where are you bringing my phone to?”

Jiang Tian tossed the phone into his pants pockets, and went to the sink. A short while later, he came back by the bed with the cooling mist smelling of mint.

“Eh, help me out,” Sheng Wang said.

“Speak.”

“I left the ointment by the cabinet yesterday, help me grab it? I’ll make too much noise if I walk now,” Sheng Wang said softly.

Jiang Tian took a cotton bud, and uncapped the tube of ointment as he returned.

“Let me take a look.” He came to a stop by the bed, indicating Sheng Wang to remove the blanket he was covering himself with.

Sheng Wang was a little apprehensive. After all, pork trotters do not look good. Out of some unknown mindset, presently, he wasn’t particularly inclined towards revealing an un-handsome side of him toward Jiang Tian (despite having lost his face an N number of times before him).

Jiang Tian dabbed a bit of ointment with the cotton bud at the opening, and upon seeing his lack of any reaction for a long while now, he shot him a questioning look.

Sheng Wang stuck out a leg in complete reluctance.

“Why is it so swollen?” Jiang Tian furrowed his brows.

“I don’t know.” Sheng Wang gave a hollow laugh, “Isn’t it freaking ugly?”

He reached over to take the cotton bud, but Jiang Tian avoided him. Next, he saw the other person bend over, use the hand that sandwiched the ointment between the fingers to lightly hold onto this foot, and use the cotton bud to apply the ointment on the swollen area.

Applying the ointment himself felt completely different from when other people apply it on him. The ointment was extremely cool, and Sheng Wang was in no way mentally prepared at all. When the ointment landed on his skin, he was caught by surprise. He was so startled that the top of his foot tightened.

“Eh you—”

“It hurts a lot?” His reaction was too obvious; Jiang Tian immediately stopped, even thinking that the sensation of the ointment was too strong.

“It wasn’t painful.” Sheng Wang didn’t know how to explain either. The ointment came into effect rather quickly, and the places the ointment was applied on instantly went from cool to warm, like a towel was placed

on it. The throbbing pain slightly died down. He moved his ankle, and gave in. “Whatever, you can just go ahead. Don’t be too light, that’s all.”

The ointment was brown in colour. Jiang Tian applied two layers on him before he finally straightened up. Sheng Wang propped himself against the bed and admired it, and said self-mockingly, “It was like a mantou just now, and now it looks like a deep-fried mantou.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Now that he mentioned it, it was really quite alike.

He stopped in the midst of twisting the cap back on, and said, exasperated, “Behave and stay in the dorm today, alright? Don’t go to the classroom.”

“Why?” Sheng Wang sat up straight.

“Your ankle is already this swollen from walking yesterday, you want to repeat it again today?” Jiang Tian tossed the cotton bud into the dustbin. “Do you not want your leg anymore?”

He wasn’t wrong, Sheng Wang couldn’t find a reason to rebut him with, therefore he could only stare at him unhappily. However, this person

went back up his bunk to retrieve something after setting down the ointment, not giving him a single chance to stand off against him at all.

Jiang Tian wore light grey cotton sweatpants inside the dorm, when he lifted his arm, a white drawstring was revealed at his waist. There was a right angle protruding out from his right pocket; that was where he put his phone.

Sheng Wang's eyes narrowed as he launched a surprise attack, reaching his hand into that pocket.

He regretted immediately after he reached out.

Jiang Tian did not expect that move from him, and caved inwards on instinct. He gripped Sheng Wang's hand in front of the pocket, and as they lost their balance in the tugging and pushing, one fell sideways onto the bed, the other didn't fall only because he grabbed onto the bed's railing.

Still, they were too close; so close that they could hear each other breathing.

"Trying to sneak attack?" Jiang Tian lifted his eyes.

Sheng Wang pursed his lips, his hair a little mussled. The air coming out of his nose was a little quick, and he was a beat slower when he replied,

“Why don’t you say who’s the one who snatched my phone first?”

This position was slightly awkward. He was in a hurry to take his hand back, but only after two wriggles then he realised that that pocket was next to Jiang Tian’s leg.

The both of them were momentarily quiet; a strange tension started to bloom around them, flooding this cramped and tiny corner.

Yet, the dorm’s residents consisted of a wooden club—

Shi Yu drank a lot of water last night in order to relieve his nervousness, and now he had to face the music. Before the alarm clock even rang, his bladder woke him up first. He rubbed his eyes and sat up straight, and saw two figures entangled with each other at the head of the bed.

He opened his mouth, and said, as though he was sleep talking, “Motherfuck……”

Sheng Wang was summoned back to reality by this “mother”.

Jiang Tian looked aside, loosened his pocket and stood up straight; Sheng Wang withdrew his hand accordingly. His wrist wasn’t sprained at all, but he still shook his hand twice, as though if he didn’t take any further action, that strange tension between them would hardly dissipate.

“What are you two doing?” Shi Yu looked for his slippers as he walked on the floor, barefooted. Mentally speaking, he still hadn’t left his dream yet.

Jiang Tian said, “Didn’t stand properly.”

Sheng Wang said, “Taking my phone.”

The two lines had zero link at all, not to mention any trace of logic. Yet, Shi Yu nodded. He yawned, and unsteadily shuffled to the bathroom in his slippers, mumbling, “I thought it’s something else, I was shook.”

Jiang Tian removed his gaze from him, dug out the phone and returned it to Sheng Wang. Then, he walked straight to the closet for clothes meant for going out. Sheng Wang scratched his head, and melted downwards against the head of the bed, shrinking back under his blankets.

There were no further words exchanged after this.

The other three left at 6.45am, around 6.50am Sheng Wang received a call from the homeroom teacher, He Jin,

Old He managed to voluminously express her thoughts on the topic of “100 days to recover from serious injuries” on the phone, took several shots

at him, and ended the conversation with an order for him to stay put in the dorm, barred from going anywhere at all.

He replied with “okokok” all the way, and coaxed Old He until she hung up. Qiu Wenbin then came rushing back again.

“I forgot my paper.” He placed three packets of food on the table, turned around and started flipping through the test paper on his upper bunk. “The deity happened to help you buy breakfast, so I helped to bring it back.”

“So much? Is he feeding a pig.” Sheng Wang made it to the table with a single hop on a foot, and as he looked through the packets, he asked, “Why didn’t he come here himself?”

“Ran into your math teacher, Old Wu, the moment he stepped out of the cafeteria. He got called away,” Qiu Wenbin explained.

“Oh.”

Sheng Wang opened up the last packet, and saw a neat row of deep-fried mini mantous; he immediately rolled his eyes.

He’s not even back but somehow freaking managed to piss him off anyways.

Just for this row of mini mantous alone, Sheng Wang single-sidedly conducted a cold war for an entire morning. Usually, he would make use of breaks between classes to tease Jiang Tian with a couple of lines. But, for today, he didn’t even open WeChat, choosing instead to do three practice papers to vent his resentment.

By the time he finished the last question, stretched and rotated his neck, he then realised that it was already past 12. There was suddenly a bustle of human activity outside the balcony, like water about to reach its boiling point.

Sheng Wang hopped over with the support of the wall, and saw a vast sea of black hair shoot straight for the cafeteria like an avalanche. From his angle, it was spectacularly glorious.

Gao Tianyang was tall and sturdy, his energy as vibrant as the rainbow; he was especially outstanding as the forerunner of the crowd.

Maybe good bros are telepathically connected or something, as he ran he suddenly looked up, and spotted Sheng Wang, who was standing at the balcony, instantly. He waved and called, “Sheng-ge—”

Sheng Wang's face may be wearing a smile, but he wanted to squat down on the spot. This idiot's loud voice caused a countless number of people to look towards him, he really lost face until his entire body was gone.

Sheng Wang pointed at the cafeteria, indicating for him to shut up, scram, and stop calling out to him. However, this idiot misunderstood, and thought Sheng Wang was hungry. He yelled again at once, "Hold on, Tian-ge went to get lunch for you—"

Great, now there's twice the number of people looking up.

Sheng Wang turned back with zero hesitation, and closed the balcony door.

Ever since the second day they moved into the dormitory, the entire school heard of how the famously brilliant Jiang Tian of year two as well as the transfer student running on hacks, Sheng Wang, were from the same family. They were brothers.

Hearsay is still hearsay after all, there was no concrete evidence. Jiang Tian was infamously aloof too, and those who wanted to gossip didn't dare to be too obvious about it, only daring to secretly discuss in small groups. Then, they would spot some traces of it in daily interactions.

Two lines from Gao Tianyang basically trapped him in the vast sea of people. With Sheng Wang slipping away, he was thoroughly surrounded by the people around him, and all sorts of questions came pelting at him—

“Yang-ge! They’re really brothers?”

“Why do I recall that they both weren’t on good terms at the start?”

“Yeah. I’ve heard it before too.”

“Your Class A is really quite something, just with Sheng Wang’s improvement rate alone, he’s definitely a bigshot in the future. A single family produced two like this, my god, that has to be way too exhilarating.”

“That’s still up for debate, the higher up you go the more difficult it is to change your placing. You think people like Tian-ge can be mass-produced?”

“Even if he can’t make it into the top five, top 10 is amazing too.”

“Nobody knows for sure what lies ahead in the future, I scored first fucking place for middle school’s combined exams too, but now I can’t even get into top 20?”

……

Gao Tianyang's head threatened to explode, and he started to seriously reflect on his loudspeaker trait for the first time ever. He could barely move an inch due to the crowd surrounding him, and as he watched the number of people in the cafeteria increase with his very own eyes, he asked in despair, "Don't you all need to fucking eat? Can gossiping sustain you with magical energy or? They're bros, related, on hella good terms, any more and I'll KMS."

When his good bro was left to struggle alone downstairs, Sheng Wang heard the jingle of keys outside the dorm's door.

Jiang Tian came in with a plastic bag filled with containers of food, and closed the door behind him.

"Didn't the cafeteria just open?" Sheng Wang did not expect him to be this quick at all. He asked, full of doubt, "Old Gao hasn't even made it there, but you did?"

He wasn't saying that Jiang Tian ran slower than Gao Tianyang, more like Jiang Tian never ran for the sake of lunch.

"Not from the cafeteria." Jiang Tian took out the containers from the plastic one by one, and the first box already showed suisines unavailable in

the cafeteria.

Old Man Ding was excellent at cooking, there were a few signature dishes that nobody could mimic at all, one of which was this container of tofu with minced pork. Sheng Wang had mentioned this to the nanny, Auntie Sun before, and both she and Jiang Ou had tried to recreate it. The tofu was either too tough, or the minced pork wasn't fine enough, the flavours were different too.

"You went to Beyond Parasol Trees?" Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian said, "The old man made it in advance and got uncle mute to bring it here."

This line of his skipped out on countless details: first of all, someone had to tell Old Man Ding that Sheng Wang sprained his ankles. Secondly, they also had to tell him that Sheng Wang came back to school. Thirdly, that his ankle was swollen again and he couldn't go up and down the stairs. Lastly…...someone had to know what he wanted to eat the most.

Sheng Wang sat down by the table with respect and veneration; the moment the lid came off, the aroma spilled out. He single-sidedly ended the

cold war he started this morning, and decided to resolve the awkwardness with Jiang Tian and bury the hatchet.

He dug a spoonful of tofu, and felt that Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou were being extra with their worries—

Look, he could have his food delivered right to him even in the dorm, living an even more comfortable life here than at home.

Sheng Wang lazed away in the dorms for barely two days, and National Day had arrived. Fuzhong did not accommodate according to the public holidays, if they said three days of break, they meant three days of break. Still, this was enough to send students over the moon.

Only at this time, did Sheng Wang realise what an awkward timing he picked to go back to school at. He only had to grit his teeth for a few more days and Jiang Tian would have already gone back. Great, now he made himself look extremely impatient to return before.

Putting aside the issue of his dignity, if he decided to rush back home today with a broken leg with Jiang Tian, he still had to come back with a broken leg three days later? He clearly harboured hatred towards his foot if he did so.

Therefore, the two discussed and settled on not leaving the dorms for the three days of break, choosing to remain on campus.

Translator's notes:

National Day break is supposedly one week. However, due to labour laws and probably hardcore academic cultures etc etc, and also by getting students to have make-up lessons in lieu of the holidays or something, the seven day may be shrunken to three days. Apparently there's a labour standards of adjusting for not coming for work by making employees come on a day where they are not working instead, like the weekends, to ensure that sufficient labour hours are met. Also don't take me 100% on this.

Chapter 050 - Disturbance

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After Not Budging Despite Two Pushes, He Simply Covered Up That Entire Hand With His.

There were more people than Sheng Wang expected staying behind for National Day break.

He thought that there would be the tragic situation where the entire residential block would be left with him and Jiang Tian. Unexpectedly, just Block 6 alone, five rooms were not completely emptied, not to mention the ones with year threes.

There were a hundred million reasons to stay in school: their house was too far, they wanted to make good use of the time to catch up with their studies etc etc, these were relatively normal situations.

Then there were some with slightly more *special* reasons: for example, their parents were too strict, and felt that “the mountains are tall, the emperor was far” by staying in school. Or, the adults at home were out and they wanted to mooch off the school’s food……

(t/n: □□□□□: translated the meaning literally, it suggests that where the mountains are tall and the person is away from the emperor (the authorities), they can do what they want without worrying about getting caught etc etc)

Then there were those who wanted to experience the campus on a holiday.

The perspective for the last one was somewhat unique, but they existed in room 602, next door over, and it wasn’t just one of them. The students staying in 602 came from a certain more special class in year two.

As everyone knew, Fuzhong placed heavy emphasis on physics and chemistry, so the physics-chemistry classes consisted of half of the “country”. Other than that, there were also the biology-chemistry classes as well as the regular humanities classes. And then there's the not-so conventional humanities class: the history-chemistry class.

Jiangsu Gaokao required the students to take history for the humanities stream, and physics for the science stream. The last elective subject was up to you. Therefore, there came the more niche combinations like history + chemistry.

Sheng Wang also only knew about how humanities students came in this freaking pattern after transferring over.

Everyone in 602 came in this pattern.

In terms of memorisation, the people in this class got to skip out on political studies. In terms of spamming practice papers, they were a physics subject less than the other science students. In the ecological system of

Fuzhong, they accidentally became the most relaxed students in the whole level.

Once people become overly relaxed, they easily become extra.

The extraness happened to match up well with Class A's people on a certain degree. Therefore, despite how their classes were situated on the topmost and bottommost floors, diagonally across each other in Mingli Block, they became the two classes on best terms with each other, with many personal friendships established across the two classes.

602 was also where two of Gao Tianyang's scoundrelly friends stayed, one named Mao Xiaobo, the other named Yu Tong. They were both on decent terms with Jiang Tian, and so they rapidly developed into Sheng Wang's scoundrelly friends too over the National Day break.

The first day of break, Old Mao and Tong-zi popped over thrice out of boredom.

First time round, it was 10 in the morning. The two of them came charging over with a stack of papers respectively in their arms, and started fake-crying the moment they entered. "Sheng-ge, Tian-ge, did your class give out homework yet?"

Currently, Jiang Tian had just returned from his trip to the cafeteria to buy breakfast, Sheng Wang was leisurely blowing at the spoon and slurping up the porridge.

Upon hearing that, he casually pointed by the table, indicating the two to take a look themselves. “They did, it’s all there.”

Old Mao fixed his eyes on it. “Damn, this thick? How many pieces?”

Sheng Wang picked out the carrot strips in the side dish strip by strip, and used his spoon to scoop out a piece of boiled peas and ate it. He asked Jiang Tian, “Was it 34 or 36? I didn’t count, I only heard Old Gao’s wails.”

“36,” Jiang Tian replied.

“How many???” Old Mao thought he misheard.

“36 pieces,” Jiang Tian said.

Old Mao and Tong-zi made eye contact, and stopped crying. They pulled over two empty chairs and sat down by the table.

Tong-zi made a thumbs-up at Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang, saying, “You’re living so tastefully! The tyrant is still the daddy! There’s 36 papers waiting here, and you two still have the spare time to eat breakfast? If it’s

Old Mao and me, we won't even have time to copy. Did nobody wail when they gave these out?"

(t/n: Pun: □□ □□ □□ (ba4ba4 jiushi ba4ba) ⇒ the tyrant/overlord (?) is still your daddy.)

Sheng Wang said, "Yeah, I did. I said people would think we're having our winter break if they didn't know. But, I wasn't physically in class, so the teacher didn't hear."

Old Mao was amused.

"Our class gave out 19 papers, around half of what you guys got." Tong-zi respectfully spreaded the papers on the table, saying, "Can we mooch over here for today? Maybe by basking under the glow of top students, our train of thought will travel more smoothly while studying."

"Sure," Sheng Wang gladly said, "I love having people around to suffer together."

"You guys are still suffering more," Old Mao politely said.

They dug out their pens, and waited for the two top students to study. However, five minutes later, their Sheng-ge was still picking out the terribly unfortunate carrots.

Jiang Tian pushed over the steamed dumplings. "Don't bother anymore, there's none in these."

“You sure?” Sheng Wang picked one up in skepticism. “I’ve been wanting to ask for a while now, did Fuzhong secretly contract a plot of carrot field or something? The cafeteria stir-fries them all day every day, no matter what dish, I see them. If they see a gap and stuff the needle like this for meat too, that’ll be good.”

(t/n: □□□□/see a gap and stick a needle in it: To make use of last and every single inch. I didn’t translate directly into the meaning in order for Old Mao’s part to make sense later.)

Old Mao gave a hollow laugh. “See a gap and stuffing the needle is impossible, but the shredded meat is indeed thin enough to stuff through the needle.”

They raised their heads in anticipation, estimating that Sheng Wang should be done soon after eating two steamed dumplings. However, this mister took a bite, and his nose abruptly scrunched.

What now……

Tong-zi was a little anxious as he gripped his paper.

Sheng Wang flipped over half a steamed dumpling, and pointed at an extremely tiny red dot hidden within the stuffing. “See it? It’s everywhere.”

(t/n: □□□: sam sun stuffing in english, referring to the stuffing in dumplings made with various ingredients depending on the region. I chose to omit the kind of stuffing in the translation.)

“Did you use your 5.3 vision all on this?” Jiang Tian deadpanned as he pushed his own container of porridge, indicating Sheng Wang to put that remaining half of a dumpling there.

Tong-zi was a little numb.

In that moment, he felt that his and Old Mao’s appearance here wasn’t exactly the right move to make, but his desire for studying suppressed that moment of instinct.

Sheng Wang appeared to be a little caught by surprise too. After staring at Jiang Tian’s container of porridge for a while, he obediently ate the remaining half of the dumpling.

He swallowed the dumpling, and took a sip of warm water before saying, “I’ve already taken a bite out of it, next time round I’ll give you a complete one.”

Jiang Tian raised an eyebrow, and didn’t say anymore. He drank the remaining bit of porridge.

When Tong-zi and Old Mao saw Jiang Tian keep the two containers, they met each other’s eyes, internally saying, *they’re finally done.* However,

the moment they looked up, they saw Sheng Wang stuffing an egg tart into his mouth.

(t/n: The phrasing here was actually more like: an animal carrying food away in its mouth (that kind of grab))

Ancestor, why…...

(t/n: □□: it does mean ancestor. In certain contexts it can be a term of endearment, or in this one, refers to someone as hard to please/take care of/deal with as their ancestors.)

Old Mao and Tong-zi were both on the verge of breaking down.

Their expressions of agony were overly obvious, to the point that Sheng Wang was a little afraid to swallow. He briefly hesitated, and pointed at the container, “You two didn’t eat breakfast? Do you want some?”

Tong-zi squeezed out, “No, not hungry. We don’t have the habit of eating breakfast, rushing homework is more important. We’re hoping to get them done by today, and go out and play tomorrow.

Sheng Wang finally understood what the two were in a rush for. He swatted away the flakes of pastry on his hands, quipping, “Dang, you two can start first then, you need us to yell ‘Ready, get set, go’?”

Despite saying that, he didn’t continue dragging it out either. He switched on the phone’s screen, checked the time and said, “We still have

time.”

He placed the two containers into the garbage bag, tied it up, and then both his hands reached out straight to Jiang Tian, his palms opened as he summoned, “Here, serve me the papers.”

Jiang Tian moved around the two outsiders, took two thick stacks of papers at the corner of the table, and heavily slapped one onto Sheng Wang’s hands.

It had been more than 40 minutes, this good sir had never left his chair; everything was catered to his needs.

Tong-zi looked towards Old Mao, asking, “Is this still the Tian-ge we know?”

Old Mao shook his head. “Nope.”

Sheng Wang found this slightly hilarious. He stuck out his left foot, dangling his slippers, saying, “Are casualties not allowed to have a little special treatment?”

Tong-zi then said, “If I sprained my ankle, can I harvest a dormmate like this too?”

Old Mao said, “Dream on.”

Jiang Tian was holding on to these scripts, when he passed by he gave them a smack each before sitting down by the table. He started a timer and said, “Any more bullshit and you can go back to write it yourselves.”

The two instantly chickened out. “Zipping it now, not talking any more.”

Overall, the entirety of year two roughly made the same amount of progress on the syllabus, but different classes went in-depth at different levels. Therefore, Class A’s papers overlapped with Old Mao and Tong-zi’s homework in a few parts, which was why they came over to mooch—

What if—no, wait—they definitely didn’t know how to do the last two questions, they could borrow the two top students’ papers for a look when they get to it. With these two’s support, they shouldn’t be in too much pain.

However, they soon found out, they were wrong, ridiculously wrong!

When Jiang Tian was setting the countdown timer, he tapped the screen. Sheng Wang took a look, and changed the two hours to one and a half.

Tong-zi and Old Mao wistfully exclaimed, that top students are top students after all; they had the exam mindset when doing their papers on a usual basis, they even followed exam timings.

The chemistry exam lasts for 1h40min, roughly the same time as this. Therefore, the two tacitly whipped out the chemistry paper, only to discover Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian took out math instead.

Tong-zi looked at Old Mao, his head full of question marks, and then hurriedly changed his paper to the math paper.

Next, the everlasting torture began.

Around 1h15min, when Old Mao and Tong-zi only reached the first part of the third major question, Jiang Tian had already put down his pen.

He gave the paper a scan as he squeezed his finger joints, and used the tip of his fingers to tap on the table.

Tong-zi and Old Mao looked at him at the same time, their expressions a little distressed. Jiang Tian glanced at them, saying, “It has got nothing to do with you.”

Tong-zi and Old Mao then buried themselves in their work again.

Sheng Wang had been playing deaf from the start to the end; Jiang Tian, unperturbed, placed the timer that he wouldn't be using for the time being next to Sheng Wang's hand.

Now, this was arrogant to the point of asking for a beating. Sheng Wang rolled his eyes, and dragged over a random book to cover up the timer, continuing to speedily write down the last formula.

The moment he started to hurry, his words grew wings and soared again.

Jiang Tian could see how ugly his handwriting was all the way from the other side of the table. He couldn't help but remind, "Did you practise your handwriting for nothing?"

Sheng Wang's fingers paused, and slowed down with much reluctance, obediently finishing the last line. Upon settling his pen down he went to stop the timer. He checked, and he was slower than Jiang Tian by 10 minutes.

Sheng Wang was pissed to the point that he fell back against his chair. Several beats later, he pointed at Jiang Tian in fury, "You're screwed up."

Jiang Tian didn't lower himself to Sheng Wang's level.

How this term affected him depended on people. If it came out from Shi Yu, it just seemed uninteresting. If it came out of Sheng Wang, however, it was especially delightful. The key was whether the person talking was capable enough.

“How much is there left?” After Sheng Wang scolded his ge, he finally remembered to show some concern for the lowest rung of citizens.

Yet, Tong-zi and Old Mao did not want concern to be shown to them. They were so stressed out that their face and neck were thoroughly flushed; in the end, two fingers were raised with a “There’s still two and a half questions left!”

Jiang Tian didn’t appear to be convinced. “When I was done, you two were on the third question. You’re still on the third question?”

Tong-zi looked up, Sheng Wang saw his indignant look, and decided to go muffle Jiang Tian.

“Don’t go around pissing people off, look at me.” He snapped his fingers at Jiang Tian, thus attracting his gaze. He pointed at the settings on the countdown, asking, “What do we do next?”

“Aren’t there three math practice papers?” Jiang Tian said.

“Sure.” Sheng Wang restarted the timer with a new timing, took out a paper and began to write.

Tong-zi couldn’t understand them at all. “Wouldn’t you puke from doing three math assignments in a row?”

“These two are still okay, one is fill in the blanks, the other one is the practice for annex questions,” Sheng Wang said, “they can be quickly done.”

Tong-zi and Old Mao were stuck on the last two questions. For every single question, they tried at least five trains of thoughts, only to be met with a train crash halfway through. By the time they finally managed to figure out the first two parts of the second last question as well as the first part of the last question with much tediousness, the two top students had already completed the fill in the blanks practice, as well as half a page of the annex questions.

Old Mao faintly said, “I don’t know if they’re puking, but I already want to……”

They borrowed Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s completed papers, and studied them for a while. By the time they completely understood, those

two had also completed their annex questions.

“Are we continuing?” Tong-zi slumped over the table, asking while sounding like he’s on the verge of death.

Sheng Wang said, “Up to you guys, I guess? We definitely have to continue, there’s more than 30 papers…”

Tong-zi clenched his jaws, saying, “Then let’s do another chem paper.”

He internally said, chemistry is just a total of 1h4omin, that’s all. How big can their difference get? Furthermore, they were subject reps for chemistry in their class, they were pretty decent for this subject.

This time round, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian didn’t cause any further blows, and obediently set the timer at 100 minutes. Tong-zi and Old Mao went on their way with much ease.

In the end, the instant the timer reached zero, the two of them both cursed, internally saying, *to hell with ease*!

The total time was 100 minutes, they did finish a chemistry paper in that time, that’s true, but Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang settled two……

They did know Class A were fast at doing questions, but in no freaking way did they think that they would be this fast!

The two initially wanted to bask in the glow of top students, but they basked in it until their mental defensive lines all collapsed. Tong-zi kept the papers with a few clean moves, cupped his fist at them, and said, “Farewell.”

Sheng Wang didn’t know if he should laugh or cry. “You’re really leaving? Not doing your homework anymore?

Old Mao said, “We’re leaving, if we don’t, our lives will end here too.”

The two ran away like they were escaping from famine, leaving Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian to look at each other in consternation.

Sheng Wang shook the English paper he just took out, and asked Jiang Tian, “Are we still continuing? You hungry yet?”

“Not hungry, our breakfast was too late,” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang used the joints of his finger to rub his nose, slightly sheepish. The reason why breakfast was late was because he played dead

and tried to have a lie-in, no matter how Jiang Tian dug him out he refused to get up. Somehow, he managed to resume his sleep on his stomach, by the time he opened his eyes it was nearly 10am.

“Then, let us do English before we find food to eat?” he asked, probing out.

Jiang Tian nodded and said, sure.

Now that the masses who were butting in had just left, Sheng Wang didn’t bother setting a countdown anymore. He was already at roughly the same speed as Jiang Tian, they could only go faster and faster, no slowing down subconsciously.

He glimpsed at the starting time, and began writing.

There was no suspense as to the outcome for English, he finished it earlier than Jiang Tian, recovering from the loss for math last time round. If what Jiang Tian did by putting the phone screen next to him was the subtle form of being extra, then he was being obviously extra.

He copied Jiang Tian by using his fingers to tap on the table. The person opposite didn't even look up. His fingers mimicked the motion of

walking, crawling forward on the table for a distance, and then knocked a few more times.

Jiang Tian continued to not pay any heed.

Sheng Wang's finger crawled on forward again, and went straight to pressing the paper opposite down, knocking quite a few times. If he could still ignore this form of harassment, then he must be truly blind.

Jiang Tian finally reacted.

With his right hand not stopping, still filling in the MCQ, his left hand pushed away Sheng Wang's meddling fingers. After not budging despite two pushes, he simply covered up that entire hand with his.

Sheng Wang blanked out.

Jiang Tian's palm enveloped the back of his hand, his long digits resting on his wrist bone, cooling to the touch.

His eyes were lowered as he looked at that hand, the mirth at the corner of his lips slowly dimming away. The touch on his skin suddenly became much more sensitive. He subconsciously wanted to whisk his hand back, but out of some mysterious mindset, he didn't move at all.

Jiang Tian seemed to have noticed that split second of peculiarity; Sheng Wang saw his pen briefly pause, and his gaze sweeping over from the end of his eyes, seemingly looking at their hands.

For that couple of seconds, he didn't move either.

Yet another beat, he removed his hand like he just came back to himself.

With a hand squeezing the joints of his fingers, he settled down his pen as he said, "I'm done writing."

Translator's notes:

So there's that further insight into Jiangsu's/Fuzhong's subject combinations! Funnily I was in a class like the residents of 602 at one point and can confirm it's really Like This.

Also handholding (ᵔᴗᵔ)

Chapter 051 - Thief

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you could!
buymoumoutoday

“The Auntie Said We Can Share Beds. It May Not Be Possible to Share the Upper and Lower Bunk, but I Can Spare You Half.”

Sheng Wang also retracted his hand and straightened up.

“It’s finally over,” he mumbled, and opened up an app on his phone, asking, “Let’s get something to eat, I’m starving to death. What do you want?”

“Something not too weird will do.”

Jiang Tian was the exact opposite of Sheng Wang: this person wasn’t picky with his food at all. No matter if it was delicious or terrible tasting, he could swallow it down without blinking an eye. If you asked him how was the taste, he would reply with, “It’s okay.”

If he wasn’t in a decent mood, he could give an even shorter reply, shrinking it into “okay”.

Ever since Sheng Wang started going to Beyond Parasol Trees to mooch off for meals, for Old Man Ding, it was as though he had been reborned; he had complained to Sheng Wang on more than one occasion,

pointing at Jiang Tian, “This boy has no sense of taste, no matter how much salt I put, how much sugar, whether I used soy sauce or vinegar, he couldn’t tell at all!”

The old man would occasionally invent some new dishes on a whim, and Jiang Tian still wouldn’t be able to tell. Every single time, the old man would have to throw his old face to the wind, point at the plate and ask, “Look at the new dish I just made, how was it?”

This asshole would then reveal a trace of shock, saying, “Didn’t you make it before?”

The old man was so pissed that he desperately wanted to smack him with the chopsticks.

When Sheng Wang just began going there, the old man had already heard of how especially picky this child was, giving him the impression that he was yet another one bound to cause anger, therefore he didn’t hold much expectations. However, he found himself gravely mistaken on the second day—all he did was to change the green chilli to Hang Chilli and Sheng Wang could already taste the difference, saying that he preferred the newer flavour.

Old Man Ding felt like he found gold right there and then.

This caused much puzzlement in Jiang Tian for quite a period of time; once, when he really couldn’t bear it anymore, he took the chance to ask the old man why while he was in the kitchen.

The old man said righteously, “He’s a delight, why else?”

Jiang Tian was washing the dishes by the sink at that time, he casually replied, “Really?”

“If he isn’t a delight, would you bring him here?” Old Man Ding had the look of saying “all you know is to be stubborn with your words”, and mercilessly refused to give him an out. “You even tried to get me to lure him here for food, you think I didn’t know?”

Jiang Tian drained the water in the bowl, stubbornly refusing to admit it, “Since when did I try to manipulate you to say anything.”

Old Man Ding scoffed, indicating that he refused to lower himself down to the same level as the young’uns.

He mulled for several moments, and added, “You picked someone with a smooth tongue, who knows what’s what, and is better at praising than you do.”

Jiang Tian internally said, *old people are truly easy to lie to.*

In conclusion, Old Man Ding and Sheng Wang managed to hit it off all the way across the insurmountable chasm of 60+ years of differences in their ages, and the old man began his journey of invention from then onwards. Every few days or so, he would create some strange and new dishes, with Sheng Wang even being especially supportive, pleasing the old man until he couldn't tell north south from the east west. Ultimately, the unfortunate one was still Jiang Tian.

In accordance to how he could tolerate anything, the new dishes would always be presented to him first. When his reaction told them it was edible, the pair of old man and youngster would then start to eat.

From that onwards, Jiang Tian developed a new habit: when he ate, he had to request for "not too weird", because when certain people started to mess around, they were absolutely unstoppable.

When Sheng Wang heard this request, he started laughing. His head was lowered as he scrolled on his phone. Who knew what sort of no good was he up to, but it managed to wash away the awkwardness from that earlier moment of tension.

However, he was unable to unleash the no good he was up to in the end, because the masses from next door over dropped in again.

Old Mao lifted his phone high up as he said, “Babas! Let us go wild for tonight? The people delivering food can enter campus during the holidays, I’ve ordered some crayfish and clams, it’ll be reaching real soon!”

(t/n: babas: Remember the pun for tyrant and daddy earlier? The text said □□, tyrant style, but it can also sound like □□/daddy/papa, so I chose to keep what it sounded like.)

Tong-zi was even more amazing; he straight up pulled a mini suitcase over.

Jiang Tian’s brows were knitted as he asked, “You’re moving?”

“Nonononono,” Tong-zi hurriedly waved as he said, “don’t they always conduct random spot checks on the dorms? The auntie would check the tables and cabinets, but not open up the suitcases, so therefore—”

He opened up the suitcase, and gestured proudly, “Tada!”

Sheng Wang took a look, and damn, the suitcase was full of canned beer!

Tong-zi was still asking for credit, “Tell me, is this not awesome!”

Sheng Wang slowly raised his thumb at him, saying, “You might as well open a shop too.”

“I did!” Tong-zi said, “Oh, yeah, just did for a week. It’s a business running on a small capital, the publicity hasn’t caught up yet, also mostly because I didn’t come to your dorm for business. I don’t exactly like your dorm’s Shi Yu, and that Qiu Wenbin looks like a law-abiding man, what if he tells the residence manager later?”

Old Mao pointed at Tong-zi as he said, “Our sixth floor makes going up and down pretty troublesome, right? This bastard had taken over all of the instant noodles, ham, spicy sticks, chips from the convenience store downstairs, he even supplies hot water for the entire day. So many people on the sixth floor would make their way here to buy noodles from him when they get hungry at night.

Tong-zi said, “I even hid poker cards and mahjong tiles under my bed board, they’re available for rent.”

Sheng Wang was rendered speechless from everything he heard, and ordered BBQ delivery on the spot in order to shut this commerce whiz’s mouth.

“Two packets of crayfish for four people isn’t exactly enough, that’s true,” Old Mao said, “but Sheng-ge, don’t order too much either.”

Sheng Wang said, “I roughly ordered a few sticks, probably not that much.”

Old Mao wanted to say sure, but when he saw Jiang Tian’s expression, he wasn’t so sure. Therefore, Tong-zi and him waited for the food delivery, half believing and half doubting.

Soon, Sheng Wang’s phone received a call, and the crayfish coincidentally arrived too. Tong-zi and Old Mao jumped at the chance to go down and take it, Jiang Tian added, “I’ll go downstairs too.”

Tong-zi: “No need, the two of us will do.”

Jiang Tian: “You can say ‘will do’ later.”

Tong-zi was utterly lost. “Isn’t it just a few more skewers?”

Two minutes later, when he stood dumbfounded on the ground upon seeing four giant bags printed with “During Those Years BBQ”, he internally said, *the fuck you mean a few sticks.*

Old Mao finally understood why Jiang Tian insisted on coming down along too, without him, it would really be too difficult to carry everything.

“Does Sheng-ge always eat so extravagantly?” he asked as he quivered in fear.

Jiang Tian wanted to say that he was always very generous when it came to treating people, but praises like this would cause him to be sold out by them all too easily. Therefore, he swallowed his words, and changed it to “He usually isn’t like this.”

The implication being that he bought it especially for them, please have some self-awareness.

Old Mao and Tong-zi hastily nodded.

Jiang Tian also said, “Don’t waste food.”

“.....”

Old Mao and Tong-zi wanted to kneel down before him.

They carried four giant bags of BBQ, two packets of crayfish as well as a packet of extremely spicy clams. Just as they were about to head upstairs, Jiang Tian said instead, “You two go ahead first.”

“Don’t tell me there’s still more???” Tong-zi was on the verge of breaking down.

“Nothing to do with you two,” Jiang Tian said.

Tong-zi sighed in relief.

A moment barely passed before Jiang Tian also received an order of food delivery. Tong-zi and Old Mao peered at the packaging: it appeared to be plain tasting dishes like coconut chicken. They thought Jiang Tian himself was the one who wanted to eat it, but when they opened up everything upstairs, they found out that it was the ‘casualty’s meal’ that he ordered for Sheng Wang.

The casualty kicked up a fuss on the spot, nearly taking JT down with him by hooking an arm around his neck, tightening it.

“The crayfish and BBQ are right in front of me, and yet you’re making me eat these tasteless things. Are you doing it on freaking purpose?” Sheng Wang was angered.

Jiang Tian was caught in his death hug, and had lowered his head out of necessity. Perhaps it was out of friction from rubbing against his arm, or maybe his throat was rumbling from his deep chuckle, but his Adam’s apple as well as the surrounding skin started to flush a pale red.

The laugh disappeared from him, and he dragged over two boxes of medicine from the head of the bed as he remained in the hostage position.

With a twitch of his pointer finger, he turned the box to the back, pointing at the instructions as he said, “Take a look yourself.”

Sheng Wang didn’t need to read it to already know what was written on it—the patient is supposed to avoid hot and spicy food, and anything too unhealthy, that’s all……

Jiang Tian said, “Release me.”

Sheng Wang laughed contemptuously, and released his paw. He grudgingly ate the plain-tasting food, and as he ate, he watched the surrounding masses with bitterness in his eyes. Tong-zi and Old Mao internally said, *what sins did we commit to be going through this suffering now?*

The two busied themself with gorging on food as they regretted dropping in, and managed to get rid of most of the food. In the end, they both gave up when they reached the last skewer. They leaned back against the chair, and fell into a food coma as they rubbed their stomachs, watching Jiang Tian take away the last stick of chicken cartilage skewers.

Just as he ate the topmost piece, his phone suddenly vibrated twice. While he looked down to reply to the message with a single hand, Sheng

Wang’s keen eyes and even faster acting mouth snatched away the meat with the stick still attached to it.

Jiang Tian tossed his phone back onto his bed, giving him a flat look.

Sheng Wang smirked provocatively, and finished the cartilage noisily.

Tong-zi’s slow reaction caused him to spend several moments zoning out; he supported his stomach as he straightened up, saying, “Let’s go, Old Mao, I’m so full that I’m gonna burst.”

*

Three days of break, if they were described to be long, they were indeed longer than a weekend break. But, when they were described as short, then they were truly short. Time flew past like a whoosh.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were fast, and only spent a day and a half on completing all their homework. If Sheng Wang didn’t sprain his ankle, they even still had time to go out and roam freely. Unfortunately, reality kept them rooted to the same spot.

Before that, when Sheng Wang got anything and everything he wanted in his house, he was so bored to the point of nearly growing mould.

He was stuck in the dorm for a day and a half, with nearly zero entertainment, yet he felt relaxed and content. Comfortable, even.

Oh humans, what mystifying creatures.

After National Day, the weather became warmer all of a sudden. The dorms were frustratingly stuffy at night. The air condition in both the dorms and the classroom were directly controlled by the school, after the start of September, they were no longer switched on.

Boys at this age were naturally warm and full of heat, they couldn't tolerate warm temperatures. Therefore, the *geniuses* of 602 decided to sleep with their door open at night, taking advantage of the safety of the school as well as the high floor they stayed on, experiencing the feeling of "doors wide open at night" for themselves. With the door and the balcony both open to the wind, and the night wind going from the south to the north, the entire dorm was quite cooling.

(t/n: Doors wide open at night: The phrase translates to literally this, but the meaning is "safe and stable society")

According to them, this was past experience passed down from the seniors of previous batches, they did this every year. Up till now, nothing went wrong. Upon seeing someone take the lead, the other dorms all followed suit. Other than 601, that is.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian weren’t particularly sticklers for rules, and they didn’t exactly avoid doing things that resulted in them getting directly called out by the residence manager on the public blackboard too. The reason why they didn’t do so, was because they merely felt that the dorm at night was a very private personal space, just like how one would close the bedroom door in their own home too.

With the door wide open, what are they supposed to do when they decide to have a lie-in? There’s no barrier when other people want to pop over, how unseemly that would be.

As the saying goes, *You can’t help but to run into ghosts if you keep walking at night*. With an entire row of dormitory rooms leaving their doors wide open recklessly for several days, a ghost finally paid them a visit in the last sprawling night of the National Day break.

When Sheng Wang saw a figure, he had just broken free of a dream that was akin to someone chasing him down to kill him. He wasn’t fully awake yet, and as he blearily opened his eyes, he faintly saw someone go past his bed.

He thought it was Jiang Tian on instinct, and even mumbled a “What time is it?”, as unclear as sleep talk. The other person didn’t answer, and he soon fell into a new round of dreams.

He didn’t go completely unconscious, he even clearly knew that he was dreaming. As he followed along his dream, he recalled the figure that passed by his bed, and suddenly realised that something was wrong: Jiang Tian wore a white T-shirt to bed, why would the figure be all black? Not to mention, he had a cold white skin tone, as long as there was a tiny bit of light shining in at night, there was no way the figure would be this unclear.

Sheng Wang turned around, wrapped up in his blankets, and then was startled awake with a jerk.

He sat up straight, and scanned around. Both the upper bunks and lower bunks opposite him were empty, there were only clothes left hanging at the balcony, floating upwards and sinking with the wind. There wasn’t any noise in the direction of the bathroom.

Sheng Wang got down from the bed, and reached up to tap on the person on the upper bunk.

“Jiang Tian,” he softly called.

The other person wasn’t in a deep sleep either, with one call and he was awake. His eyes were barely open as he looked at the side of the bed, hoarseness in his voice, “What’s going on?”

“Did you come down just now?” Sheng Wang asked.

“No.” Jiang Tian understood the meaning after he answered the question. He sat up, rubbed the bridge of his nose to get himself awake, and came down from the upper bunk. “What did you see?”

“Maybe I was just dreaming?” Sheng Wang said.

The two walked one round around the dorm. Initially, they didn’t find anything wrong either. Just as they both silently agreed that it was a dream, and were prepared to go back to sleep, Jiang Tian paused.

His foot was already on the ladder; he took it back down, and opened up the door to the balcony when he walked over there.

The clothes were still wet after they were washed and left hanging to dry, causing puddles to form on the floor. Someone accidentally stepped

into a puddle, and left a few footprints behind. If they woke up any later, the footprints would be dried by the wind.

Without a second word, Sheng Wang grabbed his phone and called the people on duty for the dormitories. Before long, the auntie on duty came up with two security guards, the row of dorms on the sixth floor all lit up one by one.

The dorm check took roughly more than an hour, and it was basically confirmed that they were visited by a thief. The dorms that left their doors wide open more or less had some losses, with Tong-zi suffering the heaviest loss. 601, on the contrary, didn't really lose anything at all. It was possible that Sheng Wang's sleep talk managed to spook the thief.

Now that trouble had occurred in the dorms, the school didn't dare to drag their feet to manage it at all. The dormitory office soon made a police report, and the auntie summoned the few residential students who left their dorms open for guests for a bout of reprimands.

By the time various issues were settled, it was already four in the morning.

The auntie made a blacklist, and hurried them back to sleep. Before they left, she reminded, still apprehensive, “Even if they are investigating, it still takes a few days, we can’t guarantee that the thief wouldn’t be daring enough to sneak in again. He even dared to climb around the sixth floor. All of you, watch out when you sleep at night for the next few days, if you’re scared, share beds or go home for a couple of days. Anything is fine, as long as safety comes first. If you’re going back, be sure to sign out with me.”

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian returned back to the dorm.

If they wanted to stop thieves, it was actually still quite difficult. After all, the dorms were so stuffy, even if they closed the door at night, there was no way they would shut the windows too. That thief probably reached in from the window to open the door to the balcony.

The dormitory auntie was worried that something bad would happen to the students, it was pretty normal for her to nag a few more times. However, Sheng Wang felt that the thief probably wouldn’t be coming again any time soon, therefore, he continued to leave the window open for ventilation.

Sheng Wang washed his hands, and chatted with Jiang Tian for awhile as he sat cross-legged on his bed. Only when the sound of human voices gradually faded, and the night was restored to its tranquil state, he then felt a few hints of sleepiness.

When Jiang Tian was prepared to go to the upper bunk, Sheng Wang was slumped sideways against the wall, on the verge of dozing off with his blanket wrapped around him.

His eyes were half-open as he quietly watched Jiang Tian place his phone on the upper bunk. His spacious white T-shirt loosely pressed against the bed railing, creating two horizontal creases.

He saw Jiang Tian stop in the midst of his action. He suddenly lowered his head, looking over to Sheng Wang as he leaned against the bed railing. He asked, “Scared?”

Sheng Wang was submerged in drowsiness, he was a little slow to react. He said a “hm” in doubt before he realised why Jiang Tian was saying.

He was actually rather bold: he dared to watch horror films with the lights off, and play the VR edition of horror games. He had been alone in

his house for so long, it was enough for his nerves to be thicker than anyone else's. Otherwise, he wouldn't have gone straight to leaving his bed to check upon realising someone else was in the dorm.

He totally could have said "No way I'll be scared", but his lips only moved wordlessly, the line not leaving his mouth.

The breeze permeated through the sheer curtain; the mosquito net on Qiu Wenbin's bed opposite them lightly trembled. Sheng Wang suddenly made space by moving inwards on his bed. He lifted his chin at the empty spot, saying, "The auntie said we can share beds. It may not be possible to share the upper and lower bunk, but I can spare you half."

Translator's notes (food agony edition):

So while translating this, I went into a relatively deep hole on chilli and various types. Recall how Sheng Wang could taste the difference between two chillies. Anyways, fun fact time! The first one was □□□ ((sharp/pointed) green chilli), and researching shows that it might just be your common green chilli, of the *Capsicum frutescens L.* variety. The second one was □□(Hang(pronounced as *hung*) chilli)(pinyin: hangjiao), a hybrid/crossbreed of various chillies (according to some sources, it's between something called jizhuajiao/"chicken claws chilli" and jilinzaojiao/

“jilin chilli”). I called it Hang Chilli (I couldn’t find an English name and thus the spiral into research sighs) due to the meaning behind its name: it was first planted successfully in Hangzhou (also capital of Zhejiang City in China). The differences between the two chillies are as listed: green chilli is longer and more slender, some would call it spindle-shaped or finger shaped, with a smooth surface. The major difference is that it has a pointed tip at the end, with no curve at all. Whereas Hang Chili is a hybrid chilli, with a goat horn-like shape, and a slightly wrinkled surface. It has a gradual turn to pointedness, slightly curving along at the end. Texture wise, Hang Chilli has a thinner skin and is on the softer side, green chilli has firmer flesh. In terms of heat/spiciness, Hang Chilli is moderately spicy, and isn’t too ‘dry’. Green chilli meanwhile is slightly spicy, with its red counterpart being extremely spicy. However, according to the author of the article I’m largely referencing from, the Hang Chilli that people usually buy from markets are no longer pure authentic Hang Chilli, for instance they may be bigger, and the skin thicker.

Edit: see shortly after this I found out that Hangjiao is indeed a thing in English, but it all refers to a type of chilli that was breeded/made/grown in outer space from China, with no explicit reference that it is the very same chilli that was made and grown in Hangzhou. A cursory search for space

chilli in cn suggests that its green bell peppers so like?? I can’t tell if they actually use the Hangjiao for outer space plant experiments too?

And I don’t even eat spicy food.

TLDR: Sheng Wang ur tastebuds fucking OP bro…

Also chicken cartilage skewers: ngl the text didn’t mention it was chicken, but a general search suggests that it’s likely chicken. TIL that it’s apparently *edible*. Apparently, the cartilage usually came from chicken sternum/breastbone, but it is also possible to use the one in the knees (yes chickens have knees but it’s not where you think it is). It contains a bit of meat, and when you roast it with salt it tastes especially sweet and tender.

Also also: yes, coconut chicken is a thing! However, as a lover of coconut, I would like to digress and say that coconut is absolutely delicious and flavourful hello

Also bedsharing (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Chapter 052 - Change of Classes

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Sheng Wang Studied It for a Few Seconds, and Changed His Mind. “I Think I’ll Try to Pass by.”

Jiang Tian didn’t have the habit of sharing a bed with people. Despite how he lodged over in Old Man Ding’s house when he was little, he always curled up by that old and worn sofa by himself; no matter how Old Man Ding persuaded and coaxed him, he refused to sleep on the bed.

There was only ever one time that he did: “Leader” had peed on the sofa, and the stench was truly soul rapturing. Old Man Ding removed the sofa cover as well as seat cushions, and washed them for two entire rounds. He even left the frame outside to dry, leaving Jiang Tian with no other choice but to make do by sharing a bare wooden bed with Old Man Ding for a night.

The bare wooden bed was very spacious, more than enough for two whole adult humans to sleep on. Moreover, Jiang Tian was still tiny back then, he could be counted as half of one. Coupled with the old man’s giant blanket, he thought that there would be no issues at all. Unexpectedly however, when he opened his eyes in the middle of the night, he found Jiang Tian nearly falling off the bed.

The old man stared at him for half the night as though he was observing a small animal, and finally understood—

When this kid slept, he was like a living radar: if you shift a little bit towards him, he would subconsciously shift away to the other side of the bed. He would rather freeze with no blankets covering him, than to huddle up against someone to sleep.

As such, for that night, nobody had a good sleep.

Old Man Ding initially thought that that brat was shunning the place, it was only later did he understand that that wasn't the case. It was just that he had been alone for too long; he could sleep in any given environment, but he wasn't used to being close to people at all.

Jiang Tian didn't know what he was like when he's asleep, of course. He could only recall the giant dark circles under Old Man Ding's eyes as well as the constant yawns for the entirety of the next day.

From that onwards, he had never shared a bed with someone else ever again……

Including the time Sheng Wang practised his handwriting.

That night, Sheng Wang refused to leave his bed, and all it took was two lines for him to fall asleep.

The bed in that bedroom was bigger than Old Man Ding's bare wooden bed by one entire round, there was enough space for three, even. Not to mention two. For that one instance, Jiang Tian genuinely hesitated.

But he didn't sleep there in the end.

He only draped the blanket over Sheng Wang, tucked in twice, and wrapped a certain person up into a cocoon wordlessly, as though he was being mischievous. For himself though, he took out a blanket from the wardrobe, and made do with resting his head on the table for the night.

He knew that Sheng Wang had a sensitive disposition, therefore he went as far to pretend that he slept on the bed the next day.

It was different this time round.

It was him who opened his mouth first; it was him who asked, for no apparent reason, "Scared?"

Smack—

"What are you zoning out for?" Sheng Wang reached out, lightly snapping his fingers.

Jiang Tian came back to himself, and saw how his hand burrowed back under his blankets, like a cat who got sleepy while sitting on its hind legs. He lowered his head, restraining his yawn, and his clear eyes were instantly fogged up by a layer of mist.

A nerve in Jiang Tian's brain weakly struggled.

"I toss around quite often in my sleep, I'll easily wake people up," he said.

Sheng Wang was a little confused. "I don't think so? Didn't I share with you before?"

Jiang Tian: "....."

"I slept pretty well though, I wasn't disturbed."

Jiang Tian felt like he dug a hole for himself, the kind he couldn't crawl out of.

The nerve that struggled had been completely smothered. He internally said, *fine*, and went to tug his blanket.

The drowsy person with his legs crossed had spoken up once again. "This bed is like one metre plus wide at most, can it really fit two blankets?"

No way it could, no doubt.

Jiang Tian quietly contemplated as he held onto the bed railing, and went to the lower bunk as he submitted to fate.

Sheng Wang shared half a blanket, with him being covered by the other half. There were no railings for the lower bunk either; according to what Old Man Ding said years ago, it wouldn’t be too long before he would fall off the side of the bed, covering himself up in a blanket would just be a foolish endeavour.

His eyelids were slightly lowered as he watched the icy moonlight outside the balcony, through the sheer curtains. Some thoughts self-mockingly flashed by in his mind. He felt Sheng Wang lightly turn around, his lightly curved back as well as his shoulder blades pressed up against him. Warmth from another body was diffused to him; the temperature was slightly higher than his.

Even though he was going on about being sleepy earlier, Sheng Wang didn’t fall asleep that quickly. Jiang Tian could tell.

The other person would occasionally make some micro-movements, the back that was pressed up against him lightly dipped up and down with his breathing, with who knows what on his mind.

Not that long later, Sheng Wang finally couldn’t keep it up anymore and gave in to sleep, his breathing becoming calm and even.

Jiang Tian turned to look, and saw the collarbone that was slightly protruded due to his lowered head.

He already heard that drowsiness was infectious; he thought that he would be awake until daybreak, but in reality, not even a few minutes had passed before he felt the call for sleep, like the warmth from the body closely stuck to his arm, constantly transfusing over.

*

Jiang Tian was awakened by the rustling sound of the door opening. When he opened his eyes, everything outside the windows were clear and bright.

To describe having a good night’s sleep, people would often say “a dreamless sleep until daybreak”. He didn’t get to enjoy this feeling. Quite

the opposite, really, he did not waste a single second by having three consecutive dreams in a row.

A dream found his hand being entangled by seaweed by the edge of a deserted island. Another dream found half his body being pressed down by a heavy boulder due to the residential block collapsing after the school started getting haunted. There was even a dream where he was playing basketball during PE lesson; he was either heatstroked or poisoned or something, no matter what, he couldn’t jump up. He was basically held down by a steelyard weight.

He squinted his eyes, trying to get used to daylight. He wanted to sit up straight on the bed, but he realised he couldn’t get up at all—young master Sheng got too warm in his sleep, and piled up the blanket all on him. Afterwards, due to the sensation of cotton, he treated him as a bolster, and over half his body crowded against him; he practically slept by sprawling over him.

Jiang Tian numbly stared at the bed board on the upper bunk, and understood how the dreams came to be at last. The exaggerated complaints

from Old Man Ding ten years ago were unable to be proven, because *someone* wouldn't give him a chance to fall off at all.

"What the fuck!"

Shi Yu's voice abruptly rang, and Qiu Wenbin went "ow" for a while, as though he tripped over something. The stumbling footsteps, as well as the clanging noises that came from the schoolbag crashing against the bed frame, had completely aroused Jiang Tian from his sleep.

He turned to look, and saw the two dormmates watching him with their jaws gaping open, the spitting image of having just seen a ghost.

Sheng Wang moved a bit from all the racket, and looked around with bleary eyes…...the dorm was nothing but a blur, he couldn't see anything clearly. He then lowered his head, wanting to bury himself back inside the blanket to recover for a bit. That was, until the "blanket" was a little stiff to the touch, he couldn't bury himself inside.

Sheng Wang looked up once again in confusion, and saw Jiang Tian's face.

Sheng Wang: "....."

He zoned out as he was still shrouded in his morning moods, and suddenly sat up straight in one breath.

“Did I really sleep like this the whole time???” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian could get up at last. He leaned against the railing at the head of the bed, and was about to to exercise his right hand which had gone numb. Upon hearing that, he paused in his action, and said neutrally, “No, am I stupid?”

“That’s true.” Sheng Wang was at ease.

But Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin weren’t.

The two of them carried all sorts of luggage in various sizes, their schoolbags had already fallen to their elbows, looking both unkempt and comical. They somehow managed to stay frozen for a long while before stuttering, “T-tian-ge, what’s the situation with you two?”

Shi Yu looked an entire round at the dorm. “There’s even six beds in here……”

And it’s still not enough for you two to sleep???

Sheng Wang was stuck. He shot a glance at Jiang Tian, and explained to the two of them in all seriousness, “There’s a thief in the dorms last night, have you heard?”

Shi Yu was a little lost, it was Qiu Wenbin instead who let out an “oh”, saying, “I was registering the number of luggage I have with the auntie just now—”

“You actually register them?” Shi Yu didn’t get it.

“According to the rules, I have to.” Qiu Wenbin appeared completely guileless. “Don’t you do it too?”

“If nobody catches me, I wouldn’t. That’s just troublesome.” Shi Yu waved, “Let’s not digress, you continue.”

“The auntie reminded us to keep an eye on our belongings, saying that someone snuck in last night.”

“Yeah, nearly everyone has some losses on our entire floor, I even saw a human figure.”

“Figure?”

Sheng Wang described what happened last night; this person watched plenty of horror films, as well as having hoarded a whole bunch of horror

games. When he narrated, he was so good at creating the ambience that Shi Yu's tanned face managed to turn white.

"You okay?" Sheng Wang wanted to laugh.

"It's not that I'm scared, I just think that for this thing, hm, there's heavy potential for more danger." Shi Yu desperately held onto his pride as he defended himself, and after that, he asked Sheng Wang, "So did the person get caught?"

"You wish, the report was only made last night." Sheng Wang quoted the residence manager upon seeing his chance, "This incidence is pretty spooky, so the auntie said that if we're scared we can share beds."

Qiu Wenbin was about to say "I wasn't really scared" when he saw Shi Yu woefully look at him, saying, "Bin-zi, how about we share too?"

".....okay."

*

The school is a piece of fertile land, with too many nutrients, any sort of people can come out of it. The news about the thief entering the boy's dormitories soon spreaded throughout the entire school, and people kept on approaching Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian to ask about what they

experienced that night. Some did it out of concern, some simply thought that it was thrilling.

Jiang Tian used only a single line of “I didn’t see” to get rid of all the busybodies. Sheng Wang, at the start, still briefly narrated out of politeness. Eventually, when it started to get on his nerves, he muddled through with a “ask the residence manager” or “wait for the school’s announcement, I suppose”.

Either way, it was Shi Yu—who wasn’t in the dorm that night—who told people with much vividness.

In the next few days, new rumours constantly popped up left and right: for instance, someone in a certain girls’ dormitory heard someone knocking on her bed, strange footprints were found on the balcony and along the corridors, someone heard someone sticking something in the keyhole in the wee hours of the night. There were even a few dorms who solemnly swore that they met a thief too. With both truths and lies being completely mixed up, everyone in the residential block was clouded by anxiety.

Thus, sharing bed inexplicably became a trend.

Shi Yu declared that as long as the rumours weren't gone, there was no way he was sleeping on his own bed; his bed was opposite the closet. Sometimes, when the closet doors were not closed shut, the doors would occasionally creak open in the middle of night.

Truthfully speaking, that was really quite terrifying. Although Sheng Wang wasn't scared, he wouldn't blame him.

The one who suffered was Qiu Wenbin. He's already fat, and disliked being warm. With an extra scaredy-cat crowding him on his bed, he woke up drenched in sweat every single day. The scaredy-cat was clearly disdainful of that, but he still insisted on not leaving.

With Shi Yu—this coward—as a base, no matter what others did it wouldn't seem strange any more.

Sheng Wang's ankles, under Sheng Wang's…...and Jiang Tian's collaborative care, recovered very well. By the last third of October, he was pretty much barely affected by it. It would just get a little swollen if he ran for a long time or if he kept hopping and jumping.

Sheng Wang basically moved back to the upper bunk. This “basically” was also dependent on the state of his ankle.

When it would occasionally relapse and swell up again, he would go down to squeeze with Jiang Tian for a couple of nights, and continue living recklessly after the swelling went down.

The midterms that were supposed to be arriving in mid-October were delayed due to the various crises the residential block was going through, and was definitively pushed to the first third of November instead.

An assembly was conducted for each level at the end of October. Old He came back with a notebook, and announced the new regulations for “change of class”.

“I’m going to be honest: it’s more severe this time. For certain students in our class who are too used to slacking off, this is probably a bolt from the blue.” He Jin’s expression was solemn. “In the past, it's the last three places for the major exams like midterms and finals who would have to leave. But, you all know deep down that there’s definitely more than three who scored out of the top 50 places.”

“I get it, we all have ups and downs when it comes to exams, just like a waveform graph. You may be in an especially good state for this exam, but next time it might not be as good, then next next time, it’s better again. It basically comes in alternation. Therefore, while I personally think that just because you aren’t in the top 50 for a major exam, it doesn’t mean that you don’t have what it takes to be in Class A—no, it doesn’t work like that __”

She paused, and continued, “—Your placing can still reflect the fruit of your learning for a period of time, the adjustment of your state is also part of that. Therefore, don’t think that this new rule is out to make your lives difficult on purpose, the school’s purpose will never be that. Rather, it is for the sake that your lives wouldn’t be made difficult after you leave the school.”

“So what’s the new rule, teacher?” Someone couldn’t help but ask.

He Jin said, “Our class has 45 people, and 45 seats. Therefore, the first 45 places in the major exam would be in Class A. Those who are behind these places will be sent to the corresponding classes. 46-90 will be in Class B, 91 to 136 would be in Class 1, and so on and so forth. For

students in other classes, if they make it into the first 45 places, no matter how many of them there will be, they will all come here.

The commotion exploded within the class.

Gao Tianyang wailed, “I’m gonna die, I’m always the lucky fourth person. Great, now I’m sent straight to the elimination zone.”

Sheng Wang said, “Hey, don’t die yet, I’m staying in the elimination zone too.”

“You call that staying? Yours is clearly passing by!” Gao Tianyang said.

“I haven’t taken an exam for a while now, ever since I broke my leg, I don’t have the feel for it anymore. Maybe this time round I can’t pass by, and when we’re all exiled together, you might still get company.” Sheng Wang tried to console him, but the moment he turned around after he was done consoling, he saw Jiang Tian’s face. He wasn’t looking particularly pleased.

Sheng Wang: “?”

The pen around Jiang Tian’s fingers spun for one round, and smacked against the notebook, his expression ice cold.

Sheng Wang studied it for a few seconds, and changed his mind. “I think I’ll try to pass by.”

Gao Tianyang: “?”

A week and a half before midterms, Sheng Wang found the time to make yet another trip to the sickbay. He finally acquired teacher Lu’s orders: he could finally stop taking medication for his ankles, and he no longer needed to avoid any food.

In order to express his exuberance, he planned to treat the entire class to skewers on Sunday, the location being “During Those Years” BBQ store, those who wanted to come were all invited. Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting had been back for a while now, it’s time to make up for the meal he owed everyone when he got a prize.

Translator’s notes:

Google searched:

Steelyard weight

Types of bed frames/types of bed/bed board/structure of a bed/bed terminologies

Cat body language

Cat sitting positions

Cat sitting on hind legs

Cat falling asleep

Cat falling asleep while sitting upright

Also sleeping on the floor/the bed without the mattress (assuming there's a whole wooden board) might be good for your health and it's what people like old man ding (the older generation) may do!

Not gonna lie I had 3 chapters done over the weekend but a certain piece of news motivated me with enough spite to do two more so ¯_(□)_/¯

Chapter 053 - Meal Gathering

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Have You Done Something Like This Back in High School Before?

The businesses in front of Fuzhong's school gates were the exact opposite of other places: the others were the busiest during the holidays, they were busiest during the school term instead.

There was a monthly break for this weekend, and most students already left the school. There were slightly fewer customers in the BBQ store than usual, but there was still a queue. Fortunately, the boss gave them special privileges and left Class A the biggest spot.

Sheng Wang's previous classes had also held gatherings like this before, but when they said "the whole class", having only half who showed up out of 40-50 people was considered pretty decent. He thought that it would be the same this time round, thus he did not expect 37 people to actually turn up in the end. Other than those with their personal grudges and issues with Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, along with those who were genuinely busy, everyone was basically there.

Zhao Xi saved enough seats for them, but he did not expect them to be literally filled up in all honesty. When he saw the sea of black hair

swarming in, the term “The whole nest has come out” was the only thing left in his mind.

(t/n: □□□□: the whole nest has come out, meaning the enemy has sent out their full strength)

“Your class really is on good terms, I see,” he remarked, and shot straight to the kitchen—they all said that young man can easily eat an old man broke, eating skewers already had the effect of the appetite of 1 + 1 > appetite of 2, with 37 young people gathered together…...are you serious? It’s no different from having a plague of locusts descending upon them?

Not even a moment later, Chuizi, who was in charge of loading and unloading the stocks, left the shop hectically in his vehicle.

Sheng Wang went to find Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting, upon seeing the back of the vehicle, he asked, bemused, “Why’s Chuizi-ge leaving? He’s not going to have some too?”

“Later, probably. No need to hurry.” Xi-ge directed the servers around as they carried the buckets of beer and drinks along. “When he saw this many people, he ran away like his ass was on fire. He’s scared that you guys wouldn’t have enough to eat, so he went to top-up the stocks.”

Gao Tianyang stuck out his head from the private booth. “What top-up?”

Sheng Wang was concise, “Scared that you all will eat the store empty.”

“I don’t think there’s no need to be this scared, we’re not gluttons. Besides, we still have girls around.” Gao Tianyang pointed at Chilli, Li Yu and the girls, “They keep going on about losing weight and dieting and practising inedia and ascending to the heavens, they probably would barely make a dent.”

Chilli smacked his back with her palm. “You’re the one who’s ascending!”

“Aiyo what the f—” Gao Tianyang’s swear had already half exploded from his mouth, and yet he swallowed it back down under the girls’ glares. He was like a long-armed orang utan with the way he was covering his back. “How are you this strong? My back is already swollen.”

“Deserved!” Chilli said.

Gao Tianyang put his palms together, “Okokok, my bad. You don’t need to fast and lose weight, you don’t need to practise inedia and ascend to the heavens. You’ll eat more than us, is this fine now?”

He used a few lines to mould the impression of a female Li Kui, Chilli peered at Sheng Wang before hurriedly looking away again, and chased Gao Tianyang away.

(t/n: □□/Li Kui - big burly man from Water Margin, well known for his strength and his berserk behaviour in fights)

Zhao Xi took it all in, and suddenly used his shoulder to nudge Sheng Wang, teasing, “You’re quite popular, I see.”

Sheng Wang stumbled from the nudge. “What’s popular?”

“Keep pretending.” Zhao Xi lifted an eyebrow.

Sheng Wang crooked his pointer finger as he rubbed his nose, not saying a single word. He roughly understood what Zhao Xi was poking fun at him about: Little Chilli’s blush was too obvious, and he wasn’t blind either.

Still, he did not feel that this meant anything, some people just happen to flush easily. There was a boy named Cheng Wen in their class, he was born easily flushed, and his face turned red regardless of who he spoke to in class. According to this logic, he ought to be in love with the entire class.

Just as Sheng Wang was about to debate with Zhao Xi using that boy as an example, he heard Zhao Xi rib, “The little girl has chased Xiao-Gao around for two entire rounds already, why is this so? That’s because Xiao-Gao said that she ate more than boys right in front of you.”

Sheng Wang thought, *weren’t we talking about blushing*?

His grounds for an argument instantly lost its purpose, therefore his mouth opened and silently closed again.

When teenage boys and girls started playing around, they were actually a little noisy, but Zhao Xi was engrossed in watching them. He seemed to have recalled quite a few things, and when they were through, he even commented, “It’s during these years when you have the most vigour, you can do any stupid thing that you can think of, you want your dignity only in front of the person you want to woo.”

“Who said that?” Sheng Wang rebutted.

Zhao Xi pointed at his own nose, “I said that, got a problem?”

Sheng Wang internally said, *I want my face aplenty in front of everyone, thank you very much, go ask Jiang Tian if you don’t buy it*. However, after some mulling over he figured to not take it seriously, and

made an inviting gesture with much veneration, “Whatever, I don’t dare to have one. Teacher Zhao, please take your seat.”

Zhao Xi playfully smacked him.

Other than that period of time when they just started their business, Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting didn’t consciously behave like the boss. The two of them actually came down to the store quite rarely, and even when they did, they merely took up a table and enjoyed the skewers.

Therefore, even without the both of them, the servers still did their jobs quite well. Class A saved the two of them seats, and after notifying the servers, Zhao Xi entered the booth with an easy conscience.

“Mini beef skewers, mini chicken skewers, lamb skewers, tendon...this, this and this, all of them.” Sheng Wang checked his order with the server, washed his hands and entered too.

The moment he entered, he heard someone ask Gao Tianyang, “Where’s Tian-ge, why isn’t he here yet?”

Gao Tianyang had just escaped from Chilli’s clutches, and was standing directly in front of the air conditioner, using his face to enjoy it. He

replied, without even looking back, “Beats me, I’m too warm to be sending a message right now, go ask Sheng-ge.”

Another person added on, “Yeah, definitely ask Sheng Wang for sure, why even ask Old Gao.”

“Eh, Sheng-ge’s here.” That person asked Sheng Wang, “Where did Tian-ge go?”

“He went to the alley in front to pass someone something.” Sheng Wang glanced around, asking, “Did someone save me a seat? Where do I sit?”

Gao Tianyang pointed at the two empty spots between him and Zhao Xi. “There, you sit here with Tian-ge.”

Next, someone was acting worrisome again. “How about Lin-ge then? Why isn’t Lin-ge here too?”

Zhao Xi said, “He went to retrieve medicine.”

“Lin-ge’s sick?” Concern was visible on everyone’s faces.

Zhao Xi hurriedly waved, “No, it’s for the alcohol. Scared that you all lose control and get too drunk, it’s there just in case.”

“Don’t lie to kids. Be clear that who’s the one that’s scared of getting too drunk,” a gravelly voice cut in, mercilessly exposing him.

Everyone followed the direction of where the voice came from, and saw Lin Beiting standing at the entrance with a tiny box of pills.

“Why are you so good at picking the time,” Zhao Xi said, annoyed.

“Punctuality.” Lin Beiting weaved through various tables, and sat down by the seat to Zhao Xi’s right. When he settled the box in front of Zhao Xi, it was six o’ clock on the dot. It was the stipulated time of the BBQ, yup, he’s indeed on time.

“Is this really useful?” Sheng Wang asked, puzzled.

“It’s okay, I guess.” Zhao Xi popped one out and gulped.

Sheng Wang recalled the dumbassery he got up to the last time he drank too much, and was a little tempted. “You wouldn’t get drunk after eating this?”

“Nope, the damage is relatively light, I think.” Zhao Xi said, “What, you wanna eat?”

Sheng Wang considered it, and nodded.

However. Zhao Xi said as though he was making a joke out of him, “Nuh-uh.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He looked down and sent Jiang Tian messages on WeChat—

Sticker: Xi-ge - a stingy asshole

Jiang Tian : ?

Sticker: he wouldn’t even let me eat a pill of his

Jiang Tian: ?

Jiang Tian: Why would you need to eat a pill

Sticker: it’s no ordinary pill, it’s for the alcohol

Jiang Tian: ……

A few seconds later, a voice message suddenly popped up on the chat interface, and Sheng Wang tapped it on reflex.

“He has a reason for doing so—”

Due to the fact that he wasn’t wearing his earpiece, WeChat, that braindead piece of shit, automatically switched to playing out loud.

Jiang Tian’s cold voice was overly distinguishable, a few words alone was able to attract the attention of the entire table. Sheng Wang let out a

“shit”, and hastily turned down the volume to the lowest.

“Jiang Tian?” Zhao Xi asked.

“Mn,” Sheng Wang nodded.

“Why you gotta act like a thief just to listen to his voice message,” Zhao Xi teased, “are you speaking bad of people?”

Sheng Wang was caught in the act, and figured that he might as well show the message to the topic of the conversation himself. Zhao Xi snorted, and changed Jiang Tian’s voice message to text. “Lemme hear what he replied.”

Jiang Tian: He has a reason for doing so, back when he just came back he hurt himself by drinking at too many gatherings, so now he has them for backup. You need it with how easily drunk you get?

Although the speech was converted to text, Sheng Wang’s brain still automatically converted it into Jiang Tian’s tone nonetheless. When he said the last line with that indifferent voice of his, the ridicule that came through was honestly quite something.

Zhao Xi laughed from the message; he recalled the way Sheng Wang held onto the beer mug last time, and just as he was about to follow up with a couple lines of ribbing, a new message popped up on the chat interface.

Jiang Tian: You think a pill alone can stop you from making me film you?

Sheng Wang: “.....”

This asshole was truly a marvel at making conversation. To touch a sore spot.

Sheng Wang’s fingers flew and mercilessly sent him an entire column of “Lao-zi is telling you to die” memes.

After he beat Jiang Tian up, locked his screen and lifted his head, he saw an odd expression on Zhao Xi.

“Xi-ge?” Sheng Wang called out to him.

Zhao Xi then came back to himself and looked up. “Hm?”

“You okay?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Nothing.” Zhao Xi drank a mouthful of water, and grinned, “I was just thinking of stuff. Jiang Tian’s arriving soon, right?”

“Oh, I forgot to ask.” Sheng Wang unlocked his screen again, and asked if Jiang Tian was done with his delivery.

This time round, it took Jiang Tian a while to reply: Didn’t pass it.

Those were the specialty fragrant pears that Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou had brought back a few days ago, they picked some to give to Old Man Ding.

Sheng Wang was a little bemused, and sent a question mark over.

Jiang Tian: Someone is over at the old man’s.

Jiang Tian: I turned back, will be going there afterwards

Sticker: k

Sticker: so where are you now?

Jiang Tian: the entrance of the booth

Sheng Wang stilled, and looked up on instinct. The doors were half-open, and Jiang Tian stood there with a hand on the handle. He lowered his eyes as he locked his phone screen, and tossed the phone into his pocket.

“Tian-ge!”

Various voices chorused disjointedly as they greeted him, Gao Tianyang called, “Your ass is finally here! I’m about to die from hunger.”

“Why don’t you eat if you’re going to die from hunger?” Jiang Tian slid past the gaps between the stools as he talked to Gao Tianyang, automatically pulling out the stool next to Sheng Wang and sitting down.

“We’re waiting for you, duh!” Gao Tianyang said, “With so many gaping maws around, if we don’t wait for you before serving the food, you will literally not even get to eat the sticks.”

Jiang Tian leaned against the chair, and scoffed. He then greeted Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting too before turning his eyes to Sheng Wang. His head was slightly tilted down, and he quietly said, “Let’s go to Beyond Parasol Trees after this?”

“Sure,” Sheng Wang said, “and the pears?”

“Left it at the counter, will take it when we leave.”

The server came over to double check the number of people, and finally started to serve the skewers in giant platters. Platters after platters were served. There were a lot of people today, and Sheng Wang had 100 as

a minimum for every type. When they served the food, it was truly quite the spectacular sight.

The voices of those slamming their palms on the tables and clinking their cups all blended in together in a ghastly howl, those who could drink all poured themselves iced beer, and the gathering was suddenly in full swing.

Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting were older than this group of boys and girls by more than 10 years, but they didn't appear out of place as they sat amongst them. As compared to teachers, Class A students felt that they were more like their seniors, and friendliness was mixed in with their admiration towards them. They dared to joke with them, and tease too.

When a group of people are gathered together, they can only enjoy themselves when there's a common topic.

They complained about various aspects of the school with zero qualms: the new class changing regulation was too evil, Old Xu was catching rulebreakers in increasingly ridiculous ways, there were a bunch of morons in year 1 who tragically got caught for climbing over the wall to go on the internet, and when Old Xu dragged them down their heads were still

covered in black trash bags, XXX from Class 7 was caught for dating XXX from Class 9 and their parents were called down, etc etc.

Sixteen-seventeen are the ages where hearts begin to stir, so the last topic went on for especially long. With Gao Tianyang in lead, a bunch of ‘dogs’ with zero experience in dating developed a strong interest in the young couple getting caught.

Due to their overly excited state, they even reached out their claws of gossip towards Zhao Xi. Lin Beiting was sterner, and everyone didn’t exactly dare to ask.

“Xi-ge, have you done something like this back in high school before?” Gao Tianyang smirked as he asked.

“What thing?” Zhao Xi wasn’t bothered either, he asked as he spun his mug around.

“What else? Dating, that’s all,” Gao Tianyang said.

Everyone started joining in the cajoling, and all fixed their eyes on Zhao Xi as they held back on their laughter.

Zhao Xi raised an eyebrow. “Me? If you ask me now, from a rational, objective point of view, I suggest you do your best to suppress any fluttering of the heart. You wouldn’t miss out by not doing anything for these two years, you have to properly study when you ought to. You wouldn’t want to flashback to liking so-so-so in high school, and flunking everything just because of that, and that’s why you are in this state now etc. That would be unfortunate.”

Everyone thought he was about to preach at them, and instantly behaved. A few even sat up properly.

Unexpectedly, just as he said that, he continued, “But, when I was in high school I wasn’t a stickler for rules either...soooooo, that’s right, I did break the rules and fall in love too.”

Sheng Wang chugged down three glasses of iced beer with the skewers. He was composed on the surface, but his mind was starting to swim. Maybe he was affected by the alcohol or something, but he kept feeling like Zhao Xi gave Lin Beiting a look when he said that.

Next……

Maybe he was still affected by the alcohol, but he instinctively looked at Jiang Tian too.

Chapter 054 - Back Alley

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Soon Enough, the Lost Item Was Claimed by Jiang Tian Along With the Pears.

The brats were already intrigued, but Zhao Xi refused to go on anymore. He used his chopsticks and leisurely picked out the soft tendon on the metal stick. The moment he looked up, 30+ pairs of eyes were sparkling at him.

“What?” Zhao Xi was amused.

“What’s next, Xi-ge?”

“What do you mean what’s next?” Zhao Xi played dumb.

“Why are you like this?!” Everyone didn’t dare to fight him either, they could only protest by slapping the table.

“Then?” Zhao Xi didn’t intend to go into too many details. He only said, “Then my grades fluctuated too much and nearly gave my homeroom teacher heart problems.”

Those who were there all knew how amazing his grades were, when they heard that, expressions of surprise all showed up on their faces. “No way, Xi-ge, your grades could still piss teachers off?”

“It could, of course it could.” Zhao Xi was frank, “Who doesn’t have their bad days or two. I had a bad temper back then, it’s fine if I'm so pissed that I was gonna explode, but I was too apt at fanning the flames too, so whenever I fou……”

His words jammed, and he chuckled, his fingers tracing the rim of the glass, “The alcohol is making me blabber. Anyways, quarrels and conflicts happened pretty often. Now thinking back, my luck was pretty shit, 8 out of 10 times we fought, it was exam time, therefore—”

His palms splayed open, indicating “You get it”.

Back then, he was honestly insane, he didn’t put too much importance on anything. When he’s in a good mood, he could go through an entire Olympiad questions collection in two days. When he’s in a bad mood, then to motherfucking hell the exams can go.

This type of people, when they start dating, who they are torturing are the teachers and not themself. One week he may be the first in the level and leaving the second behind in the dust, the next he dared to fall out of the first 100 places with a dark look on his face. The next week again, he came back with a grin.

Which teacher could stand this? None of them could stand this.

At the start, the homeroom teacher was scared out of his mind, thinking that a major incident happened to him or something. He dragged him to the office for a heart-to-heart talk, and with that it took up the entire night of self-study. After that, the teacher wasn't terrified anymore, he had only anger.

That homeroom teacher had the surname of Fang, and was the infamous King of Hell in Fuzhong. When he started acting fierce, nobody dared to even breathe too heavily. When they heard his footsteps, any student chasing each other around would instantly return to their seats.

Sometimes, he would try to relax the mood in the class, and play some songs for the students. No matter, it was basically two songs, one *Yesterday Once More* and the other *Don't Cry*. The former was out in 1973, the latter in 1991, a few generations away from the students.

He didn't speak when he played the songs either. He just propped himself up against the lecture table, and surveyed the entire class from the top of his his spectacles. Nobody could relax at all.

It was a teacher with such a terrifying reputation, that Zhao Xi somehow managed to anger into growing an entire patch of white hair.

Zhao Xi had met many teachers as he grew up, and out of them, Old Fang was the strictest, the one who scolded him the fiercest, and the one who worried about him the most after he graduated.

Old Fang wasn’t good at small talk, neither was he good at expressing a casual side. Every year when it was the time for festivities once more, Zhao Xi would make a call to him. He would use the tone he used in the night self-study chat, ask Zhao Xi about how his health was, was he doing okay, and when would he be coming back to the country.

For quite a few years, Zhao Xi didn’t frequently come back, but every single time, he would pay a visit to Old Fang.

Yet another day later, Old Fang became sick; it was lymphoma. It rapidly turned for the worse. Zhao Xi hastily returned, and could only make it in time for his funeral.

That day, Zhao Xi played Old Fang’s two favourite songs on loop in the car. He suddenly realised: life is full of accidents, if you aren’t careful enough, you might not get to see a certain someone ever again.

*

The brats didn’t get the full juice, they weren’t satisfied at all. However, Zhao Xi paid zero heed to their whines and complaints. Nothing came to fruit of their revolution, and so they could only give up in resentment. Soon, they were enthusiastically chatting about something else. A bunch of youth, full of vigour, will never run out of conversation topics when they are gathered together.

Zhao Xi didn’t speak much later, he only smiled as he watched them. Occasionally, he would murmur something to Lin Beiting, probably treating the group of students as an accompaniment to the alcohol. Around nine, Zhao Xi received a call. Lin Beiting notified the group, drank the remaining alcohol in the bottle, and the two went on their way.

“Lin-ge and Xi-ge are honestly so tight.” Song Sirui glanced outside through the window, and saw the pair of silhouettes turn around the corner. His face was full of envy as he said, “My dad said, students usually don’t stay much in contact with friends made in middle-high school, people like him have friends from only uni.”

“Not for sure,” Gao Tianyang said, “that few godmothers of mine are my mom’s friends from middle and high school.”

“That’s right, it depends on the person, and also whether they are truly tight.” Someone added, “I think our class is pretty good though, we’ll definitely stay in contact after we grow older.”

“Definitely!” Song Sirui sported two blotches of plateau red that came with drinking, and said, with an arm around a boy on his left and another on Gao Tianyang on his right, “Look at how tight we are! And there’s still Tian-ge and Sheng-ge, I’ve always thought that you two are especially similar to Xi-ge and Lin-ge, you’ll definitely be as close in the future.”

Jiang Tian was murmuring something to Sheng Wang at that time, upon hearing that he looked up at Song Sirui. His lips moved, whether he wanted to refute that or answer was up to anyone’s guess, but in the end, he didn’t speak.

As for Sheng Wang, he drank enough to enter the state of buddhist meditation. No matter what others said, he appeared to be above everyone else.

Gao Tianyang swatted away Song Sirui's reed stem that he called his arm. Exasperated, he said, "No shit sherlock! They are part of the same family, of course they'll be close."

"Ohohoh, yeah right." Song Sirui slapped his head, and raised a glass at Sheng Wang, "My bad, I drink!"

Sheng Wang lifted his glass along too, and took a sip in much self awareness.

Jiang Tian: "....."

He stuck his hand right in front of Sheng Wang's face, lifted a few fingers, and asked, "How many?"

Sheng Wang scoffed in annoyance, and pressed his fingers back down one by one. 'Who are you trying to scare, it's four."

Jiang Tian: "....."

Glasses and plates scattered askew on the table, there was still a bit of iced beer left, but nobody could take it anymore. Everyone had long since finished their food, but to depart straightway felt a little too abrupt. Some idiot suggested to play "Seven", whoever lost, whoever takes a shot, thus finishing the remaining beer.

Jiang Tian pointed at Sheng Wang, “He’s skipping this out.”

“No way! Why is he skipping?” Everyone rejected it.

“He’s already drunk,” Jiang Tian said.

“Drunk?” Gao Tianyang looked next to him, and Sheng Wang smiled as he shook his head. His face was utterly composed, he didn’t blabber nonsense nor did he act insane, how was he even drunk?

“Who are you tryna fool, Tian-ge? If this is called drunk, then I’ve gotten alcohol poisoning!” Gao Tianyang waved, “No skipping, nobody is allowed to skip at all, let’s start!”

With a hand on the beer bucket, he pointed at the girl opposite. “Little Chilli, you start, show them no mercy.”

The so called “Seven” drinking game is a counting game, those who reached numbers with the digit 7 or a multiple of 7 have to clap their hands and skip. When played on a normal basis, the group of people that is Class A could make it go on for forever. But, after drinking so much, it wasn’t the same anymore, someone was bound to make mistakes.

Class monitor, Li Yu, rested her head on the table and snoozed after she received her first round of punishments. There were a few who couldn’t

handle their alcohol who began slumping downwards in the chair too, waving their hands with a stupid grin on their faces. Still, none of them made as many mistakes as Sheng Wang did.

This young master appeared to be easy-going and casual on the surface, but his mouth had a mind of its own. He specifically counted for 7 and multiples of 7. In the end, Gao Tianyang gave up and placed the bucket of beer in front of him, filling up an entire glass and said, “Sheng-ge, you’re just here for free beer, right, Sheng-ge?”

The golden liquor continued to bubble up, the creamy white foam gathering on the top, and sliding down from the outer surface of the glass. Sheng Wang couldn’t be bothered to even raise his hand anymore. He lowered his head and sipped that mouthful of foam without lifting the glass, and then frowned. “Actually, I don’t think I can take it anymore.”

Gao Tianyang asked in despair, “Then you shouldn’t have made that many mistakes!”

“It’s not like I did it on purpose,” Sheng Wang said.

A ring of white stained his lips, and his tongue darted out to lick them off. Just as he was uncertain about how he was supposed to down that glass

of beer, he saw a hand reach in from the side.

Sheng Wang's reaction at that present was actually a little slow. He zoned out as he stared at the mole on the wrist for a while, before he turned his eyes towards the owner of that hand—

Jiang Tian's thin eyelids were half downcasted as he finished all the beer with his head tilted up. He settled the glass back onto the table, nodded at the door and said, "We can leave now."

Gao Tianyang and the rest wowed in jeers, and cried out things like "badass". Various chairs moving around caused a giant racket, and most people stood up.

Sheng Wang stood up too, and tried to shoot for the exit.

Jiang Tian pulled him back, asking, "Where do you think you're going?"

"Toilet," Sheng Wang said, "you wanna go with me?"

"....." Jiang Tian released him. "I'll wait for you at the entrance."

Sheng Wang wasn’t actually heading to the toilet, he was going to pay for the food. This person may be so drunk that he couldn’t count 7 anymore, but he refused to forget the fact that he was treating everyone. He leaned over the counter and said to the young lady, “The bill for the private booth.”

“No need, Lin-ge said that this meal is on them. Everyone has finished eating? Stone and the rest have booked cars for you, and will be sending the classmates of yours back. This is also what Lin-ge and Xi-ge told us to do.”

Sheng Wang grumbled, “For such a grown person, why are they still fighting with me to treat……”

The cashier lady giggled non-stop, and followed his train of thoughts, “Yeah, the boss is so immature.”

She took out a bag of fragrant pears from the counter’s cabinet, passed it to Sheng Wang and said, “Xiao-Tian placed it here, you two are going back to school together later?”

Sheng Wang nodded. He carried the bag of pears, found a random counter, leaned against it and waited for him.

“Hey, don’t stand there, that’s the lost and found corner,” the cashier lady said.

“Oh, then I’ll wait to be claimed,” Sheng Wang said.

The young lady doubled over in laughter again.

Soon enough, the lost item was claimed by Jiang Tian along with the pears.

*

Last time he drank too much, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s relationship was just so-so, therefore he only managed to earn the role of the cameraman. This time however, it was different. *Someone* threw an arm around Jiang Tian’s shoulders, and forced him to participate in the dumbassery that was “walk in a straight line” for the entire time.

The alley in Beyond Parasol Trees was quite uneven, actually. Cars can pass through the widest parts, and as for the narrowest, only bicycles can pass through. Under Sheng Wang’s lead, Jiang Tian’s shoulders crashed into the wall three separate times.

“Why are you constantly going sideways?” Sheng Wang asked in confusion.

“Unhand me and I wouldn’t go sideways,” Jiang Tian said.

“Nuh-uh.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian really had to give it up for him.

This was in no freaking way better than being a cameraman.

He may be thinking so, but his arm still guided Sheng Wang nonetheless. There were plenty of small pieces of rocks in the corner of the alley, and he would sprain his ankle again if he accidentally stepped onto them. Though the snake-path walking style was absolutely moronic, it did manage to reduce the probability of *someone* getting injured for the second time at least.

Old Man Ding’s house was of the older type, with a tall doorstep. The young master had heavy feet and couldn’t lift it up to go across it. In a bout of anger, he planted his butt down on the stone block outside the gate, and waved at Jiang Tian. “I’m not gonna go in, Imma just wait here.”

“Don’t run all over the place,” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang nodded, and internally said, *my legs are mine though*.

Jiang Tian walked across the courtyard and into the house. Old Man Ding’s coughs could be heard across the walls and doors that weren’t tall in

the first place, causing some slight echo to reverberate within the alley.

This was the deepest part of the alley, with most of its residents being the elderly. People at this age usually wouldn’t be awake at this timing, there weren't even many lamps lit up. It was so quiet that only the sparse sounds of dog barks could be heard.

Sheng Wang vaguely heard someone murmuring something in the vertical alley to the right. He turned around to look, and saw two tall figures walking past the alley entrance, the shadows elongated by the streetlights slowly faded behind the wall.

He stared at empty space for a few seconds before he recalled: the two people sort of resembled Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting.

Out of the investigative desire of top students, he stood up and stomped his feet that were going numb, and staggered his way to the alley entrance. He stuck his head out. What surprised him however, was that the two didn’t walk very far either, they were only 7-8m away from him.

They appeared to be more like strolling, as they spoke, their footsteps would occasionally stop. With the aid of the streetlight, Sheng Wang could finally get a clear view of their faces. It was Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting indeed.

Judging by the direction of the alley, they probably just came over from Xi Le.

Lin Beiting said something, and Zhao Xi stopped in his steps. After listening for a while, he was doubled over in laughter as he had a hand on Lin Beiting's shoulders.

Sheng Wang was unsure whether he should let them know he's there, after all, the two bosses had just stolen his treat.

He was conflicted for a while. Just as he wanted to leave the corner of the wall and call out to them, he saw Zhao Xi straighten up. He looked towards Lin Beiting with mirth on his face, and raised the hand that was previously resting on his shoulder. He hooked his finger at him beckoningly, as though he was issuing a challenge.

Lin Beiting appeared to lift an eyebrow.

He slapped away that challenging finger, tilted his head and pressed his lips to Zhao Xi’s.

This long and straight alley was both narrow and out of the way, with too many routes that could easily replace it. Usually, barely anyone would pass by, like a peaceful and secluded passage.

There was only a single streetlight, it wasn’t exactly bright. The yellow light elongated the two’s shadows to eternity, casting upon the uneven rock floor, both suggestive and intimate.

Crack.

The gravel in the corner made a slight noise under his shoe, there was barely any commotion at all, but Sheng Wang was startled nonetheless. By the time he realised, he had retreated back behind the wall, his heart quickly pounding like a drum.

*

Jiang Tian left the courtyard, and saw the empty rock. Fortunately, there came a noise the next second from the wall, the breath that was caught in his throat was released.

“Why are you standing here?” He strided over.

Sheng Wang seemed to be zoning out, and only came back to himself by sound of the question. Perhaps it was the dark encroaching night that was obscuring his vision, but there was a trace of panic in his eyes.

Despite knowing that he couldn’t be logical with a drunkard, Jiang Tian still lowered his voice nonetheless. “What are you scared of?”

His gaze swept everywhere, and looked around the alley too. Everywhere was spotless, there were no stray dogs or stray cats, neither were there bats and moths.

Sheng Wang didn’t speak. He stared at Jiang Tian with vacant eyes for a bit, and the once dispersed intoxication slowly bubbled up in him again. People who drank got thirsty easily; he licked his lips before looking down as he said, “Who’s scared? Am not. Ate too much, decided to stand up for a bit.”

Jiang Tian was still a little skeptical.

Sheng Wang then said, “Is the old man asleep yet? I wanna sleep already, I’m so sleepy.”

Jiang Tian lowered his head and kept his eyes on him for a bit. He straightened up. “Let’s go then, back to the dorm.”

The dormmates had already long since showered, the scent of shampoo wafting about in the room. Shi Yu was playing games as he leaned on his bed, Qiu Wenbin was still industriously toiling away at the table, only a portable lamp was switched on.

When they entered, the alcohol kicked in for Sheng Wang once more, he was a bit unsteady on his feet. Qiu Wenbin rushed over to help him, but this ancestor rejected his help. He was so drowsy that his eyelids were threatening to fight each other already, but he still remembered to go take a shower in the bathroom, and proceed to die a glorious death in the lower bunk with the wetness still clinging onto him.

“My god, how much did he drink?” Shi Yu asked as he sat on the bed.

“Not that much,” Jiang Tian said.

Someone could barely handle his alcohol but had an abnormally strong will too, nobody knew from which drink was it that he started getting drunk.

Qiu Wenbin took a look at Sheng Wang's sleeping position, and asked in sympathy, "Deity, are you sleeping upstairs tonight then?"

Jiang Tian didn't manage to successfully make the transition in the end, because *someone* was having quite the fitful sleep, he kept tossing and turning. The bed in the dorm was in no way comparable to that giant bed of his at home, with two rounds of toss and turn, he nearly fell off the bed.

Therefore, Jiang Tian remained in the lower bunk in order to stop him from falling.

That night, Jiang Tian didn't get a good night's sleep, and neither did Sheng Wang.

That scene from the alley seemed to have imprinted itself in his mind, and then appearing in his dreams every opportunity it got. He had a lot of dreams that came in messy bits and pieces, and with the end of every part he would suddenly find himself walking beneath that streetlight.

Around him were two mottled walls of the alley. Beneath him were the moss growing in between the cracks of the floor made of stone, as well as tiny bits of gravel. The light was always swaying in the dream, sometimes, the shadows would be casted on the wall, and others, on the floor.

Dusky, quiet, salacious.

He would always hear someone call his name in the end. Every time he looked up, all he saw was Jiang Tian’s face.

*

After god knows how many parts, Sheng Wang finally woke up.

The instant he opened his eyes, his spirits were still stuck at the end of his dream, a thin layer of sweat gathered on the corner of his forehead.

Half of his body was draped over Jiang Tian’s, his arms around his neck, a leg pressing down against the other’s. Due to the heat, the blanket had long since been discarded, with more than half of it hanging by the edge of the bed. Therefore, there were basically zero barriers between his and Jiang Tian’s body.

The material of his long pants was soft and yet thin, it couldn’t even block out body heat, not to mention some even more awkward reactions.

The sky was on the verge of lighting up, the light that shone in was pale. It seeped in through the gaps between the balcony door and the floor,

and the gaps between the windows and the wall. The dorm was dead quiet. Sheng Wang lowered his eyes, and heard his own heartbeat, pounding like a drum, and the uneven breaths he took.

He removed his leg near frenetically, while also attempting to be more subtle, trying to not wake Jiang Tian up. He glanced at Jiang Tian, and soon he abruptly left the bed and went back to the upper bunk, terrified to stay for a second longer.

Because, for a split second just now, with his eyes on Jiang Tian, he seriously felt the impulse to go a little closer. He wanted to lower his head, and touch his ge's lips that constantly pursed into a straight line. He wanted to see if it was as cold as it seemed.

The ceiling above him was nothing but white, so was the look on Sheng Wang's face.

He stared at that swath of white for a very long time, his heartbeat so heavy that he heard it roaring in his eardrums.

He didn't notice the person below him turn around, not to even mention the way Jiang Tian pulled over the blanket to cover his abdomen,

and opened his eyes as he laid on his side.

Translator's notes:

Yesterday Once More - The Carpenters.

Don't Cry - Guns N' Roses

Kiss kiss fall into an Awakening

Also I owe the audio drama for my life solely for turning zhao xi and lin beiting's kiss into a straight up makeout session, also also SHENG WANG'S DREAMS ARE ADAPTED SO WELL AHHHHHHH

Chapter 055 - Again and Again

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Sheng Wang Choked on a Mouthful of Wangzai, and Coughed Till He Nearly Passed Away on the Spot.

For the next few days, Sheng Wang didn’t get a good sleep.

He was actually quite normal in the day. High school students may be missing anything except for new conversation topics as well as idiotic moments. Even an error of the mouth could cause the whole class to cackle in laughter. With this atmosphere, as long as Sheng Wang didn’t think about it, he wouldn’t recall anything.

Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui would often enthusiastically perform an ensemble cross-talk show with a bunch of dolts, and once in a while, he would be foolhardy enough to attempt to drag Sheng Wang along. Sheng Wang would instantly try to drag Jiang Tian down with him too. With one of them being warm, the other one being cold and echoing each other, they were always able to snark Gao Tianyang until he slapped himself. “This mouth of mine, why does it always ask for a spanking.”

And then Sheng Wang would laugh loudly as he leaned against his chair, fistbumping Jiang Tian behind him without looking back.

It was in these moments that he felt that that moment his heart fluttered in that early dawn was just an illusion; he was so unrestrained and free, no different from Gao Tianyang, Song Sirui as well as the surrounding classmates.

But, he had never been able to keep up that gusto for too long. It would slowly retreat away in the thoughtless eye contacts as well as moments their skin touched, replaced by some other nameless emotion. Like the turbulent undercurrent beneath the peaceful surface of the ocean.

It was even more dangerous at night.

There would be teachers conducting spot checks on the dorms after lights out in Fuzhong, whichever dorm that found itself missing someone, whichever dorm that was being too noisy, would find themselves on a notice board hung up by the residence manager, therefore the campus at night was always quiet. It was so quiet, that it was left with the teacher on patrol's occasional coughs and murmurs, exactly the same as the alley that night, exactly the same! Exactly the same……

Therefore, three days later, two patches of black grew beneath young master Sheng's eyes.

He had a pale complexion, and looked like he was meticulously cared for on a regular basis. The occasions where he appeared tired then became particularly conspicuous.

This morning, Sheng Wang went to the classroom to catch up on his sleep without even buying breakfast, and somehow still managed to have two weird dreams with that span of 20 minutes. He only broke free of it when the school bell signalling to start prepping for class sounded.

He vaguely felt something lightly brush past his clothes, and thought that Gao Tianyang was there to dig out his papers from his desk again. However, the next second he heard Gao Tianyang's loud voice ringing from a few tables away. "Chilli, gimme chem, quick! Old He is going to be here real soon!"

"This is the last time," Chilli said this for the Nth time.

"Last time last time, quick!"

"If you copy again tomorrow, your surname wouldn't be Gao."

"Not Gao anymore not Gao, if I copy tomorrow again I'll call you daddy."

Gao Tianyang, that bastard, could really say anything for the sake of papers.

Sheng Wang complained as he was half awake and half asleep, and next he startled awake; if it wasn't this bastard who was digging for his paper, who was that just now???

He frowned and looked down with bleary eyes and a drowsy mind; the paper was still inside his desk, and other than that, an additional plastic

bag appeared. That bag was printed with a dark blue logo, one look and it was apparent that it was the one used in the school cafeteria as well as the supermarket.

Sheng Wang took out the plastic bag and opened it up. Inside it, was a cup of beancurd, a hard boiled egg as well as a can of milk.

There were two floors in the school cafeteria, with the flavours not being entirely the same. The second floor has a shorter queue, with a stronger alkaline taste to the beancurd. There were more people on the first floor, and they would sprinkle peanut and walnut bits onto the beancurd.

Sheng Wang liked the flavour from the first floor, but he bought from the second floor more often, as he was truly too lazy to queue up.

The beancurd came from the first floor, a layer of toppings fully covered the milk-white beancurd, it was steaming hot too.

It was the hard boiled egg that somewhat caught Sheng Wang by surprise, because he refused to eat hard boiled eggs without any condiments. However, if it was take-away, hardboiled was indeed more convenient than fried.

As for the milk, it was a familiar little red can, the exact same as his previous profile picture.

As long as Jiang Tian was the one who brought him breakfast, there would definitely be this can of Wangzai. Initially, Jiang Tian did it to get

back at him for a mocking line on WeChat, and intended to tease him with Wangzai in return. Afterwards, it somehow became a habit and a symbol.

When Sheng Wang saw the small red can, he let out a breath he didn't know he was holding.

There were two tiny figures fighting each other with blades in his mind. One said, "Thank god, there's zero change in any habits, Jiang Tian probably hasn't discovered anything yet."

The other said, "No shit, there's nothing to be discovered in the first place."

One said, "I didn't mean anything else, I was referring to that biological reaction that morning."

The other one: "Fuck off, what kind of guy wouldn't have a bit of reaction in the morning."

"That's still pretty awkward."

"It wouldn't be awkward if you forget about it."

"Another way to resolve this is to know that the other person was more awkward than you."

"So, that morning, did Jiang Tian also—"

Before the two could keep nagging on, they were all squashed out by Sheng Wang.

When Gao Tianyang returned to his seat, he saw a complete poker-face on Sheng Wang. He was shook. “The fuck? Sheng-ge, what’s with your giant eye bags?”

Sheng Wang said, “Insomnia.”

Gao Tianyang was still confused. “Then why are your neck and ears flushed too?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He pointed in front of him, “Old He is here, are you screwing off or not?”

Gao Tianyang shrunk his neck, and scrammed on the spot. After he was done scramming, then he found out that his Sheng-ge was messing with him, there’s nobody on the platform at all. The bell hasn't rung, and neither was Old He here yet. Therefore, he stubbornly turned around, and asked relentlessly, “No she ain’t, why are you losing sleep for no good reason?”

Sheng Wang internally said, *you’re asking me this, but who do I ask.* Before he could think of an explanation, Gao Tianyang—that idiot—opened his mouth again. “Tian-ge—”

He asked Jiang Tian, over Sheng Wang’s shoulders, “Did something happen in the dorms again? Sheng-ge seriously lost his sleep even with that giant heart of his?”

Sheng Wang almost vomited blood, saying on the inside, *thank you so freaking much.*

His entire back tightened up, he was quiet for a few seconds before he realised that he was seriously waiting for Jiang Tian’s answer too. Although, the question was a bit nonsensical, he pretty much wouldn't be getting an answer at all.

Just as expected, Jiang Tian sent Gao Tianyang away with a offhand “No”, as Old He had also entered the classroom right on the dot of the school bell ringing. No matter how mischievous Gao Tianyang was, he wouldn’t dare to chit chat right in front of the homeroom teacher. He pouted as he sat up straight, and listened to the lesson.

They were already through with the syllabus for year two, Old He and the chemistry teacher have been going through specific topics for lab work, and began the lesson with a few clips of hands-on experiments first. When they were through with lab work, they would be starting year three content soon, finishing within an estimation of a month and a half. After that, it would be all sorts of competitions and revision.

In order to facilitate the watching of videos, the light-blocking curtains on both sides were let down. The classroom was cloaked in darkness, with the lights coming from the experiment projected onto the screen flashing and dimming.

The person behind him no longer spoke. Sheng Wang waited for a while more, and his tense back finally gradually relaxed.

Jiang Tian didn’t bother further chatting with Gao Tianyang, neither did he ask about his insomnia along with Gao Tianyang, avoiding an even more awkward situation. Rationally, he ought to be relieved, and he was relieved, really. But, for some reason, he felt a little let down.

Not much, just a little bit, seriously.

Perhaps it's because...for something that even Gao Tianyang—that careless dolt— noticed, Jiang Tian didn’t even show any concern at all.

Sheng Wang lazily leaned against his seat, his right hand settled on his table, a pen listlessly spinning around his fingers. His gaze quietly rested on that screen, but on the inside, he mocked himself: get over it, how prissy can I be.

Just as he was about to toss out these random useless thoughts and note down the key points of the experiment on the notebook with the aid of the light from the screen,something lit up within the bag inside his desk.

With his pen unstopping, his left hand reached inside his bag and dug his phone out. He swiped across the screen to pull down the notification panel, and saw a new notification from WeChat, indicating that Jiang Tian just sent him a picture.

A picture?

A meme?

He tapped open the chat that he rarely used for the past three days, and saw the picture Jiang Tian sent.

It was a screenshot from baidu encyclopedia or some other online encyclopedia. It was mostly some instruction in text, saying that hard boiled eggs can get rid of dark eye circles, even specifically instructing how to apply it, and to make sure to not get burned etc.

Sheng Wang's pen slipped, and accidentally dragged it all the way to the edge of the notebook. He finally knew what that hard boiled egg that wasn't up his alley in his breakfast was for.

So Jiang Tian did notice all along, way earlier than Gao Tianyang.

Sheng Wang pursed his lips, and entered a "thank you" in the chat box, then felt like it was overly polite, unbefitting of his usual style. Therefore, he deleted it and changed it to a "k", but that felt too perfunctory.

In the end, he sent a "makes sense, I was thinking why you gave me an egg", personally thinking that it was casual, relaxed, and not too cold either.

Jiang Tian replied: Yeah.

On the platform, Old He opened the last video. The lights and shadows from the new colour palette spreaded from the front. Sheng Wang swiped his screen in utter boredom, and just as he was about to lock his screen and keep his phone, another line popped up in the chat.

Jiang Tian asked: Why couldn’t you fall asleep?

Sheng Wang’s brows twitched, his finger stopped on the screen lock button.

For a split second, he suspected that Jiang Tian could tell something was up despite having nearly zero evidence at all, or that that morning Jiang Tian was awake. But, he rationally calmed down with a passing thought, thinking that it’s not very likely.

His eyes were lowered as he silently read the message Jiang Tian sent. A moment later, he sent back an excuse that did not overly sound like it was made up.

Sticker: nothing much, just that I didn’t sleep well from nightmares recently

Sticker: i wasn’t really getting insomnia

He learned that from Sheng Mingyang, that the best way to lie was to mix it in with some truths. It wasn’t exactly a good thing to do, but doing so once in a while can cause one to avoid some awkward situations.

Jiang Tian did not instantly reply; he did not know if he bought the excuse either.

Sheng Wang waited for a while, and until the screen darkened by itself and turned to black, then he realised belatedly that he was hungry and

thirsty. He dug out a small red can from the table, slowly turned that pair of side eyes towards the direction of Jiang Tian who was behind him, and then took two drinks with a lift to the corner of his lips.

When he reached his third mouth, he suddenly felt someone lightly tapping on his shoulders from behind. He briefly froze up, and immediately naturally leaned behind too, the edges of the can still touching his lips, held in his mouth.

He slightly tilted his head upwards, and drank in tiny sips. His senses, however, were all concentrated behind his head. He could feel Jiang Tian leaning forward, and murmuring next to his ears, “That night at Beyond Parasol Trees, were you spooked by something?”

“.....”

“Cough—”

Sheng Wang choked on a mouthful of Wangzai, and coughed till he nearly passed away on the spot.

His ge probably doesn’t want him to live anymore.

Translator’s notes:

A quick refresh, Wangzai milk looks like this. Boy has eyes looking to the side. Sheng Wang’s entanglement with Wangzai was due to his name. Wangzai is □□ in Chinese, Sheng Wang’s nickname, affectionately called by Sheng Mingyang, is □□ due to the fact that they are pronounced in the

exact same way. □ means ‘kid’, roughly speaking. So Jiang Tian gave a Wangzai to a Wang-zai.

Chapter 056 - Impact

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The Dream He Finally Forgot With Much Difficulty Made a Dramatic Reappearance

“Sheng Wang, are you okay?” He Jin queried.

The clip of the experiment happened to stop playing at that moment, the students on both sides of the classroom were already rolling the light-blocking curtain back up. Sheng Wang sprawled across his desk, and as he coughed, he waved his hand high up in the air, indicating that he was alright.

“You’re really okay?” Out of Class A’s teachers, He Jin was the most gentle, and the one prone to worrying the most. Probably had something to do with how young her kid was too.

Sheng Wang’s hand, up in the air, made a thumbs up, indicating that he was perfectly fine.

“Did you choke on water?” He Jin asked once more.

“.....”

Sheng Wang was toeing the verge of breaking down. To his resignation, his neck and face were thoroughly flushed from coughing, and

thus he couldn’t reply. Therefore he hesitated two seconds, and lifted the can of Wangzai milk up.

He Jin said, “Isn’t this internecine?”

The entire class guffawed.

Sheng Wang placed the small red can back onto the table with a clang, and internally said, *the fuck you’re laughing at, you monsters!*

After He Jin was done joking, she started going through the topic. Some students, previously dozing off, had completely awakened from the laughter and started taking down notes too. Young master Sheng had made a noble sacrifice, it was just that his dignity couldn’t get over it.

He had already stopped coughing, but the blood that rushed to his face had yet to fade. He figured he might as well not get up, and hid a hand under the table to send messages.

Sticker: the nerve to laugh when you’re the one who bought it???

Jiang Tian: Wasn’t laughing

Sticker: bullshit, I heard you

Jiang Tian: ……

Jiang Tian: Your hearing must be truly good

Sheng Wang stopped in the midst of replying. He came to the abrupt realisation that Jiang Tian honestly chuckled quite softly, when mixed with Gao Tianyang's racuous voice, it might as well be silent. Yet, he still caught it.

Other people's laughs didn't enter his ears, he only heard that laugh from Jiang Tian, like he minded particularly much.

Sheng Wang pouted, and replied to the person with a "ha" first. The joking expression on his face gradually faded away. He then sent a despicable shrugging meme "no 300 taels of silver buried here" style, and said: can't help that you're the closest

(t/n: A classic chinese story about how a man got his silver taels stolen because he buried it with a sign that said "no 300 taels of silver buried here".)

In any case, with the effort of the few lines, he managed to diverge from the topic on that night at Beyond Parasol Trees. Jiang Tian got distracted by him for once, and he seemed to not remember afterwards either.

He wasn't sure if Jiang Tian knew about the truth about Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting's relationship…...from the reaction he showed that day at the

gathering, he probably didn't.

No matter what, that was still Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting's private matter after all, that scene in the alley outside of Beyond Parasol Trees was ever so intimate; no matter how surprised, shocked, or affected Sheng Wang was, he wouldn't spread around what he chanced upon by accident.

It happened in a place where no one would pass by, therefore it was a story known by no one. Only the main characters have the rights to decide whether it should be spread around.

Sheng Wang wasn't a busybody, and neither did he like to judge whether someone is a good candidate for friendship or to even get to know better based on private matters that were neither right nor wrong. He still thought Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting were both cool as hell, but he did slightly avoid them recently—after his worldview was so abruptly shaken up just once from this, he already ended up with so many strange dreams in a row. With a second round of shaking up, he could wave goodbye to sleep.

But, there exists a saying called "whatever you're scared of will come for you", and also a phenomenon called "selection bias". The person he

used to not see often in the past, was now everywhere he looked these few days.

Sheng Wang went to Xi Le to buy water, and so he heard Boss Zhao gesturing at the mute, “I left my phone by the cabinet next to my bed, Zhao Xi will be passing it to me later.”

He went to eat at Old Man Ding’s, and ended up bumping into Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting talking to their friend at the corner of the street outside the west gate.

He was summoned to the office at night by Jing-jie to help to mark papers, Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting were a table away as they discussed the progress for the competition class.

It was even to the point that when he went to the PE equipment room to return the basketball, he ran into the two walking shoulders to shoulders with Big Mouth Xu on Road #3, appearing to be attending a meal together.

It was no big deal if he was the only one there, and yet nine out of ten times, Jiang Tian was next to him too. Thus, they had to stop, greet the two, and chit chat with them.

Not only that, Sheng Wang kept hearing people say that he and Jiang Tian were incredibly similar to that pair. There definitely weren't so many 'insightful' people before.

If they were the Gao Tianyang/Song Sirui type, Sheng Wang could viciously beat them up with an excuse. To his chagrin, even the teachers like He Jin and Yang Jing were involved too, Sheng Wang couldn't just beat them up either.

The one who said this the most was administration's Big Mouth Xu, actually.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian never exactly stuck to the rules. Big Mouth was a heavy victim of it before, therefore, he said to Zhao Xi more than once in front of them, "These two are so proud, the moment I see them I would think of you two. This head of mine…...it has been aching for more than a decade."

Zhao Xi, in contrast, was daring to joke about anyone and everyone as usual. "Lin-zi was from Yizhong in the past, kindly don't take on the credit for Yourself. The Yizhong administration dean himself did not say anything either. Also, if your head has been aching for more than 10 years, I recommend at least paying the hospital a visit."

Big Mouth Xu flew into anger. “Yizhong administration’s Old Pan is plenty close to me, what do you mean he didn’t say anything? He told me all about it 10+ years ago, saying that if Lin Beiting goes to your Fuzhong to stir trouble, be sure to help me catch him and give him a good scolding. But I couldn’t catch him? So what kind of ideas could I even come up with.”

Zhao Xi nudged Lin Beiting.

Lin Beiting explained, “Young age gave plenty of energy and vigour, the speed at running away was a little faster than expected.”

Zhao Xi nearly died from laughing, Big Mouth Xu was tongue tied and completely unable to quibble back. He could only turn around to snark at Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, “Saw that? You two are just like a carbon copy of these two rascals now.”

What’s with the just like.

Sheng Wang internally said, *you sure are good at juxtaposition*.

He furtively shot a glance at Jiang Tian when Big Mouth Xu said “carbon copy”, the other person appeared to have felt his gaze too, and also turned to look at him.

Jiang Tian's lips moved, but in the end no sound came out. After letting Big Mouth nag on and one for a good while, he replied with a single line in the end. "Got it, teacher. We'll run slower next time."

Big Mouth Xu's eyes bulged, wishing more than anything to whip him to death. Sheng Wang swiftly reacted, turned heel and ran as he pulled Jiang Tian along.

With that, he confirmed one thing: Jiang Tian probably genuinely didn't know about the exact truth to Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting's relationship.

*

The midterm exam was a major exam, the few key point schools with a legacy in the city all enjoyed training their troops with simulations on major exams like this. This time, other than a synchronous examination date as well as marking of papers, they even planned to simulate the randomised exam venue, wanting to give their students the chance to get used to not taking their exams in their own schools in advance.

Fuzhong had terrible luck this time, and got Nangao, the school located the furthest away. Mingli Block had to be allocated for Jinhu's

students' exams too. The day before the exam, Fuzhong cancelled night self-study, and spent it on setting the exam venue up.

The moment the afternoon classes ended, the day students ran away happily. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian went to Old Man Ding's for dinner. They initially planned to return to the dorms, shower and sleep, but they ran into management's teacher on Road #3, and so Jiang Tian was summoned away again.

Despite the looming pressure from midterms, the very fact that night self-study was cancelled was enough to send a portion of students into a frenzy. The residential block was raucous. There were all sorts of people: those who were chatting at the corridor, those who were chasing each other around, those who were accompanying each other to get hot water, or those who were hidden away in a corner to secretly smoke.

When Sheng Wang walked past 605, he smelled the stench of cigarettes wafting out from the tiny window in the bathroom. He narrowed his eyes and coughed, then speeded to the entrance to his own dorm.

To his surprise, their dorm was very quiet, neither could he see any light inside.

It’s nearly eight, there nobody is back yet?

Sheng Wang opened the door in confusion, only to see Shi Yu hugging a laptop, light faintly emanating from the screen and casting onto his face.

“What are you doing?” Sheng Wang closed the door, and reached out next, wanting to turn on the lights.

Shi Yu hurried, “Don’t switch it on, do it later. Are you in a rush to use it?”

“Not really,” Sheng Wang said.

There were lamps along the corridor too, they shone in through the window on top of the door, thus the dorm wasn’t in complete darkness. He tossed his school bag onto the table with the aid of that light, asking, “Where’s Bin-zi?”

“He found the residential block too noisy, so he went to the lecture theatre to study,” Shi Yu said.

Sheng Wang internally said, *oh yeah, those who are truly in the hurry to study would have gone to the lecture theatre. Those who stay in the block tonight are all planning to not cram anything in, no wonder it is this noisy.*

His screen was bright and then it was dark again, this went on and on, but no sound came out. Sheng Wang moved closer, and saw a female ghost hanging upside down with her head touching the ground. Her ghastly pale face with blurry features floated towards the screen from the other end of the corridor.

“Horror film?” Sheng Wang tapped on the keyboard. “Why didn’t you turn on the sound? I think I’ve seen this before, want spoilers?”

“What the fuck don’t—” Before Shi Yu could stop him, the volume was switched on by Sheng Wang.

The way the female ghost’s head met the ground was a little like the basketballs that bounced and rolled by themselves on the basketball court in the evening, it echoed repeatedly. That face instantly flashed to right in front of the screen.

A howl escaped from Shi Yu, he instantly covered his eyes.

Sheng Wang had no reaction whatsoever to the female ghost, rather, he was more startled by him. “What are you doing?”

“Quick, turn off the sound already, quick—”

“Suresuresure,” Sheng Wang pressed the mute button, unsure if he should laugh or cry. “It’s switched off already, want to switch on the lights?”

“No need!”

Shi Yu apprehensively removed his fingers, and heaved a long sigh of relief. “Don’t switch on the lights, I’m building my courage.”

Sheng Wang: “.....I really couldn’t tell.”

“I’m going at it incrementally.” His skin was too tan, without any light, it was hard to tell if his expression was fine or not. In any case, he sounded incredibly weak.

“You can increment yourself then,” Sheng Wang felt for his school card, “I’m gonna bathe.”

“Eh, Sheng-ge!” Shi Yu called out once again.

Sheng Wang said, “Relax, I’m not switching on the lights.”

“No, I wasn’t meaning that.” Shi Yu tugged at him in a rare moment of kiss-assery, saying, “Wait, you’re really not scared? You still dare to shower without the lights on after witnessing that female ghost's ‘a glance back and a smile’?”

(t/n: ‘A glance back and a smile’: a set expression specifically describing the way women turn around/look back at someone with a smile, lovely, moving, enticing.)

“Why wouldn’t I dare,” Sheng Wang said.

Shi Yu internally said, *this can’t be, you’re this gutsy but you still had to share a bed with Tian-ge the last time the thief entered the dorms? Could it be that the scaredy cat is Tian-ge?* After letting his imagination run wild for a few seconds, he shook his head and went straight to the main point. “If you aren’t scared, you might as well watch a few minutes with me then. It’s going to end soon anyways.”

Sheng Wang had nothing to do either way, so he nodded. “Sure, I’ll watch.”

With him around, Shi Yu turned on the volume to two boxes with much difficulty, and finished watching the last 15 minutes with agony on his face. He basically had a death grip on Sheng Wang’s arm the entire time, his palm wet with sweat.

Sheng Wang didn’t really like this sensation of sweat sticking to skin, and used reaching out to take a bottle of drink as an excuse to remove his elbow. Shi Yu wiped his hands on his pants, and didn’t continue gripping onto him either.

He recuperated for a few seconds as he leaned against the bed footbridge, thinking that the aftermath of this film was a little too much, the more he thought about it the more it scared him.

“That won’t do, I will watch something else to cover up my impression of that.” Shi Yu randomly clicked around.

Sheng Wang joked at the side, “Seeing how spooked you are, something that isn’t super impactful couldn’t save you, submit to fate already.”

“Impactful, impactful……” Shi Yu mumbled, and suddenly smirked, “If you put it that way, I really do have something.”

Sheng Wang looked at him in doubt.

He said, “Come, Sheng-ge. Seeing that you accompanied me to watch a horror film, I’ll show you something real good. Da-Qian and the rest got it and sent it to me a few days ago.”

Sheng Wang wasn’t completely familiar with Class B students. Just as he mulled over who Da-Qian was, Shi Yu had already found that something “real good”, and clicked ‘play’ cryptically.

The video jumped straight to the last time it stopped at.

Sheng Wang looked up, and saw two figures tangled up with each other as they kissed under the dim, swaying light. One had the pants half taken off below the groin, the other kneeling in between the slightly parted legs.

What…...the fuck.

Sheng Wang was stunned for two seconds, and turned his gaze away like his eyes were stung by honey bees. The dream he finally forgot with much difficulty made a dramatic reappearance. There seemed to be footsteps outside the corridor; he didn’t actually catch it clearly, but his hands moved before his brain, and snapped Shi Yu’s laptop shut.

“Fuck, what for?” Shi Yu was astonished by the lightning speed that Sheng Wang’s hand moved at, and after he realised what was happening, he was a little baffled. If he doesn't wanna watch, he could just not watch it? Why close the laptop. Besides, what’s wrong with watching it a little, it’s so normal, was there a need to be this prissy.

Sheng Wang had already stood up from his bed. Just as he was about to open his laptop again and grumble, he heard the sound of keys jingling in the keyhole. The next second, the door was pushed open, and Jiang Tian's tall silhouette stood at the door, his back facing the light.

Shi Yu quietly retracted the hand that was about to open the laptop again, internally saying, shit, thank god Sheng Wang reacted quickly enough. They were both dormmates, but he wouldn't dare to watch things like this right before Jiang Tian's very eyes. Maybe it was because that person was too cold.

He thought, *no wonder Sheng Wang was in a hurry to close the laptop, he knew Jiang Tian was coming back soon. But how did he freaking know?*

Jiang Tian, who opened the door and came in, didn't know about the wild thoughts in his dormmate's head. He merely switched on the lights out of habit, and saw Sheng Wang standing by the long table.

Perhaps it was the way the room was lit up, briefly dazzling him, but in that split second, Sheng Wang's face and neck were both ivory white, yet somehow he gave him the illusion that he was flushed.

His lips were slightly parted, the expression in which he looked at the direction of the entrance revealed a tinge of astonishment.

Jiang Tian, entering inside, paused in his footsteps. He met his eyes across the distance of a few steps.

Seconds later, Sheng Wang abruptly tore his eyes away. His Adam's apple lightly bobbed. He reached out, scooped over the clean clothes he had previously laid out on the bed's railings, and said, "I'm gonna go shower."

Translator's notes:

Re: selection bias. The term the original text used translated into "Retinal effect", according to what chinese wikipedia (aka Baike) said, this referred to a theory postulated by Dale Carnegie, the same guy who wrote *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The retinal effect is whereby when we have an item or a particular feature, we would notice that other people have the similar item/feature more so than ordinary people. He listed an incident in which he wanted to buy a car, and decided to buy a dark green car, thinking that since most people chose black and white, he would be unique. However, he suddenly found himself seeing dark green cars everywhere. When he shared the observation with his colleagues, a pregnant lady said "Well I didn't notice that many dark green cars, but I swear I'm seeing

pregnant ladies everywhere.” After that, Carnegie was listening to a speech overseas when he overheard that this phenomenon is known in psychology as “retinal effect”.

In text, it probably meant that Sheng Wang couldn’t stop seeing Zhao Xi + Lin Beiting no matter where he went.

And when I saw this

I was like

HUH???

No matter what I did I couldn’t find any mention of this in English sources at all, neither did the Chinese side of the internet provide any direct linkage to an English term.

So I ended up going through the wikipedia list of psychological biases and figured that selection bias fits the closest to whatever the hell retinal effect is. My first thought was the Baader-Meinhof effect, actually.

Tldr: unwanted lessons in psychology/musuli why

Chapter 057 - [Address]

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The Profile Picture of the Person He Was Talking to Didn’t Change, but the Personal Nickname Did. It Became: Ge.

The door to the bathroom closed with a click, the soon the rustling noises of clothing as well as water flowing came out.

Jiang Tian looked at that narrow tea-white louver door, the dilute coloured vapours spilling out from the blades at the bottom, creating an additional patch of moisture in front of the door.

His elongated eyes lightly blinked, and turned his view away from the door. He asked Shi Yu, “What happened to him?”

“What do you mean what happened?” Shi Yu played dumb. Jiang Tian was the one who initiated a conversation with him for once, the show of favour made him feel as if...no, he really was scared. He felt the guilt of being caught red handed.

When Jiang Tian walked in, he settled the bag on the table. Sheng Wang’s bag was next to his, the zip not even opened yet. He didn’t take

anything out at all, as though he had never touched the bag the moment he came back.

He recalled the darkness in the dorm he returned to, and looked at Shi Yu questioningly. “What were the two of you doing?”

Shi Yu was stuffing his laptop under his pillow, upon hearing that, his hands shook and his laptop nearly fell onto the floor.

He gave Jiang Tian two forceful laughs, and spoke lightly while avoiding the crux of the issue. “Actually, we were watching a horror film before you came back. I rarely watch films in this genre, and Sheng Wang happened to come back. So I dragged him along to watch with him, boost my courage or something.”

“Trying to boost your courage with him.” Jiang Tian glanced at that closely shut louver door once again, and couldn’t help himself. “So the two of you can quiver together?”

“Of course not.” Shi Yu used the horror film to cover up the existence of ‘action film’, and gabbled non-stop, “Sheng Wang is really so bold, I was about to piss my freakin pants, but he didn’t even blink. He even helped to switch the volume on and off, and drag along the progress bar too. He even planned to go shower halfway through at one point.”

Jiang Tian paused, his expression finally revealing a trace of shock. He heard Shi Yu prattling non-stop like the sound of pouring beans, and finally asked, as if he was confirming something, “You said Sheng Wang is gutsy?”

“Yeah,” Shi Yu nodded, “he said he’d basically watched all of the horror and thriller films in the market, saying that when he was young and alone at home, he would watch them to boost his courage. Then he grew numb from watching too many.”

After all his non-stop babbling, he suddenly remembered that the person opposite him came from the same family as Sheng Wang. They were brothers, did he even need to need an outsider like him to introduce. Therefore, Shi Yu stopped the conversation, and said, “Oh yeah, Tian-ge would have definitely known about this already.”

Yet, Jiang Tian didn’t know; Sheng Wang never brought it up.

The late night with the false alarm flashed in his mind: the residence manager and security guards were discussing the thief that invaded the

dorms, their voices indistinguishable and meaningless, and then gradually, the night became silent again.

He had his hand on the bed railing as he asked Sheng Wang if he would be scared. His clear bright eyes were clouded by the fog of drowsiness. He scooched over to make extra space on the bed, and patted it.

Something lightly pawed at Jiang Tian’s heart.

Shi Yu was keeping his laptop, pulling the bed curtains, and digging out his phone. He was busy. Jiang Tian stood by the table for a long time, and suddenly felt a little thirsty, and so he took out a bottle of water from the bag to drink.

*

That shower Sheng Wang took went on for a little too long, by the time he came out, it was as though his eyes were washed too, with an extra layer of water, gleaming crystal clear. He lowered his eyes as he dragged a towel to wipe his hair with, and nearly crashed into Jiang Tian, who was standing by the closet.

The two stilled for a brief second as they stood within each other's reach, and both went a step back by himself. Sheng Wang blinked away the water droplets that clung onto his eyelashes, wiped his hair and said, "Why are you standing here? You scared me."

If the person in front of him was Gao Tianyang or someone else, Jiang Tian probably couldn't resist it and ask, "Aren't you quite brave? Even you can get scared?"

However, he didn't bring it up. He only took the clothes and towel neatly folded and stacked in the closet, and said, "I'm going to shower."

"Oh." Sheng Wang sidestepped, making way for him.

There was still hot steam in the bathroom, the scent of body wash had yet to fade, like a mark left behind by the previous person. Boys were plenty rough with each other, they wouldn't be fussy over so many things like this. Still, Sheng Wang, for some mysterious reason, opened his mouth. "How about you wait a bit? It's pretty warm inside."

Jiang Tian shot a questioning gaze.

A towel hung on Sheng Wang's head, the half damp hair messily fell down from his forehead, covering his eyes. He waved and said, "Whatever,

it’s nothing. Go ahead.”

Jiang Tian entered the bathroom. After so much turmoil, Shi Yu had finally settled down, and was reading a book for the first time ever. Who knew if the words actually entered his mind.

Sheng Wang pulled open a chair and sat by the table, his back hunched over and his head down as he dried his hair. A moment later, he looked up, and Shi Yu had already put down his book, playing on his phone instead. He was happily chatting away with someone on WeChat, an uncontrollable smile tugging at the corner of his lips. He couldn’t even feel the gaze of other people on him.

He looked at Shi Yu for a while, and suddenly recalled the time Big Mouth Xu confiscated his phone outside the sports ground. Big Mouth asked if he was in love. Back then, he was so confused, he didn’t understand how Big Mouth came to such a strange conclusion just like that. Now…...he roughly understood.

“Who are you chatting with that got you smiling so hard?” Sheng Wang asked, trying to sound offhand.

“Huh?” Shi Yu looked up, the dumb grin on his face finally toned down a little. “Who else, He Shi, duh.”

He knew it.

The hand drying his hair stopped, a moment later he removed the towel and gripped it in his hand.

Shi Yu didn’t discover his strange state at all.

When people are engaged in romantic endeavours in this age, one one hand, they would be a little furtive, try to cover things up. On the other, they also wanted to brag. He replied to He Shi’s message, and then aimlessly went through his chat records again. He finally couldn’t resist and told Sheng Wang, “I’ve discovered that, no matter how fierce those girls can get usually, they are all quite cute when you date them.”

Sheng Wang nodded, but his heart wasn’t in it. He had no interest as to whether the person Shi Yu was mentioning was cute or not.

Shi Yu didn’t mind whether he was sincerely listening to him, a nod was good enough. He gabbled aboutHe Shi: how she had dimples when she smiled, the way the sun shone on her hair made the colours look amazing, although she may be competitive she would be so so cute as long as she

didn’t get wound up by the smallest details, etc etc. He also spoke heavy praises of her pale skin, good looks, and legs that went on for days.

Sheng Wang’s eyes were lowered, his mind wandering. The parts in front went in one ear and out the other, the last part came true the clearest instead.

He heard Shi Yu’s praises, but what came to his mind was Jiang Tian —

After Jiang Tian played basketball, he always liked to push his slightly damp fringe backwards, and then take the clothes hanging by the railing, drape it over his shoulders. His fingers were slender, and his legs were long too. His skin was a cold white.

Sheng Wang blinked, and pushed these random thoughts out of his mind. He asked Shi Yu, out of the blue, “How did you know you like her?”

“Huh?” Shi Yu was stumped by that question.

“Pale skin, good looks, long legs. So many girls have these features, how did you know it is He Shi that you like?” Sheng Wang said.

Shi Yu had never met a question like this, he was a little confused for the time being.

He really put some serious thought into it, and attempted to answer. “I don’t really look at other girls though? That time, during the sports carnival, I got first place for both sprint and level 3 jumps, an entire group of people from my class all came over to give me towels and bottles of water. There were so many girls, but all I saw was her. When I received the bottle from her, I accidentally scratched her. I was so nervous, my palms were full of sweat. And I still wa—I still want to kiss—”

“—Whatever, whatever, these are all bullshit.” His face was as red as a baboon’s butt, as though it wasn’t him who took out porn just now. “There’s no need for questions like this at all, whether you like someone or not, you know best.”

Sheng Wang’s elbows were propped against his knees, the towel loosely dangling between his fingers. After he was done listening, he was quiet for a moment. With an “oh”, he never spoke again.

He went to wash the towel and hung it at the balcony, minding his own business, and then climbed up to the upper bunk.

“You’re sleeping this early?” Shi Yu still felt like continuing somewhat, however, his audience had already fled.

“We have exams tomorrow morning, my good guy,” Sheng Wang thoughtlessly answered, and then turned to face the wall, curling up in his blanket.

Yet a few more moments later, the door to the bathroom made a noise. Jiang Tian was done showering and came out.

He heard footsteps coming next to the bed and stopping. Jiang Tian asked in a low voice, “Asleep?”

Shi Yu answered from the opposite side of the room. “He’s probably asleep, he said to sleep and rise early for exams tomorrow morning.”

Jiang Tian stood for a while, and the bed moved very lightly next. He probably sat by the side of the bed. Moments later, Qiu Wenbin came back after he was done revising. They lowered their voices, said a few words, and the signal for lights out began to sound.

The upper third of November was already the end of autumn, heavy beads of dew formed in the late night. The frosty chill pervaded in the darkness, seeping in from the cracks of the windowsill.

Around midnight, a few rolls of thunder rumbled in the sky, the torrent came pouring down without any warning. The rain fell into the

balcony, and crashed against the window pane in pits and patters. A moment it was hurried, the next it slowed down, *clattering and murmuring*.

(t/n: The phrase used was □□□□, a line famously from Song of the Pipa. The transition I linked to used ‘clamouring and murmuring’, my impression of the line was sorta onomatopoeic too, like ‘caocao qieqie’, the sound of pearls falling onto a plate.)

Sheng Wang finally turned over ever so slightly, and laid completely on his back.

The streetlights downstairs managed to shine in all the way to the heights, forming a blurry blob of light on the glass, curtained by the pouring rain.

He stared at that blob for a while, felt around for his phone by the pillow and turned on the screen: 3.14am. Seven in the morning, tomorrow, Fuzhong had arranged for school buses to send all of them to Nangao’s exam venue. He had less than four hours for rest, but sleep completely escaped him.

He stuffed in his earpiece, planning to find some relaxing music to listen to. Yet, he found a new message in WeChat that he did not notice.

Jiang Tian: You’re really asleep?

Sheng Wang was startled on instinct, and stuck his head out to look at the lower bunk. He saw Jiang Tian lying on his side, a hand resting on his neck out of habit. His elbow blocked out more than half of his face, his eyes and brows sunken within the shadows.

Perhaps it was an illusion created by the shadows, but he seemed to be frowning in his sleep too. He didn’t really seem to be happy.

Sheng Wang watched on his stomach for a while before he retracted his gaze.

He lied on the bed, facing upwards as he swiped through the chat records. He finally noticed the time the message was sent: 11.20pm. It was around lights out, all and any commotion would be obfuscated by the signal for lights out, not startling someone who would be already asleep.

Sheng Wang stared at the time, and thought that perhaps this is the reason.

The person sleeping in the lower bunk looked as though he was cold and emotionless, but he paid more attention than anyone else. And yet, he was also the sensitive type, he could always discover these miniscule, trivial details.

It must be because he has been lonely for too long, and Jiang Tian was the one who came too close to him. That's why it was like that.

He didn't have any experience, this was the only plausible reason to him.

Shi Yu was right, there was no need to ask questions like this. He knew whether he liked someone himself the best.

He should have understood a long time ago……

He likes Jiang Tian.

But, that can't do, you're my Ge. Sheng Wang internally said.

Sheng Wang spaced out at his phone screen for eons, and finally managed to tap into Jiang Tian's personal info page. He changed the name he had used for a very long time.

When he backed out, WeChat was already refreshed. That cat named "Leader" was still at the topmost of the screen, lying on the grey-white wall on its belly. It quietly looked down at him, all the way across the bygone years.

The profile picture of the person he was talking to didn't change, but the personal nickname did. It became: Ge.

Translator's notes:

Ge (can) mean(s) older brother. Please write a 1000 word essay on the symbolism behind our dear Sheng Wang's action and figure out where this story is going, plenty of foreshadowing already :D

Technical terms google searched:

Tf is tea-white?

- I've opted for a literal translation and typing it in chinese shows something like this. I am too old and tired to be finding out which exact shade of off-white this is.

Types of doors

LOUVER DOOR (i break down as I've finally find the term for it)

Also, recall: the last time 'address' was used in a chapter title was in chapter 40 :D

Chapter 058 - Exile

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He Softly Called Out, “Ge.”

The language teacher, Beckon Money, had given that group of bigshots who were terrible at lyrical writing an advice: if you really can’t crap anything out, you can save the emotional parts for the night. She said that people are more emotional in the late night, they wouldn’t be like this in the day.

Sheng Wang felt that this made an incredible amount of sense. As he stood at the waiting platform for the school bus, six plus in the morning with the northwest wind blowing at him, he instantly felt that whatever that caused him to toss and turn in his bed was nothing at all.

Even Sheng Mingyang knew that his son was unflappable and never got too deeply involved; he refused to stumble into deep holes and get mud all over him. If there was trouble blocking the path, all he needed to do was to walk away. If a thorn was stuck to his side, all he needed to do was to throw it away. Just like that Tri-Quality nomination from a long time ago: since he wasn’t happy with how he got it, then he might as well not want it.

He had always been good at letting go.

Didn’t Big Mouth Xu say so before? It was normal for sixteen-seventeen years olds to be a little restless; he just happened to channel that restlessness in the wrong direction, that’s all.

He remembers he would often game on the living room couch into the night back in middle school. Not a single light was switched on, only the flickering lights from the phone or the television screen were present. At the health checkup held in year three, his vision had already dropped to 4.8. Afterwards, he didn’t participate in gaokao as he had gotten a direct admission to high school on recommendations, and got to enjoy a holiday in advance. By the time high school started for year one, his vision had already recovered—pseudomyopia, correcting his vision was all he needed to do.

It was the same now; some correction and everything would be fine.

With a little cool down, it would be alright.

The rain in late autumn didn’t rush to come and go like summer rain; every time it rained, it lasted for several days. The beads of water rode with the wind, splattering everywhere, both heavy and wet.

Yang Jing was in charge of following the students this morning. The moment she came, she pointed at a few students, saying, “Who are you freezing your asses off for in this cold weather by wearing so little? I’m talking to a few certain residential students.”

There were only two residential students in Class A, this was no different from directly calling them out by name and chiding them.

She side-eyed Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang. “Didn’t the school send a group message last night to remind everyone that the temperature is dropping today? Will wearing another sweater kill you?”

Jiang Tian said, “Didn’t check SMS.”

The way he spoke on a normal basis sounded like he was talking back, the teacher had already been used to it. Yang Jing mercilessly exposed him, “Why didn’t you check SMS? Your phone has been in your hands for the entire time, you clearly are quite diligent with using it.”

Gao Tianyang butted in at the side, “Reporting, Jing-jie, he was checking WeChat. Who even looks at SMS other than for verification codes?”

Yang Jing pointed at him, “Shut up.”

Gao Tianyang zipped his mouth shut in aggrievement.

Jiang Tian didn’t ask for his useless contribution; after this guy explained, he kept his phone and shot Sheng Wang a glance. Sheng Wang’s school jacket had sneakily been unzipped to go down below the lower half, revealing a single thin long-sleeved shirt inside.

No wonder Yang Jing had to yell at him.

Sheng Wang was zoning out when a patch of white flashed right before his eyes. He looked up in mild shock, and saw Jiang Tian’s hand reaching out from a pocket—from the distance of slightly more than a step away—and took matters into his own hands by pulling his zip all the way up.

The school uniform had a high collar when it was flipped up, enough to circle the entire neck. The crook of Jiang Tian’s fingers accidentally touched Sheng Wang’s lower jaws, causing him to slightly tilt his head up.

His gaze swept across Sheng Wang’s face. He released the zip, and his hand lowered as he said, “If you are warm, you might as well wear short sleeves. Saves the effort too.”

Not again, this douchebag with cutting words.

Sheng Wang obediently unrolled the sleeves that he previously rolled to his elbows, and said defensively, “I’m not even the one who unzipped it.”

“You’re telling me I’m the one who did?” Jiang Tian said.

“The zip slid down by itself, go ask it if you don’t buy it.”

“.....”

The douchebag with cutting words looked aside, and laughed from the anger. Or maybe he really was laughing.

Commotion indistinctly spreaded in the girls around them, tiny whispers and giggles were mixed with exchanges of private words. According to this feedback, Jiang Tian’s smile likely caused hearts to race.

Sheng Wang raised an eyebrow at him, both smug and taunting. He then looked down and buried his lower face into the collar. He rolled the jacket’s sleeves to his wrist, and stood at a spot where the wind was weaker with his back facing Jiang Tian. He bit on the zip out of habit.

Yet a moment later, he suddenly realised that the zip he was holding in his mouth was what his Ge had just touched.

……

This is really going to kill him.

Sheng Wang was silent for a few seconds, and released his jaws.

The school bus soon arrived. Sheng Wang didn’t like the crowd, so he boarded the bus at the end of the group.

He thought that there wouldn’t be many seats left and thus he would have to be separated from Jiang Tian naturally, but he did not expect Gao Tianyang—that idiot—to pat on the pair of seats in front of him, and say, “Here! I saved you two seats, am I not your fuzzy little jacket?”

(t/n: Fuzzy little jacket: term in cn was □□□□□, or "thoughtful little jacket (worn in winter), used to describe daughters towards parents, like putting on a warm cotton padded jacket in winter. Describes the warmth and intimacy of their kinship too. Basically, this is Gao Tianyang going AM I A GOOD BOY)

If Sheng Wang has a lighter, he would set this jacket on fire there and then.

It was nearly a 40 minutes ride from Fuzhong to Nangao. Sheng Wang already did not have a good sleep, and he did plan to “cool down” after all, therefore the moment he boarded, he stuffed in his earpiece and planned to catch up on his sleep.

The school bus wasn’t exactly new, the rubber at the side of the window pane was a little worn out, it was terrible at sealing the bus; the draft constantly got in through the gaps. Sheng Wang closed his eyes and leaned against it for a while, and was a little cold from the tiny gusts of wind.

He pulled his collar up, and buried the entire lower half of his face inside the collar. He switched to an angle where the wind could barely get him, and continued sleeping.

A few seconds later, he felt Jiang Tian shift around. The fabric lightly rustled, and that irritating draft suddenly disappeared.

Sheng Wang half lifted his eyes amidst the bleariness, and saw Jiang Tian on his phone, his right hand propped against the edge of the window pane. As he rested his head on his palm, his arm happened to block that hole.

Sheng Wang’s heart skipped a beat, and gradually slowed down again.

Most of the students were sleeping on the bus, with some still hugging the buddha’s leg at the last minute. There were muffled snores, the

shuffling of paper, and softly spoken recitations; none of them was as loud as the torrent of rain outside the bus.

He looked at Jiang Tian in silence for a while, and suddenly felt that Beckon Money's words weren't exactly right. The day was not a time solely for rationality.

"Ge," he softly called.

Jiang Tian's finger swiped at thin air, and turned to him in surprise.

"I'm just letting you know, wake me up when we're about to reach." After Sheng Wang spoke, he yawned, and slumped over in a withered manner.

Jiang Tian finally snapped out of it after that term of address. He frowned as he stared at Sheng Wang's complexion. "Are you unwell?"

"Noooo," Sheng Wang dragged his voice, sounding as if he had something else he wanted to say. He dug out his phone and typed in WeChat for Jiang Tian: bus driver uncle's style of driving is a little too wild, I'm car sick.

Jiang Tian’s eyes stopped on that alias. Last time he saw it, it was his full name. At one point he didn’t know, it suddenly became ‘Ge’.

(t/n: Alias: I used personal remark/personal nickname in the previous parts, however turns out the actual term for this WeChat function that WeChat has opted to use is alias. Edits will be made to earlier parts of the tl to reflect this eventually.)

He was briefly dazed. By the time he came back to himself, Sheng Wang had already kept his phone and was asleep once more. Once that pair of clear, bright eyes closed, the radiant or sometimes crafty smirk at the corner of his lips faded and flattened into a plain straight line, the sense of dispiritedness became heavy instantly.

He seemed a little wilted, sort of uncomfortable, and not very happy either.

*

The midterm exams lasted for two days. This time round, the papers for English, mathematics and physics were all difficult. Howls and wails of complaints chorused all over the corridor, a huge wave descending the moment a subject was over. By the time every subject was over, they were basically dead.

When the school bus drivers drove the students back to Fuzhong, they felt as though they were holding vigils for the dead.

(t/n: Vigils for the dead, or □□, is a customary practice from chinese funerals, in which family members need to take shifts to watch over a relative on their deathbed. This is to ensure that

said relative is accompanied until the very last moment before entering the afterlife. (largely cited from wikipedia).)

To Sheng Wang, the paper being difficult, the lack of sleep, whether he liked someone, all had zero impact on him. He wouldn't become too stupid to answer the questions just because he channeled his restlessness in the wrong direction.

He was the only one who could control his grades; it wasn't an issue of his abilities, but whether he wanted to or not.

When they alighted the bus, half of Class A was busy with comparing their answers with each other, the other half was busy yelling at each other, "I screwed up for this subject, how 'bout you?" "I did so shittily for this one, you?" "I nearly couldn't finish all the questions, how about you?"

Sheng Wang always said "I'm ok" in the past. This time round, it all became "so-so".

The first time they heard that, Gao Tianyang, Song Sirui and co all honestly paused, but that was all they did. Nobody treated this seriously at all.

It was only until the few schools were done marking the papers, then did the people understand this line.

It was a Wednesday that day.

Jiang Tian was startled awake at around five in the morning, and when he opened his eyes, he discovered the balcony door was blown wide open by the wind at one point. A bird came crashing in with soaked feathers, drenching an entire area with moist mud, knocking over a glass of water, and then flying away in a flurry.

The moist mud happened to be on Jiang Tian's clothes, which Jiang Tian had just left out to dry. The glass belonged to him too, the water soaked the book nearest to it: Jiang Tian's collection of Olympiad questions.

He cleaned up that horrified mess on the table, and took down his dirty clothes to wash it again, thus completely losing any trace of sleepiness. He stuffed Sheng Wang's dangling hand back under his blanket, and watched him for a while as he stood by the bed. He finally sat down.

For some reason, he felt that this day wouldn't go too well.

Old He entered the classroom right on the dot, a few stacks of the physics paper in her arms as well as a complete list of everyone’s results.

All and any racket instantly reverted back to silence, the entire class of people all behaved. They eagerly fixed their eyes on that list, its corner lifted up by the wind.

Old He didn't appear to look too fine, but she did look like that after every major exam, so nobody was surprised by that.

“Our class, as a whole, has performed within expectations. Out of the four schools, we have the highest average score for physics, for maths, second highest for chemistry, third for language and fourth for English. Teacher Yang Jing isn’t pleased about this, be prepared to get scolded later.”

Nobody dared to even breathe too heavily, the moment they thought of Yang Jing they didn’t dare to move.

“There is a praiseworthy point this time round.” He Jin’s eyes scanned across the entire class, and landed on Jiang Tian first. “The first place goes to our class for the combined exams for four schools, out of a

total score of 480, the first place has left the second place behind by 21 points.”

The difference was larger than the last combined exam’s, it broke a new record. Class A was in an uproar for a while. As Gao Tianyang clapped, he turned to say to Sheng Wang, “He’s not human, right! My Tian-ge is no human at all!”

Sheng Wang laughed as he seconded, “Yeah, he’s screwed up!”

Jiang Tian’s mood improved for that short moment, the pen pinched between his fingers heavily rapped on Sheng Wang’s shoulder.

“Hiss, you’re too unreasonable.” Sheng Wang pretended to be in pain as he clutched onto his shoulder, “You’re not letting me speak the truth either?!”

He Jin knocked on the lectern, and the class soon quieted again. She said, “I also have to commend that there are more students entering the top few than usual. In the past, there would usually be 10+ students who fell out of the top 45 places, this time round, there are only 5.”

The people wanted to cheer on instinct, and just as they were about to begin, they suddenly recalled that these five would have to switch classes, and managed to abruptly brake.

“I’ll be getting each group leader to pass down the individual results slips soon.” He Jin paused, and continued, “Those who didn’t get it, go see me in the office during the long break. We’ll have a chat.”

With this, everyone understood: those who didn’t get their result slip were basically out of the 45 places.

Each group leader weaved around the classroom. Not even two minutes later, all the result slips were given out. When Gao Tianyang got his slip, he nearly sobbed from joy.

He had amazing luck, with both his weaker subjects being very difficult this time, other than the bigshots at the top, there weren’t much difference in everybody’s results, thus saving his life. Therefore, his total point gave him exactly the 45th place.

He fiercely kissed the score two times, and turned around to share his joy with Sheng Wang instantly. Yet, his face froze the very next second; there was no slip on Sheng Wang’s table.

The clamour of noise completely dissipated in a certain instant, everyone merely had to look around to find out the result of “change of class” this time.

The five students who had to get out were Zhang Xin, Zhou Sitian, Zhao Rui, Wang Zelin…...as well as Sheng Wang.

At that moment, the classroom was dead quiet.

Sheng Wang tilted his head slightly, and saw that the pen in his Ge’s hand had stopped spinning. With a smack, it plummeted onto the table.

He lightly blinked, and thought, *I really did do what they said, when I start being reckless, I’m the exact same as Zhao Xi*. However, he didn’t do this recklessly, he merely decided to send himself into exile, and cool down a little.

This may slightly hurt, but he will be okay soon.

Translator’s notes:

Sheng Wang’s description at the start: “He had always been good at letting go.”

Surprisingly, this might be one of those times when a line works better in English, especially if you compare to Jiang Tian’s lines in the last part of the next chapter.

Original term was: □□□, meaning (able) to look past things that upset/trouble you, not letting your heart be constrained by upsetting things. If letting go isn’t a good enough fit, the full meaning (kinda) is here.

And so, let the dip before the rise on this rollercoaster ride begin.

Chapter 059 - Switching Class

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“Ge, Are You Mad at Me?”

For the entirety of physics class, Class A was enveloped in a suffocating mood. Of course, it wasn’t solely because of Sheng Wang, but he was indeed the key element.

He Jin would usually make some pretty lame jokes when she had class. However, she was solemn from the start to the end for today. As she deconstructed the logic behind answering the question on the lectern, the students’ pens scritch-scratched against their papers as they noted it down. Sheng Wang didn’t retain anything as his phone screen was constantly lighting up, new messages coming in non-stop.

Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui, the two chatterboxes, sent the most frequent messages. As Sheng Wang switched back and forth between two chat windows, he finally couldn’t handle the both of them at once in the end, and figured that he might as well make a group chat for the two of them.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: NO!!! I STILL CAN’T FREAKING ACCEPT IT!!!

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: why……

Da-Song: i can barely accept it too

Da-Song: this shouldn’t be

Da-Song: even Old Gao made it in

(t/n: Da-Song/□□, a play on Song Sirui’s nickname. It could mean “big Song” or what I’m more inclined to, “The Song Dynasty”. I’m keeping the pinyin to retain that possible pun.)

His words were clearly taunting. If it was any other time, Gao Tianyang could fight him for half an hour with that alone, and maybe the mood would become livelier too. Yet, Gao Tianyang didn’t refute his words.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: yeah, even I made it in

Sheng Wang typed with his head down, and brought out what he had already explained previously: i’ve said it before, the exam was so-so for me.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: wasn’t that just being humble!!!

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: ask that to 10 people after exams, and all 10 will all say it’s so-so, isn’t that the polite standard reply???

Sticker: i have never participated in those

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: ……

Da-Song: ……

Da-Song: omg that’s true

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: truly your *baba*

Sheng Wang never did participate in formalities like this. His “so-so” meant that he wasn’t really satisfied with his performance, his “it’s okay” meant that it was not bad, his “pretty good” meant that he really did do quite well.

This was already the restrained and humbled down version, he was even more brazen towards Jiang Tian.

Once, as he compiled his notes, tucked away in the neighbouring bedroom, he went all the way to declare boastfully, “Just wait, in a semester, I could touch the tiger’s butt?”

Jiang Tian was stunned for a moment, and asked what he meant.

Sheng Wang said, “The first in place, the king of the mountains, refers to the tiger. Second place, close enough to touch, that’s what I meant.”

The tiger possibly had never met such an audacious person, and had to take two seconds to digest this joke. He first watched Sheng Wang with

extremely mixed feelings, and then expelled him from the bedroom along with his books, saying, “It’s faster to just dream.”

Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui were still talking. Sheng Wang’s finger hovered over the keyboard as he spaced out. That conversation was merely a couple of months ago, but now thinking about it, it was a little dizzying.

Nobody had entered his “study room” for a long time now, the place they lived in changed too. That kind of joke he could make with zero abandon, he would no longer make anymore.

It was because of what weighed down on his conscience.

He was just changing his class, it wasn’t like a life and death separation or anything. He simply had to move from upstairs to downstairs, that’s all. Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui were natural crosstalk performers, and with Sheng Wang’s various changes in subject along with a couple of jokes, the mood was soon lively again.

Da-Song: the next time there will be a change of classes is after finals, by then Sheng-ge will be ready to fight his way back

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: definitely!

Sticker: Old Gao, I’ll suggest you to seize the moment

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: why should I have to seize the moment?

Sticker: if you're still teeteering at the 45th place, the next time I make it in, it's your turn to cry

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: ????

This idiot probably just realised why Sheng Wang said, and spammed with an entire column of memes expressing confusion, then silently keeping his phone away in order to take down notes. This round of consolation ended with a backfired attack and the persuasion to study.

Sheng Wang backed away from the group chat, and saw 20+ unread messages, coming from all sorts of people in class. Some told him that it's alright, that there are many people who go in and out of Class A. Some said that with the rate he was improving at, the next time he came in he would be a resident in the nail house. There were even some who weren't too good at comforting people, and only sent a few emojis.

(t/n: Nail house: phenomenon where people refused to sell their property to developers, thus the property/nail house is left to stand alone while development occurs around them. An article on this. (....or I could have just translated this as 'absolutely untouchable'))

This was only a part of it.

He replied to all the messages on WeChat one by one, and by the time he looked up, he discovered many post-it notes folded into tiny squares on

his table. They featured the same encouraging words, the content not so different from each other, the handwriting vastly differing. Sheng Wang didn't even know who were the ones who tossed them over, but that didn't stop him from feeling a little touched.

These were the sort of friends you would have in the teens; friends both silly and simple.

He even saw Little Chilli crumple up a ball of pink post-it, and while He Jin turned around, she tossed it behind her without looking back. It ended up on Gao Tianyang's table by accident.

Gao Tianyang—that idiot—didn't realise what was happening, and gestured furiously. Like chicken communicating with ducks, they ended up chatting through paper notes instead.

Sheng Wang was very much amused by that.

He lowered his head as he quietly chortled, and the smile slowly faded from his face again. He suddenly had the thought, would Jiang Tian look at him the same way he looked at Little Chilli? Maintaining a distance with some awareness, not causing awkwardness while also not leading anyone on either?

This was clearly impossible, however.

The average person wouldn’t think the wrong way like him until they are on the same frequency, there would naturally be no chance for that awareness. Besides, Jiang Tian was family, there was no way he could maintain his distance like normal classmates.

He simply wanted to correct the crooked path he had set upon, he didn’t plan to stop talking to Jiang Tian forever.

Sheng Wang sneered at himself, thinking, *man, this is so freaking distressing.*

What was even more distressing was that he had received messages from most people in Class A, there was only one person whom he hadn’t heard from at all.

He stared at the chat pinned at the top of WeChat, and panic was starting to set up.

This period of physics class went by unexpectedly quickly, as though he only blinked twice, and the bell signalling the end of the period rang. Sheng Wang was startled back to reality by this bell that came out of the blue. He peered behind him as He Jin left the platform, and coincidentally met Jiang Tian’s eyes.

For some reason, Sheng Wang wanted to flee on the spot. And so he did.

Are you a coward?

Sheng Wang spat in his head. He was on He Jin's heels as he followed her into the office, and presented himself for a scolding in advance. As expected, that "Reporting in" of his was akin to a lamb entering the tiger's mouth, five teachers instantly surrounded him.

"You've arrived just in time, I was about to look for you!"

The language teacher, Beckon Money, drew out an exam paper. The paper bobbed up and down as she said, "What were you doing for these two comprehension passages? How many times did I say this before, for the poetry appreciation segment, look at the score weightage, the score weightage, the score weightage! An 8 marks question, the answer has a high likelihood of requiring 4 key points. For 6 marks, it should be 3. Any less, and there should be something wrong. Just to be safe, making up 8 small points or even 6 will do. Either way, extra points wouldn't result in a deduction of marks. You ought to be familiar with this format by now, why did you mess up this time?"

“And also, for memorised text, I’ve said this over and over again: when you memorise, don’t just move your mouths, take a pen and write it down. A single wrong character and everything is gone just like that, no matter how well you have it memorised, it’s all for nothing.”

Just as Beckon Money finished speaking, Yang Jing too also slapped the paper in front of him. She pointed at the MCQ she marked out, and said, “Were you unconscious or were you frozen stupid by wearing too little that day? You’re telling me you made such low level mistakes too?!”

No matter how much she liked the student, Jing-jie was utterly ruthless when it came to chewing them out. In fact, the more she liked them, the harsher her words.

Beckon Money saw the way Sheng Wang obediently hung his head down low as he accepted all and any scoldings, and didn’t have the heart to watch anymore. She helped to speak up for him, “I think his English is still okay, that boy is first in English after all.”

“So what if he’s first in English?” Yang Jing said, “Have I not seen number 1 before or he hasn’t?”

Beckon Money: “.....”

“Don’t act obedient in front of me!” Yang Jing knocked on the table loudly, “Tell me yourself, if only you have taken another look at these questions, would you still make these mistakes!”

Sheng Wang replied with a “Mn”.

“To hell with Mn!” Yang Jing said, “My stomach hurts every time I think of it.”

Old Wu and the rest were flipping through his papers at the side too. Their expressions were rather mild, they didn’t scold Sheng Wang like Yang Jing who was basically jabbing at his forehead as she scolded, but their mood were around the same—

If you say that Sheng Wang made a complete mess, that wasn’t the case either. He answered most of the questions pretty well, with only a small part not being the average standard, the score wasn’t unsightly either; it could fall under regular fluctuation.

If you judge by one subject alone, Sheng Wang’s grade was actually pretty decent. Every mistake could be said to be a small mistake, but with the mistakes accumulated from five subjects, then it became such a pity.

After much pondering, they could only say that it was a pity.

“If you didn’t get these few questions wrong, you could have gotten 5 more marks at the very least for English! What’s the meaning of that 5?” Yang Jing said, “With that 5 marks, you wouldn’t need to change your class, got it?”

“Sorry,” Sheng Wang said.

He did know that he would not need to change his class if it wasn’t for the five marks; it was because he knew, that was precisely why he made the mistakes. He didn’t feel any regret, as long as it was something he did himself, no matter how insane it is, he would rarely regret it. However, he was indeed guilt-ridden. Very, very much guilt-ridden.

“Alright, alright. Fortunately, it’s just midterms, there’s still more chances after this.” He Jin had been in charge of many batches of students, with every batch, she was not lacking in excellent and outstanding students. However, every batch had a different way of adding more white hairs to her head.

The years of youth are the fusion of impulse and mishaps in the first place. The most captivating, but also the most anger inducing. As the

homeroom teacher, she had long since been used to it.

As compared to the subject teachers, He Jin was concerned about more issues. She was more like a parent in a different way.

She pulled out a chair, and said to Sheng Wang, “You have already received your scoldings, take a seat.”

“You have sprained your ankles before, and didn’t attend a few minor exams.” There was a stack of papers with tables neatly layered in her hands, a red pen was used to mark out every single improvement and the opposite of for every student, as well as points to take note of. Sheng Wang’s column was especially filled up.

“Your level position this time is the 49th place, and the 147th place amongst the four schools. Compared to the exam before you sprained your ankle, this is actually an improvement. But whether the improvement is from a week or a month, there is still a difference.” He Jin gently said, “The teachers are this frantic, not because they don’t think you are good enough, but precisely because that you *are* good enough, that we wish that you performed at the level you ought to have. At the very least, it shouldn’t be 49 or 147.”

“I can tell you aren’t in a good state this time, are you facing any problems?” He Jin stared into his eyes.

Sheng Wang avoided her eyes, and a moment later, he quietly returned her gaze. He flashed a quick smile as he said, “No, I’m not. I wouldn’t be like this next time, teacher.”

“Sure.” He Jin’s expression relaxed, and joked, “The administration dean, Dean Xu, was telling me last time that you are merely getting away because of your good looks. You look obedient, like a good student, but you are actually plenty mischievous. I’ll believe you for the time being, I want to see you in the top 45 places next exam, is that okay?”

“Okay,” Sheng Wang nodded.

“You probably have to go to another class from midday onwards. For the next half of the semester, you can ask the teachers from your class if you have any questions, you can also come upstairs to ask us, there’s no need to have any qualms. We have always said this: any students in the entire level are free to treat us as their teachers too. Also, for competition class, in principle your attendance is now voluntary, but I’m personally

letting you know, I hope that you will obediently turn up for every class. There is plenty of space in the classroom, we are at no shortage of chairs."

"Okay," Sheng Wang said.

"If you let me find out that you have slacked off at any point—" He Jin's finger pointed at him, and hmphed before continuing, "—just you wait for a face to face chat."

Yang Jing pointed around her, and added, "See this? Five teachers, it will be a ruthless non-stop style face to face chat."

Sheng Wang laughed.

*

The ten minutes inter-class break was spent on that talk. Sheng Wang went back to Class A with He Jin, and when they entered the classroom, the school bell rang on the dot.

He went back to his seat briskly. What surprised him however, was the fact that the seat belonging to the person behind him was empty.

Sheng Wang suppressed his curiosity for a while, and didn't manage to in the end. He patted Gao Tianyang's shoulder.

"Huh?" Gao Tianyang turned around questioningly.

Sheng Wang jabbed behind him with his thumb. “Where is he?”

“You’re talking about Tian-ge? Convenience store,” Gao Tianyang said.

Just after he said that, Jiang Tian opened the door to the classroom, and said without looking up, “Reporting in.”

He Jin nodded at his seat, indicating for him to hurry and sit down. Her gaze swept past his hand twice in a row before she called, puzzled, “Jiang Tian.”

Jiang Tian happened to be passing by Sheng Wang’s desk. He paused in his steps, and turned to face the lectern.

He Jin asked, “You bought iced water in this weather? Aren’t you cold?”

“No.” When Jiang Tian turned back, his eyes flitted past Sheng Wang’s face. He carried that fogged up bottle, and sat down behind him. His clothes lightly brushed past Sheng Wang’s shoulder, bringing about a frigid breeze

Sheng Wang didn’t turn behind. He heard the sound of a bottle being uncapped coming from the back. Jiang Tian was the one who was drinking it, but it felt like he took a few gulps too.

Iced water in late autumn had to be petrifyingly cool.

After that, for the entire morning, Jiang Tian did not speak. It was only when the last lesson ended, he then stood by Sheng Wang’s desk with an umbrella, and his finger knocked on his table, saying, “Go eat.”

Road #3 still meandered on, the two walked shoulders to shoulders as they shared an umbrella. Their pace wasn't exactly quick, but nobody spoke at all. When they passed by a rubbish bin, Jiang Tian tossed the empty bottle inside.

Condensation was still dripping off from the outside of the bottle even as he tossed it away. The joints of his digit were a bloodless white, appearing icy. Sheng Wang wanted to feel how cold they were for himself all of a sudden, yet he could not find a single reason to.

The current scenario reminded him of the first time he went to Xi Le. Jiang Tian was just as silent as he was now for the entire journey. Back then, he felt that it was only reasonable; now, he could only feel incredibly unaccustomed to it.

“Ge,” Sheng Wang called out to him.

If Sheng Mingyang heard that word from him, he would be so moved that he would be experiencing an entire myriad of feelings. After all, no matter how he coaxed and cajoled at the start, Sheng Wang would rather die than to say that.

To be honest, he was still unused to it, but he was trying his best.

Laziness was written in his nature, it was rare for him to be putting so much effort, despite how this type of hard work wasn’t pleasing anyone.

Jiang Tian’s cheekbone moved a bit. There was barely any expression on his face. Moments later, he finally looked at him.

“Are you mad at me?” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian’s gaze rested on his face for a while before he eventually retracted it. “No.”

Sheng Wang nodded, and only replied after several moments later, “Okay.”

They went around the corner of the long alley, and went across the doorstep in front of the old courtyard one after another. Old Man Ding

welcomed them with a wok spatula. “How quick you’ve arrived today, none of that dilly-dallying along the way I see.”

“Yup,” Sheng Wang was supportive, “I’m so hungry I’m gonna die.”

He was hungry to the point that his stomach was twitching in pain.

“You’re just in time, I’ve made a steamed fish head with chopped chilli today,” the old man said, pleased with himself. “Apparently the cafeteria has made it before? Try it and see which version is nicer.”

The old man was in a good mood today. Not only did he cook steamed fish head with chopped chilli, he had also stewed black chicken soup, as well as three small plates of stir-fry. The red and green chopped chilli, as well as the jade green choy sum were placed neatly on the table. Uncle mute was there too, and was giddily bringing the bowls and cutleries.

“Aren’t you starving to death already? Eat more.” Old Man Ding scooped for them full bowls of rice and ladled soup too, and waited for comments in elation.

Sheng Wang gave his praises, to the point that the old man was absolutely over the moon.

He turned and asked Jiang Tian too, “How is it? Better than the school’s cafeteria, right?”

Jiang Tian replied with a “Mn”.

“Oh, you think that it’s yummy too?” Old Man Ding looked askance at him, “I thought I must have poisoned it.”

Jiang Tian finally looked up at him, confusion evident on his face.

Old Man Ding pointed at the face and said, “If it’s so yummy, what’s with that ugly look on your face?”

Jiang Tian lowered his eyes and swallowed his food. Two seconds later, he finally answered, “If I’m smiling as I eat, you would have even more questions.”

Old Man Ding surprisingly found himself agreeing. He pictured that, and shivered. “No more talking, let us just eat.”

Sheng Wang’s stomach felt terrible, he couldn’t taste much of anything either. However, since he already said that he was hungry, he ate more than usual nonetheless. The old man and the mute both ate quickly; two entire mouthfuls and the rice in the bowl would disappear by half. Soon enough, they were already done eating, and headed to the kitchen to finish washing the vegetables they didn’t manage to in the morning.

Thus, the hall was only left with two people.

The more Sheng Wang ate, the more he slowed down. He put down his chopsticks eventually.

Jiang Tian's soup spoon bumped against the bowl, creating a light *clang*. He suddenly spoke. "Gastric pain?"

Sheng Wang was stunned for several seconds before he realised that Jiang Tian spoke to him on his own accord, and his mood instantly changed slightly for the better. He replied on instinct, "No, I'm full, that's all."

Jiang Tian didn't speak. He drank two mouthfuls of chicken soup with his head down, and finally couldn't resist asking, "Did you lie to Old He like this in the office too?"

Sheng Wang stiffened. This time round, he really froze up.

Perhaps he didn't want to come off as sounding too cold or being too overbearing, Jiang Tian's eyes were downcasted for the entire time. He waited for a reply in silence. A white porcelain spoon was pinched between his fingers, but he did not take another mouthful of soup. Still, even with all that, the sharp and pointed corner of his was still revealed.

It was just like that bottle of iced water in late autumn; despite the gentle, hazy layer of mist wrapped around the bottle, it was so cold that it hurts to the touch.

Sheng Wang fidgeted, wanting to change his sitting position, but he couldn't be bothered from the pain in his stomach.

"What did I lie to Old He about?" he asked.

Jiang Tian: "About flunking on purpose."

Sheng Wang's stomach twitched, and the pain akin to a needle stab speedily spreaded. He lightly hunched over, and didn't manage to say anything for several long whiles.

This gastric pain sure knows how to pick its timing, he ridiculed himself, *it probably looks no different from pretending*.

He pressed down on the aching area twice with much force, and said to Jiang Tian, "It wasn't on purpose, why would I flunk a major exam on purpose? It's not like I'll get anything out of it."

The entire class was consoling him; they all thought that he didn't perform at his usual level, he had terrible luck. All the teachers were reprimanding him; they thought he wasn't in a good state, he was negligent. Jiang Tian was the only one who knew that he didn't fail to perform at his usual level; he wasn't negligent, he did it all on purpose.

He could not find a reason, nor did he find any evidence. He just knew.

Jiang Tian’s lips pursed into a straight line. His brows briefly knitted, he appeared to be wanting to say something, but simultaneously not knowing what to say at all.

“I didn’t do it on purpose.” Sheng Wang’s eyes were slightly downcasted, his voice incredibly soft.

His face was pale, either from possibly the lack of rest or the gastric pain. The lighting was terrible in the old house, the hall was dim. The torrent poured on outside, the rain cascading down from the inclined rooftop, forming a curtain of water along the edge of the tiles on the ledge.

For some strange reason, Jiang Tian was reminded of the first time Sheng Wang was drunk. He sat in the car sulkily, the expression on the face being the same too. Occasionally, he would look outside the car window. The swath of light and darkness gliding across his half-lidded eyes; sometimes, they were extremely bright, but others, a tiny twinkle of light.

He certainly wasn’t saying anything, but he always seemed a little lonesome.

He thought, it must have been around that moment onwards, that he started being unable to help but to be a little nicer to him. Unwittingly, it became habit.

Jiang Tian stood up by the table, the person who was still quibbling suddenly tugged at his wrist.

“What?” Sheng Wang looked up at him as he asked.

“.....”

Jiang Tian’s fingers twitched. He said, “I’m getting you hot water.”

Sheng Wang said an “Oh”, and his gaze sank again. He released him.

Jiang Tian went to the kitchen, took out a glass, washed it and poured half a glass of boiling water. He then mixed the previously boiled water that the old man left out to cool, and went back to the hall. He settled the cup before Sheng Wang.

“When are you moving?” he asked.

“Hm?” Sheng Wang was caught off guard.

He curbed his impatience as he asked once more, “When are you moving to a different class?”

“Noon,” Sheng Wang paused before he added on, “before noon break ends, I think.”

In reality, there wasn’t much time left, but none of them spoke up about leaving. The hall fell into a silence that kept stretching on. Sheng Wang brought the glass to his mouth, and took tiny sips of the slightly boiling hot water.

After yet several moments later, he suddenly spoke. “I really did mess up this time, I’ve made so many mistakes across all the subjects.”

Who are you trying to fool.

Jiang Tian said so internally, but what left his mouth was, “Okay.”

Sheng Wang took a few more mouths of hot water. Perhaps his gastric was slightly relieved, he looked like he felt better.

Jiang Tian was momentarily quiet before he nodded, his throat rumbled, “Okay.”

*

Mingli Block’s noon break had always been quiet, but it was absolutely bustling with life today. One could hear the sound of tables and chairs shuffling around all the way from the ground floor. At first listen, it was lively, but it was at the expense of some tears.

When Sheng Wang returned back to the classroom, the other four students who needed to leave had already packed their bags. One of them was empty handed; clearly, he must have gone downstairs at one point already.

“Sheng-ge, you all will be going to Class B, right?” that person asked.

Sheng Wang nodded. His expression was mournful as he said, “Okay, I’m merely downstairs, I guess. We’re only separated by a ceiling.”

“You wouldn’t be there?” Sheng Wang asked.

“I have to go to Class 1,” he said, “I don’t know if I can ever come back.”

“Don’t be like that, you definitely can!” Gao Tianyang consoled.

That boy however was pretty clear-headed. He said, with bitterness laced in his voice, “Every time people had to leave they probably received the same consolation. How many of them actually made it back in the end?”

Gao Tianyang choked, and slapped his back. “You can’t give up just like that either!”

He then fistbumped Sheng Wang, saying, “Sheng-ge, you sh—no wait, don’t be overly determined, it’ll scare us.”

After Gao Tianyang spoke, he instinctively shot a glance at Jiang Tian. He thought that he would be receiving a glare from Jiang Tian, like the last time when he said “pass by”. However, Jiang Tian did not look up this time.

He acutely felt the subtle change between the two, but with his jellyfish style brain, he was unable to put the change into words.

Therefore, he chose to keep his mouth shut, as quiet as mice.

Sheng Wang stuffed a portion of his items in his bag. Just as he was about to carry another stack of books, he saw Jiang Tian bend over, and help him carry those. He proceeded to walk towards the staircase.

Issues like level position were discussed behind closed doors. Before they go through the change of class, nobody would know the situation in other classes.

Class B was waiting for the people upstairs to descend from the heavens as they cleared up the tables, but never did they expect the first one to appear to be Jiang Tian. The student on duty was so spooked that they lost their grip on the rag, and nearly wiped it on another person's face.

"What's the situation?" Someone discussed furtively, "What kind of bombshell is this, Jiang Tian is switching class?"

"Keep dreaming," another person mocked. "He's helping to carry things for sure."

"Who is that big of a deal?"

Just as they spoke, Sheng Wang followed into the classroom, a bag slung across his shoulders. The people were agape again.

A few seconds later, someone muttered under their breath, "There, the big deal himself."

There were a few empty tables. Jiang Tian asked Sheng Wang, "Where?"

“Here!” A tanned hand before an empty table suddenly reached out. Sheng Wang looked over there, and saw Shi Yu pointing at the seat in front of him. “You can sit here.”

“That will do too.” Sheng Wang nodded.

Jiang Tian said, “Is he taller than you?”

Shi Yu: “.....can we not talk about this now? Let it rest, Tian-ge.”

Jiang Tian did not speak any further. He walked over, and placed Sheng Wang’s books down. The other students who had to change their class all streamed in one after another too, and occupied the remaining tables. Sheng Wang stuffed his school bag inside his desk, and just as he was about to take things out, he heard Jiang Tian say, “I’m going up.”

He briefly paused in his action. He looked up and said, “Sure.”

He watched Jiang Tian leave the classroom via the back door, and soon, he disappeared from the corridor. In that fleeting moment, he had a flashback to the first time he saw the suitcase, in the neighbouring bedroom, as well as a certain inter-class break, when Jiang Tian told him “have to move sooner or later” at the back of the class.

Only, he was the one who had to move this time.

You’re the one who chose to stay further away from him, you’re the one who wanted to come downstairs. Stop acting like you can’t bear to leave with your crocodile tears.

Sheng Wang said to himself.

There was still more than 10 minutes until noon break was over. The people who moved into Class B had already settled down, the classroom gradually reverted back to calmness. Over here, the arrangement between different groups was slightly different. Unfamiliar gaps, unfamiliar faces. Even the scent of the air freshener wafting through the air was unfamiliar too.

Still, that’s alright. He had transferred schools so many times, and switched to so many different classrooms. This was merely one of them.

He was good at adapting, he could thrive anywhere. Within a few minutes, he would be used to this place, just like the time he moved into Class A all the way from a different province.

Remnants of gastric pain still lingered in Sheng Wang; after he was done tidying his things, he sprawled over the desk.

He planned to make use of the tail end of the noon break to relax with his eyes closed, but he ended up accidentally falling asleep instead. Just like how one can already have everything all planned out, but there would always be some people, and some issues unaccounted for in the plan.

*

Class A was a place in the level where people would watch in envy, but also shrink back away from. Therefore, some students may have ended up in the top 45 places, but they were too terrified to enter the classroom.

Class B and Class 1 were already done with the switching of class, the few tables in Class A were still empty. When Jiang Tian went back to his classroom, he saw a few people tentatively looking inside.

Gao Tianyang had once again taken upon the heavy duties of being a socialite. He waved at them without asking, and said, “Whatchu waiting for, friends? You’re in military pose? We’ve already cleared the tables, you’re still not coming in? You need us to perform a formation to show our welcome?”

“Noneednoneed.” The few students’ faces were flushed, they awkwardly shuffled in with their bags.

“Take whatever seat you like, yeah?” Gao Tianyang pointed at the few empty tables. Just as he was about to point at Sheng Wang’s, he heard Tian-ge open his golden mouth, saying, “Wait.”

Gao Tianyang looked at him in puzzlement.

Jiang Tian did not sit down the moment he came back to class. Instead, he took out the school bag, pencil case as well as papers out from the inside of his desk. He had a tall stature; with just a stretch, he managed to toss the few books on his table to the one in front of him. He then went to Sheng Wang’s seat and sat down, a bag in his hands.

Gao Tianyang never thought that things could go like this. He watched for ages with question marks floating all over his head, and asked, “Tian-ge, what are you doing?”

“Changing seats, can’t you tell?” Jiang Tian said.

“No, I mean, I can tell, but—” Gao Tianyang scratched at his buzzed crew cut, and said, “Why are you suddenly changing your seat?”

Jiang Tian placed his items inside the desk one by one. Upon hearing that, he said without even looking up, “I sat here in the first place, any problem?”

Gao Tianyang then recalled: before Sheng Wang came, Jiang Tian did sit here. Now that Sheng Wang left, he came back here with his things in tow.

He suddenly felt some mixed feelings, but he soon snapped out of it. “No problem, it’s good that you’re changing back here. Otherwise, if I want to whisper something during class, I lean back, and the new classmate doesn’t answer me at all, that would be so awkward.”

Jiang Tian settled his things down, and shot him a glance as he said, “I wouldn't respond to you either.”

“I knooow, not only will you ignore me, you’ll even ask me to shut up and turn back around.” Gao Tianyang shook his head, “Now that we’re comparing, Sheng-ge is the one who shows me more face.”

Jiang Tian pursed his lips, and no longer spoke. He took out a book conveniently, and picked a ballpoint pen. He no longer looked up. Gao Tianyang groaned and sighed, and turned back to face the front. After a quick round of banter with Song Sirui, he began doing his practice paper too.

More than half of the students made use of the time to sleep. The class monitor subtly switched off two lamps, and the lighting in the classroom dimmed. The raindrops in the ongoing rain that fell around them were slanted. The cascade of water continued to hum. Inside, however, it was quiet. Just like every single noon break in the past.

These few Olympiad questions were extensive, the sentences being convoluted too. Jiang Tian stared at them for quite a few minutes, but not a single word entered his mind. He then realised that he was completely distracted.

He leaned back against the chair; a hand dangled by the side of his body, the other hand rested on the table, a pen within his fingers. The pen spun for four-five rounds, and he still couldn’t absorb anything. He finally raised his eyes in a manner of giving up.

The figure by the table in front of him became Gao Tianyang; it was no longer the person who likes to wear his uniform below his shoulders when he’s warm, and lazily fanned himself with his T-shirt collar. It was no longer the person who would dare to slowly and leisurely rock his chair with his foot on the bar beneath the table, and turn around to act obedient as

he apologised to him after his chair would occasionally bump against the edge of his table.

His eyes were lowered as he zoned out for a moment. He suddenly felt, after so many twists and turns, he had gone from the starting point to the starting point once more. The transfer student in the middle seemed to have never come in the first place.

If he doesn't look back, and see the few new students who transferred in, he even felt like it was an illusion; that he merely took a nap on the table over the noon break, and had a fleeting dream.

It was the height of summer when he closed his eyes; when he opened them, it was already late autumn.

The screen on his phone inside his bag suddenly flashed. Jiang Tian dug it out on instinct and opened WeChat. There were no new messages. He spaced out for a while before he realised that that was some lunchtime news that an app sent out as a notification.

He pulled down the menu, and kept it back up again. He watched the top most chat in WeChat, that flat Wangzai sticker quietly rested in the profile picture.

Jiang Tian actually had the habit of changing aliases, his style simple and completely boring: the full name, or how he addressed them. The one at the top was his first exception.

He had briefly changed the person's alias to "Sheng Wang" before, but a few days later, deep into the night, he changed it back for some inexplicable reason. Back then, he couldn't put into words what mindset he was doing that out of, but now, it was more obvious: he simply wanted to see the other person's changes, if his profile picture changed, if he was happy or not.

He recalled a noon many years ago: it was a continuously raining day like this, that cat named "Leader" had come to the end of its life as it laid in its home.

Before that, there were already many signs—he didn't like to eat anymore, neither did he like to move. He visited a lot of stores, and searched on a lot of websites. He had tried so many ways in order to keep it for a few more years.

However, Old Man Ding said, "It's already an old cat, it doesn't have much time. We can't make it stay anymore."

In the end, he didn't manage to make it stay. Just as expected.

……

It seems that it has always been like this.

When he was young, he tied Jiang Ou’s silk ribbon around his finger, but he had never seen her every time he opened his eyes. Later on, he wrote his name and pasted his photo on a slip of paper, and tied it around his grandmother’s wrist, but the old lady still couldn’t remember him. Even later, after taking so many pictures and videos of Leader, that cat who had spent such a long time with him was still buried six foot under.

Keeping people with him had never been his forte, and never did he managed to make anyone stay either.

These few days, Sheng Wang had begun calling him “Ge” at a frequent rate, but he wasn’t happy. Instead, he would often flashback to these bygone affairs. He knew that the person who would hook an arm around his neck as he said “Let’s stay in school together” was going further away from him, but he had no idea how to keep him.

After so many years, he still never managed to learn how to keep someone; he could still only use awkward, and stubbornly stupid methods.

It had never worked, but he still wanted to try nonetheless.

Translator’s notes:

Sheng Wang: [moves to a different class]

Jiang Tian: [starts thinking about everyone who has ever left him]

No I didn’t tear up what are you talking about

Also this is such a long chapter I’m gonna cry (8.7k in raws, basically x2 - x3 of a normal chapter)

Hey remember when Sheng Wang said in the last chapter he had always been good at letting go

:)

Chapter 060 - Swayed

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you could!
buymoumoutoday

He Tried So Hard to Crush Certain Feelings in Its Roots, but Before It Even Had a Chance to Work, He Nearly Failed Because of One Thing.

The atmosphere of learning in Class B wasn’t particularly thick; in fact, just as Shi Yu said, half of the class have their heads lowered in the middle of lesson. There were those on their PSP with their hands inside the desk, playing mobile games, chatting on QQ and WeChat etc. There were even people who stuffed their phone inside their pencil case horizontally in order to read novels, or make use of their long hair to cover the wireless earpiece hidden away as they watched videos.

The relation between teachers and students illustrated that virtue may be one foot tall, but the devil ten. One side always had a way to check, the other always had a way to play.

The few classmates from Class A weren’t quite used to this either, or maybe they were not in a good mood in the first place. A few of them all pulled a long face.

Sheng Wang was the only exception.

When Shi Yu told Sheng Wang about this at the start., there were a few elements of flexing. However, he forgot one thing: Sheng Wang had changed through too many places, and had seen too many classes.

Each class has their own vibe, Sheng Wang had even stayed in a class more unruly than Class B: when they moved on to high school, the cream of the crop eligible for the direct recommendations exam were selected, forming a pre-exam final sprint class that truly straight up disregarded the rules.

With a lock of the classroom doors and the pull of the curtains, it was a normal sight to see people grouping up to play poker, chess, and even mobile games together. Sheng Wang brought a foldable basketball hoop and nailed it to the back of the classroom. When boys start to get fidgety, they could toss anything inside. They even dared to compete. The main credit behind Sheng Wang's shockingly good accuracy in shooting into the basket went to mainly those two months.

There were even people who brought dice, and used a mug as a dice cup. Those who lost will have to treat the entire class to supper. Sheng Wang had terrible luck, and had treated everyone many times.

Back then, the school cafeteria's supper was meant for teachers on duty only. Theoretically, students shouldn't be able to buy it, as the school did not want to delay lights out and sleep. However, they have succeeded again and again. Someone ratted them out twice, and the teacher on duty came to catch them with the penalty book. They split into three teams as they fled, and managed to shake the teachers off despite the ambush and being cut off. They snuck food back to the dorms, and toasted each other in celebration. On Monday, they would come to have a joyous reunion as they were forced to attend "The Public Criticism Beneath the National Flag".

Whether Shi Yu had seen it before, Sheng Wang probably did it all. Big Mouth Xu was correct about one thing: he simply happened to be getting away because his good looks, his obedience was all surface level.

At one point, he thought that he liked that class that best; because of the utter lack of restraint, because of the liveliness. Because he could avoid returning to the empty and boring house.

Afterwards, when the recommendation exams were over, and that class that was formed in the last minute dispersed, he then discovered his so called 'like' was only just that—

The second day of vacation, those crazy days that overstepped boundaries started to blur in his mind. A month later, he couldn't even get the names of some classmates straight, only remembering a few nicknames. Much later, the people in those days all became "them".

Because, as he recalled, those were odds and ends of things he never had to work hard for; they were nothing to write home about.

The lessons in the afternoon were all taken up by physics and mathematics. The teacher was doing their best to go through the thought process behind solving the question, but there was only a pathetic amount of people holding their pen as they cooperated with the teacher. Sheng Wang was one of them.

However, he wasn't taking down notes.

During the inter-class break, the study rep had given the few new classmates the homework left behind by the language and English teacher. He spared an ear for the person at the lectern, his pen however leisurely scrawled away for English.

When he flipped to a new page, he slightly rocked his chair with his foot on the bar, and felt that there wasn't a huge difference between upstairs

and downstairs.

The teacher’s speed of talking was slightly slow, the breakdown behind the thought process was too detailed. The difficulty of the question wasn’t as in depth as what Old He and the rest did, the expansion was slightly too little, the number of repeated questions on the practice paper a little too much. But, he could adjust and cope with all those by himself. Other than those, there did not seem to be any flaws at all.

I told you it wouldn’t be that hard. Look, you’re already getting used to it.

He told himself.

The downpour outside went on non-stop. For a very long period of time, the beads of rain constantly pattered against the window pane, so rhythmic to the point that it was monotonous; like the wall clock at the back of the classroom, continuously repeating the same sound, and time quietly streaming on in this sort of noise.

The sky outside was dark and gloomy, it resembled neither day nor night. The teacher’s voice was sleep inducing.

Sheng Wang looked up for a bit in the midst of doing questions, and suddenly was unable to tell what day it was. He took out a language paper, spent an entire period and a half on it until he reached the last comprehension passage, and then his words started to break apart.

He scribbled a couple of times before he realised that the ink level in his pen had reached its bottom, leaving him with only a layer of slight yellow oil; language paper was truly ink consuming as usual.

Out of habit, he twisted open the tip of the pen, his chair tilted backwards, and knocked on the table behind him without even looking back, his palm wide open as he waited.

Nothing happened at all in that several few seconds, nobody stuffed something into his palm. He didn't manage to get a new pen refill, only Shi Yu's confused question. "What, do you want to borrow a ruler or pen?"

Sheng Wang blanked out for a moment, and was suddenly mortified.

The sound of rain seemed to have become louder from that instant, noisy enough to irritate. He turned around in that chaotic background noise, and wanted to say to Shi Yu, who was confused, "Do you have any extra pen refills? Lend me one, I'll return it tomorrow."

However, before he spoke, he already no longer wanted to speak anymore.

Shi Yu was still completely befuddled. Sheng Wang flashed a smile, and said, “It’s nothing, I got confused from all those questions.”

“Okay……” Shi Yu replied, unsure.

Sheng Wang didn’t wait for anything more to leave his mouth, he already turned back to the front.

He looked at the ballpoint pen that he dismantled into half in his hand, and was abruptly no longer in the mood to keep doing questions. He sat for a long time in the clamour of the pouring rain, and finally admitted to himself that he did somewhat take certain things for granted.

He overestimated his ability to adapt; he also overestimated his endurance.

Not even half a day went by, and he already began to miss that seat upstairs.

Sheng Wang could no longer remember how he spent that remaining half of the period. He only recalled coming back to himself upon the sound

of the school bell ringing, signalling the end of class. He dug out the umbrella that was basically unused, and hurried to Xi Le Convenience Store.

Boss Zhao was flabbergasted. He nagged, “Aiyoh, why come here in the heavy rain? Look at the pant leg of yours, how much water got on it. You’ll cry when you have to wash it.”

“It’s okay, there’s the laundry lady.” Sheng Wang went straight into the most inner part of the store.

Boss Zhao stretched his neck out to look in bafflement, and saw Sheng Wang taking three boxes of pen refill, for all red and blue and black. Other than those, there were also a paper knife, ruler, scotch tape, and correction fluid……

“Okay okay okay, what are you doing? Trying to open up a wholesale market?” Boss Zhao zoomed out from behind the cashier, and followed Sheng Wang around the shelf back and forth, like a parent worried about his son misusing his money.

Sheng Wang’s eyes were still darting around the shelf. “I’m not doing wholesale, these are all what I need.”

Boss Zhao was even more confused. “I get it for the pen refill, I know you all use it way too quickly. But why wouldn’t you have a ruler and a pen knife and correction fluid? You haven't gone to class before?”

Sheng Wang explained in all seriousness, “I did, but I’ve always lost my stuff. They just disappeared into thin air, and I needed to borrow.”

Boss Zhao tsked, and said, “All mischievous sons in the world are the same, scatterbrained and leaving their things everywhere.”

Just after he spoke, he saw Sheng Wang take three stacks of post-it notes. He couldn’t help himself once more and chided, “One stack is enough, why take so many?”

“I’m using it to remind me to not keep losing my things.” Sheng Wang said, “So I wouldn’t have to keep borrowing from other people.”

He took a few more items, and nearly couldn’t hold all of them at once when he finally softly said, “I don’t want to borrow from others anymore.”

A difference of three years constitutes a generational gap; Boss Zhao felt that that was an entire Pacific Ocean between him and Sheng Wang. He couldn’t understand what exactly were current students thinking, he only

understood that if Sheng Wang kept shopping around, he would be late for class.

Furthermore, the way Sheng Wang was lingering before the shelves was actually a little lost, like not even he knew what he still wanted to buy. Boss Zhao clapped his back as he pushed him towards the check out area, and said, “Don’t pick anymore, and put down the repeated items too. You can come take more when you’re done with using them. And that’s all for the items, let me scan and check your things out.”

He found a plastic bag to contain the items, and after some thought, he then wrapped another layer in order to prevent the rain from drenching them. When he passed the bag to Sheng Wang, Boss Zhao couldn’t help but say, “Actually, it would be dinner time after one more period. You totally could have come here around that time, either way you have to go to Beyond Parasol Trees for food. This isn’t any particular emergency.”

Sheng Wang said, “My pen just happened to run out of ink; if I don’t buy now, I wouldn’t be able to use it for the next period.”

Boss Zhao nodded. He bought that reason.

However, Sheng Wang knew it himself, that these were all excuses: he simply didn’t want to drag it out to dinnertime, because Jiang Tian

would definitely be next to him, and he didn't want to let Jiang Tian witness the way he was when he bought those things.

Flustered, and aimless.

He definitely looked foolish.

Sheng Wang hurried back to Mingli Block with a plastic bag in his hands. Perhaps it was the urgency that the bell for lesson prep brought about, or maybe people tend to be more confused in rainy weather, his legs moved faster than his brain. Either way, by the time he realised, he was already at the top floor.

Old Wu walked to Class A with a thermos, and stopped a boy who was walking past him on the way. "Jiang Tian, please take the papers and give them out first."

Jiang Tian received the papers, and strided towards the classroom. When he passed by the stairs, he spotted Sheng Wang, who was rooted to the ground.

He carried an umbrella in his hand, the beads of water drip dropping off and forming a giant puddle on the floor. His other hand held a plastic

bag, the name Xi Le Convenience Store was printed on it along with Fuzhong's school logo. He probably just bought something, and was in a rush to go back to class.

With one look and Jiang Tian already knew: he came to the wrong floor. His expression was vacant and awkwardness filled every fibre of his being, he even looked a little sorry for some strange reason.

Jiang Tian looked away and his brows furrowed in a flash. He turned back to face Sheng Wang as he said, "Here to find Jing-jie?"

Sheng Wang shook his head. His dark pupils stared at Jiang Tian unblinkingly. Yet a moment later, he shook his head again as though he just came back to himself. "No, I just……"

He paused, and then said in resignation and self-mockery, "Came to the wrong place."

Jiang Tian eyed the forced smile at the corner of his lips, and didn't continue the conversation.

Sheng Wang was the one who flunked on purpose, who decided to go further away like he was minding his own business. Yet, when he saw that smile, he still felt upset, and a little heartache too.

“This is way too embarrassing, just treat it as you’ve never seen me, yeah? I’m heading down now.” After Sheng Wang spoke, he turned around to go downstairs. When he went around the corner, his eyes lifted towards his direction.

However, Old Wu had already arrived. He asked, not understanding, “Why aren’t you in class yet?”

By the time he finished his words, Sheng Wang had already disappeared from the corridor.

*

When he returned to his seat, Shi Yu was startled by that giant bag of items. “What are you doing? You plan to live in the classroom?”

Sheng Wang placed the items inside his desk one by one, and said without looking back, “I wish.”

“Why? You received a blow?”

“I didn’t.” Sheng Wang opened a box of refill and took a new pen ink refill out, and changed the pen which ink just ran out last period. “It’s just that the rain is too troublesome, and I’m too lazy.”

It was because the rainy day spelled trouble, that after he tried so hard to crush certain feelings in its roots, before it even had a chance to work, he

nearly failed because of one thing.

All it took was a single glance at Jiang Tian when he was upstairs.

A while later, with dinner and going back to the dorms to sleep and what not…...fuck, can he even live?

Perhaps the heavens heard his cries, he didn’t manage to have that dinner at Beyond Parasol Trees in the end. That was because Jiang Tian’s father, Ji Huanyu, went to Old Man Ding’s house.

Translator’s notes:

[whispers] it’s about the tiny details

It’s Sheng Wang’s unused umbrella because he always shared with Jiang Tian

It’s the various stationery that he kept borrowing from Jiang Tian

It’s not about missing his seat upstairs, it’s about missing the person behind his seat.

Number of Tianwang interactions in this chapter: 1

Chapter 061 - Gift

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you could! Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Note: A change has been made for "Beyond Parasol Trees" (a location) to "Wu Tong Wai" (the pinyin version of the term). If you have any strong feelings about this change, feel free to contact me.

“Can You Come Back?”

Old Man Ding had an elderly phone, the font size as gigantic as bronze bells. Apparently, Jiang Tian wanted to buy him a normal smartphone back then, and tried to patiently convince him that he will teach him how to use it. However, the old man refused no matter what, claiming that he’s old and couldn’t see clearly, there was no way he could read a single word on the screen of a smartphone.

The old man was a force to reckon with, and threatened that he would sell the smartphone as soon as humanly possible. He was genuinely capable of doing such a thing, therefore Jiang Tian was unable to change his mind otherwise, and could only buy him an elderly phone. The old man adored what kids wouldn’t spare a second look at, and brought the phone with him everywhere he went.

Jiang Tian was a gauche person, so the old man loved to tease him especially much. He would often brandish the phone in front of other people, saying that it’s Xiao-Tian who bought it for him etc etc. Naturally, he did show off to Sheng Wang too. When that happened, Jiang Tian was eating his food next to him, and the more he ate the more his expression

turned deadpan. In the end, he dumped a giant chicken drumstick in the old man's bowl, saying, "Don't talk while eating."

The old man wanted to smack him with his chopsticks, saying that Jiang Tian is a cheeky brat with a bad temper. Sheng Wang nearly perished from laughter.

One could assign contact numbers as kin on the elderly phone, it was convenient and also for the case of emergency. Jiang Tian took up the number 1 spot, and the old man said this is enough. Later, Jiang Tian notified Xi Le, and added Boss Zhao in too. When Sheng Wang came, he scooted over a little, and so Sheng Wang took up spot number 2 and Boss Zhao ended up with spot number 3.

However, under normal circumstances, Jiang Tian was the only one Old Man Ding would call. Therefore, when Sheng Wang received the call he was caught by surprise.

The old man said, "Ji Huanyu is here to be a menace again. Bring Xiao-Tian to eat elsewhere, don't let him come here."

Now that was quite the strange statement, Sheng Wang was a little confused by what he was hearing. "Grandpa, you're trying to say that don't

let him know Ji Huanyu is there?”

“You don’t say? If not, I would have called him straight away,” the old man said, exasperated.

It was strikingly obvious whenever Old Man Ding lied through the phone: scared of more questions, his tone would deliberately sound harsher, and hang up straight away after a few curt lines, not giving the person the chance to speak.

Even Sheng Wang knew how to distinguish his words, not to mention Jiang Tian.

Sheng Wang let out an “oh”.

The old man continued, “I’m afraid the kid will get into a bad mood after hearing Ji Huanyu’s name.”

That was indeed true; Sheng Wang had witnessed Jiang Tian’s change of mood before. Back then, all it took was a mention from Jiang Ou and his mood visibly—dramatically—changed for the worse.

That was kind of strange, Sheng Wang had never fingered out why.

He couldn’t resist but ask, “Grandpa, why is Jiang Tian so bothered by him?”

Old Man Ding did not get what he was saying at the start. He said, as a matter of factly, “Ji Huanyu is no good at all, that’s why. Is there any difference to having this thing that is his father around at all? Quite normal to be annoyed by him, ain’t it.”

“No, I do get it.” Sheng Wang deliberated, “But if we’re talking about not taking care of him enough, well, when I recall what you’ve said, actually……”

Actually, Jiang Ou and Ji Huanyu were basically of the same stripe. They were both negligent in their care towards Jiang Tian when he was young. The difference was that Jiang Ou had no other choice, while Ji Huanyu was simply being himself.

Yet, Jiang Tian’s attitude was as different as day and night. Though he may not be as close and intimate like mother and son towards Jiang Ou, he was protective of her at the very least. He cared about her, and could not bring himself to be harsh with her. On the contrary, he was extremely repulsed by Ji Huanyu, to the point that he refused to spare him even a look, let alone talking to him at all.

When he heard Old Man Ding talk about Jiang Tian's childhood, Sheng Wang did suspect whether Ji Huanyu hit Jiang Tian before. Later on, he rejected that theory, as Jiang Tian was completely unafraid of Ji Huanyu at all.

When the father and son were around each other, it was Ji Huanyu who was the one treading carefully around him. That kind of cautiousness wasn't necessarily surface level, but rather…… it was more like he was afraid that any carelessly spoken word would touch Jiang Tian's sore spot. Jiang Tian was the one who harboured zero fear towards him, not even a single trace. There was only vexation.

To put it in a more serious term, Jiang Tian despised him.

Old Man Ding could not clarify while being all the way on the other side of the phone. After all, he did not live with the Jiangs in those years, he would not know the cause of the animosity between the father and son. He was the same as Sheng Wang, he could only guess.

But it's so hard to guess with Jiang Tian.…

Sheng Wang thought.

“Then, why is he at your place?” Sheng Wang asked.

Old Man Ding scoffed, “What else? He found out that Xiao-Tian doesn’t look down on an old man like me, and is close to me too. He’s trying to make me a middleman, I suppose. Maybe he thought that I’ve lost my marbles with my age, that he could treat me like a moron. As if he only needs to pose around a bit, and I’ll think he’s a good boy again. Or maybe he thought that after he showed a little filial respect to me here and there, Xiao-Tian wouldn’t be so bothered by him.”

Sheng Wang felt that it was rather funny: an actual flesh and blood father, somehow ended up in a situation where he needed to show filial piety to his old neighbour in order to win some affection in his son’s eyes. He supposed that that was a talent too.

“What is he trying to get you to be a middleman for?”

“One for reconciliation.” Old Man Ding sighed, “A 40+ years old man who has been playing around for so many years, suddenly recalled that he still has a son out there, probably wants to resolve whatever issue they have between them.”

“Wasn’t he previously overseas?” Sheng Wang said.

“Yes, I’ve heard his classmate or friend has gotten some major illness, cancer or something else. He probably started panicking the more he thought about it. Kid, this is human nature, everyone becomes like this at this age, everyone tends to overthink. When you’re young, you’re whatever this, whatever that, and now you start to regret. When you look at other people falling sick, you would think: what if you become like this one day, and not have a single loved one around you? That would be quite upsetting too.”

But, when he was young, Jiang Tian didn’t have his loved ones around him too.

Sheng Wang internally retorted.

Old Man Ding smacked his lips, and grumbled resentfully, “Even if you get a cat or a dog, you still have to stay around it, creating bonds or something. Look at him, it’s been so many years, does he know how much Xiao-Tian cannot stand him? Daydreaming about some coaxing and cajoling to mend their relationship, even wanting to bring him overseas. Ha __”

The old man coldly hmmphed, and said, “I’m the first one to object!”

Until he hung up on the phone, all Sheng Wang's head was filled with was "even wanting to bring him overseas". Despite knowing that Jiang Tian did not plan to pay any heed to Ji Huanyu at all, he was still a little bothered.

Tonight's dinner was eaten at the cafeteria.

Blessings to Gao Tianyang, when this knucklehead entered the cafeteria, due to his overly uninhibited footsteps, he accidentally slipped on the cleaning rag that the cafeteria lady soaked in soap, and fell ass-down onto the ground, even slipping several metres on the floor.

The classmates following behind him all heaved with laughter.

Sheng Wang was originally still a little down, but with that even he couldn't resist anymore, and was doubled over in laughter for a while before he realised that he was resting on Jiang Tian's shoulder out of habit again, and Jiang Tian was laughing too.

Gao Tianyang rolled his eyes while he still sat on the ground, and stuck his hand out. "The hell you're laughing at? Can someone *please* help me up already? To think I've provided a bit of momentary happiness for your stressful lives, how unappreciative of you!"

Song Sirui could barely stand up straight from laughing, Sheng Wang went over to lend a helping hand. Everyone helped him up in a scramble of limbs.

“Eh, are my pants wet?” Gao Tianyang tried to look behind him.

“It’s fine, there isn’t that much piss,” Song Sirui said.

“Fuck you, I’ll pull your pants down and change into them, don’t you test me,” Gao Tianyang angered.

“I won’t, you can’t fit in anyway.”

“Fu—”

Gao Tianyang was ridiculously disgruntled, and sat down with everyone else while still covering his behind. He said, “Sheng-ge, I know you are a good person, I want to eat the sweet and sour ribs, curry briskets and spicy chicken from the number 8 window, can you help me get it? If I don’t manage to eat it, I will die from pain right here today.”

“???”

Sheng Wang turned and saw the long queue that had already made two turns and snaked all the way to the cafeteria’s entrance, and asked incredulously, “Why do I like you so much?”

Gao Tianyang blew a kiss at him, “I’m enchanting, that’s why.”

Right after he spoke, the school card in his hand was taken away by someone.

Jiang Tian held the card between his fingers, and waved it at him, calmly speaking, “I’m buying. What do you want to eat, say that again.”

Gao Tianyang: “.....”

He said, “I want the bok choy, steamed egg and ribs from the number 3 window.”

Jiang Tian said, “Okay, wait.”

Everyone heaved from laughter again.

Other than the number 8 window, the most popular one, there were actually quite a few people at the other windows too. Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang stood at the end of the queue for the number 3 window, Song Sirui and the rest also followed them as they joked and giggled.

The queue wasn’t crowded, but Sheng Wang still acutely felt the presence behind him. Sheng Wang mindlessly fanned himself as he pinched the school card by its corner, and suddenly heard Jiang Tian ask, “Are you that warm?”

“.....”

You’re so good at making conversation.

Sheng Wang paused, and stuffed his card into the pocket. A certain someone’s presence became stronger than ever.

“Is the teaching okay?” Jiang Tian’s deep voice rumbled next to his ears again; it was composed, not as sharp and cutting like the time at Wu Tong Wai.

“Not bad,” Sheng Wang answered.

After he spoke, he realised that the answer was a little too awkward, and added, “It’s a little simple, but it’s not bad.”

Several moments later, he finally heard Jiang Tian reply, “Mn.”

Time flew by in a meal, Gao Tianyang and the rest belonged to the food inhaling, and no matter how cultured Sheng Wang was, he wouldn’t take too long either.

They went back to Mingli Block, and went their separate ways throughout three floors. When Sheng Wang entered Class B, he felt his heart slowly sink down again, like a hot air balloon that reached the end of its journey.

Only at this time, then did he realise how happy he was just now.

The happiness was only ever so momentary, then he had to spend the entire night self-study, or even longer to get himself to calm down.

Five hours for five minutes, an entire day for a single hour. Every day after that was the same process, looping endlessly.

Without anyone noticing, the time he took to eat became shorter and shorter, and the time he went back to the dorms after night self-study became later and later.

Out of the entire level, Class A was the only one with special privileges, they got to stay in the classroom for night self-study. Every other student in the level had to go to the lecture theatre.

At the start, when Sheng Wang left with his bag in tow, more than half of the people in class were still packing up. The second day, it became less than half. Much later, there was barely anyone. In the end, he was the only one left.

When he went back to the dorm, it usually was cutting close to lights out. They barely had time to exchange a few words before silence settled in the dorm with the sound of the lights out signal.

He would close his eyes, listen to the movement from the bed below his, toss and turn a bit, and fall asleep just like that.

No matter how he told himself that he wasn’t giving Jiang Tian the cold shoulder or distancing himself, that he was merely going through some inner conflict for the time being……

…...this was still a course of events basically doomed to happen. No matter how much he wanted to deny it, he and Jiang Tian were still inevitably embarking on two different paths.

The weekly test for this week was temporarily cancelled due to the city holding an event for appreciation of great teachers. A few classes from year two were selected for being recorded over the weekend, while the other classes held regular self-study.

Sheng Wang took out an entire question bank as usual, and went through it the moment he opened his eyes until night. When he walked into the lecture theatre with a new book of English Olympiad questions, Shi Yu finally couldn’t resist anymore and said, “The hell, this has to be the third book already?”

“What third book?” Sheng Wang sat in the corner at the back, and said as he took some books out.

“I’ve watched you finish going through two books of Olympiad question banks that are literally this thick. This is the third book already, aren’t you tired?” Shi Yu got a headache from just looking at it.

Sheng Wang, however, was stunned and said, “It is?”

“Don’t you know how many questions you did yourself?”

“I didn’t really notice.”

He didn’t stop at just not noticing, he didn’t bother to be selective with the quality of the question bank at all. As long as there was something to fill up his spare time; the busier he was the better.

The corner of Shi Yu’s mouth twitched, and he flashed a thumbs up at him. Sheng Wang was really downright terrifying of late, he did not have the audacity to be on WeChat while he sat beside him, and inexplicably ended up doing questions with him for the past few days too.

It was scary now that he thought about it: he was done with half a book, he had never been this hardworking for his entire life up till this point.

“If the weekly test wasn’t cancelled, I think I could jump up a few places this time,” he said, half humble and half smug. Unfortunately, he did not receive a reply.

Sheng Wang had already stuffed in his earpiece and began studying.

He watched him for a while, and felt that the other person was in a strange state: like he was focusing particularly hard, but his mind seemingly elsewhere too.

……

The bell signalling the end of night self-study rang. Both Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin had packed their bags. They were already used to Sheng Wang's late return, and after waving him goodbye, they went back to the dorm.

The giant lecture theatre slowly became empty again.

The song happened to shuffle to quite an old English song, the hoarse voice of the singer was low but gentle. Sheng Wang stilled, and recalled that this song was acquired from Jiang Tian's playlist.

Perhaps it was just an unfortunate coincidence, that every time the phone shuffled to his song, it was day; the surrounding was chaotic and lively, causing it to seem overly low spirited and quiet. It was only at this moment then he realised that the song was honestly really good.

Sheng Wang sat for a while, and busied himself with writing a few nouns down. In the end, he stopped writing. The sound of human voice suddenly came by the window, and two boys passed by with a basketball. As they tried to snatch the basketball from each other, the sound of the basketball hitting the ground echoed along the corridor.

A teacher who happened to pass by roared at them, and the two obediently fled with the basketball in end. Their laughter could be heard even from a distance.

Sheng Wang looked away, and suddenly plucked out his earpiece, hurriedly keeping his pencil case and books. He did not know what was up with him either, all he knew that was in this instant, he was struck by the desire to go back.

Therefore, he slung his back across his shoulder, and ran towards the dormitory block in large strides.

When Sheng Wang ran up to the 6th floor, it was 10.45pm, much earlier than the previous few days. When he opened the door, he was met with the astonished looks on his dormmates' faces.

Qiu Wenbin asked in confusion, "Are you okay, Sheng-ge? Why the rush?"

Shi Yu said, “So early for today?”

Sheng Wang, however, did not reply to a single question. His eyes scanned across that lower bunk, the study table, and even the sink and the bathroom, but he did not see any trace of the other person at all.

He caught his breath as he supported himself against the door. He placed his bag on the table next, and pretended to be asking casually, “Where’s Jiang Tian?”

“He isn’t back yet,” Qiu Wenbin said, “doesn’t he usually come back at nearly 11?”

Sheng Wang was stupefied.

Qiu Wenbin then realised what was happening, and said, “Oh, yeah right, you’re usually a couple of minutes later than him. It’s normal that you wouldn’t know.”

In that moment, Sheng Wang found it difficult to put what he was feeling into words. He was dazed for a few seconds, and felt as though his heart was stabbed by something, both a gentle poke and a heavy slam.

From a certain day onwards, he really did lose track of Jiang Tian’s schedule.

“Why……” Due to the exertion from running, his voice was a little parched and hoarse. He paused for a while before he said, “Why is he coming back this late too, studying hard?”

“I don’t know, I think it’s for the competition or something?” Qiu Wenbin guilessly said, “I’ve seen him copying things recently, I think it’s some notes and questions.”

Sheng Wang nodded.

He stood by the table for a while, and felt a little insipid. After walking for a couple of rounds, he grabbed his collar as he said, “I’m going out to the balcony for air, the run back is overheating me like crazy.”

“Okay,” Qiu Wenbin said, “watch the time then, Sheng-ge. It’ll be lights out soon.”

“Got it.”

There was an outdoor faucet at the balcony, it could be used for washing of giant articles of clothing and blankets. Some dorms would also take water from there in order to mop the floor.

Sheng Wang closed the balcony door and fanned himself. He then sat down at the edge of the basin area, and stared at the ground with his hands

propped against the white porcelain surface.

The running took too much out of him, he needed to rest. He needed to catch his breath.

Ages later, he heard muffled voices in the dorm. Yet another moment later, the balcony door opened with a click; someone came in.

Sheng Wang's eyes remained on the ground. He knew who it was, but he couldn't muster the energy to smile. He was feeling kind of upset.

There definitely weren't any reasons at all.

Jiang Tian didn't ask if he was okay, neither did he ask why he was sitting there.

The balcony was very quiet; he merely stood before Sheng Wang, and was probably looking at him with his eyes lowered the same way he was before too.

Quite a while later, Sheng Wang pursed his lips, moulded his face into an appropriate expression, looked up and attempted to joke, "Hey I'm getting some air out here, why are you in my way?"

After he spoke, he spotted a thick leather bound notebook in Jiang Tian's hand instead.

"I've been in your way for a while now." As Jiang Tian spoke, he placed the notebook by his hand, his finger lightly tapped on the cover. "It's for you."

"What's this?" Sheng Wang was stunned. He flipped through a couple of pages after taking the book, and was starting to be unable to flip through anymore.

He had seen something like this before: when his ankle was sprained and he rotted away at home from sheer boredom, Jiang Tian went through several different books, and compiled a bunch of interesting questions for him.

That item was like this too, it was labelled with the name of the book, the page and question number. It clearly stated what made the question special, and why it was selected for a look through.

However, this was slightly different this time: the book before him was more precise than before. He didn't need to go search it up himself, all those questions were cut out from their respective books, neatly pasted

inside the notebook one by one. They were separated by subjects and types, the unique points as well as beneficial points were labelled at the side too.

At the later half of the book, the corresponding answers and solutions to the questions were written down too. Every single line matched.

Jiang Tian said, “You’ve mentioned the teachers weren’t as in depth. With these, it should be enough.”

The questions were all individually handpicked, question by question. They consisted of all mathematics, chemistry and physics. If Jiang Tian could understand a topic to a certain level, Sheng Wang could manage it too. Perhaps, this could be counted as a simple and crude gift.

He wouldn’t take anything from other people, he only knew how to give. All he knew was to search and carve from within himself, and extract whatever he could, giving all of them to people he cared about.

Sheng Wang said he flunked his exam, so he will pull him back up. Sheng Wang said the teachers weren’t as in depth, so he will make up for it.

This was the most practical thing he could think of.

Therefore……

Jiang Tian's eyes were on him as he asked, “Can you come back?”

Translator’s notes:

AND SO HERE WE ARE, AT MY FAVOURITE SCENE, AND TEARS ARE WELLED UP IN MY EYES AS I TYPE.

To clarify, the final line in cn was “□□□□□?” meaning “Can you do well enough in your exams to come back?” To me, the scoring part is more like a prerequisite for Sheng Wang to return, and within the context of the passage, the prerequisite isn’t strictly necessarily IMO to convey what Jiang Tian was truly asking, the act of handing him a compiled notebook of questions was enough to suggest the academic aspect. Also that is just clunky as hell. So, I’m just leaving it out here because I am very, very biased.

Jiang Tian literal saint

I cri

A compiled list of items Jiang Tian made/had to make people Stay:

- For Jiang Ou, a ribbon from her blouse, gripped tightly in his sleep
- For his grandma, a tag with his name and his photo, to remind her who he was

- For Sheng Wang, a painstakingly compiled collection of questions, to ask him: come back.

Chapter 062 - Wooden Block

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“You Don’t Know About Lin-zi and I, but Jiang Tian Already Knew Though?”

Sheng Wang’s heart abruptly hurt.

It was as though someone pinched the corner of his beating heart, and instantly, all he felt was a sour ache as his heart weakened.

Upon facing a Jiang Tian like this, he was physically incapable of bringing himself to say the word “no” at all. All of a sudden, he thought that he was quite the fool: after so many days of busying himself here and there, when it came down to it, all it took was a single line from his Ge and he was back at square zero. He wanted to say “You really are quite something”, but he could not speak at all.

For a long while, all he could do was to hold that notebook in a deathgrip; he did not speak, nor did he look up. He did not move at all. Only when that sour, aching feeling dissipated with the pumping of his heart and the flow of blood, and that it no longer hurt so much anymore, then he rapidly blinked his eyes several times.

“I can,” he softly spoke, his voice still slightly cracked. He pursed his lips as he cleared his throat, and then waved the notebook. “With this, if I still can’t go back, then I don’t even deserve to be here.”

Jiang Tian didn’t say anything.

His eyes were born gorgeous, his eyelids were paper thin, the crease at the end of his eyes weren’t long, but instead, they slightly tilt upwards. When his gaze swept across here from the tailend of his eyes, it always appeared both cold and arrogant, like he held no regard for anything at all. However, when he plainly made eye contact, his gaze slightly sunken and reflecting the sparse dots of lights—barely bright at all—you were the one that stood within his eyes.

Sheng Wang stood in his eyes for eons, and finally nodded, saying, “Okay.” Afterwards, the sharp edges he seemed to put up around him all gradually softened, like he finally let out a sigh of relief.

In that few seconds, Sheng Wang even had the illusion that he was on the same wavelength as his Ge. This illusion gave birth to an impulse within him, he wanted to ask, “Ge, can I hug you”. However, just as he was about to speak, the bell for lights out rang.

He was startled and snapped out of it.

There was a ever so slight trace of osmanthus fragrance in the air outside the balcony; under the temperature in late November, the flowers ought to have all wilted and fallen off. Yet, somewhere, there were those scarce few flowers who were stubbornly giving out that nearly imperceptible fragrance. That bit of impulse within Sheng Wang gently faded amidst the remnant scent.

He straightened up as he grabbed the book, and said to Jiang Tian, “Let’s go in?”

“Mn, the temperature has dropped.” Jiang Tian glanced beyond the railing, and side-stepped to open the balcony door, motioning for Sheng Wang to go in.

Earlier on, his grip on the book was too tight, and relaxing his hand out of the blue caused it to feel both numb and sore. Sheng Wang rotated his joints as he walked into the dorm, and when he went over the short doorstep at the balcony door, he felt a light pat on the back of his head.

Maybe it was some form of soothing, or something else.

Sheng Wang stopped, and whipped his head back; Jiang Tian had already entered. He went straight past the long study table, grabbed his clothes and towel from the closet, and said, “I’m taking a shower.”

Shi Yu was sending messages with his legs crossed on the bed. Qiu Wenbin clipped the portable lamp onto his bed’s railings, and reminded, “Deity, you gotta hurry up, the teacher on patrol will be coming here later.”

“I know,” as Jiang Tian spoke, he entered the bathroom.

“Sheng-ge, why are you still standing here?” Qiu Wenbin left the bed to retrieve a book. Due to Sheng Wang standing rooted next to the balcony door, the area seemed a little squeezy.

“Hm?” Sheng Wang ran his fingers through the hair at the back of his head, and said, “Oh, it’s nothing. I was just thinking.”

Jiang Tian was soon done with his shower and came out. Sheng Wang proceeded to take over his shift as he grabbed his clothes and towel. Water vapour still fogged within the bathroom, and as the hot water descended upon him, he suddenly could see it all clearly now; or rather, the moment he told Jiang Tian he could “go back”, he already figured it out.

All he did was to like someone, what's the big deal? A lifespan of a human is like 80-90 years, he's still at the start. The future is so long, so far that he couldn't see the end of it at all. He just happened to fall for Jiang Tian in this period of time, that's all. He wouldn't know how long it would last, and he wasn't planning to say anything either. He also understood that there is no way anything is going to come out of this.

The future is a straight line; he only wanted to go side-ways at this point for a bit, he will have to go back sooner or later. Was this really a serious issue?

Not at all.

The hot water for the day was finally completely used up, the water pouring down on him soon turned cold. Sheng Wang slammed the tap shut, took a towel and started drying his hair.

He sneezed in the midst of the dissipating steam, and thought: *to hell with cooling down, I'm going back to Class A.*

Sixteen-seventeen years old, the time for living to the fullest.

Other people gaze at flowers as they ride on horses, is he hurting anyone with a few more glances at his Ge? It's not like he'll be missing a

slice of flesh or anything. Besides, his Ge is a wooden block, what is there to be scared of.

(t/n: To gaze at flowers as you ride on horses: a fleeting glance in passing, or to or to jump to conclusions based on limited information)

*

The moods of teenagers are just like weather in June: when it's pouring and storming and the dark clouds loomed above everyone, it seems that the clouds are there to stay forever. The moment the rain stops however, the sky is clear, and the warm rays of the sun shine upon the earth.

Sheng Wang was the embodiment of the shining sun himself for these few days.

As Sheng Wang's dormmate slash new deskmate from behind, Shi Yu received the most direct impact.

A while ago, Sheng Wang was buried in studying like he did not want to talk to anyone else at all, finishing one book after another. It was to the point that not even Shi Yu was entirely unaffected, and took a few sets of questions to secretly compete too. He found out that no matter how fast he went, he could never catch up to the other person.

Recently, Sheng Wang suddenly slacked off again. Oftentimes, the teacher would be meticulously going through the question at the front, he would be experimenting with papercutting instead. The few question banks he previously completed were given another round of combing through, and after some picking and choosing, he managed to cut out a few pages worth of questions while the rest went into the trash.

He no longer kept completing questions ceaselessly, and did not pay any particular attention to the lesson. More often than not, he would be reading a dark brown leather notebook while spinning a pen, and occasionally taking out a notebook to scribble down a couple of lines as draft. As he wrote, he would even dig his phone out and chat with people on WeChat.

Shi Yu stole a glance before, and due to how fleeting that glance was, he did not catch any of the content clearly. He could only see the word “Changbai” for the alias. He was baffled for quite a while over that, he still could not recall anyone around them being named “Changbai”.

It was only at night self-study on Wednesday then did he find out who exactly the mysterious “Changbai” was.

Night self-study meant for residential students only began after the day students ended classes. Students from every class would all go to the specified lecture theatre one after another, a bag in hand. There would be a teacher in charge of answering questions at the lectern, and the teachers in the level would usually be the one on duty.

There was plenty enough space in the lecture theatre, and there was free seating. Nobody was restricted by class. Sheng Wang sat in his usual seat at the last row as per the norm, and Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin sat right in front of him, so that they could go back to the dorms together after night self-study.

When the bell to start prepping rang, roughly everyone had moved in, and the classroom gradually quieted.

The teacher on duty scanned around, and figured that everyone had arrived. Just as the teacher was about to stand up to close the door, a boy with a school bag on his shoulder came in. The teacher froze, and questioned without thinking, “Why are you here?”

The students in the midst of self-studying all turned to look over there, and next, commotion began to stir.

The person who just came in was Jiang Tian, the commotion was because as everyone knew, Class A has special privileges, they don’t need to come to the lecture theatre for self-study at all.

Sheng Wang looked up amidst the buzz of discussion; Jiang Tian was conversing with the teacher on duty. As he spoke, he looked up, his eyes swept around the lecture theatre, briefly paused on Sheng Wang, and then said something to the teacher in a low voice. Next, he calmly climbed upstairs, going two steps at a time, and went past an entire row of tables and chairs.

The every goose—no, every person—in the lecture theatre all stuck their heads out to look. Shi Yu was the nearest, and accidentally caught a glimpse of Sheng Wang’s phone.

There was zero obstruction to the phone’s interface, laying on the table in plain sight just like that, like he didn’t care if anyone saw either. On the screen was a WeChat chat. At the top of the frame, was the alias for the other person. This time, he managed to get a full view of the name at last: Changbai Mountain’s Divine Tree

This Changbai Mountain’s Divine Tree had just sent a message half a minute ago, asking Sheng Wang: Which row do you sit at for self-study.

Sheng Wang answered: the last row.

And so Jiang Tian came, the identity of the Divine Tree became clear as day. Shi Yu internally said, *as expected, I can never truly understand terms of endearment between brothers, what the heck even are these.*

Jiang Tian turned a blind eye to the attention he was receiving. He sat down next to Sheng Wang, and dug out a thick book with a dark blue cover from his bag as well with a pen. After all that, his eyelids finally shifted as he asked the person next to him, “Why so dazed?”

Sheng Wang opened his mouth, and asked in bafflement, “I thought you can study upstairs?”

Jiang Tian flipped open the book, and replied with a “Mn”.

“Then why did you come down?”

Jiang Tian said without looking up, “Sitting there for self-study by myself is quite stupid.”

“Oh.” Sheng Wang felt a twitch in his heart, and continued reading his own book. Yet a while later, he suddenly chortled.

Jiang Tian looked towards him with a frown. Sheng Wang said, “I imagined it, it *is* quite stupid.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian ignored him for the entire night self-study.

*

On Friday, Yang Jing looked for them, and gave them two forms. She said the training camp would begin next week, and they will have to fill up the form as well as prepare two sets of ID photos, sized two inches.

“Photos again?” Jiang Tian said, “Didn’t we submit before?”

Yang Jing said in annoyance, “They all went up on the wall of honour thanks to the man surnamed Xu from administration. You want me to go tear it down or what?”

Sheng Wang initially planned to go to the printing shop at the school entrance for a random photo and make do, but Yang Jing then said, “Take a good one, smile at the very least, yeah? Your photo will still have to go up the wall after you do well, don’t make it look like a mugshot.”

“Okaaaay,” Sheng Wang dragged his voice in response.

There was a printing shop next to Xi Le. On the way there, Sheng Wang kept going through his phone gallery. He lived like he had an “auto-follow” function activated, and was constantly half a step behind Jiang Tian. As he turned, he also turned. As he stopped, he also stopped. He did not look up for the whole time.

Jiang Tian told him “eyes on the road” twice, and they all went in one ear and out the other. When he could no longer stand it anymore, Jiang Tian led him towards the tree at the side without a single word. It was only when it was too late to brake and his forehead bumped into something then did Sheng Wang was startled enough to look up: Jiang Tian’s palm was in front of him, and a single step further would be the tree trunk.

“You really dare to not watch where you’re going?” Jiang Tian said incredulously.

Sheng Wang was even more incredulous, “You really dare to lead me to crash into the tree?”

Jiang Tian rendered speechless by Sheng Wang’s words, and he started looking around expressionlessly.

Sheng Wang followed him and looked around too. There was nothing but leaves and more leaves. “What are you looking for?”

Jiang Tian said, “A straighter tree branch.”

Sheng Wang didn’t realise what was going on, and took his words seriously and pointed to a bunch of twigs and leaves, “This is pretty straight, what are you planning to do?”

Jiang Tian said, “Break it and make a walking stick for you.”

Sheng Wang never expected his Ge to have a build up to insulting him, and was rendered rather speechless too. He imagined him holding an end of the walking stick, Jiang Tian holding the other, and someone wearing a pair of round dark glasses….*oh my god*.

“What are you laughing at?” Jiang Tian was exasperated.

With a skip in his heart, Sheng Wang stuck out his left arm and presented to him, “There, a human walking stick for you. Do you dare to hold it?”

He saw Jiang Tian pause, and took his arm back, pretending to sneer as he said, “I can’t believe you even have to think about it. We’re leaving.”

After he spoke, he went ahead with his head down, still busy using his phone.

Ever since the day he made peace with himself, he had been in this state.

“Changbai Mountain’s Divine Tree”, meaning a cold and aloof wooden block. It was as though a tiny person with an itchy hand lived inside his body, and as he took advantage of Jiang Tian not knowing anything at all, he would paw at him for a bit, and scratch at him for another

too. Like that cat picking a fight in the meme, it teetered at the edge, completely unrestrained, having zero respect for the law.

They were all false moves anyway, Jiang Tian wasn't on the same wavelength as him at all, there wasn't a single chance that he could manage to paw at the real figure himself.

However, this opinion only lasted for a week or so before it was busted with a bang.

It was a Thursday that day, and there was still a day before they had to leave for the training camp. Yang Jing had begun urging them to start packing their luggage, and they managed to acquire two absence slips excusing them from night self-study as an exception. Regardless, they had to go to class that day.

The last period on Thursday afternoon was Class A's Olympiad coaching. It was physics. He Jin had been going through a portion of the content of physics at the university level. However, He Jin was unwell for the day and went to the hospital, so the coaching class got Zhao Xi as a substitute.

Sheng Wang did promise a few teachers to definitely go upstairs and listen in for the competition classes. Despite that scene he witnessed in the

alley having happened a long time ago already, there was still a flash of uneasiness when he saw Zhao Xi in the classroom.

He personally thought that he managed to hide that uneasiness very well, but when lesson ended, Zhao Xi went to the office to put down his teaching plan before returning to Class A, and sat down at the edge of the table in front of Sheng Wang.

"Xi-ge," Sheng Wang greeted.

"Waiting for Jiang Tian?" Zhao Xi shot a glance outside the window: Class A students were eating or heading to shower, they had already all left. There was just Sheng Wang and him. "Management's Old Zhao dragged him away again?"

Sheng Wang nodded, saying, "We're not having night self-study tonight anyway, so I'm waiting for him to go have dinner at Wu Tong Wai."

"Oh."

"Xi-ge, aren't you going back?" Sheng Wang asked.

Zhao Xi laughed, and said, "I'm not in a rush, let's have a chat."

Sheng Wang asked hesitantly, "What are we talking about?"

"Talk about why you, kiddo, are avoiding me and Lin-zi recently?" Zhao Xi said.

Sheng Wang's awkwardness instantly reached its limit.

"Sigh, what are you so awkward about?" The way Zhao Xi conversed was very hooligan-like, entirely different from the way he was during class. He was more like a delinquent senior. "I personally am not awkward."

Sheng Wang was shocked, and asked, "You knew?"

"Roughly, I suppose." Zhao Xi switched to a more relaxed position. "Heard a bit of noise from the alley that time, nobody usually walks through that alley, the few old houses are vacated for a long time already, mute and the old man are the only ones living there. Older people tend to sleep earlier, so there's no way he would be up and about at the time. The only ones who will go there would be you and Jiang Tian."

"We thought that we could just let this pass by. But, after a chat with Lin-zi, I was worried that we accidentally traumatised a kid going through puberty—" as he joked, he accidentally broke into laughter too as he spoke, "So while there's free time today, I came to have a chat with you. Were you...spooked?"

Sheng Wang realised that after being torn up on the inside over this for so many days, he ended up forgetting whether his first reaction was

terror. He was hesitant for a moment, and answered, “I’m okay I think.”

“Really? Are you this accepting?” Zhao Xi raised an eyebrow.

“It’s just that I really didn’t think of that, I was slightly surprised, and afterwards I gave it more thought……” Sheng Wang’s expression was complicated for an instant, and he gradually relaxed again. “.....and then I figured it’s no big deal in the end.”

Zhao Xi stared at him, and nodded thoughtfully.

The colour of his pupils was a little lighter than normal people, closer to a golden brown. Perhaps it was the window pane that reflected a swath of brightness into his eyes, that when he looked at him like this, Sheng Wang had the illusion that his thoughts were bared wide open to him.

He lowered his eyes, and the top of the book spun around beneath his finger tip for a few rounds. He wanted to change the topic, so he asked Zhao Xi as if he was making small talk, “Aren’t you scared of traumatising people? Then why find only me and not Jiang Tian? You and Lin-ge are this certain that I’m the only one who saw?”

“Not certain,” Zhao Xi said, “but it’s different though.”

“What’s different?”

Zhao Xi said, “You don’t know about Lin-zi and I, but Jiang Tian already knew though?”

Translator’s notes:

My second favourite scene (or is it?): Jiang Tian leading Sheng Wang into a tree.

For those of you who have read Global University Entrance Examination (novel by the same author), Qin Jiu (ML) does this to You Huo (MC) too :D except it’s with going downstairs and purposely faking a stumble.

Chapter 110, if anyone’s curious

Outtake:

Original, more word for word: Other people gaze at flowers as they ride on horses, is he hurting anyone with a few more glances at his Ge?

Version I so desperately wanted to go with: Other people miss the forest for the trees, does it matter if he misses heterosexuality for his Ge?

also sry the 'preview image' is a scam because it never actually happened :")

Chapter 063 - Declaration

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Sheng Wang Thought of What He Said Earlier, and Only a Single Word Was Left in His Mind: Fuck.

“Jiang Tian knew?!” Sheng Wang was thunderstruck.

Zhao Xi nodded. “Yeah.”

Sheng Wang dropped his book. He stared numbly at it for a while before he bent over to scoop up the book again, and then asked, disbelieving once more, “Jiang Tian knew?”

Zhao Xi: “.....”

He couldn’t help but laugh. “I didn’t see you dropping your book when I came to look for you to have a chat, so why are you dropping it now?”

Sheng Wang did not answer, and remained in stunned silence for quite a while.

Various images flashed in his mind: from groups of two, groups of three, groups of many. In the end, they all freeze-framed on the same line: there wasn’t only one person who said that he and Jiang Tian were super similar to Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting. The person who said it did not imply

anything otherwise, but the person who heard it took it to heart. Sheng Wang had heard it countless times, and Jiang Tian was next to him for nearly every single one.

Therefore, there had to be no way he knew?

But that's impossible.

Sheng Wang thought, at a complete loss.

That can't be……

Otherwise why did he not refute them even a single time after hearing it again and again?

"How would there be no way?" Zhao Xi suddenly spoke. Sheng Wang turned to him, and realised he said the "no way" out loud.

"Isn't it quite normal for Xiao-Tian to know? I've known him for so long," Zhao Xi lamented, "He's still so little when I was in high school. It doesn't really sink in if I don't say it, but now that I'm mentioning it, I seriously witnessed a Jiang Tian that was so tiny? Life is so magical."

There was mirth in his voice no matter what he spoke about, regardless if it was between him and Lin Beiting, or him and Jiang Tian, it

all seemed like casual chitchat. However, at this moment, the more he spoke, the more Sheng Wang's heart was sent into chaos.

Yeah. Jiang Tian stayed in Wu Tong Wai ever since he was a kid, Zhao Xi was someone who stayed here too. They've known each other for so long, and it couldn't be any more normal for him to also know.

Yet, if he already knew about Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting's relationship, then what was he thinking every time he heard the comparisons?

Why was he so quiet every time?

Sheng Wang thought: *did he think that I would lose face if he refute them? Or……*

Whatever that came after the "Or" was way too preposterous, he knew that he shouldn't go in that direction, but he couldn't help to. Therefore, his sunken heart began to gently soar amidst the seemingly aimless thoughts.

He suddenly felt that he was quite hypocritical—he kept going on telling himself, "He is my older brother", but when it came down to it, as long as he thought of that one in a million absurdity, he couldn't help but to

be happy again. Even though this probability was so miniscule to the point that it was negligible, and it would never be proven, ever.

He zoned out with his eyes fixed on a random spot for a long while before he finally asked Zhao Xi, “Xi-ge, do you know what happened when he’s super young?”

“You’re talking about Jiang Tian?”

“Yeah.”

Zhao Xi recalled for a moment, and said, “He didn’t know when Lin-zi and I just got together. He’s too small back then, around five-six years old, I think. I would often help my dad to pass some things to uncle mute, and he always stayed at grandpa Ding’s, who lived opposite.”

“His surname isn’t Ding, I think,” Sheng Wang said.

“Yup, but as to what is his true surname, I don’t think anyone really knows. He rarely brings it up.” Zhao Xi quirked a corner of his lips as he smirked, “I’m even the one who came up with Old Man Ding as a nickname, afterwards the kiddos in the alley plagiarised from me, and even later everyone in this generation all call him that.”

“Everyone? Then the first time I met him, I called him grandpa Ding, but his eyes were so huge when he glared at me?”

“He’s just scaring you. The old sir does have a bad temper, but he’s a pretty kind person too.”

It was Jiang Tian’s desk that Zhao Xi was sitting at, he started fiddling around with a ruler he casually fished from his pencil case. “Back then, Jiang Tian often read in the old man’s yard. What a young age, but such a stubborn temperament. I could already tell this boy will definitely be quite proud when he’s older, and quite gloomy for sure.”

“I’m pretty wild around then, I didn’t exactly have much patience. Sometimes, I would leave after teasing him for a couple of lines, and sometimes, I would chat with him for a bit. At the start, he didn’t respond to me. Later, when he chanced upon books he couldn’t understand, I would go there and go blah blah blah as I showed off. He probably never seen hooligans who love to read too, and thought that it was quite novel, so he reluctantly responded to me. Eventually, we became familiar with each other, and then I introduced Lin-zi to him. Lin-zi was an infamous school tyrant in middle school too, and pulled a long face all the time. When he sat face to face with Jiang Tian…...man, that scene was hilarious.”

Sheng Wang recalled the Jiang Tian in Old Man Ding's words. The two years Zhao Xi mentioned were around when Jiang Tian was locked out from his grandma's house. With that gauche personality of his, the surface level of familiarity he displayed towards Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting only suggested that he cherished them more personally at heart. They were probably the few friends he had in that time.

"Jiang Tian didn't know back then. Later—university, I think, I don't remember what year it was—I came back once to tidy things up over a break, and wanted to find some suitable books for Jiang Tian to read. Instead, I ended up finding a bunch of old thingies. There were two polaroids, and they happened to be stuck in between the old books." Zhao Xi recalled, and his words gave way to laughter, "I was already no longer with Lin-zi at that time, and I personally was a little dazed when I saw the photos out of the blue too, so I didn't immediately keep them away. So Jiang Tian saw them, just like that."

Upon seeing the confusion on Sheng Wang's face, he added, "The degree of...intimacy was around the same as what you saw that day."

Sheng Wang awkwardly let out an "oh", indicating that he got it.

Zhao Xi raised an eyebrow; this hoodlum truly befit his school tyrant origin, as the person implicated himself, he was the one who was completely unbothered instead. “Jiang Tian wasn’t that old back then, not even 10, I think. I thought he wouldn’t get it at all, but for some reason he had an especially strong reaction towards it.”

“Strong reaction?” Sheng Wang didn’t quite understand.

Zhao Xi thought and said, “He was repulsed, by like, a lot.”

Sheng Wang stilled.

That one out of a million absurdity abruptly vanished in the few words that came from Zhao Xi; like a popped balloon, after the explosion, the ragged bits were left to slowly drop, and quietly descend onto the ground.

After an unclear amount of time, he softly asked, “He....he’s that against it?”

“Yeah, he’s so repulsed that he left without taking the books.” Zhao Xi said, “He was still young back then, different from the way he is now. No matter how hard he tried to keep his face stony, it was still evident from

his face. I could tell he was trying to restrain himself out of politeness, but I could also tell that he was especially……”

He frowned as he deliberated over his words. For a moment, Sheng Wang thought he would use the word “disgusting”, but what he went with in the end was “uncomfortable”.

Zhao Xi said Jiang Tian looked especially uncomfortable at that time.

“That’s why I was saying, your reaction today surprised me quite a bit.” Zhao Xi’s light brown eyes turned to Sheng Wang, his hands still fiddling with the ruler, “It’s so drastically different from Jiang Tian’s reaction. However, his reaction was quite rare. Most of the people who knew had the same initial reaction between you two.”

Sheng Wang downcasted his eyes, and chuckled in half self-mockery, half playing along, “Is that true? We must truly be brothers then, we took up both extreme ends of the spectrum.”

“Yeah, it was pretty extreme. I nearly questioned my life over that boy.” Zhao Xi said jokingly, “After he left, I took the entiiiiire day to reflect, thinking: really? Is it really that hard to stomach?”

“What about later?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Later? Later on, I was like, that kiddo is so freaking troublesome, why should I have to coax him? Let him be, damn. In the end, not even two days later, I obediently went to have a chat with him.” Zhao Xi lifted his chin, saying, “Just like the way I’m talking to you know, but not as light-hearted though. He’s very stolid, he refused to reveal any of his thoughts on this at all. I don’t even know if any of what I said had an effect at all.”

“For a time, I suspected if he had some trauma in regards to it. Later on, I discovered that he likely did have something happen to him.”

Sheng Wang violently looked up, but Zhao Xi did not plan to go any further into it. “Just my guess, I don’t have any concrete evidence, so I wouldn’t be telling you. In any case, I have already tried my best, and chatted with him so many times. Not that long later, he moved away from here, and I went overseas too. We did stay in contact, but not often. A year or two, and I’m back in the country for summer break. He came to Wu Tong Wai a few times. The first few times, he said he’s there for Old Man Ding, and later, he finally came to look for me on his own, and awkwardly apologised to me. That’s when I knew he got over it.”

He got over it.

The four words came so easily out of his mouth, but Zhao Xi knew that for someone with Jiang Tian's personality, spending two years to correct an inherent perception had to be a tough internal battle with much push and pull.

It was also from that day that he realised: to Jiang Tian, he and Lin Beiting were truly important friends to him.

"I keep saying that he's too mature, but that's not true, really. When he starts getting proud, he's a match for my unruly ways back then. Honestly speaking, he's constantly asking for it, but that face of his lets him get away every time." Zhao Xi tutted, and his voice lowered, "But, he's very rational. Even people older than him by a lot wouldn't be able to get past this either, not to mention the people the same age as him. He wouldn't let a problem stemming from one person affect his perception of an entire group of people, that's quite rare to see."

As Zhao Xi spoke, he looked up, only to discover Sheng Wang had long since spaced out. Who knew what went into his ears, or what he was thinking of. Perhaps it was the way the hue of the lights in the classroom was too cold or something, but his face appeared pale.

This reaction was rather abnormal, and with some details from earlier clicking together, Zhao Xi gradually began to furrow his brows. He watched the boy’s slightly lowered eyes, and suddenly called under his breath, “Sheng Wang?”

“Hm?” Sheng Wang came back to himself, and looked up to face him.

“I see that you’re zoning out, and your face doesn't look too good. Are you unwell?” Zhao Xi said.

“No,” Sheng Wang shook his head, saying, “I just thought of something that has nothing to do with this, that’s all.”

“Then that’s fine,” Zhao Xi said.

As they spoke, Sheng Wang suddenly noticed a new notification on his phone screen, from two minutes ago. He unlocked his phone and entered WeChat, the message came from Jiang Tian—

Changbai Mountain’s Divine Tree: I’m done over here

Changbai Mountain’s Divine Tree: I’ll wait for you downstairs?

Sheng Wang looked at the alias with mixed feelings, and typed out a reply: omw

Zhao Xi asked, “Jiang Tian is done with his stuff?”

Sheng Wang nodded, “Yeah.”

“Then, let’s go. Downstairs.” As he spoke, he stood up from the table, and even remembered to put the ruler he had been fiddling with back inside Jiang Tian’s pencil case.

Sheng Wang followed behind him; the more he looked at that alias, the more out of place it seemed, therefore he changed it to “The Emperor of Acting in the Jungle”. Who knew if it was a jab at Jiang Tian, or at himself.

The cold light in the classroom darkened just like that. Sheng Wang looked up, and saw Zhao Xi switching off the lights. He changed the alias, and just as he tapped on “confirm”, Zhao Xi, who was in front of him, suddenly turned around. He asked, “Sheng Wang, I’ve wanted to ask you this just now, actually. Are you also……”

The way he said it was hesitant and euphemistic, but Sheng Wang understood near instantaneously. His heart skipped a beat, and flashed a smile at Zhao Xi on instinct, saying, “Hey, what are you thinking about, Xi-ge? I like girls.”

Zhao Xi looked at him with lowered eyes, the roguish light in his eyes absent for once. Instead, there were a few traces of gentleness laced within. He nodded, saying, “Ah, that’s good.”

Sheng Wang paused.

“It’s not an easy path to walk on,” Zhao Xi then said, like it was both a lament and something he aimed at Sheng Wang.

“I know.” As Sheng Wang spoke, he reached out to tug at the handle on the classroom door.

However, when the door opened, Jiang Tian was already swiping on his phone by the door. God knows how long he had been standing there, and how much of the conversation did he hear.

Sheng Wang thought of what he said earlier, and only a single word was left in his mind: Fuck.

Chapter 064 - Father and Son

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Ji Huanyu Said, “Xiao-Tian, Do You Know? Some Things...Can Be Inherited.”

They walked to the west gate together. Zhao Xi was heading to Xi Le, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were heading to Wu Tong Wai.

The three of them could chat normally when they were together, but for some reason, the moment Zhao Xi left and Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were left travelling side by side, the mood took a turn for the quiet.

Evening at the west school gate was a constant stream of people. The school banned car horns around the school premise, and the items dangling from street food carts were jingling and chiming. The sky was slowly overtaken by the night, the lights in the distance were sparse and scattered, yet to form a single straight line.

Sheng Wang’s head was full of the scene upon leaving the classroom, he didn’t know what to say. As for Jiang Tian, he wasn’t the chatty type. Usually, it was hard to tell if there was something weighing on his mind or if he was simply too lazy to speak.

Still, this moment was overly quiet.

For an instant, a vague thought formed in Sheng Wang's mind. Maybe he did know why Jiang Tian was so silent, or maybe he didn't know anything at all.

It was already said that the troubles of youth were the hardest to tell, his Ge happened to take the cake. Personally, he actually wasn't outdone either.

The old lady at the entrance to the alley was walking her grandson around, stooping and teasing the child with an imitation of how the child spoke. Sheng Wang side-stepped to give way, and his shoulder accidentally bumped against Jiang Tian's chest. Jiang Tian supported him a bit.

Jiang Tian's palms were huge, but they weren't particularly thick either. Sheng Wang could feel the long and slender fingers pressing down against his shoulder, and then backing away after a while.

He tugged at his school bag, slung across a single shoulder, and continued walking only after the old lady left. Perhaps it was because he bumped into him, he wanted to say something to break this ineffable deadlock. However, before he opened his mouth, he heard Jiang Tian say, "I've caught a bit from outside the classroom."

This topic was brought up so jarringly, Sheng Wang stilled.

Jiang Tian looked at the narrow and long alley before them. A short while later, his gaze finally turned to him, like a casual glance. “You have a girl you like?”

“No,” the word left Sheng Wang’s mouth almost immediately.

Maybe it was because he was too quick to answer, but Jiang Tian paused too.

It was like Sheng Wang finally saw the chance and grabbed it. He said, “I was just chit-chatting with Xi-ge earlier. He casually asked me, so I casually replied too. I didn’t mean anything else.”

He thought, and added, “I don’t like any particular girl. There are only so many in our class anyways.”

Jiang Tian’s eyes were on him. A while later, he finally shifted his gaze and nodded, not saying anything else. Like he was simply casually asking too.

Now that he finally explained what he had been holding back, Sheng Wang’s heart slowly sunk back onto the ground. He only cared about finally getting that sigh of relief, only when they went around the corner of the last

alley and heard the sound of human voice from the near distance, a question then suddenly flashed by in his mind.

Why…...did Jiang Tian ask that?

The moment that thought materialised in his head, he peered at Jiang Tian, only to see Jiang Tian looking straight ahead, his expression turning ugly for some reason, seemingly both irritated and disgusted.

The last time he saw him turn that way, it was because of Ji Huanyu.

Sheng Wang looked in front on instinct, and just as expected, he saw a man who had just exited Old Man Ding's courtyard. The other person was still immaculately dressed, his expression was the only thing filled with unkempt.

Old Man Ding's raspy voice came from the door, "Look at the way you are, do you have no shame? Doesn't it look bad for you to keep going on about this everytime you come here? Take a listen at yourself, are those reasonable words at all? Oh, you can just say yes when you feel like it and no when you don't? Does the world revolve around you? Xiao-Tian is a human! You're a complete monster! Don't you come looking for me, and don't you dare look for Xiao-Tian either, the both of us aren't acknowledging you! Scram, and stay as far away from us as possible!"

This was the first time Sheng Wang witnessed the old man truly lose his temper, and not lovingly act harsh. The old man's physique may not be as good as his younger days, but he was part of the military before, he still had plenty of strength. He pushed the person out of the door without any mercy, and Ji Huanyu stumbled a few steps backwards with the force too.

The old man stuck his head out, wanting to shut the door. However, he spotted the people at this side of the alley. He paused, and hurriedly motioned at Sheng Wang, indicating for them to hurry up, don't just watch the show here.

However, Ji Huanyu already saw them. He had lost his face before the younger people like that, and anger born from humiliation was evident in his awkward expression.

He tugged at his shoulders, and tidied up his clothes before walking towards Jiang Tian.

"You! Don't go tell him about whatever nonsense you have, ain't nobody want to hear them! If he wants to hear, he would have heard you a long time ago, no need to wait until now." The old man still wanted to go pull him back.

Ji Huanyu kept a lid on his temper, and pushed the old man back into the yard without any further arguments, and closed the door for him too. “I’ve said it before, I only wanted to have a chat with him. Can you go back inside and rest? No matter what, this is between Xiao-Tian and I, it has nothing to do with other people.”

The old man cursed and yelled inside, Ji Huanyu latched the door shut from the outside. He said in Jiang Tian’s direction, “I didn’t lock, I’m just blocking for a bit. I’ll let go after I’ve said my piece.”

Sheng Wang suddenly felt that he had to somewhat give it to him: he could still maintain the way he was now even under this circumstance. Despite his voice evidently being on the verge of irritation, he still sounded calm as for now.

If the person was younger by around 20 years, he should be quite eye-catching in school. He recalled what Old Man Ding said before, that he met Jiang Ou in high school, and were together ever since. After university, they naturally got married too. It seemed perfectly reasonable for Jiang Ou to have fallen for someone like him too.

He was father and son with Jiang Tian, and in Old Man Ding's old photos, they did look a little alike. But when the man himself stood before him, Sheng Wang felt that they weren't the same.

He couldn't put it into words as to what the difference was, but they were simply just different.

"Let's find a spot." Ji Huanyu took out his phone and checked the time, "Is that corner over there—"

"You can do it right here," Jiang Tian cut him off impatiently, "you can say whatever here."

Ji Huanyu sighed as he looked at him, and put down his phone. "Sure."

He swept a look around. This alley was secluded enough, there wouldn't be anyone coming here. It was even more secluded than a restaurant or a cafe or some other place.

A spot hidden away under broad daylight.

"Sure, then—" he nodded, and turned to look at Sheng Wang.

Jiang Tian coldly scoffed.

He thought that Ji Huanyu was an absolute joke: he was the one who said that he wanted to have a chat, but every time he had to act like this was

a conversation privy to no one else. Why bother? Isn’t that just contradictory?

The mockery on his face was overly obvious, and after feeling as though he had been burned by that expression, Ji Huanyu suddenly could not go on anymore. The peaceful facade he tried oh so hard to keep up finally revealed a crack.

He walked two steps towards Jiang Tian, and stopped halfway through. He couldn’t bear it anymore and said, “Xiao-Tian, it has been years. Your mom has found a suitable partner for her too. I heard that she’s doing quite well these days, better than with me. Why do you keep harping on those issues?”

Jiang Tian looked aside, as though a single second longer would cause him endless vexation. “You think you’re qualified to even mention my mom?”

“No.” Ji Huanyu did admit it really quickly. His eyes were lowered, and did not speak for a long while. He stared at a spot on the ground, thinking of god knows what. A good while later, he said, “I don’t have the rights to mention her, that’s why I’ve never visited her up even up till now __”

“You dare to?” Jiang Tian moved a step.

Ji Huanyu hurriedly said, “No, I’ve never gone to find her. I’ve been avoiding her ever since I came back from overseas. But, Xiao-Tian, that really happened for so long ago. Yes, I was indeed somewhat muddling along, nothing was going well for me at all, it was such a long way off from what I envisioned in my youth. I was a little…...crazed. Back then, I'd already lived separately from your mom for quite a while, you were young, you didn’t really know, but there I really didn’t……”

He deliberated on his phrasing, either out of the need to justify himself, or perhaps he was just scared of pissing Jiang Tian off. He hesitated before he continued, “I already don’t have much feelings towards her. I’m going to be honest, Xiao-Ou—your mom had already been looking at information related to divorce proceedings, I was thinking the same thing too. I just thought that we could still wait, and still go on together. After all, we met each other in high school, and were together for such a long time too.”

He looked at Jiang Tian as he said, “You probably think that I am a scumbag, from top to bottom. I also understand why you didn’t want to let

your mom know. You don’t want her to think that she wasted more than ten years on a dog, right?”

Jiang Tian did not rebuke him.

He bitterly laughed for some vague reason, “It doesn’t matter whether you believe me, I suppose. I was truly head over heels for her when I was with her at the start, I wasn’t thinking of anything else. But, living our lives together wasn’t the same as dating, there were too many troublesome issues. It was part of the reason why I fought with her too. Anyway, there were too many this and that and what not, I was a little dispirited. I don’t know if you have experienced the same situation before too. Sometimes, when the stress gets to you, some crazy thoughts come up in your head, just like that, you’ll think, whatever, I give up. And then you want to do some things that would really take it too far. That’s why……”

That’s why you were messing around with some strange man in the room of that old house?

Jiang Tian often thought that some people were truly hilarious, that the person himself was too ashamed to even speak of what he had done, every time he brought it up, he had to do it away from other people, or just cut himself off. As though if he didn’t say it out loud, those things would gradually be drowned out by people, and fade away in memories. As long

as he wanted to move past that issue, other people had to follow along and forget too.

As though what other people's feelings didn't matter, other people's memories could be erased at will. Are other people…...not human too?

Ji Huanyu would emphasise every time: you were still young.

Yeah, he was indeed quite young at that age, so young that every time he recalled something from that period of time, there were only disconnected parts. Just like the memory of that day, all that appeared was the clouds of cigarette smoke wafting in the room, stinging him to the point that he nearly couldn't keep his eyes open. Cigarette butts lay strewn all over the floor; they were burnt through, with tiny red embers still lit up. Ji Huanyu was entangled with another man in that coiling cloud of smoke.

He was already sick that day, his head heavy. He might still have a fever. Those images even seemed surreal, like graffiti or threatening arms and legs and bodies that came out of a B-grade film.

He might have said something, thus startling the people entangled with each other. And then there was chaos. He seemed to have been tossed aside. Or maybe someone crashed against him. He fell onto the floor. Perhaps he landed on the cigarette butt, yet to completely extinguish. A searing burn at the back of his neck.

Originally, in that year, he kept having similar nightmares. They weren’t terrifying, but he could only suppress that feeling of disgust after waking up and chugging down half a glass of water.

Eventually, the images became blurry as the years passed by, and all he could recall was the smell of cigarettes and the feeling of utter disgust.

Zhao Xi said he was a little precocious, and perhaps that was true. It was true in the way that he knew Ji Huanyu was someone who clung onto his dignity tighter than his life at a tender age, and loved to act like everything was alright.

It was said that Jiang Ou and Ji Huanyu were not that different from each other, both did not know how to take care of him. However, he could clearly tell who did it out of resignation, and who had it written in his blood.

The care he received was limited, therefore the type hidden away in the heart was counted too, therefore his protectiveness over Jiang Ou. When he was brought away, Jiang Ou hugged him and sobbed for a long time, saying that she seemed to keep making mistakes, saying that she was a little useless.

Because of him, Jiang Ou had negated a few years of her life. He did not want her to disregard more than ten years of her life just because of Ji Huanyu, as such he kept hiding it from her.

As long as he hid it from her, Ji Huanyu would never say a word either.

That was why, for a long period of time after that, he kept feeling disgusted, and still had to suppress that disgust before Jiang Ou. Gradually, he no longer had the urge to lash out.

Even a tin can would rust after staying sealed up for so long.

For quite the while, he rejected any sort of touch that was overly intimate in nature. Rationally, he knew that he was taking it too far, but it was honestly too difficult to correct what he did on instinct.

Fortunately, there were Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting.

He saw things that weren’t the norm from the two friends who were older than him, and then he forced himself to gradually make peace with it, slowly get used to it. Until a certain day, he could finally sever Ji Huanyu apart from all the other people, and thus also himself from those things too.

Just like what the two friends said, not all sorts of intimacy represent a certain feeling, and there was no need to be unnecessarily paranoid too. That would only easily backfire.

That did make quite a lot of sense. See, there was Zhao Xi, Lin Beiting, Gao Tianyang…….and many friends of various degrees of closeness, there weren't anyone who caused any absurd thoughts to manifest in his mind.

He wasn't the same as Ji Huanyu.

……

The sky grew darker and darker, and the outlines of their figures finally became indistinct.

Ji Huanyu explained for a long time, and finally started getting impatient. He felt that he didn't really say anything wrong, but no matter what he did, he could not change a single iota of Jiang Tian's mind. He couldn't help but recall what Old Man Ding said: he was the one locked outside the door back then, and now it's your turn.

He didn't do anything, but he felt tired to the bones. Therefore, he gradually turned silent. And no matter how agitated, composed, impatient, or remorseful he was, Jiang Tian was only cold and aloof from the start to the end.

Sheng Wang watched Ji Huanyu; in the increasingly agitated words, he finally got a whiff of what happened. He thought of what Zhao Xi said, and recalled the so-called “trauma”. Even though Ji Huanyu didn’t say anything particularly concrete, he guessed it all.

He then couldn’t help but turn to look at Jiang Tian. In that instant, he had the illusion that Jiang Tian’s despise and vexation floated about in the air around him, as though he wasn’t the victim, more like a witness.

It was just like he spent many, many years, and forcibly removed himself from the messy bygone affairs, and became some irrelevant passerby. And then, in the today culminated from those years ago, he helped to convey a message from the him who had to lodge all over the place.

He said to Ji Huanyu, “I think you are *disgusting*.”

There weren’t any bright streetlights around them, but Sheng Wang could tell that that man’s face turned deathly white. He really was burned by that line.

He stood rooted to the ground. Old Man Ding’s curses, Jiang Tian’s icy gaze…...all sorts of pressure and feelings surged up within him, and he

had the impulse he had at the start, wanting to do something or say something.

Sheng Wang saw him move, and he proceeded to stand in front of Jiang Tian, like he was afraid he might do something. Unexpectedly, the other person’s gaze swept across the two of them, and then he said a line to Jiang Tian.

Ji Huanyu said, “Xiao-Tian, do you know? Some things...can be inherited.”

Chapter 065 - Implied Words

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“It Has Already Backfired for a While Now.”

The alley fell into dead silence. Sheng Wang was stupefied for several seconds before he got what Ji Huanyu was implying. He shot a look at Jiang Tian on instinct, but due to the darkness of the night, he couldn’t tell Jiang Tian’s expression.

He did not know what Jiang Tian was feeling now: embarrassment? Fury? Or disgust upon disgust?

Personally, he was this close to snapping.

He had never seen someone like Ji Huanyu, who messed up so terribly and yet still insisted on dragging other people down with him. He lost his face, therefore he had to make other people feel ashamed too.

He looked at Ji Huanyu’s figure, turning blurrier by the second, half of his face covered in the shadow. He suddenly felt he was seriously blind when he looked at the old photos at Old Man Ding’s, why would he ever

think that Jiang Tian resembled that scumbag when he was young in any way?

Sheng Wang tugged at his bag strap, and moved forward half a step. “Uncle, I actually don’t have anything to do with whatever you said, but I really want to interrupt.”

It was part of what he learned from Sheng Mingyang: the more he was this close to losing it, the more he could instantly welcome the person with a brilliant smile. He had the looks that said he was a cultured good student, so Ji Huanyu treated him as some random classmate who was accompanying him. Despite hearing the mockery in his voice, he did not really take it seriously.

“What are you interrupting with?” Ji Huanyu asked.

Sheng Wang took down the bag that was on his shoulder, lifted it up and presented it before him. “I just wanted to say, if it’s not for you being Jiang Tian’s father, this bag would be bludgeoning against your face now.”

Ji Huanyu’s left foot subconsciously retreated by half a step, and stopped. He frowned as he looked down at Sheng Wang, either thinking that Sheng Wang was sticking his nose in other people’s business, or he was certain that an outsider wouldn’t intervene in private affairs between him and Jiang Tian.

However, the boy before him spoke again—

He shot a glance at Jiang Tian, and said, “But, I think Jiang Tian doesn't have any plans to call you his father, right?”

The moment after he spoke, he swung the bag and smashed it against Ji Huanyu.

“It’s none of your goddamn business how Jiang Tian is doing now? He has a home now, fuck.” After Sheng Wang swung his bag, he grabbed Jiang Tian and walked to Old Man Ding’s house.

It had been a while since Ji Huanyu was around seventeen-eighteen years old boys, he did not know of people who kept his words if he said he was going to hit you. He rubbed his face, dishevelled, and strided after them as he frowned.

Sheng Wang heard his footsteps, and just as he wanted to turn behind to look, Jiang Tian moved him behind him with his hands pressed down on his shoulder.

With a slump of his right shoulder, Jiang Tian's bag slid to his elbow. He lifted up his bag strap, and said to Ji Huanyu, "Haven't you had enough after a hit?"

Ji Huanyu braked in his steps.

He knew it damn well how much he owed his son, the halted footsteps was the evidence. That was because he clearly understood that Sheng Wang's move was just for that one time, he was standing up for him as he was truly pissed. If Jiang Tian made a move, then he would be settling several years of debt all at once.

Old Man Ding could not see the battle situation, and banged on the door from the inside of the house. He yelled, "XIAO-TIAN? XIAO-WANG! XIAO-WANG! HELP ME OPEN THE DOOR, I'M GOING TO

BEAT THIS USELESS THING TO DEATH! WHO DOES HE THINK HE'S BULLYING, AND DOING IT AT MY DOORSTEPS TOO!"

His voice was loud, and with that the dogs from some random house in the alley began barking too, causing a giant racket. Coughs and human voices began to come nearer too. Ji Huanyu hesitated, and his feet finally moved.

He had always been eager to be first, he split hairs over the smallest issues, he cared about his face to an extreme degree. Every time he appeared before people, he would always be immaculately dressed, suave and refined. Yet, there was always someone—someone who remembered the hideous state he was in in that dim room, to the point that he could never truly glow and be respected in front of everyone.

After so many years of struggling, he still felt that he was an utter disgrace in certain moments.

Disgrace.

A corner of Jiang Tian’s lips jerked, like a jeer that he couldn’t be arsed to even sound out. He walked to the door at the old courtyard, and unlatched the closed door. He pulled Sheng Wang and walked in.

Old Man Ding, red in the face and the neck, was blocked from him by Sheng Wang holding him below his armpits. Jiang Tian closed the door once more, and the person was separated out of the door in the night. He did not spare him another look.

After a long while later, Sheng Wang checked around the surroundings as he poked his head out from the patterned cement on the courtyard walls. The spot before the door had long since been void of people, only the used cardboard boxes and plastic bottles that uncle mute left to pile up in the corner were left, knocking against each other in the wind.

Old Man Ding was a little sheepish tonight, he kept thinking that it was his fault for not notifying them on time. “If I managed to squeeze out

time to make a call, then maybe Xiao-Tian wouldn’t have met Ji Huanyu, that mongrel.”

When Sheng Wang went to wash the cups in the kitchen, that was the Nth time he heard him grumble like that. After grumbling, the old sir took a kitchen knife and turned towards him, asking, “Dried bamboo shoots, lotus roots, chestnuts. Which one do you think Xiao-Tian likes more?”

Sheng Wang avoided his blade, and felt a little like he didn’t know if he should laugh or cry. The elderly man was no good when it came to cheering people up, especially when it came to Jiang Tian. After all, Jiang Tian was quite rational ever since he was a kid, and rarely did he need consoling. The only solution the old man could think of was to whip up something good. The person was already angered, so let’s not mistreat the stomach any further too.

As to what Jiang Tian liked to eat, that would be a philosophical question. Old Man Ding had raised him like his flesh and blood grandson,

and he never understood this either. It was because, everytime he asked, he always replied with an “Anything”.

Sheng Wang thought that not even he knew, but unexpectedly, after some thought, he did manage to sort out an order from the three items. “Dried bamboo shoots, I think. He seems to prefer crunchier stuff, and eat them more than the others. He rarely touches food like eggplant and luffa on his own accord.”

The old man flashed a thumbs up at him, and went to dig things out from the fridge.

Sheng Wang initially wanted to pour two glasses of water. However, thanks to inspiration from the old man, he searched all over the kitchen and found a packet of chamomile. He sprinkled a few in the glass, wanting to quell some of Jiang Tian’s anger. That would still be better than nothing at all.

That night, the old and the young tried with all their might, but Jiang Tian remained silent from the start to end.

Sheng Wang suddenly flashbacked to the first time he met Jiang Tian. He was baffled for quite a while, thinking why the long face all the time. Now, he finally understood. If he ended up with a dad like that, witnessed all those hideous things, and became an adult under an environment like that, he would also be hard pressed to find anything worth being happy about.

The luggages were long since packed in the dorm, and there was no need for night self-study either. They stayed at Old Man Ding's for a lengthy amount of time, and by the time they went back to school, the residential students were done with night self-study too.

Students were everywhere along Road #3, some would 'travel from afar' to Xi Le to buy the snacks that the other convenience stores didn't stock. Some had a basketball in their hand, and when they passed by the basketball court, they aimed the ball at the basket a couple of times for the fun of it.

Jiang Tian would occasionally look over at the sports ground, and his eyes would half narrow. A while later, he would retract his gaze again. He was zoning out, something was on his mind.

Sheng Wang shot a few glances at him, and spoke, “Ge?”

A few students whooshed past them, Jiang Tian seemed to not catch that.

Sheng Wang thought, and called again, “Jiang Tian!”

“Hm?” The other person finally came back to himself, and turned his eyes to him.

“Inheritance is just bullshit.” Sheng Wang said, “It’s just that he couldn’t find a fault worth mentioning with you, that’s why he even brought in heredity. He merely wanted to upset you, just ignore him.”

“Besides, Auntie Jiang has merits all over, there’s enough to pass on. There’s no way it would be his turn. You’re the one who gets the final say

in anything you do, it has nothing to do with him. You’re different from him……”

Sheng Wang thought about the implication behind heredity, and was quiet for a few seconds. He said, “Don’t worry, you’ll be different.”

Jiang Tian, however, did not reply.

They'd reached the dormitory block at a certain point in time, and a lot of people were making their way downstairs. Some were getting water, buying things, or just popping over. They went against the flow, and all the lights were lit in the sixth floor corridor. The door belonging to the dorm at the corner was wide open; Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin probably just reached too.

When they were about to reach the dormitory door, Jiang Tian, who had been silent for the entire journey, suddenly spoke. “Xi-ge said something before.”

“What did he say?” Sheng Wang asked.

“To not overcorrect myself to the extreme, that’s how I’ll easily overdo it and have it backfire on me,” Jiang Tian said.

Zhao Xi said: *The more you force yourself to go the opposite direction, the more you will pay attention to the path behind you. The more you want to get rid of something, the more acutely you can feel its presence.*

Lin Beiting said: *There will be all sorts of people you will meet in the future, too many, really. No way that as long as you go a little closer, you’ll definitely start thinking the wrong way.*

Sheng Wang said: *Don’t worry, you will be different.*

He actually did understand all of that, but……

Jiang Tian tore his eyes away from Sheng Wang, unloaded his bag and walked inside the dorm. The lights out signal had yet to sound, and the room was brightly lit, encasing the boy who returned late in a fuzzy halo of light.

When he walked through that door, he whispered, “It has already backfired for a while now.”

Chapter 066 - "Vacation"

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"Why Are Your Ears Red Again?"

The first half of the sentence was meant for Sheng Wang.

Because he saw the silence that barely lasted for two seconds before Sheng Wang spoke to comfort him, because he saw the traces of avoidance and upset in Sheng Wang’s slightly lowered gaze; he always seemed to see all these. For every pause, for every unspoken word, for all the laughing and joking around despite not being exactly happy himself, he could see them all.

Therefore, he wanted to let Sheng Wang know that he had stopped splitting hairs over that. He merely despised Ji Huanyu, it had nothing to do with other people.

As for the second half……

For quite an extended period of time, he always thought that he was sufficiently objective and rational. He had always been on good terms with Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting, he had no problem getting along with Gao

Tianyang and the rest too. He thought that he found the perfect balance beyond the boundary itself. That was, until Sheng Wang appeared, and that balance was knocked over.

He knew for quite a while now, he understood clearly that to him, Sheng Wang wasn’t the same as other people. He was setting himself up against himself, that’s all.

Occasionally, he would reflect. He would recall many people and many things, but he would always avoid that point. He would deliberately look past certain unplatonic or other feelings, like as long as he didn’t think about it, those things wouldn’t exist.

Until today, when they met Ji Huanyu at Wu Tong Wai, and heard Ji Huanyu say what he said, he suddenly came around to it. The other person wants to pull him into the darkness? He’ll emerge instead. The other person wants to nauseate him? There is no way he’s getting his way.

Ji Huanyu wanted to make him hesitate and unwilling to take a single step forward, he’ll make peace with himself instead. He refused to fight himself anymore.

He liked Sheng Wang, that’s all. He has fallen for him for a while now.

Due to Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting’s relationship, he understood better than the average people this particular route. He had witnessed the unions and separations along the way. His rational side told him: Don’t drag the other person in, he is very precious. He wanted the person to smile more often.

However—occasionally, in extremely rare moments—he couldn’t hold himself back.

He longed to speak of them to Sheng Wang, but at the same time, he wished that Sheng Wang couldn’t hear him either.

Meaningless noise filled the dorm. A wave of people happened to charge up towards them from the neighbouring dorm, Old Mao and Tong-zi tugged at Sheng Wang as they greeted him, saying that the training camp begins tomorrow, all the best for them, and bring some glory to Fuzhong.

He knew that Sheng Wang couldn't hear him.

He could stand on the road by himself, wishing for Sheng Wang to stop by the road, take a breather and leave. It’s best if he didn’t say hello to him at all; he wasn’t as unaffected as people imagined, he was afraid he couldn’t hold himself back.

*

The training was held in another city, a river separated them from Fuzhong.

According to Jing-jie, they picked an especially remote school, separated from the centre of the city by thousands of miles. It would be too troublesome to keep changing transport, so Fuzhong, in order to reduce all the troubles that came with transferring again and again on the journey, arranged for a private car for them. As the teacher in charge of the team in Fuzhong, Yang Jing was the one who would be bringing them there.

The place to board the bus was the same one where they usually waited for the school bus.

“I get a spare day away from marking scripts for once, and I still have to get up so early for cold wind in my face? The sun isn’t even up yet!” Yang Jing wore a thin woolen coat outside of her sweater and lacquered shirt, long enough to cover her ankles. As the wind blew, she stomped her feet, cursing Big Mouth Xu: older people could wake up early, they don’t even spare a thought for young people’s need for sleep when they arrange for transport.

After she cursed out Big Mouth Xu, she started scolding Sheng Wang instead, as Sheng Wang was wearing fewer layers than her.

Young master Sheng was feeling quite sorry too. He initially took a thicker outer jacket this morning. Now that he no longer needed to wear school uniform the entire day as he was out of Fuzhong, those simple and stylish clothes of his could finally be worn. For some reason, his brain shortwired upon leaving the dorm, and changed into a thinner one.

Yang Jing scrolled through her phone, saying that the temperature would drastically drop today. As Sheng Wang froze his reddened ears off,

he wouldn’t stop moving about before his Ge with his jacket completely unzipped. Jiang Tian side-eyed him several times with a furrow in his brows, and asked him, “Do you know what temperature is it today?”. He stuffed in his earpiece, pretending to not hear a single word.

The fourth round Sheng Wang moved before Jiang Tian, Jiang Tian finally couldn’t hold back anymore, and pulled up his zip for him like last time. He then removed an earpiece from him, saying, “Are you having fun with the cold?”

Sheng Wang internally said, *of course I’m not having any freaking fun, my tears are literally going to fall out from the cold. I’m just making sure if you’re okay from yesterday, hello?!*

Very fortunately, whatever unhappiness caused by Ji Huanyu—that scumbag—seemed to remain behind last night. His Ge would still reprimand him with a frown, he did not reject him or avoid him no-homo style. He would even pull up his zip for him, showing that what happened did not affect him as heavily as he thought.

Still, he was a little worried.

This concern surpassed all and any other feelings, to the point that he even forgot what Zhao Xi said yesterday, and forgot the fact that Jiang Tian knew everything too. All he cared about was to make sure Ji Huanyu did not cause any further trauma for him.

Of course, it was possible that he subconsciously wanted to ignore all that too.

Sometimes, the student mindset worked in strange ways: like as though everything that happened in school stayed in school, everything would be different the moment they left the school gates.

They were heading for training soon, they were on the way for another city, leaving Fuzhong for a brief period of time. Those secretly blossoming feelings that sprouted in the corner of the classroom, the balcony at the dorm, beside the sports ground, or even beneath the shade of the tree, could quietly come out for air for a bit. There was no need for tip-toeing around.

Take it as a limited time vacation, that’s all.

However, the beginning of said vacation did not go as well as he would like; Sheng Wang had a rare case of motion sickness, unlike the one he faked last time.

The car just went past the tollbooth, and he felt his stomach churn. There was a light scent of leather in the car; usually, he wouldn't really notice, but now the scent was making its presence especially known, and tunnelled into his nose with all its might.

He was chatting with Jing-jie at the start, and looked for every opportunity to tease Jiang Tian too. With that, he finally settled down, saying "I'm sleeping for a while", and leaned back against the seat. He even took the hood from a hooded sweatshirt in the inner layer to cover his head and block out the light.

He felt that he had an especially strange disposition: last time he faked being carsick, he could say it out so easily. This time round, now that he was genuinely feeling terrible, he ended up being obstinate about it, as

though saying a single line would make him appear frail and weak or something.

Jiang Tian was good at pissing people off and not good at casual talk. Once Sheng Wang shut his mouth, Yang Jing lost the interest to chat either. She went through her phone, and planned to prop her head with her hand and sleep too. The car soon quieted down. In the midst of his discomfort, Sheng Wang half-opened his eyes, and saw Jiang Tian with a white earpiece stuffed in, his head lowered as his hands speedily flew across the screen, typing. Who knew what he was searching for.

The nausea was getting to him. Sheng Wang didn’t keep looking, and hurriedly shut his eyes again.

With motion sickness, every second that went by felt like an eternity, it was hard to keep track of time. He did not know how long his head tilted upwards for, and suddenly he felt the person beside him shuffle, like he leaned forward.

Jiang Tian called out to Yang Jing with his voice lowered, saying something. Sheng Wang's eardrums were buzzing, so he couldn't really catch anything. Yang Jing's pitch was higher, saying, "Around 2km."

Next was the sound of a zip; she was possibly looking for something.

A moment later, the leather seat slightly shifted again; the person next to him leaned back.

The next second, Sheng Wang felt something touch the corner of his lips. Jiang Tian's deep voice rumbled next to him, "Open your mouth."

Sheng Wang: "?"

He opened his mouth on instinct before he finally opened his eyes.

There was a newly opened packet of preserved plums in Jiang Tian's hand, the one he just took out was already stuffed into Sheng Wang's mouth.

"It's Jing-jie's," Jiang Tian said.

Yang Jing turned around from the front passenger seat. “Why didn’t you say so earlier about being carsick? There will be a rest stop later, we’ll get the driver to pull over for a bit. There’s still at least three hours before we can reach there, you’re telling me you can hold on until we reach?”

Who knew where she bought her plum candy from, either way the sourness was overwhelming. It was probably for motion sickness. The nausea was instantly suppressed by a lot, and some life finally went back into Sheng Wang.

He pushed the candy to the side of his cheek, and said to Jing-jie, “I usually don’t get sick.”

Jiang Tian side-eyed him. “You were last time though.”

Sheng Wang: “.....’kay.”

Yang Jing was amused, the driver meanwhile couldn’t hold himself back, and asked, “Is my driving really that rough?”

Sheng Wang said, “No, you’re pretty steady. It’s just that I woke up too early, the blood supply to my brain was insufficient.”

Yang Jing saw the opportunity, and began to curse out Big Mouth Xu again. She thus sent the person a long voice message, completely fearless, harshly criticising the anti-sleep measure of his.

She attacked the leadership like a rattling gun, the driver was amused as he listened. Sheng Wang pulled down his hood, and leaned back against the chair again, wanting to close his eyes and rest for a bit. However, his eyes weren't tightly shut, and he spaced out as he sneakily watched his Ge through the miniscule gap between his lids.

Jiang Tian still held onto the packet of preserved plums, who knew if he couldn't find a place to put it down or if he thought that Sheng Wang still needed another one. His other hand hovered in the air, his pointer finger and thumb slightly crooked. They were probably stained with powder from the preserved plum.

There were tissues on the car, but they were placed by the windshield in front of the car. Jing-jie was busy, and had no time to deal with the people behind for the time being.

Sheng Wang metaphorically munched on popcorn with his eyes barely open, withholding the mirth bubbling in his heart. He always found joy in watching Jiang Tian being helpless and resigned, his motion sickness even felt much better because of that.

The lady in the midst of complaining was deaf. Jiang Tian called Yang Jing twice before he gave up again. He leaned back against the chair in surrender, and took out another plum from the packet. He ate it himself, and licked the remaining powder on his fingers away.

Sheng Wang lost his joy all of a sudden.

He silently closed his eyes, internally saying, *what the……fuuuuck.*

A moment later, Yang Jing finally tossed Big Mouth Xu aside, turned around and retrieved the packet of preserved plums. She asked, mystified, “Sheng Wang, is the car too cold?”

Sheng Wang opened his eyes. “Hm?”

Yang Jing said, “Why are your ears frozen red again?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He gritted his teeth and said, “Yeah, it’s cold. Can we turn on the air conditioning?”

The driver turned on the heat without a second word, and Sheng Wang felt his motion sickness worsen again.

This car ride was a total of three and a half hours. They stopped by a rest stop halfway through, and ate something, walked around, got some air. By the time they boarded the car again, Sheng Wang had completely recovered.

Around noon, they finally stopped their car at the destination.

When Sheng Wang alighted, he lamented, “How is this only a little remote, this has to be in the middle of the jungle, right? Why a place like this?”

Yang Jing said, “To pen you guys in, duh.”

“We’re not here for labour reform though?”

“A few years ago, it wasn’t that remote. Every summer and winter camp for every subject were all held in schools in the city. Do you know how troublesome is it to take care of you unruly kids? You think that just because you’re not in school, you can get up to any mischief. I remember a year when 12 were caught climbing over the wall to go use the internet in a single night. They couldn’t even directly name and shame, and had to send the training camp office notices about not staying in dorms at night.”

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian met each other’s eyes, feeling like the scoldings their seniors never went through, were all about to be materialised on them.

“Okay then,” he said, having submitted to fate, and followed Yang Jing to the office to report in.

The school was bigger than they thought, it was divided into two zones by a hill, the front and the back, The one behind was the main school campus, the one in front was slightly smaller, and thanks to the generosity

of the school, they carved out the zone in front of the hill all for the training camp.

“Lessons will be conducted in the experimental block in front, as for the lodging, hm, it will be the staff residence block over there. The conditions definitely wouldn’t match up to hotels. They also have double decker beds, but they are much better than normal student residences. Two students to one room.” The teacher in charge of logistics gave Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian two cards, saying, “The dorms are assigned according to school. You two are quite lucky, just nice for a room. There are no lights out at night, no limit to electricity and hot water usage either. However—”

He emphasised, as though he was still reeling, “Past experience tells me I still have to say this, so...try to follow the school rules, okay? You are not here for a vacation.”

Sheng Wang recalled what he was thinking earlier, and suddenly felt a little called out.

Chapter 067 - Push and Pull

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“He Said, Does My Tian-ge Look Like the Type Who Would Fall for Someone?”

The staff residence in this school indeed had better conditions than the ordinary student dorm. Other than an independent bathroom, they even had a small kitchen, a mini fridge, as well as a sanitised washing machine. Even the so-called double decker bed was much more ‘luxurious’ than the average student’s. At the very least, it was wide enough, and the steps upstairs were wooden stairs, no need to climb up the metal rods.

Yang Jing brought the two students to the dorms as per her responsibility. She went around the room, and headed to the balcony—or more accurately—the patio. Since it was a residence meant for teachers, there weren’t so many strict precautions and protection set up. They even placed a pair of coffee chairs, as if people would come out here to enjoy the blast of icy wind coming at them or something.

The balcony faced the view of an extensive patch of autumn woods, surrounding the hill. Yang Jing tsked, and mumbled, “How quaint.”

Sheng Wang happened to be unpacking. Upon hearing that, he asked her, “Is it better than our school’s teacher condos?”

Yang Jing critiqued, “Smaller area, mine has a bedroom and living room. Still, the view is pretty decent here, there has to be a good thing about this place after all. Teachers don’t have it easy too you know. We keep having to mark your papers all day long, and suddenly oops, we get depression from all that anger.”

Sheng Wang said, completely void of any humility, “Meh, in any case I’m not the cause of anger for English.”

“Don’t spread your peacock feathers for now, pass me the room card,” Jiang Tian reached out to him as he said, directly after having settled down the now empty boxes.

“Okay.” Sheng Wang dug through his pocket without any fuss.

Yang Jing was slightly amused by that scene, and was curious enough to ask Jiang Tian, “Shouldn’t everyone have their own room card? Why are

you taking his?”

Jiang Tian took away the card, and his thin eyelids were lifted, much like mockery. “Get him to say why himself.”

Sheng Wang kept a poker face. “Reporting, Jing-jie. Up till today, I have lost the school card thrice, the dorm keys twice, three rulers, and how many pens again?”

Yang Jing: “.....How have you not lost your head yet?”

Sheng Wang thought, and said defensively, “But I swear I’ve changed recently, I haven’t been losing any more things for a while now.”

Jiang Tian’s fingers paused, and his eyes were lowered as he was momentarily silent. He quietly kept the school card in the side pocket of the bag.

Their doors weren’t closed, and there was suddenly a commotion outside the door. A huge wave of boys surged up from downstairs, half laughing and half jeering about.

“What’s the fuss about?” Yang Jing walked out of the door, and Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian followed.

The boys in the next dorms all sprawled around the corridor, discussing the timetable for the training camp with their heads put together. There were a sparse few who came up from the stairs, still marvelling, “Holy shit, this arrangement.”

Participating in training camps like this, students would more or less flock together; those from the same schools preferred to stay with each other. With this scale alone, it was obvious they were from Yizhong.

Throughout the years, Yizhong had occupied a good half of the slots for the English training camp. This group of students acted like they came home, free and given the green light. They even acted like they were the hosts.

Sheng Wang listened to their discussion for a while before he knew why the boys were all creating a disturbance: all training camp students, regardless of gender, stayed on the same block. The boys lived on this floor, the girls on the next floor.

Just as expected, there was soon a chorus of shocked gasps; the girls had realised too.

“Are they for real? Has the school gone insane?” Sheng Wang said, astonished.

Yang Jing shook her head. “Don’t just listen to the way they are acting up now, there’s a metal gate for every floor. They are open now only for the sake of moving in. When your classes start, the doors will be locked for a certain period of time. When I saw the arrangement, I already went to ask logistics. They said there will be dorm checks after the doors are locked. Yizhong managed to come here generation after generation, no way they wouldn’t already know.”

“Then what are they cawing about,” Sheng Wang didn’t know if he should laugh or cry.

“Don’t know,” Yang Jing said, annoyed.

Teenage years are filled with frissons of surprises; when a huge group of people are gathered together, seeing some things different from their

usual lives would easily send them into fits of rowdiness and chaos. Soon enough, that group of boys began chasing each other around, a group of people crowded a boy against the wall. They were no different from Gao Tianyang, Song Sirui and the group of idiots.

Yang Jing pointed at the air in front of the two, “I’m warning you, don’t get infected by Yizhong’s foolishness with a trip to the training camp. Also, whether the people downstairs are boys or girls or the existence of the metal gate is none of your business, don’t go out there and provoke anyone. Got it?”

Just after she spoke, two pairs of eyes watched her in silence. Yang Jing mused, and figured that the two really aren’t the type to go flirt with girls for fun. Thus, she changed her wording, “Not even if the girls are the one who approached you first, don’t you dare pay any attention.”

The two pairs of eyes still watched her in silence, utterly wordless.

Yang Jing: “.....”

Yang Jing: “Whatever, treat it like I said nothing then.” Yang Jing’s stomach hurt every time she dealt with these two. She waved, “In any case,

don’t let any distraction get in your way and secure the semifinals for me. I have to do pre-competition coaching if it's the others, but you two with your mental state can do without it. I just have one request: do not hand in ahead of time. If I catch this happening, you better watch out.”

After settling them down, Yang Jing left with the arranged transport.

Sheng Wang pondered through her words, and felt that her worries were somewhat uncalled for. How would he go flirt with anyone? Even if he did, the person wouldn’t be from downstairs. As for the girls, they literally don’t know them? Who’s approaching who even.

However, he soon found out quickly enough that he likely miscalculated. There really were people who knew them.

There weren’t any lessons in the afternoon of the day they report in, only a camp opening ceremony. In its essence, it was no different from a class meeting; at the very most all they did was to give out some teaching materials and made speeches to get them going.

There was a printing room before the experiment block. Jiang Tian went to print the student info they were supposed to hand in, and Sheng Wang went to reserve seats in the classroom with Jiang Tian's bag. Unexpectedly, the moment he stepped in he heard Jiang Tian's name.

Sheng Wang shot a glance at the group of people chatting, and found a pair of seats next to the window at the back of the classroom. The conversation of the chat in front of him flowed into his ears with much clarity. He listened for a while before he figured out that out of the group of people from Yizhong, two were Jiang Tian's middle school classmates, a guy and a girl.

The girl sat on the table, and wore a loose ponytail as well as a spacious jacket. She giggled non-stop as she held onto another girl's arm. She was the one who started all the jokes, appearing to be even more bold and shrewish than Class A's Chilli.

She probably had a more easygoing personality, and the group of people from Yizhong all used her as the topic of their jokes, going on about

“Old deskmates can catch up with each other” or like “When Jiang Tian arrives later I’ll drag you to sit in front of him”.

The boy who started ribbing her had a very tanned skin, and wore a bright silver sports jacket. He was Jiang Tian’s ex-classmate.

Sheng Wang silently glanced at the empty seat before them, pulled out the chair and sent a message to Jiang Tian on WeChat.

Sticker: your old classmates are in Yizhong

When he typed the message, he felt that his tone was pretty normal, but after he sent it out, it started looking weird again, so he retracted the message.

However, in the very next second, Jiang Tian replied.

The Emperor of Acting in the Jungle: Who?

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Aren’t you supposed to be printing? Why are you staring at WeChat for?

Sheng Wang roasted in his mind.

It would be fine if Jiang Tian didn't see the message, but now that he replied, that line of "You have retracted the message" seemed sort of unnatural.

To be fair, Jiang Tian's middle school was quite famous in the first place. Running into old classmates should come as no surprise at all. His Ge is this brilliant, it couldn't be anymore normal for there to be people who liked him out of his old classmates. Sheng Wang didn't particularly feel anything about this issue, but now with these few messages, it ended up painting him in a different light.

Sheng Wang couldn't help but laugh as he stared at the chat, and figured he might as well keep talking.

Sticker: i don't know the names

Sticker: a boy and a girl

Sticker: your middle school classmates i think

The Emperor of Acting in the Jungle: Didn’t notice

Sticker: you’ll know when you come to the classroom later

After Sheng Wang sent that message, the Yizhong students’ conversation took on a different topic. This time round it was surprisingly relevant to the competition.

“Apparently the training camp this time will be using the score from the preliminaries?”

“Oh no, I’m totally losing out then? I completely screwed up for the preliminaries,” someone said, upset.

“Scram already, jesus christ. Quit pretending, yeah? You’re in the first 10 and you’re still saying that you screwed up? I’ve gotten the same score as you, why didn’t I feel like I screwed up?” This was said by the one in bright silver.

“Exactly, all of you have the same score, you are all basically the 6th place. If this is called screwing up, then what about us?”

“Don’t even bring that up, 5th place is from Fuzhong, 11th is Jiang Tian, and we’re stuck in the middle. This is called ‘stuck between a tiger and a wolf’.”

Bright Silver continued, “Nothing to be goddamn scared of, for the semifinals, there’s public speaking and Q&A, they take up half of the score. Putting other factors aside, our school actually still has a pretty huge advantage when it comes to spoken English. With a bit of everything from here and there, we can totally leave them behind in the dust.”

“Is Jiang Tian’s spoken English bad?” someone asked.

Bright Silver laughed dryly, “Forget about him, his is better than mine.”

“Then what the crap are you going on about!”

“But, you can still surpass #5 though!” Bright Silver said, “Not like you haven’t seen the people from Fuzhong before, they are either idiots or braindead. They didn’t have top 40 for English before, so I figure, #5 is

either a hardcore crammer who spams questions all the time. So, probably braindead.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

“Tone it down, oh my god, there’s other people in the class,” a student reminded him. The group of boys and girls from Yizhong all subconsciously scanned around, and when the girls’ eyes reached Sheng Wang, they briefly lingered. They turned around with a giggle, and continued their discussion at a lower volume.

Other than Sheng Wang, there were still a few students scattered all over the class. They were clearly from other keypoint schools of the province too.

Bright Silver waved, “Hello, are you dumb? The person is classmates with Jiang Tian, of course they’ll come here together. Jiang Tian isn’t in class yet, what are you scared of.”

“Oh, that’s true.” Other people felt that this made sense, and nodded along.

The moment after he said, Jiang Tian entered the classroom with a few copies of printed material.

Thanks to the two ex-classmates, the attention he received in Yizhong’s intensive focus class was not lower than what he received in Fuzhong. The moment he entered, the bunch of people who were chatting all turned around in unison.

Bright Silver pushed that girl teasingly, and then raised his hand, calling, “Jiang Tian!”

Jiang Tian paused in his steps and looked at him. “You’re here too?”

“Yeah, got a slot here by dumb luck, and also Ge Hui is here too.” Bright silver looked at his hand, and said, baffled, “You’re not even taking your bag? Only the material?”

“Bag’s over there.” Jiang Tian pointed, and walked towards Sheng Wang.

The group of people from Yizhong first stilled, and then slowly turned to face Sheng Wang as they followed Jiang Tian’s path. Their faces all turned green. The group of girls started laughing first, and Bright Silver’s skin turned from dark to red, cringing from embarrassment. He scampered over with his tail between his legs, and sat down on the seat before the two of them. He squeezed out two empty laughs at Sheng Wang, saying. “Um, about that, why didn’t you stop me when I was bullshiting?”

Sheng Wang thought, and answered, “If I stopped you immediately, you’ll probably feel more embarrassed.”

Bright Silver: “.....”

“I’m usually quite mean-mouthed, so treat it as no discord, no concord, please?” Bright Silver introduced himself, “My name is Bian Chen.”

Bian ‘no discord, no concord’ Chen wasn’t exactly foolish, neither was he exactly smart, but this mouth of his was truly asking for it. Possibly

out of guilt and remorse, he kept trying to make aimless small talk with Sheng Wang for the whole afternoon, attempting to get friendly with him. However, he kept touching his sore spots, to the point that the more he spoke, the more Sheng Wang's face was expressionless, and so the grudge was formed.

The teacher said that for half of the time, the classes will be focused on spoken language training, and even the training itself has a certain degree of competitive element to it. The students will be grouped into twos, and for public speaking and Q&A, all will be practised via PK. Winning net them a score of 1, losing a 0. With two weeks of training camp, the accumulated score will be tabulated into the final score for the semifinals.

(t/n: PK = player kill, english acronym more commonly used for cn slangs. Can be used to mean showdowns/faceoffs.)

The grouping was based on preliminary scores, the 40 of them were grouped according to odd and even numbers. For example, as the 5th place, Sheng Wang would be grouped with the 6th place. This time, there were

quite a few people all occupying the 6th place, and according to alphabetical order, it just so happened to be Bian Chen.

After dividing them into groups, the teacher gave them the training camp uniform as well as the teaching material, and so the event concluded for the day.

The person in charge of logistics had passed them the map of the school campus before. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian picked the nearest route to the cafeteria from the map and went to have dinner. On the way back to the staff's residence, they ran into the people from Yizhong again. The few girls all nudged and winked at the girl named Ge Hui, and buzzed about softly like the tide before they walked far away as they giggled. Nobody really dared to start poking fun at them.

Later, when they reached the dorm, the girls saw him and Jiang Tian chatting by the balcony, and all swarmed out to gawk like bees from a hive. After they saw them, they shrank back into the room, even their giggles and speech were hushed.

They all had the time of their lives poking fun, but when they actually came face to face with Jiang Tian, they all became bashful. Even Ge Hui, who was Jiang Tian's deskmate for an entire year, stopped her interaction with Jiang Tian today at merely a 'hello'.

It always seemed to be like this: the girls would swarm over, but would stop a step away due to Jiang Tian's cold and aloof appearance. Sheng Wang had seen it too often to count.

The last girl downstairs went back in too, Sheng Wang scanned around once with lowered eyes and looked away again. He joked, "The balconies are all empty now, those who came out were burned away by your chill. There's not a single person left."

Jiang Tian just showered, a white towel rested around his neck. The night breeze blew his slightly damp hair up. His thumb flipped through the calendar and weather forecast on his phone before he turned his screen off, "The wind is the one that froze them out, what has it got anything to do with me?"

Sheng Wang tsked.

Sheng Mingyang happened to be sending him messages on WeChat then, asking him how he planned to spend his birthday that was approaching in two days. If there weren't any limits placed by the training camp, he and Jiang Ou wanted to rush over here and treat them to a good meal.

Sheng Wang speedily typed, saying that there are limits here, parents aren’t allowed to visit. After he typed and tapped the send button, he then spoke, “Old Gao was right.”

“What do you mean by that?” Jiang Tian asked, perplexed.

“The sports carnival from before, a girl from Class 9 tried to get Old Gao to pass a love letter to you. Old Gao rejected her on the spot, and said something to the girl,” Sheng Wang said.

“What?”

“He said, does my Tian-ge look like the type who would fall for someone?” Sheng Wang mimicked Gao Tianyang’s tone, and ended up cracking up instead.

He clutched his phone, and lazily watched the hill in the distance.

In the darkness of the night, the autumn woods formed a swath of inky black, undulating, ever connected. Due to the lack of lights, some stars could be seen in the sky, shining brightly or barely noticeable to the human eye.

Sheng Wang evened the tilt at the corner of his lips, and said, seemingly jokingly, “You do look like the type who wouldn’t fall for anyone.”

Out of the corner of his eyes, Jiang Tian paused in the midst of drying his hair. A while later, he then ran his fingers through his messy hair, saying, “Not for sure.”

Chapter 068 - Address

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Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

The Simple Word Suddenly

Became…...*Suggestive*.

To be honest, Sheng Wang immediately regretted the moment he said that.

Sometimes ,when people start to get impulsive, nobody can stop them, not even themself. He didn’t know what the purpose behind what he said was, and neither did he figure out what kind of answer he wanted to hear from him.

He thought that Jiang Tian wouldn’t bother with this kind of joke at all, but Jiang Tian spoke up instead.

His emotions at the moment were simply ineffable. Sheng Wang’s mind blanked out for two seconds, and turned to ask, “Who?”

Jiang Tian did not speak, like a particular sort of self-reflection or simply regret. What happened just now was probably a moment of impulse

on his behalf too. His hand went down, and he wrapped the white towel around his hand. “What do you mean who?”

“Didn’t you say not for sure?” Sheng Wang straightened up.

His current state was just like having chugged down three giant mugs of iced beer straight: coolness attacked his heart, but his blood and his brain were in a state of broil, like he was mildly tipsy. He didn’t know what kind of answer Jiang Tian would give, and he couldn’t tell if he was looking forward to it or upset either.

Jiang Tian glanced at him, and for a split second, it did seem like he was this close to saying something. However, all he did in the end was to turn around, and toss the towel that he wrapped around his hand into the washing machine.

“I was just casually refuting, that’s all. There’s no one.” He held onto the balcony door as he said to Sheng Wang, “Go in and sleep, the wind is getting stronger.”

Sheng Wang did not immediately answer.

Those few seconds of silence was slightly enigmatic, like a standoff with something rather *suggestive* behind it. A while later, Sheng Wang then finally walked into the house. When he passed by Jiang Tian, he grumbled, “What a way to brush me off, you even try to keep secrets from me.”

He walked two steps, and turned around again, “Do I know the person?”

Jiang Tian closed the door tightly shut behind him, and upon that, he said, not exactly pleased, “Are you ever going to stop?”

“Okay, alright, time to sleep.” Sheng Wang hung the jacket he wore after he showered on the clothing rack, and went to the upper bunk as he climbed the mini wooden flight of stairs. He quickly tunneled under his blanket.

Jiang Tian glanced upwards. The blanket with grey stripes formed a lump, at the top end was the back of Sheng Wang’s head. He walked to the

wall and switched off the lights. The house instantly gave way to darkness, the only light came from the phone screen by the lump on the bed.

“Need me to shed some light for you?” the lump asked.

“I could see,” Jiang Tian said.

“Oh.”

Although Jiang Tian was the one who urged him to sleep, sleep did not find Jiang Tian at all. He rested against the head of the bed and used his phone for a while—

He mentioned a few things to Zhao Xi, replied to Gao Tianyang’s spamming style messages, flipped through his gallery, and entered WeChat once more. He initially wanted to keep going through some things with Zhao Xi, until he saw that the person at the top most of his chats had quietly changed his profile picture.

Jiang Tian paused, and tapped into Sheng Wang’s information page. He even made a post in the Moments.

Curiosity has gotten me by the throat. @someone

The picture attached was a can of Wangzai milk, crushed by a hand.

His new profile picture was this crushed can, and his nickname became: Recyclable.

There was already a chain of comments below this post.

Gao Tianyang: huh? you didn’t manage to catch all the gossip or are u stuck on a question?

Song Sirui replied to Gao Tianyang: dumbass, it has to be the former if you used your brain

Gao Tianyang replied to Song Sirui: ur the dumbass

Gao Tianyang: who’s the asshole who got you like this, Sheng-ge? we have to crack down on people who stop halfway through while spilling the deets

Song Sirui: we have to crack down on people who stop halfway through while spilling the deets

Wu Kai: we have to crack down on people who stop halfway through while spilling the deets

Li Yu: curiosity has now gotten me by the throat too

Zhang Qinglan: curiosity has now gotten me by the throat too

…...

Class A people love to line up and be a repeater under the replies to posts in Moments, and the queue was simply endless. They took dumbassery to a magnificent level, until a person at the end of the queue came up to ruin the formation.

He said: The someone is waiting online too.

Someone: “.....”

He lifted his hand to knock on the bed board above him, like he was knocking on the bedroom door or something. He wanted to repeat “There really isn’t anyone”, but what came out of his mouth ended up becoming “Why the sudden change in profile picture.”

Sheng Wang said, muffled, “Don’t knock anymore, I’m asleep.”

Jiang Tian’s face was ellipses brought to life.

His phone interface went back to a certain someone’s information page, his profile picture was much bigger than the picture posted in Moments. The squashed can was half bent over, the cartoon grin was a little deformed, the corner of the lips was downturned instead.

(t/n: The fifth image here)

If it wasn’t for the post in Moments, it was hard to tell from the profile picture alone if he was joking or he was truly in a bad mood.

Jiang Tian looked at it monetarily, and his thumb caressed the screen; like he was patting someone’s head through the picture.

The person on the upper bunk tossed around, and after a long while, his breathing gradually became evened. He probably did fall asleep. Silence filled the dorm, and Jiang Tian tapped open Moments once more as the sound of his light breathing entered his ears. He wanted to say something, but what should he say? In the end, all he typed was a series of punctuation marks.

His ellipsis sank at the bottom of the post, different from the other people's jokes and repetitions. It distantly echoed with the '@someone' at the top, trailing behind the long queue of people. The simple word suddenly became…...*suggestive*.

*

The timetable for the training camp wasn't filled to the brim. In the morning, it was training in regards to grammar and linguistics. In the afternoon, it would be spoken language. There weren't any compulsory activities held at night, the self-study room was open all day long, and there was no rest limit in the dorms.

The competition was just a gild on the lily, after all. Whether you are willing to gild, how far you are willing to gild, it is entirely your business. At least, nobody will be caring about you the same way your homeroom teacher would, everything is up to your own initiative.

Compared to other schools, the students of Yizhong were much more unbridled. They were relatively well-behaved the first day, they obediently

stayed in the zone before the hill, they obediently went back to the dorms after dinner, and then everything changed on the second day.

The moment it was inter-class break, that group of people began to discuss where to go play at night as they sprawled over their desks.

Bian Chen, who started the discussion, had a stupidly loud voice. Thanks to him, everyone in the class knew that the school wasn't as desolated as it seemed. There were some shops, and they were all gathered at the south gate at the area behind the hill. However, the services they provide were quite uniform, there was nothing else but food. In the middle, there were a couple of internet cafes as well as a tabletop gaming shop.

"I think there's an escape room, apparently it just opened recently? It wasn't there last year, the facilities should be decent," a girl from Yizhong said.

"How about let's go check it out tomorrow?" Bian Chen suggested.

He did not change his seat after moving to the back to apologise to Sheng Wang, and settled before Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian after dragging

another friend to sit with him, and so that became his fixed seating.

After instigating Yizhong students, he turned around to ask the two behind him, “How does that sound, let’s go together?”

“I have something on tomorrow,” Sheng Wang rejected him quite frankly.

“What do you have to do?” Bian Chen asked and turned to the other person, “How about you, Jiang Tian?”

Sheng Wang silently turned and fixed his eyes on his Ge. His Ge tilted his head towards him, saying, “I’m together with him.”

Bian Chen shrugged at the people at his side, quite a few tables of girls looked away in disappointment and bashfulness.

“What do you have tomorrow, is it urgent?” Bian Chen tried his best, after he looked at Sheng Wang, he turned to face Jiang Tian again. “Ah? Tian-ge, to think we used to be classmates too.”

Jiang Tian did not have any intention to loosen up. He knew Sheng Wang’s birthday is the day after tomorrow, and logically speaking, he really

did not have anything planned for tomorrow. Still, he could tell that Sheng Wang had no interest in going out with them at all, and personally, he didn’t exactly have much of a friendship with Bian Chen too. He barely spoke to him while he was in the same class with him, let alone after being in different schools for high school.

“Why aren’t you guys going today?” Sheng Wang asked offhandedly.

“How are we supposed to?” Bian Chen shook the two pieces of paper on the table after he grabbed it. “Bro, have you forgotten what they just gave us? Don’t you need to prepare tonight?”

The papers in his hand were given out in the first period of spoken language class today. There wasn't anything about 1v1 competition arranged today, only some basic training, a mention of what one should take note of in public speaking, and then the announcement of the theme. The students have to prepare a speech centred on this theme, and from tomorrow, they will really enter PKmode according to their groups.

Bian Chen asked, seemingly joking, “We’ll be competitors tomorrow, how about you spill some details, and let me have some mental preparation? How is your spoken English?”

Sheng Wang thought, and answered, “Pretty good.”

Bian Chen: “.....”

He was already prepared for both sides to display humbleness and then exalt the other person. After all, politeness can let the enemy underestimate you. Never would he have thought that before he could start exalting, the other person had already soared high up in the sky by himself.

Jiang Tian let out a laughter by his side, and Bian Chen finally recovered from the utter bafflement. He thought, *I’m just asking? And you started bragging just like that?* There really weren’t anyone who dared to truly say that their spoken language is good, Sheng Wang had opened up a new world to him.

Those who like to brag usually don’t have any self awareness of their actual capability. Bian Chen thought, *guess tomorrow’s settled*.

However, there were a lot of factors when it came to competing in public speaking with a script prepared in advance. Afterall, the speech itself was a test to the art of writing. Some people may only be so-so in their spoken language, but, with a well-written script, they could still score some points too. Bian Chen refused to give opponents the opportunity to score like this.

His written paper was only a mark lower than Sheng Wang's, but this difference barely meant anything. He planned to really polish out a good script tonight, and then stun the other person with his spoken language tomorrow, achieving overwhelming victory.

The first impression made in this exam is quite important. If the beginning is already an irenic victory, then he wouldn't need to worry about the other person's comeback for the next few days afterwards at all. The PK scores for two weeks will be firmly in his grasp.

Competition worked like that: you can be friends outside the exam venue, but you gotta be more ferocious when it's time to score. That was

what Bian Chen told himself.

In the end, on the second day, he wanted to give himself a slap to the mouth.

The public speaking showdown happened in reverse order, starting from the group consisting of the 39th and 40th place. A total of five teachers would be scoring them, with a total score of ten. Victory would be determined by the average score. The group of teachers were only stringent and more stringent, and before the 14th and 15th place went up, literally none of the students scored above an 8.

The 15th place was Jiang Tian's middle school classmate, Ge Hui. Compared to the others before her, her pronunciation was rather nice. But, when combined with the script, she only scored an 8.6 in the end. She was the first to barely make it past an 8.

There was instantly an uproar in the classroom, especially the group from Yizhong. Yesterday, they thought they could get a 9 for sure, but after waiting for so long, the first high score went to Fuzhong instead.

Jiang Tian’s scores were actually quite extreme.

A teacher outright stated that they liked his pronunciation and the cold quality to his style, and gave the highest score so far, 9.7. The other teacher had the opposite reaction instead, and felt that his expression of emotions was deserving of a negative score instead. It was his script that was outstanding, and reluctantly gave him an 8.6. Still, after tabulating the average from the five teachers, he scored a 9.3 nonetheless.

Sheng Wang seized the chance before Jiang Tian returned to his seat, and sent him a series of memes. There were those that called for a major celebration, banging gongs and drums, whipping the head back and forth rock and roll style etc…….until he clicked on the wrong thing and sent the one with two cats, with one hugging the other, peppering kisses and munches.

He froze. He looked up on instinct, and ended up meeting Jiang Tian’s eyes instead. The other person happened to have just left the stage,

and was already on his way to his seat.

Sheng Wang's finger rubbed the screen, and retracted the last meme with his eyes lowered. After removing, he felt that removing the last one alone only drew more attention to it, so he simply removed everything above too.

Therefore, as Jiang Tian sat down and read through his WeChat, in a chat with a certain person, that was a neat and tidy column of "the other person has retracted the message".

"....."

Jiang Tian stared at the screen with a poker face, and he really couldn't help but to turn to face Sheng Wang. This person, fully taking advantage of the fact that he retracted all the messages, left his phone screen out of the open with nothing to hide, entirely unafraid of anyone seeing it. That was how Jiang Tian saw his questionable alias.

"The emperor of acting in the jungle?" Jiang Tian frowned.

Sheng Wang internally swore, *fuck, I've totally fogotten about this*. He stole a glance at the person's expression next to him, and immediately pacified, "I'm changing, okay, I'm changing it right now. It's just for fun, Sheng Mingyang's is even called 'Encyclopedia for Healthy Living', okay."

As he spoke, he tapped into Jiang Tian's information page, and deleted his alias, entering "Jiang Tian". However, the other person was completely unmoved, and neither did the look on his face turn any happier.

Sheng Wang met his eyes, and deleted the two words, entering "Ge". The other person expression started showing some very mixed feelings, and he still did not look happy,

Sheng Wang deleted that box of text for the third time.

His finger hovered above the keyboard, and stopped for quite a while before he pursed his lips. He keyed in "Someone" out of some inexplicable reason. He intended to make a joke with what happened in Moments last night, but after keying it in, he felt like this address had a hidden meaning to

it. Just like the deepest depth of the alley that always existed, but no one ever visited.

The speech performed by the student on stage happened to be reaching its end, the pitch becoming higher. Sheng Wang snapped out of it, and just as he planned to delete this alias, he saw Jiang Tian's lowered eyes tremble a bit, and turn his gaze back to the lectern, like a silent acquiescence.

The tip of Sheng Wang's heart violently throbbed. He followed along, casting his eyes ahead too. A long while later, he clicked on 'confirm' on the interface, and kept his phone.

For the last few speeches, Sheng Wang did not take a single word in. Only when Yizhong's pupils burst out in a round of applause and whistles, then he realised that Bian Chen was done and it was his turn to go on stage.

Bian Chen kickstarted the second mini climax of the afternoon. His scores weren't as extreme as Jiang Tian's, every teacher had nearly the

same remark. They all said he had a decent script, expressed them well enough, and his words were infectious. His final score was 9.3 too, reaching a tie with Jiang Tian was good enough for him. After all, the person steadily occupied the first place in combined exams year round. And after three years in middle school, he had a complete understanding of Jiang Tian's level of spoken language, and was already long since mentally prepared.

There were still five people behind him. He knew the few from Yizhong very well. When it comes to spoken language, especially speech, if he claimed to be the second in class, no one else would dare to claim first. Therefore, he figured that the highest score could only get that high. He hit a tie with Jiang Tian; that was not bad already.

He even felt, if he slept much later last night, and polish up his script even more, his score might even go up to 9.5, and thus truly leaving everyone behind in the dust.

Even as Sheng Wang went up, he was still calculating the probability of scoring 9.5. However, by the time Sheng Wang was done, he was no

longer in the mood for it.

His head was filled with two words: I’m screwed.

No wonder the other person dared to say “pretty good”. If this still has to go under freaking “not so good”, then there was no such thing as good in the class.

The five scoring teachers kept on heaping praises after praises, and then after they chatted with Sheng Wang, then Bian Chen knew that that guy mixed around with foreigners when he was super young.

While he was still calculating how to score 9.5, Sheng Wang had already left everyone else behind in the dust with a 9.7. What he said last night was a prophecy that came true. Competition worked like that: you can be friends outside the exam venue, but you gotta be more ferocious when it’s time to score...and he happened to be the one who had that ferociousness enacted on him.

The first impression is important, and the beginning has to be an overwhelming victory. For the ten plus days afterwards, he could basically

give up.

His deskmate patted his shoulder. Bian Chen said, “What the hell can I do, I’m quitting…….”

After class, Yizhong pupils swarmed Bian Chen, and dragged him towards the south gate, saying that he needed some cheering up.

Sheng Wang, otherwise, was in a pretty decent mood. He held his bag, and saw that the day was still young. He said to Jiang Tian, “I wanna go out and eat today.”

Chapter 069 - Impulse

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Happy Birthday, Wang-zai.

Sheng Wang honestly thought the so-called “a few shops” did mean a handful, but as it turned out, it was an entire street when they saw it for themselves at the gate at the campus behind the hill.

The terrain around the school wasn’t smooth at all; the street winded down along the gentle slope of the hill, surrounding the school a little by half. Its end was obscured behind the wall at the side of the hill, nigh impossible to see the end of the street with a single look.

This was the only place anywhere near prosperous nearby, it was also the only place people in this school could go to. Therefore as evening approached, not only did this place not become unfrequented, it was bustling with people instead.

Still, the regular students here still had night self-study; even if they came out, they had time for only a dinner. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian

picked an unfortunate timing, and happened to arrive at peak hour. All the eateries were filled to the brim.

Sheng Wang checked all around before he couldn’t stand it anymore. “How bad must the canteen food be that everyone’s this repressed?”

The school opened up a separate cafeteria window for them. Regular students used school cards, they used dining vouchers. The meals from that window were so-so, its merit was that there was no need to queue. Yesterday, they were still mumbling on about how the normal window looked like they had a greater variety of food, likely tasting better too. Now, it seemed that there wasn't that much difference after all, so the students seized the chance to gorge on good food by the school gate the moment they could.

Jiang Tian took his phone out and checked the time. School ended at 5.40pm, the students have just entered the shop. By the time they were done and seats were cleared out, it would be 6.30pm at the very least.

He asked Sheng Wang, “Any place you want to go?”

This place consisted of only a single street. There were only so many gimmicks to be found here; if Sheng Wang came by himself, he wouldn’t be interested in any store at all. However, things were absolutely different with Jiang Tian by his side.

His eyes swept before and behind him, and said, “I want to go everywhere.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Sheng Wang said, “How now?”

“Pick one.”

“I’m indecisive, can’t pick one.”

“.....”

Mischief was clearly written in Sheng Wang’s eyes. “Aren’t you my Ge? You have the duty to settle on a direction.”

Jiang Tian’s brows were knitted as he looked at him, speechless. A while later he nodded and stuck his hand out. He deadpanned, “Pass me the knife, I’ll help to divide you up. How many places do you want to go?”

Sheng Wang: “.....the hell, who are you trying to scare. Can you bear to?”

He merely intended to let it be a casual continuation of the conversation. No matter if they were brothers or friends, lines like these were nothing out of the ordinary. Yet, when it was spoken to the special someone, it took on an entirely different meaning.

Jiang Tian paused.

They were still traversing up that gentle slope, shoulders to shoulders. Their footsteps were leisurely, as though they were having a pleasant stroll. Jiang Tian’s palm was still spreaded open, his slender digits slightly crooked.

That was where Sheng Wang’s peripheral view landed on. He saw Jiang Tian’s fingers curl, and then went back into the pockets of his long pants. For a few seconds, Jiang Tian did not make a second sound; like he was mulling over the issue of whether he could bear to, like he was also digesting those few traces of the inexplicable *something* between them.

He spoke after a moment. “Then...forget about it.”

Yet another while later, Sheng Wang then softly replied with an “oh”.

As such, the wind slipped through them, every gust taking twists and turns.

The streetlights at the side gradually lit up one by one. The two suddenly became silent. Sheng Wang walked a few steps, and played natural as he looked around at the various shops. Amongst the numerous fancy and overly accessorised signs, a store stood out with its truly unique style.

One level of that store was above ground, the other level was below the surface of the road, with a wooden staircase that led down to it. A few golden rain trees were planted at both sides of the store, with the tree branches sprawling over the roof. The top half of the treetop was pink and orange, the lower half was shades of green. In the wavering darkness of the night, they blurred into each other.

A bone-white paper lantern hung on a tree on the left, and beneath that lantern, was a sign that pointed downstairs. On the right was an extremely modern blue-white ring of light with an arrow pointing upstairs.

Graffiti made out of glow in the dark material was splashed across the merchant's wall, the words "Escape Room" were written on it.

However, what truly caught Sheng Wang's attention was in fact the crowd before the entrance. A group of boys and girls gathered there, clearly having just come up from the lower floor. Some of them were patting their chests, looking like they had their souls scared out of them.

"That was so scary," a girl said.

"I'm gonna have nightmares tonight." Another person added, "The room itself is still okay, it's just that the mechanics are too on point, the decor has too much effort put into it, that's why they are so scary. Where's Bian Chen? Bian Chen, are you okay? You look so pale."

The few boys began to openly laugh, mocking, "He can still be scared pale with that face of his?"

“Fuck to the off, you’re the one who can’t turn pale from fear.” Bian Chen’s voice was rather distinctive amidst the crowd. After he cursed at them, he felt that something was wrong with his words. He roared, in the hoots of laughter, now louder than ever, “Who’s the goddamn one who said that I came out because I was too scared? It’s just too stuffy inside, hello?! Dumbass, you have the nerve to laugh at me? Who’s the one who screamed louder than the girls just now?”

“You,” the boy, who was the target of his accusation, replied ruthlessly.

Bian Chen cussed, and the two began chasing each other around on the steps.

One girl asked, “Are we still playing?”

The boys—who were still mocking each other earlier—said simultaneously, “To hell with playing!”

The girl snorted. “So many cowards but none refusing to admit it. But anyway, we don’t have seats even if we want to eat now. How about let’s

head upstairs to play the futuristic version of the escape room? Or play tabletop games for a while?”

“Tabletop I suppose, let’s go, c’mon,” as they said that, they ran upstairs.

“Then you guys can go up first, we’ll go down and keep looking,” a girl said. She wasn’t through with playing yet, and dragged two other boys who wanted to play downstairs; the three entered the store again.

Sheng Wang stared at the store, the gears in his head turning, and turned to look at Jiang Tian. The words “I wanna play” were written all over his face.

Jiang Tian looked at the horror style decor downstairs, and turned to look at Sheng Wang’s eager expression again. He seemed to want to remind him of something, but stopped short of it. In the end, he nodded and said, “Let’s go.”

The boss of the escape room was a young person. In order to coordinate with the theme, he dressed himself spookily. When Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian went in, the three from Yizhong were still conflicted over which one to play.

That girl pointed at the escape room meant for groups of 2-3, and said, “How about let’s play this one?”

One of the boys roasted, “Ain’t no fun in small escape rooms, if we’re gonna play, let’s play the one with five people and above.”

“We don’t have enough people though.”

“Boss, can three people play the room for five?” that boy asked.

The boss nodded. “Sure, but it’ll be slightly difficult. How about you try asking the two over there whether they want to join you?”

“Who?” They turned around in confusion, and saw Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian.

“Eh? ! It’s you guys! Perfect timing—” the boy who showed a disdain towards the small escape room earlier was instantly full of zeal. He wasn’t actually familiar with both Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang, but having

someone was better than none. Therefore, he invited, “We’re missing a couple of people, let’s go together?”

There was no way Sheng Wang was going to do this with other people. However, before he expressed his thoughts, he heard Jiang Tian say to that person, “No need.”

He knocked on the counter, asking the boss, “Is the two person room still empty?”

The boss pointed at the one with the haunted school theme. “Yep, this one’s empty.”

“Ay, Jiang-ge, what are you doing with the one with two people?” the boy from Yizhong said, “Aren’t they for couples? It’ll be boring.”

The person who said it didn’t mean anything, but the ones who heard took it personally.

It was just a casual grumble, but Sheng Wang froze in the midst of unloading this bag. He shot a look at Jiang Tian on instinct, only to see Jiang Tian tell that person, “‘Kay.”

*

After that, no matter what Yizhong’s people said or what the boss said, Sheng Wang did not bother paying attention to them. Neither could he make himself listen at all. He knew that Jiang Tian usually did not care for people who acted close even though they weren't, and that “‘Kay” was just to shut the person up. Still, his heart violently skipped a beat.

He suddenly recalled what Sheng Mingyang said when he was young. “Other people’s kids act crazy in front of new people, why hasn’t mine gone nuts before? So lazy.”

For a point in time, he thought that he wasn’t wrong; he wouldn’t be hyped up or filled with adrenaline just because someone was looking at him or was next to him. It was today then he found out: he just never met the right person.

Tonight, he was slightly “crazy before people”, throughout the entire escape room, his mind was in a state of constant euphoria; although it

wasn’t particularly obvious from his face.

Before entering the escape room, the boss said something like “this escape room is much scarier than the other bigger escape rooms”. Who knows what other people felt, in any case Sheng Wang did not feel a single trace of fear from the start to the end. This had nothing to do with his bravery at all, it was simply because his mind was in no way on those things at all.

Never was he ever stuck when solving the puzzles with Jiang Tian at any point, the entire process flowed as smooth as water. From opening the doors in the dim classroom to the corridor where the lights were spoilt, and then to the bed inside the girls’ dormitory with the bed board underneath filled with words written in blood, and lastly to the bathroom in the deepest depth of the corridor.

There were three mirrors with mechanics in the bathroom. The last step to solving the puzzle required them to turn on the tap and wash their

faces, and the face of a female ghost would appear in the mirror, hinting which cubicle she was in. Next, they had to knock thrice on the door to the cubicle, and a board in the ceiling above their heads would move away, a human model with ragged long hair would drop from above, hanging on a rope.

The story “The Girl Who Went Missing” thus ended, the hidden door on the wall would slowly rise up, and that would be the exit of the escape room.

However, when Sheng Wang knocked on the cubicle door, the human model hit the wall, and the wig accidentally fell off. Only a bald head was left hanging on the rope.

As such, when the secret door rose up, the two walked out, still doubled over. Sheng Wang directly sprawled over the counter in laughter, and Jiang Tian couldn’t help himself either.

The spooky boss was numb from watching them.

He had seen customers who said “It’s not that scary”, seen those who cried from fear, seen those who discussed the storyline as they walked, but he had never seen those who were nearly dying from laughter.

“You sure you came out by pressing the right buttons? You didn’t open the door with your feet?” the boss couldn’t help but ask.

Sheng Wang laughed until his neck was flushed, and couldn’t reply at all as he turned to goo over the counter. Jiang Tian scanned the QR code and paid. He said to the boss, “Remember to glue the wig.”

After he spoke, he tapped Sheng Wang, “Stop laughing already, dinner now.”

Only when they sat down in a restaurant selling Hangzhou cuisine then did Sheng Wang finally get over it. He let out a long exhale, and fanned himself with his hand, “All that laughter is making me feel so warm now.”

Jiang Tian was ordering food on his phone. He then passed the phone to him, saying. “See what you want to eat.”

Sheng Wang's eyes were still crescented; they were brilliant beneath the light. He said, "Dinner's on me, don't you dare snatch this from me. You can snatch on any other day, just not today."

"What's up with today?" Jiang Tian asked.

"My birthday." Sheng Wang said, "Rules of the Jianghu, I'll treat you."

Jiang Tian stopped, and didn't manage to rebut his bullshit rules of the Jianghu. He opened the calendar on instinct and took another look. He frowned, "Isn't your birthday December 4th? It's the 3rd today."

"Yeah, I know." Sheng Wang scanned the QR code to the menu on the table, saying, "Theoretically it's tomorrow, but I don't like to celebrate on that day."

"Why?"

Sheng Wang looked up, and saw the slightly befuddled expression on Jiang Tian's face. It was such a rare sight for this expression on his Ge's

face, to the point that he also stilled with him. He asked, “Why the look on your face?”

Jiang Tian then got his face back under control, saying, “Nothing.”

Sheng Wang stared at him for a while. He suddenly leaned forward, “Ge.”

The lights in Jiang Tian’s pupils flickered, his eyes moved up to meet him.

Sheng Wang narrowed his eyes. “Could it be that you’re planning to celebrate my birthday tomorrow? Or rather…...did you prepare a gift for me?”

“No,” Jiang Tian said.

“Oh.” Sheng Wang leaned back against his chair, his phone in his hand as he ordered his food.

“Why don’t you like celebrating on the day itself?” Sheng Wang heard Jiang Tian suddenly speak.

“It’s nothing much, really. It’s just that I spent mine with mom and dad when I was young, so I have a kinda deep impression of it. And then my mom isn’t around anymore, so there’s always a person missing on my birthdays, it’s a little subdued.” Sheng Wang studied the menu seriously. “When it comes to birthdays...it’s better to eat and drink, have a little more joy. If I celebrate it tomorrow…...I might miss my mom.”

He ticked some, and passed the phone to Jiang Tian. “Celebrate with me today, okay?”

Perhaps it was the lighting, Jiang Tian’s brows were knitted ever so slightly, but his gaze was unexpectedly gentle instead. He said, “Okay.”

Just for this line, Jiang Tian granted his every wish tonight, he even held back on snarking Sheng Wang with his words by quite a lot. A Jiang Tian like this was truly a rare sight to see too, Sheng Wang felt that if he didn’t take the chance to tease him a little more, he would be literally wasting this day away.

The signature dish in this restaurant wasn't its food, but its rice wine. The rice wine was served in a specially made goblet bowl, and was given a stage name of "White Jade Brew". Sheng Wang asked for a giant jug, and brazenly served it before Jiang Tian, saying "You've seen me become a roaring drunk several times already, and I still haven't witnessed how you're like when you're drunk. Isn't this kinda unfair?"

He pointed at that jug of "White Jade Brew", saying, "Tell me the truth, how much does it take to get you drunk, is this enough?"

Jiang Tian: "......I don't know."

Sheng Wang: "???"

He nearly made the server bring another jug on the spot. Fortunately, Jiang Tian stopped him. With two giant jugs of rice wine down the throat, getting drunk wasn't the issue, but many many trips to the bathroom would definitely happen.

In the end, it was the server who couldn't bear to listen anymore. They reminded him, "Our rice wine kicks in quite strongly afterwards. You

might not feel anything after you just drank it, but when it kicks in you'll get drunk easily."

At that time, Sheng Wang just finished a glass. It was indeed quite tasty, and he wanted a bit more. He heard "strong kick afterwards", and then pushed the glass opposite him without a second word, saying, "For you, the rest is for you too. I'm not drinking anymore."

For this so-called afterkick, Sheng Wang deliberately dilly-dallied, and managed to spend nearly two hours on a single dinner. However, when it was time to settle the bill already, Jiang Tian still remained sober.

This restaurant was still relatively new; they still had on-going promotions, and gave Sheng Wang a small gift: two porcelain wine jars strung together with a piece of rope, containing the signature "White Jade Brew".

It was nearly 10 when they left the restaurant.

Internal heat ran high in the bodies of young people. Although Sheng Wang only had had a glass of rice wine, a thin sheen of sweat still appeared

on his body. With a caress of the night breeze, particular to the transition between late-autumn and the beginning of winter, he managed to feel much better.

He hooked the rope, and brought the wine before him. He measured the size of the jar, and asked Jiang Tian, “You’re sober, right?”

“Mn,” Jiang Tian answered.

“How about you add these two jars too?” Sheng Wang asked.

“I’ll probably still be sober too,” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang tsked, and his hand lowered. “Whatever, I give up.”

“There’s no need,” Jiang Tian said.

“Hm?” Sheng Wang paused, and turned to face him.

The night breeze rustled at the hair before his forehead, the contours of his features were exceptionally highlighted by the streetlights at the side, spring-like and handsome. The patches of lights were reflected in his eyes as he shot a glance at Sheng Wang, saying, “We can try again next year.”

“Makes sense.” Sheng Wang suddenly grew happier; either from his birthday next year being planned in advance or something else. He swung the wine in his hand, and the porcelain jars clanged as they knocked against each other.

After he spoke, he then immediately continued, “No wait! I nearly got tricked by you. I can’t test you other than on the day of my birthday??”

Jiang Tian said, “Forget about normally.”

“And on what basis?”

“I’m the one who has to deal with you after you accidentally get yourself drunk again,” Jiang Tian said.

“Fuck.”

Sheng Wang was rendered speechless by Jiang Tian’s retort; his hands reached out, wanting to choke him. Jiang Tian was especially nimble as he avoided him, he even reminded, “Don’t keep swishing around, the wine is still with you.”

The two messed around as they walked back to the school. Jiang Tian would occasionally send some WeChat messages to other people on the way. When he received the message for the fifth time, they happened to reach the ground floor of the dormitory.

Jiang Tian said, “You head up first.”

“How about you?” Sheng Wang asked.

“I’m going to take something.”

Sheng Wang was a little confused even as he reached the dorm. He first played on his phone as he leaned against the balcony for quite a while. He took a shower, waited by the corridor for even longer, and Jiang Tian was still nowhere to be found. He still didn’t know where Jiang Tian went and what he was taking.

The server in that Hangzhou cuisine restaurant was right; you might not feel anything while drinking the rice wine, but the after kick was plenty strong. After going around the dorm for a while, the alcohol slowly started to kick in.

Sheng Wang was starting to feel sleepy, but he was still a little unwilling to sleep.

This was the birthday he personally designated, he planned to spend it with Jiang Tian several days ago. This day passed, he laughed, he played around, and there were even moments where his heart raced and *something else* amidst his excitement. He did manage to do so many things, but something still felt like it was missing.

The current day was about to end soon; the night was dark, the surroundings void of sound. Yet, he still felt a little empty, who knows if he hadn’t had his fill of fun, or something else.

……

*

By the time Jiang Tian got back, it was already 11.30pm. The entire campus was trapped in the thick atmosphere of silence. Only when he went around the hill, then did he hear the sound of a few boys and girls chatting and laughing by the autumn woods. Probably the people from Yizhong;

Bian Chen’s voice seemed to be there too. However, he didn’t really notice. He merely ran past them, and then strided up the stairs.

There were indistinct murmurs and furtive whispers from the girls behind him. Someone called out to him too, but by the time he heard, he was already upstairs.

He braked in his steps before the dorm. His hair, ruffled by the wind, dropped down. He evened his breathing outside the door as he held a thick paper package in his hand.

Most of the lights were out in the dorms along the corridor. Other than the few downstairs who just came back, most people ought to be asleep. Jiang Tian opened the door with a tap of his card, and was about to greet the person inside before he noticed the complete silence inside. The quilt on the upper bunk was slightly disarrayed; Sheng Wang was already asleep.

From his awkward position, he probably dozed off in the midst of waiting, and accidentally fell onto the pillow.

Jiang Tian stilled.

He stood at the door for a while; his eyes lowered as he stared at the paper package in his hand. Quite a while later, a corner of his lips jerked as he smiled, either out of self-mockery or something else.

He did prepare a gift; but no matter how he rushed it, it appeared that he was still late.

Sheng Wang's sleep was a little heavy, half his face was buried in his quilt, his hair slightly messy, scattered on the pillow. He seemed to be a little warm, a very thin layer of sweat gathered at the corner of his forehead. Jiang Tian walked to the bed, and placed that paper package in the lower bunk.

He stood by the bed and watched him for a long while. His thumb wiped away the sweat that gathered at Sheng Wang's forehead; the other person noticed nothing at all.

He looked up at the cold light—too glaring to the eyes—and walked to the wall, switching the light off. The dorm instantly fell into darkness. He left out a torchlight on his phone for him, and with the limited blob of light, he placed the porcelain jars of wine in the fridge, got his clothes to shower, and walked back to the lower bunk as he dried his hair.

The soundproofing in the dormitory block was rather well done, the group of students who returned late did not make much noise either. It was quiet all around.

Jiang Tian leaned against the head of the bed, and hung the towel around his neck. A bead of water slid off from the tip of his hair, quietly falling onto the towel. He took the paper package beside his pillow, looked at it in silence, and settled it down again.

Outside the balcony, silver-white light flooded in as they climbed over the railing. From his angle, he could see the contours of the mountains in the distance, equally silent, standing in the night for an eternity.

The person on the upper bunk seemed to have turned around in his deep sleep, the bed slightly moved. Sheng Wang's arm dangled down from the side of the bed, his thin and snowy fingers were slightly crooked, slender and clean.

Jiang Tian raised his eyes and looked over.

He remained leaning against the railing at the head of his bed, a leg sticking straight, the other one curled up. The gift he brought back rested on his thigh, just like that. It wasn't particularly eye-catching, like the feelings he had constantly kept hidden away, tucked in a secret corner, unknown and unshown to anyone else.

But—just in this moment—perhaps from the quietude of the night—those feelings were itching to burst out.

The rice wine he downed from more than two hours ago finally started to rear its head. He was a little tired, but drowsiness completely evaded him.

On his phone screen, the hands on the clock in the app slowly walked, approaching 00:00 ever so closely.

From 10, 9, 8, 7, it leisurely went to 4, 3, 2, 1.

It’s December 4th, today is a sunny day. The moon at this moment is stunning. The person he likes turns 17.

The entire universe was quiet in this moment, nobody would ever know of this. Therefore, he held Sheng Wang’s dangling hand, and murmured, “Happy birthday.”

Happy birthday, Wang-zai.

He held his hand for a long time, till the hand he was holding suddenly curled, and he snapped back to himself. Next, Sheng Wang’s slightly husky voice rang next to him.

He said, “I heard that.”

Chapter 070 - Wild Grass

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Youths Fall in Love Like a Wasteland on a Midsummer’s Night; Ceaseless, Unhurt by Flames and Scythes.

With a Caress of the Breeze, the Wild Grass Scrapes the Sky.

Jiang Tian’s hand loosened instinctively; his body heat dropped just like how his fingers slipped out of Sheng Wang’s. Sheng Wang, with a turn of his hand, clung back on again.

I heard your happy birthday, I also know that you reached out in the darkness of the night. Sheng Wang’s voice was hoarse, “I caught you.”

I already caught you; therefore, you cannot pretend nothing happened.

The wooden staircase creaked, the footsteps were a little hurried. The final two steps were crossed over in nearly a single step. By the time Sheng Wang realised, he had already rushed down from the upper bunk.

Before he could figure out what he wanted to ask—what he wanted to say—he was already standing before that person.

Jiang Tian’s back was no longer leaning against the bed railing. Instead, he sat on the bed, his right arm propped on his folded knee, slightly crouched over. The moonlight was casted upon the bed from the side, shedding a brilliant silver glow as it brushed past him. Yet, he sat in the shadows.

The hand that held Sheng Wang’s dangled by his side, his long digits half crooked. His eyes were downcasted, his gaze resting on that empty space above his palms. His mind wandered in silence.

Only when Sheng Wang’s misshapen shadow landed on the sheets did he look up.

Sheng Wang was suddenly unable to speak. He looked into Jiang Tian’s eyes, his heart palpitated; his chest was so full with emotions that it was threatening to burst, but there was nothing but a blank in his head.

They both fell into a silence, the intimacy that came from the entanglement of their fingers grew madly; unreasonable and silent, instantly

filling the entire room.

Nobody else could see them, they were the only ones who knew it deep down.

They knew it better than anyone else in their hearts.

Jiang Tian’s deep voice was a little unclear in the darkness. “When did you wake up?”

Sheng Wang’s chest heaved. All he did was to go down five-six steps on the stairs, going from the upper bunk to the bottom, yet he felt like he had travelled 3000 kilometres.

He said, “At the start.”

The moment you grabbed me, I woke up.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang said, “What do you think?”

Jiang Tian’s gaze flickered; as light as breathing, or the tremor that came from the beating of the heart.

Sheng Wang watched him, and for some reason, could not really stand that sudden silence. His voice was hoarse as he said, “I thought your ‘going out for a bit’ referred to a couple of minutes or ten, so I kept walking around, waiting for you. However, after waiting for so so long, you still weren’t back, so I climbed up, wanting to play on my phone for a while.”

He chuckled in a bout of self-mockery, and said, “Who knew the alcohol really kicked in that strongly, so I accidentally fell asleep.”

He was momentarily quiet. “To be honest, it was a fitful sleep.”

When he said that, it seemed like he was simply finding a casual conversation topic. It was only afterwards then he realised he sounded like he was whining, like he did it on purpose to melt Jiang Tian’s heart. As though as if he didn’t say anything, this night would come to an abrupt end just like that.

His rationality told him: *it would be even better if you don’t mention this at all, the events of this night* should *come to an abrupt end just like*

that.

Still, he couldn’t help himself, he asked again, “Didn’t you say you’re gonna take something? Why did it take you so long?”

Jiang Tian eyed the paper bag on his thigh, and said, “Because this should’ve come tomorrow.”

Sheng Wang stilled. “A gift? Didn’t you say that there’s nothing?”

“I lied,” Jiang Tian said, “how could there be nothing.”

He pinched the corner of that paper packaged, and his brows knitted infinitesimally. “But...I’m not very good at this.”

“What?”

“Not very good at preparing gifts for people.”

“You don’t need to be,” Sheng Wang said. He received that package with lowered eyes, and as he tore the packaging open, he said, “Odds are, I’ll be ecstatic with whatever you gift me.”

The paper packaging was thick, probably out of fear that the corners will be creased, or it might get caught in the rain and become damp. Sheng Wang unwrapped two layers, and finally got a peek at a corner of the gift from the opening he unwrapped from.

It seemed to be a leather cover.

He almost thought that it was yet another notebook. He only discovered upon unwrapping the entire thing that it was in fact, a photo album. Nowadays, photos in the phone were all stored in the cloud drive backed up on his phone. Personally, he had never used something like this before.

However, he recalled what he said to Jiang Tian before in a random passing conversation. He seemed to have said: he really likes to flip through Old Man Ding’s old photo albums.

The phone would spoil eventually, there were too many disorganized things in his cloud drive. Those pictures that recorded certain places in

times were drowned in the extensive sea of data. If he didn’t need to look for something, he would never recall to flip through them at all.

As such, he would occasionally feel like the past 16 years of his life was a giant blur. He could not really recall where he’d been to, or where he’d lived before.

Moonlight was the only illumination in the dorm currently. Jiang Tian got up, and went to switch on the table lamp. Sheng Wang managed to get a full view of the photo album with the aid of that light.

This album was slightly special, the cover was a piece of quick sketch. The sketch was of the red can he often used for his profile pictures, like it was customised for him.

A corner of his lips quirked as he smiled, and flipped open to the first page.

He never actually guessed what photos would be inside that album, but it was still enough to stun him when he saw the first photo.

That was an old picture. Perhaps it was due to the restrictions of technology back then, the picture wasn't quite clear as today's. However, the trees by the side of the street as well as the passersby were outlined in light.

That's right, there wasn't a specific subject in the photo. It was a busy street.

Sheng Wang was a little lost, but he soon noticed the road sign at the corner: it was the street outside White Horse Alley, the entrance to his house.

At the upper right corner, someone wrote down the year.

A vague idea was starting to form in Sheng Wang's mind, and he flipped to the second page. That was a shopping mall, sitting at the intersection of the crossroads, the flow of traffic criss-crossed each other at that spot. The sunlight shone on the glass window, forming a dazzling patch of brightness.

Similarly, a number was also written at the upper right corner. It was the year following the first photo.

He suddenly recalled a morning where they waited for the bus, an evening when they walked to the administration office, and words he exchanged with Jiang Tian in certain conversations—

“I was an especially fussy kid back then, I would often cause a ruckus and wake everyone up early in the morning.”

“And then?”

“Then I would come to this street, and survey the circumstances of the common people. I had to walk from that end of the street to this end, and when I saw that everyone was living a safe and peaceful life, I could go back to sleep without any worries.”

“Why this street.”

“It’s lively.”

……

“See that crossroad yet? Wasn’t there a shopping mall here before? When I was young, I heard my mom say that before my grandpa passed away, I kept kicking up a fuss, whining about wanting to go shopping.”

“Did you know what you were doing?”

“I was two, of course I had no idea what I was doing. So I was just mingling with the common people, I was born to be an emperor, can’t help it. However, the mall’s already gone. Who knows when they demolished it.”

“They did it last year.”

“I’ve picked such an unfortunate timing to transfer back then. If I were a year earlier, I could still go back to reminisce.”

……

Sheng Wang kept flipping behind, page by page, one after another. The number at the upper right kept changing, year by tear. He saw many roads in the photos; roads near his house, near his primary school, outside his middle school. And then he was in another province; he saw the school

gate he often snuck out to eat at in middle school year three and high school year one, that Flower Street.

The last photo was taken this year, featuring the west gate of Fuzhong. He could see the giant characters of the school name on the arch above the school gate. Through the door was a horizontal street, and by the street was a narrow passage. A cart selling jianbing was parked there year round; that was the entrance to the long alleys in Wu Tong Wai.

On the other side of the photo was the convenience store he went to most often, two giant characters written on it: Xi Le.

The most special places to him this year were all in this photo.

There was a silhouette of a boy wearing his bag on a shoulder on the road to Xi Le, his right hand raised, like he was beckoning someone behind him.

That was Sheng Wang himself.

From the first year he was born to his sixteenth, all the roads he ever travelled were all recorded in this photo album. He could no longer keep all of them straight by himself, but unexpectedly, someone stealthily helped him to complete them, sealing them up in here.

Every road here is bustling with life, filled with the hubbub of people. Every year here is a brilliant sunny day.

Sheng Wang's eyes were lowered as he looked at the last photo; he did not look up for a long time.

His hand moved behind him to switch off the table lamp, and the entire dorm was filled with darkness once more. The photo blurred before his eyes, and he rapidly blinked several times.

After yet another long while, he then turned to ask Jiang Tian, "Where did you get these pictures?"

His voice was hoarser than before, the nasalness so slight to the point of being unnoticeable.

Jiang Tian rested against the table. He was next to Sheng Wang, his shoulder touched his. His eyes were the colour of the moon, clear and bright. However, the moment he lowered his eyes, they all were all buried in its depths. “I looked for them, Xi-ge helped me out a little.”

Sheng Wang then asked again, “When did you take the last one?”

Jiang Tian said, “I don’t recall, it’s quite a while ago.”

Sheng Wang nodded.

A while later, he said, “Why did you take a picture of me from behind?”

Jiang Tian did not say anything.

Sheng Wang: “Why are you so nice to me?”

Jiang Tian was silent for a long time, his brows briefly furrowed before relaxing. “I’m your Ge.”

Sheng Wang then nodded again. This time round, he was quiet for a long time, so long that Jiang Tian’s hand, propped against the edge of the table, started to tighten instead. His knuckles turned white. Sheng Wang

finally spoke, “Then, was it also because you are my Ge that you grabbed my hand just now?”

Jiang Tian no longer came up with a new explanation. Instead, he remained silent for a prolonged while.

Sheng Wang was emotional from looking through the photo album just now, and the alcohol started kicking in again. He thought that he was being perfectly composed, but every word he said was more impulsive than the last.

Every time Jiang Tian was rendered speechless by his questions, his heart pounded a little faster.

Perhaps it was the way they were too close to each other as their shoulders touched—or maybe it was simply an illusion—he felt that Jiang Tian’s heart was racing too, completely contradictory to his silent exterior; like the riptide beneath the peaceful surface of the ocean.

He listened to his heartbeat, and turned to look at Jiang Tian. “Ge, your heartbeat is as fast as mine.”

Jiang Tian blinked ever so lightly, like he wanted to block out that *something* and his impulse. However, when he opened them once more, the emotions in his eyes only deepened.

“Don’t call me that,” he turned to face Sheng Wang.

Due to the way they were making eye contact, the distance between them was ever so infinitesimal. Sheng Wang’s breathing was sent into a chaotic rhythm, all and any semblance to regularity was lost.

He saw Jiang Tian’s gaze dart below— beneath the tip of his nose— for a split second. Still, his gaze was kept back in an act of self control.

Sheng Wang blinked lightly too. “You said it yourself earlier, you did all of this because you are my Ge. Why aren’t you letting me call you that now?”

Jiang Tian managed to turn his eyes back in the end. He looked at Sheng Wang, his slightly lowered gaze was conflicted; his conflicted

emotions threatened to burst at the seams.

After who knows how long, he then spoke. “Because I’ll think that I’ve gone insane.”

He tilted his head and leaned in.

The moonlight passed through the window pane, taking over the corner of the table and the floor, like a geometry diagram taken apart.

Someone from a random dorm was still awake,; maybe they were having a chat in the dark, or perhaps they were playing around. Muffled laughter echoed in the night.

The two boys inside were leaning against the table, shoulder to shoulder. Their fingers gripped the edge. Their breaths mingled, quivering and tentative. They kissed each other; inexperienced and messy, both fervid and quiet.

Youths fall in love like a wasteland on a midsummer’s night; ceaseless, unhurt by flames and scythes.

With a caress of the breeze, the wild grass scrapes the sky.

Translator's notes:

And with that, I've caught up to the audio drama at last :3c

Even now I'm still not certain if I actually did the last line of this chapter any justice but hey,,,

End of book 3!

Chapter 071 - Shop's Anniversary Celebration

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Notes:

StarAniseCrab --> Bajiao Crab

His Personal Nickname Changed to Three Words: Shop’s Anniversary Celebration

Sheng Wang's heart was beating so fast it was about to explode.

He felt as though he was a hot air balloon; someone sneakily turned on the heat, and everything above his neck was dazed from the warmth—yet his limbs felt like they were floating in thin air. By the crash back to the ground sent him awake with a start, it was already morning.

He glared at the ceiling—which was nothing but white—as he spaced out, and was suddenly a little confused. He was unsure if he slept at all, and even doubted if “yesterday” as a concept actually existed.

He groped around by his pillow for quite a while before he found his phone and turned the screen on. The lock screen said that today was December 4th, it’s a sunny day. Every word could not be any clearer. He then felt by the right side of his pillow, and his hand landed on the leather cover of the photo album. He was certain he truly wasn’t dreaming at last.

Half of the sunlight was blocked by the door, and it shone onto the upper bunk from the side. After all that mess, Sheng Wang finally flopped back onto the pillow like a weight had been lifted off his back. A few seconds later, he suddenly tugged the quilt over his head.

In the darkness and stuffiness, he thought: fuck, he kissed his Ge.

Just this verb alone was enough to cause his heart to start speeding up.

Sheng Wang couldn’t recall any bit of how he climbed back up or how he buried himself under the quilt last night. In times of high stress, the memory tends to be scrambled up, along the lines of suddenly losing track of the very idea of time. When did what come first? How long did it last?

Did I say anything?

No, I think. Any pretexts were completely forgotten, like his mouth was sawed off.

What about Jiang Tian?

He didn't either, I think.

Sheng Wang tried his best to recall, but all that popped out was the way Jiang Tian's breath was feather light on the corner of his lips when he leaned over, and how soft his lips were. They were a little cool to the touch.

What the……

Fuck.

Sheng Wang's arms splayed open at the side of the bed, having the air of someone who was ready to leave for a better place on the spot. After muffling himself for a while, he rolled around in his quilt again, and buried his face deep in the pillow.

There was a likelihood that he did want to suffocate himself to death, but he did not succeed. In the end, he gave up and got up.

The quilt was tossed aside, and his hair was untidy from all the tossing and turning. Sheng Wang ran his fingers through it, and got on his

knees, wanting to lean over the railing to peer at the person in the lower bunk. That was, until he felt pain shoot up his right knee.

He hissed, sucking in air through his mouth, and rolled up his pants in confusion. Two bruises formed on his knee and shin. He was briefly stupefied before he remembered how he tried to keep it together after the kiss, and wanted to climb back upstairs like he was experienced and unfazed. That's how he bumped into the corner of the stairs twice in a row.

Comparatively, Jiang Tian was much more calmer, he—

Where is he???

Sheng Wang leaned over the bed railing; the lower bunk was as empty as it could be. The quilt was neatly folded, placed at the foot of the bed. The person on the bed had long since disappeared.

He unrolled his pants legs, and after going down two steps he gave up and jumped down with a hand on the railing. He went around the dorm

twice; he truly couldn’t find Jiang Tian.

It was 7am now, there was still an hour until the first period of classes for the training camp. How was the person gone just like that?

Sheng Wang grabbed his phone from the upper bunk, and called Jiang Tian without a second thought. Yet, the moment he pressed ‘call’ the regret started to hit him. As compared to talking, the two of them were more suited to just typing and sending each other messages on WeChat now.

He just managed to figure this out when the phone call was picked up.

The people on both ends of the call were near synchronously silent for quite a while.

Sheng Wang listened to Jiang Tian’s rather light breathing, and thought of the breath that landed on the corner of his lips last night.

He licked the edge of his lips, and took a glass of water from the table, drinking some. Jiang Tian’s deep voice finally rang next to his ear. “Hello.”

Sheng Wang's fingers, still holding the glass, tightened. He put down the glass.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Cafeteria," Jiang Tian answered, "you're up?"

"Just."

Sheng Wang sat down at his bed, and continued, "That scared me, I thought you—"

He lagged, and skipped the words "kissed me" in a fumble, "—and escaped just like that."

The person on the other end of the call seemed to be briefly at a loss for words too. Next, Jiang Tian's voice came through again. "I didn't."

Sheng Wang nodded, and only after he did then he realised that the person on the other end couldn't see him.

A sound of a whistle indistinctly came through the call. It was distant, like the gathering whistle the PE teacher will blow during class. Sheng Wang asked, with suspicion, "You're really at the cafeteria?"

……

Needless to say, he wasn’t there.

This school sounded the waking bell at 5.40am, and the regular students began their morning run by 6.10am. At 6.30am, the crowd spilled from the sports ground, and walked towards the teaching block as they chatted and laughed. That was when the sky lightened up.

Presently, a wave of sports students just arrived, and they did their warm up stretches along the track. The training teacher blew their whistle at the other end of the sports ground, and they all headed there. Jiang Tian was sitting at the top row of the spectator’s seats on this side.

Of course, Jiang Tian wasn’t as composed as he seemed either—otherwise his brain wouldn’t have short circuited, letting the other person go back to the upper bunk forgetting to say anything at all.

In the period of time before dawn, he slept a little, and went to the sports ground after he woke up. He tried to calm himself down with the

morning breeze, until Sheng Wang called him.

He stood up from the grandstand, and went down the giant flight of stairs. He said to the person at the other end of the phone, “What do you want to eat, I’ll buy and wait for you.”

*

The sky in this season appeared to be much further than ever. Sheng Wang pulled the collar of his shirt up, buried his chin inside and walked towards the cafeteria.

The sunlight was especially friendly today. It wasn’t raining, yet the flora by the side of the road were abnormally pristine. Even the withered leaves that landed on the ground were coated in a golden gleam.

The air was cold but clean. Sheng Wang inhaled, and a lazy bliss emanated throughout his entire body—like he would be pretty happy even without doing anything.

Only the special window was open in the canteen, a few people from the training camp were the only ones scattered all over such a giant place. He spotted Jiang Tian immediately.

Sheng Wang scampered over and sat down opposite Jiang Tian. In the end, his right knee accidentally bumped into the table, and he instantly hissed in pain.

“What happened?” Jiang Tian looked below the table.

Sheng Wang rubbed it carelessly. “Nothin’, accidentally knocked against a bruise.”

“Why is there a bruise?” Jiang Tian was a little puzzled as he watched the area he rubbed.

“Accidentally bumped against the staircase last night.”

“.....”

As to why he accidentally bumped against the staircase, there wasn’t a need to further elaborate.

Sheng Wang's motion of rubbing his bruise suddenly became mechanical. Jiang Tian's eyes were still stuck there, and after a while he then quietly looked up.

The two's eyes met each other, and started busying themselves with eating breakfast.

They were both hiding secrets, and did not notice their surroundings. Only when they looked up upon vaguely catching laughter and words around them, then they realised that the surrounding empty tables were all taken up by girls.

The two girls at the right probably just sat down. The classmate next to them teased, "Eh, can you two be any more obvious?"

"Seriously?" A girl with reddened ears rebutted, "You're *so* annoying."

"Okokok, let's eat," that boy answered. "Lemme take a look at your script later, please? Both Mazi and I thought that this subject is kinda tough to tackle."

The girl flashed a look at Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang's table. "Ours aren't any better either—"

As the conversation kept continuing and Jiang Tian happened to look up at the same time, that girl turned to Jiang Tian, her face as red as a tomato, "Jiang Tian? The script for the spoken English lesson and the few questions the teacher left us yesterday…...do you mind lending us a look?"

For a split second, Jiang Tian's face blanked out.

Sheng Wang choked on a mouthful of porridge, and coughed until he turned red.

The girl who asked this question did not expect a response like this at all and was startled. She hurriedly took out a tissue and gave it to Sheng Wang.

"Thanks." Sheng Wang calmed down as he sprawled over the table, his pale and thin hand weakly waving the tissue at her.

That girl cautiously asked, "Why did you suddenly choke?"

Jiang Tian got up to buy a bottle of water from the vending machine, and touched Sheng Wang's hand with the bottom of the bottle, settling it next to him. He then finally said to the girl, "You should borrow from other people, I suppose."

"Huh?" the girl stopped.

Jiang Tian said, "I didn't do it."

The girl: "???"

Sheng Wang looked up from the crook of his elbow, the redness was fading down from his neck. He opened the bottle of water Jiang Tian bought, downed two gulps, and saw the girl turn towards him again out of the corner of his eyes.

He swallowed the water, and smiled awkwardly, "I didn't do it either."

The girl: "???"

“Are you two not planning to write anymore or……”

Sheng Wang gave a forceful laugh. “We forgot.”

The teacher in charge of the public speaking lesson was very strict; a little fierce, even. The girl thought of the teacher’s face and couldn’t help but say, “So much time last night…...and you two didn’t write a single word?”

Sheng Wang was planning to take a couple of mouthfuls again, and upon hearing that, he made himself stop as he refused to choke to death for the second time. He met eyes with Jiang Tian and looked away again. “Yeah, not a word. Guess we’ll catch up at noon break.”

When he heard Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang didn’t do their homework, Bian Chen instantly came alive. It wasn’t that he was enjoying their misfortune, but rather he thought he could score for PK today at last.

He also did return back late last night, but he did not really dare to forget about the speech at all. Therefore, he burned the midnight oil until it was three plus in the morning, and polished out a script that he was very satisfied with.

Noon break was only an hour, to finish writing a script as well as figuring out the questions the teacher left yesterday—and to also prepare for today's improv speech—there was no way they would succeed unless they were doped or something.

Bian Chen kept waiting, and the public speaking lesson in the afternoon came at last. Before the lesson started, he even said to his deskmate, "Just you wait, your daddy, I, will *slay* everyone here."

In the end, he soon noticed he was being too imaginative.

The two bastards probably did take drugs; not only did they settle the script, they even performed especially well. Judging by the reactions of the few girls in front of them, they were likely jaw-droppingly handsome while doing it.

Bian Chen thought, annoyed: they are just like peacocks opening their feathers, who are they even showing off to!

The gap between him and Sheng Wang wasn't that big with the normal public speaking PK on the first day. Today, with impromptu Q&A as well as the speech, the disparity in their scores was soul crushing.

As such, for the second half of the lesson, he was entirely out of it. He sprawled over his table like he was on the verge of death, thinking that he had to be sleepwalking.

What he didn’t know was that the two behind him weren’t exactly in the right mood too—especially Sheng Wang.

The moment Sheng Wang finished his improv speech and left the stage, he received some WeChat messages from his old classmates, all wishing him a happy birthday.

He replied to everyone one by one, and chatted a bit more with Bajiao Crab.

Crab was an abnormally gossipy person, he was not outdone by Gao Tianyang in this aspect. It was obvious from the way he followed Fuzhong's confession wall. However, he was different from Gao Tianyang when it came to one point: Gao Tianyang's EQ was lower than the grass. Crab was different; he was especially perceptive when he gossiped.

After bullshitting around with Sheng Wang, he suddenly said, suspiciously: Sheng-ge, I've noticed something

Recyclable: what?

Bajiao Crab: in order for you to not mistake me for some screwed up person, lemme first explain

Recyclable: ?

Bajiao Crab: we started competition classes recently too. those questions disgust me so much that I'm turning bald, every time I can't solve them, I want to message you. but!

Bajiao Crab: I'm so considerate, I know your papers are more disgusting than mine, so I endured it

Bajiao Crab: however!

Bajiao Crab: I didn’t send any questions to you in the end, but I have tapped on your chat countless times

Recyclable: ……

Recyclable: if you keep talking in such a disgusting manner I am going to unfriend you

Bajiao Crab: no pls

Bajiao Crab: kowtows

Bajiao Crab: I’m done building up

Bajiao Crab: I just wanna say, bro your profile picture is changing kinda quite frequently these past few months

Recyclable: ……

Sheng Wang stared at the chat interface, and could vaguely guess what that idiot on the other side wanted to say.

Just as expected, several new messages popped up in his chat at once.

Bajiao Crab: I figured

Bajiao Crab: Sheng-ge, is something up?

Bajiao Crab: [fly rubbing its hands]

(t/n: yes i know that's not a fly)

Bajiao Crab: [narrowed eyes smile]

Bajiao Crab: look at how long you've used 'canned'? ever since I know you, all you used is canned, even after you left you still didn't change

Recyclable: ……

Bajiao Crab: you've changed enough recently to last for several years

Bajiao Crab: are you dating someone now?

Sheng Wang's brows twitched.

He stared at that line for a long while, and then turned to look at Jiang Tian.

The other person noticed his gaze landing on him. His head was slightly lowered as he asked, "What?"

Sheng Wang made use of the boy impassionately speaking on stage as a cover, and said, "Was talking on WeChat with a bro from before."

Out of who knew what mindset, he turned over his phone screen and showed it to the other person.

Jiang Tian's eyes moved down; from that angle, he probably saw the line “dating someone” immediately. He stilled for a few seconds, and his eyes moved up to look at Sheng Wang.

The teachers on stage were scoring the student, most of the students in the classroom were all at the edge of their seats. This corner of this classroom was the only place that was thoroughly filled by some ineffable thing.

That boy walked down from the stage. The teacher made some brief comments, and a girl went up next. Sheng Wang shot a hurried glance over there, lowered his eyes and typed out a reply to Crab.

Recyclable: u just reminded me

Bajiao Crab: ?

Recyclable: it’s time for me to change my profile picture

Bajiao Crab: ???

Jiang Tian watched him reply with those. He also saw the scoring teacher—who was watching the speech—leave the stage, and sit down on a random empty spot in the back of the classroom.

Jiang Tian had no choice but to look away, and watched the improv speech in complete disinterest. A while later, he looked down once more, dug his phone out from the bag, opened Sheng Wang’s WeChat profile and refreshed.

This person changed his profile picture to a giant Wang-zai gift pack, his personal nickname changed to three words: Shop’s Anniversary Celebration.

(t/n: Something like this, also see this fanart (6th picture))

Jiang Tian: “.....”

After Sheng Wang changed his profile picture, he went to mess with Crab again, causing the other person to keep spamming memes as well as cawing and yelling in his replies. He finally stopped with much satisfaction.

There were only a few minutes left until class was over. He casually went through Moments a few times, and thought everyone's moments were pretty interesting. Lastly, he unknowingly tapped into the chat with "Someone".

The real person was sitting next to him, but he was looking at this person's WeChat personal info page instead.

Compared to him, Jiang Tian had a much more consistent profile picture and personal nickname. Always Leader the cat, always the full stop.

Although he could predict how his Moment was empty just as usual, he tapped in nonetheless. That was when he saw a change.

The cover for Jiang Tian's moments was originally the default one, nothing was changed. However, it was different today—it became a photo.

The photo was taken before dawn break, the morning light was pale and shone in from the patio, dividing the dorm clearly into darkness and light.

That empty table was right in the middle of the boundary; half received the bask of the light, the other remained at night.

Nobody knew that a few hours prior, the table witnessed the pounding of hearts between youths, and the seamless intimacy between them.

Sheng Wang stared at that photo, and a wave of red crawled up his neck.

Fuck……

He didn’t know how much Jiang Tian drank when he took that photo last night, but either way, he was never getting sober from that.

Translator's notes:

Aight I don't know what's wrong with me at the start who decided on StarAniseCrab for Bajiao Crab but anyways the reason behind the change:

I've realised while the □□ in □□□□ can mean star anise, □□ could also mean eight sided, or also serve as a pun for □□(also bajiao), meaning eight legs. Since there's a pun here I might as well give up and use pinyin so there it is. here we are.

Sheng Wang's personal nickname evolution:

- Canned (Chapter 1)→ Shop's Closed (Chapter 30) → Open for Business (Chapter 35) → Sticker (Chapter 36)→ Recyclable (Chapter 68) → Shop's Anniversary Celebration (Chapter 71)

Jiang Tian's alias (given by Sheng Wang) evolution:

- . (Jiang Tian's own personal nickname, Chapter 1) → Jiang Tian (Chapter 11) → Ge (older brother, Chapter 57) → Changbai Mountain's Divine Tree (Chapter 62) → The Emperor of Acting in the Jungle (Chapter 63) → Jiang Tian > Ge > *Someone* (Chapter 68)

Sheng Wang's alias (given by Jiang Tian)

- Briefly "Sheng Wang", and removed so he could see every change in Sheng Wang's personal nickname

and also, happy valentines! love yourself <3

Chapter 072 - Unsuccessful Attempt

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you could!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

This Table Is Poisonous.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were completely distracted as they were reading WeChat messages, therefore they naturally did not notice what was happening at the lectern. Neither did they catch the “We’ll be checking up on you guys in your dorms tonight” said by the teacher.

When class ended, the teacher pasted a piece of paper containing a table on the classroom’s front door. The rows listed out the dates, meticulously marking out the training time for the two weeks for every day, box by box. The columns were listed according to the groups, two to a group, and so 20 groups in total.

At the start, the students were mystified by the purpose of said table, and everyone crowded around it. That was, until the public speaking teacher took out the score sheet used for the past two days, and started writing down the marks on the table.

Those who won the PK that day were given a 1, those who lost were given a 0. Both Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian won two days in a row, so they both got two 1s. Bian Chen and the unfortunate opponent of Jiang Tian's lost two days in a row, so they both got two 0s each.

People at this age are more or less competitive, and neither do they have a thick face. This table was literally public shaming to the group of students who were too used to praises, and so their fighting spirit instantly surged up.

As such, the number of people who snuck outside and play at night saw a sudden fall. Even if they went out, they obediently went back to the dorms at around 7-8pm.

The corridor today was especially lively. In order to make it easy for everyone to pop over, the group of boys from Yizhong all left their doors wide open. Like they were welcoming guests at any time.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian just returned from dinner, and there were enough people in the corridor to make them feel like they stuck in a fair.

Quite a few boys popped in and out of various dorms, hugging their clothes and towels. There was even someone who asked at the top of his lungs, “Er-zi, why don’t you even fucking have shower gel?”

“Just finished them and forgot to buy.” A boy in the corridor spat at the small bathroom window, “What do you mean tree bark skin still needs shower gel? Just make do with bar soap.”

“Fuck off.”

“Are you showering or not? If you aren’t, get out.”

“I am I am I am.”

Sheng Wang had confusion written all over him, and nearly thought that he came to a public bathhouse instead. “What are you all doing?”

“Couldn’t you tell? They’re sharing bathrooms for showering.” Spiritually speaking, Bian Chen was still immersed in the PK in the afternoon, every word he spoke was still laced with emotion. All of this person’s emotions showed on his face, so in a way this became a sort of frankness after interacting with him for a while.

The boy beside him pointed at the noticeboard by the staircase. “Didn’t you read the notice when you come up?”

“Notice?”

Sheng Wang really didn’t notice.

Jiang Tian went back to check, and said, “There will be a water outage.”

“Think the pipeline’s getting renovated or something, but either way there will be a water outage tonight.” Someone explained, “The notice says it starts at eight, but just now, there were already two dorms with so little water coming out that they can’t shower.”

Bian Chen corrected, “Now there’s three.”

“Oh, yeah. It started from that end,” the boy pointed at the other end of the corridor. “The girls downstairs are still okay, so I’m guessing it’s because our floor is higher, and the water pressure isn’t enough? Anyway, it’s possible that the water will be cut before 8 pm. There’s still 20 minutes, if you want to shower you better hurry up.”

As they spoke, a howl came from a dorm. “Shit, there’s no water. I still haven’t rinsed myself!”

His neighbour instantly answered, “How about you come over here? I still have water, we can squeeze.”

“I’ll squeeze your grandpa, I’m literally naked, how am I supposed to go over?!”

“Cover yourself then moron!”

“I swear—to fucking god.”

The people along the corridor paused, and instantly guffawed. They started howling and jeering, “Cover yourself! Cover yourself!”

Not even two minutes later, a topless boy—entirely drenched and in his underwear—came bursting out from his dorm, and sprinted to the other dorm.

Due to the shower gel being too slippery, he stumbled at the doorstep, and a bunch of boys cackled as they went to tug at his underwear.

“What the fuck!!! You assholes!!!!” That boy wriggled out of their grasps with much struggle as he held onto his underwear. He roared, “JUST YOU FUCKING WAIT, I’LL PULL YOURS OFF WHEN I CATCH YOU LATER!”

It’s not like Sheng Wang never witnessed residence life before, but he had truly never seen anything this uninhibited. His jaws were agape and his eyes burned. He pushed Jiang Tian as they hurried back into their dorm, and as they entered, he even grumbled, “I’m being so cautious, and yet there they are, no qualms at all.”

Jiang Tian was typing on WeChat with his head lowered, thanking Zhao Xi for his help. He did not realise what Sheng Wang just said, and replied, without thinking, “What do you mean by cautious?”

“.....”

Sheng Wang closed the door with his hand behind his back, and watched him, wordless.

Jiang Tian turned around, and his eyes were lidded as the gears in his brain momentarily turned before he understood. His eyes shifted up, and his

gaze swept across Sheng Wang's eyes, before they slid downwards a little ever so lightly.

Sheng Wang could feel the door getting warm from his back. He was about to say something, but the phone in his pocket suddenly vibrated. He dug it out, and saw that Sheng Mingyang had just sent him a message on WeChat.

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: Are your lessons over yet? Are you free to take a call now?

Sheng Wang's heart skipped.

He did know that this was merely a coincidence, of course. However, as he read a message from his dad at this time like this, the irrepressible feeling of guilt always welled up in him.

Jiang Tian did not get a clear view of who the sender was. He merely tore his eyes away from Sheng Wang's lips like he just came back to

himself. A second later, he then turned back to say, “There’s still 20 minutes, you take a shower first.”

“I’m returning a call, you go first,” Sheng Wang said.

“A call?” Jiang Tian asked.

Sheng Wang hurriedly turned off his screen, and the hand holding the phone drooped. On the surface, that action appeared to be inadvertent, but it actually implied traces of having something to hide. “My classmate from before, asking me if I’m done with lessons. Probably here to wish me a happy birthday.”

Jiang Tian nodded. He tossed his phone next to his pillow, took fresh clothes from the closet and entered the bathroom. He tested the water temperature first, and came out to remind Sheng Wang, “Don’t talk for too long, there isn’t enough hot water.”

“Got it.”

Sheng Wang walked around the dorm, and decided to go to the balcony in the end. He propped his elbows on the railing, and stared at

Sheng Mingyang’s message for a while. Only when his previously startled heart rate returned to normal, he then typed: especially inconvenient.

Not even two seconds later, his phone started vibrating.

Sheng Wang waited for a few rings, biting the tip of his tongue, before he accepted the call. “Didn’t I say that it’s not convenient now?”

Amusement was in Sheng Mingyang’s voice. “You think I wouldn’t understand that opposite language you speak? Lessons’ over?”

“Just.”

“It’s really just over?” Sheng Mingyang said, “It’s already seven plus.”

“Then why do you even ask me if the lesson's over,” Sheng Wang said.

Sheng Mingyang grumbled “stinkin’ brat" at the other side of the phone. “Fine, Dad’s too used to making customary remarks and hasn’t adjusted. I plead guilty with all my sincerity, is that okay now?”

“Okay,” Sheng Wang said.

“Have you eaten dinner?” Sheng Mingyang said, “Now, this isn’t customary, right?”

“Just eaten,” Sheng Wang also said, “It’s true this time round.”

Sheng Mingyang laughed. “What did you eat? Is the food there okay?”

“The canteen is so-so, but there are a lot of shops outside, the taste is not bad.”

“So, you went out with Xiao-Tian to eat today?”

Hearing the two words “Xiao-Tian”, Sheng Wang’s guilt reared its ugly head again. His shoulders hunched as he squeezed his joints. He replied using a casual tone, “Nah, we ate in the canteen.”

“You didn’t go out on your birthday?” Sheng Mingyang was a little caught by surprise. “Oh yeah, does Xiao-Tian not know your birthday?”

Jiang Ou’s voice came next to his, “He knows, I’ve told him at the start. He said he knew, and that he saw Xiao-Wang’s student info at some

teacher’s office or the administration office. He’s an older brother, and he seriously did nothing at all? Let me ask Xiao-Wang—”

Upon hearing that Jiang Ou was going to take over the call, Sheng Wang hurriedly added, “We did, we celebrated yesterday. Last night, we ate a grand meal outside.”

For some reason the guilt was intensified with Jiang Ou’s voice, as compared to Sheng Mingyang. Fortunately, after adding that line, Jiang Ou’s concern eased, and no longer said anything.

“Then you have to thank Xiao-Tian,” Sheng Mingyang said. “Not every older brother will remember to celebrate his younger brother’s birthday.”

He unwittingly took on the business tone again. Sheng Wang carelessly nodded, “Already thanked.”

Sheng Mingyang nagged at him to remember Jiang Tian’s birthday too, and then exchanged a few casual lines before he finally hung up with

Sheng Wang's urging.

He zoned out for a while as he rested against the railing. A wave of guilt would hit him, and a wave of rebelliousness the next. Only when the balcony door behind him was pushed open then did those conflicting thoughts finally come to a temporary end.

Jiang Tian was drying his hair. Due to the cleansing the water had given him, his features were so clean that they glowed beneath the light. When Sheng Wang saw him, all those nonsensical, conflicting thoughts went to the back of his mind, the joy that continued since early morning began to slowly poke its head out once more.

"You're done?" Jiang Tian asked.

"Yeah." Sheng Wang went through the balcony door, grabbed his phone with an eye squinted at the upper bunk, aiming, and then tossed it out like he was shooting for the basket. It landed exactly on the thick quilt on the bed, not a single inch off. Any sound from crashing was completely cushioned, like how all external worries were separated from himself.

“I’m going to shower.” Sheng Wang went inside the bathroom with his clothes.

The water vapour wasn’t as substantial as the previous showers—maybe it was because of the cold weather, but it wasn’t really quite humid either. Sheng Wang originally thought that since he’s showering later, he would be the only unlucky one if the water runs out. Unexpectedly, there was more hot water than he thought; if he showered quickly enough, there was totally enough to go around. He managed to finish showering as the flow of the water gradually turned slower and cooler.

Sheng Wang opened the small window to disperse the vapours, and walked out as he dried his hair. Jiang Tian was already seated before the table, penning down the script to be used for public speaking tomorrow.

With the lesson they learnt from the previous day, they did not dare to forget their homework anymore. When class ended, they obediently copied the theme for the speech and the post-lesson Q&A. Sheng Wang casually hung his towel around his neck, and went to take his bag.

He dug out a notebook and a pen from his bag, pulled open the other chair at the table and sat down. However, when his arm just rested on the edge of the table, what happened last night started to come flooding back……

His fingers gripped the edge of the table, his head was slightly tilted. At some unknown point, his fingers loosened, crooked and grasping at thin air. And later, he grabbed onto Jiang Tian’s arm instead.

……

This table is poisonous.

(t/n: Poisonous - chinese internet slang of describing something is irresistibly quirky, compelling in wackiness to the point that it makes the the person feel like they are intoxicated or addicted to something, can take on different meanings in different situations too)

Sheng Wang hurriedly stood up again the moment he just sat down. He paced around with his pen and notebook, and climbed up the stairs to the upper bunk under Jiang Tian’s watch.

“Why are you going there?” Jiang Tian asked.

Sheng Wang sat down on the middle of the stairs, and said, in a restful buddhist meditation voice, “Cos I wanna.”

Jiang Tian raised an eyebrow, and didn’t say anything else. He nodded and went back to studying, the white wireless earpiece still stuffed in his ears. When he lowered his head, the curvature of the muscles on his shoulders became rather obvious, like a gorgeous and refined bow. His shoulders were broad, his waist was narrow. He had the energy that came uniquely from being his age—thin, but not frail.

Sheng Wang had never written the entire script every time he prepared, he only wrote down the key words. With that, not only is it speedy, he could make adjustments in time. There weren’t any of the dryness and awkwardness that came from hardcore memorisation.

He jotted down bits of words and phrases here and there in his notebook, and as he wrote, he couldn’t help but to look up and stare at his Ge’s back.

After a while, he pursed his lips, and he stood up again with his notebook and pen in hand for some inexplicable reason. He walked back to the table, pulled open that chair without saying a single word, and sat down next to Jiang Tian.

He had just put his things down when the person next to him suddenly spoke, “Why are you back again?”

Sheng Wang happened to be writing down nouns with a pen in his grip. When he heard that, he shot a glance at him before looking back, continuing to write a few letters. “Cos I wanna.”

The dorm was very quiet, there was only the scritch-scratching noise his pen made as he wrote. His arm touched Jiang Tian’s, his skin met the other person’s skin. Their body heat was transmitted to each other, with zero barriers in the way.

He finished writing down the phrase, and finally put down his pen amidst the tension clouding in the air.

He saw Jiang Tian remove an earpiece, his head tilted as he leaned in, his gaze casted from his half-lowered eyes.

Their breaths mingled between their lips. Just as they were about to touch, a “knock knock knock” suddenly came from their door.

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Motherfuck which idiot is here at this time?!

Chapter 073 - Liar

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He Did Not Say Anything, Yet He Managed to Accomplish Everything.

Sheng Wang stormed to the door like an angry chicken flapping its wings. He only realised that he was being a total dumbass when his hand was already on the door handle—he should have completely disregarded everything and just give his Ge a munch first.

With that, he felt that he totally lost out.

The idiot was still knocking. He opened the door with the expression that said he’s gonna eat someone, and just as he was about to ask “What”, he saw that the ‘idiot’ was the teachers from training camp. It was a group of five teachers with the teacher in charge of logistics leading them, standing at the door as they grinned.

Sheng Wang: “.....”

“Oh? What’s with the look on your face? You’re unwell?” Teachers usually are a little biased towards students with outstanding results, these

few teachers all quite liked Sheng Wang. They weren't as strict when they spoke outside of lessons.

Sheng Wang obediently put down his metaphorical butcher knife, and came up with an excuse. "Gastric pain."

"Why the sudden gastric pain? Ate something wrong or did you catch a cold?" a teacher asked.

Sheng Wang bit the bullet and switched back on the "too weak to fight even a chicken" character setting he had stopped using a long time ago. "Nothin', I just have a poor constitution, that's all."

It was the logistics teacher who answered instead. "A cold, I figure. This school sure loves to joke around, they could have renovated that useless pipeline at any other time, but they choose to do it during training camp? Let's not talk about them, I myself nearly got doused in cold water when I was showering just now."

The grammar teacher said, "Oh, I showered at noon after my class ended in the morning, I really didn't notice. It would be disastrous to

shower in cold water in this weather.”

“Yeah, you’ll definitely fall sick.”

They all came into the room one after another, greeted Jiang Tian, and looked around the dorm.

“Teacher, why are you suddenly visiting our dorm?” Sheng Wang asked.

The public speaking teacher scoffed. “Daydreaming in class, I see. It’s obvious that you weren’t listening. I’ve already said this afternoon that we will be visiting tonight. The previous two days, we were busy with all sorts of preparation work, and free time finally came up tonight. We said that we’re here to check up on you guys, see whether you’re okay with your stay here etc, but now that we ran into a water outage, we can’t bring ourselves to say this anymore.”

After he spoke, he pointed at Jiang Tian, “See, Jiang Tian listened in class. He knew that we’re coming, and didn’t ask questions like this.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He knows jackshit.

Jiang Tian just put down his pen and stood up by the table. When he saw Sheng Wang's woefully wronged expression, he couldn't help but want to laugh a little bit. That split second of expression was caught by the public speaking teacher, and he said, "See, your emotions *are* quite vivid now!"

Jiang Tian: "?"

"I've already told you like 800 times for the past two days, your script is very well written, your diction is precise and remarkable." The teacher said, "It's just that the emotional tonality in your voice has some issues. A successful orator can stir emotions in a crowd, they can even move them to tears. After you speak, the audience ought to be overwhelmed by a myriad of feelings or be deeply moved or—"

The teacher was really getting into it, and went on and on. It was literally an impromptu "How to make a cold-faced student passionate again" speech.

After he spoke, he took two sips of water from the mineral water bottle in his hands, still wanting to go on. He asked Jiang Tian, “Are you overwhelmed by feelings yet?”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

He silently pondered for two seconds, and just as he was about to speak, the teacher raised his hand. “Fine, I get it, don’t need to say it out loud. Your expression is enough.”

He turned to his colleagues, “I’m resigning tomorrow.”

The teachers nearly died from laughter.

The public speaking teacher turned solemn again. “Okay, no more jokes. The public speaking PKs during the training camp *are* quite important. Think about it, when pros fight each other, the difference between a mark more and a mark less is enormous. With the PKs counted into the total score, it is quite significant.”

“Today, we’re here to talk about this too. We just want to give all the students a reminder when there’s still plenty of days left in the training

camp. The final outcome of the competition is a part of it. In our core, we still wish for brilliant students to overcome their shortcomings, and become even more brilliant. Every person has their own personality, you are good and bad at different things. I am not forcing you to be oh super expressive or anything, what you have now is entirely good enough for the competition alone. Still, I would like you to try your best to improve yourself."

The teacher pointed at Sheng Wang, "See, your roommate is a readily available resource, you can totally have one person speak and the other person be the audience. You can see if you can move him, overwhelm him with feelings and make him cry, right?"

These teachers really did cherish talents. They weren't in class, yet they still couldn't help but to teach them various techniques and tricks, and chat like this, one dormitory after the other.

In the end, they held a mini meeting with everyone, and said what they needed to take note of for the final competition before they were completely dispersed.

It was already quite late into the night—the sound of human voices rose and fell like the tide, but also blocked out by the dormitory door.

Sheng Wang yawned twice in a row, and started to feel sleepy.

There was something wrong with all the students, they loved to fight against themselves. They clearly wanted to sleep, but they would still insist on playing games on their phones for a bit. Their eyes were clearly threatening to shut, but they would still insist on uselessly chatting away with people on WeChat; like if they didn’t wring themselves out until they accidentally fall asleep, they would be making a complete waste of time. The ten minutes interclass break was the only time when they had zero qualms falling asleep.

Sheng Wang walked around the dorm for a bit after he brushed his teeth, offhandedly grabbed Jiang Tian’s script, and sat down on the staircase to the upper bunk.

Jiang Tian stood by the basin, the splashing of water as well as the soft buzzing of the electric toothbrush could be heard from Sheng Wang's end. As Sheng Wang stepped onto the next step, he listened for the other person's movements and read the script with his head lowered, his fingers gripping the zip.

Jiang Tian came over. He splashed water on his face, tiny beads of water gathered at the tip of the hair before his forehead. Sheng Wang sat a little high up, Jiang Tian's head was also slightly lowered, so from the angle on the staircase, he could only see his high nose and flat lips.

Young master Sheng stared at that for a few seconds before his gaze quietly darted away. In this age, once the stirring in the heart finds an outlet, one would want more than anything to step on that threshold, all day every day.

Restless and silently reflecting at the same time—

Every time he became restless, his eyes always ended up beneath Jiang Tian’s nose, sometimes not even he himself caught what he was doing. Who knows if Jiang Tian noticed, and who knows what he would think if he did.

And then he would silently reflect, thinking that he was being up to no good.

“Why are you sitting on the stairs again?” Jiang Tian took a piece of tissue along the way.

The moment he spoke, Sheng Wang had the feeling of being caught red handed for thinking impure thoughts. Therefore, he straightened a leg and switched to a more unperturbed position.

He lightly waved the book in his hand. “I’m reading your script. Didn’t the teacher say it’s quite well written? I’m reading it respectfully.”

Jiang Tian remembered the teacher’s teasing remark, and was a little resigned. “Are you done? Return me if you are.”

“Nope.” Sheng Wang did not absorb a single word at all. He casually flipped through two pages, saying, “It’s faster to listen than to read, how about you just perform it now.”

“Not happening.” Jiang Tian refused to show him any face at all.

“The teacher already said so, you can’t let a free audience like me go to waste.”

“I’ll rather waste it.”

“Hurry up, where else are you gonna find such a cooperative audience?” Sheng Wang was really getting into teasing him. He leaned backwards like he was his boss, and his hands splayed open, “Come, more feels in your words, make me *cry*.”

“.....”

The dorm was momentarily quiet. Jiang Tian shook off the water droplets in his hair, blinked and looked up.

Sheng Wang realised that his words were a little misleading after he spoke. He met Jiang Tian’s eyes, and immediately continued, “No—I mean

—use your words to make……”

He spoke halfway through and decided to shut up, feeling that this was in no way any better than saying nothing.

The pleasantries he learnt from Sheng Mingyang were all completely useless in this situation—he was suddenly fumbling over his words.

The young master silently kept his audacious leg, and shut himself down on the staircase with his head lowered. Next, he fled to the upper bunk. His actions were pretty composed, but his figure was superimposed with “I’ve freaking embarrassed myself again”.

Jiang Tian’s eyes were still on the stairs, and a long while passed before he blinked and came back to himself. The person on the upper bunk had already buried himself alive. He went back to the basin mechanically, and turned on the tap before he remembered that he was done washing up. Therefore, he washed his hands for the second time while looking perfectly

composed, took a second piece of tissue to dry his hands, and finally switched off the lights as he made his way back to bed.

When he lifted the quilt and sat on his bed, a gust of night breeze snuck in through the gap between the balcony door and the floor. He felt a little cold, but he did not take it seriously…...and that was how he faced the music on the second day.

Sheng Wang was woken up by the alarm at 7.15am, his eyes blearily opened before he discovered that Jiang Tian's script was still in his hands. The temperature had fallen again, and the early morning was a little cold.

He grabbed a jacket, wore it, and came down from the upper bunk, wanting to return the script back. However, he found the person in the lower bunk still facing the wall, deep in sleep.

Jiang Tian usually got up early; it was a little abnormal for him to still be sleeping at this time.

Sheng Wang propped himself against the bed and stuck his head in. He softly asked, “Are you awake?”

Jiang Tian’s brows furrowed. He grunted, “Mn.”

Quite a while later, he finally opened his eyes and sat up. “What time is it?”

Sheng Wang did not check the time. Instead, he stared at his complexion for a while, asking, “Are you feeling unwell?”

Jiang Tian knew it damn well himself whether he was unwell or not. He did wake up at around 5+ in the morning, his throat painfully parched, bouts of chills running throughout his entire body. Therefore, he went to the kitchen, poured himself a cup of hot water and downed it.

He thought he would be fine after some sleep, but it ended up worsening in the morning, even his eyes were so dry that they hurt.

It was the first time Sheng Wang ever saw Jiang Tian being like this: his skin changed from a cold white to a ghastly white, his hair messily

falling before his forehead, half-covering his eyes when his head was lowered. He could see his tightly knitted brows through the gaps in-between his messy hair.

He suspected that Jiang Tian had gotten a fever, but there wasn't a thermometer in the dorm. As such, he leaned in, wanting to measure the other person's temperature with his own forehead.

Jiang Tian likely felt him moving, and his eyes half opened. After a moment of hesitance, he instinctively backed away. He rasped, "Stay further away, you'll get infected."

"To hell being infected, I'm tryna see if you have a fever." Sheng Wang stubbornly pressed his forehead to this, and felt a patch of burning heat.

"Why the sudden high fever?" Sheng Wang straightened up. He rushed to get the campus map the logistics teacher gave out, and frantically tried to find the location of the sickbay.

Jiang Tian sat on the bed for a while. “Maybe I got up too early yesterday.”

“It still wouldn’t be this bad though.” As Sheng Wang spoke, he suddenly recalled the offhanded comments the teachers made last night, and also the bare cloud of water vapour left in the bathroom before he showered. He came to a halt in the middle of flipping through the pages.

He gazed at the slight tinge of redness beneath Jiang Tian’s eyes that came from the fever, and asked, “Ge, did you not use hot water when you showered yesterday?”

Jiang Tian did not look up. He rubbed his temples like he was minding his own business, and his lips, dry and cracked, slightly moved. “I did.”

Liar.

Sheng Wang thought.

The teacher said a successful orator can use their words to overwhelm people with a myriad of feelings, to cause a surge of emotions, to make people laugh their hearts out, to reduce people to tears, to cause people's hearts to be filled with *something* but not a single word adequately formed.

However, Jiang Tian was different.

He did not say anything, yet he managed to accomplish everything.

Chapter 074 - Numb Legs

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“Ge, What Are We Now?”

As a patient, Jiang Tian had approximately zero self-awareness.

Sheng Wang managed to locate the sickbay, refilled the hot water dispenser and plugged it in—he did not want to come back to only cold water for Jiang Tian to drink after he goes to buy the medicine—but the moment he turned around, Jiang Tian already got up from the bed.

His school bag was upended on his bed, the zip wide open. Inside it was the script that Sheng Wang had seized for himself for the entire night. His hand grabbed a bag strap, and he sat on the bed with his head lowered, trying to wait for the dizziness to pass.

He probably heard Sheng Wang’s footsteps. He croaked, “Give me five minutes.”

“What five minutes?” Sheng Wang stilled, “Why are you up?”

Jiang Tian said, “I’m going to class.”

Sheng Wang: “???”

“I’ve already asked the teacher to excuse you from class, what do you mean by going to class. Stay lying down.” Sheng Wang strided over, wanting to take his bag away. Jiang Tian dodged him.

He opened his eyes, “It’s not that bad.”

“You’re in my hands, whether it’s that bad is entirely up to me,” Sheng Wang returned what Jiang Tian said before, word for word. He gripped the other end of the bag, and stared at him with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, “Are you lying down or not? If you aren’t, I’m taking off your jacket.”

Jiang Tian looked at Sheng Wang, a little speechless, his gaze passing through the messy fringe on his forehead. Perhaps it was from his pale complexion, his eyes were darker than usual, a few traces of sickness lingered.

A while later, he finally felt that standing off like this was simply foolish. He looked away and let go of the bag.

Sheng Wang immediately stuffed his bag in the upper bunk.

“Lie down for a bit first, the hot water is cooking, it will probably take a few minutes—” Sheng Wang wore a jacket, took out a small sports bag from the closet and slung it behind his back.

He wasn’t done briefing Jiang Tian, but Jiang Tian cut him off, “You’re going to class?”

“Huh?” Sheng Wang paused. “No, I asked for leave too.”

“Then where are you going?”

Sheng Wang waved the campus guide in his hand. “Taking medicine for you from the sickbay.”

Jiang Tian withdrew his gaze. He coughed to the side before he said, “No need for medicine, some hot water will do.”

“I’m boiling hot water, not Miracle Healing Water.” Sheng Wang flipped the collars up to cover the lower half of his face, “If you insist on being like this, I’ll find a way to get infected. Then the two of us can both

drink hot water, and see who can triumph over the illness with willpower alone first.”

Jiang Tian: “...”

Seeing that he finally went back to lying down on his bed with no further protests, Sheng Wang left the dorm in satisfaction. The school’s sickbay was next to the students’ dormitory, it was a little far away from the teachers’ condos in front of the hill. He jogged all the way there.

There weren’t that many complicated procedures to acquire medicine, it was okay to take on the behalf of other people too. There were two teachers on duty, and one of them asked him, “What’s the situation, how did he get the fever?”

“He probably showered with cold water.”

“Cold water? In this weather?”

Sheng Wang stared at the ground and was silent for a few seconds before nodding. “Mn.”

It was the teacher on duty who was at the opposite table who said instead, “Hey, you’ll never know. This is the third person claiming medicine today. Wasn’t there a water outage in the teachers’ condo last night? There were some who legit showered with cold water. However, those two didn’t have a fever—they just got a sore throat.”

“Oh, I see. I thought it’s some other student who couldn’t take it anymore and is trying to score a sick leave.” The teacher smiled at Sheng Wang apologetically, and said, “I’m going to grab medicine for you now, hold on, okay?”

The school hospital was probably afraid that the students would eat indiscriminately, so the school didn’t give that much in quantity. However, they did give him an additional thermometer. Sheng Wang kept the medicine, and just as the teacher was about to remind “feel free to come for IV drip for a faster recovery”, Sheng Wang had already went down the stairs three steps at a time with his bag over his shoulder, and then disappearing around the corner in a couple of steps as he ran.

Sheng Wang sprinted back to the dorm, and the moment he opened the door, a certain person who wasn't obediently lying down was caught in the act. Jiang Tian stood by the basin; he probably just finished washing up, there was still a towel in his hand, he still clearly smelled like mint.

"Ha, caught red handed; do you have anything in your defense?" Sheng Wang was a little warm from running. He settled the medicine and porridge on the table, rolled his sleeves up and turned to capture someone.

Jiang Tian had nothing to say. He silently left the basin. He stood before the table, took out two containers of porridge from the plastic bag, and pushed one over to Sheng Wang.

"The teacher said take two pills for this medicine." Sheng Wang was opening up the box, and suddenly turned to his Ge in suspicion. "Did you use cold water or hot water when you washed your face?"

Jiang Tian's hands—in the midst of dividing the chopsticks—paused. He plainly said, "Hot."

Sheng Wang reached over to touch his face—it was cold to the touch.

Jiang Tian: "..."

Sheng Wang: “You think I’m stupid?”

Jiang Tian did not even look up. He stuffed a spoon in his hand, saying, “Focus on your food.”

The hell with the food, how incredible you are with changing the topic. Sheng Wang thought. However, as long as he heard Jiang Tian’s husky and tired voice, he couldn’t make himself stern with him at all.

Young master Sheng was rather particular when it came to being ill himself, but it was the first time he had to take care of someone else like this. The person who fell sick was Jiang Tian, so he wanted to use all and any method to reduce fevers possible, and thus he couldn’t help but to be a little worked up.

He stared at Jiang Tian, making sure he ate the porridge and the medicine, ensuring he went to obediently lie down on the bed for the second time, then he sat by the bed to change into his shoes.

He just stood up when someone grabbed his wrist.

“Where are you going again?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Heading downstairs to buy some stuff,” Sheng Wang said.

Jiang Tian’s boiling hot fingers loosened a little, and slid down along his wrist. He lifted his quilt, saying, “I’m going down with you.”

“Why are you going down?” Sheng Wang acutely pressed the side of the blanket down. “I’m just buying some cotton swabs and chips. I saw some alcohol on the shelf next to the basin earlier on, you can bring your fever down by smearing some on yourself.”

Jiang Tian frowned. “No need for the trouble, the medicine is enough.”

“Auntie Sun used to smear some on my forehead and arms,” Sheng Wang said.

“I don’t need that.”

“Do you dissipate heat at a particularly fast rate or?”

“Yes.”

“.....”

Afterwards, whenever Sheng Wang wanted to go do something he would always end up getting vetoed by Jiang Tian's singular vote. All he would say was "No need" "Don't want" "Don't go". This person was already cold and stubborn on a normal basis, now that he's ill he only became worse.

Initially, Sheng Wang thought he was just being stubborn, he wanted his face and was refusing to admit that he's sick, or that he wanted to prove that his body was especially healthy even when he's ill, he'll recover with some water etc.

Later, he leaned against the glass counter as he waited for a new pot of water to boil, as well as searching for shops that provided food suitable for a patient to eat. Without knowing it, he stayed a little too long in the kitchen. Within that time period, Jiang Tian left the bed twice: once with a cup in his hands, wanting to get some water, the other being that he accidentally got some dust on his hands from the inner side of the bed railing, so he's there to wash his hands.

Sheng Wang was baffled for quite a while and still could not figure out how exactly the dust managed to get on his hands. So, he simply brought the newly boiled water back to the bedside, continuing to keep his eyes on him. This time, he remained seated, and Jiang Tian did not ask for any more water, neither did he leave the bed.

Only until a certain someone gave in to the effects of the medicine and finally fell into deep sleep once more, then Sheng Wang realised in a certain moment—it's possible that it wasn't that his Ge wanted to cling on to his pride, but that he was just a little clingy when he's ill.

To be fair, he couldn't be blamed for realising too late. It was more like nobody would associate the term "clingy" with Jiang Tian at all. But now that the connection was made, it was like something magical occurred.

Sheng Wang left his chair and silently leaned inwards as he propped himself against the bed—Jiang Tian was sleeping on his side, facing the wall. His lips pursed into a straight line, like he reverted back to his usual "strangers beware" state.

Sheng Wang silently eliminated in his mind: it had to be either Old Man Ding of Jiang Ou who ever got the chance to take care of Jiang Tian when he's sick, right? He wondered if Jiang Tian would be like this towards them too.

Intuition told him he wouldn't, but he thought his intuition wasn't humble enough.

Be more modest—he could be within the top three.

The young master was instantly thrilled, his long legs caused the chair to rock back and forth. Still, his happiness did not last for too long as *someone* wasn't quite obedient even when he's asleep.

The feverish person would experience sudden chills, or suddenly feel hot. It's too easy to feel stuffy in the process of recovering from a fever. When Sheng Wang was asleep while he's sick, he would wrap himself tighter than a burrito. Jiang Tian was his antonym.

As this person slept, his blanket would retreat from his jaw to his chest. Sometimes, when he was so warm that his brows furrowed tightly, he would directly flip the upper half of the blanket down, squashing it beneath his arms.

In a single hour, he lifted the blanket six times, and Sheng Wang covered the blanket back on him six times too. While doing so, he even nearly woke him up.

In the end, Sheng Wang stood by the bed with a headache, and said in a low voice, “You forced my hand.”

He went to the closet to take out yet another blanket, adding another layer to seal the person within his quilt, covering him up nice and tight…...and then he climbed on top of him.

He grabbed a pillow from the upper bunk as his backrest, and sat horizontally across the bed with his back against the wall. He kept his legs

straight, pressing them down against Jiang Tian’s lower leg with the quilt between them, pretending that he was a weight weighing him down.

From then onwards, Jiang Tian was abnormally well behaved in his sleep; he did not even turn around.

He picked a particularly good spot; the sun happened to shine upon this area, his bones lazily melted away from the glow. He was dozing off from reading the lecture notes, so he took the photo album from the upper bunk and flipped through it.

There were only less than 20 photos no matter how many times he flipped, yet he could still keep flipping through. He managed to continue until Jiang Tian got enough sleep and woke up, and then he went to sit next to him.

“Are you still feeling terrible?” Sheng Wang’s palm covered his forehead, and passed the digital thermometer to him. “You don't seem as feverish as in the morning.”

Jiang Tian sat next to him, shoulder to shoulder; the warmth of human skin diffused to him across fabrics. He held the thermometer near his ears for a while, and said, “Much better now.”

The thermometer beeped. He looked at the temperature with his eyes lowered, and showed the indication to Sheng Wang. It was below 38 degrees, much better than the one taken in the morning.

“Hungry?” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian shook his head.

Sheng Wang said, “Then I’m going to pour some water for you.”

Jiang Tian held him back just as he was about to stand up. He said, “I don’t want it.”

With the new found knowledge of “clingy” he acquired, Sheng Wang automatically translated this into “Sit next to me for a while”. Therefore, he was obedient and did not hurry off the bed.

Jiang Tian looked at the photo album—now flipped open—with lowered lids. He asked, “Why do you keep looking at this page?”

Sheng Wang pointed at the last photo with his silhouette, saying, “Feels like it’s missing a photo.”

Jiang Tian stilled. “Which one’s missing?”

Sheng Wang raised his phone next to him, and captured the instant Jiang Tian looked towards the camera.

In the photo, two boys sat shoulders to shoulders. The bright and genial morning sun of the beginning of winter shone upon them, gently covering up those few traces of sickness. Sheng Wang’s eyes were crescent in a smile, effervescent. Jiang Tian just happened to look up, his thin eyelids nearly translucent under the sunlight; quiet, and alive.

“Okay.” Sheng Wang tapped on the photo, and waved at Jiang Tian, “It’s complete now.”

“Just nice, there is still a slot for another photo below this one, we can find a shop at night to print it out.” As he spoke, he folded his legs, wanting

to change his sitting position. However, the moment he curled a leg, his expression immediately turned complicated.

“What the, hisssss—”

Jiang Tian shot a glance at him. “What?”

“Numb.”

Jiang Tian looked at the way Sheng Wang didn’t know if he should laugh or cry, and asked, “Which leg is numb?”

“Two legs.” Sheng Wang’s head rested against that bent leg. “Both of them are numb.”

Jiang Tian, dumbfounded, shook his head. He reached out to squeeze the muscle on the other leg. “How long have you been sitting?”

“More than two hours,” Sheng Wang said, muffled.

“You don’t know how to change your position?”

“Forgot.”

……

Sheng Wang's head rested on his knee, and let Jiang Tian massage the stretched out leg as he liked. Quite a while later, he suddenly bent his knee, and stopped Jiang Tian's wrist with his hand. "Don't squeeze anymore."

Jiang Tian paused, and turned to him. "You're fine now?"

"No."

Sheng Wang answered with a word, and no longer spoke. He only looked up again after quite a few seconds later. He let go, and the warmth that came from Jiang Tian lingered on his thigh. It gradually faded away.

In a long period of time after that, nobody spoke at all.

Sheng Wang bent his legs, propping his elbows on his knees. He lowered his eyes in his hammering heartbeat, pounding like a drum, waiting for the tension and restlessness in the air to slowly dissipate.

In a certain moment, he vaguely realised that he and Jiang Tian were actually in a pretty odd state—they both knew each other's feelings damn well, but they still seemed to be somewhat neither here nor there. As such, he kept feeling like that layer of intimacy had always been hovering in thin air, never did it once truly settle on the ground.

He was quiet for quite a while with his head lowered, and suddenly played with Jiang Tian's finger. "Ge, what are we now?"

Chapter 075 - Surprise

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Me and the You I Like.

Jiang Tian’s eyes rested on his own fingers—which was being fiddled around with—and was silent for quite a while too.

“Why are you asking this?” His gaze shifted up to meet Sheng Wang.

“I don’t know.” Sheng Wang’s head rested against the wall, his chin slightly raised. His gaze thus slid down naturally, watching the dust drift about in the air. He reached out to grab at them, all he caught was thin air.

“It just feels a little floaty, neither up nor down, nothing concrete at all.” His hand lazily drifted down, resting on his knees. “Seems a little dramatic now that I’m saying it, after all—”

We've already kissed.

He stopped for a few seconds, and skipped what they both already knew. He pursed his slightly dry lips. “Either way…...kinda odd, don’t you

think?”

A few while later, Jiang Tian finally looked away from him.

Although Sheng Wang was being quite ambiguous, Jiang Tian did know what he was getting at. He knew it well, he had always understood it clearly. He just didn’t expect Sheng Wang to ask.

More accurately, he did not expect Sheng Wang to ask this early.

He thought they were in tacit agreement on this issue, already reaching a silent consensus—just like the many instances from before. Still, he knew at the same time that this so-called “silent consensus” was utterly impossible to keep up in the long run, it would inevitably be broken. It was set in stone that someone would break the silence first.

After all, nothing can stay hidden in the dark for long; it either erupts, or quietly withers away.

Therefore, this question may be sudden, but completely logical at the same time. Jiang Tian actually did already come up with an answer a long

time ago. He had already rehearsed this multiple times in his subconscious. When Sheng Wang brings this question up, he would say: wait a little longer.

Wait for this training camp to be over, wait until we leave this confined school, wait for us to leave this utopia...or this Neverland. Wait until we are surrounded by people once more, filled with clamour that we (do not) want to hear. If you still want to ask this, I can tell you the answer.

If you don’t want to ask, that’s fine too. As long as there isn’t a grandiose, serious beginning, there is no need for a deliberate end. The way out will always be there for you; no barrier, no concerns. Nobody would be embarrassed, I don’t even need to lay the steps for you.

This is the most rational approach, wrapped up by impulsiveness.

But the sun was too bright, the person next to him was made too cozy by it. As long as he saw Sheng Wang’s eyes, filled with light, saw the way

he fidgeted in anticipation but also apprehensive, Jiang Tian couldn’t bring himself to say something like “wait a little longer”.

All his subconscious preparation was messed up. When he came back to himself, he asked Sheng Wang, “Are you unhappy?”

“No,” Sheng Wang shook his head, “I’m quite happy.”

He paused, and completely threw his dignity away as he added, “Especially happy.”

Then he heard Jiang Tian say, “That’s good.”

Sheng Wang’s mind went blank for an instant, and suddenly understood where that floaty, untethered feeling came from.

It was this line. It was the way he said “That’s good”.

He was actually worried about this without knowing.

Jiang Tian was made of sharp angles and an even sharper personality, sometimes giving people an illusion that he was just as impulsive as any

other youths in certain conditions. However, Sheng Wang knew that that wasn’t being impulsive—it’s pride.

Sheng Wang knew very well how cool-headed Jiang Tian was as a person. Even with someone like Ji Huanyu along with an incident like that right before him, he could amalgamate all his trauma within the smallest area. He could reconcile with himself and the people around him, so the conclusion was obvious.

He was full of pride, but never impulsive—let alone the matters of the heart.

Therefore, for the past few days, between bouts of elation, Sheng Wang would occasionally think: how did they suddenly end up like this? Of course, he knew why for himself, but he didn’t know about Jiang Tian.

Was it the way he was so unconcealing? Sometimes, he was too obvious in his anticipation, sometimes too obvious in his disappointment. His sudden advancement, his abrupt retreats, all got himself busy as a

beaver. Therefore his Ge couldn’t bear to watch anymore, and came over to help him out.

It was also just that subconsciously, he was even more worried that the tension and the intimacy wasn’t because of a temptation he could no longer resist; but that he ran too near, too hastily towards him, that Jiang Tian was afraid to disappoint him and make him look bad.

If it was really like that, then he was truly putting him on the spot.

He’s hoarding all the happiness and excitement for himself; that was too tyrannical, and also unfair too.

This ought to be equally divided between two people.

Sheng Wang was deep in thought for a while, and made a small smile. “Then did you do those things to make me happy?”

“What things?” Jiang Tian said.

“Quite many, actually.” Sheng Wang counted them one by one, his tone a little lazy, like this was just a casual conversation, one that neither of

them were too personally involved in. “Watch me bullshit my way through changing your alias, celebrating my birthday in advance with me, tolerating me trying to make you drink, searching photographs all over the place for an album, and also—”

The hand he rested on his knee seemed to be playing around jokingly, for every count he curled a finger. At the last finger, he stopped for a while before finally saying, “And kissing too.”

The room was quiet for a long time, so long that Sheng Wang couldn’t help but to look at Jiang Tian. Jiang Tian finally spoke.

Perhaps he was playing along with his casual chat too, Jiang Tian also started counting on his fingers.

He said, “Yes for the alias, yes for the birthday, yes for the drinking, yes for the photo. No for the last one.”

Sheng Wang nodded ever so slightly, and his tongue darted to lick his dry lower lip.

He actually got nervous quite rarely; no matter what scenario, how many people were standing or sitting before him, he would hardly ever get nervous. Only when he was standing before Jiang Tian alone, that smugness and pride that he was naturally born with would temporarily disappear.

“Why for the last one then?”

He waited for the answer, his thumb subconsciously rubbing the knuckles on his pointer finger, until the patch of skin there was red and flushed from rubbing. He finally heard Jiang Tian say, his voice hoarse, “Impulsiveness.”

“Lack of resolve.”

“Couldn’t resist.”

Sheng Wang’s fingers, pressing on his knuckles, stopped. A good while later, he finally relaxed; like the giant load of joy he had been keeping

to himself, hugging and waiting, finally had half of it claimed by the other person. Therefore, the load was finally off his arms, and he could feel unadulterated happiness at last.

He asked Jiang Tian, “Will you get impulsive too?”

Jiang Tian: “Yes.”

“When?” Sheng Wang asked again.

“A lot of times,” Jiang Tian said. “When my willpower is weak.”

Sheng Wang let out an “oh”, and suddenly said, “Then, is your willpower strong now?”

Jiang Tian looked at him, and away again. A moment later, he said, “No.”

“Then...let me ask you a question.”

“Ask.”

“Publicly, I keep telling everyone you are my Ge.” Sheng Wang hesitated a few seconds, and turned towards him. “Privately, can it be something else?”

“Define privately.”

“When the doors are closed.” Due to the way his voice was lowered, Sheng Wang’s voice was a little husky too, “When nobody else is around us.”

“What do you want to change it into?” Jiang Tian asked.

“What can I change it into?”

Perhaps it was because of that definite “weak willpower” just now, Sheng Wang seemed to have suddenly lost any qualms—he became absolutely unrestrained. His hand lifted his chin as he thought, and turned to ask, “How about ‘boyfriend’?”

The back of Jiang Tian’s head rested against the wall, his half lowered eyes blinked flittingly. He was about to open his mouth, but Sheng Wang

added once more, “If you say no, Imma use my mouth. I’ll kiss you until you say yes.”

Jiang Tian’s gaze swept from the end of his eyes, suddenly dropping before he looked away. “Then, it’s a no.”

A lit matchstick dropped into the pool of gasoline in Sheng Wang’s brain, and suddenly a blazing fire roared, his ears became flushed from the heat. He blinked, turned his head and kissed him.

Jiang Tian had a lot of self-control; he allowed Sheng Wang to awkwardly press his lips against his, raw and inexperienced. Until the other person tentatively licked the gap between his lips, then he tilted his head and moved away.

Sheng Wang narrowed his eyes, and saw Jiang Tian’s Adam’s apple bob.

A moment later, Jiang Tian finally turned back. “You really want to get infected?”

“You’re the one who said no,” Sheng Wang still yearned for more—the bare contact wasn’t intimate enough for him.

“It’s a yes now,” Jiang Tian said.

“Oh, then let us celebrate.” Sheng Wang grinned as he got his way, and then licked his lower lip, wreaking havoc in him again. After peppering many messy kisses, Jiang Tian was finally bothered enough that he couldn’t stand it anymore.

He slightly backed away, his right hand glided down Sheng Wang’s cheek and lower jaw, turning Sheng Wang’s head to the side with his thumb hooked onto his chin. He kissed the side of the other person’s neck.

Full of self restraint, but lost to temptation.

Sheng Wang grabbed his hair, neither too tightly or too loosely. Even his breathing quivered.

He knew that this way, he wouldn’t get infected. But……

Fuck.

*

When young people are deliriously caught up in love, all and any willpower are just there for show. The final result was Jiang Tian’s fever completely subsiding that night, but unfortunately converting to the even draggier cold. As for Sheng Wang, after sneezing three times in a row in the second morning, he joined the army of people who caught a cold. What a martyr he was.

The good news was now that the milk was already spilt, he didn’t need to be worried about getting infected anymore. The bad news was now that they both have a sore throat as well as cough, their performance in public speaking was very much affected.

Despite the scoring panel knowing their original standard very well, and also that getting sick was a factor beyond their control and they ought

to consider that when scoring them, the final outcome was still what it was. They couldn’t turn a blind eye and tolerate all their issues. Therefore, as Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s cold appeared on and off over a week, their PK scores also went up and down.

In this period of time, Bian Chen was the one who felt the most conflicted. He managed to harvest PK scores 7 times within 10 days, and as he felt thrilled and happy over it, he also felt like he was taking an unfair advantage of their suffering.

It was Sheng Wang who was quite at peace instead. He said to him, “With every gain comes a loss, that’s how it ought to be. It’s a good reminder for me to work even harder for the formal competition.”

The second half of the sentence made an incredible amount of sense; the “with every gain comes a loss” and “ought to be” was beyond Bian Chen’s comprehension. They were more like the mystical arts at this point. In any case, he couldn’t tell what Sheng Wang's “gain” was, or why he said it was “ought to be”.

Time flew by, the training camp had reached its end. The venue for the formal competition wasn’t set in this school. The training camp teachers arranged their journey, and all 40 students had to head to the north.

Before they set off, Sheng Wang finally found the time to go to the top of the street behind the hill. That store was completely new after closing for a few days to undergo renovation. He printed that photo in his phone out, and made two copies.

He gave one to Jiang Tian, and slotted the other one into his photo album.

He just turned 17; there were 18 photographs altogether, and the last one was an accident as well as the biggest surprise at the same time.

Every page was made with stiff paper sprinkled with gold, a transparent film on top and below. He slipped the picture featuring the two of them between the transparent film, and some ideas sprouted within him.

He asked Jiang Tian, “Did you handwrite the year on the upper right corner?”

“It’s printed.” Jiang Tian said, “It wouldn’t be easy to write on this type of paper.”

“Sure.” Sheng Wang asked again, “What if I want to write something though?”

Jiang Tian thought, and said, “Write it on the back then.”

“If I write it on the back, it can’t be seen anymore after I put it inside though,” Sheng Wang said.

“What do you want to write?”

Sheng Wang stilled with Jiang Tian’s question, and laughed. “Oh yeah, my brain shortwired. It isn’t meant for other people’s eyes in the first place anyway.”

He grabbed a pen and turned the photograph over, watching the outline of the silhouettes printed as they faced the light. He wrote behind himself: Me.

And then he wrote the remaining words behind Jiang Tian's back: The you I like.

Me and the you I like.

Jiang Tian stood right next to him, watching him earnestly write down these words. He abruptly felt that his previous inner conflict, the back and forths, those so-called rationality, were all too foolish. So foolish that he wasn't being himself at all, so might as well be a little more unbridled.

I like you too much; therefore, I teeter by the edge of the abyss, I carefully tread on thin ice.

So much so that I nearly forgot—I'm seventeen. At this age, the whole world is mine. No need to hesitate, no need for any considerations.

I am unstoppable, I am invincible.

Translator's notes:

For the final few lines (the last one in particular), I did take some artistic liberties...aka the first one is more literal than metaphorical/simile-like in

the raws, but also as for the last lines, a direct translation is “There is nothing I cannot overcome/nothing can stop me, I am also omnipotent”. Omnipotent feels too grandiose a word to be used in this context, when this is a slice of life story primarily, so my choice of wording as above ahaha.

To the reader who sent me an email: thank you so so much.

Chapter 076 - Back to School

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Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: May I Have a Human Pillow

It happened to be already Monday by the time they were done with the formal competition, thus perfectly skipping past the monthly break. Sheng Mingyang initially arranged for Xiao-Chen to go fetch them from the bus stop, but Fuzhong ended up stealing his job instead.

The private vehicle was the exact same as the one from before, and so was the driver. Only, the person sitting in the shotgun went from Yang Jing to Big Mouth Xu.

Sheng Wang was initially a little relieved, thinking that taking the school’s car was better than Xiao-Chen’s — better than seeing Jiang Ou and Sheng Mingyang the moment they open the car door in any case.

Still, seeing Big Mouth Xu upon opening the door wasn’t something to rejoice about either; no student — yet to graduate, that is — would love

to hang around with the administration dean, let alone students who once had their phones confiscated.

The moment Big Mouth Xu showed himself, Sheng Wang stuffed his phone back into his pocket.

“You aren’t even this obedient while you’re in school, you think I’ll bother confiscating your phone when you’re out?” Big Mouth Xu said, exasperated. “Checking in with your parents at home or just chit-chatting? Continue if you’re checking in, treat it like I didn’t say anything if you just want to chit-chat and play games.”

“My dad’s asking if our school’s car is arriving soon,” Sheng Wang answered.

“Then you definitely have to notify him, so that the parents wouldn’t worry. Our school is quite adept when it comes to this — we will only be early, never late. No matter what, we wouldn’t land the students in a situation where they are waiting at the bus stop with nobody fetching them.” Big Mouth Xu thus began seriously going into a spiel on how

Fuzhong is responsible towards the treatment of its students. As Sheng Wang just kept replying with “Mn” noncommittally, he speedily replied Sheng Mingyang’s WeChat messages.

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: The temperature has dropped quite drastically recently, your Auntie Jiang said that the quilts in your dormitory are a little too thin. Do you have time to go back to your dorm in the afternoon? We’ll make a trip to the school, and add more mattresses.

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: it isn’t cold though

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: we’re behind on two weeks worth of lessons, we might not necessarily have time after afternoon classes.

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: Pass the keys to us, I’ll go settle that with Auntie Jiang

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: it isn’t just the two of us in the dorms, we have dormmates too...you’ll scare them if you suddenly show up

Sheng Wang was busy typing with his head lowered when he suddenly heard Jiang Tian ask quietly, “Why are you frowning?”

“My dad.” As Sheng Wang spoke, he wanted to show Jiang Tian the contents of the chat, but just as he turned over he suddenly felt that it wasn’t quite appropriate.

Firstly, in this conversation, his intent in not letting Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou come to school was too obvious — he was scared that Jiang Tian would think that he was regretting everything.

Secondly, he also did not want to let Jiang Tian see Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou’s names either, worried that Jiang Tian would feel burdened and regretful.

Therefore his phone flashed before Jiang Tian’s eyes, and his phone was back to him again before the other person could catch a glimpse. His eyes were lowered as he grumbled, “My dad insisted that the temperature dropped, and was interrogating me about whether we wore long underpants.”

Afraid that Jiang Tian didn’t buy what he said, he went all the way to caress Jiang Tian’s thigh, whispering, “Lemme see if you wore it.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian avoided him, and removed that paw of his. Sheng Wang relentlessly tried to get around him, but Jiang Tian grabbed his wrist instead.

Big Mouth Xu — who was prattling non-stop in front — finally quieted and turned around.

The two instantly let go, Sheng Wang even moved slightly to the side, and made a clear divide between them in much contriteness as he leaned against the car window.

Subconsciously, he was a little worried — Big Mouth Xu had the eyes of an eagle, he even suspected that he was in love by watching him send messages alone. Now that he was sitting next to Jiang Tian, right before Big Mouth Xu’s very eyes, he might as well be turning himself in.

Unexpectedly, Big Mouth Xu simply hmphed, and shook his head, telling the driver, “*Sigh*, thank god I only have one son at home. If they are brothers, look—”

He pointed at the two behind him. “They’ll probably fight all the way into adulthood.”

The driver’s face expressed that he could very well relate. “Two sons are what my house has, fighting over toys, food, the bed…either way the other person’s stuff will always be better.”

“Right? What a headache.”

Big Mouth thus began chatting with him in regards to their sons’ education, and no longer bothered about the two sitting behind him.

Sheng Wang was stunned for quite a while before he realised that in Big Mouth’s and the rest’s eyes, he was part of the same family as Jiang Tian. They were brothers; it was plenty normal for them to be closer and to get into more skirmishes. No matter what, they wouldn’t read too deep into their behaviour, as long as they are careful.

…….

They just needed to be a little more careful.

Sheng Wang’s body, tense for the entire time, finally started to gradually relax, and his spirits were lifted again. Even the tone he replied Sheng Mingyang’s messages with was no longer as stiff — like the phone screen separating them was a protective film itself, able to withstand any smash and fall.

He switched to a more comfortable position, his head against the car window, his right leg touching Jiang Tian’s, and began bullshitting with Sheng Mingyang.

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: tell Auntie Jiang there’s air-conditioning in the dorm, we even get too warm if we wear long sleeves to sleep at night. if you put another layer, we will literally combust.

Sheng Mingyang replied, exasperated: Nonsense

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: forreals

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: I’ll take a picture at night when we get back if you don’t believe me, a slightly fatter dormmate is even in singlets

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: do you want your son to die from overheating

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: The temperature will definitely keep falling later on, even if you don’t layer it now, you can keep it there as backup

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: dad, please recall carefully: think about the closets in our dorm, you’re telling me there’s enough space for backup quilts?

The Encyclopedia for Healthy Living finally started to have doubts.

Sheng Wang then added: we can simply just bring them over the next time we go home

Sheng Mingyang probably went to discuss this with Jiang Ou, and finally replied after quite a while later: Sure, we’ll wait for the next break.

His right hand, resting on the seat, softly snapped. Jiang Tian looked over, asking, “Done?”

“Yeah.”

Sheng Wang finished replying, and in the very next second he tapped into the chat pinned at the top, typing: I’m so sleepy

Someone: ……

Jiang Tian swept a look at him, his expression indicating that he was rather speechless, probably thinking that this was kinda dumb. The word “childish” was written on his face, but his fingers played along as he typed without making any protests.

Someone: If you’re tired, sleep

Someone: There’s still more than 30 minutes to the school

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: may I have a human pillow

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: forget it, I know I’ll never get to have one

Jiang Tian’s thin eyelids slightly shifted up, his gaze landing on the back of Big Mouth Xu’s head. After staring for about five seconds, his eyes

lowered again, like a silence expression of displeasure. It was a very simple movement, but when Jiang Tian did it, Sheng Wang found it hilarious.

Big Mouth Xu was afflicted with the occupational disease of being an administration dean, he was constantly on the lookout. He heard Sheng Wang's rather soft snort, and turned to ask, "What are you laughing about?"

Sheng Wang instantly went back to normal, saying, "Nothing, happened to chance upon a joke while refreshing my Moments."

Big Mouth appeared very interested as he asked. "Oh? What's the joke?"

Sheng Wang: "....."

This time round, Jiang Tian turned aside.

The hell you're laughing at.

Sheng Wang shifted his feet, and stepped on Jiang Tian's shoe without batting a single eye.

Fortunately, Big Mouth Xu wasn’t that intent on listening to the joke, and soon he was lured away by the driver’s conversation topic. Sheng Wang slumped over once more.

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: I miss uncle Xiao-Chen

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: I could even lie down at the back in his car

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: he wouldn’t ask me what joke I saw either

Someone: Remove your foot first

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: big mouth’s sitting in front, I gotta be on my best behaviour from the top to my legs, my foot is the only thing that can rest against you for a while now

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: can’t you let me have this

Someone: ……

As Sheng Wang teased Jiang Tian, he suppressed his laughter while thinking that the car was honestly stifling — all he wanted was to reach the

school already.

It’ll be fine after we alight, it won't be this stifling after we reach the school, Fuzhong is so big after all, that was what he thought.

Yet, when they actually alighted, he realised that he had his hopes up — Fuzhong may be huge, but in actuality it was no better than the space in the car.

It was midday when they came back, when they went to their dorm to put down their luggages they ran into Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin, when they went to Wu Tong Wai for lunch, there was Old Man Ding and the mute.

In the past, Sheng Wang thought those alleys were barren of people, but now he felt that it was a little too lively. In a moment an old man greeted them with his groceries in hand, and in another kids ran past them as they chased each other around. There were even a lot of households which left the windows on the first floor wide open, with some watering their plants, letting the air out as they cook, chit-chatting with the television on etc.

The school’s Road #3 was not as empty as before anymore; there were always students walking along the boulevard, with a drink or newly-bought stationery in hand. There weren’t exactly many people, but it was enough to give the illusion that the stream of people was endless.

In the city, in the streets and alleys, human life bustled and flourished.

It was only at this moment, Sheng Wang truly realised that the “vacation” had ended — in the much longer future, they had no choice but to hide themselves away, keeping their joy and love to the private, desolate spaces.

In a hidden corner, in a place unknown to anyone else.

*

When the two headed upstairs, they bumped into a huge wave of teachers who just came over from the cafeteria. The teachers from Class A, Class B, and even Class 9 were all there.

Yang Jing directly stopped them. “I had lessons in the morning that I couldn’t switch away from, that’s why I wasn’t there to fetch you. Are your luggages brought back to the dorm?”

“Mn,” Sheng Wang said. “We just finished lunch.”

“I heard the two of you had fallen sick?” He Jin was the first to worry for their health as always.

“Huh?” Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s eyes met each others’ before they hurriedly turned away.

“Caught a cold for quite a while,” Sheng Wang pointed at Jiang Tian, “He even got a fever.”

“I’ve heard. They say that there was a water outage at your residence, and quite a few people fell sick, right?”

It was not the first time Jiang Tian had left the school for external competitions, and the teachers’ knowledge wasn’t news to him. It was Sheng Wang however who was shocked. He Jin explained, “There are only this many teachers who are involved in holding competitions, everyone

knows each other. The school is worried that you aren't taking proper care of yourself while you're there, so we do check in quite often."

"Ohh, no wonder."

"Also, your performance and results slips were all mailed to the school, it's sort of like feedback from the training camp," Yang Jing said. "We've already received them yesterday."

Sheng Wang: "???"

"Why do you look so spooked?" Yang Jing said, done. "You played truant or got up to no good and broke the rules or?"

"No," Jiang Tian said, "We got a day for sick leave, that's all."

"Saw that. The feedback already mentioned that, your performances are constantly quite remarkable, other than the one day of sick leave you did not miss a single lesson either," Yang Jing said, "The evaluation even said you are both considered excellent students, it's just that you had a slight disadvantage for PK scores."

The English teacher from Class 9 said, “Oh? I didn’t see that yesterday. How far behind are they?”

Yang Jing said, “Around 4-5 marks, I think.”

“Who’s in the lead?”

“Who else? Yizhong’s students, duh.”

“Then we’re basically out of— it’s more troublesome now.”

The teacher likely wanted to say “Basically out of luck”, because the results from the training camp could also affect the student’s state of mind for the formal competition, those who were in lead were probably more relaxed, those who were lagging behind likely faced greater pressure; if they couldn’t properly adjust, the gap would only grow.

However, in lieu of the students’ feelings, he chose his words more tactfully.

Class B’s English teacher clapped Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s shoulders. “It’s okay, being able to enter finals is already a breakthrough —

no matter what, it is an experience with a major competition, it's already pretty good."

Yang Jing also said, "Yes, this has already brought pride for me. Oh, yeah, did Xu say anything when he went to fetch you today? He was blahblahing non-stop to me with the results in his hand yesterday, asking me if we're in the run for top three on the national level."

Sheng Wang replied as per the truth, "He didn't mention anything at the start, just casual chit-chat. Later on, he mentioned something like that as we alighted, saying that the number of people who can get a prize in this competition is quite few in numbers, the school will already be very satisfied with a third place. He told us to not feel burdened, and do our best to prepare for other competitions too."

Yang Jing nodded, "Sure, he finally said something that isn't so grandiose."

"Old Xu really likes to exaggerate, a little modesty is better after all." He Jin said smilingly, and asked the two students, "What did you two say in

reply then?”

Sheng Wang hesitated, saying, “We wouldn’t do badly enough to end up in third place.”

He Jin: “.....”

Okay, that’s no better than Old Xu.

Yang Jing looked at the two madmen, exasperated. She squeezed out a line, sounding possibly happy or worried, “Sure, the results are out next month. I’ll wait and see how the two of you wouldn’t do badly enough to end up in third place.”

Chapter 077 - Possessed

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One on One, Guaranteed Successful Outcome, and It’s All for Free. Tell Me, Are You Learning or Not?

When Sheng Wang entered the classroom, Class B’s math teacher happened to be passing out the practice paper meant for the noon break at the lectern. He took special care to go in through the back door, but it was all futile — the entire class all made use of passing the paper around to turn to look at him, envy in their eyes.

Students become envious over the purest of reasons: if you are entirely justified in not showing up for class, then you are the most blessed person in this world. The members of the class committee being summoned to a meeting that took up an entire class period could even garner a comment along the lines of “that must be so good”, let alone cases like Sheng Wang where he managed to leave for an entire half a month.

“Quit staring, the answer key doesn’t grow on my face.” Sheng Wang felt like he accidentally walked onto the set for Star Boulevard, and he cupped his fist to beg for pardon as he sat down on his seat.

(t/n: Star Boulevard: A Chinese talent show, also named after hollywood’s walk of fame)

The entire class laughed at him, the math teacher teased him as he propped himself against the lectern, “Looks like Sheng Wang is in quite a good mood, life at the training camp must be pretty good.”

Some smartass continued, “Not going to class is better for health.”

The entire class guffawed once more, and finally began to get started on work obediently.

The moment Sheng Wang started he realised he was screwed, the training camp that lasted for two consecutive weeks had left its residual effect on him — his first reaction upon seeing math problems wasn’t to draw a diagram, list out formulas or calculate, but rather, he wanted to translate the question into English.

Usually, he had plenty of time left to spare after he completed a half an hour practice paper like this. However, due to this godforsaken residual

effect, he was actually running a little tight on time today. When the teacher said “pens down”, he then hurriedly finished the last line.

“You seem to be a little out of practice, huh? Sheng Wang?” The math teacher lifted his chin at Sheng Wang across a few tables, “You’re much slower than before.”

For this, Sheng Wang honestly did not have any good excuse, and accepted the reprimand without any protest.

“Since you’re already done with English, you ought to put in more effort into your other subjects from now onwards. For example, you can do a couple of number sequence questions for fun.”

The whole class simultaneously let out a yell of “what the hell”.

The math teacher glared at them, and then reminded him half-jokingly, “You haven’t touched these for half a month already, but the other students did not slack off either. It will be the weekly test in a couple of days, do make use of your time properly.”

The moment he brought up exams, the class descended into despair. However, Sheng Wang's mentality was the exact opposite of others: he looked forward to the arrival of exams. It wasn't because he was getting too full of himself, but that after midterms he had not formally participated in any exams. He was in a rush to score into the top 45 places, and reassure Old He, Jing-jie and the rest from Class A.

When the teacher left, the people filled with despair were instantly bursting with life again. He Shi bore the brunt, and snuck her way from the front row with her back hunched over. Shi Yu spared her the majority of his chair on his own accord.

"Eh, Sheng Wang, was the training camp fun?" As someone who also participated in the preliminaries for English, He Shi's envy was much more impactful than the others.

"It was okay. The camp was nothing special, the people there were more fun," Sheng Wang said.

He Shi was amused, “Those who can go are all bigshots, can there be very fun people?”

“Yeah, there’s Jiang Tian,” Sheng Wang happened to be chatting on WeChat with his eyes lowered, and the words slipped out just like that.

He Shi: “.....”

Sheng Wang shot a glance at her and Shi Yu, and his fingers flew as he rapidly typed.

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: Jiang Tia:, of handsome looks, of a clear voice, of a magicked name, able to stop the nightly cries of babies with a mention.

Someone: ……

Someone: What got to you

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: the existence of a young couple

Someone: ?

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: Shi Yu and He Shi ignored the empty chairs, and insisted on squeezing on one

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: you know who’s He Shi?

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: whatever you might not really remember, in any case she’s Shi Yu’s girlfriend

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: 40+ seats in class, and they choose to flex right in front of me

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: they think they are so terrific for having a partner

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: then I too am terrific

In Class A, most people had kept their stationery away and were prepared to take their afternoon naps. Only a few people were being up to no good. Gao Tianyang was engaged with tossing notes back and forth with the person in front of him, and yet this person had terrible aim, so the paper always ended up on Chili’s desk. He had to put his palm together and begged for Chili to pass the note to his front deskmate with all the sincerity of praying to his grandpa, grandma, and ancestors all at once.

As Chili helped, she rolled her eyes. The fifth round of note passing, Gao Tianyang turned behind and looked at the person behind him, and

coincidentally caught that fleeting expression on Jiang Tian’s face.

“Tian-ge,” Gao Tianyang whispered, “you were smiling just now, right? I wasn’t mistaken?”

Jiang Tian lifted his gaze from the bottom of the desk. “You were mistaken.”

“I don’t care, I saw that.” Gao Tianyang said, “Your little brother said, during these times I just gotta put words in your mouth and be completely unreasonable.”

Jiang Tian did not realise what Gao Tianyang just said. “My little brother?”

“Yeah, Sheng-ge.”

“.....”

Jiang Tian swept a look at the phone beneath his desk — a certain little brother was still saying that he was terrific for finding himself a partner.

Making use of how he hadn’t replied, Gao Tianyang asked again, “Then...since you were smiling just now, you should be in an okay mood, right?”

“Don’t bullshit about my mood.” Jiang Tian turned his screen off, and looked up like he knew what was coming. “What did you land me into?”

“It ain’t my fault this time! I even tried to speak up for you, but you weren’t around, so they weren’t as easily deterred.”

Gao Tianyang turned and motioned at two people in the front row, indicating for them to get their asses here. The next second, Song Sirui. the culture rep and Li Yu the class monitor all got their asses here.

The moment he saw Li Yu and the culture rep, something became apparent to Jiang Tian. If they were Gao Tianyang and the rest who were on good terms with him, Jiang Tian could still say a “scram”, but he couldn’t exactly do it to two girls, considering how the class monitor was a crybaby too.

Gao Tianyang poked Li Yu, Li Yu poked the culture rep. The culture rep summoned up her courage, “So uh, it’s basically this: Jiang Tian, the school’s cultural festival will be happening at the end of this month again. Since we won’t be participating in year three, this will be our last chance to do so. Old He generally suggested for us to not take up too much of our studying time with this, but don’t do it too half-heartedly either.”

“Initially, um, having the entire class form a choir is the most fair and least troublesome method, in any case nobody is getting out of this. Pick a song that’s easy to sing, rehearse a few times and that will do. But—”

Gao Tianyang pointed downstairs, “This was taken by the beasts from Class B and 7.”

The culture rep explained, “The meeting ended, and without even discussing with their classmates, the culture reps instantly filled the form and handed it up on the spot. There can only be two class choir performances in a level at most, I was being slightly democratic, and the slots were gone just like that.”

Jiang Tian's brows were knitted. "So?"

"So we can only come up with smaller items. You know with our school rules, if there are less than or two people for individual performances, then the class has to come up with two items. If not, the entire level will end up sending one person up there to sing by themselves." Gao Tianyang pointed at himself and Song Sirui, "The current arrangement is that I'll be performing crosstalk with Old Song, this will be a group. You will be performing a song with Carp—"

Jiang Tian: "???"

"Bleh—no wait—" Gao Tianyang corrected himself, "You will be playing the guitar, and Carp will be singing."

Jiang Tian was stupefied. "Who said I know how to play the guitar?"

Li Yu's voice quivered, "I can't really sing either."

Jiang Tian: "....."

Gao Tianyang explained, “Old Song and I, we are basically reincarnated crosstalk performers. Carp, our dear class monitor, sacrificed herself for the greater cause and tanked this. However, Carp gets nervous easily, she will probably sing into a breakdown with tears. So……”

Jiang Tian: “I don’t know how to play.”

“That’s fine, you know how the cultural festival goes. You just need to be hot, who the hell actually cares about the guitar.” Gao Tianyang said, “Tian-ge, I’m not blindly flattering you — with your face alone, there would be people clapping even if all you do is to hold a broom on stage.”

Jiang Tian looked at him with very mixed feelings. “So it’s your crappy idea after all?”

Gao Tianyang’s neck shrunk. “I don’t dare to seek death like this.”

Carp said, “It’s actually teacher He.”

Jiang Tian appeared to be at a total loss. A while later, he said, “I’ll look for her after class.”

“Old He seems to be leaving the school to attend a class this afternoon.”

“Then I’ll look for her after school.”

Yet, by the time school really ended, he didn’t manage to stop He Jin — he was stopped by someone else instead. The person who stopped him had the surname of Sheng and the name of Wang, the bane of his existence that he canvassed for himself.

“I’ve heard that you have to perform too?” Sheng Wang sat cross-legged at the short window railing at the corner of the stairs, his head looking up at Jiang Tian, who was descending.

Jiang Tian turned to stare at Gao Tianyang. “You spilled?”

Gao Tianyang was already a foot on the stairs before he hastily went back inside the class. “I didn’t bring this up, Sheng-ge happened to ask.”

Jiang Tian followed down the stairs, and walked towards where Sheng Wang was. “I’m not participating.”

“Nooo,” Sheng Wang stood up with his bag, “I was just feeling glad earlier.”

“What are you glad about?”

“My class’ choir. They took advantage of me not being in school, and placed me in the direct centre of the first row.” Sheng Wang said, “The bunch of bastards kept this from me until afternoon, and caused me to completely be out of sorts for the last period. I only felt slightly consoled when I heard from Old Gao that you also have to participate just now.”

“I’m not,” Jiang Tian said, “I don’t know how to play at all.”

“The guitar?” Sheng Wang instigated, “Learning a simple song quickly for an emergency is actually quite doable, a top student is afraid of this?”

The top student was impervious. “I’m not learning.”

“Try.”

“No.”

“You’re heartless enough to let me embarrass myself alone?”

Jiang Tian tugged at his bag strap, and said rather scoundrelly, “Mn.”

Sheng Wang narrowed his eyes, and hooked an arm around his neck, causing him to hunch over and lower his head. “Say that again?”

Jiang Tian’s Adam’s apple was stuck against his arm, bobbing up and down. Sheng Wang was the only one who knew he was chuckling.

Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui then poked their heads out from the classroom at this moment, and as they cheered Sheng Wang on, they were also prepared to retreat any time.

Sheng Wang threw a quick glance at them, and turned Jiang Tian around to make his back face them. Behind him was the endless stream of students heading to the cafeteria. He lowered his voice and said to Jiang Tian, “I’ll let you in on a secret: your secret boyfriend just so happens to know how to play the guitar, and he would very much like to teach you. One on one, guaranteed successful outcome, and it’s all for free. Tell me, are you learning or not?”

……

Therefore, the same night, Gao Tianyang passed the good news to Carp and the culture rep. “Tian-ge agreed.”

“For real?” The two girls could not believe their ears.

“Sheng-ge mentioned it while we’re eating, and Tian-ge didn’t refute him.” Gao Tianyang said, “It’s real, guaranteed.”

“Why? Why did he agree all of a sudden?”

“Beats me.” Gao Tianyang said, “Are mere mortal humans able to guess my Tian-ge’s thoughts? Am I right, Tian-ge?”

As he said, he also turned to ask, “So, why?”

Jiang Tian did not even look up. “I was possessed.”

Gao Tianyang: “.....”

*

Sure, everyone had to plan for the cultural festival, but the only ones who really took it seriously were the year ones. The year twos usually did not put in as much rehearsal time, at the very most only a few extra periods of night self-study were taken up.

Class A was even more lackadaisical compared to the other classes — He Jin was generous, even more so towards Jiang Tian. She straight up

produced a long term absence slip, saying that he could go practise if he wanted to during night self-study.

However, Jiang Tian did not manage to make use of the night self-study leaves; Class B was rather strict, and Sheng Wang couldn't leave. Even when he managed to get an absence slip, it would be under the context of practising their singing as the entire class in the music classroom.

After the last period of night self-study on Thursday, Jiang Tian was on his way to look for Sheng Wang in the lecture theatre with a bag in his hand, already heading downstairs, when he received Sheng Wang's message.

Shop's Anniversary Celebration: come to the arts building

Someone: You went for choir rehearsal?

Shop's Anniversary Celebration: yeah

Shop's Anniversary Celebration: we've already been dismissed. I got the keys to the music classroom from the teacher, and got excused from residential students' night self-study

Fuzhong's arts building was situated to the north, it was rather close to the sports ground, and very far from the blocks the students went to school at. All music and art lessons in Fuzhong were held here, the arts students usually practised here too, some diligent ones leave at closing time on the dot, precisely 11pm.

When Jiang Tian reached downstairs, he saw Sheng Wang waiting by the entrance.

At this timing, most of the building was dark, with only a sparse few classrooms with their lights still switched on. Sheng Wang glanced upwards, and said, "There's already barely anyone. Thank god you were fast, otherwise we wouldn't really have time if we leave by 11pm."

Jiang Tian walked up the stairs three steps at a time, and entered the building with Sheng Wang, shoulders to shoulders. A few seconds passed before he spoke, "You're really here to practise with me?"

Sheng Wang touched his nose, and turned to look behind him. There were round security cameras, covering all 360 degrees the entrance to the

arts building as well as the corners of the corridors.

The campus was enormous, it could not be anymore normal to have a lot of security cameras lying around. The intent was to guard against thieves, for security purposes, but to students who were up to no good, those would be administration dean, Big Mouth Xu's eyes, omnipresent no matter where they go.

Sheng Wang did not particularly feel that way in the past, and now he felt it more than anybody else.

The ring-shaped corridor was not actually narrow, but his shoulders — his arms — they always bumped against Jiang Tian's. With no righteous reason, for no righteous purpose, he was simply trying to get a little closer to the person he liked with the excuse of accidental touches.

There were still two arts students in the art studio on the first floor, the room with the musical instruments was at the direct opposite. They left the glow of the light, and entered the area full of darkness. Sheng Wang opened up the door with the key, his eyes lowered.

The musical instruments room was not exactly small, but it was divided into a few narrow paths via rows and rows of metal racks. The racks were custom made, with different instruments placed according to their types. Other than instruments like pianos that were difficult to move, most of them were here.

“So dusty.” The smell of dust in the room was a little heavy, smelling distinctly aged and vintage. Still, he did not fan the dust away.

Actual arts students all brought their own instruments, only those who need it temporarily would come here to borrow. Therefore, despite the culture festival looming in the near distance, this place still remained relatively unvisited by people.

Sheng Wang reached up, wanting to switch on the lights, but his fingers did not press down upon finding the switch. He looked around with the aid of the light on his phone, and asked, “Will there be security cameras here?”

Jiang Tian followed him and checked around too. “I don’t spot any.”

Sheng Wang nodded.

He met Jiang Tian’s eyes. “Does it count as having the doors closed now?”

Jiang Tian’s eyes landed on his phone screen before turning to him again. “Not exactly.”

Sheng Wang released his thumb, and the screen darkened just like that. The metal racks and canvas bags all fell into the darkness. A random assortment of items littered by the window, crisscrossing, nearly blocking out the entire window pane. The light from the corridor was pale as it shone in through the gaps.

They could see the shadows outside, but if someone was to look in, all that could be seen was just darkness.

Sheng Wang peered at the direction of the windows, saying, “I think we can count it as closed by force now.”

However, the moment he said that, the sound of human voices could be heard from the staircase facing the room. Due to the tranquility of the night, they caught every word clearly.

“You brought the recorder yourself?”

“I borrowed it from the musical instruments room.”

“Doesn’t that mean you still have to return it?”

“.....”

Without a second word, Sheng Wang raised his hand to switch on the lights, and went towards the guitar racks with Jiang Tian.

Just as they lifted up a bag, the door to the instrument room opened. Three girls walked in, and said, “Eh?”

“Jiang Tian?!” a girl gasped on instinct, and she hurriedly covered her mouth. Clearly, she did not expect to see a hot guy the moment she opened the door either. There were even two of them.

“You’re here to borrow the instrument too?” They only remembered to introduce themselves after they asked that. “We’re from Class 10.”

Jiang Tian did not appear to be in a particularly cheery mood, but he had always been so cold and aloof, everyone had long since been used to it. Funnily, it was Sheng Wang who also looked sort of unhappy. Despite the mirth in his tone, the expression on his face was a little indistinct. “We’re here to borrow a guitar. Adios.”

They registered themselves on the booklet hanging by the door, and went upstairs with the black colour bag. This time, Sheng Wang wasn’t in the mood to pick the classroom, and went in after vaguely looking for an empty one.

The arts building was designed to look like a musical note, the classrooms formed a circle that wasn’t quite round with the corridor. In the middle was an ecological garden, with a giant patch of bamboo planted. The windows facing inwards ended up being quite nicely blocked.

Young master Sheng was thwarted from his attempt at immoral behaviour, and was abnormally displeased. He began to shut the entire

world out the moment he put the guitar down. Jiang Tian closed the door, and by the time he turned around, he saw a certain person sitting on the windowsill — he even pulled the hood from the sweatshirt he wore as an inner layer out and wore it on his head.

The lights weren't switched on yet; he sat in the shadows. He did appear rather cool, but it's just that his mood was a little bad.

Jiang Tian shot a glance at him, and suddenly walked an entire round by the windows at the other side of the classroom, pulling all the curtains facing the corridor shut. He then locked the classroom front door.

He headed to the window, unloaded the bag from his shoulder and tossed it aside. He pulled Sheng Wang's hood down, and his back hunched over as he kissed him.

The chill at night in late December was bone-seeping. One of Sheng Wang's feet was stepping by the edge of the windowsill, and his back was pressed against the icy-cold glass as his palm held the back of Jiang Tian's neck.

They spent a few days being brothers, dormmates and schoolmates. Their kisses were a little sloppy now that they were finally alone, only quite a while later then did the kisses gradually turn gentle.

*

The cafeteria in a morning at Fuzhong wouldn’t be as crowded as noon, a lot of students would give up on cooked food for the sake of a few more winks of sleep, and settle their breakfast with a few biscuits and bread.

Sheng Wang and the rest went to the cafeteria depending on their moods. This morning, both Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were in a terrific mood, so they were already seated in the canteen super early in the morning. Unexpectedly, they bumped into Gao Tianyang and the rest.

It was honestly quite the rare sight to see the lazy bums of Class A come down for breakfast for once. Sheng Wang greeted them, and the surrounding seats were instantly filled.

“I heard that you went to practise the guitar with Tian-ge last night,” Gao Tianyang shoved a mouthful of noodles into his mouth, and looked up to ask, “How did it go?”

Jiang Tian was sitting opposite him, upon hearing that he looked at him. “So-so.”

“Why?” Gao Tianyang asked.

Both Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian had long legs, and their legs were almost intertwined beneath the table. He knocked against Jiang Tian’s knee, but his eyes were on Gao Tianyang as he said, “The guitar was bad.”

“Oh, yeah, that’s true.” Gao Tianyang had zero clue as to the sneaky behaviours under the table, and even thought that they made quite a bit of sense. “After all, it belongs to the musical instrument room. With so many people borrowing it here and there, it can’t be particularly good. How now?”

“There’s one at home.” Sheng Wang said, looking at Jiang Tian. “Let’s go retrieve it after the weekly test?”

Chapter 078 - Endearment

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Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

This Really Looked Like a Couple Name, the Kind Where It's Secretly Shameless

The weekly test was nothing out of the ordinary for Fuzhong students, and after an entire semester, they were basically numb.

The day before the exam, each class began clearing their tables as per regulations. Class A students did not like stacking their books on the table, they usually just brought whatever they needed for the lessons that day. With the opening of their bags, their tables were basically clear. However, Class B was different.

God knows who started it, but Class B liked to display their books and learning materials for the entire semester upright on their desks; with the book standee by the side, it formed a natural barrier.

They did enjoy much convenience during ordinary times — they simply needed to bring a couple of papers back and forth to school, and even if they were sleeping away or misbehaving in class, they wouldn’t

appear to be too obvious about it. However, they suffered greatly before the weekly exam, and had to carry the books stack by stack to the back of the class.

There were more girls in class B, and usually they could only ask the boys for help during times like this. “Who the girl invited to help her” and “Who did the boy volunteer to help” was never what it seemed, with many hidden agendas and feelings behind it.

It was the first time Sheng Wang was part of this entire process, and before he realised what was going on, he saw a boy walk out from the last row, lifting up a stack of books from a girl in the front row without a single word, and place it behind the classroom with a plonk.

The entire class was quiet for a few seconds before they exploded into chaos, slapping their tables and hooting. The boy then tried to act composed as he returned to his seat, but the red flush on his face betrayed him. The girl was even redder than he was.

Sheng Wang: “.....”

His phone was buzzing, there was a stampede of footsteps happening upstairs, ergo Class A just ended class.

Jiang Tian asked if he was done yet. He replied, saying *soon*.

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: luckily Big Mouth Xu isn’t here

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: otherwise he’ll have a 100% hit rate

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: I haven’t even gotten all their names straight, but just by watching them carry their books alone, I already know all the couples in this class

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: 100% sniped

Someone: ……

Someone: Class B’s homeroom teacher did say their entire class is all a little stupid

Shop’s Anniversary Celebration: Old Zhang said “our class is more simple” hello?

Just as he ridiculed them to Jiang Tian, Shi Yu — who was next to him — swaggered out. Not only did he help He Shi carry her books, he even helped to refill her water at the back of the class.

On the behalf of their relationship as dormmates, Sheng Wang added: still, I get it though. you definitely will only help whomever you like.

The moment he looked up after sending the message, four girls were pushing and nudging each other as they approached him in a group, asking, “Sheng Wang, can you help us carry our books for a bit?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Shit, he spoke too soon.

Jiang Tian was heading downstairs with Gao Tianyang. After he went down two steps, he suddenly received a new message from a certain someone, with only three words in its contents: I like you.

Jiang Tian did not know what brand of madness did the young master opposite spiral into, and sent a question mark having absolutely no clue

what was happening. In the end, what he got in return was an entire column of a tiny figure, in tears as they kneeled down.

“Hm?” Gao Tianyang’s pitch suddenly raised, making a questioning noise.

Jiang Tian turned to face him, only to see him frantically tearing his eyes away from his phone screen.

“I think I just saw something……” Gao Tianyang explained, wanting very much to stay alive, “Let me get this straight! I didn’t mean to peek, I merely accidentally saw what was on your screen while trying to say something to you. See, I turned myself in immediately.”

“What did you see?” Jiang Tian lowered his hand, his thumb moving to turn the screen off. He realised belatedly that by doing so, it still seemed like he was trying to cover something up.

As expected, Gao Tianyang glanced at his dangling hand, and mischief was instantly written on his face. He checked the surroundings,

and moved Jiang Tian to the corner of the stairs with an arm on Jiang Tian's shoulder. He cleared his throat before teasing, "Tian-ge, did I just witness a confession from some girl?"

Jiang Tian: "....."

In that instant, Gao Tianyang could tell that his Tian-ge's expression was extremely wooden — a trace of hesitance in his coldness, a trace of very complicated feelings in his hesitance.

He unilaterally asserted that as the shyness of an iceberg turned man, because after Jiang Tian numbly stared at him for a few seconds, he seriously admitted it with a "Mn".

Actually, there was no way Jiang Tian could deny it anyway. After all, he, Gao Tianyang, had eyes of an eagle, and one look was enough to allow him to catch the main point, seeing that line of "I like you".

He observed for a bit, and figured that Jiang Tian was in an okay mood. Therefore, he continued probing, foolhardy, "Will you usually

respond to any ordinary person’s confession? Nah, for sure. But, you replied just now!”

Jiang Tian continued looking like he didn’t know where to even start. “.....So?”

Gao Tianyang chickened out for half a second, and concluded with a shut of the eyes and a kick of the legs, “So, I think that girl has a chance.”

Jiang Tian was momentarily silent after listening to him. He answered, “Okay.”

Gao Tianyang was the epitome of shock. “You said okay??? YOU REALLY SAID OKAY???”

He thought no matter if he was right or wrong, Jiang Tian would definitely deny it. He was already mentally prepared to be mercilessly mocked by stubborn words, but never did he ever expect for Jiang Tian to admit it!

After Jiang Tian said that, he went down the stairs by himself. Gao Tianyang was stunned stupid for a few seconds before he flew after him. The two arrived outside Class B together.

The two of them appeared here quite frequently, especially Jiang Tian. He always came to wait for Sheng Wang every lunch and dinner, every day.

Class B's teachers loved to drag on their lessons, sometimes, they had to wait for several minutes at the back door. Despite the high rate they had to do so, the girls of Class B still stirred whenever they saw Jiang Tian coming over.

Currently, there were no teachers in Class B's classroom, everyone was going back and forth to carry their books. The moment commotion stirred, Jiang Tian discovered that a particular someone's seat was empty. He scanned around the classroom, and finally saw a Sheng Wang carrying books along the passageway.

He appeared to be scholarly, handsome, and not buff at all. His strength however was unexpectedly good. He managed to carry such a tall stack of books with perfect stability, it was the girl by the side who kept going on instead, "Is it really heavy? Do you want to rest?"

“It’s alright, I’m fine.” Sheng Wang bent over and settled that stack of books at the back of the classroom. He straightened up and patted away the dust on his hand, asking, “Is there anything else?”

“Nope, no more. I can carry the rest myself, thank you so much!” The girl pointed outside the window, “Jiang Tian’s here.”

Just after she spoke, the girl felt a gust of wind whoosh past her. The next second, Sheng Wang had already strided to the window. He held onto the window frame as he said to the person outside, “A few girls honestly couldn’t carry their books, and asked me if I could help them. Hold on a bit, I’ll be done soon.”

Jiang Tian understood at last what brand of madness did Sheng Wang spiral into with the “I like you” just now. What probably happened was that the moment he just said “you definitely will only help whomever you like”, he was surrounded by girls.

He recalled that column of a tiny figure kneeling down and crying, and felt a little like laughing. Therefore, he asked Sheng Wang, “How many stacks are there left?”

“Two,” Sheng Wang said.

Jiang Tian nodded. He glanced at the state of chaos Class B was in where anyone was free to go in and out, and directly entered the classroom via the open back door.

“What are you doing?” Sheng Wang was confused.

Jiang Tian rolled his sleeves up, revealing his forearm. He said without even looking up, “Helping you.”

When they left the classroom, the girl who was helped by Jiang Tian was still a little dazed. After all, she did not expect a good thing like “buy one get one free” to apply to this too.

Sheng Wang bought three bottles of drinks at the vending machine at the bottom of the building, and gave the other two people a bottle each.

“What’s on Old Gao’s mind?” He twisted the cap open, and then leaned away, avoiding the bottle. The thin white foam instantly gathered at the mouth with a sizzle, and slowly seeped outside along the gap, leaving sparse dots on the ground.

Gao Tianyang snuck a look at Jiang Tian, indicating with his gaze: Am I allowed to say anything?

Funnily enough, Jiang Tian was rather direct. “Did I order a gag order?”

“Imma say it then.” Gao Tianyang deliberated, and turned to say to Sheng Wang, “I suspect my Tian-ge has been tempted by love.”

Sheng Wang did not control his strength well, and accidentally uncapped all the way — a portion of the drink instantly shot out just like that.

Gao Tianyang only avoided the tragedy of getting his pants drenched by hurriedly retreating two steps back. “What the fuck, Sheng-ge, did you just sneak attack me?”

“My hand slipped.” Sheng Wang rubbed his thumb, stained by the drink, and borrowed a tissue from a passing by student.

He covered the mouth of the drink as he asked Gao Tianyang, “What did you just say?”

“I said—” Gao Tianyang tried to set it up, “Whatever, I’ll put it this way. Just now, when we were heading down to Class B, I spotted someone confessing to Tian-ge.”

“Confessing?”

“Yeah, saying ‘I like you’ or something.” Gao Tianyang’s tone was lighthearted teasing, and next that tone instantly shifted into regret. “Unfortunately, Tian-ge’s thumb happened to be in the way, I didn’t manage to see that girl’s profile picture.”

“You didn’t see?” Sheng Wang let out an “oh” enigmatically.

They stood at both sides of Gao Tianyang respectively, and met each other’s eyes across Gao Tianyang. He lifted his head and chugged a mouthful of drink.

Gao Tianyang was completely unaware of that at all, he attempted to suss out more information from Jiang Tian, looking to his right. “Therefore, Tian-ge.”

“Mn,” Jiang Tian grunted.

“Do we know that girl?” Gao Tianyang asked.

Jiang Tian: “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” Gao Tianyang made eye contact with Sheng Wang, attempting to find a similar response in his ally. Sadly, he only saw an indifference towards gossiping in his gaze.

“That means that maybe we know, and maybe we don’t?” Gao Tianyang realised. “I know it, you definitely met during the training camp.”

This time round Jiang Tian replied with a “Mn”.

Seeing that Jiang Tian actually answered, Gao Tianyang was instantly filled with vigour.

“Eh, Tian-ge,” he nudged Jiang Tian’s shoulder, asking, “is she pretty?”

Jiang Tian’s gaze travelled from god knows where, and then calmly took a sip of his drink with his eyes lowered, replying with “Mn”.

Perhaps he was just seeing things, but Gao Tianyang kept feeling like the corner of his mouth twitched before he went “Mn” — maybe he was laughing or something. But either way, none of that mattered at all.

“If Tian-ge said that she’s pretty, then she has to be insanely pretty!” Gao Tianyang turned and immediately hooked an arm around Sheng Wang, saying, “Sheng Wang, was there anyone who’s insanely beautiful in the camp?”

“I don’t know about pretty,” Sheng Wang dug out his phone with his head lowered, “I do know about insane though.”

“Who?” Gao Tianyang’s attention was attracted just like that.

“Guess.”

“.....”

“You can continue gossiping, I need to send a message,” Sheng Wang said.

Gao Tianyang no longer bothered him after receiving the imperial edict, and turned to continue trying to wrangle more information out of Jiang Tian.

Sheng Wang’s thumb speedily flew, Jiang Tian’s phone kept buzzing in his pocket. However, in lieu of how Gao Tianyang was quite excited, he didn’t check at all.

Only when they finished their lunch and went back to class for the noon break, then he dug his phone out for a look. He saw a certain someone first demandingly ask him: PRETTY????

And then he spammed more than 10 memes, each of them waving long blades, with every hit causing bloodshed. Some shish-kebabed three to four people at once, some skewered through seven to eight. How fearsome.

Just that alone wasn’t enough, he even changed his profile picture to a giant Wangzai, rolling his eyes. The picture was zoomed in that there was

only the eye-rolling, his personal nickname became: You say that again

(t/n: profile picture reference: 7th picture in this link)

Jiang Tian spent merely 25 minutes to complete the 30 minutes math practice without any hurrying. In the remaining five minutes, he spent four and a half on watching someone kicking up a fuss and asking for a fight, and then in the last 30 seconds, he changed his own WeChat personal nickname too.

As the saying goes, people in love would turn stupid in certain occasions, and even subconsciously become more and more similar to the other person. For example, their catchphrases. Or, certain habits too.

Jiang Tian had never related so much.

While thinking that this was so childish, he changed the personal nickname — unchanged ever since he registered for WeChat — into this: Ok

A mere few minutes later, Sheng Wang already discovered this change.

You say that again: ?

Ok: .

They really looked like they have matching couple names, the kind where it's secretly shameless, completely subtle and yet somehow as clear as day too too.

…...They are even quite mocking.

As Sheng Wang felt pleased, he also wanted to challenge his Ge to a fight.

Chapter 079 - Accident

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Warning: mentions of suicide and dead bodies

“Your Skin Over Here Is Broken.”

However, Gao Tianyang’s words did remind Sheng Wang — he had too many friends in common with Jiang Tian, his profile picture was rather unique too. As long as someone with bad intentions looks through their messages a few more times, they could tell that something was wrong. After all, not everyone was as upright as Gao Tianyang.

What if someone else ends up chancing upon the messages in the future? What if that person does not turn themself in or make a noise, and get all tangled up in trying to figure that out instead?

He suddenly felt that the strings of relationships between people were too much in the way...if only there were none of those around him and Jiang Tian. Not a single thread tied to them, nothing to do with anyone else at all. That would be great; they could act without the slightest qualm.

*

The weather on the day of the weekly exam suddenly turned cloudy, with humidity heavily fogging the air. The grey cloud of mist floated across the river to the east of Fuzhong, twisting and winding itself around the parasol and camphor trees that were planted all over the school.

Sheng Wang did not have a good sleep last night, his eyelids keep twitching early in the morning. As he walked towards Mingli Block with Jiang Tian, they ran into a few teachers. They vaguely heard them discussing something, but the moment they noticed students coming nearer, they immediately ended the conversation furtively.

(t/n: Chinese superstition that might be relevant: if it’s the left eyelid that's jumping, good fortune is coming. If it is the right, it’s bad luck.)

“Did you catch what Old Wu said just now?” Sheng Wang looked downstairs again once he climbed upstairs. He leaned over the railings, and saw the balding heads of Class A teachers.

“I didn’t.” Jiang Tian stopped in his steps when he got to the corner of the third floor, indicating for Sheng Wang to go to Class B.

“It’s cool, either way it has nothing to do with us.” Sheng Wang withdrew his gaze as he headed to the classroom subconsciously. He only moved two steps before he retreated back once more.

“Just remembered that there is an exam coming soon. Do I get special encouragement?” He looked at Jiang Tian, seeming like on the verge of smiling.

“Define special?” Jiang Tian had already ascended one step, he turned aside and his head moved to look at him.

Sheng Wang originally wanted to tease him, that’s all. He did not intend on anything else. When Jiang Tian asked that question, he replied off the top of his head, “Give me your hand.”

Jiang Tian took his hand out from the pocket of his long pants, and his palm faced upwards.

Sheng Wang rubbed his palm with both his palm and the back of it, saying, “Bless me with a little of your godly energy.”

Jiang Tian raised an eyebrow, but before said eyebrow went down, he saw a few people shoot up from downstairs, hollering,

“NOHOLDONDON’TKEEPITYET! Shouldn’t everyone present get to have a chance at mooching off things like godly energy too?”

Gao Tianyang was at the very front, Song Sirui closely followed behind. A few boys even lunged over like hungry wolves. “Let me touch Tian-ge too!”

“.....” Without any hesitation, Jiang Tian stuck his hand into his pocket once more.

Gao Tianyang found himself mooching off thin air, and relentlessly clapped Jiang Tian’s shoulder anyway. “Does it count if it’s the shoulder? I don’t care, I got some.”

“You bastard, can Tian-ge’s shoulders even be touched by the likes of you? Scram! I need to get a bit of that holiness too, I messed up real bad last time.” Song Sirui charged over.

In the blink of an eye, Jiang Tian was surrounded by that group of boys.

He pointed at the bunch of dumbasses that came clinging onto him, and asked Sheng Wang, a headache evident in his voice, “Did you get a kick out of setting me up?

Sheng Wang doubled over in laughter, sprawling over the handrail. While nobody noticed, he blew a flying kiss at him, and then attempted to flee on the spot. However, before he could even take a single step, he found himself blocked.

A huge wave of chit-chatting girls surged up from the stairs, and all of them happened to be from Class B coincidentally. Sheng Wang stuck to the side with his back against the railings, giving way to the girls. The girls glanced towards Jiang Tian’s direction, and then giggled as they greeted Sheng Wang.

Sheng Wang nodded, and politely returned the greetings. Just after he finished laughing, he felt a light pat on the top of his head.

“What?” Sheng Wang looked above him as his hand rested on the railing, “You want revenge even for that? How about you get Old Gao and

the rest to touch me too.”

“No,” Jiang Tian pointed at his own right corner of his lip, saying, “your skin over here is broken.”

Gao Tianyang, Song Sirui and the rest all looked over on instinct, the passing girls also glanced at the corner of his lips too. Sheng Wang’s tongue darted out to lick that corner, and found a very small wound.

This was the result of what happened at the dorm last night. Jiang Tian was washing up by the sink, and he snuck over using the excuse of going to the toilet. While Shi Yu and Qiu Wenbin weren’t there too, he made use of the opportunity to grab Jiang Tian’s shoulders and gave him a munch. However, he was in too much hurry out of the fear of being caught, and accidentally cut his lower lip instead. He ran away with a hand covering that corner.

Jiang Tian, as the person involved himself, witnessed everything from the start to end. He knew every damn detail well, yet he chose to vaguely bring it up at this moment.

The crowd was an endless stream around them, Sheng Wang felt a wave of heat rush to his face amidst all sorts of greetings and laughter. He licked the wound, and fanned himself with the collar of his shirt. He made a tall thumbs up at Jiang Tian and conceded, “You win.”

He had now begun to realise a true principle of the world — when it comes to being secretly shameless, nobody could defeat his Ge.

Sheng Wang’s seat for the exam was the third in Class B, right next to the window. Just as he sat down, he heard the few day students behind him say, “Eh? Have you heard?”

“What is it?”

“You don’t know about what happened by the river at the east gate?”

“We literally stay in the dorms, how are we supposed to know? Spill already.” This was Shi Yu.

“Apparently they found a dead body.”

“Ah???” Someone sucked in a gust of air. “Is that for real?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never seen it.”

“Where did the body come from?” Someone guessed, “Don’t tell me someone from school committed suicide?”

“I don’t think our school is that bad though?”

Nearly every student had heard of some rumours: like how someone from XX school XX city jumped off the building, dived into the river, hung themselves etc etc. Usually, once they heard it, they would express some melancholic sentiments, and slowly the discussion would fizzle out until they hear of the next one. Although Fuzhong was heavy on the homework and exams, the overall mood wasn’t depressing and too down.

A certain rumour went around the students, saying that every time someone from some other school jumped off the building, Fuzhong would add another layer of soft mud beneath the major teaching blocks and residential blocks, to the point that there wasn’t a single building suitable for committing suicide in the whole of Fuzhong.

Last year, a year three student had their paper blown outside the window by the wind, and stuck their arms out to try to grab it. However, they accidentally fell straight from the fourth floor, and gave the teachers a giant scare. Apparently Big Mouth Xu's legs even turned jelly, only when they went straight to the hospital then they found out that it was only a minor fracture.

With that, Fuzhong hired yet another wave of hourly workers on the second day, and added a layer of soft mud, ensuring to their best abilities that students would leave with not a single hair touched even if they fell down.

Nothing came to fruition out of the discussion they had — after all, the students were thoroughly occupied with school, they could barely spare any time inquiring issues like this.

However, because of that, the entire classroom fell into a sullen mood. Most people's hearts weren't entirely in it when they answered the questions.

Only when they went to have lunch at Wu Tong Wai then did Sheng Wang hear about the situation from Old Man Ding.

As the old man ladled more soup into Sheng Wang's bowl, he said, "I didn't see anything, but the Da-Mei who lives at the front saw it. Doesn't she like to applaud all around the streets at night?"

There was a group of old ladies who were too old to properly dance anymore, so they took themself to stroll around the circumference of the school and clap their hands. They claimed that there were a lot of acupuncture points on the hand, clapping will ensure they live a life of longevity.

Old Man Ding called this behavior "applauding" every time.

"Ooooh, it is truly terrible weather to be soaking in the water. Apparently the body had already bloated up by the time they fished it out," he continued while gesturing an exaggeratedly wide distance, "it bloated until it was this big. It didn't even float over together."

“What do you mean it wasn’t together?” Sheng Wang’s face was slightly green.

“The body was dismembered,” the old man said.

“It wasn’t a student committing suicide?”

“No way.” Old Man Ding said, “Your school still requires residential students to ask for a permission slip to leave the school. You’re telling me the student gotta ask for a slip from a teacher if they wanna jump? Even more impossible for day students, wouldn’t they have to come all the way from home to jump?”

The old man said, “Ain’t nothing like this happened in our area before; last night, a good half of the alley all went to look. I didn’t manage to make it before I was dragged away. What a pity, the body was all white and meaty.”

“Forget it, let’s not talk about it anymore. I made stewed chicken especially for your exams, it will nourish you.” As he talked, he settled the

bowl of soup before Jiang Tian, a white and meaty drumstick swimming within.

Jiang Tian: “.....”

This incident caused the two boys to both lose their appetites; but they also did not want to let the old man’s cooked meal go to waste just like that, so they drank intermittently. When they finished the soup, the old man’s giant bowl of rice was already finished. He cleared the bowl without a second word and said that he would be going to the kitchen to knead some dough — he would be making some *baozis* tomorrow.

(t/n: baozi: steamed stuffed buns)

Jiang Tian said, “Leave it alone first, I’ll help you knead after my exams, at night.”

The old man said, “Does it look like I don’t know how to knead?”

“Kneading takes quite a bit of strength,” Sheng Wang asked, “Grandpa, how many do you plan to make?”

The old man said, “Not much, just a bit.”

Jiang Tian exposed him in a heartbeat. “At least 200, he does it every single year. He’ll make an entire mountain at around the end of December, the start of January-ish. He couldn’t exactly stomach much either, so he’ll keep giving them out in bags.”

“200?” Sheng Wang was stunned, “Then how much dough is he gonna knead? No way, please just let us do it at night.”

“None of ya business, eat your food. You kids gotta wait for me to age by at least 20 years more before you get to help.”

The old man was not obedient at all; he walked away, mumbling under his breath. However, barely a moment passed before there was a giant clang in the kitchen — like something fell to the ground and knocked the vegetable basket over.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian stilled for a second before they pushed their bowls aside and rushed to the kitchen.

The old man was in the military at one point in the past, even as he got older he did give naughty kids a good smacking. He refused to admit

that he was old on the premise that he was still strong with a good hearty appetite, as though he was still in the prime of his life; it would take half a lifetime at the very least before he was a hunchback.

But sometimes, all it took was an instant for someone to age—

He merely saw a couple of rice grains on the ground, so he bent over to pick it up. He stood up a little too quickly, and by the time he opened his eyes again he was already in the hospital.

He was dazed for a while. After he figured out what happened, his first reaction was “thank god I can still open my eyes”.

Old Man Ding usually enjoyed densely flavoured teas on a daily basis, his food tended to be on the saltier side. Jiang Tian ate without any complaints for a very long time...until one day Zhao Xi and co came over to eat and casually brought up how his food was rather salty, then he finally realised that it was too salty. After that, his food gradually became milder.

Oh, he did like to smoke in the past too. If he had nothing else to do, he would help himself to frying some peanuts and enjoying a couple of

mouthfuls of alcohol. Although he did reduce his intake under Jiang Tian's vigilant watch, he still craved for it once in a while.

Anyway, all sorts of direct and indirect reasons led to this accident. When he woke up, it was already nearly evening, Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting were in the hospital ward, fruits and clothing in hand. "Fortunately, it was just a slight brain hemorrhage, and fortunately, Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang were around for food too."

The IV drip was still inserted into the old man's hand, the smell of disinfectant and medicine invaded his nose. He watched the back of his hand, flesh loose and skin wrinkled, and abruptly realised that he really was old; it wouldn't do him any good to not admit to that.

"Where are the kiddos?" the old man asked.

"Chased away by Lin-zi and me," Zhao Xi said, "how goddamn stubborn, they nearly skipped the exams this afternoon. At least, it's only the weekly exam this time — the rules aren't as strict — plus their school

gives them more leeway too. Otherwise, who would let them enter the exam venue after arriving so late."

The old man was instantly a little frantic. "Then did they go for the exams?"

"They did, relax," Zhao Xi hurriedly assured, "lie back down first. Even if it's only a slight hemorrhage you still gotta stay lying down in bed, don't rush. If you faint again they would have to come again."

He did not want the old man to overthink, so he did not bring up other issues. The fact was, when Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang were chased back to school, the afternoon exams had already begun for a long, long time. They did take their papers, but their grades would definitely be somewhat affected.

Chapter 080 - Going Home

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Jiang Tian Suddenly Said, “Your Bathroom Has Terrible Soundproofing.”

After the last paper, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian went straight to the hospital on their very next footstep. There were supposed to be proper visitation hours for the ward, but it wasn’t set in stone. The nurse still allowed them to chat a little with the old man.

“Didn’t Xiao-Zhao pass the massage?” The old man glared, “You’re not going to school tomorrow? Nothing serious happened to me, what are ya doing running here and there?”

“They’re giving us a holiday for tomorrow, the night self-study for the next few nights are cancelled too,” Jiang Tian said.

“Who do you think you’re fooling?” Old Man Ding found it a little hard to believe. “Why the holiday out of the blue? Did you two ask for leave?”

Jiang Tian said, “Didn’t they fish someone up in the river?”

“So what about it?”

“Our school is more cautious,” Sheng Wang explained, “they said that they don’t dare to let the students loose all over the place at night without finding out what exactly happened. Either the parents fetch us after night self-study, or it’s straight up cancelled for the time being.”

“How would it be possible for every family to get someone to fetch them?” Old Man Ding said.

“Indeed,” Sheng Wang nodded, “So they simply cancelled it.”

There was also an elderly man staying next bed over. He fell asleep and woke up again several times while watching the TV, and after he stacked his pillows up, he began chatting with them too.

“You kids are from Fuzhong?” the elderly man asked, “Didn’t an accident happen there?”

“Yes,” Old Man Ding said, “we were just talking about it, the school is scared enough to give them a holiday.”

However, the old man was clearly on the more gossipy side, he knew more details too. “I heard from the nurse this morning that the body fished up was a girl. Quite young, around twenty to thirty years old. She’s not from this area, and until now nobody has claimed the body. Poor thing.”

“Yeah.”

“That’s why as they say, you can’t live alone.” The elderly man said it from the bottom of his heart, and he sighed, “As for me, sigh, the old missy left early, my kids aren’t filial, now I live by myself. I fainted while playing mahjong that day, and it was other people who sent me here. If I rely on them……”

He waved. “Then I’ll already be gone.”

The elderly always found their kindred when it comes to conversation topics like this. Old Man Ding tapped Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, saying to the elderly man, “See this yet? As for me, well, if not for these two, I would be gone too.”

“Oh? Grandsons?” the elderly man said, “it’s okay if the grandkids are filial too, that’s good enough.”

Old Man Ding shook his head. A while later he nodded again, saying, “Mn, grandsons, flesh and blood.”

The old man pondered. “No, wait, you were telling me this afternoon that you have no kids, where did the flesh and blood grandsons come from.”

Old Man Ding laughed, pointing at him, “Why are you so easy to trick.”

“I don’t have sons or daughters, but this one here is closer than blood.” Old Man Ding pointed at Sheng Wang, “I’m not giving this one up for anything.”

Sheng Wang joked, “How about me, grandpa? Will you exchange him for me?”

Old Man Ding hesitated for two seconds.

Jiang Tian: “.....”

The old man guffawed again. “I’m not changing, I want both.”

The old man showed off for a while before the nurse came in, urging them to hurry up and rest and sleep. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian hence called for a car home.

It had been a while since they last returned to White Horse Alley; the house was still deep in the depths of the alley, once they were inside, the clamour of the city was muted. The streetlamp outside the courtyard quietly stood at the corner of the wall. Sheng Wang's footsteps briefly paused — he suddenly recalled what it was like when Jiang Tian just moved in.

That day, he stood at the second floor, and saw the way Jiang Tian stood beneath the streetlight while tugging his bag. Back then, they weren't exactly on good terms, but he impulsively called out to him nonetheless.

Why?

He probably felt that the way Jiang Tian was made him seem a little lonely.

The fleeting thought that occurred in his mind yesterday popped up again, saying that if only there wasn't anyone who would entangle their relations; let them be untethered, with all paths unbound for them. With that, they could do anything they want, how good that would be.

Instead, now he felt that that thought was too childish — and too selfish too.

If they were truly all alone in this world, with nobody around them, then that would be so depressingly lonesome. Nobody liked to be all by themself, no matter if they were the grumbling old man in the hospital ward, or the rejoicing Old Man Ding, or even the nameless woman who had yet to be claimed at this moment…

Nobody liked being like *that*.

At that time, he called out for Jiang Tian — because he wanted to pull him into where the people are; now that he's already here, then don't go back anymore.

Don't go back at all, no matter the reason.

I like you; therefore I wish for the people to flock around you, therefore the path you walk on should always be surrounded by blooming flowers — and the clamour of people too.

"Why are you zoning out?" Jiang Tian walked a few steps before he realised that a certain someone was lagging behind.

Sheng Wang stood beneath the streetlight. "I wasn't zoning out, I was doing a little self reflection."

"What are you reflecting over?" Jiang Tian was visibly confused.

"Reflecting over how there's not a goddamn trace of people to be found on this road, my dad and Auntie Jiang aren't home either — why am I walking all properly."

"How did you know that they aren't home?" Jiang Tian asked.

"I sussed out, duh." Sheng Wang said, "What's the point of us going home if they are there too? We'll put up the most touching brotherhood act in the world?"

"Aren't we going back to take the guitar?" Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang: “???”

Jiang Tian: “What’s with that look of yours?”

Sheng Wang stared at him with a poker face for a few seconds, and then he ran over and pounced onto his back, hanging onto him. “You’re doing this on goddamn purpose, aren’t you?”

Boys at this age might look thin, but they were no feather. Jiang Tian stumbled a step back when Sheng Wang threw himself on top of him, and mirth was in his eyes as he said, “What was I doing on purpose?”

“Noo,” Sheng Wang asked, worked up, “don’t tell me you honestly thought that we’re here just for the guitar?”

“Then what do you want to do?” Jiang Tian asked.

Sheng Wang quieted.

In all honesty, he didn’t actually put any thought into what he wanted to do. It was just that the school was too stuffy, and there were too many eyes on them. They could only reveal a little of how close they were in the

tiny gaps of spacetime where nobody else was paying attention, otherwise they had to tiptoe around.

An underground romance was thrilling, but he was going to suffocate from holding his breath all the time. He merely wanted to find a spot where nobody was watching and let some air out. But, with the way Jiang Tian asked, it seemed like he had nefarious intentions.

“What do you mean ‘what’? I am a proper person,” Sheng Wang admonished.

There may be someone hanging on Jiang Tian’s back, but he still managed to make it to the entrance steadily, unlocking the door and entering. When he pushed the door open, he turned aside and replied, “I don’t seem to recall saying anything.”

Fuck.

Sheng Wang released his hand, and silently bent down to change his shoes. However, he only kept that facade of propriety up for barely two

seconds before he grabbed the back of Jiang Tian's neck and began kissing him.

He was the one who took the initiative, so he did not have the nerve to ramble on about being very "proper" etc. Still, as long as he thought of how Jiang Tian could be so shameless beneath his icy surface, he felt a little resentful. Therefore he also backed away a little by his own accord, and mischievously pressed his lips to Jiang Tian's Adam's apple.

He kissed until the apple bobbed, and then he took to his heels.

The lights weren't turned on in the house, it was nothing but darkness all over. The streetlight outside the courtyard walls shone in, casting a transparent and pale patch of light.

Sheng Wang was used to the layout of the dorm, now that they were abruptly back he was little unused to the house. As he went over, he bumped into quite a few things with a few clangs and bangs.

Jiang Tian's pointer finger and thumb rubbed his Adam's apple and was rooted to the ground at the entrance hall for a long while. Just as he

came back to himself, he heard the ruckus.

He held himself back for a few seconds before he could no longer resist, and said, “Do you know what you sound like?”

Sheng Wang’s voice had already travelled upstairs. “Like what?”

“Like a silly bird that just left its cage—”

“Shut up!”

“—flapping its little wings and flying all over the place,” Jiang Tian calmly finished the remaining half of the line.

“You’re so full of shit.”

“You’ll knock yourself out sooner or later,” Jiang Tian tacked on.

“Scram, why are you suddenly so talkative today.”

Jiang Tian pressed the switch, and the lights on top all lit up. He saw Sheng Wang leaning over the second floor railing, squawking at him with reckless abandon.

The two messed around for a bit. They received a call from Zhao Xi, briefly described the situation when they visited him at the hospital, and

eventually gradually settled.

There wasn't any homework after the weekly exam, the next day was a holiday that came out of the blue. Both Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou weren’t at home — Sheng Wang suddenly was at a loss as to how he wanted to spend his time.

It was rather boring, but he was quite happy for some inexplicable reason — like as though he was with Jiang Tian, even zoning out while staring at each other would be interesting.

Forget it, zoning out while staring at each other is a little stupid.

He went to shower in his own bedroom, and before his hair was even dry, he went down with a towel hanging around his neck. He fiddled around the TV and put a game on.

But sitting side by side as they gamed would be a little too brotherly of them. As such, he fiddled around again, and put on a movie instead.

When Jiang Tian headed downstairs, drying his hair, Sheng Wang was digging out the guitar he had not touched for two-three years from the storage. There was sweat on the tip of his nose, and his hands were all dusty.

“Isn’t taking the guitar a lie?” Jiang Tian said.

“We can’t literally not do anything though?” Sheng Wang wiped the guitar once, set it next to the sofa, and went to wash his hands.

This young master refused to use the tissue despite its availability, and shook water all over Jiang Tian instead before he brazenly curled up in the corner of the couch. He asked Jiang Tian, “What song is Carp planning to sing again?”

“We didn’t pick one.” Jiang Tian sat down next to him. “She said she’ll sing whatever I can learn, either way she will be off tune.”

Sheng Wang: “.....how did Old He not eliminate you guys?”

Not only did Old He not kick them out, she even clapped for their dedication and devotion. Only, the audience probably would want to kick

them by the time of the performance.

“When did you learn to play?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Year one or two of middle school, can’t remember.” Sheng Wang said, “I was quite free, so I learned a lot of things, like karate, guitar, basketball……”

He listed down a lot, Jiang Tian understood the moment he listened: this young master simply did not have perseverance, he wanted to try everything, he would learn whatever that seemed cool.

“You’ve learnt karate and yet you still say you’re too weak to fight a chicken?” Jiang Tian questioned.

“That’s because it’s troublesome.” Sheng Wang plucked the guitar string randomly, “Not every school is like Fuzhong. There were a lot of people who would pick fights in the school I went to in year three, or their chunni disease is a little too terminal. I was stopped on my third day of going there, he insisted that I stole his girlfriend.”

Jiang Tian raised an eyebrow.

Sheng Wang mocked, “The hell kinda girlfriend I stole, I haven’t even gotten everyone’s names straight.”

“And then?” Jiang Tian changed his position, allowing his curled up leg to lean closer.

“And then that dumbass tried to beat me, but I beat him instead.” Sheng Wang reflected, saying, “He looked quite ugly after he got beaten up. I did feel exhilarated after doing that, but I spent the remaining year in constant regret. That’s because every few days, there would be someone asking for a beating, and then they would call the parents for a meeting at the slightest infraction. Of course, my dad couldn’t be summoned, so the teachers would talk to me, like two-three times every week. After that, I’ve learnt my lesson. The first thing I do after I transfer school would be to declare that I am too weak to fight even a chicken, therefore allowing me to avoid a lot of dumbasses.”

“The first day I met you, I thought you were also the kind of—” Sheng Wang paused.

Jiang Tian sideyed him. “The kind of idiot who would explode on first sight?”

“The kind of friend who would explode on first sight.” Sheng Wang changed his phrasing and then immediately said, “Who would have thought that you’re a boyfriend.”

His head was lowered as he plucked around, and then his eyes lifted as he opened himself up for praises. “It’s been a few years, and I still seriously remember how to tune the guitar. Is this not cool?”

“So-so,” Jiang Tian said.

“.....”

Sheng Wang watched him in silence for a while, and pressed him into the sofa with a roll. As he tickled his waist, he asked, “So-so this, it’s normal that. Why are you so hard to please, hm?”

Jiang Tian curled a leg — as he blocked the edge in order to stop him from rolling off, he also had to stop his wandering hand. With that, he was

still unable to stop him, and with a few more tussles and turns they both fell onto the carpet.

For boys of this age, all it took was a single spark for everything to turn aflame. A short while later, Sheng Wang's back was arched as he no longer dared to move. His hair was a tousled mess as he looked at Jiang Tian for a while, and then he got out of the way, sitting by the side.

The movie playing on the screen had long since been muted, the light in the living room was switched off too, leaving only the floor lamp behind the couch. Sheng Wang's shoulder touched Jiang Tian's, his heart pounding like a jackrabbit in his chest. He pursed his lips, taking several deep breaths before he croaked, "We'll practise tomorrow instead, I'll head back to my room first……"

Jiang Tian suddenly said, "Your bathroom has terrible soundproofing."

Sheng Wang froze.

The next second, he heard Jiang Tian murmur, “Let me help you.”

Chapter 081 - "Neighbours"

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Warning: the beginning of this chapter consists of Two Bros Helping Each Other Out, and is vaguely rated as mature.

If nsfw scenes are described as 'cars', then this is the vague outline of a bicycle. Those who are familiar with musuli's writing like global university entrance examinations/qqgk should be aware that its around the same level, aka barely nsfw.

If you want to skip past it, look for where // starts and ends.

Sheng Wang Laughed Forcefully, Saying, “Ah...Yeah. Reminiscing About Childhood and Stuff.”

Only at this time then did Sheng Wang discover that he may talk big, but when it came down to it his actions were rather pathetic. Teasing Jiang Tian came as easy as breathing, but now because of a single line — four words — his world was sent into an upheaval, and his defenses collapsed just like that.

The two did not dare to stay in the living room in the end they chose to return to the second floor.

//It was clearly winter, but the room remained warm and stuffy nonetheless. The air-condition hummed as it operated, Sheng Wang felt like his brain was approaching that state too.

His eyes, covered by the back of his hand, were a little teary as he remained leaning backwards. His eyelashes fluttered, and his pupils lost focus as his mind blanked out, wave after wave.

Jiang Tian’s breathing was heavy too. He took out a few pieces of tissue, intending to wipe his hand, but the hand was held down by Sheng Wang instead.

Such a tall lanky boy can weigh down quite heavily too. He said, his voice hoarse, “I nearly thought I’m the only one who’s this affected by a little touch. I believe in reciprocity, let me help you too.”

It was the first time Sheng Wang saw Jiang Tian like this — his eyes slightly lidded, the Adam’s apple on his throat a flushed red. His gaze was piercing and full of turmoil as he lowered his eyes.

This sight belongs to me alone, nobody else will get to see him like this, he thought.

The room seemed to have heated up, his own neck and ears were boiling red too. He narrowed his eyes,tightening his grasp. He said to Jiang Tian, “Ge, I want to take a picture of the way you are now.”

Jiang Tian curled a single leg and closed his eyes. A moment later, he opened them again, and pulled Sheng Wang into a kiss with his hand at the back of Sheng Wang's head, his head turned aside.//

Sheng Wang was startled awake by the commotion on the stairs the next day.

Jiang Tian had already gotten out from the blanket, and sat at the edge of the bed, frowning as he listened to the noise outside. He felt for his phone and checked the time. He lowered his voice, "When are they returning?"

Sheng Wang was still trapped in the grogginess from opening his eyes, and his mind was blank for a few seconds before he understood that Jiang Tian was asking about Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou. "Thursday, I thought."

His throat was terribly hoarse. After he spoke, he gulped two mouthfuls of water from the glass by the head of the bed, and then he froze, the water almost spilling out..

The voices downstairs weren't quite clear, but he could still tell: it was indeed Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou.

“Why are they back already?!” Sheng Wang shot up straight, combed his hair with his fingers and then hurried downstairs.

He did not even bother wearing slippers, and went to the door while walking barefooted on the carpet. He merely wanted to sneakily survey around, but there was someone unexpectedly in the bathroom opposite—

Auntie Sun was holding a mop. Seeing the way he stilled, she asked, “Did auntie accidentally wake you up?”

Sheng Wang was a little confused. “Auntie, why are you in this bathroom?”

“The tap downstairs stopped working.” After Auntie Sun said that, she asked in surprise, “Eh? Xiao-Tian? You slept here last night?”

Sheng Wang then recalled that there was someone behind him, and nearly closed the door on instinct. Fortunately, Jiang Tian was much more composed. He took a jacket, draped it over Sheng Wang’s shoulders, and

slipped past him, coming out of the bedroom. He said to Auntie Sun, “We talked too late into the night.”

“Hm?” Sheng Wang paused for a moment before he agreed, “Mn.”

Those who were extremely familiar with Jiang Tian would know that it was abnormal for him to bother explaining with this many words. Luckily, Auntie Sun did not actually see him every day, and didn’t know him well enough to tell that something was amiss. As for Sheng Wang, he was always half a beat behind every time he just woke up, it could not be anymore normal for Auntie Sun.

“I saw the guitar in the living room just now,” Auntie Sun said.

Sheng Wang was stuped once more, thinking, *oh no*. Last night, they went upstairs in a frenzy, and did not manage to keep the things like the guitar. He explained reflexively, “I took it out. Last time, I told him I’ll teach him to play the guitar, and then later I told him quite a bit of my hobby classes when I was younger, and then….and then I brought him up to see my certificates, so I forgot to keep the things downstairs. Yeah.”

Auntie Sun laughed. “Hey, you’re not that old, you’re already chatting about your younger days?”

Sheng Wang laughed forcefully, saying, “Ah...yeah. Reminiscing about childhood and stuff.”

Jiang Tian — who was on his way back to the neighbouring room — paused in his steps, and glanced at him. He twisted the knob and entered his own bedroom.

Sheng Wang ducked back inside too, and aimlessly walked around the room with his messy bed hair.

Leaving the guitar downstairs was no big deal, and neither was it strange for two brothers to share a room. Most importantly, Auntie Sun was busy with cleaning and tidying after she washed the mop. She forgot what she asked the moment the conversation ended, her mind did not linger on any of these things at all.

He changed his clothes, washed up, and the coolness of mint added some sense back into his head — he was his usual self again. Whatever that happened just now no longer felt like any major at all.

He tossed all the panicky things to the back of his mind, and what happened last night reared its head instead. Therefore, Sheng Wang was a foot out of the bathroom before he turned back and splashed cold water on his face once more.

He was too lazy to wipe away the water droplets coalescing by the corner of his brows, so he simply used his phone, leaning against the sink, and he waited for his face to dry.

His phone screen lit up non-stop, new messages kept streaming in. He briefly looked through them and then entered Moments on WeChat, and ended up chancing upon a new status posted.

This status was posted a minute ago, and in this short period of time, there was already a long queue of comments beneath the post, the contents more of less the same thing — either “wtf did the sun rise from the west look what I found” or “are my eyes deceiving me Tian-ge actually posted in Moments omg”. Gao Tianyang, Song Sirui and their fellow clowns were straight up singing “Today Is a Good Day”.

(t/n: probably this song)

In this early morning, Jiang Tian — whose Moments was once a barren land — posted a status for once. The content was rather simple; he merely shared a guitar version of a song, the song titled “Childhood”.

The class monitor, Little Carp, asked below: are you planning to practise this song? that’s great, I happen to be less out of tune for this song.

There were a few other classmates who agreed too, saying they were cool with this idea, the song being both simple and pleasing to the ears.

Only Sheng Wang knew: *someone* was shading him for his reply to Auntie Sun, the “we were reminiscing about our childhood last night.”

Because of this sharing, Sheng Wang splashed water on his face again, and then left a comment beneath that long chain of replies.

You Say That Again: you can go learn by yourself now.

A few seconds later, Gao Tianyang replied: what a fierce little brother.

Song Sirui immediately followed. However, the moment he just copypasted, Gao Tianyang deleted his original comment, and changed it into: what a fierce Sheng-ge.

Da-Song: ….am i just a joke to you?

Sheng Wang was amused by the two clowns, so he was in a relatively relaxed state by the time he went downstairs.

He was actually still a little terrified of seeing Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou, hence he kept dilly-dallying, not wanting to go down. However,

when he got to the living room, he saw that Jiang Tian was a step ahead of him, already sitting on the couch. He felt assured.

“Didn’t you say that you’ll be back on Thursday? Why are you suddenly back today?” Sheng Wang asked.

Sheng Mingyang said, “It was initially Thursday, but with something so serious happening by Fuzhong’s school gate, I definitely have to come back and check up on you guys. And I heard the old grandpa feeding you two lunch has gotten sick too?”

“You even know this?” Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian met each other’s eyes, and he was astounded. “I don’t think I brought that up?”

Sheng Mingyang laughed, “I do know plenty of people in Fuzhong, isn’t it quite normal for me to be a little more well-informed?”

That was partially the reason why he transferred Sheng Wang here; Sheng Mingyang knew quite a few people in Fuzhong, and as such it was easier to take care of Sheng Wang that way. It was Sheng Wang who first forgot about this.

Sheng Mingyang did not notice his split-second odd behaviour, and asked, “How’s the old man now?”

“He’s hospitalised, think it’s a slight brain hemorrhage or something. He’s on an IV drip, and is already awake. The doctor said that it isn’t serious,” Sheng Wang answered.

There was no way the two parents wouldn’t pay the old man a visit after he had taken care of the two of them for so long. Therefore, the group of four went to the hospital that afternoon.

That hospital was well known for their neurology, there was always a large crowd every day. The inpatient department was the only place on the quieter side.

A few buildings of uneven heights were clustered around the artificial lake and garden, connected by long stretches of passages. It was a place ideal for recovery and healing. There were families pushing the patients on wheelchairs around, taking them for a stroll, chit-chatting and relaxing.

Sheng Mingyang brought a mountain of gift packs containing food, and managed to get himself familiarised with the old man with the aid of Jiang Ou introducing them to each other. Soon, they were laughing and chatting.

Jiang Ou went to get hot water with the bottle in the ward, saying that she'll be washing two persimmons to peel. The people inside chatted, and the topic of the conversation soon went back to the woman fished up in front of Fuzhong's school gate.

Honestly, this incident had nothing to do with any of them, but old people do love to spend their time worrying and fretting, finding out more about this issue in order to relieve boredom.. With such a big city, cases like this weren't exactly many in numbers, but neither were they little. Before an actual conclusion came out, it was bound to be the topic of the day for the entire zone. Therefore, all sorts of rumours flew around.

The elderly man next bed over enigmatically said, "When I went for a stroll downstairs, I heard someone say that that girl has been claimed."

“That’s good,” Old Man Ding nodded, “It would be terribly sad if nobody claimed that poor girl. Still, this family is quite the work, wouldn’t they know if someone that grown has gone missing?”

“No,” the elderly man waved his hand, “she wasn’t claimed by her family, it was another woman.”

“Another woman? What does that mean?”

“Was she her friend?” Sheng Mingyang wasn’t quite into this topic, but he would play along and insert questions as needed.

“No, no!” The elderly man splayed his hand, and crooked his thumbs. “They are like this.”

Sheng Mingyang had not realised. The elderly man tsked, and specified, “They weren’t friends at all, they were partners!”

“Two girls?” Sheng Wang stilled.

“Yes!” The elderly man shook his head, “Apparently the deceased girl wasn’t a good student, she messed around outside, her family had excommunicated her, and this time she owed a loan shark money or made an enemy out of someone or something, in any case—”

He smacked his lips, shaking his head, “She wasn’t a good student, and messed around with a women, what are they called again, homo—”

“Homosexuals?” Sheng Mingyang reminded him.

Sheng Wang was a little drowsy from hearing them chat. Just as he was about to drag Jiang Tian out for a walk, he froze when he heard this word pop out from his dad’s mouth.

He hastily snuck a look at Jiang Tian, and then turned to face Sheng Mingyang. He saw the other person still remaining his same cultured and refined self, and listened to the elderly man concluding, “Yes, how screwed up.”

Sheng Wang’s hand, dangling by his side, chilled.

His face turned pale, and he rubbed his own thumb forcefully. He wanted to refute the old man — that was his first reaction — but Jiang Tian tugged at him the moment he opened his mouth.

Sheng Wang frowned. He thought Jiang Tian wanted to pull him out, pretending that they heard nothing. However, the other person simply pulled him behind him, and spoke up himself. “It isn’t quite nice to speak of people like that though?”

He had always been direct, Old Man Ding and Sheng Mingyang both knew. It was indeed normal for him to say that. The elderly man was astonished by his question, and Sheng Mingyang immediately smoothed things over, “That is true, the person isn’t alive any more, and who knows what actually happened. We aren’t the police too, right?”

Old Man Ding funnily did not speak up at all, and was extremely quiet. Until he followed Jiang Tian sownstairs, Sheng Wang then realised that the old man had never actually said anything about “Homosexuality”.

He suddenly had a gut feeling that although Old Man Ding never brought it up, he probably did know certain issues in regards to Ji Huanyu a long time ago — it was just that his attitude was a little odd……

More specifically, Old Man Ding's attitude towards Ji Huanyu had always been a little strange — like he wasn't merely his neighbour. No neighbour would yell at Ji Huanyu the way Old Man Ding yelled at him, and neither would they dig out old photo albums to flip through them after they scolded him.

Sheng Wang had just left the lift. He suddenly grabbed Jiang Tian, asking, "It was you who registered the old man in the hospital, right? You have his social insurance card?"

Jiang Tian asked, "Why are you asking this?"

"May I take a look?"

"It's not with me."

"Oh." Sheng Wang thought, and then asked again, "Do you know what's the old man's actual surname?"

Jiang Tian did not expect him to ask that. He was momentarily silent before he answered, "His surname is Ji."

Sheng Wang halted.

He recalled what Old Man Ding told him a long time ago, saying that Ji Huanyu was quite a pitiful thing when he was young, he had no parents and was an orphan. He was picked up by someone and raised with a few other kids, in a place that wasn't a proper orphanage. The person simply thought that they were poor little things, so the person gave them some food. Later, due to the lack of proper protocols, the place was ordered to stop. Everyone dispersed, only Ji Huanyu remained here, and lasted into high school.

The old man said, Ji Huanyu's name was given by the person who picked him up, following the surname of that person.

Jiang Tian saw the way Sheng Wang was astounded, and said, "Did the old man tell you about Ji Huanyu's past before?"

Sheng Wang nodded, hesitant. He wasn't sure if Jiang Tian's mood would turn sour with the mention of Ji Huanyu's name, but it seemed like he was still fine for now.

“He said that Ji Huanyu was an orphan, and was picked up and raised by someone?”

“Yeah……”

“The old man was the one who picked him up,” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang suddenly understood why Old Man Ding had such a strange attitude towards Ji Huanyu — he wasn’t merely seeing a neighbour, he was seeing an ingrate of a “son”. He was filled with anger and also self-reproach.

He was angry at him for turning out to be a scumbag, for not becoming a good person, for being an asshole. The self-reproach was aimed at asking himself where did he go wrong, where did he mess up in raising the kid he picked up.

After all, they weren’t real father and son. He wanted to intervene and take charge, but on what grounds did he have to do so? He could only do a few things here and there as an old neighbour. He was probably both rueful

and gratified as he watched Jiang Tian grow up — lamenting over the kid that grew up wrong, glad that Jiang Tian had always been on the right path.

But what if…...he finds out on a certain day that Jiang Tian likes boys too?

Sheng Wang suddenly did not dare to go down that train of thought any further.

Translator's note:

Childhood, a song sung by Lo Ta-yu. A translation can be found here.

An inch of time, an inch of gold, the teacher says an inch of gold cannot buy an inch of time

Day after day, year after year, a wasted childhood.

Chapter 082 - Weekly Exam

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

You’re a Little Hard to Catch Up to

The case of the body in front of Fuzhong’s gates wasn’t a difficult one to solve, and a conclusion soon came out. It was even largely similar to what the old man in the neighbouring bed said.

The one who went to claim the body was indeed that woman’s same-sex lover, the killer was a friend of that woman from before. Reasons included money, included those daily little things, and also a bunch of relationship issues that couldn’t be helped, both simple and complicated. As for the actual nuances, they were the only ones who knew deep down.

Someone placed a bouquet of lilies by the corner of the river in front of the east gate. The passing by students saw it, and talked about it in hushed whispers when they went back in class. And then it was no more.

Happiness and sorrows are not universal in this world — a person’s life and death separation could possibly be reduced down to only a bouquet

of flowers in someone else's eyes.

The day this news made it to the office, the result of the weekly exam came out too.

Song Sirui made a trip to the office to deliver homework, and when he came back, he flopped to Jiang Tian's table, shock written all over his face but also at a loss for words at the same time.

Gao Tianyang tapped him heavily, twice. "Eh! Are you possessed or what? Hello?"

Song Sirui's eyes were falling out of his sockets. "I saw the positions list……"

"And?" Gao Tianyang asked.

"The first place isn't Tian-ge," Song Sirui said.

"Huh???"

The first place seriously isn't Tian-ge. This, to the entire level, was a major once in a lifetime incident. The news instantly spreaded all over.

Class B’s last period just so happened to be PE. Sheng Wang came back from the sports ground, wearing his jacket, and raised his hand to receive a basketball another boy tossed over. Just as he was about to enter the classroom, he overheard this line from a passing student, and the ball that was spinning on his finger fell to the ground with a bonk.

There were already people discussing this in class. A few boys sat in a circle on the surrounding chairs, and said, disbelieving, “Who started this? Did they see the positions chart? It doesn’t seem that likely?”

Sheng Wang bent over to pick up the fallen ball, and tossed it onto the rack in the corner of the classroom.

Shi Yu shouted at Sheng Wang across the table, “Sheng-ge! Have you heard, Tian-ge isn’t the first place this time round?”

“I’ve heard,” Sheng Wang went back to his seat, and draped the jacket on the back of the chair. “You think he’s really running on hacks? That he can still be the first without doing so many questions?”

With that, the people then remembered: Sheng Wang's and Jiang Tian's exam situation wasn't normal — they had to send someone to the hospital, and came in late because of that. Just with that bit of time, there was absolutely no way they could finish the paper.

Jiang Tian was famous for how quickly he solved questions, but there were still around 30 marks worth he did not have the time to do. If it was anyone else, they would have collapsed on the spot.

Even with these circumstances, the fact that there were still people who were shocked that he wasn't the first place could only indicate how exemplary he was on a normal basis.

Sheng Wang drank water as he listened to them ramble on. He appeared composed on the surface, but his mind was in havoc.

He wanted more than anything to snatch the homeroom teacher's little mic, and tell everyone: Sorry, the hack named Jiang Tian already belongs to me.

But at the same time, he was also a little concerned. He knew that Jiang Tian wouldn’t flunk too ridiculously bad, but he still wanted to know the actual results.

It was the first time the young master had waited so eagerly for the homeroom teacher’s arrival. Thankfully, the teacher did not let him down, and entered the classroom with the position chart in hand bright and early.

The homeroom teacher looked rather pleased, flattening the list on the table. “Our class did relatively well this time, the average score for nearly every subject improved, there were even three students who squeezed into the top 45. The first in our class is ranked #12, and has greatly exceeded my expectations. Also—”

He enthused for quite a while, only when he looked up then he discovered that nobody was actually paying attention. Most people looked like they were way more interested in finding out about the gossip. The boy

who sat in the front row couldn’t resist, and softly asked, “Teacher, can you say who’s first?”

The homeroom teacher stopped. He scanned around the classroom, exasperated, and said, “The first in the level is Class A’s Li Jia.”

Sheng Wang softly let out an “ah”, internally saying, *little chili has done well this time*.

The homeroom teacher then said, “I know you guys aren’t actually interested in who’s first, you’re interested in how Jiang Tian did this time. You think I can’t tell?”

The students below all cleared their throats.

The homeroom teacher let out a cold laugh, his fingers crooked as he knocked on the table. “Here, let’s do it like this. How about you guys guess? Let me set this straight: that student did not touch a single word of 36 marks worth of questions.”

Only a small minority of people heard Sheng Wang's explanation just now. With what the homeroom teacher said, the entire class realised.

Students were all like this: when they heard of things in relation to results, they liked to imagine themself in the other person's shoes. The people thought about it on instinct: what if 36 points get erased from their total score…...jesus christ, that's a suffocating thought.

It was still the boy at the front row who couldn't resist that spoke up again, "could it be he's still stuck in the top 30 or even 20?"

He was the cream of the crop in Class B, but squeezing into the top 20 in the level was already an arduous enough task for him. Therefore, he subconsciously picked these positions in his guesses.

The homeroom teacher shook his head. "Nah, it wasn't that."

Just as the people wanted to let out an "oh", indicating that even the guy running on hacks was just so-so, they heard the homeroom teacher take a deep breath, and finally continue, "He's the 9th place."

Fuck.

There was only this word flashing in everyone's minds, even Sheng Wang exclaimed that internally. And then the corner of his lips quirked uncontrollably.

Isn’t he a badass?

He’s mine.

This was the worst Jiang Tian had scored ever since he entered Fuzhong. But on a certain level, this was more provoking than his countless #1s, enough to numb.

The buzz of discussion in Class B lasted for quite a while, the homeroom teacher had to knock on the table before peace was restored to the class. “Done gossiping? Done with finding thrills too, right? Can you finally listen to your own grades now?”

A bunch of people drawled in reply. “Yeeees.”

The homeroom teacher said, “Then according to the norm, let me first praise a few students. Cao Ziya improved by 3 places in class, 12 places in

the level. This improvement doesn't sound that big, right? But! After you improved by 12 places, you're the 43rd place now. What does it mean? It means, if you keep this up at finals, you can move up a class."

"Lu Wei improved by 12 places in class, 33 places in the level. I like the way this is going, keep it up."

"Guo Can, you dropped by one place in the class, from the first to the second." As the homeroom teacher spoke, he looked at the active boy in the front row.

Confusion was written all over the person's face. "......Didn't you say that praises come first?"

"I'm not reprimanding you," the homeroom teacher said, "although your class position dropped, your level position improved. You're the 18th place. I remember that your mid term exam was quite the pity, you nearly made it into Class A. You improved every exam ever since then. Steadily keep this up, and don't get too full of yourself, okay?"

The boy said, “I’m not getting too full of myself, teacher. Now, I’m more curious who is the first in class this time, they pushed me off.”

The homeroom teacher pushed up his spectacles. “This time, the first place in our class goes to a student who came down from Class A. Back then, when there was a change in classes, the teachers in the level all found it quite a pity. The truth is gold can’t help but shine after all, what ought to shine will still shine, the ability is already there. Right, Sheng Wang?”

The homeroom teacher looked over with a smile, the entire class all twisted their necks to turn to look.

Sheng Wang stopped, and then said half-jokingly, half-indifferent, “Yep.”

Students: “???”

This group of people had never stayed in Class A before, they had never learned of young master Sheng’s peacock tail opening behaviour and shamelessness. They didn't manage to react properly on first instinct, only wanting to spit at him.

Only when the teacher moved on to the next topic and was ready to begin the reprimanding, the boy named Guo Can suddenly let out a “what the fuck”, and turned around again.

“What?” The homeroom teacher may have slightly higher tolerance towards students with good grades, but that did not necessarily mean that he would allow him to interrupt with cursing at the same time.

Guo Can said, “Wasn’t he late for the exam too???”

The homeroom teacher nodded. “Correct!”

The people were stunned, and then they realised what exactly was he cursing over — Sheng Wang was in the same situation as Jiang Tian, his exam was severely delayed. If Jiang Tian had 30+ marks worth of questions left blank, then Sheng Wang wasn’t any better.

Under these conditions…...first in Class B? 12th in the level? Doesn’t that mean he’s not far from being Jiang Tian already???

The homeroom teacher said, “Sheng Wang basically didn’t make any mistakes for the other subjects, thus rescuing his overall score. He kept a cool head.”

The people internally said, that’s not having a cool head, that’s called being absolutely mental.

After this period, other than Jiang Tian, Sheng Wang’s name was also passed around the level.

The feeling of acting recklessly side-by-side wasn’t bad, actually. The young master was relatively satisfied. It was just that he felt slight regret over the few positions that separated him and Jiang Tian.

He pondered, and sneakily sent a message on WeChat to the person upstairs—

You Say That Again: I’ve finally caught you slipping for once, yet I’m still 3 places behind you

You Say That Again: you’re a little hard to catch up to

Someone: ?

Someone: I’ll help you catch up

(t/n: "to catch up to", or □, Sheng Wang's line can be construed as an innuendo on how Jiang Tian is a little hard to woo too)

Sheng Wang stared at the chat interface, and suddenly felt it was time to move the suggestive personal nickname behind the scene. The matching couple names were clearly there, what a waste it would be if he doesn’t look at them.

Therefore, he deleted everything in Jiang Tian’s alias, and the chat was refreshed.

You Say That Again: you’re a little hard to catch up to

Ok: I’ll help you catch up

*

It was always like this when it comes to exams: there will always be tears of both happiness and sadness. Class B did well as a whole, but there were still some who flunked. For example, those who got too full of

themself after they improved last time, or those who were affected and distracted from being in a relationship.

Therefore, after the results were released, the general atmosphere in the class was more or less a little sullen. Quickly enough though, the mood was improved by the notice of a break.

Even though the case of the female corpse by the river was already clear, Fuzhong still kept to its words. They really did stick all the way to giving them an entire week of break from night self-study. Since the school's dormitory and that river was merely separated by a single wall, a lot of students signed out, and went home after school for a while.

Qiu Wenbin's grades improved with flying colours this semester — he learned quite a few tips and tricks from Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang. After weeks and weeks of exams, his exam venue jumped from Class 12 to Class 8, his results went from the last few places to nearly middling. His relations with his family improved because of that too.

His parents were afraid that what happened outside the school would affect Qiu Wenbin’s state of improvement, so they fetch him home in a hurry.

Shi Yu initially did not want to sign out — he wanted to take advantage of the lack of night-self study and spend more time with his little girlfriend. However, He Shi did not think the same.

Firstly, she wasn’t quite brave, she was scared of ghosts of the dark of all sorts of things. Ever since a body was fished out from the river, she did not even dare to go towards the direction of the east gate, nor did she dare to stay in school until night.

Secondly, she messed up for this weekly exam and was in rather low spirits. She was in no mood to be dating.

Shi Yu did not find any fun in being in school by himself, so he decided to go back home for a while. Therefore, a room for four became a room for two, and in the blink of an eye only Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were left.

Sheng Mingyang initially wanted to get the two of them to go home too, but Sheng Wang came up with an excuse, saying that he wanted to “teach Gege how to play the guitar”, thus convincing Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou.

Sheng Mingyang agreed out of the gladness he felt towards witnessing their deep brotherly bond, and did not want to ruin the scene. As for Jiang Ou, she was surprised. Never would she think that Jiang Tian would actually agree to participate in the school cultural festival — she acted like a rare species has been discovered, she dare not to disturb it.

Hence, Sheng Wang found actual time for the two of them to be alone at last, and “mucked around” with his Ge for a week.

Next, the cultural festival arrived not a second late.

Chapter 083 - Marked

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

Nobody Knew They Were Together, but Everybody Was a Witness to the Way They Belonged to Each Other.

The stage for the cultural festival was in Fuzhong's grand hall. Afternoon onwards, the year one classes all went to rehearse. The block in front saw a constant stream of people entering and leaving hurriedly. The year twos were much more composed in comparison — at the very least, they obediently finished the self-study classes in the afternoon.

Sheng Wang finished all his papers before the lesson ended, and sent Jiang Tian a message on the dot.

You Say That Again: your boyfriend is coming to check up on you

Ok: ?

Ok: I'm in the classroom

You Say That Again: who's talking about that

You Say That Again: you done with the papers for today and tomorrow yet

There would be a holiday after the cultural festival, it could also be vaguely considered as the year two's last hurrah before their finals. However, some teachers were also rather "hurrah" when they assigned homework, and gave them to the students like it was free.

Sheng Wang wanted to go out tomorrow, so he urged the person upstairs to hurry up and finish his homework. Unexpectedly, Jiang Tian soon sent a picture of his desk: there were a total of three papers, and they were all completed.

Okay: Old He and Jing-jie didn't give out any papers, there's only this much for the two days

You Say That Again: fuck! I wanna go back to Class A

Sheng Wang was rather shaken as he packed the 10 papers he completed. Just as he was ready to go upstairs to find the person who rattled

him for dinner, the music teacher entered the classroom.

He clapped at the entrance to the classroom, saying, “C’mon, pack your things up. We’ll be heading to the hall.”

“This early?”

“It isn’t early anymore. The festival starts at 7pm, and it’s already 5.30pm now,” the music teacher said, “hurry, we’re leaving.”

“We haven’t had our dinner yet.”

“Where’s the class monitor? Also, the culture rep, go to the mart to buy some stuff to tide over for the time being. Your performance is relatively in front, you can slowly eat after you’re done performing.”

Sheng Wang tsked. He could only take his phone out again, and send a message to Jiang Tian, telling him that he would have to go to the cafeteria on his own.

There was an entire row of resting rooms in the backstage of the grand hall. Due to the limited numbers, they basically had to be shared by

two classes. The door for Sheng Wang's room was pasted with "Class A, B", but nobody from Class A was to be found.

"Teacher, this is so unfair—" quite a few people grumbled at the music teacher while knocking on their mineral water bottles, "Why do Class A people get to have dinner but we have to come this early?"

"Is this your first time here? Hasn't the people of Class A always been like this: they are too lazy to even stroll to the resting room unless the show is about to start soon. It's not like there's an award for participating in the cultural festival!"

The music teacher gave the talking boy a smack. "Quit having a mouth. Change your clothes and get over here for makeup! There aren't many people in Class A, so I told them they could take their time. Even if they are here, they will just be waiting around doing nothing."

The table next to the dressing table was filled with a pile of unopened packages of clothes, all white shirts and black long pants. Simple and convenient.

Sheng Wang went over and looked through it. He immediately turned to ask, “Do we just take what we want?”

“No, it’s already labelled with names. Didn’t we estimate everyone’s sizing before? Don’t take the wrong one.” The music teacher said, “There are also some from Class A, please read carefully before you take the clothes.”

“Class A is wearing the same thing as us? Teacher, you sure are good at saving yourself trouble.”

Sheng Wang originally thought that the names would be pasted onto the package, if not places where they would be out of sight like the collar or the cuff. Never did he expect that this music teacher was quite the treasure too — she got people to print the names on the back of the shirt, in graffiti font even. From the front, they look prim and proper, and once they turn around they are eye-grabbingly extra.

With the opening of the package, the resting room was filled with yells of “what the hell”.

Sheng Wang dug through to find his shirt, and recalled the “Super A” from the sports festival last time. He couldn’t help but to send a picture over to Jiang Tian for him to gander.

You Say That Again: this teacher is quite the work

You Say That Again: I suspect he’s Gao Tianyang’s relative, he’s extra in the exact way as Old Gao

OK: Suits your taste very well

OK: Weren’t you rather enthusiastic about wearing it last time?

You Say That Again: ???

You Say That Again: hello get the situation straight I was just trying to make you wear it

You Say That Again: oh yeah hold on

He found Jiang Tian’s piece, and sent a picture over.

You Say That Again: see, you are not escaping this too. happy yet?

Ok: ……

OK: Help me set that on fire

Ok: I’m not wearing that

Sheng Wang cracked up when he thought of Jiang Tian’s cold and reluctant face.

Just as his laughter stopped, the door to the resting room was opened. Two waves of people entered, one after another. The first two were the monitor of Class B and the culture rep who went to buy dinner, carrying four giant plastic bags in their hands. They were filled with bread and biscuits.

A crowd swarmed them, yelling and were ready to fight each other for food. The second wave of people thus entered too.

Everyone stilled, and instantly hollered, “Have we seen a ghost? You Class A people are so early for once?!”

Class A arrived unprecedentedly early — with those who were helping out along with the actual performers, there were around 7-8 people.

Jiang Tian came in at the very last, white earpiece stuffed in his ear, his left hand swiping on his phone, his right hand holding a takeaway box from the cafeteria. The aroma of food wafted out.

He entered with his head lowered, and raised the plastic bag with food at Sheng Wang, saying, “Dinner.”

The group of people holding the bread and biscuits instantly lost it, and questioned the class monitor, “Why didn’t we get hot food? Why didn’t you guys go to the cafeteria?”

“Dream on, the cafeteria has queues!” the class monitor said, exasperated.

Gao Tianyang was familiar with anyone and everyone, he shook the crosstalk script in his hand as he cut in, “No, queueing isn’t the issue. The key thing you’re missing is an older brother.”

Sheng Wang kicked the back of Gao Tianyang’s knees with neither too little or too much strength, and jokingly scolded, “Scram, you envious?”

“Not envious, Sheng-ge, you have to treasure this time now; treatment like this will have to go to someone else in the future eventually. Right, Tian-ge?” Gao Tianyang pulled over a chair to sit down before Sheng Wang, winking at Jiang Tian as he sprawled over the back of the hair.

Jiang Tian settled the food next to Sheng Wang’s hand, and frowned. “What are you going on about?”

“Tsk—“ Gao Tianyang looked up in dissatisfaction. While other people weren’t paying attention, he lowered his voice as he reminded, “The one who’s chatting with you, the one who’s insanely pretty. Isn’t she definitely the girlfriend to be?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Jiang Tian glanced at a certain someone fleetingly, and tossed the unopened package of clothes to the side. He replied with an “Mn”. A moment later, he added on, “Remove the words ‘to be’.”

Gao Tianyang: “???”

A simple line from Jiang Tian nearly caused his childhood friend to go insane from holding everything in. If it weren't for the presence of a teacher, Gao Tianyang could sit him down to find out the full juice to the end of time itself.

The bunch of people from Class B were munching on their dry rations. Yang Jing and Beckon Money got Little Chili to come help put on makeup for the girls. The music teacher was in charge of grabbing the boys to put on foundation, causing a giant ruckus.

Gao Tianyang avoided the stampede of people running about, and shifted his chair nearer to Sheng Wang again, attempting to recruit an ally. "Ay, Sheng-ge, have you heard? Tian-ge has a girlfriend now."

Little Chili was helping Yang Jing hold the makeup brush, upon hearing that her head whipped around. She was first thoroughly shocked, and then hurriedly kicked his chair.

Gao Tianyang nearly fell onto the floor. He steadied himself and turned to ask, “Why did you kick me?”

Little Chili motioned at Yang Jing and the rest with her eyes, hissing a few words through clenched teeth, “You think your voice is dainty soft?”

Gao Tianyang's shrank, and obediently kept his mouth shut.

After this, Little Chili became part of the same crew who was going insane from holding everything in. Her eyes were already huge, and after they widened they became even more obvious. She kept peeking at Jiang Tian, appearing like she honestly couldn’t believe it no matter what. Later, when she met Sheng Wang’s eyes, she then hurriedly withdrew her gaze; her face reddened and she no longer did anything else.

Yang Jing was putting on makeup for Carp. She chatted all around as she applied the eyeshadow, she even asked Jiang Tian, “I heard you learned the guitar in short order?”

“Mn.”

“How did it go?”

Jiang Tian still did not speak; Sheng Wang stilled first. He threw a winter jujube into his mouth, thinking, *now, that's a good question*…...With the pretense of wanting to teach Jiang Tian the guitar, they stayed in school for a week. They practised and practised until he was well-versed in all sorts of things...except for the guitar.

This age was an ardent and restless one. A taste would leave one wanting more — once some things were done, it was hard to go back. The bunk beds in dorms weren't wide enough, with the pulling of the bed curtain, it was like they found a holy ground, cut off from the rest of the world. It was narrow, it was cramped, but it filled them with a strong sense of security. They kissed and touched each other within those curtains, doing the private things lovers do.

Seventeen-eighteen years old boys were fitted with a roaring furnace in their bodies; Sheng Wang was fine on a normal basis, but he would easily sweat during these occasions. He always thought his Ge wouldn't sweat, his

icy self seemed to not fear heat at all. Only in those few days then he found out that he was no different from him.

When Jiang Tian went to take the glass of water — beads gathered by the corner of his forehead, long pants on his waist — the lines of his shoulders and his neck formed a curvature pleasing to the eyes, both similar and completely opposite of the way he was in the day, a kind of sexiness that was hard to put into words.

As long as he saw this side of him, Sheng Wang could never recall the guitar sitting in the corner of the room.

He was a total failure of a “teacher” in this regard, and neither was the “student” diligent at all. The only fortunate thing was that the other person was honestly quite smart, even with the bare minimum effort put in, he seriously did manage to learn to play “Childhood”.

As Jiang Tian answered Yang Jing, Sheng Wang heard a cry from his side the moment he came back to himself, and next something splashed onto his shirt. He looked down, and a line of ink droplets dotted the lower left half of his shirt, all the way to the helm.

“.....Sorry!” The class monitor held a pen in his hand, his expression already at a loss. “I was just changing the script meant for the crossover later, the pen wasn’t working, so I shook it a couple of times.”

The teacher released the face of the boy in his hands, and strided over. He straightened the corner of Sheng Wang’s shirt before shaking his head. “This can’t do, it’s too obvious already. You’re standing front row in the centre, how can the face of the class wear dirty clothes?”

The class monitor, feeling like he just got in trouble, took a piece of wet tissue and clumsily attempted to wipe.

“Eh wait, no—” the music teacher did not manage to catch him, and with a wipe of the wet tissue, the ink droplet was smudged even further.

Sheng Wang: “.....Class monitor, I recommend you to start running for your life now.”

The music teacher glared as he turned around, the class monitor already ran to the entrance in a panic. Now that these things already happened, there was no point in losing his temper — he had to deal with the clothes first and foremost.

“How about you take off the shirt and wear only the white t-shirt inside?” Yang Jing suggested.

“It’s a choir though, it’s too unsightly to not have a uniformed look, a little blemish ruins everything too.” The music teacher said, “How about you switch with someone in the back row?”

“I’ll give mine to you.” Jiang Tian passed his unopened package to Sheng Wang.

The music teacher was stumped. “What will you wear if you give yours to him?”

“Anything, it’s not like we are a group item,” Jiang Tian said.

Carp added on, “It’s just the two of us for our item, the colours just have to be similar enough. Right, teacher?”

“That will do,” the music teacher said.

Sheng Wang soon changed into his clothes, the back was written with “Jiang Tian” in giant characters. The front was indeed a patch of snow white, nothing was visibly wrong.

“Be a little more careful when you leave the stage later, face the audience with your side at the very most. People behind him — don’t stray too far either, help to cover him.” The music teacher briefed, “Otherwise, it’s a little embarrassing for him when he’s wearing someone else’s name.”

Next to him, Yang Jing exposed him. “You’re thinking too much, no way he’s getting embarrassed.”

Sheng Wang laughed.

Certainly, he did know that that wasn't what Yang Jing meant. However, to him, wearing a shirt with Jiang Tian's name gave the illusion that they were openly out as a couple in public for some inexplicable reason.

Someone knocked on the door to the room. The teacher in charge of the event came over and reminded, "There are still 15 minutes left until Class B's item begins, be prepared. After Class B will be Class A, the crosstalk comes first, and then the guitar and singing accompaniment next."

The teacher in charge left, and the air in the room began to be filled with tension. The people initially laughing and joking around all stopped; some went to the toilet, some went out for air, and there were even some who went to the side of the stage to watch for a bit.

Carp got nervous easily. Yang Jing finished putting on her makeup, and she dragged Little Chili out straight after that. Most people in Class B had already put on makeup; the boys even wore a simple foundation. Yang

Jing surveyed around with a makeup brush in hand, and reached her claws out to Sheng Wang.

“You’re the face of the class, right? Come here, this teacher will help you put on handsome makeup!” She beckoned him.

“No, no need, thank you,” Sheng Wang avoided her, “I’m fine like this.”

“Other people already put it on, why aren’t you fitting in?”

Sheng Wang tugged Jiang Tian over, using him as a shield. “Teacher, if you insist on putting on more makeup for fun, please use him. I’ll wear it if he does.”

Before Yang Jing could open her mouth, Jiang Tian immediately said “no way”.

In the end, it was the music teacher who put a stop to Yang Jing’s mischievous streak. “They don’t need foundation with the skin tone of theirs, my powders can turn them darker, believe it.”

Yang Jing looked at the pink foundation in her hand, and seriously did not find a comeback to that for the time being. She could only put the brush down.

Sheng Wang, hanging on Jiang Tian's shoulder, let out a sigh of relief. However, he saw Yang Jing briefly ponder, picked around her makeup box, and dug out a tube of lipstick instead.

"It's fine if they don't put on foundation, but the lipstick must be used, otherwise they don't look lively on stage." Yang Jing said, from the bottom of her heart, "The stage lighting can make people look like they are on their deathbed."

The music teacher did not stop her this time round — he even enthusiastically tacked on, "That's true."

Sheng Wang faced off against Yang Jing for a few seconds, and fled on the spot. However, Jiang Tian — that bastard — literally pulled him back, disrupting his escape attempt. The boys from Class B who already had stuff put on their face were unwilling to spare him too, with the mindset

of going down on this ship together, the masses rose to attack him, and presented him to the hands of Yang Jing.

“Boys with this skin tone will look good with this colour, no worries.” Yang Jing spoke the words of the devil and applied a layer on him without any room for further negotiation. Sheng Wang had never tried something like this before, and it felt weird to him. His hand rose to wipe it away on instinct, but he was forcibly stopped by Jing-jie. “Don’t recklessly wipe it, your mouth will smudge if you do.”

“.....”

Sheng Wang wanted to eat someone.

After Yang Jing was done laying hands on one, she set her eyes on the other.

Jiang Tian’s reaction was ridiculously fast — he was already at the door basically the moment she turned her head, and disappeared outside with the blink of an eye. Sheng Wang stilled for one second, and instantly

chased after him. “Don’t you dare run, why did you have zero qualms setting me up just now!”

Light and noise gathered on the first floor of the grand hall, people were milling about both in front and behind the stage. Jiang Tian turned at the end of the corridor, and ran up to the second floor. Sheng Wang followed after.

The two boys chasing after each other were tall with lengthy legs, they went upstairs three steps at a time, and with a few turns they were already at the fourth floor.

There were still those who went to the toilet on the second floor, the lights weren’t even on for the third and fourth. It was nothing but darkness all around; the noise and the bustle were beneath their feet, separated by thick walls. It seemed a little stuffy.

The staircase on the fourth floor led to the rooftop, Sheng Wang felt a little cold when he ran here. Jiang Tian happened to reduce his speed too. Without a second word, he hooked an arm around Jiang Tian’s neck, pulling

him down such that he had to bend over. He scolded laughingly, “Still gonna set me up?! Anymore, and we will both take a swan dive off the roof.”

Jiang Tian just let him vaguely choke him, catching his breath with his hand propped on his knee. A laugh rumbled from his throat as he said, “No need to go that far.”

“Bullshit, it’s ‘no need to go that far’ when it comes to you. When didn’t you say ‘no need’ when I was held down by Jing-jie?” Sheng Wang settled nearly his entire weight on his body, and took the chance to catch his breath too.

He hung there for a while, and suddenly realised that he got a giant patch of dust on his palm. Therefore, he released Jiang Tian’s neck. “Goddamnit, did they not wipe the stairs railing for a year straight or.”

“The bathroom is at the side,” Jiang Tian raised his chin in that direction, “go wash your hands.”

The moonlight cascaded down by the stairs to the rooftop, both luminous and clear. Jiang Tian straightened up, and went to find a clean railing to lean on as he waited for him.

Sheng Wang was done washing his hands and left the bathroom. He walked towards him while shaking off the remaining water droplets, “Either way, it is important for everyone to be equal. Now that I’ve put on lipstick, you gotta too. Otherwise, we’re never moving past this.”

Jiang Tian watched him walk to his side, and asked, “Are you serious?”

“Yep, think about what you're gonna have to do,” Sheng Wang said.

The two stood off jokingly, and Jiang Tian finally gave in. He nodded, and then leaned in, pulling Sheng Wang close to him with a hand on his chin. Yang Jing’s lipstick was slightly sticky, and when their lips separated, they remained a little stuck to each other.

Jiang Tian backed away a little, and said, “I’ve put it on now.”

“You’re seriously……”

“What?”

“Nothing.” Sheng Wang’s eyes crescented, and bit him once more.

Little Chili never expected that by accompanying Carp to the rooftop and relieve her pre-show stress with some fresh air, she would end up witnessing a sight like this.

The corner of the stairs wasn’t in complete darkness beneath the moonlight, the outline of everything was suggestive as they were half covered in light, half covered in darkness. The boy her heart once quickened for was quietly kissing another boy.

Only when the two went downstairs, then she came back to herself from the state of nothing but blank in her brain, and walked out from the toilet on the other side, behind the wall.

It was already very close to the time Class B had to go on stage. Carp came down from the rooftop, and stopped when she saw the state Chili was

in. “Chili? What happened? What rattled you so badly in the toilet?”

It was at this moment then Chili truly realised the implications behind what she just saw.

“Are you okay?” Carp was getting more worried by the second.

Chili only found her voice after Carp grabbed her elbow and shook it a few times. She opened her mouth, but pressed her lips shut again. A while later, she shook her head. “It’s nothing…...I j—just remembered something.”

“What is it? Is it urgent?”

“It’s fine.” Chili shook her head again. “Everything’s fine.”

*

Class B’s performance was nothing special, actually. It was merely an item that saved both time *and* trouble. They roughly divided the class up into voice-parts, the girls in the front row all holding a lamp, and barely made it pass as a uniformed and heartwarming performance. Still, when

they left the stage they received a thunderous round of applause and whistling nonetheless. Sheng Wang internally said, *they sure are giving us a lot of face.*

The classes that performed were not allowed to go to the back stage, there would be a teacher sent to guide them off the stage and take a seat among the audience.

Sheng Wang wanted to slip away, but did not manage to succeed. He could only sit down with everyone else on the seats Class B was assigned to. He borrowed a tissue from the classmate next to him, and cleaned the remnants of colour on his lips thoroughly. Tugging at the slip-knot around his neck with his fingers, he took off the standardised tie.

Just as he was taking the tie off, a few girls from other classes who sat in the front row turned around. “You’re especially hot tonight.”

Sheng Wang was stunned. “You mean that’s possible even with this song?”

“Who cares about the song, it’s all about the face!” A girl was both shrewish and direct, her face looked up at him while she leaned forwards on the back of the chair, asking, “You mind getting into a relationship?”

“.....”

Sheng Wang politely smiled. “Sorry, I’m already in one.”

The girl turned back in disappointment, but Shi Yu — who was next to him — nearly got whiplash from how fast he turned. “What did you just say?”

Sheng Wang leaned back on the chair, rolled the (now loosened) tie into a ball, and gave it to the culture rep who was in charge of giving out and keeping everything. “Why are you ears so sharp at this particular moment?”

“Are you for real?” Shi Yu asked, sounding like he could not believe his ears.

“What do you think?” Sheng Wang said.

Shi Yu mumbled under his breath by himself for a while, and figured that he was probably trying to reject her with a more tactful excuse. Sheng Wang did not further elaborate either — he pointed at the stage, indicating for him to just watch the show.

The mucking around lately gave him the illusion that he could do whatever he wanted and get away with it — as to sometimes, even though he knew what was the wisest answer to give, he still could not resist letting a little detail leak out here and there.

His heart was restless; he wanted to tell everyone, in all sorts of ambiguous words, that he had someone he liked especially much, so much that he did not want to let the other person stay in the darkness.

Waves and waves of laughter could be heard below the stage, coming in and out like the tides. Sheng Wang came back to himself in the hubbub, and then discovered that Gao Tianyang’s and Song Sirui’s crosstalk item was already nearing its end.

The lighting gradually dimmed the moment they exited the stage, the final bit disappearing by the upper right corner of the curtains. The hall was silent for a while, and the din began once more as the lights were switched on again.

The spotlight appeared like a pillar of light sent from the heavens, and Jiang Tian stood in the centre of one of them.

Barely suppressed cries rang out from the audience, but none of it overpowered the buzz of whispers over here in Class B. Sheng Wang did not manage to catch whatever they said clearly. His eyes were fixed on the person on the stage — the person was wearing his shirt, the white shirt that was accidentally stained by ink.

Only, that line of ink droplets could no longer be seen. Jiang Tian had tucked in that half of the shirt into his long pants, leaving the other half hanging out. The fabric loosely dangled by his hips, forming a few geometrically shaped wrinkles. He appeared cold and aloof, but at the same

time, giving off the hints of the unbridled and unrestrained energy unique to older boys.

His pupils appeared rather pale from the spotlight, his eyes slightly glistened as he looked up. His gaze swept around the audience, and found where Sheng Wang was. His eyes briefly landed on him before they were lowered once more, beginning to test out the sound of the guitar.

Jiang Tian plucked a couple of strings, lowered his hands, and motioned to Carp who was next to him.

The guitar began to play its wooden timbre, neither too quickly nor too slowly. At one point, Sheng Wang felt that this is a magical instrument, like a pluck of the guitar strings brings to mind the youthful days, when the sun was dazzling to the eyes; or the way the youth sprinted on the track, demarcated by lines; or, the way it was always a little nostalgic for some inexplicable reason.

It was such that even though he clearly was in the said age group, at a certain moment, he wanted to use “that year” to describe this scene.

That year, on the stage, the person he liked played a song on the guitar. When he turned and exited the stage, his back was printed with his name.

The applause beneath was thunderous and unceasing; the grandest of blessings bestowed upon them.

Nobody knew they were together, but everybody was a witness to the way they belonged to each other.

Translator's notes:

this chapter is 6k in cn and 4.8k in tl

also i nearly broke down from the last scene of them being on stage :")

anyways have some tianwang stage art

Chapter 084 - False Alarm

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

“I’m So Happy That My Legs Turned Jelly.”

To the students whose lives solely revolved around the three locations of the dormitory, the cafeteria, and the classroom, there wasn’t any particular festivity that was worth paying attention to — the school holiday was the only thing of any significance.

Fuzhong students relied on weekly/monthly exams and major school activities to keep track of the days; they knew it was November when they saw the sports festival, and they knew the year was about to end upon the arrival of the cultural festival.

Sheng Wang had yet to form this particular conditioned reflex.

He unabashedly slept away on Jiang Tian’s bed, until the sun shone on his face and he grabbed his phone blearily. He discovered that a huge December 31st was displayed on the screen.

“Are you getting up?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Nope,” Sheng Wang tossed his phone aside. This bed was ridiculously narrow, having to host two large boys made it even more cramped. Sheng Wang went through all the effort to cling onto Jiang Tian with his arms and legs like he was hugging a bolster, drawling, “I can’t believe it’s the new year tomorrow.”

He was half buried in the quilt, eyes lidded. Perhaps he simply did not feel like moving, or it was also possible that he planned to continue his sleep. Jiang Tian—resigned to fate—acted as his bolster. His left hand was actually going a little numb, but since it was already numb, he did not plan to say anything of it.

“What about the new year?” he asked.

It seemed that Sheng Wang had fallen asleep again. He only answered a while later, “Nothing much, was just feeling things. Felt like these six months lasted especially long, longer than the 10+ years I’ve lived before.”

“Did it?” Jiang Tian closed his eyes too. He was initially quite awake, but the voice of the person talking beside him was starting to make him feel

a little drowsy too.

Sheng Wang said, “Maybe I simply had a bad memory.”

He always forgot the very next moment what he did, who he met, all the everyday little things. The seasons changed in the blink of an eye, like with doing a few papers here and there, nap for a bit between classes, zone out a little more, and time zoomed past just like that.

“It’s different now. I remember every stupid little thing so clearly.”

“Why?”

Because he wanted to remember more — how they met, how he fell for him, how they ended up together…...he did not know why he wanted to keep remembering these things either. He only felt that he was like a money grubber, hugging heaps of gold and silver to his chest. He wanted even the taels, and losing a single copper coin was out of the question. A single gram lighter and it felt like he was making a giant loss.

Before, he never understood those people who insisted on taking pictures of everything for keepsake, ranging from eating and drinking and

sleeping to going to the toilet. He felt that it was too mushy, too melodramatic. But now he understood a little better.

Still, these words were somewhat pretentious, he wouldn't be able to bring himself to speak them even if he had 10 more faces to lose. Therefore, he answered Jiang Tian, "Dunno. Maybe it's the second growth spurt during puberty, the brain got better, my ability to keep memories got stronger."

Jiang Tian was probably cringing too much from what he said, and wasn't unable to not react despite holding himself back for ages. He snorted, brief and harsh sounding.

"You're laughing at me?" Sheng Wang looked up from beneath the blankets; he was a little warm from the heat, his tousled hair was threatening to poke his eyes as he stared his Ge down.

The other person did not open his eyes — he silently played dead, hoping to resolve it like that.

Sheng Wang stared at him for a while, and the hand below the quilt sneakily travelled down, and then dove inside the other person's pants as

though he was launching a sneak attack.

Jiang Tian curled inwards; he grabbed his wrist, and opened his eyes, staring expressionlessly at him. “.....”

Sheng Wang succeeded in his prank, and basically scrambled out of the bed after he withdrew his hand, zooming to the basin. His laugh was especially scoundrelly as he supported himself against the wall, “I was just saying hi. Good morning, Jiang Tian Junior!”

Precisely because of this rascally greeting, the skin of the bottom of his lips was broken when he went out.

*

Fuzhong’s school holidays had always been off the wall, anything goes, up to fate etc etc, they would simply start their breaks on whatever day they could. All the other schools in the city started their breaks on the 1st, but Fuzhong insisted on putting said break on the 31st.

There was barely anyone in school, filled with the desolation that came after festivities. The wind indistinctly rustled in the wintry chill. Xi

Le Convenience Store did not open for business for once, even the mobile street food carts at the school entrance lessened by more than half.

Jiang Tian had something going on and needed to head to the north gate. The two took several twists and turns in the street and alleys, and entered a shop called “Jiu Lao Tai” for breakfast. A small stall like this might not even be found on food apps.

“You can even find a place like this?” Sheng Wang found a spot and sat down, flipping through the crudely made breakfast menu.

“The old man used to come by rather often to buy peanuts for his alcohol,” Jiang Tian said.

“He went from the west gate to the north gate for peanuts?” Sheng Wang wowed, “The old man sure has good stamina, does the boss make especially good stir-fried peanuts or?”

Jiang Tian shook his head. “Attractive, that’s why.”

Sheng Wang stilled before he turned around, and saw a tiny old lady pushing the curtains aside, walking in. She set down two cups of hot tea, and was grinning as she asked, “Here for vermicelli soup?”

Sheng Wang also smiled, nodding, “Yep, two bowls please.”

“Anything you don’t want?”

“Don’t make his share spicy,” Jiang Tian said.

“Hold on,” the tiny old lady wiped her hands, and went behind the curtains again.

Sheng Wang withdrew his gaze and took a sip of tea. He whispered, “She’s probably a beauty when she’s young. Why didn’t the old man come these days?”

Jiang Tian said, “He wasn’t competitive enough.”

“Hm?” It was rare for Sheng Wang to hear gossip coming from Jiang Tian’s mouth for once, and this experience was rather novel to him. He continued asking, “What do you mean by ‘not competitive enough’?”

“Stubborn temper, loud voice, fierce looks.” Jiang Tian summed up Old Man Ding”s characteristics in simple terms. “He lost to a retired

teacher.”

“Then the old man had to be sad for a while?”

Jiang Tian replied with an “mn”, and continued, “He got angry enough to give up on alcohol.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

His temper was honestly *somewhat* bad.

The old lady had nimble hands, and soon she brought out two bowls of vermicelli soup. The two boys did not have the heart to let her walk any further, and got up to retrieve the bowls.

The winter in this city was rather extreme — it would be as warm as spring as long as the sun was out, the indoors would instead be gloomy and cold, with the kind of chill that seeps through the bones.

Sheng Wang did not like to layer up, he came out with merely a black denim jacket on top of his sweatshirt. He was so cold that his knuckles turned pale, and after downing two mouthfuls of hot soup, he was thoroughly warmed at last.

He busied himself with eating for a whole, and then tried to act casual as he asked, “Isn’t the old man quite the worrisome type? I keep hearing how he would lose sleep over worrying about something.”

Jiang Tian stopped, and his eyes turned up to look at him.

Sheng Wang could feel the other person’s gaze, but he did not look up either. He focused solely on picking at the tofu and egg in the soup, as though the question was really something that randomly occurred to him.

“That was how he put it.” Jiang Tian had already withdrawn his gaze, and said mildly, “He would fall asleep for three-four hours while watching TV in the afternoon, of course he couldn’t fall asleep at night.”

Sheng Wang said an “oh”, and was animated again. He kept feeling like Jiang Tian’s spicy food smelled even better, and took quite a few chopsticks full of noodles despite Jiang Tian trying to stop him. That’s how he died a heroic martyr's death on the table while covering the cut on his lips.

The old lady was startled when she came out, and asked Jiang Tian, “He ate himself too full?”

“It’s tears from the heat.” Jiang Tian stood up from the table, exasperated, and picked out a bottle of milk from the counter. He lightly nudged it against *someone*’s face.

The chime by the door suddenly rang — it was a new customer. Sheng Wang received the milk and abruptly shot up like a dead body that was revived, and discovered that said new customer was someone he knew.

“Xi-ge?” Sheng Wang greeted.

Zhao Xi had already spotted them the moment he entered. He inhaled the smoke, and smushed the lit cigarette — previously between his lips — on the dustbin by the side. A pale cloud of smoke spreaded before his face.

His eyes narrowed in the smoke, and greeted them before saying, “Not sleeping in now that there’s a holiday? You’re seriously here for breakfast?”

“He had something to do at the north gate.” Sheng Wang pointed at Jiang Tian, “So we’re getting breakfast along the way.”

“Yeah. We’ll be going to Chu-ge’s later,” Jiang Tian said.

“Oh, yeah, right.” Zhao Xi nodded, “It will be finals soon.”

The north gate was full of masters in disguise. There was a special express class hidden away in the residential block, never short of customers and business was constantly blooming. Zhao Xi, as the school tyrant slash street tyrant in the early days, knew a lot of people. At the start, he introduced Jiang Tian to help his friend’s educational organisation code supplementary software for math, physics and chemistry, the kind that was meant to be used for further enrichment classes. To a top student like Jiang Tian, not only did this barely take up any time, it even earned him a lot of money.

When Sheng Wang just met Jiang Tian, he would go over to the north gate to do so, and would only go home after he was done, in order to prevent Jiang Ou from worrying too much if she ever finds out. Later on,

school officially started, so he notified the other person and thus this thing was put on hold.

It was nearing finals, meaning that winter vacation would arrive soon, and so would another peak wave of supplementary enrollment.

Zhao Xi asked for two bowls of rice vermicelli soup for takeout, and chatted with the two of them as he waited. At the end, he asked Jiang Tian as though he just recalled something, “Is your birthday before Chinese New Year?”

“Mn, why?”

“Then there’s still time.” Zhao Xi said, “Lin-zi and I will treat you two to a meal.”

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian met each other’s eyes, and sensed that there was something more to what Zhao Xi said. “What do you mean ‘there’s still time’?”

“By there’s still time, I mean we’re about to leave soon,” Zhao Xi said, “Lin-zi and I will be heading to Beijing.”

“Vacation?”

“Work.”

“Then the barbeque shop……”

Zhao Xi laughed. “We aren’t chefs in the first place anyway, this place will remain open even if we leave. Rock and the rest are already quite familiar with you guys, you will still get the discount you ought to receive whenever you feel like eating skewers.”

Sheng Wang let out a very, very soft “ah”, feeling a light sense of loss.

The old lady soon finished preparing the two takeaways, and added a lot of chili into Zhao Xi’s automatically, so much that it made Sheng Wang’s mouth hurt just from looking at it.

The three walked towards the residential block together. Chu-ge’s supplementary class was in the block near the north gate, Jiang Tian went upstairs to retrieve the range and material required for the winter vacation’s courseware.

Sheng Wang basked in the sun as he waited downstairs, Zhao Xi stopped in his steps too. He lightheartedly teased Sheng Wang, “What trouble did you get up to, why are your lips so swollen?”

“From the spiciness,” Sheng Wang chugged the milk, meant for getting rid of the heat, and appeared to be quite the embarrassment.

“Oh.” Zhao Xi took out yet another stick of cigarettes, and lit it up with his back against the wind. Perhaps it was the veil of smoke, but he appeared to be a little tired.

“Xi-ge, were you not getting a good sleep lately?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Are my eyebags that obvious?” Zhao Xi rubbed his eyes, and said, “Old comrade Zhao’s health isn’t quite good lately, Lin-zi and I kept attending to him, so we got less sleep. When we go to Beijing later, the two old ones will follow along too. Xi Le will probably be taken care of by other people, if you want to buy anything hurry up and buy it before the new year. After the new year, you might not get that friendly discount.”

(t/n: the new year they are talking about generally refers to chinese new year from here onwards)

Seeing that he could still joke, Sheng Wang felt a little more relieved.

Zhao Xi did not stay for long, he received a call, snuffed out the cigarette and was going to leave. Only, right before he left, his eyes swept across Sheng Wang's neck. He tsked, and removed his scarf. "I'm probably getting old, but I feel cold already just from seeing the way your neck isn't covered up in the winter. Cover up, I'm leaving."

Sheng Wang was completely baffled as he stood there, a scarf in hand. Zhao Xi had already turned around the corner, in the far distance.

Even if the young master was just putting on a scarf, he was particular about whether he looked good in it, he wouldn't just wrap it around his neck haphazardly. The windows on the first floor were basically gleaming from how thoroughly they were wiped, so he used them as a mirror. And that was how he saw a small mark on the side of the neck — who knew if it was from last night or it came from this morning, left by his Ge.

That was where Zhao Xi’s gaze landed on just now.

Sheng Wang, still holding the scarf, froze on the spot. His heart sank to his stomach with a thump.

When Jiang Tian went downstairs, Sheng Wang had already wrapped himself up in the scarf. The dark grey cashmere material covered his chin, highlighting the snow-white colour of his face.

“Where did the scarf come from?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Xi-ge forced it on me.” Sheng Wang’s voice was slightly muffled beneath the scarf, “He said he’s cold from looking at me alone.”

They delivered the material back to the dorm, and proceeded to the nearby cinema on foot.

All the major blockbusters were left to air during the Chinese New Year season, there was nothing interesting in the ones that recently aired too. The two randomly picked one, but their film ended up being too boring

due to an unlucky pick. As such, Sheng Wang wasn’t quite paying attention after he barely entered the theater.

There weren’t many people watching movies in the morning, the two simply wanted to find a place and chill together. Therefore, when Sheng Wang picked seats, he looked for the theater with the least number of people, and picked the last row where nobody else would pick.

Jiang Tian honestly wasn’t into films like this, and had dozed off halfway through the movie, his finger hooking onto his, head propped on his hand. Sheng Wang did not wake him up. He dug his phone out, changed the brightness to the dimmest, and scrolled through his Moments. He ended up spotting two video clips, shared by Sheng Mingyang, with no caption except for two thumbs up.

Sheng Wang could already tell from the thumbnail: it was the footage of his and Jiang Tian’s performance during the cultural festival.

He was briefly stunned before he messaged Sheng Mingyang in a hurry.

You Say That Again: you came to school yesterday?

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: No. I did mention to you before, officer Ju invited me for dinner, daddy had already delayed his invitation twice, this time round I really couldn’t get away anymore.

You Say That Again: oh. it’s just that I suddenly saw the two videos you shared, so I thought you went over with Auntie Ou to watch

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: It’s the Moments posted by your Dean Xu, I especially asked for them from him

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: Had to make up for our regrets for not being able to make it, your Auntie Jiang said very handsome

You Say That Again: ofc, since when is your son not handsome

Sheng Wang let out a sigh of relief, thinking, *thank god it’s just a false alarm*.

The sigh was barely let out before Sheng Mingyang came up with a: Why am I seeing Xiao-Tian in your shirt?

Sheng Wang nearly tossed his phone away. He caught his phone, and snuck a glance at Jiang Tian. Seeing that he simply frowned, he relaxed, and replied word by word, biting the tip of his tongue: ink got onto my shirt, not very good for the class choir, so I borrowed his. he's performing as a duo after all, their costumes didn't need to be that uniform.

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: No wonder. I saw his shirt wasn't tucked in properly, he only stuffed it in on one side. Your Auntie Jiang said that she wanted to stuff in the other half the more she watched too.

Sheng Wang couldn't help but chuckle. An ineffable feeling washed over him after his laughter quotes.

A moment of silence. He replied his dad: my Ge calls that cool

Encyclopedia for Healthy Living: Okay, us old comrades aren't used to this. Tell Xiao-Tian that his guitar playing is great.

Sheng Wang replied "okay", and no longer continued.

Perhaps it was the vacation, WeChat was especially lively that day. Barely a while passed before his phone lit up more than 10 times. Sheng Wang initially thought it was Sheng Mingyang, only when he tapped in then he realised that it was a group chat that was causing the commotion.

It was a preparation group formed for the festival. Jiang Tian used to be in it too, but he left the moment the festival ended last night. Sheng Wang had not left yet.

Gao Tianyang and the rest were extremely bored, and were sharing their lunches on this day of vacation, attempting to torture each other. However, Little Chili suddenly popped out and said: have you guys heard? someone lost something in the hall last night?

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: huh?

Da-Song: classmate chili, I appreciate your gossiping spirit, but to tag everyone for something like this…...you might get hella roasted by Tian-ge and Sheng-ge

Just after he said that, Little Chili was suddenly quiet.

It was Carp who added on: didn’t Jiang Tian already leave the group chat?

Da-Song: oh yeah, i forgot

Carp: I’ll leave this group soon, I’m eating porridge at home, and watching your battle of food pics is honestly too painful

They chatted about everything and nothing for quite a while before Little Chili appeared again, replying: accidentally tagged everyone oops

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: bruh. Chili sis, are you here to joke around?

Little Chili sent a meme that indicated she was shutting the world out.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: so what was up with someone losing something in the hall?

This time round, Little Chili replied very promptly: there were a lot of people yesterday, it was probably very chaotic. quite a number of students lost their items, and apparently our class’ english rep lost his bag.

You Say That Again: Qi Jiahao?

Ever since Qi Jiahao sabotaged Sheng Wang at the start, it was as though this person no longer existed in Class A. He basically did not participate in any activity, major or minor, like he had his heart entirely set on studying. In other words, he was inconspicuously alienated.

Other people no longer counted him in on their own accord, he also chose to stay away from other people. This sort of alienation that was neither here nor there wasn't anything minor to any student, so despite looking like he was very hardworking, his grades were steadily dropping. He thus became even more at the edge of the social circles. Sheng Wang barely saw him ever since he transferred to Class B, if it wasn't for Little Chili suddenly bringing this up, he was this close to forgetting about that person.

Who knew if Chili was busy or if the internet was slow, but after Sheng Wang sent a message, she was gone again.

After quite a while later, she finally popped out to say: yeah.

And then she immediately added: apparently he went to the administration office to check the security footage in the hall today.

Sheng Wang was already prepared to turn off the screen, but when these words suddenly appeared before him, he stopped breathing entirely — it was like someone had just pumped his blood out, an icy feeling exploded in his chest.

Security footage? The footage for which time? Will they end up looking through the one on the 4th floor?

Perhaps the way he froze up was too obvious, Jiang Tian woke up. He pinched the centre of his brows, and aroused himself from the drowsiness before whispering, “What happened?”

Sheng Wang switched the screen off on instinct.

He rubbed his thumb forcefully, feeling the temperature coming back to the tips of his limbs before he finally spoke, “Nothing, just the group chat from the cultural festival. Little Chili had shaky hands and accidentally

tagged everyone twice. I thought there was something, but I ended up seeing all their hotpot and barbeque pics.

The truth was, the checking of security footage meant that it was possible the things he did with Jiang Tian on the fourth floor would be seen, planning a counter strategy to this with Jiang Tian in advance would likely be the wiser choice.

His instincts did not want him to bring this up though — like the mark Zhao Xi saw this morning, including the footage Sheng Mingyang posted.

He kept feeling like once he brought it up to Jiang Tian, it meant that they had no other choice but to bring up the troubles they were bound to run into in reality, and dissect them apart out in the open. The result of that probably wouldn’t bring too much joy to them.

We wouldn’t be seen.

He said it to himself.

Rationally speaking, there wasn't an exit on the fourth floor, if there was really a student with sticky fingers who stole a wallet, they would only walk outside the hall, and not bother heading upstairs.

Besides, as long as they checked the footage in the hall, they would already know who the bag ended up with. There was no need for them to really look through every area earnestly, that would waste too much time.

They definitely…...wouldn't be seen.

He figured that he was too full of himself, too beside himself with joy for the past few days, that the heavens decided to hit him a few times, asking him to keep it down. It was just that he was unfortunate enough to get hit all on the same day, creating a combo hit, causing him to be unable to put up any defences.

The other things were still fine, it was just that Qi Jiahao and the security footage was a sword that hoovered on top of his head, he did not know when it would fall. As such, he was a little out of it for the next few

days. The moment Jiang Tian wasn't next to him, he would zone out for a long, long time with abandon.

That state continued until a morning on a certain day one week later. Small Mouth Xu went downstairs to Class B during the inter-class break, and summoned Sheng Wang at the entrance to the classroom, saying, "Go to the administration office, the Dean is looking for you."

Sheng Wang blanked out; seeing Jiang Tian, who also followed him downstairs, his brain instantly exploded into static.

He licked his lips, and asked stiffly, "The two of us?"

Small Mouth Xu nodded, "Yeah."

"Did he say anything?" Sheng Wang asked.

"No?" Small Mouth Xu shook his head, "He just got me to pass on the message, he didn't really say anything."

Sheng Wang could not recall any bit of how he went to the administration office, nor did he remember a single bit of what he and Jiang

Tian said to each other along the way. He could only feel himself splitting into half, with one half smiling and talking to Jiang Tian, the other half utterly quiet, frozen in ice.

In the end, when they entered the administration office, he did not see Qi Jiahao, but Yang Jing instead. Big Mouth Xu had two finely made certificate booklets with covers made of velvet, and his smile was so wide the corner of his mouth reached his ears, looking like a baboon.

"Good! Very good!" Big Mouth Xu opened up the booklet, waved it before the two of them, and gave Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian's shoulders a good hearty clap. "The results of the English Olympiad are out now, my mouth is nearly broken from smiling. Two first prizes! National level! I've been holding this all back all morning just so I can give you two and Xiao-Yang a surprise! How was it! Are you happy?"

"....."

What the……

Sheng Wang was dumbfounded for ten seconds straight before he let an expletive explode in his mind.

Things are already like this, if they really did find something, there was no way Big Mouth Xu wouldn't not bring it up at all, therefore they should be alright. The sword that had been hovering over him for an entire week suddenly plunged to the ground, striking his head enough to see golden light. That moment, he held onto Jiang Tian's shoulder for support, his mouth was saying "what a huge surprise, I was nearly shocked to death", and his entire body weight was supported by Jiang Tian instead.

When they left the office, this young master was still very much a "corpse", he was basically dragged along by Jiang Tian.

"We will be going downstairs later, you sure you still want to hang on like this?" Jiang Tian side-eyed him.

Sheng Wang: "I'm so happy that my legs turned jelly."

Jiang Tian: "....."

Big Mouth Xu hummed with his head held high as he walked in front of them, two photographs in hand. He led Jiang Tian — who had received so many awards until he was completely indifferent — and Sheng Wang — who was suddenly paralysed down from his neck — to the Wall of Honour, and pasted the two's photos side by side solemnly. He then pasted a newly cut red piece of paper —

Middle-High School English Olympiad (Comprehensive)

First Class Award in the Nation

Jiang Tian Sheng Wang

Translator's note:

Not @ how I had to go all the way to book 2 to find out GTY's wechat name again,,,

Also terminology like first place has been changed into class, will edit past updates eventually

If they are talking about the new year they are generally referring to Chinese New Year, a pretty major holiday

Chapter 085 - Shifting Den

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

He Said: Let’s Rent a Place Together.

The Wall of Honour was in an area of the corridor that everyone had to pass by, with the strikingly outstanding red piece of paper as well as the newly-pasted photographs, the passing-by students would all stop and take a look. Barely half a day passed before there was already an extra line of heart shapes next to Sheng Wang’s photo, nearly identical to the one next to Jiang Tian’s. This was probably a tradition among Fuzhong girls.

Sheng Wang was filled with some mixed feelings when he saw them, thinking, *the one in this photo has been so cowardly lately, you can still bear to draw your heart shapes?*

He took a look back at his behaviour for the past few days after he finally escaped the caught defenseless state he was stuck in, and only felt that the him for the past few days was so goddamn silly. His mindset upon facing exams was clearly more stable than stable, why did he fumble around and panic so much upon having something like this happen to him?

Weakling, immature, can't withstand a single hit, he mocked himself.

People are often like this — the incoming storm was a fearsome foe to them, and as they managed to get away without doing anything, they would think whatever they felt was utter bullshit.

Thanks to previous experiences, a normal ordinary event made him feel very insecure as long as Qi Jiahao was dragged in. Sheng Wang attempted to look for him and try to wring a little information out of him, but the other person unfortunately had only grudges and not friendship with him. He couldn't find an appropriate way to start the conversation, so he could only go to Gao Tianyang for an indirect answer.

"He found the bag, got it back yesterday. Didn't really lose anything. Old Song, who was just being nice as a class comm member, even tried to show a little concern, but got ugly words in return instead. He said that Old Song was being fake." Gao Tianyang did not catch a whiff of anything unusual at all, and the moment he was asked, everything came pouring out

of him like a waterfall. “I didn’t catch anything unusual about him though. Ever since he sabotaged you, hasn’t he always been half dead like that. Apparently, he was hit by his mom after his grades dropped in last week’s exam, and recently, his behaviour has been more...peculiar.”

Sheng Wang then found an excuse and made two trips to the administration office on his own. The group of teachers were talking as per normal, and Big Mouth Xu, due to his overly excellent mood, kept cracking jokes with him; he didn’t act like he was hiding anything from him. He found out from Big Mouth Xu that the other students that lost their stuff had all found their items one by one, there wouldn't be any more people who would have a lightbulb appear on their head and go check the security footage.

As such, this accident that rudely cut in had seemingly passed over just like that.

It was evening by the time he left the administration office, the last period in the afternoon just so happened to end. Jiang Tian descended the

stairs from the other end of the corridor, turning into Class B on the third floor. Sheng Wang spotted him from afar, and had the feeling of having a great burden lifted off his back for some inexplicable reason. Like his childhood days, when he would be lost in the maze of alleys outside of White Horse Alley, and had made countless twists and turns before he spotted the gate to his house.

He crouched and ran over, wanting to launch a sneak attack and jump onto Jiang Tian's back. However, he stopped in his steps upon getting nearer to him. A moment of hesitation, and in the end, he simply snapped his fingers next to Jiang Tian's left ear, before dodging to the right with a devilish grin.

*

Finals were approaching, yet another major exam involving the changing of classes. The entire student population was up to their heads in the mountain of revision.

Qiu Wenbin and Shi Yu packed their luggages, and got their asses back from home to the school at last, ready to join the army of students

revising. What happened instead was on the very first day they moved back in, Shi Yu experienced for himself the fickleness of the human heart, and how friends could turn on you in a blink.

(t/n: What Shi Yu used was □□□□□□□□, when taken apart it means the world is fickle/constantly changing, and men have become degenerated. I kinda trimmed it down a lot, and cn netizens suggested these answers that helped me to come up with a tl.)

It began with Sheng Wang chit-chatting with him during interclass-break, starting with how it was more difficult than ever to fight for food in the cafeteria anymore, the convenience store would close shop in advance randomly, the water meant for showering wasn't quite enough, all the way to how the bed was much bigger at home, better food too, the freedom to choose the timing for lights out, and the kind and earnest concern from parents, etc etc.

As they talked, Shi Yu also went on non-stop like flood water being released from a dam. The conversation ended, and Shi Yu suddenly realised in retrospect that every single line in-between Sheng Wang's words was instigating him to continue his stay at home.

This person was relatively more tactful, but Jiang Tian was different. He asked Shi Yu directly, “Why are you back?”

Shi Yu said, “Why wouldn’t I be? I’ve stayed home for so long.”

Jiang Tian said “oh”, continuing, “I thought you’re going to stay until the next semester.”

Shi Yu: “.....”

He pondered and wrung his brains out, and figured that he was being ostracised.

With the time the two got to be alone together being cut short once more by the return of their dormmates, the days of mucking around suddenly came to a stop.

Recently, Jiang Tian could obviously feel that young master Sheng was being kind of clingy — not the mushy type, more like the kind where he had a following pet.

In the level exercise lessons before, what happened at the very most would be Class A and B roughly playing basketball on half court, the two would bump against and touch each other in the guise of the competition, and whoever was switched out got to sit by the side to watch the competition, waiting for the other to leave the court too before they head to the cafeteria for dinner in advance.

As of late, Sheng Wang hardly participated enthusiastically; as long as Jiang Tian left, he was guaranteed to claim that his wrist or his ankle was abruptly sprained, and jog out of the court while swiping away the bead of sweat gathering at the tip of his hair.

In the night self-study before, Sheng Wang would usually head to the lecture theatre by himself first. Jiang Tian headed downstairs occasionally early, occasionally late. Once he arrived, Sheng Wang would then shift the bag on the chair next to his seat away, making a spot for Jiang Tian.

It was different these days — the moment day students ended self-study, he would head upstairs, going against the flow of the crowd, and wait to go down with Jiang Tian, crossing his arms.

These two days, it had gotten to the point that as Jiang Tian headed to the washroom during night self-study, Sheng Wang would even set his pen down, saying “I need to go too”.

Yet, all he did was to simply be there, no moves made whatsoever. In every environment under supervision, he paid much attention to his behaviour — like a cat that went around a person’s legs in circles, but still keeping a few centimeters away.

It was only during the nights when they walked across Magpie Bridge, under the mottled dark shade the trees provided, a place with tree branches and twigs obscuring them, then they would relax a little; the tip of their noses touched as they kissed each other.

Jiang Tian could actually feel the inner conflict Sheng Wang was going through — the intimacy he expressed on instinct, the occasional smugness that reared its head, and the restraint that came from a place of rationality. Right at the start, during the camp, he already knew: as long as

they left utopia, things would definitely end up like this. It wasn’t a problem caused by anyone in particular.

They had no rightful name or place for their relationship, they were doomed to keep this under covers. A relationship that had to be kept under covers was thus bound to cause anxiety in people. With that build up, everything either avalanches into no return, or they would gradually drift apart.

To be honest, he was able to accept gradually drifting apart at the start. Countless people had said love during teenage years mostly came to no fruition — the timing wasn’t right, hell, the person themself might not even be right. He was actually a little similar to Sheng Wang in this regard — sometimes they would be more impulsive than other peers their age, sometimes they were both well aware in much unspoken synchronicity.

Therefore they said “I like you”, but none of them ever said “I’ll like you for the rest of my life.”

A lifetime was too long, these words were too heavy.

Before, what he thought was “I’ll travel alongside with you for a while, until you don’t like me anymore”, but now he was a little greedy — he wanted to walk with him a little longer.

His aptitude lies in simplifying complicated science topics, lies in using formulas, but in no way was he an expert in dealing with these issues. He could only come up with ways to reduce elements of instability, so they could have at the very least a place to let it all out; a den of their own.

*

The night self-study wasn’t exactly pure silence. After all, the entire level’s residential students were all gathered in a single lecture theatre, with only a single teacher on duty.

Oftentimes, there were students who would run down with a book in hand, getting the teacher to answer questions that bugged them. Some who didn’t manage to get in the queue would consult students with better grades.

Business was basically blooming over here where Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang were.

Jiang Tian wasn’t good at going through the solutions, he would skip a lot of common-sense steps, highlighting the keypoint. Those who understood would think “Oh, turns out it’s this easy all along”, but the moment they run into a similar question type, they still wouldn’t know how to do it. As for those who didn’t understand, they wouldn’t dare to say “can you repeat that” to Jiang Tian’s face.

Therefore, everyone usually wouldn’t consult him; instead, they would borrow. They would borrow his test papers, his notes, all sorts of things they could borrow from him. Once they acquired said objects, they would make their way to Sheng Wang instead.

Jiang Tian thought that this sequence of actions was honestly mystifying, and had mocked them a couple of times to Sheng Wang, only to get howls of laughter in return. He no longer cared afterwards.

As such, their usual state during night self-study would be this: Sheng Wang taught the other students, Jiang Tian focused on feeding questions to Sheng Wang.

The meaning behind feeding was simple: he was helping Chu-ge make the lecture notes for the supplementary class, and needed to sweep through all sorts of guide books and question banks. When he stumbled upon a question worth doing, he would mark it with a post-it for Sheng Wang.

The rate he was feeding questions to Sheng Wang was increasing, showing with all his might that he was letting his boyfriend touch the tiger's butt during finals. Sheng Wang had absolute faith in his choice of questions, and he basically did whatever he was fed without any fuss. He wasn't picky at all.

This day, Sheng Wang spent a little too much time guiding a girl, and by the time he finally managed to send the girl away with much difficulty, he turned to see seven post-its stuck to his table.

“This many?” Sheng Wang was a little confused, but he still tore one out and matched the question to the book, doing all of them. As he did them, Jiang Tian was still sticking post-its onto his table, appearing that he intended to take up his entire night self-study.

He did four questions as he mumbled under his breath, and finally started revolting, throwing his pen aside. He put a hand on Jiang Tian’s neck, saying, “Three out of four questions have repeated question types, are you messing with me?”

Jiang Tian looked down and chuckled. He stopped bullying him at last, and slapped the post-it he was just done writing on to the back of Sheng Wang’s hand.

“There’s still more?” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian pointed at it with his chin. “Last piece.”

Sheng Wang lowered his head and looked, and saw that whatever that was written on the post-it wasn’t the page and question number, but a single line.

He said: Let’s rent a place together.

Sheng Wang’s heart skipped a beat, and looked up to face him.

Jiang Tian asked, “Do you want to?”

“I do, but —” Sheng Wang said, shellshocked, “your luggage……”

Jiang Tian checked the surroundings: a few students were discussing a tricky question a few rows away, their voices weren’t too loud or too soft, like a buzz enough to cover the two’s hushed words.

He asked Sheng Wang, “Will you one day suddenly stop opening the door to me, and lock me outside?”

“No!” Sheng Wang said, “What are you even thinking about, no way that’s happening.”

“Then why should I worry about the luggage?” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang was left speechless. A while later, he squeezed out, “If there’s nobody else beside us now.”

Jiang Tian: “Hm?”

Sheng Wang was about to say something, but stopped. He wrote the second half of his sentence on the post-it on the back of his hand: I'll kiss you so hard that your lips turn swollen.

Jiang Tian: "....."

Sheng Wang ripped the post-it out with a cheeky grin, crumpling it and tossing it away.

Sheng Mingyang doesn't check his expenditure every month, how much he spent and saved was entirely up to him. Jiang Tian had some savings of his own too, so the two had zero problems when it came to the rent.

If it was before, they would have definitely asked for Zhao Xi's help. However, Sheng Wang had some qualms this time, so they were the ones who reached out to look for a place. There were a lot of suitable places in the west and north gate, they filtered three out, and planned to go take a look on a day.

Coincidentally, Old Man Ding would be discharged on Thursday. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian asked for leave from two periods in the afternoon and night self-study, and headed to check the house out by the north gate, before going to fetch the old man in the hospital.

Sheng Mingyang was already at the hospital. He was actually quite tolerant towards his son taking leave, but he still said nonetheless, “We could have fetched him ourselves.”

The “we” referred to him and Jiang Ou. After all, to Old Man Ding, Jiang Ou could still be counted as his “grandson’s” mom, and Sheng Mingyang was half an outsider, only that he got along particularly well with this half-outsider.

Jiang Tian helped the old man pack his belongings. He scanned around the ward before asking, “Where’s my mom?”

Sheng Mingyang pointed above his head, “Just now, she said she bumped into an old classmate in the hospital, she’s paying a short visit and will be back soon.”

Translator’s notes:

Goddamn what Jiang Tian asked Sheng Wang about his luggages sounded so much like a marriage proposal wtf

Chapter 086 - Family Dinner

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Sheng Wang: “Help Me Take a Picture With My Son.”

Jiang Ou did not expect to run into Du Cheng in this hospital too,

She told Sheng Mingyang that this was her classmate from high school, but in reality they were closer than classmates — Du Cheng was one of her closest friends in high school.

She was the class monitor, with Du Cheng being the vice class monitor, sitting right behind her. He would often grumble “I get the brunt of the work, you get the highest title, where else are you supposed to find such a good bro like me”, and then continue helping her out the very next second. She would often feel bad about it, so she would bring some homemade treats for the two boys behind her to share. Back then, her mother was a teacher, without any of the illnesses that came with age. She had a clear mind and a gentle personality, she was especially good at

cooking too. Du Cheng often said that that deskmate of his owed it all to him for managing to get so much good food without lifting a single finger.

His deskmate’s name was Ji Huanyu; he was Jiang Ou’s boyfriend, husband, and ex-husband eventually.

Du Cheng did know of Jiang Ou’s infatuation with Ji Huanyu. Young people are bad at hiding what’s on their mind, and they have to have that one friend who they can spill everything out to. Du Cheng was that friend that she could have heart-to-heart talks with, and he even helped her indirectly find out Ji Huanyu’s actual feelings on this issue. However, Du Cheng did not have a positive view of them, he said Ji Huanyu was too scheming, he wasn’t suitable for her.

Therefore, when Jiang Ou actually did get together with Ji Huanyu, the clique of three consisting of front and back deskmates was dismantled. Ji Huanyu and Du Cheng were initially on good terms, but after that they would often have mini fights and quarrels.

At a point in time, Jiang Ou was rather confused: how did two people on perfectly good terms suddenly tear at each other's throats just like that? It was only later then she found out that Ji Huanyu thought Du Cheng liked her too, and treated him as a potential rival for her affections, causing Jiang Ou to both cry and laugh, not knowing how to explain any of these too.

In her green days, she believed that conflict is temporary, relationships are more unwavering. Friends wouldn't leave, lovers wouldn't separate. Later, in the future, she found out that time stops for nobody; everyone is running ahead, everything is bound to change.

After graduation, Du Cheng went to the North, and was no longer in contact with her. He had good grades and good relations with people in general; apparently he was flourishing where he was at. It was Jiang Ou and Ji Huanyu who were entangled up for more than a decade, and concluded in a dismal, disastrous state.

Jiang Ou did not stay in much contact with her old classmates; in the earlier years, it was because everyone was busy. Later, it was intentional on

her part. After the divorce, she was in a half closed-off state for a very long time. Before her son, she maintained a positive and upbeat attitude, but in actuality she had long blocked out everything that had to do with Ji Huanyu.

Later on, she then found out from her Moments that Ji Huanyu got in contact with his high school friend, got a ride on the other person's connections, and went to develop his business overseas.

From then onwards, other than the obligatory child support he carried out, she no longer had any new knowledge of what the person was up to.

That was, until this year, she found out also via Moments: the friend that went overseas with Ji Huanyu had fallen ill, and it was quite troublesome. They didn't know how much time there was left.

That friend was Du Cheng.

The Du Cheng on the hospital bed was completely different from the Du Cheng at 18. If not for the visiting ex-classmates she bumped into along

the corridor, Jiang Ou wouldn’t have dared to claim that that was Du Cheng at all.

The scene of bygone years when the teacher would mess up, and the front and back deskmates would collapse over in laughter was just like it happened yesterday. She looked away, and suddenly they were all in their middle ages.

Du Cheng was astounded when he saw her, he propped himself upright on the bed, but did not say anything at all. It was Jiang Ou who spoke up first instead. She asked him why he came back so suddenly. He pointed at his head, “Something’s growing here, it spreaded and so there’s no cure. Every day is a day lost. There are only so many things overseas, and after a while they all sorta became meaningless. So I wanted to come back.”

He was silent for a long time before he gave a light smile. “I didn’t want to die outside.”

Because of this line, Jiang Ou couldn’t make herself stay in that ward any longer. She carelessly chatted a bit, and then hurried downstairs. For one, it was because she had gotten sensitive over the years, and was reduced to tears too easily. A scene like this was unbearable to her. For the other, she was afraid that she would run into Ji Huanyu if she stayed for too long.

Du Cheng had returned, so Ji Huanyu was definitely around too.

When Jiang Ou returned downstairs, Sheng Mingyang was handling the discharge procedures for Old Man Ding. Sheng Wang was holding the old man’s canvas bag, full of things that clanged around. He was telling jokes to him, causing the other to heave with laughter. Her darling son was just standing there, his elbow forming a hanger for the old man’s jacket. “This joke is truly terrible” was written all over his face, but the corner of his lips still couldn’t help but quirk.

This scene caused her heart to settle a little.

Just as she was about to head over, her phone suddenly vibrated as it had received a message. It was from Du Cheng, and they had only added

each other’s WeChat just now. The content of the message was just this short sentence: Thank you for coming to see me.

Jiang Ou halted in her steps, and replied: No problem, we’re friends for so many years already. Rest and take care of yourself, don’t overthink, okay.

Afterwards, the other person did not reply at all.

*

Every year around this time would be Sheng Mingyang’s busiest. With the flow of money, financial accounts, clients, problems could easily occur in every step of the process. Yet, he still had a lot of business dinners to attend, to facilitate this, to bribe that.

Ever since he settled Old Man Ding’s things, his phone never left his hand, messages and phone calls came in non-stop. Even as they entered the yard in Wu Tong Wai, he kept an eye on the road, and an eye on his screen.

Sheng Wang initially planned to find a suitable time to bring it up to his dad, saying that schoolwork would get heavier and heavier, lights out in

the dorms was too early, so he rented a place with his Ge outside the school.

In actuality, the contract was yet to be signed. However, many years of experience told him that “act first report later” was the ultimate way to deal with Sheng Mingyang.

Instead, the other person honestly did not have the time for casual chit chat at all, so Sheng Wang could only further delay this conversation topic.

Jiang Tian had noticed Jiang Ou’s glum mood even while they were still in the hospital. He held himself back for the entire journey before he gave in and asked, “Are you okay?”

“Hm?” Jiang Ou was completely out of it, and nearly tripped over the threshold before the kitchen. She supported herself against the door, embarrassed, and explained, “Nothing, it’s just that there’s a little issue with the withdrawal of funds from circulation, and a permit didn’t manage to pass. I was just a little tired from all that. Just now, I even ran into an old classmate, and that sight was rather unbearable.”

“Which classmate?” Jiang Tian asked.

“You wouldn’t know even if I say the name.” Jiang Ou broke into a smile, saying, “Someday when we’re free, I’ll dig the old picture out and show it to you, even though I might not be able to tell you all of their names — it has been too long since I last talked to them.”

Jiang Tian nodded, but the moment he thought of how Ji Huanyu would be in that picture too, his expression instantly soured. “Maybe.”

Jiang Ou saw the way he looked like he just ate rotten food, and wanted to say something before stopping herself. In the end, she settled for giving him a pat, resigned, “Go play with Xiao-Wang for a bit, I’ll whip something up in the kitchen.”

“No need for the trouble, let’s order delivery.” Sheng Wang stuck his head out from outside the kitchen.

“You don’t trust my cooking?” Jiang Ou smiled as she tied an apron.

In the end, her cooking wasn’t put to the test. Sheng Mingyang received a call, and called her out in a hurry — the two had to make a trip to the city industrial park.

The kitchen was all set up, but the sole chef was missing. Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian could only look at each other, at a loss as to what they have to do. Old Man Ding rolled his sleeves up, and was ready to do it himself, but was tucked back inside the bed by the two older boys.

“The doctor said that you have high blood pressure and thus more likely to bleed, and have blood clots too.” Jiang Tian did not cushion his words at all, he switched on the television for him, and draped a blanket, “Stay put here.”

Sheng Wang tugged at him. “Be more selective with your words, don’t scare the old man back into the hospital again.”

Jiang Tian pointed at the old man. “Does he look like the type to get scared?”

Old Man Ding struggled, wanting to get the blanket off him, “Back then when I was in the army, I ain’t even scared of the bullet brushing across my scalp. This minor problem isn’t going to scare me.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He pondered, and dug the blanket out from the old man’s clench, thus covering him up firmly again. “Grandpa, this old granny used to be my neighbour, she had high blood pressure. She also got up from the bed like you, swayed, and then she was gone just like that.”

Old Man Ding: “.....”

“This minor problem doesn’t allow for you to exert yourself too much, much less to get worked up. I even chatted with a nurse today, she said a senile old person next ward over also had a blood clot. One day the person got mad over something for a bit, and then his head became all fuzzy like that onwards.” Sheng Wang said, “Grandpa, you were a little too worked up just now.”

Old Man Ding: “.....”

The old man was stubborn, but as compared to death, he was more afraid to become senile. His words were yelling at him for being a brat, but his body still obeyed without a fuss.

Sheng Wang still wanted to speak, but Jiang Tian covered his mouth in a single move, and dragged this mischievous creature bent on scaring

people back into the kitchen.

“Keep bullshitting and he’ll really have to go back to the hospital again,” Jiang Tian said.

“Mm-mm-mm.” The young master was still muffled by him, and was unable to speak anything decent. So, he simply puckered his lips and kissed his palm.

“.....”

Jiang Tian was made a little restless by him, and abruptly withdrew his hand. Sheng Wang cackled as he supported himself against the tabletop.

“I wasn’t bullshitting either, those were the exact words the nurse told me.” Sheng Wang jumped and sat on the counter, his eyes on the already-washed vegetables. “What are we gonna have to do about all these setups? How about the two of us cook?”

Jiang Tian looked at him in doubt. “You know how to cook?”

Sheng Wang said modestly, “A little.”

The young master was a man of action, he started preparing without any hesitation. He jumped off the counter, washed his hands and said, “You heat up the pot, and I’ll finish chopping the half-chopped Chinese cabbages. How did Auntie Jiang plan to cook them again?”

“Sweet and sour,” Jiang Tian said.

“Sure, hang on.” Sheng Wang stood by the chopping board, a hand with the diced up vegetables, another hand holding a knife.

In lieu of how there was a literal weapon in *someone*’s hands, Jiang Tian’s eyes did not dare to leave him at all. He stared at him, propping himself against the counter. Right before his very eyes, he saw Sheng Wang swing the knife twice with the stability of walking on tightropes in thin air. Setting aside how the vegetable was chopped unevenly, the third knife aligned directly onto his finger.

I can’t believe I bought into your bullshit.

Jiang Tian thought.

He moved the other person aside, and took the knife from him. “The door’s over there. Leave.”

Sheng Wang poked around behind him. “Hey, I’m just a little unfamiliar with it, let me try chopping a couple more times.”

“I don’t want to eat cabbage stir-fried with fingers.” Jiang Tian deadpanned, “Stay out of the way.”

“Then do *you* know how to cook?” Sheng Wang asked.

Of course Jiang Tian knew, after all he was used to being independent, and neither did he have an Auntie Sun who was in charge of every meal like Sheng Wang. When he was by himself, he took over everything. However, he did not have the patience to really hone his craft, so his cooking was just so-so, around the standard of “edible”.

It was fine enough to keep someone like him alive, but not very adequate to satisfy a certain picky menace.

Jiang Tian was done chopping the vegetables, and just as he was about to risk it all with a frown on his face, the door to the courtyard

suddenly creaked open, and Uncle Mute came in with two bags of things, effectively saving him.

Uncle Mute had just returned from Xi Le, where Boss Zhao was. Along the way, he bought dumpling skin, minced meat, scallions and ginger. He planned on making dumplings and freeze them, so he could cook them whenever he was hungry.

Without a second word, Jiang Tian finely diced up the chopped cabbages, and got Uncle Mute to mix it into the meat. After the filling was prepared, the three thus started folding dumplings in the kitchen.

The young master was still out of his element, and his eyes were on Jiang Tian’s hands as he followed Jiang Tian’s actions intently, learning on the spot. Sometimes, he even forcibly pressed the pause button by stopping the other person’s fingers.

His dumplings had either too much or too little filling, or there would inexplicably be a hole in the dumpling that threatened to burst, or it was as flat as a pancake; no matter what the dumpling couldn’t stay upright. Yet,

he clung onto his pride like his life and insisted on twisting the argument. “The skin is too stiff, it isn’t sticky enough. Auntie Sun’s dumpling skins were all handmade, that’s why I could fold them so easily.”

Jiang Tian did not play along at all. “Ours could all stand up.”

“The filling isn’t obedient at all, it keeps moving around.”

“Mine is though.”

“.....”

As Sheng Wang attempted to mess up his Ge’s dumpling folding process while simultaneously trying to refine and improve his own techniques, his dumplings finally started to slightly resemble dumplings after creating a bunch of ugly creatures. He placed the final product on his palm, and said to Jiang Tian, “Help me take a picture with my son.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

There was barely any dumpling skin left, the Mute went to the side to start the water boiling after he washed his hands, nobody was paying any attention to them. Jiang Tian took a tissue and wiped his hands. He took his

phone out and aimed it at Sheng Wang. When he pressed the button to take a picture, he murmured, “I don’t acknowledge a son like this.”

When the Mute had set the water to boil and returned, he discovered that Sheng Wang had stopped messing around, and was obediently finishing up the last dumpling. He did it with so much focus and rigor, like he was doing handicraft — except, his neck was a little flushed.

*

Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou’s journey back was a rushed one. They initially planned to finish up preparation in the kitchen while the sun just set, but instead what they smelled upon entering was the smell of vinegar and dumplings.

Old Man Ding came out from the bedroom in a jacket, and beckoned them into the hall. “You’re just in time, the two kids and the Mute made dumplings.”

“The two kids?” Sheng Mingyang was a little disbelieving. “Sir, are you sure it’s the *both* of them?”

“They did fold them, Xiao-Wang even spent ages trying to learn,” Old Man Ding said.

Sheng Wang’s descendants immediately reverted to their true forms upon being cooked, and many of them fell apart. Dumpling soup nearly became cabbage soup, but the Mute still scooped them up with a grin nonetheless, and served a few giant platefuls onto the table.

It was rare for the courtyard to be this lively, and it was the first time the three generations got to sit together for a common, ordinary meal. For that one instant, there was even that comforting feeling of home.

The old man dug out alcohol that he had kept hidden under his bed for a very long time, and poured three glasses. He lightly drank with Sheng Mingyang and the Mute. When the alcohol got to his head, the old man couldn’t help but tease, “Xiao-Wang, kid, you have to practise that cooking of yours, or else you can’t scam a wife into marrying you.”

Sheng Mingyang almost choked on the alcohol, and doubled over in laughter by the side.

Sheng Wang opened his mouth, wanting to say something. In the end, he simply replied with a “Mn”, and took another bite of the dumpling. He actually wanted to say “then I simply wouldn’t get one”, but his shoe received a light nudge from Jiang Tian, and rationality immediately came rushing back to him, so he swallowed his words once more.

It wasn’t that he was a coward, if this issue concerned only him and him alone, then there was no need to be afraid at all. He would dare to come out right in front of Sheng Mingyang, at the very most he’ll get beaten to death, that’s all.

But there’s still Jiang Tian.

As long as Jiang Tian was involved, he suddenly became a wimp.

Sheng Wang’s leg was touching Jiang Tian’s under the table. He busied himself with taking a few more bites, and played on his phone for a bit as if there was nothing out of the ordinary. When the jokes that the

seniors cracked completely tided over, he finally looked up again. Only, the broken dumplings that he made with the terrible craft of his, were all picked out by Jiang Tian and eaten.

He blinked his eyes, ever so slightly, and hurriedly lowered his head again. His heart ached softly.

This meal was no feast, but they ate for a long time. Sheng Mingyang's alcohol tolerance was as deep as the ocean, but he ended up a little tipsy at the end. He poured the last bit of alcohol in the bottle, lifted his glass and clinked it against Old Man Ding and the Mute. He was on a high, and suddenly spoke, "Jiang Ou and I planned to find some day before the new year, and get a few relatives and friends to come over for a meal. We aren't young anymore, and a whole ceremony is a little too grandiose. We've discussed, and thought that simple is good. Please be there."

Sheng Wang was zoning out from his food coma, and he nearly did not understand the implication behind Sheng Mingyang's words. He only

realised after a few seconds — Sheng Mingyang was saying that his relationship with Jiang Ou was about to be set in stone.

Invite friends and family to a meal, get that certificate, and they would be considered one family in the eyes of the law.

Sheng Wang’s face was deathly pale beneath the light. He pursed his lips and was silent for a long time. When he looked up, he met Jiang Tian’s eyes.

Translator’s notes:

The Suffering I went through for the cabbages...anyways the funny thing about translating is that what is just cabbage to them is “chinese cabbage” to western speakers and I really wasn’t sure whether I should include the “chinese” in chinese cabbage inside

Again if they are talking about "the new year" they are referring to Chinese New Year

Chapter 087 - Winter Break

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Chili: I Saw It, It Was During the Cultural Festival.

“Xiao-Chen will be coming to fetch us later, so how do I say this — will the two of you be coming back home tonight?” Sheng Mingyang helped Jiang Ou to bring the dishes to the kitchen, he asked Sheng Wang while he washed his hands.

“We’re not going back,” Sheng Wang shook his head. “The teacher only approved of our leave from night self-study, that doesn’t extend to dorm check at night.”

“That’s fine too, finals are coming anyway. After you’re done, you can come home for a good rest.”

“Mn……”

Sheng Mingyang drew a piece of tissue to wipe his hands. The window before them glistened, and Sheng Wang spaced out in the reflected

light. Sheng Mingyang glanced at him, and turned to ask, “Are you okay? Why do you look so lifeless?”

“Nothing, I’m just drowsy,” Sheng Wang scratched the corner of his eye, and answered off the top of his mind.

“Oh. I thought you’re feeling the pressure from the upcoming exams.”

“Is that even possible?” Sheng Wang laughed. “Since when have you seen your son get stressed out over exams?”

“That’s true.” Sheng Mingyang laughed heartily and walked outside. When he went past him, he patted the back of his head.

Boys grew like trees, and they shot up faster than anything else. He could still recall the way Sheng Wang was a tiny boy, and his hand only needed to dangle before he could pat his fluffy bed of hair. It was as though in the blink of an eye, the little kid back then already was roughly the same height as him, with the possibility of growing even taller. It was no longer as easy for him to pat his head.

There's barely any years left…...Sheng Mingyang thought.

Now, he could still be in charge of every aspect in Sheng Wang's life, but that might not be the case in the future. Become an adult, wings strong enough to carry them, and then they'll fly too far. No parent could accept this process without a single fight, just like beasts fighting over the last piece of territory.

Fortunately, the son of his didn't really cause trouble.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian waved them goodbye, and returned back to the school together. Xiao-Chen fetched Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou, and drove the car to White Horse Alley. Jiang Ou leaned against the chair for a while, and suddenly asked Sheng Mingyang, "Why did you bring the dinner ahead? Didn't we agree on holding it after the new year?"

She was someone who knew what's the appropriate thing to do in the right time and place very well, and would rarely immediately expose anyone in front of everyone. She actually did disagree with Sheng Mingyang in many things, this is unavoidable no matter between working

partners or spouses, not to mention the way they were both. However, they would never let it show before Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang.

Sheng Mingyang patted the back of her hand, and gave a placting smile. “The alcohol got to me a little, so I ended up saying things on my own accord. So, you don’t want it to be that early?”

Jiang Ou looked outside the window. “Not really. There’s too many things before the new year, I’m scared that we won’t be able to cope.”

To be fair, this wasn’t Sheng Mingyang’s fault, there was hardly any difference between before and after the new year. She was just a little agitated, possibly a side effect from that meeting in the hospital. Her fingers rubbed the phone screen, unlocked the phone and aimlessly scrolled through Moments. She then couldn’t resist it anymore and tapped into Du Cheng’s gallery.

There was hardly anything in his gallery. In the earlier days, he would occasionally share some articles, and in these two years, there were more

things related to daily life. Sometimes it would be a boring painting, sometimes it would be a picture of the hospital. Most of them weren't very happy, some on the verge of sounding moody.

Jiang Ou had heard from doctors that patients with problems occuring in their brains would often end up like this: bad temper that changed like the weather. Just as she was zoning out, she mindlessly refreshed the screen and saw an additional status in Du Cheng's gallery, posted just now—

He took a picture of the bedside drawer, on top of it was a fruit basket gifted by his friends and old classmates, and certainly including the flower Jiang Ou bought at the last minute. He captioned two words, seemingly random: I'm sorry.

The nonsensical rambles that came from illness would easily cause one to feel down too. Jiang Ou stared at the status for a while, and felt a little uncomfortable.

“That classmate of yours?” Sheng Mingyang asked.

“Mn,” Jiang Ou nodded.

“What’s the illness?”

“Cancer, it has already spreaded.”

Sheng Mingyang felt a little pitiful for him. “Today was in too much of a hurry, two days later, squeeze out some time to buy something, and I’ll accompany you to go visit him again. He’s probably around our age, if something happens to him, his wife and kids must feel very sad.”

Jiang Ou nodded. A while later, she said, sounding uncertain, “I think…...he didn’t get married.”

*

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian had settled on a place. The agent was rather quick, and the procedures were done in the blink of an eye. However, the landlord was on consecutive business trips, and they had to wait for him to return before they could get the entrance card and the keys.

There were only a few days left to this semester, the two figured they might as well move over after their finals.

The words Sheng Mingyang said that night was like the rainy day in this season, a dark cloud of grey hanging over the two's heads. Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang silently agreed on skipping past that topic, neither of them brought it up on their own accord.

It was because they both understood — better than anyone else — that there was no way they could brashly charge over and tell Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou that they were already together, and they definitely couldn't get in the two adults' way to tell them to not get married.

There was no solution to this question for now.

The last few days before finals, plenty of day students willingly stayed behind for the last period of night self-study, even including the few from Class A. Gao Tianyang went to the water fountain to refill his bottle, and went to Jiang Tian's table in square steps, saying, "Tian-ge, are you

touched yet? You don’t need to take up the entire classroom by yourself anymore.”

The tip of Jiang Tian’s pen moved non-stop; he only looked up after he was done with a line of formula. “Why are you staying for another period?”

“His ass is so heavy he’s firmly seated in the last place of this class, nobody can drag him away,” Song Sirui interrupted, “now he’s feeling the fear again, he’s scared that he will be sent downstairs with a kick from Sheng-ge during finals.”

“*Your* ass is the one that’s heavy,” Gao Tianyang insulted him back without any mercy, and then asked, “Why aren’t you leaving too?”

Song Sirui said, “My mom declared that if I can enter the top five for the finals, she’ll reward me with a new phone.”

“How materialistic of you.” Gao Tianyang sat on the table, waiting for the bell signalling the start of class to ring. He turned and took a look behind, calling out, “Chili? Little Chili? Classmate Li Jia?”

Chili’s head was struck by his tiny ball of paper before she finally looked up. “What?”

“You’ve already scored first place in the level and you’re still working your butt off?” Gao Tianyang pointed at Jiang Tian, “The way this is going, don’t tell me you don’t intend for Jiang Tian to return to his throne?”

Chili peered at Jiang Tian and hurriedly looked away again. “None of your business.”

It was rare for someone as oblivious as Gao Tianyang to notice that something was off with someone for once. He asked, “Eh? I realise you’re kinda withered lately.”

After the cultural festival, Chili hadn't exactly been in a good state. She accidentally stumbled upon a secret, and her first secret crush was put to an end just like that.

It wasn’t possible for her to feel unaffected at all, but it wasn’t as bad as she imagined it to be either. It was a particular type of sourness, she felt

it whenever she looked at Jiang Tian, and even more whenever she looked at Sheng Wang. Only when she bantered with Gao Tianyang then she was temporarily relieved from that ache, yet this dumbass knew not a single thing at all, and stepped specifically on all her sore spots—

Jiang Tian finished up this question and kept his paper while they bantered, grabbing his bag.

Gao Tianyang hurriedly asked, “Why are you taking your bag? You’re skipping night self-study?”

Jiang Tian lifted his chin in the direction of the back door. “I’m heading to the lecture theatre.”

Gao Tianyang followed his line of sight, and finally saw that Sheng Wang had come up, and was leaning against the back door with a hand on his bag and another in his pocket.

“So lively today?” Sheng Wang asked.

“Sheng-ge!” Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui greeted him, and asked, “So Tian-ge usually goes to the lecture theatre for night self-study?”

Before Jiang Tian could speak, Sheng Wang cut in, “Yep, the atmosphere downstairs is better, more people around.”

The moment Gao Tianyang heard how the atmosphere was great, he immediately stuffed his book into his bag. “Then I’ll go too.”

Immediately after he said that, Sheng Wang, Jiang Tian, and Little Chili all turned to him in silence. Gao Tianyang stilled, and scratched his head. “What?”

Chili thought *this right here is an absolute idiot, he’s so obtuse.*

However, a few minutes later, a discerning person like her was dragged along by Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui — that pair of idiots — to the lecture theatre, and even insisted on sitting in directly front of Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang.

She heard Gao Tianyang turn behind, and lower his voice to say to the two, “I plan to live in the dorms next semester too, maybe I can discuss with the teacher or something, I want to stay with the two of you.”

“We aren’t living in the dorms next semester,” Jiang Tian said.

“Huh?” Gao Tianyang asked in confusion, “Then where will you be staying?”

“Renting,” Jiang Tian said.

“The two of you together?”

“Mn.”

Chili nudged the table behind her on instinct. She intended to remind him that with so many people in the lecture theatre, they need to be more careful with their words.

However, only after she reminded them then she realised that she was overthinking. There were countless number of students who rented near Fuzhong, there wasn’t anything inherently wrong with what they were saying.

She looked up awkwardly, and saw the few boys all staring at her in confusion.

Chili met Sheng Wang’s gaze and nearly couldn’t keep a poker face. She squeezed out after what felt like ages, “Y’all can continue whatever after lesson’s over.”

Perhaps her acting was too bad and couldn’t hide the fact that something was weighing on her mind, for the night self-study the next few consecutive days, Sheng Wang’s eyes kept landing on her whether intentionally or not. After she caught him doing that, he smiled apologetically and did not look at her anymore, like a restrained and yet polite form of observation.

There was only a sequel to this observation in the evening after finals ended.

On the way back home on the school bus, she received a message from Sheng Wang. He said: chili, can I ask you something.

The temperature had plummeted as of late, there was a sparse bit of rainfall in early morning, and it soon became snow. By the time evening

arrived, the entire of Fuzhong was coated in a blanket of white. The snow wasn't heavy, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian weren't carrying umbrellas. When they walked to the west gate, there was only a little dampness on their shoulders.

Sheng Wang fingers flew as he typed on his phone, traces of red appearing on the joints of his fingers.

"Who are you chatting with like you're running out of time?" Jiang Tian glanced at him, and withdrew his hand from his pocket, grabbing his finger tip. He felt like he was touching a snow skin dessert.

(t/n: snow skin dessert, like snow skin mooncakes)

Due to the snow, there was barely anyone outside of the west gate. Sheng Wang made use of the opportunity to plaster the entire back of his hand against his palm, covering it for a while before turning. And then he rubbed his fingers as he continued typing.

After he sent that, he finally looked up, saying, "Was just asking Chili about something."

The bit of snow rolled off from his lashes, Jiang Tian caught it with the crook of his fingers. “What is it?”

Sheng Wang was about to speak when his phone screen lit up. He rubbed his joints, and waited for a few seconds before he unlocked the phone, his eyes lowered. He saw a new message in his WeChat window.

Chili: I saw it, it was during the cultural festival.

Just as I thought.

Sheng Wang thought.

He met Jiang Tian’s eyes, and the both of them stilled in the snow. He didn’t know what to reply for the moment. Just as he was deliberating over his words, his finger hovering above the screen, Chili sent another message.

She said: I didn’t tell anyone else.

She said: Don’t worry.

Sheng Wang paused for a long time, and his eyes suddenly crescented.

The first person in the know who expressed their opinion on this was seriously someone who was on their side, on his side with Jiang Tian. It was a little unexpected, but for some reason it seemed perfectly logical for this sentiment to come from Chili.

A friend didn’t actually mean much, neither did it resolve anything. Still, it parted the dark clouds temporarily, allowing them to breathe a little.

And so the winter break came just like this.

Fuzhong’s winter break was neither too long nor too short, it started from the 25th of the last month to the fifth day of Chinese New Year, avoiding the two peak periods of travel both in front and behind, vaguely making up 10 days. Before the holiday, the school held a simple grand assembly expressing a relatively uncomplicated sentiment: it would be the start of February once winter vacation ends, exactly a month from the minor gaokao at the start of March.

The so-called minor gaokao was the one in which they would participate in the exams for all the non-elective subjects all at once. For science students like Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, they would have to go for the history, geography, and political studies paper. They would get a ranking based on their scores, and those who scored an A could get an additional mark for their gaokao, those who scored As for all four could get five marks.

As for candidates who failed minor gaokao, they would not be qualified to participate in the formal gaokao, so all major schools placed heavy importance on this exam.

According to Fuzhong's tradition, the school would end lessons for their main subjects and strictly focus on these four, concentrating all their revisions for a month. According to Class A's tradition, they only had one requirement: All As.

It wasn't about "to their best abilities", it was a "must". Whoever that lost a single A was an embarrassment.

Therefore, Sheng Wang and the rest's winter vacation homework found an entire stack of humanities papers in them, sort of counting as a warmup. If it was before, he would have definitely completed all the homework in the first few days of break. However, this time round was an exception.

The moment winter break had just begun, he became "occupied with official duties". He would often sit cross-legged on the windowsill in Jiang Tian's bedroom, his phone would buzz non-stop, busy with god knows what. For the first two days, Jiang Tian was busy rushing up the courseware for Chu-ge's supplementary class, and didn't manage to keep an eye on him too. By the time he looked up again after completing his work, Sheng Wang had already disappeared.

Both Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou were around, the two couldn't afford to be too clingy with each other.

With the excuse of getting a glass of water, Jiang Tian went around the entire house, and did not find even a hair of a certain person. Therefore, he sent a message to Sheng Wang on WeChat upon returning to the bedroom.

Ok: Where?

You Say That Again: outside, you’re taking a break?

Jiang Tian raised an eyebrow — his sharp senses allowed him to tell something was up with the second half of the sentence — someone seemed to sneak out specifically while he was busy with work.

Ok: Why are you out?

You Say That Again: I have something going on, aren’t you gonna continue fiddling around with the software?

Ok: ……

A moment of silence, and Jiang Tian decided to head out to catch someone.

Chapter 088 - Gift

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

“Is That a Son You’re Giving to Me?”

He thought Sheng Wang must have snuck over to the rented apartment, only to be met with thin air when he opened the door. Still, there were more items in the house now, there was a carpet on the windowsill, along with two cushions. There was an additional beanbag couch that allowed for complete paralysis in a corner of the living room. A basketball rack was pasted on the wall, and there were still a few unopened packages by the entrance hall.

Jiang Tian opened up the package — they consisted of pairs of mugs, slippers, toothbrushes, towels and stuff. Regardless if they owned these items already, all of them were newly purchased nonetheless, completely demonstrating the generous wealth and excitement of a young master.

He placed the items neatly, one by one, and then stuffed the drinks inside the fridge. He also tossed the empty cardboard boxes in the dustbin downstairs, and made a phone call to Sheng Wang.

“Where are you?” Jiang Tian asked.

Sheng Wang likely heard the honks coming from the passing by electric scooters, and there was a trace of mirth that suggested he got his way in his voice. “You’re at the north gate?”

Jiang Tian did not want to admit that he had failed in his capture plan, and only grunted unwillingly after a while.

“I left after collecting a few packages.”

“I could tell.” Jiang Tian walked out of the residential area, and as he looked at the on-going traffic, he switched his phone from speaker mode to earpiece. “Where are you now?”

There seemed to be someone around Sheng Wang. He asked someone something in a low voice, and sent Jiang Tian his location. “It’s a little far, you wanna come?”

“Mn, wait for me,” Jiang Tian said.

Someone would usually be obnoxious about showing off anything and everything right before him. With this abnormal state of his, the way getting anything more than ambiguous words out of him was harder than squeezing out the last bit of toothpaste, his methods like laying out a trap for him, it was clear that he wanted to lure him towards that direction. If he still couldn't tell by now, then he should be kicked out from being his boyfriend.

Sheng Wang's location was indeed slightly far, all the way at the university town at the outskirts of the suburbs. He had to transfer twice on the train, and it took an hour to go all the way there. Jiang Tian could not figure what exactly was the gift that had to be prepared there.

After midnight today would be January 27th, his birthday. Even an idiot would know what exactly was the young master being all busy over. However, in order to cooperate with the intended effect of surprise the other person was going for, he could only deign himself to temporarily lower his intelligence, and pretend that he was an idiot.

A little stupid, sure, but he's happy to.

Jiang Tian initially thought that it would be some store or a restaurant, but he arrived to discover that the place was a small building next to the university dormitories. Sheng Wang guided him via voice messages. “Come up to the second floor, third room on the left. The one that says activity room on it.”

Jiang Tian went up the stairs, and saw a wooden sign hanging on the door. The words “Please knock before entering, thank you for your cooperation.” were written on it.

He was slightly mystified, and raised his hand to knock twice nonetheless.

The door opened from the inside. The person he had been searching for an entire afternoon was standing right there, holding up a tiny little thing as though he was presenting a treasure. His eyes were curved as he said to him, “Ge, lemme show you a precious thing.”

The tiny thing in his hands was extremely cooperative, and let out a sharp little cry.

It was a kitten.

The moment he saw it, Jiang Tian was suddenly a little lost in thought — it looked too similar to the one who was at Wu Tong Wai years ago, it even had the exact same extra stripes by its left ear.

For those few seconds, he nearly thought the cat named “Leader” had come to scam him once more, after 12 entire years passed.

Sheng Wang presented the cat towards Jiang Tian, saying, “I’ve already asked, we can pet it. Just that it’s a little young, so don’t use too much strength.”

Jiang Tian was frozen for a while, and kind of did not know where to even start.

It had been years, yet he still had the same reaction towards seeing a tiny baby kitten like this, he did not progress at all. It was Sheng Wang who lightly kicked his shoes and he finally then lifted his hand, scratching the kitten's ear. The tiny creature immediately closed its eyes, and purred with a "huluhulu".

"You came all the way here just to pet a cat?" Jiang Tian's voice was low as his hands were sunken in the kitten's soft fur, his fingertips touching Sheng Wang's.

"I came to get the adoption papers. I just finished filling up and signing the form, so it belongs to us in name now," Sheng Wang lifted his chin at the direction behind him.

There were a lot of cat beds and cat towers in the activity room, bowls of food and water in the corner. Three older female cats were basking under the sun where the lighting was better, kittens of all patterns flopped on their bellies. It was obvious that they weren't of the same litter.

An office table was placed next to the window, a stack of forms was by the edge of the table. Sheng Wang was referring to that.

“This school does cat rescues for stray cats, and people can adopt the kittens born here. Actually, there’s still four or five of the kittens with this pattern. The angle of your WeChat profile picture is too one-sided, I wasn’t exactly sure. So I asked for a few video clips, got Grandpa Ding to look at it. He said this one is the most similar, it was literally the split double of “Leader”.” After Sheng Wang said that, he looked towards him, hugging the kitten, “So, is it alike?”

Jiang Tian nodded.

“I wanted to drag you over here tomorrow at first, but the rescue society people have to go home for the new year soon, the old man helping to take care of the cats isn’t in charge of adoption too. I was scared that someone would come ahead of me if I do this too late, so I came to sign the paper today. The vice president went to photocopy some documents, I’m waiting for him here.” Sheng Wang gave a lengthy explanation.

Jiang Tian looked at him quietly. A moment later, he asked, “How long have you been searching for this?”

Stray cats are everywhere, pet shops have cats too. But to find one that was so similar down to the stripes was no different from finding a needle in a haystack. How much time and effort did this person put into this?

Sheng Wang was still rambling all over the place. “It’s fine, I have been keeping a look out before this, and later I even stole your profile picture and put out a reward for it, so it was easy to track this down.”

After he spoke, he was silent for a few seconds. He asked, “This birthday gift…...do you like it?”

“I do,” Jiang Tian said.

He was actually a sentimental person; perhaps his memory was too good, he was always regretful and rueful over certain things. Just like how

he always remembered how “Leader” slowly grew up, and slowly aged too. Yet, what was imprinted on his mind the deepest, was the scene of it curled up on its bed, its breathing coming to a stop.

The old man said next to his ears, “It’s already gone, don’t look anymore.”

He stubbornly squatted there for the entire day regardless.

The old man said, “Change that profile picture of yours already, wouldn’t it hurt more if you keep looking at it?”

Yet he kept this profile picture for several years.

The old man also said, the cat wouldn’t be here anymore after it aged. Yet……

See, someone has brought it back to him.

The sun hung low in the sky, hooked onto the tree branch in the far distance outside the window. The deep golden light slanted into the room, adorning a fuzzy halo around the boy holding the cat.

Jiang Tian wasn’t good with his words, he couldn’t come up with anything particularly pleasing. He looked at the kitten, his eyes lowered, and asked Sheng Wang, “Is that a son you’re giving to me?”

“Hold on.” Sheng Wang held that tiny creature with a single hand, and lifted its tail with the other, taking a serious look at the cat’s butt. “Yep, it’s a son.”

Jiang Tian looked aside, and laughter rumbled from his throat.

“The hell you’re laughing at,” Sheng Wang said, “this has to be better than dumplings now, right?”

“Yeah, much better.” Jiang Tian turned back to face him. “So whose surname is it taking after?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

The vice president came upstairs with the photocopied documents. Sheng Wang finally snapped out of his Ge’s unexpectedly shameless words. He said, “I haven’t given it a name yet, you can take your time and think. Either way, we can’t take it back for the time being.”

The vice president only heard the last line. He came over, passing the document to Sheng Wang, saying, “Yes, this kitten isn’t a month old yet, it still has to feed from the mother cat. Wait for around a month more, we’ll give it the first few shots, and we’ll get you guys to claim it when we’re done. It’s too young to be properly kept alive if you bring it back now.”

“Sure.”

“So who should I contact when it’s time?” the vice president asked.

Sheng Wang wanted to say that it wouldn’t make any difference, either way they would be coming to claim it together. However, the vice president already tapped into his WeChat QR code, and got Jiang Tian to add him as a friend.

“About that—” Sheng Wang spoke on instinct.

The vice president looked over here, visibly baffled. “What is it?”

It wasn’t anything much, really. He was only being oversensitive for a bit, and felt that adding both their WeChats wasn’t a good sign at all, as if

one of them suddenly wouldn't be able to make it or something. But it would seem weird if he actually says this out loud, so he merely smiled and waved. "It's nothing."

*

Jiang Tian received Zhao Xi's voice message on the train on the way back. He asked if they are free at night to come out for a meal.

"Our flight will be departing tomorrow because we want to avoid the peak period of the two days before the last month. Isn't your actual birthday tomorrow anyway? Your family will be celebrating for you, so Lin-zi and I wouldn't be taking that time away from you," Zhao Xi said.

Due to the gift, Jiang Tian was already in a good mood. He replied: Sure, my treat. Chu-ge just transferred money to me.

Supplementary class' Chu-ge was quite the true bro, seeing that it was going to be new year soon, he paid him the salary for the first batch of courseware in advance. He even gave Jiang Tian an additional big red

packet, hoping that he would put more effort after the year, and add some competition level questions in the courseware.

Jiang Tian took out a portion of the money and transferred it to Jiang Ou, saying: From Ji Huanyu.

But Jiang Ou did not reply, even when they had already exited the station at Wu Tong Wai. He was a little puzzled.

“What is it?” Sheng Wang noticed how he had frowned as he checked his phone quite a few times.

Jiang Tian said, “My mom didn’t reply.”

Jiang Ou’s phone never left her body, she usually replied to Jiang Tian’s messages especially promptly. Usually, upon sending messages like this, he would receive a reply within a few seconds. It had been nearly an hour today, so it was honestly a little abnormal.

Sheng Wang paused in his steps.

Jiang Tian noticed the change in the expression on his face, and added, “They were both busy when I left, she probably didn’t see it.”

Sheng Wang nodded. “What were they busy over?”

Jiang Tian was silent for a few seconds. “Sending invitations.”

Said invitations weren’t actually that formal. Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou planned to invite everyone to a meal a day after Jiang Tian’s birthday. Before that, they already notified their friends, just that today, they would be contacting all of them again as a form of courtesy and respect.

The friends they were inviting came from all sorts of places. Some they genuinely had a deep bond with, so they couldn’t just hang up after a couple of lines, they would have to stay on and chat for a bit. As for some, they met via their jobs, and for them they could not afford to mistreat them at all, and small-talks and jokes took up quite a bit of time too.

With this and that, their entire afternoon was spent like that.

Jiang Ou had something weighing on her mind for the past few days, her spirits were a little low. She was only slightly more energetic whenever she thought of how her son's birthday was arriving. However, it seemed that the heavens were intentionally playing a cruel trick on her — first of all, she zoned out and accidentally scalded herself while pouring water, next she accidentally broke the zip while changing clothes. In the afternoon, when she arranged for new year gifts to be sent to a few clients, she got the details mixed up.

In reality, all these came from her brooding, but it kept giving her the illusion that she was about to go through an unfortunate year. Sheng Mingyang took over the remaining few tasks, and got her to rest on the sofa for a bit.

Jiang Ou mumbled, "Maybe it's menopause or something, I keep feeling like there's something wrong."

Sheng Mingyang joked with her. "I've never seen a menopause with such a good temper, you probably just didn't have enough sleep for the past

few days.”

Jiang Ou replied with a “Mn”, and leaned against the sofa, letting her mind rest. She rested a while before she sat back up again, replied to a few messages from her friends on WeChat, and went through her Moments while she was at it.

She only briefly went through it before she stumbled upon Du Cheng’s status, posted in the afternoon.

He said: My headache is driving me insane, I feel like I can do literally everything, even the bad ones. He matched it with a joking picture of self-mockery.

Jiang Ou frowned. She scrolled a few times in a row straight, and skipped past that status. She then said to Auntie Sun, who was busy in the kitchen, “Sun-jie, do you still have white fungus soup? I want to drink a warm one, I don’t feel quite well.”

“I do, let me serve you some.”

Auntie Sun scooped a small bowl for her. When Jiang Ou reached out to receive it, her phone suddenly vibrated.

Her eyelid twitched for some reason. She lowered her eyes to look at the screen, and Du Cheng's WeChat profile picture had travelled from the bottom all the way to the top, next to it was the content of his message.

He said: I haven't been able to sleep lately, I kept thinking about the past. Maybe I've committed too many shameful deeds, that even my death will not be smooth-sailing. I know it's the new year, and saying these depressing things is just ruining the joy, but I don't know if I can even make it past this new year or not. Might as well make use of how my mind is just a puddle right now, my brain being all messed up, I'll apologise to you all in one shot.

He said: I'm a bastard, I'm a piece of shit, I'm a vile and filthy degenerate. Huanyu and I have wronged you.

The bottom of the bowl was suddenly boiling hot, Jiang Ou's hand recoiled, and the full bowl of silver fungus soup fell onto the marble floor. With a clash, the white porcelain bowl broke into pieces, the soup splattering all over.

*

Jiang Tian initially planned to give Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting a proper farewell with this dinner. Zhao Xi also planned to blatantly point out certain things before they leave while they have alcohol, and have a light chat with these two little brothers.

Unfortunately, not everything in life will go as you please. When things happen, they often come in a hurry, with no "1-2-3" to prepare you beforehand.

Jiang Tian called Jiang Ou quite a few times as he sat at the table, and the dialing tone had rung for more than 10 times with nobody picking up. Just as he was completely bewildered, Jiang Ou replied to him on WeChat.

She said: Was Ji Huanyu really the one who has been giving money all these years?

In the end, the dinner didn’t fully happen, ending in a hurry. Jiang Ou kept refusing to pick up the phone, and Sheng Wang called Sheng Mingyang several times out of desperation. In the end, a call finally made it through.

Sheng Mingyang said, “We are at the province hospital.”

Chapter 089 - Needle Tip

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can! Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

Translator's notes: :)

Then You Ought to Remember to Stay Guarded Against Your Son, Who Knows if He's the Same as Me?

"The province hospital?!" Sheng Wang looked at Jiang Tian, and asked frantically, "What happened to Auntie Jiang? Why is she in the hospital?"

"She's not unwell, she's not sick." Sheng Mingyang seemed to be caught up in a mess there too. He could tell that he was stuck right in the middle of a dispute that came like a bolt from the blue. His words were hurried, but he did not want to cause Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian to also panic. "It's some minor thing, you and Xiao-Tian — Xiao-Chen? Go notify the nurse."

He was only halfway through with his words and urgently ordered the person next to him before he continued saying to Sheng Wang, "Go home

with Xiao-Tian on your own later, as for dad—”

“No,” Sheng Wang was resolute. “We’re heading over now. What’s the room number?”

Sheng Mingyang’s voice was interspersed with the chaos. He briefly hesitated before he relented, “Fine, you can come over here. 903, be careful on your way here.”

Sheng Wang was afraid that Jiang Tian would worry, he hung up and immediately comforted, “Don’t worry, Auntie Jiang is alright, she isn’t sick. Something else probably happe—”

“Ji Huanyu.”

“What?”

“Ji Huanyu must have looked for her.”

Jiang Tian’s expression was stormy, he was smoldering with anger. As they spoke, he had already hailed a passing cab, and strided over to open the door. Sheng Wang paused, hurriedly notified Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting and quickly followed after him, entering the car too.

The driver probably had already been told to rush, the car shot off straight away.

Jiang Tian's family life was complicated, and would become an even greater mess the moment the name "Ji Huanyu" was involved. Zhao Xi did know about that, and he also understood very well that this was a forbidden topic to Jiang Tian, a taboo. Hence, he did not hastily get himself involved. He merely sent the two little brothers a message each: Call Ge if you need anything.

Jiang Tian was abnormally silent on the car ride over, the screen on his phone stopped at the chat with Jiang Ou. He stared at the bottom of the screen unblinkingly. The moment he saw Jiang Ou's question, he knew the cat was out of the bag.

He had spent so many years building a protective wall, laying brick by brick, only to fall short with someone swinging a hammer against it. Everything thus came crashing down with a boom.

Ji Huanyu must have said something to Jiang Ou, otherwise she wouldn't have suspected something out of nowhere.

Jiang Tian thought.

The province hospital was the same one where Old Man Ding had stayed previously, it wasn't too far from Wu Tong Wai — merely 3 km away. The driver managed to drive like a racer, and weaved between the vehicles on the crowded road, somehow managing to send them to their destination within 10 minutes.

They saw Ji Huanyu outside of ward 903.

He appeared from a turn of a corner, his coat and jacket wide open, dark circles around his eyes, half-shaven stubble still left on his jaws. His clothes suggested that he was a gentleman, but his behaviour had none of that fine aura. There was nothing but irritation and loathing in his tightly knitted brows. He nearly crashed into them with his phone in his grasp, and a "sorry" came rushing out of his mouth before he saw clearly who exactly he bumped into.

“Xiao-Tian?”

Ji Huanyu barely opened his mouth before Jiang Tian was grabbing his collar and swinging his fist at him. A chorus of shocked gasps appeared around them, and the corridor instantly fell into discord. It was a mess of people avoiding them, people trying to pull them apart, people trying to mediate and dissuade. His brain was filled with only buzzing, and managed to land several consecutive hits on him before he was dragged away by a hug from the back.

“Ge! Not here,” Sheng Wang immobilised him, “don’t fight over here.”

“Xiao-Tian!” Sheng Mingyang and Xiao-Chen’s voices were mixed within.

The nurses and doctors all rushed over here, they were surrounded by people, voices of men and women bled into each other, sharply jabbing at his brain — like frogs in a pond causing a giant racket.

“I’ve told you before, don’t you go look for her—” the air around Jiang Tian was stifling, a dark look on his face.

“I didn’t look for her!” Ji Huanyu staggered as he stood up straight, the look on his face equally ugly. “I’ve never looked for her!”

“Who else could it be but you?”

“I……”

He faltered, and an expletive exploded from his mouth in front of everyone in an unprecedented moment. He lowered his head as he mouthed “fuck”, rubbing the cut by the corner of his mouth.

“Xiao-Tian! We’ll continue later, go inside first,” Sheng Mingyang cut in horizontally to grab Jiang Tian’s elbows, and Sheng Wang was half hugging, half dragging Jiang Tian from behind, pulling him inside 903.

Jiang Ou stood right inside there, her usually neatly tied up hair was a disheveled mess, quite a few strands fell by the side of her face. Her eyes were lowered, the corner of her lips were turned down. Her eyes were slightly puffy, possibly having just cried, or she was simply over exhausted.

Jiang Tian wanted to call out to her, but before he spoke, he spotted the person holding onto the railing of the bed.

For a split second, he thought this person was both familiar and unfamiliar to him. He was unfamiliar towards the way the person was gravely ill, but was familiar in regards to the mannerism the person had upon setting his eyes on him.

He stilled for two seconds and finally recalled: this was the man who was entangled up with Ji Huanyu in the dim bedroom.

Jiang Tian could not remember the person’s face. A long time of repulsion in his childhood allowed him to forget his appearance, like an intentionally applied mosaic. However, he remembered the deer in the headlight look in his eyes — that moment of eye contact had disgusted him for many years.

To the point that the moment he saw him again, the overwhelming feeling of nausea had hit him once more, turning his stomach upside down.

Jiang Tian’s expression instantly chilled, and touched the scar behind his neck subconsciously. This action was not missed by Jiang Ou; she froze for quite a while, and slowly looked up, her voice hoarse as she asked, “Xiao-Tian, you know him?”

Although this was a question, her tone was already certain and numb.

Jiang Tian shook his head, so slightly that it was as though he simply moved a little.

“You know him,” Jiang Ou said yet again.

This time, Jiang Tian did not deny that. He fell into a silence instead.

“How did you know him?” Jiang Ou’s voice was soft, and rather slow too. Standing up was undoubtedly the only thing she was doing at the moment, but it seemed that even that was taking all of her strength. “You saw him before? In that old house next to Fuzhong?”

Several moments later, Jiang Tian’s brows furrowed as he faintly replied. “Mn.”

“So……” Jiang Ou choked, like she was smothering the turmoil of emotions within her, while simultaneously trying to keep her disgust down. “So you already knew? You knew what sort of relationship your dad…...Ji Huanyu was in with him?”

“Mn.”

In that instant, Jiang Ou’s heart ached a little. However, the absurdity of the situation washed over her like a tsunami, to the point that she was struggling within, overlooking that tiny bit of heartache.

She said, “So I’m the only one who didn’t know. Just me, just like a fool who didn’t know a single thing at all.”

“Xiao-Ou—” Ji Huanyu called out.

“DON’T CALL OUT TO ME!” Jiang Ou’s voice was nearly broken. She was usually gentle and calm, she had never raised her voice to such a shrill pitch before. “DON’T CALL OUT TO ME, I’M *DISGUSTED*!”

Actually, before she came to the hospital, she thought she could stay rational. Du Cheng sent her a lot of messages, and she read all of them — line by line, word by word — on the sofa. She did not break down, nor was she dazed. All she felt was a chill, a chill so cold that it caused the cavity of her chest and the lengths of her limbs to tremble.

Du Cheng said, “Every single cent that Huanyu transferred over to Xiao-Tian was rejected, he did not keep anything. He kept feeling like he didn’t fulfill his responsibility.” When she saw that, her mind had yet to turn blank, she even replied to Jiang Tian’s message.

She thought she could remain collected, she did not realise that her emotions were simply too intense and were delayed along the way. It was only at this moment, then her feelings surged up and erupted. And by the time she realised, her entire body was shaking, her eyes instantly reddened.

She said, “I really feel so disgusted, Ji Huanyu. I was together with you since I was 18, do you even know how many years that was? I’ll ever only turn 18 once in my whole life, can you return that back to me? Have

you ever counted how many times I've quarreled with my mom over you?! Even when she's old and can't remember anyone anymore she still grabbed onto me, telling me, don't set all of your heart on that boy, mother knows people better than you. How many times have I coaxed her? How many times did I tell her to not worry? My mom had never stopped worrying even until she passed. Can you bring her back to me? You told me at the start, you'll take care of our son. Did you? When I brought him back, he would even squirm away even if I was just tucking his blanket over him in his sleep, did you know?"

Ji Huanyu froze there, a humiliating wreck. It was as though he was forcefully paraded on the streets, but also doing some self-reflection at the same time. He seemed to be both resentful and ashamed.

"You didn't know. You only knew to muck around with Du Cheng," Jiang Ou said.

It was the first time her words were aimed so sharply, so directly at someone. She was completely blunt, and the words were not sandpapered

down at all. Like a hysterical swan song before a complete breakdown.

“Xiao-Wang—”

Sheng Wang was suddenly summoned, and looked at her dazedly.

Jiang Ou pointed at the man by the side of the bed. “Do you know what kind of person he is?”

Sheng Wang moved his lips. He felt a little sorry for Jiang Ou, wanting for her to stop doing this to herself. Because every word from her was a double-edged blade, stabbing both Ji Huanyu and herself. Still, he did not have the grounds nor the right to dissuade her. It wasn’t just him — nobody here had the rights to.

“He was Auntie’s middle-high school classmate, he sat right behind Auntie.” Jiang Ou said in all seriousness, “Auntie treated him as one of her best friends, that kind of friend where I’ll be godmother to after he has kids.”

“Such a good friend, and he ended up on the same bed with my husband.” Jiang Ou was still speaking to Sheng Wang, but her eyes were fixed on Ji Huanyu. Her hands, dangled by the side, kept trembling. “A man and another man — how disgusting is that?”

She knew Ji Huanyu was full of pride, he did not like to have the worst of him exposed before outsiders. Therefore she had to say that, she even said them to someone who had the least of anything to do with him at all.

All her attention was focused on Ji Huanyu, so she did not discover the moment she said that, Sheng Wang’s face turned deathly white.

He blinked ever so slightly, and retreated a step. Jiang Tian grabbed his wrist.

It was the first time Ji Huanyu had encountered a Jiang Ou in this state, his sore spots were trampled all over. That bit of guilt instantly vanished, and was replaced with a chest full of anger born from humiliation. He took a deep breath, and said with restraint, “Xiao-Ou, I’ve

never wanted to disgust you on purpose. I swear, what I felt for you when we got together was real, I—”

Jiang Ou shut her eyes, as though she had blocked him outside. She had lost too many times against Ji Huanyu, she was already scarred from it. Before, she tried to believe every line he spouted; now, she refused to believe a single letter. She even sunken into a state of panic, feeling like nobody around her was innocent, nobody was telling the truth.

“Okay, let’s not talk about this. I know you wouldn’t believe me even if I tried.” Ji Huanyu ended the topic, and tried to explain, “I’ve promised Xiao-Tian to not look for you, to not cause you trouble. Even if Xiao-Tian didn’t bring that up, that’s what I intended too. Neither did I have the nerve to go look for you, even I myself thought I’m disgusting and vile. But Du Cheng is different, he always thought you knew, just that you’ve made peace with it after time passed. Du Cheng—”

“Are you helping your adultery partner explain himself to me?” Jiang Ou said, “Or were you homosexual in the first place, you were already with him in high school, and I’m the one who got inbetween the two of you?”

Ji Huanyu was a little agitated. “No, I just—”

Jiang Ou’s face was completely drained of blood. These words were meant to provoke Ji Huanyu, but the moment she said it, she then realised the person she was truly provoking was herself.

If that was really the case, then her whole life had been a giant joke. She had never made a single right choice, she was blind from the start to the end.

She felt her stomach turn, and her legs were starting to give way. Therefore, she said to Ji Huanyu, her face pale, “I don’t want to hear anything from you. I want to vomit whenever I see people like you two.”

“People like us?” Ji Huanyu’s patience was exhausted at last. His expression chilled as he asked pointedly, “What kind? The kind that got

with a man? Homosexuals?”

His personality was rather extreme. When he truly fumed with rage, he wasn’t selective about his words at all, he only wanted to shoot back all the arrows aimed at him, specifically making sure he was hurting the person where it would hurt the most; the thing that occupied the person’s heart. There was probably only a son that was that to Jiang Ou.

Therefore, Ji Huanyu glanced at Jiang Tian, and acutely caught a whiff of that *something* between him and Sheng Wang. Ji Huanyu sneered, and said to Jiang Ou, “Then you ought to remember to stay guarded against your son, who knows if he’s the same as me?”

Jiang Ou and Sheng Mingyang looked at Jiang Tian on instinct.

Before their gazes landed on them, Sheng Wang withdrew his hand from Jiang Tian’s fingers.

Jiang Tian’s grasp on him was firm, so his removal was equally firm.

It was just to cover up, but the moment his wrist slipped out of Jiang Tian’s fingers, his heart plummeted — like he was standing in a malfunctioning lift, and there was suddenly nothing but air beneath his feet.

Jiang Ou was startled for only a split second. The very next, she straightened up and slapped Ji Huanyu.

She was obedient as a child, lively as a youth. In her middle age, she ended up being frail and timid. More than 40 years of her life, and she had never laid hands on anyone; this was the first.

She shielded Jiang Tian behind her, saying to Ji Huanyu, “Don’t worry, Xiao-Tian has nothing in common with you, he’ll *never* be the same as you.”

This slap seemed to have drained all of Jiang Ou’s strength, and after that hit, her entire person was swaying — she was about to collapse. Sheng Mingyang hurriedly supported her with lightning reflexes, and turned to call for the nurse.

A bunch of people rushed in in a flurry, and poured out of the room with Jiang Ou and the rest.

Sheng Wang could not recall how he followed them home, he only remembered the way everyone looked terrible. His head was a mess, like a flock of birds, dispersed. When this entire mess was over and they were home, Sheng Wang sat on the couch, and belatedly felt a stinging pain on his palms. He looked down, and both his palms were riddled with a line of red marks, the skin nearly broken and bleeding.

He clenched too tightly……

Auntie Sun did not return home at night that day, and was busy all over in the Sheng household. The atmosphere in the house was heavy and depressing, everyone spoke softly and slowly, like they were all thoroughly worn out.

Jiang Tian leaned against the sofa, deep in thought in silence. A long while later, Sheng Wang turned to look at him, and saw that he had unknowingly fallen asleep with his phone in his hand. Yet, his brows were furrowed.

Sheng Wang stared at the hands of the clock, lost. He watched the hands tick and tick, finally reaching midnight.

He wanted to kiss Jiang Tian, telling him: Ge, happy birthday.

But he couldn’t bring himself to say it, because there was no way for Jiang Tian to be happy at all.

Not a single bit.

Chapter 090 - Blunt Knife

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His Words Finally Managed to Cheer Jiang Tian Up, and Jiang Tian Laughed Briefly.

Jiang Tian did not have a good sleep, but he still had several dreams anyway.

He dreamt of Du Cheng sticking his head out behind a cloud of smoke, saying, “Huanyu, he’s already this big? The last time I saw him was 10 years ago.”

He dreamt of Ji Huanyu saying to Jiang Ou, “Your son likes boys too, happy yet?”

He dreamt of Jiang Ou s c r e a m i n g, and as for him, he stood at the long alley in Wu Tong Wai. Leader, aged and elderly, was unmoving as it laid before his feet. Old Man Ding took a look at the cat and him, saying, “What a difficult situation, there’s no reviving. Leave.” And then closing the door to the courtyard right in front of his face.

He stood at the same spot, feeling both tired and ridiculous. He definitely wasn't holding anything at all, but he wanted to prop his hands on his knees and rest for a bit.

He tried a few times, but no matter what he couldn't bend over. All he felt was fatigue and agitation, and then he was startled awake from his dream.

Jiang Tian wasn't sure where he fell asleep at the point his eyes shot open — all he saw was Sheng Wang sitting before him, a gentle light reflected in his eyes, his gaze focusing solely on him.

"Ge," Sheng Wang breathed, and then he leaned closer, resting on a single elbow. He kissed the centre of his brows, the corner of his eyes, and his lips. He softly said, "You're 18 now, I love you."

Those feelings of agitation and sadness caused by his dreams instantly vanished; like someone had temporarily unloaded the steel plate pressing on his back, allowing him to bend over and catch his breath.

Jiang Tian turned the tides, grabbing the back of Sheng Wang's neck wanting to kiss him back. However, he suddenly recalled that they were still in the living room — the most dangerous place in the house with people chancing upon them at any moment.

He stilled, and released his hand.

"What time is it?" Jiang Tian asked in a low voice. He had already sat up straight before he discovered a woolen blanket covering his body, only that it slid to his waist with his movement just now.

"Around 1.20am+." Sheng Wang reported the time without even looking at his phone.

Jiang Tian felt his heart melting into a puddle. He reached out, and touched the other person's face. He asked, "Have you been waiting all this time?"

"Nope, I've gone up and down the stairs quite a few times, and checked the time N number of times impatiently." Sheng Wang pointed at the remote control on the coffee table, "I was just considering if I should hit you awake and pretend to be changing the channel. You probably felt the murderous vibes, so you woke up by yourself."

Jiang Tian laughed, and just as he wanted to say something, someone opened the door to the bedroom in the distance. A pale white light leaked out from the gap, a long slanted line, directly cutting the sofa into two.

The two on the sofa broke apart in a hurry.

Sheng Mingyang shuffled over in his slippers, and softly asked, propping himself against the sofa, “Xiao-Tian’s awake? Hungry? Sun-jie’s white fungus soup is still being kept warm in the pot.”

“I’m not.” Jiang Tian lifted the blanket, and glanced towards the direction of the bedroom.

He was no good with being warm with people and getting along with them, he did not like to express goodwill. However, that did not mean that he was irrational. He knew no matter if it was Ji Huanyu or Du Cheng, no matter the trauma they’ve caused to Jiang Ou and him, none of that had anything to do with the Sheng household. Sheng Mingyang could have totally chosen to not bear with any of this, but he accepted everything without a complaint.

This gave Jiang Tian a rather odd feeling — it was as though the burden he had been solely shouldering was suddenly taken upon by Sheng Mingyang. He was supposed to be a little more relaxed now, but the truth was he didn't feel that way at all. This was different from what he had long since been used to for many years, but rationally speaking, he knew he should either thank him or apologise.

"Today—"

Jiang Tian was momentarily silent. The second he opened his mouth again, he was interrupted by Sheng Mingyang, "What happened today was an accident, it has nothing to do with the both of you. Even if there's something, that is up to us adults to communicate. I initially didn't want to let you two visit the hospital…...Whatever, things have already turned out like this, so don't think too much about it. It has already been years."

Those were indeed his words, but his brows were knitted. Perhaps it was the fact that he wasn't asleep this late into the night, weariness was all

over his face. Maybe for every person that said “Whatever, don’t think about it anymore”, they were simply expressing their wishful thinking aloud.

Jiang Tian watched his complexion, and was silent once more.

Sheng Wang glanced at his Ge, grabbed the blanket and started folding it, changing the topic. “And the reason you’re out, dad…?”

“Oh,” Sheng Mingyang looked at the empty mug in his hand, “your Auntie Jiang is slightly feverish, I’m getting some water for her later.”

“She got a fever?”

“Don’t worry, she already took some medicine, just that her sleep is slightly fitful. She freaked out the moment the lights were off. After receiving such a blow today, anyone would be out of sorts. If it was me, I’ll probably fall apart for quite a well. She isn’t someone who likes to get angry in the first place, she would bottle up whatever unhappiness inside of her. It might be a good thing that she’s letting it all out today, actually. I got a friend to book an appointment with a doctor, I’ll be bringing her there

after the new year for a little chat. As for now…...please pardon each other a little more.”

“Okay, it’s getting late. Tonight has been difficult, do hurry up and get some sleep too.” Sheng Mingyang patted the back of the sofa, and suddenly turned his eyes towards the muted television. He pointed at Sheng Wang, seemingly joking, “You said you wanted to watch a movie for a bit here, you’re telling me that it’s a silent film you’re watching?”

For that split second, Jiang Tian felt Sheng Mingyang’s gaze sweep past him too. Whether it was intentional or casual was up to anyone’s guess.

Sheng Wang’s lips moved, saying, “What else was I supposed to do? My Ge’s asleep, should I have blasted him awake with the stereo sound system?”

Sheng Mingyang urged them again, and went to the kitchen with the mug. Soon after, there was a creak, and he closed the door and returned to the bedroom. Only, the door wasn’t fully shut — the light went from a slab to an extremely thin line, still landing on the sofa nonetheless.

The two boys sat at the extreme ends of the sofa, becoming two lonely, distinct islands with the cut of that line.

A while later, someone passed through that line, and grabbed Jiang Tian's hand, waving it. He said, "Wanna head upstairs?"

"Mn." Jiang Tian glanced at the direction of the bedroom, and pulled him back to the second floor's bedroom.

After that fitful sleep he had gotten on the sofa, Jiang Tian wasn't actually sleepy. Sheng Wang's eyelids were the ones that threatened to close any time soon instead. Yet, he kept hovering behind him non-stop, like he had done something wrong or something.

As he washed up, Sheng Wang leaned against the door. He made his bed, Sheng Wang was helping by the side, holding a corner of the quilt. He took out that stack of learning material from Chu-ge, Sheng Wang took a book and said he could help a bit.

“What’s up with you?” In the end, Jiang Tian had no other choice but to turn and catch him.

Sheng Wang stared at his fingers. He was momentarily quiet before he held them from the back, saying, “I’ll never pull my hand away again.”

Jiang Tian was briefly startled before he realised what exactly was Sheng Wang referring to. Initially, he kind of did not know if he should cry or laugh, which was closely followed up with a surge of even more complicated emotions within him. He suddenly didn’t know what he should say in reply.

A long while later, he finally blinked, saying, “I’m afraid that’s impossible.”

Of course he knew why Sheng Wang reacted that way — if he didn’t do so, with the onslaught on disgusting people Ji Huanyu was bent on going on, he might say something even much more insane. He would have probably targeted every single word at him; he was the last line of defence for Jiang Ou, if even this line collapsed, then she wouldn’t be too far off from full blown insanity.

Except…...he was indeed rational, he indeed understood why those things happened. He completely understood all the reasons, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t feel upset the moment the space between his fingers was emptied. This was the helplessness between him and Sheng Wang, which they had no solutions to for the time being.

Hell, even if they argue, they clash with each other, they keep disagreeing on certain issues, or if they start to feel boredom, ennui, dullness after the test of time, at the very least all the causes of conflict stemming from normal circumstances aren't as hard to accept. Because when people stand at the finishing lines of arguments, they would be more fed up than they are in love, so they wouldn’t feel too sad about it.

However, they had none of that — only rationality forcing their hands. Just like what he was doing right now.

“I’m the person of highest risk right now.” Jiang Tian was slightly mocking himself, but he gradually turned grave. “My mom and your dad likely took what Ji Huanyu said to heart.”

“I don’t think so, everyone could tell that he was a cornered rat at that time,” Sheng Wang said.

Jiang Tian shook his head. “They heard him — can’t change that fact.”

They might think that it was absurd, they wouldn’t really believe that. However, words are like blades, leaving a mark in the heart no matter what, and then rear its head in some random moment that nobody saw coming.

No matter if they were doing it intentionally, they would definitely, subconsciously become more sensitive and paranoid.

Sheng Wang lowered his eyes, and tightened his grasp on Jiang Tian’s fingers. Time ticked for a while before he spoke, “My dad is half open and half old-fashioned, I still remember a long time ago, someone mentioned……”

He paused, and then continued, “a topic related to homosexuality. He did not react badly to it, he didn’t say anything about person ABC being disgusting because of that, or that they are screwed up or something. Last

time, when they were talking about that case in the hospital, what happened with the old man with the rest was just quickly following up with the conversation. You know my dad's personality, he was just playing along with what other people say, it doesn't necessarily represent his own stand on the issue."

Sheng Wang actually omitted some details. Sheng Mingyang was indeed a fifty-fifty of being open and being traditional. He was accepting of who other people's son liked, no matter if female or male, no matter if human or non-human . He would even sincerely bless them with a big red packet. It was because he did not like to gossip, it wasn't like it was any of that was under his purview.

However, things were different when it came to his own son.

Sheng Wang did not intend to bring those up, he only wanted to let Jiang Tian hear the nice things. "As for Auntie Jiang…...it's because of her own personal baggage. After the new year, the doctor will chat with her, she'll move past it, and then everything will be much easier after she no

longer has any prejudice towards this group of people because of that scum."

"High school is too close to here, but it'll be different in university. They can't reach us there, unlike Fuzhong, where the teachers more or less know both my dad and your mom." Sheng Wang said, "I'll work harder, get into the same school as you, and then rent a house, bringing our cat son along. There's a saying that goes 'distance makes the heart fonder', and when their hearts grow fond enough of us, we can slowly whittle this out with them. There has to be a day when they'll finally accept this."

"My dad dares to transfer me out of school at the drop of a hat, he wouldn't be able to do that once we get to uni. No way he could still say 'Leave, in order to stop you from dating, we'll change schools' by the time I'm already in Tsinghua and Peking U, right?"

His words finally managed to cheer Jiang Tian up, and Jiang Tian laughed briefly.

Sheng Wang was instantly in the mood, and fiercely kissed him for a long time after throwing himself onto him on the bed.

When it came down to it, it was simply an issue of it not being the right time. Sometimes, Sheng Wang would wish for time to fly faster, the best case was him lying down, closing his eyes, and waking up to already being an adult, in university, or even working. Only, if he met Jiang Tian during those times, he dreaded that things would turn out differently entirely.

So they merely needed to wait, to endure past these two years.

When they chatted, words like “high school” and “university” were over in a matter of a few syllables, spending less than two seconds. Yet, when they opened their eyes, the days were still slowly trudging on ahead.

The easing of tension they worked so hard on last night was utterly demolished in the early morning next day — Jiang Ou was truly in a terrible state. She did try her best to get herself to calm down, there was

mirth in her voice, she got Auntie Sun to be busy with her in the kitchen, wanting to prepare a delicious birthday meal for Jiang Tian.

She fully occupied her time, leaving no room for idling as she found one task to do after another. However, all it took was a line from Jiang Tian, saying that he was heading out with Sheng Wang, and she accidentally broke an entire claypot.

The entire boiling hot pot of stewed vegetables spilled all over the kitchen floor, scalding her feet bright red.

“Auntie, we’re just retrieving his birthday cake, it was pre-ordered from before,” Sheng Wang explained, bewildered. He didn’t know what was on her mind, nor could he tell if she didn’t manage to catch the second half of Jiang Tian’s sentence.

“I know, I know,” Jiang Ou softly repeated that several times. She sat on the sofa, and ointment was applied on the scalded area. She then apologetically said, “Auntie is fine, I accidentally zoned out just now, that’s all.”

With that, neither of them brought up leaving the house, and got the cake shop to deliver the cake instead.

There were two cakes, both of which Sheng Wang had ordered quite a while ago. One was for eating, the other was a fondant that could be kept. He actually got this particular idea from a WeChat group chat — Carp and Chili were inviting each other to go learn how to make that during the winter break, saying that it could be preserved for a long time upon completion.

The fondant cake he customised for Jiang Tian consisted of a little house. Before a little house was an entire group of chibi people — Jiang Ou, Old Man Ding, Gao Tianyang, Zhao Xi, Lin Beiting, himself, and a cat, all surrounding the tiny figure that represented Jiang Tian. It was rich and lively. He hesitated for a long time, and seeing that they were father and son after all, he pulled strings and added Sheng Mingyang too.

There was a sign by the house, saying: The Best 18th Year.

However, by the time the cake arrived, the kitchen was a mess, and there was nothing but dead quiet in the house.

The cake was in a transparent box. It looked extremely pretty from afar, but a closer look would reveal flaws. Sheng Wang got the shop to use the best sugar they could find, so that the cake could be kept for many years. However, maybe it bumped into something along the way or something else happened, but there were a few cracks in certain areas.

Sheng Wang was a little frantic, the delivery man kept apologising. It was Jiang Tian who took over the cake in the end, saying, “I’m bringing it upstairs.”

This was the 18th year of his life, given to him by the person he liked. Everyone he cared about was around him, everything was perfect, he had to treasure it. Even though reality was the complete opposite.

In lieu of how Jiang Ou’s fever was on and off and was in an unstable state each day, Sheng Mingyang had no choice but to indefinitely postpone

the banquet that was already arranged, and even had to give an explanation to everyone invited.

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian helped him take on a significant portion of trifle tasks, that was the reason why he wasn’t up to his neck in stress.

This was what Sheng Mingyang said to other people on the phone: “Thank god I have two easy sons.”

He was actually quite nice towards Jiang Tian, but he kept the distance he ought to keep anyway. It was because he knew that Jiang Tian just wasn’t anyone that would easily open up to people. In the past, he had never used “my son” to describe Jiang Tian, but he constantly brought these words up for the past two days.

These words, to Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang’s ears, became a form of emphasis. A reminder. Just as what Jiang Tian said before, Ji Huanyu’s words were like a blunt knife, carving out a mark in their hearts. Not to the point that it would bleed, but enough for it to vaguely throb in pain.

To the extent that no matter if it was Sheng Mingyang or Jiang Ou, they would constantly subconsciously observe Jiang Tian, watching out for his every move.

Under that kind of supervision, the situation of someone abruptly tearing his hand away had happened a lot of times. So frequent, that even they themselves were a little numb.

Hence, the last day of winter break, Sheng Wang went downstairs for a meal with a phone in his hands, and sat at the most left corner of the sofa as he waited. A moment later, Jiang Tian also came downstairs, and sat at the most right out of habit. The line of light in the middle that leaked out from the bedroom was already gone, but the distance between them was like the mountains and seas.

Sheng Wang stared at that empty area, and a strange thought occurred in his mind.

If there wasn’t that rented apartment waiting for them in the distance, if the environment he and Jiang Tian were in all day long was like *that*, if sitting at two ends, clearly drawing up boundaries between them reflexively was already a part and parcel of their daily lives, then could they still be considered lovers?

It was as though a circle of people with unclear features stood around them; when he spoke, they'd stab Jiang Tian. When Jiang Tian spoke, they’d stab him.

If this carried on long enough, will they one day be unable to clearly differentiate who was the one behind their pain?

Chapter 091 - Ice Arrows

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“Don’t Bother Checking.”

The house that was White Horse Alley had been transformed into a barrel of gunpowder, ready to explode at any moment. When Sheng Wang was packing up his luggage, he accidentally overheard Jiang Ou and Sheng Mingyang’s conversation. To be fair, it wasn’t quite a conversation — it was Jiang Ou apologising one-sidedly. She had been high strung and temperamental as of late, what she did the most every day was apologising. Nobody could withstand that, and nobody could really criticise her for that too.

She felt that her current state was very problematic, and that was unfair towards Sheng Mingyang. She wanted to separate for a while. All Sheng Mingyang did was to comfort her, saying, “It’s fine, don’t think too much. Healing first is more important.” And then he went to the balcony, smoking for a very long time.

Sheng Wang instinctively felt that the two might not end up getting married after all.

He thought that he would feel glad or regretful when this happened, but in actuality he did not feel a single thing at all. He and Jiang Tian were standing on a tightrope, shoulder to shoulder — trying to keep their balance alone was sapping all their energy, they had no time to care about anything else at all.

Fuzhong would be holding a level parent-teacher meeting when school reopens. For one, they wanted to chat about the results for the finals last semester, and secondly, they wanted to prepare them for the minor gaokao at the start of March.

The meeting will be more formal than the previous others, the school was deathly afraid that some people wouldn’t bring it up to their parents, so they went straight to sending everyone a message via the contact list.

Funnily enough, this period of time was probably the longest Sheng Mingyang had ever stayed at home. He received the notice from Big Mouth

Xu, and immediately agreed to go without any doubt.

He initially wanted to go by himself, wanting to let Jiang Ou stay home and rest, and get Auntie Sun to take care of her. After much pondering however, he also figured that having the chance to go out and take her mind off things, having a change in environment, would help Jiang Ou escape the things that haunted her, to stop burrowing deeper into it.

Sheng Wang wanted to make use of the opportunity of school reopening to breathe, but ended up back at square one because of this parent. As such, he was down and spiritless on his way to school.

Sheng Mingyang was the one driving. He eyed his son from the rearview mirror quite a few times, and finally asked, laughingly, “What is it, you still can’t bear for holidays to end even when you’re this big now?”

The moment he heard this, Sheng Wang felt that this line coming from Sheng Mingyang of all people was way too absurd. He honestly couldn’t resist anymore, and a corner of his lips jerked; a casual act of self-mockery. Jiang Tian’s hand dangled on the seat, and in a spot where Sheng

Mingyang and Jiang Ou couldn’t see them, he picked at his little finger gently.

The irritation in Sheng Wang’s heart dwindled by a little. His eyes were outside, but his finger hooked onto Jiang Tian tightly. When Sheng Mingyang looked at him once more, he half-heartedly grunted a reply, saying, “‘M a little sleepy from getting up too early, Imma nap a bit.”

He grabbed a cushion off-handedly, placed it against the window, and shut his eyes.

There are 24 hours in a day and 365 days in a year. Setting aside school and sleep, the remaining time was small change. After putting it that way, they weren’t too far from graduating either.

He flipped through many books and did many questions over the break. Sometimes, he’d have the illusion that as long as they tried with all their might to keep running — faster than anyone else — the days would shorten a little more.

Sheng Mingyang had a lot of friends. Before he even entered Fuzhong, his phone — his WeChat, buzzed non-stop. It was as though he wasn’t there for a parent-teacher meeting, but for a gathering.

He had been troubled by Jiang Ou’s issues for the entire winter break, and it was only at this time then he realised that it had been a long while since he paid any attention to his son’s academics. He absorbed information vigorously like a student studying for a test at the last minute, he took in anything and everything.

There wasn't much, actually. Most of it was about his grades and performance in school, and they were basically all praises. Yet, Sheng Wang felt like he and Jiang Tian were like organisms cultivated in a transparent petri dish, allowing people to verbally report their daily observations and their growths. The first sentence may be a praise, the next would forever remain an unknown. And all they could do was to listen.

“Did you catch that? Xiao-Tian is so amazing, other than the time he was a little affected by sending the old mister to the hospital, he’s first in the

level every exam. He performed especially well for finals," Sheng Mingyang hung up, and generously heaped praises upon Jiang Tian. Jiang Ou also sported a gentle and pretty smile.

Adults expressed even their prejudice in a "polite, respectful" form. At this moment, it was as though they had already forgotten how they watched Jiang Tian, intentionally or not — like the animosity caused by Ji Huanyu never existed in the first place.

"Wang-zai did quite well too," Sheng Mingyang smiled as he said, "Second place. To be honest, the fact that you can catch up to this extent, dad is really happy about it. I can tell you really put in a lot of effort."

Sheng Wang replied with a "Mn".

For some reason, this "second place" that came from those phone calls always felt so surreal. He didn't feel quite real; he wasn't happy, nor did he feel like a burden had been lifted off his back.

Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Ou were barely in school before they were guided towards the hall by the teacher, that was where the level's parent-teacher meeting was held. Big Mouth Xu was as pleased as punch, and he even brought them to see the Wall of Honour.

Sheng Wang only tapped Jiang Tian after he watched them go in the distance. The two went up Mingli Block, a few steps at a time, and then their blood, frozen solid for a while now, started flowing again at last.

Sheng Wang took huge strides up the second floor. He turned around, hands in his pockets, and was smiling as he walked backwards, his eyes on Jiang Tian. He said, "Heard that? Second place. What did I say last time? I'll definitely touch the tiger's butt in a semester."

Jiang Tian let out a "Mn", and his pace matched with his, neither too fast nor too slow. When he grunted that reply, it was still filled with the habitual gloominess from the holiday. After a few seconds, he melted at last, and cracked a joke. "Was it nice to touch?"

Sheng Wang was about to open his mouth, but He Jin hurried down with a few papers in hand. She let out a sigh of relief when she saw Jiang Tian. “Why are you so late? Here, come with me to the hall.”

“Why?”

“You’re first in the level, so you’re the student rep. You need to say a couple of things for the parent-teacher meeting later,” He Jin shook the paper in her hand, “Just a small bit, you only need to read them out loud.”

Sheng Wang stood by the side for a while, and tapped Jiang Tian’s shoulder. “I’m heading up first, we’ll talk about it later.”

We’ll talk about it later, this line filled up their entire break.

The instances of them getting interrupted and then having to find another time to continue happened too often, they were already way too used to saying it. Only, most of the interruptions precisely occurred at the interesting moments — after that time, there was no longer any meaning in continuing.

When Sheng Wang headed upstairs, He Jin called out to him too, reminding, “You performed well for finals this time, do bring your belongings back upstairs during self-study. I’ve informed the class monitor and the rest to squeeze out a seat for you.

“Huh?” Sheng Wang gaped.

He Jin laughed. “What, a winter break was enough to break your mind, and slow down your reaction speed? You’re the second place, you’re coming back to Class A!”

Sheng Wang barely entered Class B before Carp and Gao Tianyang headed down too, waving at him while leaning forward against the backdoor. Sheng Wang informed the deskmates in front and behind him, grabbed his bag and left.

Gao Tianyang had once again managed to struggle his way into staying in Class A, along with how happy he was feeling for Sheng Wang, he seemed overly excited, nearly dancing for joy. “I don’t think you had the time to poke around after arriving this late, right? I’ve managed to

eavesdrop for you in the office — Sheng-ge, you're only five marks away from Tina-ge this time. Old Wu said two minor mistakes of yours were quite a pity. I think there is a threat to Tian-ge's reign now, we can anticipate you two's fight for the throne for this semester."

Carp said, "He Jin got us to spare a seat for you, the empty seat we squeezed out were too in front. Since you're tall and have no problems with your vision, sitting in front will just block the people behind you. So we're still giving you your old seat, in front of Jiang Tian's desk."

It was only at this time that it had truly sunken in for Sheng Wang that he was back in Class A already. The dumbass decision to change classes back then finally had a full-stop to it.

After taking so many twists and turns, he's going to sit in front of Jiang Tian once more. The days ahead suddenly became clear — listening to the lessons, doing questions, participating in competitions. Maybe he could fight for a few first places, maybe he could win a few awards with

Jiang Tian next to him, turning the Wall of Honour into a matching puzzle game, seeing who has more pictures of them on the wall.

Once he thought about that, it seemed to be pretty good too.

This was probably the only thing worth being happy about as of late. Sheng Wang followed them upstairs, and asked offhandedly, “Then how many have the misfortune to get exiled this time?”

“Oh, just one,” The mirth on Gao Tianyang’s face was gone; it was unclear if he felt pity or something else.

“One? Who?”

“Who else? Qi Jiahao, duh.”

Sheng Wang was shocked, and halted in his steps.

“His grades had been steadily dropping last semester, it was a matter of time.” Gao Tianyang snuck a glance upstairs, and lowered his voice. “You were late today, if you were earlier you might have seen it. Qi Jiahao’s mom came over, what the hell…...seriously, he was quite the sorry thing, even I—”

He abruptly stopped in the middle of his sentence, as Qi Jiahao was coming downstairs with his bag. He had a cut by his mouth, his hair was extremely messy. There was a tissue stuffed in his nose, blotched with a patch of red. He seemed both humiliated and comical.

Sheng Wang was going back to Class A, and he was pushed out. One was heading upstairs, the other was heading downstairs. This intersection was embarrassing and taunting — fated, even.

His most humiliating, ugly state was directly chanced upon by the person he disliked the most, and he couldn't even run away. The instant Qi Jiahao looked at Sheng Wang, his gaze was filled with resentment, yet he stubbornly kept his head up, with a few traces of disdain.

He intentionally did not stay out of his way when he turned around the corner, he heavily knocked against Sheng Wang's shoulder. "Why don't you continue, huh? Weren't you so excited talking about it? Fuck!"

"What's wrong with you?" Gao Tianyang was a little sheepish, but as he ended up stumbling along with that knock, anger rose up within him too,

especially considering that Sheng Wang — the person he bumped into — didn’t say anything at all. He knew Qi Jiahao was merely picking a fight.

Qi Jiahao suddenly stood still, and turned around, a dark look on his face. “Yeah, there is something wrong with me. Isn’t that what you guys always thought? You think I’m an idiot, treating me like I don’t exist. Happy now that I’m chased out at last?”

He then turned, staring at Sheng Wang. “You managed to force me out, does it feel good?”

There was something indescribable in that gaze, like he was carrying a bucket of petrol as he watched a fire burn. Seconds ago he was humiliated, but the next he gave off the feeling of haughtiness. This baffled Sheng Wang, and it made him rather uncomfortable too. He suddenly recalled Little Chili’s reminder a long while ago, saying that Qi Jiahao wanted to check the security cameras after he lost his bag, but in the end nothing was really settled.

Sheng Wang initially wanted to reply “Were you the second place before? Did I steal your place or what?”, but when he thought about that incident, he swallowed his words back with a frown instead. He tugged at Gao Tianyang, saying, “Old Gao, let’s go.”

“What do you mean go? Why are you chickening out? Aren’t you the arrogant type?” Qi Jiahao rubbed at the blood by his nose, relentless. He had been holding everything back in a corner of Class A’s classroom; he was invisibly ostracised and alienated. Initially, he thought that that was on him, but time passed — resentment, indignation, and the feeling that he was being wronged gradually took over instead. And then he was squeezed out of Class A; the instance he was showered by hits and blows from his mother, those feelings instantly escalated into a twisted anger.

“What are you guys doing? Don’t argue anymore, the parents are all here today,” Carp was a little lost, and attempted to get them to back down a little, to bring it inside.

Gao Tianyang rolled his eyes, adding on, “Yeah, it's the parent-teacher meeting. Is it not shameful to act up here?”

“*SHAMEFUL?!* SO MANY OF YOU GUYS WERE STANDING THERE WHEN MY MOM HIT ME, WHAT USE DO I HAVE FOR SHAME? MY ASS IS ALREADY OUT OF CLASS A, WHO CARES ABOUT SHAME?” Qi Jiahao roared.

Sheng Wang honestly couldn’t hold it in anymore. “Then you can tell that to your mom.”

“My mom can’t be reasoned with, but y’all are *disgusting*.”

Sheng Wang nearly developed a reflex to the word “disgusting” over the break. Because of this word, they spent their entire break stuck under suffocating, watchful eyes. To the point that he felt extremely irritated upon hearing this word.

Regardless, Qi Jiahao was still going on. “You all think that I’m garbage, that I’m a goddamn idiot. But the ones who called me Old Qi here Old Qi there were you guys too. So what were all of you?”

Gao Tianyang, “We’re blind, alright?”

“Yeah, quite blind indeed,” Qi Jiahao nodded, and glanced at Sheng Wang. He said, emphasising every word, “Worshipping two *homosexuals* like something precious.”

Sheng Wang’s brain exploded into static, the corner of the stairs fell into a dead quiet.

The hubbub upstairs and downstairs were ceaseless, but it felt like they were blocked out by layers upon layers of thick, thick frosted glass. They might as well be an entirely different world, unclear and muted. He couldn’t hear a single thing.

There was only one thought on his mind: *As I expected*……

The blade hovering on top of their heads occasionally reared its head. It had never truly disappeared all along, as he expected — it was merely waiting for the time when it would crash onto the ground with a bang. It was probably made of ice, otherwise he couldn’t explain the way the shards sent chills all over his body as it landed on his head.

“What kind of bullshit are you spouting?!” Gao Tianyang was the first to react, snapping out from that bombshell. He acted like he heard some ludicrous joke, and fumed with rage too.

Qi Jiahao tugged at his bag, saying, “What, you didn’t know? Your two closest friends are commiting brotherly in—”

Before he could say “cest”, Sheng Wang had already swung his fist.

How Gao Tianyang exploded into curses and swearing, how Carp was trying to talk everyone down from a fight, how Big Mouth Xu managed to leave the hall and rush over, Sheng Wang could not recall a single bit.

He didn’t know why Qi Jiahao didn’t choose to expose them at the start, and why he wasn’t able to stop himself later on. He only knew the moment the other person spoke, the delicate balance he maintained with Jiang Tian with much difficulty was devastatingly shattered.

The tightrope snapped; their feet were met with thin air, and they plunged into the abyss.

By the time he finally landed, and abruptly came back to himself, he was already standing in the administration office. Sheng Mingyang was nearby, listening to Qi Jiahao refute with all his might.

Big Mouth Xu believed in keeping everything on the downlow; if he could get less people involved, he would. Other than Sheng Mingyang who was always at the forefront of news, there was nobody else. Everything else in the hall went on as per normal, the student rep had just finished his speech. The applause from the parents was thunderous beneath the stage. In comparison, this office was as cold as an icehouse despite not having air conditioning switched on.

Qi Jiahao insisted that he wasn't lying, he saw them. He saw them on the day of the cultural festival, just that he did not want to say anything at that time.

Sheng Mingyang said, "I know my own son, I trust that he wouldn't do something like this. Wouldn't the school have security cameras in these places? All we need to do is to check to find out if the truth was being told. It's plenty normal for teenage students to quarrel here and there, and say

anything once they are cornered. I understand all of these. However, we cannot stop slanders and rumours — once it spreads, it is damaging. Old Xu, please help me check.”

Perhaps he genuinely didn’t believe him, or he was just finding evidence to support himself. Every single word from him was serene, but they seemed to be pressing down on Sheng Wang’s shoulders, stabbing his torso blade by blade.

……

That wasn’t quite right, actually.

Sheng Wang thought, he was also the one pressing Sheng Mingyang down, stabbing him blade by blade.

He opened his mouth when Big Mouth Xu stood up, his voice hoarse. He said, “Don’t bother checking.”

Before the break ended, Sheng Wang would always think: what would become of Jiang Tian and him in time? However, he forgot — there

were too many hidden risks for them, they might not even have a chance at “time”.

Chapter 092 - Wasteland

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“I’m Not the Person You Should Be Saying This to.”

Jiang Tian’s seat was at the most extreme edge of the platform — his heart had long since not been in the event the moment he finished the speech, but it was honestly quite inappropriate to leave immediately. Somehow, He Jin made him stay until the next part of the program started, and he finally found the chance to leave.

He nearly sprinted back to Mingli Block; Sheng Wang was moving back to Class A at last, he could finally return him the seat he had been taking up for a long, long time. From then onwards, he didn’t have to look up before he could spot the way the other person’s shadow landed on his table.

However, when he ran to the top floor and halted in his steps, supporting himself with the frame of the door, he did not find a trace of Sheng Wang in the classroom.

The mood in the classroom was rather strange — it seemed like someone pressed a pause button on the buzzing whispers in the classroom.

Everyone turned to look at him, but nobody spoke.

Jiang Tian was briefly baffled, and as he walked back to his seat, he asked Gao Tianyang, “Where’s Sheng Wang?”

The expressions on the people around them instantly turned weirder, even Gao Tianyang froze. Jiang Tian looked up, and saw Carp and Chili in front, both looking like they didn’t know where to start.

In that instant, his heart suddenly sank, as though he felt something telepathically.

“What are ya looking at, it’s self-study now!” Gao Tianyang yelled at the people around them. He pushed his paper aside — not a single word written on it — and scratched his head, slightly agitated. He pulled Jiang Tian out of the classroom.

“Sheng-ge went to the administration office,” Gao Tianyang said.

“Why?”

“He was in a fight.” Gao Tianyang hesitated, and added, “Because Gao Tianyang said the two of you are……”

His voice abruptly lowered, the word “gay” was especially fumbled. He kept feeling like saying that to Jiang Tian’s face was no different from

directly pushing a knife into him, raw and bloody.

By the time he looked up once more after he said that, Jiang Tian was already striding downstairs, and disappearing within his line of sight in a blink of an eye. He could only recall the way the other person's lips were tightly pursed, his face ashen as he turned around the corner of the stairs.

Jiang Tian almost crashed into someone as he sprinted towards the administration office, but he couldn't recall clearly any more. The only thing on his mind was the scene of Sheng Mingyang ducked over as he left the front row of the audience's seat in the hall, going out to take the call. He was terrified to even draw the connection between these two events, just like the way he couldn't bear to even think of Sheng Wang standing in the administration office, all by himself.

Yet, when he burst straight into that office, all he saw was Big Mouth Xu, standing by the window, a deep frown on his face, his hands on his waist.

The door was pushed open with a "bang" against the wall. He opened his mouth amidst the sound of the tremble of the door, his voice a difficult rasp. "Teacher……"

Big Mouth Xu turned to face him, looking at him with a complicated expression on his face. It was hard to tell if he wanted to scold him, or he simply wanted to sigh.

Jiang Tian tried his best to get his breathing under control, asking, “Where’s Sheng Wang?”

“He left,” Big Mouth Xu said.

For that very one split second, Jiang Tian’s brows furrowed, as though he couldn’t understand those two words. His brain was buzzing, like he was submerged in an icy river, waves and waves of cold numbing him.

“What do you mean he left?” he heard himself asking, not understanding.

Big Mouth Xu sighed at last. “His father took him away.”

“To where?”

“How would I know?” Big Mouth Xu frowned as he looked at him. “Jiang Tian……”

The two words barely left his mouth when he saw the boy standing at the door let his gaze sink to the ground. He seemed to be unable to hold on

anymore — he bent over, propping himself against his knees. He breathed heavily, like he had just ran a few hundred thousand miles.

Big Mouth Xu suddenly couldn't put anything into words. It wasn't that he had never dealt with this situation before — it was precisely because he did encounter them, that's why the more he wanted to sigh.

There were no secrets in high school, only rumours of varying degrees of truth spreading around like bushfire. Even though he forewarned the people with insider knowledge, some things would still spread all over the place, not even needing a few minutes even.

Big Mouth Xu saw Jiang Tian's hands — previously propped against his knees — curl up, squeezing into a fist. His thumb gripped his joints with a deadly tightness.

He was starting to feel the pain from watching him alone before Jiang Tian finally straightened up, his voice hoarse as he asked, "Did he hit him?"

Big Mouth Xu was quiet for a long time. He answered, "No, he didn't."

Jiang Tian nodded, and left.

Big Mouth Xu saw him run past the windows downstairs — through the flowerbed behind the block — littered with wilted leaves — sprinting

straight for Road #3…...he didn't know where to start looking for him.

Actually, for a single moment, Sheng Mingyang did want to hit him. It was the moment Sheng Wang said "don't bother checking". Everyone could tell how this father who was going on and on about "no way" was utterly humiliated. His hand was already in the air, but it lowered down again at the very last second, quivering as though it was spasming.

He stood there for a long time, before he merely forcefully kept his emotions under control, saying to Big Mouth Xu, "Old Xu, I'll be bringing him outside for a bit. I won't be taking up more of your time anymore."

Despite his raging anger, he still did not cause an unsightly mess by attempting to drag Sheng Wang out — neither the father nor the son was a type to cause a scene like this. He simply tapped Sheng Wang's shoulder, indicating for him to go outside.

Before he exited the office, he halted once more, turning around to say to Big Mouth Xu, who was sporting a grimace, "I'll shoulder any fault of his. Kids don't know what they're doing, and I have failed in being a father, sorry for creating trouble for you."

He slightly bowed, like those parents who clearly were accomplished in their field, but were lowly and deferential before teachers.

That slap clearly didn't land, but Sheng Wang felt like he received a heavy blow anyway, hurting from his face all the way to his heart. He wanted to say "don't be like this", but the person who caused this scene to happen in the first place…...was him. He had no rights to say that.

But did he really make such a grievous mistake? All he did…...was to like someone, that's all.

In that instant, Sheng Wang hurt so much that he wanted to cave in on himself. In the end, he only followed Sheng Mingyang outside in silence.

He thought Sheng Mingyang would bring him home straight away — he knew the other person needed a place with no outsiders. But Sheng Mingyang did not.

The car went straight onto the expressway around the city, at an extremely high speed, different from Sheng Mingyang's usual driving style. God knows how long he drove before he stepped on the brakes, the safety belt hurting Sheng Wang as he hurtled forward, and then crashing heavily back into his seat.

The car stopped at some random oblique path near a certain industrial park, nobody was around. This angle just so happened to receive the sun directly, both the driver and the shotgun seats were blinded by the light. Sheng Mingyang reached out, wanting to take a pair of sunglasses. But in the end, he lowered his hand, and pulled the car to a stop.

He couldn’t drive on anymore.

Sheng Wang’s eyes watered from the blinding light, but he did not shut them. He kept staring at that swath of light, until his whole world was nothing but blankness. Sheng Mingyang spoke at last, “When did it happen?”

There was anger in his tone, when spoken out loud in the car, it was stifling instead — like a thick cluster of seaweed coiling around, tightening, gripping.

“Don’t remember anymore,” Sheng Wang said.

Three words were enough to ignite Sheng Mingyang’s anger all at once. He slammed the steering wheel, “What do you mean you don’t remember? Since when did the two of you started fool—”

He probably wanted to say “fooling around” or something else, but even he couldn’t finish the rest of his words. He rubbed the centre of his eyebrows, and took several deep breaths. After staying silent for what felt like eons, he then forcefully relaxed his tone. “Tell me the truth, was it Xiao-Tian who—”

“No,” Sheng Wang interrupted.

At that moment, Sheng Wang was struck by how absurd that statement was.

He wanted to say, *do you know how deeply Ji Huanyu traumatised Jiang Tian? Do you know how much he was hurting from being entrapped in all those horrible things he shouldn’t have experienced? Do you know how long he took to move on from those things?*

And all you people do is arbitrarily, irrationally attribute the roots of all problems back to him, like he’s born that way.

Like he’s incapable of feeling upset at all.

“I’m the one who pursued him,” Sheng Wang said, “I’m the one who likes him, I’m the one who started this. I’m the one who tried everything to seduce him, I even flunk myself into Class B because he refused to accept

my feelings, and also tried everything to score my way back all because I want to stay with him a little longer. Couldn’t you tell how happy I was whenever I orbit around him?”

The look on Sheng Mingyang’s face was extremely ugly, with every line Sheng Wang said, the more his expression unravelled — like it was him who was being forcefully paraded around in public.

He frowned, and finally found a chance to cut in, “Don’t say these!”

Sheng Wang stopped, the look on his face equally ugly. A while later, he then shakily said, “You asked, you told me to spill the truth.”

“Dad knows you aren’t someone like this, you don’t have those problems.”

“You don’t know,” Sheng Wang said, “you don’t know. I know it the clearest: I like my Ge, I am gay.”

Sheng Mingyang was still trying to reason with him, “I know you’re saying this out of a rebellious spirit, you’re just trying to piss me off—”

“I wasn’t,” Sheng Wang lowered his eyes, “I wasn’t trying to piss you off. I’ve been happy and suffering at the same time for a long, long while now.”

Dead silence in the car. It was like Sheng Mingyang had been slapped by someone. When Sheng Wang said that, he knew that everything he had just said was just him coming up with poor excuses — he did not want to admit that his son had become like *that*.

Sheng Wang sat, his eyes lowered. Out of his peripheral vision, his dad's fingers fiddled with the gear shift, his ring finger and pinky slightly twitching, like he was trembling uncontrollably. If there was anything by his hand — if he was all by himself — he probably would have started smashing things.

However, he only gripped it for a while, and coldly ordered, "Break it off."

Sheng Wang looked up.

"You don't need to go back to school anymore, I'll give Old Xu a call later." Sheng Mingyang said, "I'll transfer you away."

"I'm not transferring," Sheng Wang said.

"EITHER YOU GO OR HE GOES!" Sheng Mingyang finally blew his top, and roared. After he roared, he started the car with shaky fingers, and said without even looking up, "I have my ways; pick one."

The car shot out. Sheng Wang seemed to be forcefully pressed against his seat, and then abruptly released again. He felt helpless and nauseous in all the sudden movement and abrupt pauses.

He still remembered the joke he cracked in order to cheer Jiang Tian up that night, on his birthday. Who would have thought it would come true that way.

“Dad, do you know minor gaokao is coming soon?” He closed his eyes in the dizziness, clenching his jaws tightly. He endured for a while before he continued, “Have you ever considered how much it’ll affect me if I transfer away right now? Have you considered any of that every time you handled these procedures? Have you ever thought that I might not catch up? Have you considered that I really couldn’t adapt this time round, and then fail everything?”

“Have you thought so yourself?” Sheng Mingyang was expressionless. “If only you used your head a little more, then you wouldn’t have done something as preposterous as this.”

“I don’t think it's preposterous.”

“You really don’t think so? Why are you afraid of being found out if you didn’t think what you’re doing is preposterous? Why would you be both happy and suffering at the same time if you didn’t think what you’re doing is preposterous? What are you so upset about? Shouldn’t you feel indignant?”

Sheng Wang was tongue-tied. He wanted to say that it wasn’t like that, but at that point, he suddenly couldn’t find the words in him to refute. It was like after walking in the dark for long enough, even the person themself might not be able to tell where’s where.

Sheng Mingyang refused to even look at him. “Go tell everyone around you that you’re messing around with your older brother, see what are other people’s reactions!”

He was so angry that he wasn’t even thinking about what he was saying. After he spoke, he shut his eyes, and the car quaked along too. However, Sheng Wang did not feel shocked; only an icy patch of coldness spreading in his chest.

After an indeterminate length of time, he then stubbornly said, “I’m not breaking it off.”

Sheng Mingyang held onto the steering wheel in silence. A long while later, he nodded. “I’m not the person you should be saying this to.”

Then who should I be saying this to? Sheng Wang was dazed for a moment.

The car whooshed along the winding road in the middle of forested trees, entering a public cemetery in the suburbs. It wasn’t too early nor too late in the day, the entire cemetery was deserted. It was as though a frost had crystalised on white marble, a numbing chill in the heart.

Sheng Wang was dragged into that pale white building, walking past through rows and rows of similarly pale white photographs, and then stopping before one of them.

Sheng Mingyang tugged at him, pointing at the person smiling in the photograph. He was at a loss for words for a long while before he said, tired, “You should tell this to your mom. Here, Wang-zai, look at her. Tell her, you want to be together with your older brother — that you're a homosexual. TELL HER!”

*

Jiang Tian ran to the end of Road #3, and went out of the west gate. He came to a brake at the place where Sheng Mingyang parked his car — someone else had already parked in that place.

He went around in a circle on the spot, and then hurriedly ran towards Wu Tong Wai.

Old Man Ding and the Mute were both plucking vegetables in the house. One only knew how to gesture, the other couldn't quite understand it. So the two could only sit opposite each other in dull silence.

The old man had been cooped up at home for an entire break, pondering and mulling over Ji Huanyu and Jiang Ou's issues, all day and night. That's what happens when people get old — they worry every second. Sometimes, he would startle awake at night, and others, he simply couldn't fall asleep. Perhaps the weather was too cold, the person had become wizened and sluggish too.

Hence, when Jiang Tian appeared at the door, he didn't quite manage to react in the first few seconds. A long while passed before he let out an "oh", and his eyes brightened. "Xiao-Tian? Isn't school reopening today?"

Jiang Tian held onto the door frame, panting. He grunted in reply. His hand reached inside his pocket before he realised that he did not bring his

school bag to the hall, his phone was still in there all along.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" The old man trotted over.

Jiang Tian lowered his head. He clenched his jaws, and finally managed to swallow down that bitter, acrid feeling. He asked the old man, "Did Sheng Wang come here?"

"No?"

As expected.

Jiang Tian nodded, but his movement was stiff and difficult. He borrowed a phone from the old man, and called Sheng Wang.

The phone rang a few times before it was picked up, and his heart came alive in that instant. Yet, before he could speak, he heard Gao Tianyang saying, "Tian-ge……"

His heart plummeted underground once more.

"Sheng-ge's bag is in the classroom," Gao Tianyang said, hushed.

Jiang Tian hung up, and found Sheng Mingyang in the old man's recent contacts. He called once more, but the other person had already turned off his phone.

He then called for a car to rush back to White Horse Alley, but the house was completely void of people. Auntie Sun had cleaned the place before leaving, and the house smelled like detergent. Due to the wetness yet to dissipate, the house was so spacious and empty that it sent chills all over him.

He looked for him everywhere he could think of, but to no avail. In the end, he ran to the rented place — that they had never lived in for even a single day — with an infinitesimal bit of hope in him.

It was cold and empty inside too, he knew there wasn't anyone around, neither did he bring the keys. But he stood there, and still couldn't help but to knock on the door — as though if he knocked a few more times, someone would open the door from within, welcoming him in.

All because he remembered someone saying to him: he would never lock him outside.

But nobody opened the door despite knocking for a long, long time.

He had been used to playing the role of an adult ever since he was a kid — taking care of Old Man Ding, taking care of Jiang Ou, taking care of himself. He bore every single burden on him, whether he could shoulder

them in the first place did not matter. It might be tiring, but he thought that he could, in fact, carry them all.

To the point that sometimes he'd have the illusion — that he was fearless, he could shoulder everything, he was capable of anything.

Yet, when he turned 18, and truly entered adulthood, he then discovered that there were too many things that he couldn't take care of. He was a shoddy bricklayer, he tore the east wall down only to mend the west wall with it, he had fingers in many pies, only for all of them to burn. In the end, he couldn't even accomplish the simplest thing: to stand together with Sheng Wang.

It was at this moment then he realised at last: their relationships with other people were like threads, messily binding him to Sheng Wang — but every thread was as thin as hair, and all in the hands of others. As long as someone slightly let go, everything would be severed clean.

The city was enormous, with people everywhere. Their features were countless, blurring into each other…...but no matter how he ran, he couldn't find the person he wanted to see.

Translator's notes:

Chapter 79: He suddenly felt that the strings of relationships between people were too much in the way...if only there were none of those around him and Jiang Tian. Not a single thread tied to them, nothing to do with anyone else at all. That would be great; they could act without the slightest qualm.

Chapter 80: The fleeting thought that occurred in his mind yesterday popped up again, saying that if only there wasn’t anyone who would entangle their relations; let them be untethered, with all paths unbound for them. With that, they could do anything they want, how good that would be.

Instead, now he felt that that thought was too childish — and too selfish too.

Chapter 38 was a pretty good sign of how Sheng Mingyang was good at manipulating his words and twisting the argument, imo.

Chapter 093 - Bitter Summer

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He Had Never Heard Such Clamorous Cries of Cicadas Ever Since.

The next time Jiang Tian saw Sheng Mingyang again was noon the very same day — in the hospital, full of chaos.

Neither of them wanted to get Jiang Ou involved, but they forgot one single thing: the walls have ears, and the school happens to be the place where rumours are most easily born.

After Jiang Ou went for her parent-teacher meeting, she called Sheng Mingyang, but he didn’t pick up. He only sent a message on WeChat, saying, “Have something going on, will be back late.” Due to Ji Huanyu, she was already in a stage of conflict with Sheng Mingyang, they were on the verge of breaking up. Along with how she wasn’t involved in his business anymore due to her health, she didn’t ask any further upon seeing

the message. Instead, she went to Mingli Block with the crowd, wanting to wave Jiang Tian goodbye before leaving.

She ended up catching wind of the rumours circulating along the corridors. Rumours about her son.

Gao Tianyang knew Jiang Ou, and was also the first one to notice that she wasn't acting quite right. Both Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian's phones were in their bags in the classroom, so he could only take the more indirect approach, and called the last number…...and so the phone call reached Old Man Ding.

And then there was no point of return.

When Jiang Tian rushed back to Fuzhong, it was this exact catastrophe he was welcomed with.

At that point, he felt like someone was playing an absurd trick on him. He was already trying so hard, but he always seemed to be a few seconds behind. He missed the first step, so he was doomed to miss everything else, and then watch with his very own eyes how the carriages

on the train crash into each other, one by one. Turning everything upside down, destroyed beyond recognition.

And all he could do was just stand there, watching.

He wasn't good at speaking up, nor was he good at venting his feelings. He was a mute in name.

Sheng Mingyang had already travelled to the hospital at the fastest speed he could manage. When he exited the lift, he saw Jiang Tian sitting on a random empty bench along the corridor, his body caving in on himself, his elbows on his legs. His head was hanging so low, it almost reached his elbows. His brows and features were still full of the sharpness of youth, but he was absolutely beaten.

He initially wanted to say something — he came to the place with a chest full of anger — but upon seeing a Jiang Tian in this state, whatever he wanted to say instantly vanished to the back of his mind.

For that split second, he abruptly had the realisation that this older boy before him was actually roughly the same age as Sheng Wang……

It seemed that it had never truly clicked for him before that.

But that thought was but a mere fleeting one in his mind before it was suppressed down again. Jiang Tian heard his footsteps, glanced at him, and then behind him on instinct. There was nobody else in the lift, and it closed behind him with a thud.

Sheng Mingyang frowned. A moment later, he spoke, “Sheng Wang isn’t here, I got someone else to take care of him.”

The feeling of accounting to other people the whereabouts of his son was rather strange, causing him to feel irked. The anger he just suppressed surged up once more. However, he couldn’t manage to speak to Jiang Tian like how he spoke to Sheng Wang; he would subconsciously restrain himself, and speak officiously.

It was at this time then he discovered that he had never treated Jiang Tian as one of his own at all.

Jiang Tian stood up from the chair. He was actually taller than Sheng Mingyang, so despite having the unsubstantial frame unique to teenagers, it

was still enough to let people feel the pressure. He said, “The problem is with me, don’t scold him.”

Sheng Mingyang thought that this was getting absurd — Sheng Wang was clearly his son, but some other person was going out of his lane, like he was a villain bent on causing Sheng Wang to suffer. “Since when have you seen me scold him?”

He asked in reply. He honestly did not want to continue this conversation anymore, so he hurried inside.

Sheng Mingyang had never seen Jiang Ou this hysterical before; for an instant, he even thought that she might descend into full blown insanity, or do something irreversible. In any case, she was completely different from the person he met at the start. The raw truth was that the feelings between them did not run that deep, actually. It just so happened that there was this person, who coincidentally triggered the cherished feelings he held towards his deceased wife, and she fit nicely. Just like how Jiang Ou’s most passionate feelings did not go to him, but were all given to Ji Huanyu too.

During the winter break, the constantly taut nerves had whittled away whatever traces of feelings he held for her. He only felt for Jiang Ou a few bits of the need to be responsible, some sympathy, and some blame that he was unwilling to admit existed, but couldn't be ignored anyway.

If there was no Jiang Ou, there wouldn't be a Jiang Tian, then things wouldn't have ended up in such a disastrous and embarrassing state today.

But similarly, to Jiang Ou, there wouldn't be whatever that happened today without Sheng Wang. So as he felt resentful, Sheng Mingyang also felt a little apologetic.

The smell of medicine filled the ward, along with the shrill screams of a broken woman, and the soft whimpers that had never stopped, and also occasional outbursts of sobs of woes. They were various conflicting pitches forcefully mashed together into a dissonant cacophony, so stifling and depressing that nobody could bear to stay.

Sheng Mingyang didn't know how long had Jiang Tian been in the hospital, but a few minutes was enough to drive him insane. He made several trips downstairs in that period of time — when Old Man Ding

rushed to the school, he accidentally fell while tugging back and forth with Jiang Ou due to his absent mind.

Everyone knew that elderly people cannot afford to fall down, and there was an additional rule for Old Man Ding: he couldn’t get too angry or panic. Those upsetting issues in regards to Ji Huanyu was enough to cause him to lose sleep, and become sluggish. Now with this other blow, his entire person had withered away. He leaned against the head of the bed, a bed of snow white hair, his back crooked, watching a random spot outside the window. He spaced out for a long time, like he had aged all at once.

Sheng Mingyang and Jiang Tian were up to their necks in the hospital, and only managed to take a break at night. They rested at the family area; silence and stuffiness slowly spreaded, filling up that corner.

After quite a long time later, Sheng Mingyang glanced towards the direction of the ward, asking, “Do you regret it? Things have ended up like this.”

Jiang Tian’s gaze was lowered, staring at some empty spot like he was zoning out, or perhaps he was solely silent.

“You’re slightly older, and you’re much more mature,” weariness was in Sheng Mingyang’s tone, he tried to patiently continue, “What are your thoughts, I want to hear them.”

A while later, Jiang Tian finally spoke. “I don’t owe anyone anything.”

He grew up with different people, going from person to person. He had never stayed too long with anyone, he had never treated anyone as his pillar. He was used to giving from himself, but he rarely received anything from other people. As long as he took a little, he would return in many times over.

He owed nobody anything at all.

He did what he thought he ought to do, he shouldered what he ought to shoulder. He didn’t need to tiptoe around anyone, he didn’t need to look at anyone at all. He only looked at Sheng Wang.

Sheng Mingyang roughly knew his situation too, and was genuinely unable to find a reply to what he said. He was stunned for a while before he continued, “But Wang-zai is different.”

Jiang Tian let out a “Mn”, and it seemed that any trace of youthfulness had been shed from him at that point. He said, “I know.”

Sheng Wang was softhearted. He’s sensitive, he kept saying that he has a bad temper, but he was always considerate of other people’s feelings. They were clearly both lonely in their childhoods, but they had two entirely opposite reactions. One gave up and sealed himself away in ice, but the other reached out with countless feelers, searching for any trace of *something* around him.

But it was because of that that’s why their paths even intersected

It was because of his soft heart, that when he stood beneath the streetlight outside of White Horse Alley late at night, Sheng Wang opened the window and called out to him.

He knew this point all too well, so he spent his morning looking for Sheng Wang all over the world, but did not ask any further in the afternoon. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to see him, it was just that he didn’t want for Sheng Wang to come looking for him. He did not want for Sheng Wang to witness the disaster before him.

He knew that Sheng Wang would be hurt. He also knew — the moment he saw Sheng Wang’s pain, he would waver a little.

*

It was already the second day when Sheng Wang visited the hospital.

He didn’t have his bag nor his phone, Sheng Mingyang got someone to watch him for the whole night. In the day, he was in a deep state of agitation and anxiety, all he wanted was to find Jiang Tian and talk to him, even if he was just letting him know where he’s going and to tell him not to worry. At night, the scene of the public cemetery kept repeatedly flashing in his mind. He thought of his mother, smiling at him through the pale white photograph. As for him, his lips pursed as he looked at anywhere but her, unable to say what he wanted to say even until his eyes reddened.

As they say, your loved ones know where to stab you to hurt you the most. Sheng Mingyang knew how to upset him too well. The first day, he was brought to the cemetery, and on the second day, he was brought to the hospital bed. Jiang Tian wasn't there when he arrived — Sheng Mingyang especially ensured that they would miss each other.

Old people tend to not sleep as much. The nurse said Old Man Ding had already sat on the bed, hunched over and zoning out the entire time before the sun even rose. With that fall, the shock and panic triggered a blood clot, and he became slow-witted. No matter what others said, his reaction was only a grin, causing people to not understand if he didn't care or if he didn't understand.

When Sheng Wang entered the ward, he turned to face him, half a beat behind. He stared at Sheng Wang for a while, and suddenly waved at him with a smile.

This was the only senior who would smile after their relationship was exposed. Sheng Wang felt himself tearing up for some inexplicable reason; was he upset, or was it something else? He walked over in hesitation. Old Man Ding's large shrivelled hand grabbed his, and as he rubbed in a circle, he reached out to bring over the hand peel oranges by the head of the bed.

The old man stuffed the two largest ones to him, and raised his chin. "Eat it, it's sweet."

Sheng Wang lowered his head. Just as he was about to say something, his elbows sandwiching the oranges, he saw the old man also point upstairs, "Bring one to Xiao-Wang too, it's sweet!"

He stilled instantly. A moment later, he looked aside, and clenched his jaws. His eyes reddened, bit by bit. He knew sometimes old people would fumble over their words when they get muddle-headed, it was just a moment, it didn't necessarily mean that he had truly gone senile and couldn't tell people apart anymore. But the old man used to be spry and lively, he had never been like this before. This was the first time……

This hurt more than receiving a slap on the spot; Sheng Wang basically ran away with his tail between his legs.

Sheng Mingyang then dragged him upstairs, pointing at Jiang Ou who was inside, saying, “I know you’re obstinate, as though if you budge on the issue, you would seem especially weak. But take a look, is this what you wanted to see?”

Sheng Wang couldn’t recall what he felt the moment he saw Jiang Ou, he only remembered the way he walked in, in a nearly vacant state, wanting to say something to the other person, but finding himself tongue-tied instead. He didn’t know if he should show some concern for her, or apologise. Until. Jiang Ou slowly looked up at him, and suddenly lost control of her emotions.

The nurse and Sheng Mingyang were both trying to console her. As she struggled, she grabbed Sheng Wang, saying, “Auntie is begging you, *I’m* begging you, okay?”

Sheng Wang’s face was drained of blood,

Jiang Ou finally calmed down after everyone's efforts. She looked at Sheng Wang, and curled back under the blanket, her back facing him. She closed her now swollen eyes, refusing to say another word. Sheng Wang stood there, frozen solid and rooted to the ground. He left the ward a while later.

When Jiang Tian turned in from the corner of the stairs, this was what he saw.

He saw a few nurses leaving the ward in a hurry, clearly having just gone through an ordeal. He saw Sheng Wang, leaning against the ghostly white wall of the hospital, standing outside of the hospital ward with his head hung low. His dangling fingers squeezed at his digits subconsciously, both aggrieved and quiet.

For an instant, it suddenly occurred to Jiang Tian: it had been a very, very long time since he saw Sheng Wang with a completely carefree smile.

He suddenly realised that everything he had been shouldering came with spikes, with all of them directly targeting Sheng Wang. Every time the

other person came a step closer to him, every time he got more intimate with him, he would be stabbed by those spikes, and then have them pulled out of him again, raw and bloody.

The sun that always revolved around him had ceased to shine. All because of him.

He wanted to press a kiss on the other person's lowered eyes, to the corner of the lips that no longer held any mirth. Standing there by himself was too lonesome. He wanted to go hug Sheng Wang, but he turned around and saw only the spikes all over him…...as long as they weren't filed down, the day he could go near him would never come.

In the end, all Jiang Tian did was to walk over. He softly called, "Wang-zai."

Sheng Wang looked up, his eyes red.

*

Sheng Mingyang was handling Sheng Wang’s transfer procedures amidst his busy work when he received a call from Jiang Tian. He said, “He’s transferred too many times, and hasn't stayed too long anywhere. Exams are coming soon, don’t transfer him away anymore.”

Sheng Mingyang said, “Someone has to go.”

Jiang Tian said, “I’ll go.”

The luggage he had unpacked for a long time was once again kept away in a suitcase in the end — like he had a rushed and jumbled dream, and then was accidentally startled awake.

*

It was mid-February when Jiang Tian transferred, bringing away with him the cat Sheng Wang had signed for adoption. Jiang Ou and Old Man Ding left with him as well — he left with his spikes, leaving not a single trace behind.

Ever since then, there was an additional empty seat in Class A. Everyone had forgotten to remind the teacher to remove it, just like how Big Mouth Xu casually brought up removing Jiang Tian’s photos from the Wall of Honour twice, but never managing to bring himself to do it in the end.

The minor gaokao in March went on as per normal; time wouldn’t stop just for the separations and unions in some random corner. The collective last minute practice Class A put into had obvious effects, and everyone got four As. They completed He Jin’s target without any suspense, with nobody falling out of line at all.

For quite a long period of time, Sheng Wang became reticent. In some occasional moments, Gao Tianyang and the rest would see a shadow of another person on him, and then they would lament, feeling upset for some inexplicable reason again.

Class A was rather open-minded, the incident only caused the atmosphere to turn awkward for a few days before it was back to normal. Those who were on good terms with Sheng Wang remained on good terms with him. They gathered in all sorts of lively scenarios, making exaggerated jokes and gossiping, trying to cheer him up. They watched him crawl to the first place, staying put there, and gradually throwing the second place behind in the dust. And then they'd howl and cheer like they were trying to get a rise out of him.

The second semester in year two was a busy season. After the minor gaokao, the other classes had entered overall revision. Class A spent all their energy on competitions instead. Sheng Wang managed to snag the semifinals for all mathematics, physics and chemistry. His July and August were thoroughly filled by all sorts of special classes, summer camps, as well as training camps.

Gao Tianyang, as the most steady last place in class, only made it into the semifinals for chemistry. He had an extremely positive attitude, and was

plenty happy in his boredom. Every time he saw Sheng Wang's timetable, he would tsk and shake his head, saying, "This is so *so* sad."

Sheng Wang said, exasperated, "If you really think that this is sad, remember to visit my jail with tributes."

It was the first time he cracked a joke like this ever since Jiang Tian left, Gao Tianyang and the rest felt spooked by this show of pleasantry. They immediately swore that they aren't human if they don't go.

Ever since that day, Sheng Wang gradually resembled what he was like before; he would step on the chair, rocking back and forth, he would expose Gao Tianyang and SSR's foolery, he would look up and chug water after he played basketball, and then smile as he chatted with other people, fanning himself with his shirt collar.

Sometimes, he gave people the illusion that everything had returned back to normal, the dust had settled.

Only, when he occasionally walked past the Wall of Honour, he would stop in his steps. He would watch the photographs of him on the wall

go from one to two to three, and then multiplying more and more, nearly taking up a small half of the wall……

And the other half of the wall had never changed ever since.

The summer break after year two ended, Sheng Mingyang mentioned that with the help of two seniors in Beijing, Jiang Tian had successfully applied for a school overseas, and thus avoiding the awkwardness of having to face different standards of examinations and progression in syllabus. A hospital suitable for recuperation was even arranged for Jiang Ou and Old Man Ding.

Sheng Mingyang did not mention his role in this, but Sheng Wang thought that it was likely he intervened too.

That period of time, Sheng Wang was in a training camp. Outside Gate #2 of that school was a convenience store, with furnishing extremely alike to Xi Le. Sheng Wang always went to buy things from there, despite it being extremely far from where he stayed. With this and that, he managed to become familiar with the boss there.

When Sheng Wang received Sheng Mingyang's message, he was buying water in that shop. The boss was gnawing on a cherry, one leg crossed over the other. When Sheng Wang was paying, he generously pushed the glass bowl before him, saying, "Here, have some."

Sheng Wang was completely out of it as he stared at the phone screen for a long time. After the boss' urging, he randomly grabbed one, but tasted nothing but bitterness when he bit into it.

He had just sweat, and his face was a little pale from the cold wind blasting the air conditioning. The boss figured that something was kinda off, and asked what happened.

He turned the screen off, and stuffed the phone back into his pocket. He paid with his head lowered, saying, "There's something wrong with what you bought, I ate a bitter one."

The boss checked around the bowl, saying, "Cherries are in season only for a short while, you luck is pretty bad."

Sheng Wang didn't look up. A while later, he let out a "Mn", and then waved, leaving without looking back.

Perhaps it was the fault of the rotten cherry, he walked only a few steps before his stomach started to hurt. The area where it hurt was too vague, to the point that he had the illusion that his chest was going ice cold too.

He suddenly recalled that day in February, Jiang Tian walked over and softly called out to him, “Wang-zai.”

Before he spoke, he already knew what the other person wanted to say.

His mind was in disarray, filled with hesitance. He already couldn’t recall what came rambling out of him. He only remembered the way he gripped onto Jiang Tian, saying, “I didn’t let go this time.”

Jiang Tian was silent for a long time. “It’s my fault, I’m the one who let go first.”

……

His stomach hurt awfully much, his heart was so cold that it pained him too. Sheng Wang stood on the spot, cold water in his hands for a long

time, before he gradually moved forward ahead.

[This school was similar to Fuzhong in its road sheltered by parasol trees, the scorching sun shone through the branches and wide leaves. So bright, that it hurts the eyes. All at once, it's yet another midsummer; but he had never heard such clamorous cries of cicadas ever since.]

Translator's notes:

End of book 4, Cherry.

Bitter summer can also be translated as harsh summer.

Anyways, how's everyone coping?

Chapter 094 - Passing Years

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Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

“What I Like Are Boys.”

Sheng Wang had once envisioned running into Jiang Tian at the finals for some competition, or some other summer camp.

He could imagine that scene — right down to the details of the weather, and the features of the people rushing about around them. But he couldn’t imagine what he would say. Perhaps he would call out a “Ge”, or maybe he would greet him, trying to act completely natural. Maybe…...he would start feeling sad even before he managed to speak.

Later on, after receiving news of Jiang Tian’s move overseas, he did not have the room left to even imagine anymore.

Sheng Wang devoted all of his time into competitions. He was busy as a bee, not sparing his brain a single second of freedom to relax and space out. He was studying and learning at a rate that was practically self abuse. Personally, he thought he was smart, but he was nowhere near being a

genius. Trying to “touch the tiger’s butt” back then already took quite a bit of time and energy from him, and at the later parts of competitions, he felt the difficulty even more so acutely.

As compared to normal students, he could still be jokingly called “running on hacks”, but as he managed to worm his way into the cream of the entire nation’s crop, he was only so-so. No matter how he vented his feelings by studying, he only had so much energy.

Therefore, he managed to end up with a passable second class award in the province for physics, and entered the selection camp for chemistry, his specialisation. Along with how he happened to perform well that time, he entered the national training team, and acquired direct recommendation to university after all of that trouble.

The parent and the teachers were happy, but it felt like every step he took landed on thin air; no matter how he walked, he wasn’t met with solid ground. It was as though a certain feeling was pushing him to run forward continuously, not daring to stop, not daring to look around — and then his

chest was suddenly met with a stripe of red, and the people at the side cheered, telling him, “Congratulations, you’ve reached the finishing line.”

Independent recruitment to all sorts of universities always came pouring as a group, each top school all recruiting the top students on their own accords. Class A had a great performance overall during competitions this year. Everyone went all over the place to deliver their application material, their certificates in hand. Nearly everyone had gotten a few selection places.

Gao Tianyang only possessed a single certificate, neither was its level particularly high. During that time, he constantly joked “I’m about to become the only left-behind children” to the point that Sheng Wang couldn’t bear to see it anymore. He searched all over the internet on his laptop for several days, and somehow managed to find a few famous schools with suitable conditions. He helped Gao Tianyang edit the essay as well as English material needed for preliminary application. They handed it up, and he was unexpectedly accepted.

For that entire month, Gao Tianyang was this close to giving Sheng Wang three loud kowtows each day, and so he also covered his breakfast. Old Gao was more obtuse than 179°; he did not put too much thought into his actions. He would constantly bring Sheng Wang whatever he personally found delicious. After 20+ days of burgers and cola straight, Sheng Wang ate so much that he was automatically full the moment he even saw him.

At the end of the month, this idiot had finally realised that Sheng Wang was sick of the food, and so he went back to Chinese cuisine. He tried his best to recall the breakfast Sheng Wang had eaten before, and went to queue up in the cafeteria bright and early in the morning in a truly unprecedented move. He entered the classroom with beancurd, an egg, and a red can of milk……

And then for that entire day, other than the “thank you” upon receiving the breakfast, Sheng Wang had never spoken another word since.

Around winter break, the students who had passed the preliminary rounds for independent recruitment and comprehensive tests had headed to all sorts of universities for their exams. During that time, He Jin had signed absence slips until her hands turned jelly. More than half of the class was empty, there was no way for lessons to be carried out, so they often ended up with self-study all day long.

It was pouring with rain one day, the weather had been dark and gloomy since morning. Sheng Wang was stepping on the bar below the table, a book spreaded open on his lap, and was half-heartedly doing questions when he suddenly heard someone rap on his table with a knock.

He suddenly fell into a stupor, nearly mixing time up. It was as though he was back to a day when he just arrived at Fuzhong. It was raining heavily that day too, and as he sprawled over the desk, burning with a fever. Jiang Tian had made a trip to the sickbay, and also knocked on his table in the same exact manner while he talked to Gao Tianyang, a bag of medicine in his hand.

Sheng Wang withdrew his gaze from the question, and looked up in a fluster. He saw the class monitor, Carp, asking him, “When are you leaving school?”

He was momentarily silent. “I don’t know. Around April, I think.”

Carp recorded down the general time on the form, and peered at him, slightly worried. “You look terrible, have you fallen sick?”

“No,” Sheng Wang pointed at the top of his head with his pen, “it’s the lighting.”

He only lowered his eyes again after Carp left for a long while.

Much later, Sheng Wang then suddenly recalled — the day Jiang Tian was talking to Gao Tianyang with medicine, he didn’t knock on his table. The time he knocked on his table, he wasn’t sick either.

It had clearly only been a year and a little more, but he was already starting to lose track of his memories……

He sat in silence for a while, and hastily dug his earpiece out from the depth of his bag, stuffing it in his ears. He found a random heavy metal rock

playlist, and turned the volume to the loudest.

The classroom was too empty, too quiet.

Fuzhong had a bountiful harvest that year, reaping a giant batch of direct recommendations and points deduction for entry into top schools that year. Chili received the admissions into a top university, same as Sheng Wang's, Song Sirui and some others had direct recommendations to the foundational classes of various top universities in the province, and Carp was heading to Shanghai.

Gao Tianyang was probably drama personified, managing to add so many twists and turns in the independent recruitment process. He initially performed quite well, earning himself a discount of 15 points for entry into university. With the premise that the full mark was 480, that was already rather significant. Just as his parents were overjoyed, he changed his mind and rejected that with a generous wave of his hands.

"My dad got so mad that he bought a feather duster on Taobao," Gao Tianyang said, with much pride, "He swore to be chill in regards to my

education ever since elementary school, and he nearly broke that promise this time.”

Sheng Wang asked him, “Why don’t you want that discount? You have an ace up your sleeve for gaokao?”

“Didn’t wanna go to that school anymore, suddenly had a complete awakening, wanted to go apeshit while I’m still young.” Gao Tianyang said, “Just you wait, bro will go accompany you in Beijing.”

The batch of people entering university via independent recruitment left school in mid-April. Sheng Wang was calm from the start to the end, but Song Sirui and the rest had been going insane from all the repression. The day they left, they insisted on creating the atmosphere for it, and tossed the mountains of test papers they’d received during high school down from the top floor; the white pieces of papers were littered all over the ground like snow. And then they got cursed out by the students downstairs — whose suffering were yet to end — while also receiving the invitation to the administration office for a final friendly chat.

Sheng Wang got implicated while being entirely innocent, and was forcibly punished to sweep the floors with those few idiots, not being allowed to leave until they cleaned everything up. Class A — that group of dumb birds — laughed as they rushed downstairs to help them out.

Yang Jing rolled her eyes as she got someone to drive a recycling truck over, getting them to pile their papers there instead.

That season was already slightly warm. Sheng Wang was lightly sweating by the time they were done clearing up the mess. He bought a bottle of iced water in Xi Le — the shop assistant now changed — and shedded the stuffy school jacket.

He swung the jacket onto his shoulders. The moment he walked out of school with the bottle of water, the bustling crowd of people traversing about in the mundane world was but a flash to him as he weaved through the streets.

His frenetic, restless teenage years thus received its curtain fall in such a flurry. Only once in a lifetime, no more going back.

*

Due to being directly recommended, Sheng Wang had twice the time for his summer break, but he did not stay at home for too long. Truth was, ever since Jiang Tian left, he hardly went home.

He would be lying if he didn't feel any resentment, but more of it was out of avoidance. As long as he returned to that house in White Horse Alley, he would uncontrollably start thinking about many things.

He found the Chu-ge who was running supplementary classes, and took on what Jiang Tian was doing before. He made use of those few months of holiday to earn himself a lump of money, and unbinded all bank cards that Sheng Mingyang had tied to his account.

Chu-ge's business was doing quite well for these two years. He didn't want to focus solely on Fuzhong's area, so he opened up several outlets in a

few areas around the city. He said that now they were operating on a larger scale, the demand had increased too. He wanted for Sheng Wang to not forget about him amidst his hardwork in university, and help him out whenever he’s free....and also act as his walking golden signboard for the business.

Sheng Wang said, “Seeing how we’re on good terms, I can give you a little discount — I won’t take advertisement fees from you.”

Chu-ge laughed heartily, and gave him a big red packet before school started.

He was more like one who belonged in the Jianghu as compared to a businessman, every move of his was filled with loyalty and righteousness, it was just that his method of expressing such values was more singular — in the form of money, that was. He liked Sheng Wang’s personality very much, and they just so happen to get along rather well too, so he was always particularly generous whenever he paid his salary. In Sheng Wang’s very long university life later, this was the reason behind Sheng Wang’s confidence in becoming independent from Sheng Mingyang.

Of course, independence alone wasn’t quite enough.

The first time Sheng Mingyang discovered that Sheng Wang wasn’t spending his money was after he left for Beijing. He rarely checked on those few cards, and only ever did keep an eye on them during the period of time after Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian’s relationship had just gotten exposed. To his surprise, he discovered that expenditure had stopped a long time ago. He was a little shocked, but didn’t think too much of it.

He regarded himself as someone who knew Sheng Wang very well; he knew his son was used to spending generously, he would buy the bill and treat everyone every time he ate with others. Yet, his personality was a little prideful, and a little lazy. Unbinding the bank cards from his account was just an impulsive move, probably just a rebellious act against certain bygone issues. He would tie the cards back after a short while with his head hung low.

However, he waited for a long time and the “just as expected” did not arrive for him.

It was Sheng Wang's year two at university when he truly felt that his son was gradually leaving his control. Once, when he went to Beijing on a business trip during a holiday. He contacted a few old business friends for a meal, and called Sheng Wang along too. He only discovered while at the dining table that Sheng Wang had already changed his major, and he knew literally nothing of it.

Sheng Wang said that at the start, he got his direct recommendation through competition, so his major was naturally relevant to that subject. However, he only stayed in that major for a year before he went towards the economics side of things, and went for a double degree in legal studies while he was at it.

Sheng Mingyang asked what exactly he was thinking. Sheng Wang didn't come up with all kinds of reasons, instead only saying a "Didn't like it, so I changed it."

Sheng Mingyang personally disagreed with the behaviour of changing after barely studying for a couple of days, he kept feeling like it was a little

too reckless. However, he did not know particularly much about Sheng Wang's original major; he had no evidence to prove that that was a reckless move, so he could only let it be.

Sheng Wang would occasionally run into Chili during class. Her actual major was legal studies. If the timing was good, they would have lunch or a dinner together after class. However, it wasn't just the two of them, but three—

Under the threat of the feather duster, Gao Tianyang had performed well for his gaokao, and successfully fulfilled his promise to "accompany Sheng Wang in Beijing". His school wasn't too far from Sheng Wang's — no matter which direction he went, all it took was a few stops on the public bus to get there.

It was just that Baofusi Bridge and Wudaokou often had traffic jams during peak hours, year round. He would often scratch his head frantically, spamming messages in the group chat, saying "I'm reaching soon" "I can

see the gate", all while still being stuck in the flow of traffic on the bus. Therefore the trio's lunch and dinner were never on time.

In a fit of rage, Gao Tianyang switched to riding a bike instead. That area often had "evil wind", and frequently, by the time he arrived, his brain was already blown away too.

Sheng Wang bought his bullshit at the start, and was rather touched by it. The more he watched however the more he realised something was up. Finally, on one fine day, he pulled him aside and asked, "Gao Tianyang, tell me the truth: you're in Beijing to accompany me or to pursue Chili?"

Gao Tianyang had been in the Jianghu for 20 years, and it was the first time his face was as red as a baboon's butt. "What are you saying, of course I'm here to accompany you!"

Sheng Wang let out a cold laugh, and said, "Off with your bullshit."

Gao Tianyang kept up with his foolish spirit for two years, and had successfully acquired Chili at the end of year two. Therefore the trio became a couple and a single dog.

As Sheng Wang felt glad that the idiot had finally enlightened, he also thought, *fucking hell...*

One time, they ran into his friend from student council while they ate. That person watched the way Sheng Wang was disdainful of the dog food he was being fed from the two, and couldn't help but tease, "What are ya scared of, you can go find one too! Just with this face alone, as long as you say you wanna date, an entire major worth of girls would rush over. You *totally* can piss these two off."

He said that out of the intention of cracking a joke, but he did not expect the people around the table to meet each others' eyes and then fall into a strange quiet the moment he said that. Gao Tianyang kept winking and making faces at him, the frequency so high that it was like he was spasming. He didn't know what's so wrong with what he said either, so he started drinking his soup intently. Sheng Wang was eating with his eyes lowered; there wasn't anything visibly wrong with the look on his face. He

swallowed the food, took a gulp of ice water, and then flashed a smile at the friend, saying, “Kinda makes sense.”

Chili added in from the side, chewing her straw, “He’s so freaking busy, where is he supposed to find the time?”

The student council friend went “oh, oh”, and said, “That’s true.”

University was different from high school, it wasn’t over just in a matter of doing questions and participating in competitions. Sheng Wang still kept himself very busy nonetheless — with a double degree, student council, events and competitions, as well as the projects he was assisting his teacher with, it seemed that he wouldn’t be able to live if he didn’t fill up all 24 hours of his day.

Time always flies whenever a person gets busy.

Time in high school was measured in days, but in university, it’s measured in years. It was like he slept a few times, opened his eyes up again, and the year had abruptly come to an end.

The first second he was a freshman who just enrolled, the next he became a senior.

He was stopped by a girl behind a building. When he heard the other person call him “senior”, he had a feeling like time was but a blur. At that time, he already had a job worth envying over lined up for him. Other than handling procedures and writing his thesis, he rarely returned to school.

The girl wasn’t tall, and when she smiled, the dimples showed on her cheeks, rather sweet. She said, “I’m also from the faculty of law, I thought you are together with senior Li Jia, so I didn’t dare to confess. I discovered that she has a boyfriend later, so I boldly made my way here. I had to wait for so long before I managed to corner you here. So, senior, it will be the new year soon. New year, new times, can I be your girlfriend?”

In the near distance, there was a new year’s eve party held by the school, the sponsors were even pulled in by their student council’s public relations team. However, Sheng Wang seemed to have just realised that, and

stilled for two seconds before he asked, not answering her question, “What day is it today?”

“The 29th,” the girl said.

Sheng Wang nodded.

How odd. He had clearly left Fuzhong for a while, but whenever he heard words like “year end” and “new year”, his first reaction was still “Fuzhong always holds their cultural festival at the end of the year”.

Fuzhong always holds their cultural festival at the end of the year, it would be quite late by the time the event ended. Heavy crowds of people and their shadows filled up Road #3, and by the time he made it back to the dorms, he was already sleepy too. The next time he opened his eyes, the year had come to an end.

He clearly did do many things, filling up every single day. Yet, his memory did not refresh along in time. In the occasions he spaced out, all he could think of was the past, years ago, ages ago……

“Senior, do I have a chance?” The girl wasn’t the shy type, she even waved her hands before him, like she was in a rush.

Sheng Wang came back to himself. He apologised, “Sorry.”

“Ah……” she drawled, and asked, “Why though? Am I not good looking? I *think* I am plenty good looking though.”

Sheng Wang was amused. He nodded, “Yeah, you are. But……”

The girl blinked, waiting for the continuation after the “but”.

Sheng Wang looked at her, and suddenly felt that time was truly magical. Rumours that spread like wildfire in Fuzhong once were no longer brought up by anyone barely a few months later. It became bygone happenings after a few years, and then there wasn’t anyone who knew anymore.

Nobody around this area knew that there was only a single person in his bygone happenings. He only stopped for a bit before he left, but he had

been staring at that empty spot for a long, long time.

Sheng Wang flipped his collar up, blocking out the wintry night wind. He grinned at that girl, saying, “What I like are boys.”

Translator’s notes:

I briefly wondered if god has forsaken me while translating this chapter, because all the school related terms just about killed me. I’ve never wanted to know this much about China’s university admission process.

Baofusi Bridge is at Wudaokou.

Tsinghua and Peking U are neighbours and needless to say they have quite a bit of rivalry, which serves as the basis of certain jokes made in the later chapters.

Chapter 095 - Reunion

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Long Time No See.

The world is truly a magical place. Those words about fondness and love, he only dared to secretly say them to Jiang Tian in the past, not daring to let anyone know. Now, he could tell them to many people peacefully, but Jiang Tian was the only one who couldn’t hear this time.

Technology is so advanced, but they managed to lose contact in the sea of people.

At the start, Sheng Mingyang kept an eye on him like he was guarding against a thief. For that period of time, Sheng Wang had sort of the mindset of completely shattering the broken bottle, thinking that either way he wouldn’t be able to catch him, so he might as well give up — you’re spending so much effort just to keep an eye on me, right? So I’ll format myself just for you.

Back then he was young with a defiant spirit in him. It was rare that he was being rebellious for once. Due to his reluctance to just stab other people directly, he always had the attitude of hurting others at great expense to himself. He emptied his account right in front of Sheng Mingyang, uninstalled WeChat, and locked his old phone as well as the “Ok” and “Encyclopedia for Healthy Living” inside the drawer.

Sheng Wang could still remember the instant he shut the drawer — Sheng Mingyang stood by the table, not saying anything. He looked a little disappointed. As for him, his eyes ached, and he felt pleased at the same time — like he had used his sharpest tooth to gnaw at the most painful ulcer.

After that, people had to contact him through either phone call or text messages. Any news of Jiang Tian had to be conveyed to him through Sheng Mingyang. He said to Sheng Mingyang, “Dad, can you relax yet?”

Sheng Mingyang did not speak.

There was an alumni club for Fuzhong in Beijing. Every time new students entered school, they would hold a gathering and invite everyone for a meal. Batches of seniors would show up if they are free, welcoming their juniors into Beijing.

Sheng Wang had politely declined the invitation the first time. When he was young, he was like a fish in water in this sort of social scenario, he could get along with anyone. He would drink until he turn stupid with a mug in his hands despite being a lightweight. Later on, all he felt was irritation — the endless small talk, the formalities, trying to act close while they were all strangers — he didn't have the energy to deal with that.

He was dragged into participating by Chili and Gao Tianyang when he was invited for the second time.

Perhaps he was born that way; upon truly being in that environment, he had automatically switched into a "fish in water" state...until Zhao Xi arrived late into the event, and he quieted like someone pressed the mute button.

Zhao Xi spotted him immediately, and switched his seats as he quibbled with people. He sat next to him. While nobody else was watching, he clapped his shoulder, saying, “You’re doing rather fine, student Sheng Wang. I see you’ve learnt to lose contact.”

Zhao Xi poured him a glass of beer to the brim, and clinked it against his glass. The milky white foam splashed out. He took a giant gulp, and heard Zhao Xi say, “Wasn’t it tough?”

He couldn’t swallow anymore.

Zhao Xi said he had always felt a little abstruse guilt, saying that he was afraid that Sheng Wang only ended up on this path due to some unconscious nudging from him and Lin Beiting. Then he had truly committed a heinous crime, for he had caused people to suffer for no reason.

Sheng Wang said no.

Because Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting were just there, and if it wasn’t Jiang Tian that he met, then he wouldn’t end up on this path either — at

least, he couldn’t imagine a scenario like that.

He then asked Zhao Xi how he managed to win over his family.

Zhao Xi stilled, saying, “Lin-zi didn’t have this kind of pressure. As for me…...Old Zhao was the uncompromising sort in the past too, my bad temper probably came from him. Back then, I argued with Lin-zi and that did not end well, same goes for Old Zhao, so I went straight overseas. My mom would take it out on my father when she couldn’t find me, so he softened up with that whittling. And then Old Zhao fell sick, and suddenly got over it. He nagged at Lin-zi as much as he nagged at me, he probably treats him as his own son now.”

Sheng Wang was stunned, and dazedly remembered that Xi Le’s Boss Zhao did go through surgery for cancer before.

“However……” Zhao Xi said, “If I could start over again, I would rather whittle him down for two more years in exchange for him to not fall sick. Everybody’s time means something to them.”

Everybody experiences all sorts of joy and misery in this human world, no matter how close they are, their days belong to themself, no such thing as drawing on the experience of others.

Sheng Wang then asked Zhao Xi once more, “Was it you and Lin-ge who helped him go overseas? Is he……”

Is he doing well?

Zhao Xi often heard him go “My Ge, My Ge, My Ge” in the past, when he heard the “he” that was missing its start and end, he was still a little unused to it. He only reacted after being stunned for a while; that assembled family had long since crumbled apart, the “My Ge” no longer had any rightful place for it to be said.

Jiang Tian was no longer his Gege, nor was he his boyfriend. After so many twists and turns, he became someone that Sheng Wang did not know how to address — he became a certain someone he could never bring himself to speak of.

Zhao Xi said that while he and Lin Beiting helped to settle a portion of the affairs, the bulk of it went to Jiang Tian being capable enough himself. His life wouldn’t be that difficult with scholarship money...but all it stopped was at “not so difficult”.

Sheng Wang then asked if he stayed in contact with Jiang Tian. He said, rarely.

Because of this short answer, Sheng Wang made a trip back to Jiangsu for some inexplicable reason, digging out his old phone and logging into WeChat with some struggle. The moment he logged on, he received a huge pile of unread messages.

They had lingered too long in the gaps of time, there was no longer any meaning in replying. Sheng Wang read all of them, one by one, from the start to the bottom. Yet, the chat with Jiang Tian was the only one that was nothing but blank, completely void of anything.

It was only at this moment when he realised that he wasn't merely acting out impulsively when he uninstalled WeChat and abandoned his phone.

He knew Jiang Tian's personality, he also understood what it implied when the other person decided to let go — Jiang Tian had left his school, his old streets, the long alleys, his classmates, his friends…...everything that bustled in the mundane world for Sheng Wang, and left with a single cat by himself, not leaving a single mark behind.

Sheng Wang just did not want to accept that reality, that's all.

In that period of time, he would repeatedly tap into Jiang Tian's personal information page.

The other person's nickname was still "Ok", the profile picture was still "Leader". The cover for his photo album was still the study table beneath the light, his Moments stopping at the song "Childhood" — like the fleeting years came to an abrupt end just like that, never updating ever since.

New years eve during year four of university, the day he rejected his junior, Sheng Wang sat at the grandstand by the sports ground until midnight, the phone in his hand. He wanted to talk to Jiang Tian — he wanted so badly for the first time ever — but he did not know what to say.

The way things ended back then was too hurried, too disgraceful. Both sides were in shambles, to the point that those words that he could say on an impulse as a youth, he couldn’t send them out no matter what, despite now having gotten older.

To be honest, there wasn’t any use in sending them out either. Frankly speaking, he would just be adding more troubles and stress for no reason as long as the things getting in between them do not disappear. The term “lotus roots breaking with the fibers unbroken” sounds suggestive and romantic, but all it was was simply parting in separate ways, but insisting on dragging this out regardless. As long as they drag this out far and long enough, they would be able to break it off cleanly at last.

(t/n: Translated the literal meaning of □□□□, "lotus roots...unbroken". This is a phrase often used to describe relationships yet to sever cleanly, or of how lovers may part, but still long for each other.)

He couldn’t bring himself to send anything like small talk even more. He couldn’t imagine the day when he and Jiang Tian would greet each other with “Busy?” “How are you lately?” “Let’s meet when we’re free”, and then burying their affections from youthful days with layers and layers of soil, completely covering it up.

The day he officially graduated from university, he was dragged by Chili and Gao Tianyang to participate in a farewell dinner with a huge group of people. It seems that there has to be that one set sequence of events for every school every class’ farewell dinner — they would call all sorts of crushes and exes. It was just like April Fools’, the way out had long since been laid for them; if things didn’t go as they wish, they would simply leave via that way.

Sheng Wang thought they were a bunch of dumb birds at the start, how awfully childish of them. Later, after being toasted several drinks in a row by said dumb birds, he drank enough to sit on the sofa at the corner of

the private room, spacing out for a good while. He reached out, asking Gao Tianyang, “Where’s my phone?”

Gao Tianyang was more confused than he was. “You gave your phone to me???”

His mind blanked out for a bit, said an “oh”, and took it out from his own pocket. He tapped into the pinned chat in his WeChat seriously, and keyed in, word by word, “still there?”

And then retracted the message.

He keyed in again: I’ve graduated

And then retracted the message.

He keyed in once more: got a double degree, am I not amazing

……

He sent all of them out, line by line, and retracted all of them, line by line. He was as focused as when he was editing his thesis.

By the time Gao Tianyang was done with a round of drinks and escaped to that corner, all he caught a glance of was the lack of a single

green message in the chat interface, and a long row of “You have retracted the message”.

(t/n: The message you send out appears in a green box on WeChat)

And then Sheng Wang said “Shit, I feel like puking”, switched his screen off, and dashed into the bathroom.

His retracted messages formed an entire chain, but he did not receive a question mark in reply. Instead, other people’s messages popped in non-stop, coming in pairs and groups to congratulate him for his successful graduation. There were always people like that who would wish him happy birthday, happy holiday, happy new year on the dot. However, he could not match anyone’s names to anybody at all, so he could only reply mechanically, “Thank you, you too.”

That day onwards, Sheng Wang no longer did anything like that. It seemed like he had packed everything up, and poured everything into his job with much vigour. He went to a top class consultant company with high

barriers of entry. That year, most new hires that came from his school had masters and doctorates. He was the rare graduate.

In the past, Auntie Sun often said that he lived a pampered life, he didn't even know to add a little oil in first before frying rice, he didn't know what it was like to go through hardship and suffering. Yet, he did not waste a single second upon graduating university, and eagerly dived into a life of human suffering. The company had a large variety of clients, coming from all sorts of industries. The group he was in primarily focused on joining up with foreign investment. Due to his good looks, smart tongue, strong capabilities, alongside his good relations with all sorts of teams, he soon amassed his own network of people.

Sheng Mingyang used to constantly bring up how "you are still young", until he ran into an obstacle in his business, and needed to bribe someone somewhere in order to proceed. His past business rarely interacted with that area, and he genuinely wasn't able to find a suitable person to

bridge up the gap for him for a period of time. After jumping through several holes, he seriously ended up at his son.

That day, Sheng Wang got him to meet up for a meal while he was on a business trip, and casually agreed to help him pull strings. Sheng Mingyang then abruptly realised that Sheng Wang was no longer that child who would curl up on the couch, drinking soda and play games for a long while now, neither would he look away with reddened eyes all because of a single line from him.

Perhaps he suddenly felt that he was ageing, or maybe the alcohol had intoxicated him. Sheng Mingyang watched Sheng Wang tapping away on his phone, seeming to be chatting on WeChat as they sat by the table, and suddenly asked, “Are you in contact with…...are you in contact again?”

Sheng Wang paused, and continued typing. He kept his phone, saying, “No.”

He ate a few mouthfuls of food, and added, “His WeChat seems to be out of commission now, relax.”

In that instant, Sheng Mingyang seemed to want to say something, but all he did in the end was nod. His impression of his son was that he was a little spoiled and pampered, picky about everything; when he threw tantrums, he was like a baby animal exploding into a ball of fur, hair all raising up — every strand would appear prickly, but they are actually soft to the touch.

It’s a little different now.

He discovered all too belatedly that his son had wrapped himself up in a shell, tough and firm, covered with barbs. It’s completely sealed up, hurting a little to the touch too. The Wang-zai with a soft and fluffy bed of hair had already been lost to the sands of time, and he didn’t know where to find him.

However, Sheng Wang was mistaken on one point: it wasn’t that Jiang Tian did not reply on purpose, but that Jiang Tian had lost his phone.

It was Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting who helped to arrange for Jiang Ou and Old Man Ding, contributing quite a bit to the expenses too. He did not like owing people anything, not even if they are on good terms. As long as he accumulated a bit of money, he would definitely pay them back. Therefore, despite his scholarship money, he wasn't living comfortably. There were limits on his visa, so he couldn't work too much part-time. In order to pay them back as early as possible, he cut down on his expenditure as much as he could, and the street he rented in wasn't quite safe as a result.

He had been stopped, stolen from, robbed. At the start, he planned to grit his teeth and just bear with it — until he lost two phones, then he hurriedly moved away. Every time he switched into a new phone, the first thing he did would be downloading the old videos and photos he saved on a cloud drive, and creating a private album, safely and meticulously keeping them away. Yet, he rarely opened it up.

At the start of December for a certain year, he went to participate in a science conference with his professor. On the journey back, he stayed in

Sweden for two days due to personal reasons on the side of the professor. The winters there were everlasting and difficult, and the sky darkened at three in the afternoon.

All the shops nearby had closed for the day, the only place opened had only alcohol. The professor invited him for some drinks to warm up. He drank a few shots, and ended up curling up in a corner, sitting in the armchair by the window. As he watched the sun dip beneath the horizon, he suddenly tapped into his gallery, and dug out a video from a long time ago, pulling and dragging the progress bar back and forth.

In the video, a boy in school uniform walked a few steps in a straight line beneath the streetlamp. He suddenly turned to face him, asking, “Did you catch that clearly?”

Jiang Tian’s body bowed over, his eyes lowered. His thumb kept swiping at the progress bar; everytime the video ended, he would drag it back to the start. He was clearly quite sober, but he acted like a stubborn and clumsy drunkard.

After the professor was done chatting with his friend, he came over here. He eyed the phone in curiosity, and without even managing to get a clear look at its contents, he smiled and asked, “What are you looking at?”

Jiang Tian switched the screen off. “Nothing much, it’s my cat.”

“Oh.” The professor knew that he had a cat, and had been carefully raising it for a long time now. He nodded in much understanding, “I’ve seen the pictures, it’s very pretty. What’s its name again? I could never pronounce it properly.”

Jiang Tian’s fingers played with the phone, his gaze resting on some random spot in thin air; he seemed to be a little spaced out. He was silent for a few seconds before answering, “Wang-zai.”

It was easy enough to track down videos and photos, not so much for all sorts of accounts tied to his phone number. Moreover, some were tied to his device. Jiang Tian changed into a new WeChat account, but did not bother adding many people. Most of those he added were exchange students, chat records mostly involving schoolwork, save for one person.

He added the person on a moment of impulse while riding on a bus at midnight. The other person’s contact list was probably filled to the brim, not even bothering to ask who he was. He slept after aimlessly exchanging a bit of small chat. Yet, he was like a miser hoarding his wealth, and managed to stare at the two undiscriminating lines of small talk used on anyone for an entire long journey.

It was as though this unknown WeChat had concealed him with an invisibility cloak, he constantly deluded himself with this layer of falsehood over him. He would send a restrained line of well wishing during festivals, and then say to the person a happy birthday every December 4th — 12am on the dot — getting a simple and polite thank you in reply.

He hurried forward amidst the lines and lines of simple replies. He graduated in advance, and applied for a doctorate too — as if he worked a little harder, time would pass by more quickly, and it wouldn’t be so unbearable.

Yet, for every few steps he sprinted, there would always be some people who would pull him backwards a little—

Jiang Ou had recovered very well for the first two years, sometimes giving the people the illusion that she merely had a few bad days due to the concentrated aggravation she received; after that point in time, she would calm down.

For a time being, she became gentle and refined. She spoke with pleasure whenever she talked to people, she didn’t get too worked up or angry. It was to the point that Jiang Tian thought everything was fine, until a certain day, he tentatively brought up Sheng Wang, and it was as though a switch had been flipped on in Jiang Ou; she instantly became restless and anxious again. He discovered that it wasn’t that easy to solve psychological problems like this, and only time and patience could slowly whittle it away.

In that period of time, Old Man Ding had been hospitalised a few times, and undergone a surgery. Once people age, it’s like they constantly

stand on a tightrope, every step has to be taken with caution. After this pit, another one would follow, and there is nothing but fear.

So there was no use no matter how quick Jiang Tian ran; his shadow was too slow.

He spent a very, very long time, and managed to get his shadow to vaguely catch up a little. He then managed to catch a little break.

His academic advisor was an influential person in his field. He needed to return back to his country due to a collaborative project involving the application of nano material in medical treatment at that time. When Jiang Tian saw the school they would be working with, he submitted an application for god knows what reason. Only when he was already on the flight back to his country then he realised that his trip was a little rash.

The person he wanted to have a glimpse of had long since graduated.

*

Year end was always the busiest. After working himself for two and a half days straight, he started a teleconference on the schedule of someone living abroad while physically living locally. Just as he managed to find time after dawnbreak with much difficulty and was ready to catch up on sleep for a day, he received a phone call, saying that he needed to attend a dinner at night.

His hand reached out from his blanket, and he sat up straight while grabbing his hair. Too little sleep would result in a bad temper; he was already filled with resentment, and upon hearing about this thing that just rudely cut in, he was visibly irritated. “Who’s the client that is so good at picking the time?”

“An expert on nanoscience. The company originally working with him has a few dealings with our side, after he switched to the medical field, our contact lessened. This time, he brought a few doctors here for a project. You are very familiar with the school of cooperation, so I’m not going further into that. Coincidentally, our company also has a development

centre of cooperation with your school, along with how that professor personally knows the PAR, with this and that, the meal is going to happen."

(t/n: 1. Said "doctor" here refers to people with a doctorate degree/PhD, at least that's what I'm seeing so far 2. PAR is exactly what it says in the raws, I'm leaning towards typo for now)

Sheng Wang did not feel like any of that was coincidental at all, only thinking that disrupting one's sleep is a cause to be struck by lightning. Therefore, he was in low spirits upon reaching that place at night, not particularly lively at all.

That expert had the face of a white person but the appetite of a Chinese. He had a preference for Jiangsu cuisine. The company had booked a private room. The expert said he brought three PhDs with him, and up till the point Sheng Wang had already entered, all he saw was two. There was still a seat that remained empty, who knew if it was meant for a person or for a ghost.

He made a bit of small talk while running on the last reserves of his sanity, and then he sat down. He lazily replied a few messages on WeChat

while propping his elbow. During that time, he suddenly heard the professor and the two doctors mention the word “Jiang”, and looked up on instinct.

Sheng Wang was stunned for a few seconds as he looked opposite of him, and didn’t hear any similar wording or a full name. He felt like there’s something wrong with him.

There were countless numbers of people with the same first and last name, not to mention that this was just a surname. Still, he always did a double take whenever he encountered that name, as though this name was something rare.

After a short while, the professor received a call, and announced that the person had arrived with a grin.

Sheng Wang abandoned his phone, rubbed his heavy, drowsy eyelids, and got up. “I’ll fetch.” It was the chance for him to get some fresh air, and get rid of that drowsiness.

Just as he opened the door of the private room and exited, Jiang Tian happened to turn in from the corner.

In an instant, their eyes met, and then none of them could move anymore.

Sheng Wang stilled for two seconds, and with a buzz, his mind went completely blank.

The stream of people around them were endless, the bits and pieces of conversation ceaseless. The two of them were the only ones who stood upon a straight line of frozen silence, staring at each other, astounded. Their features were still a familiar sight to each other, and yet they were a little scared of openly claiming to know them. The sands of time filled with clashes, ambiguity, and anxiety gradually rolled past them by the side just like that. Being in each other’s embrace, the tips of their noses touching as they kissed seemed to be a lifetime ago. They had not moved from where they stood, but they were ruined beyond recognition.

Sheng Wang’s finger, dangling next to him, curled a little before relaxing. His throat was tight and dry. He said, “Ge.”

…...Long time no see.

Chapter 096 - Nonsensical Rambles

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“Former Boyfriend.”

Sheng Wang had his own personal agenda when he chose to switch his major as well as the team he ended up in upon entering the company.

There was this line that trended at one point, saying that there’s less than six degrees of separations between any strangers in this world. Sheng Wang had thought, more than once, that if he dealt with enough foreign business, his network of people expanded widely enough, maybe he would meet Jiang Tian by chance under some circumstance.

Then it couldn’t be blamed on their tie not being severed cleanly enough, it should be said that life is unpredictable, or that it is fated to be. And he would be speaking with a lighter burden on his back, with less concerns too.

Little did he know that when the day truly arrived, he was tongue-tied instead.

He wanted to say, “I dreamt of you when I was having a sleep in this morning.”

It was the same as countless times before; Jiang Tian wore a wide T-shirt, the lapels on his blue and white uniform wide open, his sleeves rolled to his elbow, sitting on the windowsill with a leg curled up, white wireless earpiece stuffed in his ears as he did questions.

The sunlight outside was too bright, the air condition hummed as it worked; the temperature in the bedroom had always been rather low. The person sitting on the windowsill turned around, saying: Don’t rock your chair while you memorise.

He even dreamt of Jiang Tian sprawled over the table, catching up on his sleep. His left hand rested on the back of his neck as always, when he was disrupted from his sleep, his brows would knit in impatience. When he walked, he wasn’t too fast or too slow, but he would go three steps at a time whenever he went up and down the stairs. After he ran, he would be covered in a thin layer of sweat; he was both dazzling and cold.

However, Sheng Wang did not say anything in the end — the boy in his dream had already taken off his school uniform, changing into a foreign dark-coloured coat. He travelled from afar, covered in dust. When he looked across at him from a few meters away, he was like the fog that would arise early winter morning.

It was at this moment that Sheng Wang realised belatedly: they had been separated for too long. The world ran ahead swiftly, not slowing down just for two certain people. Time could change too many things, even the sharpest and most jagged of rocks could be worn down into dust.

He was suddenly a little afraid upon seeing the real person.

(t/n: The phrase here used is actually □□□□, used to describe a particular complicated mix of emotions a person travelling back home after a while/from a far would feel, that he felt more worried (out of not knowing if something bad had happened while he's gone) the closer he returned home, while at the same time looking forward to it.)

Someone opened the door to the private room, his colleague came over and clapped on his shoulder. "Aren't you supposed to be fetching someone? Why are you being a vertical wooden log here?"

Sheng Wang stared blankly before he tore his eyes away from Jiang Tian, turning to ask, “What did you say?”

The other PhD that came with the professor stuck his head out from behind, letting out an “oh” and then laughing. He waved at Jiang Tian across the people, saying, “Finally, you’re here at last. Your traffic jam sure jammed for a little too long, the prof has been going on about you for a while now!”

What followed next was quite a few people all pouring out from the room, getting in between Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, and then ushering them inside with lighthearted conversation.

Sheng Wang went back to his seat as though he was sleepwalking. He brought his cup up, and sipped a mouthful of tea — the tip of his tongue hurt as it got scalded, and his heart, abruptly compressed just now, gradually relaxed; it delivered blood to his four limbs and hundreds of bones, pump by pump. His numb fingers finally regained feeling.

Sheng Wang looked up, and saw Jiang Tian being moved to sit down next to the professor. He took off his coat, revealing a clean shirt that fitted him well. As he unbuttoned his collar, he answered the professor's questions.

He seemed to be out of it too, he only nodded or gave simple replies. When he unbuttoned his cuff and folded it up, he finally looked up and in his direction; his gaze cut across the round table and the mirth that filled the room, landing on Sheng Wang.

The colleague was acute, and asked almost instantly, "Eh, I was just thinking. Don't tell me the two of you know each other?"

The entire table stopped their conversations, and looked over with curiosity in their eyes, dancing back and forth between the two of them.

Sheng Wang stilled, and thought this scene was so absurd to the point of being ridiculous. The him in high school never would have thought — not even until he died — that one day he would be sitting at the same table with Jiang Tian, with the two of them at the ends furthest away from each

other, and the people around them would say in shock, “So you two do know each other.”

He nodded stiffly, and at the same time, he heard Jiang Tian answer with a “Mn”.

“University classmates?”

“No,” Sheng Wang said.

“I think you didn’t go to a local university, right?” Jiang Tian’s fellow doctor only brought it up offhandedly, but the two people at the table met eyes, and fell into an enigmatic silence simultaneously.

For that one split second, Sheng Wang wished for any unnecessary people around them to just disappear; all his attention was nailed dead across the table, he had nothing to spare for anything else at all.

Fortunately, his colleague, Zhang Chao was a talkative person, he wouldn’t let there be even a single second of silence in conversations.

“You’re overseas for your entire time in university? That’s great, I thought I’m surrounded by the school next door again even though I’m literally just eating. That saves me from a battle of tongues over which school is better again.”

The entire table roared with laughter.

Zhang Chao then said, “If it wasn’t university, then…the same high school?”

Jiang Tian said, “Same class.”

The fellow doctor next to him clapped him, “Why didn’t you say that you have an old classmate here earlier!”

This person’s EQ was slightly lagging behind; he only realised that it wasn’t quite appropriate of him to say it after the deed was done. There’s an old classmate at a dinner, but the person himself didn’t know at all. That could only mean one thing: although they were classmates, they were clearly not on very good terms — at the very least, they rarely stayed in contact. It’s likely that they don’t even know what the other person is doing now.

As compared to the blunt and straightforward academics opposite them, Sheng Wang's group was much more flexible. Zhang Chao immediately followed up, grumbling, "How was there supposed to be an earlier? All of us only got the notice this morning that our dinner is covered."

The other people all started to laugh, concealing that one moment of enigmatic awkwardness.

That doctor who looked more of the honest type started acting more carefully after stepping on a landmine. He didn't bother going on about classmates and former acquaintances, and devoted all his energy into praising other people. He praised everyone, from the professor to his fellow postgraduates, and then he began laying on the praises thick on Jiang Tian. "He's amazing. After graduating from his major, he applied for the PhD straight away. The few of us, we were terrified when we applied at the start, scared of receiving a rejection. He wasn't worried at all — the professor had his eyes on him a long time ago, he's already a foot in. Usually, for all

sorts of conferences, the professor would definitely include him even when there's restrictions on the number of people that can go. And all we could do was watch, couldn't even poison him either."

The professor would stumble over his words whenever he spoke in Chinese, but he had no trouble listening at all. He laughed heartily like Santa Claus, saying, "Next time, I promise. Next time there's a conference like this, I'll definitely invite you to go with me."

"Should've done this a long time ago, prof. At the very least, there would be girls thanking you if you leave him behind.

The professor laughed again.

……

Sheng Wang felt like a half-rusted nail. He was already vibrating in his seat, distubred by the magnetic opposite, but he still had to spare half of his attention towards listening to their conversation carefully.

He had never been this serious, not even in class, and yet his ears were stuck on casual chit chat, not daring to miss a single word. He picked

and picked at those jokes and narrations, filtering out for all the parts relevant to Jiang Tian. He put together a tiny corner of those dawdling years. He felt pride listening to some, and a wave of bitter ache as he listened to the others.

Those were the years he missed.

This professor was a quarter Russian, and his interest in alcohol far exceeded all and any other food — especially so in cold seasons. Zhang Chao and the few others could handle their alcohol super well, and they drank drinks after drinks with the guests from afar.

Sheng Wang drank quite a bit too. Everytime he lifted his glass, Jiang Tian would look at him, all the way across the dishes on the table.

The lamp at the top of the private room was fancy and elaborate, the lights and lines intercrossed. Along with the reflection caused by the clinging of glass against glass, their eyes would occasionally get dazzled. It

was within this chaotic mixture of light that the two of them sat at two ends with restraint, their gazes entangling again and again.

The moment his glass was emptied, he went to hide away on a couch in a corner of the private room.

After everyone had their heart’s content of food and drinks, they went to the bathroom one after another. The private room was suddenly quiet and much emptier, with only a couple of people left at the table, still softly chatting away.

Sheng Wang took the warm water left heated on the table and poured himself a glass. Jiang Tian returned from the bathroom, and headed straight towards him, going around the round table.

It was as though Sheng Wang had his acupuncture points pressed, his shoulders and neck were stiff as he held the glass. As he drank with his head up, he could even hear the way his bones and joints creaked.

(t/n: Pressing down on the right acupuncture points can restrict movement)

The sofa seat softly sank — Jiang Tian sat down next to him. His hands were clasped together, he could smell the faint scent of hand soap. Sheng Wang looked aside, and saw the familiar little mole by his wrist.

Once, at their most intimate moments, he had grabbed Jiang Tian's hand, and pressed kisses to that spot; the other person pulled him to him with the same hand, and kissed him back.

With a flicker in his eyes, Sheng Wang withdrew his gaze. The finger, holding the drinking glass, circled the rim subconsciously.

They used to sit together like that before too; when they were fine, he used Jiang Tian as his resting pillow. In stifling times, they were seated on two opposite ends. But they were rarely like this exact moment: not exactly near, not quite far either, the both of them dead quiet.

Sheng Wang actually wanted to say a lot of things; with every line that surged to the tip of his tongue, it retreated back before he could open his mouth.

Have you received the nonsensical rambles I'd sent?

Why do you never reply?

Does it still hurt when you think about before?

Is it still stuck like a thorn in your heart, or have you managed to let go?

Is there someone better around you now?

Is there someone that can still make you laugh?

Has your heart throbbed for someone else for a split second?

……

When he was seventeen-eighteen years old, he couldn’t understand why people would only say some meaningless nothings upon reuniting after a long separation. It was only at this moment then Sheng Wang understood: it wasn’t that they had nothing to say, but that they didn’t dare to ask. A journey to a field full of landmines, a wrong step and then they would be blown to smithereens……

They might as well do small talk..

He watched the plain water sloshing around in his glass. He turned to ask Jiang Tian, “Did you let Xi-ge and the rest know about you coming back?”

“There wasn’t enough time,” Jiang Tian said.

“Was it rushed?”

Jiang Tian was silent for a moment before saying, “It was a last minute decision.”

The words exchanged couldn’t be anymore dull, but Sheng Wang’s heart clenched in wave after wave; like there was an invisible hand gripping it, and then letting it go again and again.

He licked the edge of his dry lips, and was quiet for a moment. “How long will you be here?”

“Half a year.”

Sheng Wang’s thumb rubbed the walls of the glass with much force, and nodded.

He could see Jiang Tian out of the corner of his eyes, his gaze was lowered — like he was looking at his fidgeting. His thumb slipped, and he tucked it away again. Jiang Tian looked for a long time, thinking who knows what.

Sheng Wang wanted to ask: Have I changed a lot? Am I very different from the me in high school?

But before he could speak, he heard Jiang Tian ask softly, “You drank so much, do you feel okay?”

Sheng Wang blinked, and was temporarily quiet for a few seconds. “I’ve practised in secret, I’m not down after three drinks anymore.”

Jiang Tian’s eyes were on him. He stuck his hand out, waving his palm before him, “I’ve raised it to five glasses now.”

His expression for that one split second had a trace of his youthful self; of the way he opened his peacock tail, bragging. It was just an abrupt crack, and then that was hidden away again. Jiang Tian opened his mouth,

wanting to say something, but someone opened the door to the private room from the outside. The sound of chit chatting and bantering poured in. Those who went to the bathroom, who went to the smoking lounge for a cigarette were all back. They took their coats from the rack, and were making final small talk.

The atmosphere on the couch was instantly ruined. The professor called Jiang Tian, speedily going on about something — probably the arrangement for tomorrow or the day after. Zhang Chao pulled in Sheng Wang, and was busy trying to arrange for cars for everyone.

He most certainly did not exceed his limit, but Sheng Wang felt incredibly intoxicated. His brain was in perfect tandem with his manic heartbeat, making him feel dizzy, like he wasn’t on solid ground. Every phone call and arrangement made were like decisions made instinctually with his body, his tongue had a will of its own, automatically saying the appropriate things.

By the time he made two trips back and forth and entered the private room once more, he found the person missing; it was just him and Zhang Chao left. At this time, on the contrary, he felt like he was terrible with words. He did not manage to convey to Jiang Tian so many things.

He suddenly remembered the period of time when he just entered Class A: once, when he went to Xi Le for food and forgot to bring money, Jiang Tian came over to redeem him with his phone. When the two went back to the classroom, the practice paper for the afternoon break had been given out for a long time. He was left with only 15 minutes, and no matter how he rushed, he still left a lot of questions untouched.

The moment the paper was whisked away from him — that's what he was feeling right now.

Zhang Chao called a substitute driver for Sheng Wang too. The two waited for the person at the open air parking lot. He was much older than Sheng Wang, when Sheng Wang interned, it was under his hands. Eventually, they became equals. He was like a worrisome older brother

quite often; he would keep an eye on Sheng Wang, trying to stop him from working himself to the bone.

He was on WeChat, adding people into his contact list one by one. He said to Sheng Wang, without even looking up, “I’ll send all of them to you after I finished adding them.”

Sheng Wang wasn’t paying attention. “I have them already.”

Zhang Chao was surprised. “You have the contacts of that many people? All of them?”

Sheng Wang then realised that he only had Jiang Tian’s. He changed his answer, saying, “I got it wrong, send it to me later, thanks.”

“Sure,” Zhang Chao nodded.

When he was done adding, Sheng Wang’s phone vibrated a few times in a row — they were all contacts recommended by Zhang Chao. He did not look through them immediately. Instead, he heard Zhang Chao suddenly ask, “You were high school classmates with that Dr. Jiang? Why do I feel like it wasn’t just that?”

His intention was to clarify if there was any conflict or issue between the two of them, but it became an entirely different meaning upon entering Sheng Wang's ears.

The night wind was strikingly cold in this season; Sheng Wang tugged his scarf, covering his mouth and nose. He glanced at the direction of the parking lot, saying, "It wasn't just that."

"How would you put it?" Zhang Chao asked.

Sheng Wang mulled, saying, "Former boyfriend."

Zhang Chao choked on a lungful of wind. "AY WHAT THE FUCK……"

Author's notes:

Coconut is sweet, sweet, sweet. This is already the last book, if I kneel anymore I'll probably have to saw my legs off.

Translator's notes:

Alright I’m not quite sure if the academic system for like doctorate labels and stuff work that entirely differently in China, neither am I sure if people who already finished their PhDs still have an academic advisor…? I *think* they (Jiang Tian and his “fellow doctors”) are working under said academic advisor while already having finished their PhDs.

On a side note searching how to phrase “fellow doctors” was quite a hellish experience because I’m not quite exactly sure of their status. The raws used “□□”, which CAN mean classmates, or pupils taught by the same master, which is to say in this context they probably share the same academic advisor? So “classmates” doesn’t fit quite right and suggestions like “fellow doctoral students” is too *ugh* because they might not even be students anymore…...starts crying

This translator’s note is here because I didn’t wanna ruin the mood in the last chapter oops

Chapter 097 - Old Flame

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He’s Out on a Business Trip for a Week, Didn’t Manage to Get His Address. How About You Call a Cab to Guangdong to Chase Him?

Jiang Tian drank a little too much tonight too.

That colleague of Sheng Wang had a silver tongue, and managed to contribute 80% of the liveliness for the dinner all by himself. He downed alcohol like water, words like “Top tier talent” “young and accomplished” tumbled easily out of him, tossing out professional lingo one after another. He could easily resume any conversation topic, he could make all sorts of jokes, and chatted all over the place with the glass in his hand.

If it was before, Jiang Tian would have rejected him without a second thought if he wasn’t feeling like drinking. Yet, it seemed like he had forgotten to bring his tongue with him today, he would drink every time the person toasted him, not even bothering with any formalities, straightforward like a machine. He drank until his temples throbbed, but he couldn’t even

remember a single character from the person's name — all he remembered were the parts related to Sheng Wang.

That person said he was rather fated with Sheng Wang: their universities faced each other directly opposite, before graduation, they'd met during school events. While other people were having the time of their lives flaming each other, it was Sheng Wang, the youngest one, who could stay the most composed. He did not talk much, and would watch the fight go down across the other side of the table, occasionally cracking a few jokes now and then.

He even said he remembered this year two boy on the spot. The few girls in his line of profession liked Sheng Wang quite a lot too, thinking that this junior looked handsome and fresh, and rather obedient too; surely it would be fun to tease him. In the end, they found out that there was no way to do so at all — Sheng Wang's closeness with people stopped at the surface level, the moment the event was over, he was nowhere to be found. He

didn’t like to talk on WeChat, nor did he enjoy going out to play — he had the qualities of a workaholic at such a young early age.

Eventually, they became co-workers, and with a second look, he turned out to be a workaholic just as expected. Other than specific days of rest, Sheng Wang was constantly awake no matter the time they looked for him. He was like a spinning top that did not know the meaning of rest, he could live on magic alone.

Jiang Tian listened to those intermittent teasing remarks, and then scenes constantly formed in his mind; some familiar, some strange.

He could imagine Sheng Wang sitting at the edge of the table, the glee of schadenfreude in the corner of his eyes as he watched other people get up in each other’s faces, and then mischievously cut in when he found the chance.

But he couldn’t imagine Sheng Wang being quiet.

His Wang-zai was really quite interesting upon being teased: he would be driven mad, he would be pleased as pie, he liked to forcibly maintain his dignity, but not for too long, and run away on the way laid out for him. He would run not too far before slinking back, tail between his legs. He had a great temper, no matter how long it was since his friend last contacted him, he could chat up a storm with them.

He really did like to chat on WeChat, he also really did like to sleep in.

The colleague said Sheng Wang had developed extremely quickly, and he was ashamed for how inferior he was in comparison. But all Jiang Tian saw was that brilliant and radiant youth encasing himself in layers and layers of shells, sealing all the most genial, the most gentle, the most passionate parts of him away on the most inside. Other people were all praising him, but all he felt was heartache. Later, with the alcohol getting to him, he was hurting all over his body.

The staff in charge of getting in touch with them for the project had arranged a place for them to stay in: right in the school they would be working with, with great conditions. Everyone got a house to themself. Jiang Tian was ushered into the car back to his lodging, and shut his eyes with knitted brows the moment he sat on the backseat.

However, they were barely on the road before someone let down the car window. With the wintry wind of late night, the intoxication was gone by half. Jiang Tian suddenly opened his eyes, and held onto the driver's seat as he leaned forward, saying to the driver, "Stop the car."

The professor was already asleep. His fellow doctor turned around from the front seat, asking, "What is it? You wanna puke?"

Jiang Tian said, "I have to do something."

"Then should I get the driver to send you?"

"No need, I can call one on my own later."

Jiang Tian exited the car, leaving everyone behind in confusion, and hurriedly made his way back. When he returned to the private room, all that

was left was the waiter clearing away the dishes. He asked for directions, and rushed downstairs to the open air parking lot. Just as he turned around the corner, he saw Sheng Wang pulling his scarf up, and waving goodbye to his colleague.

The temperature at night was rather low — when Sheng Wang spoke, there was a pale patch of mist before his nose, just like the tone of his skin. He waved his hands, and ducked inside the car without even looking back. The car drove out of the road curve, and disappeared into the night with a blink of an eye.

In that moment, Jiang Tian abruptly realised: Sheng Wang was no longer that boy who would obediently wait to be claimed after he drank, and forcibly make him walk in a straight line with him anymore.

Soon, another car turned out of the road curve, and he was the sole spirit left at the enormous parking lot. He stood for a long time in the dark and quiet night, his heart viciously and yet gently filled up by an emotion, so swollen that it hurts.

He thought that once he brought those spikes further away from him, Sheng Wang wouldn't be pricked as much. He did not expect that returning only after it had been that long, he couldn't find the opening of that tough layer of shell anymore.

He was starting to regret it.

This city was an unfamiliar one to him, yet this was also where Sheng Wang had stayed for a long time. The city lights illuminated the nights, the clamour of people filled the city.

He thought this was the bustle that the other person liked, but he managed to lose the person he liked amidst the bustle. He only had the earliest version of the map, but he did not know where to start looking.

The university campus wouldn't be too quiet even if it was late into the night. The BBQ wings shop, the hotpot restaurant nearby were full to the brim. There were plenty of students who were from the library on the

road. It was different from the Fuzhong from before — it was also different from where he lived overseas.

Jiang Tian would take a few more looks when he passed by, imagining: did Sheng Wang eat at a certain table here too? Who did he eat with? Was he still as picky?

This project would last for quite a while, so he brought his cat over too. Animals are always sensitive to unfamiliar places; usually, whenever he entered his house, his cat would most definitely be waiting at the highest level of the shoe cabinet, sticking its head out asking for pets. Today, however, it was hidden away in some corner, and he saw not a trace of it for a while.

He poured out food and water, took off his jacket and sat down on the couch. He waited for quite a while before he saw the young cat poke its head out from the cardboard box he had yet to discard, check around furtively, and then trotting its way to him.

He scratched the cat’s chin, took out his phone and hesitated. He called Zhao Xi.

*

Sheng Wang would get drowsy after drinking, and with the non-stop work earlier, he was asleep almost immediately upon reaching home. He most definitely did get the full eight hours of sleep, but there were dark circles around his eyes when he showed up for work the next day.

Zhang Chao was alarmed, and while he went to make coffee, he came over and winked at him. “What happened to you? This looks pretty bad.”

Sheng Wang filled his schedule up, looking like he was terribly busy. “What else could it be? Have you not heard of hangovers before? I’m far worse than you when it comes to drinking.”

“Drop it,” Zhang Chao propped himself against his desk, stubbornly refusing to leave. This person had received a giant bombshell of a gossip last night, and before he had a chance to truly process and think about it, the person involved himself had already boarded the car and fled. His stomach

was filled with the urge to gossip, and if he couldn't empty it out, he literally couldn't pay attention for work at all.

"You can't call this a hangover," Zhang Chao bit the rim of the cup, lowering his head. He said, cheekily, "Judging by your appearance, it's more like 'hard to forget an old flame' for you."

Sheng Wang: "....."

This person was quite something — out of all things, he *had* to mention *that*, and even did it in a way that wouldn't even enrage him, because he was spot on. However, this wasn't quite right either: you have to have someone new before the person qualifies as an old flame, and Sheng Wang had not gone through that entire process at all.

"Wow, I really was right?" Zhang Chao — this annoying menace — was a smooth person at the dining table, but now at this time, he couldn't tell when to cut it out. He continued saying, facing Sheng Wang's glare head-on, "Then that's no problem at all! Don't they say it's always like matchsticks and dry logs between ex-lovers? No spark the first time you

saw each other, no problem, just see each other a few more times. Isn't there a meeting with the cooperation centre tomorrow? Why don'tcha go with me?"

Cha, to hell with your cha.

Sheng Wang opened up his schedule and showed it to him in annoyance. "See this? I'm away on a business trip tomorrow."

After he spoke, he couldn't help but to add, "One week."

He expressed his strong displeasure on that issue without realising.

"Then it has to be said that fate truly toys with people," Zhang Chao shook his head, sighing. "But that's alright too, don't you have his WeChat? Just chat! Find something or another, once you start talking, then a conversation would surely begin, and the more you talk, wouldn't everything fall into place?"

This person had been single for 30 years, he had never dated before. He must have gone insane from being repressed or something, but he was particularly enthusiastic in matchmaking people. He sounded like he knew

what he was talking about whenever he goes into theory, yet he had never personally tried it for himself before.

Sheng Wang's sore spot was prodded at again, and so he grabbed a file, smacking him away in return. "The hell do you know."

The gossiping troublemaker ran away, Sheng Wang's gaze returned to his computer. He stared for ages, but not a single word entered his mind, so he simply gave up, and rested heavily against the chair.

A long time ago, he thought: as long as the things getting between him and Jiang Tian do not disappear, no matter how much closer he went to him, it would be to no avail. But the moment he actually saw the person himself, he couldn't care any less about the so-called "rationality" at all.

When he saw Jiang Tian's fingers, all he wanted to do was to grab them. When he saw his Adam's apple, all he thought about was the way it flushed in red as he kissed that part. When he saw every inch of him, all the thought was: these were all mine before, I could do whatever I wanted with it.

The few years they were separated, longing was a stubborn habit. When he truly saw him, he finally realised: he really…...really does miss Jiang Tian. He missed him like he had gone insane.

But he couldn’t find that opening anymore.

Zhang Chao wasn’t wrong, actually. He just needed to come up with something, and once the opening was made, then everything would fall into place. But his biggest problem was that he couldn’t find the opening at all.

He spent so many years, wrapping himself up in layers upon layers, to deal with this, to cope with that. By the time he saw Jiang Tian, he had already forgotten how to remove those shells instead.

He wanted to see Jiang Tian, he wanted to talk to him, and yet he was also afraid that he would have nothing to say when he saw him. He hid away in his shell, searching, looking, but he didn’t know which was the him Jiang Tian was the most familiar with.

If every time they see each other was filled with tentativeness, then that “old flame” would slowly waste away in continuous disappointment —

that was what he was the most afraid of.

Sheng Wang dug his phone out, and tapped into the chat he had pinned at the top for many years. He stared at the blank page for a long while, and backed out of it again without leaving a single word. He leaned on his chair, his head tilted up in irritation. Only when his phone vibrated a few more times, then he lowered his eyes to get started on hsi work again. After replying to a few messages, he slid down the app several times before recalling that he had yet to add the contacts Zhang Chao sent over last night.

Zhang Chao was very considerate: he added the names of the people under every contact card, so that he wouldn’t be unable to match anyone up. Sheng Wang sent out a request to be added out one by one, and then saw a notification at the very end.

Sheng Wang moved his fingers, replying to Zhang Chao: why is there still a retracted message? what did you take back?

Zhang Chao just so happened to pass by with his phone, and was startled when he saw a blank profile picture out of nowhere. When Sheng Wang had just started working, his profile picture was a pair of eyes rolling, showing the whites, his nickname was rather fearsome too. Zhang Chao couldn’t bear to watch it anymore, and tactfully reminded him, saying that it wasn’t quite appropriate to reply to clients and bosses with a pair of eyes rolling; it would be better if he changed it.

He didn’t know how much Sheng Wang liked that pair of eyes exactly, but in any case the person was completely reluctant when he changed it. After he changed it, he was in pretty low spirits for the next few days. Therefore, he swallowed back the suggestion he had yet to say out loud — he didn’t think that an entirely blank profile picture and a nickname like “?” was any better than before.

He still thought that there was something wrong with his internet whenever he saw that profile picture.

Zhang Chao replied, saying: I retracted your unforgettable old flame, don’t you already have his WeChat?

?: ……

?: ok

Zhang Chao read his reply, and felt a complicated mix of emotions for some reason. It was true that he had not dated before, but he did secretly crush on that one or two people when he was young and foolish too, he knew the frustrated sort of feeling too. On one hand, it was his matchmaker heart at work again, but on the other, it was because he admired this little brother of his. Zhang Chao, as a bystander, wanted more than anything to matchmake them together, it was just that he didn’t know how to even do it.

This is so worrying, so goddamn worrying.

Just as Zhang Chao was worried on the behalf of the “emperor”, the emperor himself had cowardly escaped to a different land.

(t/n: This line is probably a reference to □□□□□□□, on how the eunuch is more worried than the emperor for like...ruling issues, also meaning that the observers are more anxious than the person involved.)

Sheng Wang was actually a little vexed when he saw the schedule of the business trip, but if he were to go look for Jiang Tian, he couldn't find any particular reason to either. After pondering and mulling, after recalling how Jiang Tian would be staying for half a year, he suddenly settled on a decision. He packed his luggage, and escaped on the second day, launching himself all the way to Guangdong.

When his flight just landed, he received Zhao Xi's phone call. The other person said, "*Didi*, come save your Xi-ge."

Sheng Wang was waiting for his luggage, and was completely baffled. "What happened?"

"Old comrade Zhao's andropause has been acting up lately, and is even naggier than an old granny; one of him is as much as an entire duck farm. Your Lin-ge and I are planning to come out and escape him for a bit. Isn't it the 31st the day after tomorrow? I said the two of us will be celebrating the new year with you, please consider offering us a place to stay." Zhao Xi was probably damaged from being annoyed, and his tone

was extremely wooden. “Don’t you live around Shijingshan? Which district, gimme a house number, Lin-zi and I will be seeking asylum with you by then.”

Sheng Wang didn’t know if he should laugh or cry. “Xi-ge, I’m away for a business trip in Guangdong, it would already be the 3rd by the time I’m back in Beijing.”

Zhao Xi: “.....”

Sheng Wang was silent for a moment. He hesitated, wondering if he should mention to him that Jiang Tian had returned. But then again, Jiang Tian probably had his own arrangement, there was no need for him to go out of his place, so he chatted for a bit and hung up.

What he didn’t know was that the moment he hung up, Zhao Xi sent a message to Jiang Tian: he’s out on a business trip for a week, didn’t manage to get his address. how about you call a cab to Guangdong to chase him?

Jiang Tian: …...

Chapter 098 - Breaking the Silence

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Ge, I Just Drank.

Calling a cab to Guangdong would truly be insane.

Jiang Tian switched to a different app subconsciously, and his fingers flew as he tapped on the screen. Until his fellow PhD tapped him, and said hushedly, his hand covering his mouth, “I thought there would be a chance to rest, get look around for a bit for a couple of days before we begin and stuff. Great, now that’s ruined.”

Jiang Tian then came back to himself. He looked through the arrangement for the next few days projected onto the screen, and looked at the flight information he was checking on his phone again. He pinched the bridge of his nose, thinking, *I’m not too far off from insanity too.*

He closed the app and switched the screen off. Just as he was about to keep his phone, he received Zhao Xi’s phone call.

“I need to receive a call,” he informed the professor, and left the discussion room.

“Xi-ge.”

“Oh, I was getting worried after you didn’t reply for so long,” Zhao Xi said languidly. He had been on a break for the past few days, and drove to the mountain to enjoy the hot springs. He was living quite a relaxed life, whatever he said to Sheng Wang was purely made up — he even received a few glares and finger pointing from Boss Zhao, who was listening at the side. “I thought you really are taking a cab there.”

“No way.”

“That’s great then, there’s at least some rationality left, you’re not at the point that you’ll recklessly go there without even finding out the hotel name yet,” Zhao Xi said.

“.....”

Jiang Tian, who was this close to doing exactly that, strategically opted for a few seconds of silence.

Zhao Xi then continued, “Speaking of this, I’m a little puzzled.”

“What?”

“Why do you have to go all the way to me to get me to prod at him? Why don’t you ask him yourself,” Zhao Xi, as someone who had been through that, could relate oddly well enough; on the other hand, he wanted to just smush the two of them together already. “Just say give an address, I’ll go look for you. Does he have any other choice?”

Before Jiang Tian could even speak, Zhao Xi arrived at the conclusion all by himself. “Oh yeah, I forgot. You’re the secretly shameless type.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

“It’s not that.” He was silent for a moment, and his voice took on the tone of a headache, “He’ll run.”

Zhao Xi: “Huh?”

“Give him additional time and he’d overthink, and if he couldn’t come around to it, he’d run away.”

Jiang Tian could totally imagine that scenario — just like how someone wrapped himself up and mailed himself away to another class

without saying a single word.

His cat inherited that point nearly perfectly; it was it who reached its paws out to claw at the edge of his pants, but it was also it who slipped away faster than an arrow after teasing like that.

Back then, Jiang Tian could compile a notebook to capture him back; but what does he have now?

“What to do then? Catch him off guard and ambush him? Not give him the chance to overthink and run away?”

“When he’s back from the business trip, I’ll wait for him after work,” Jiang Tian said. He did not know other addresses, but he did know the location of the company at the very least.

Zhao Xi imagined it, and found it a little amusing. He teased, “Why do I feel like you’re trying to catch a sparrow.”

Jiang Tian did not want to be the source of amusement for him, and said stiffly, “I’m hanging up.”

“Eh—” Zhao Xi stopped him.

“There’s still something else?” Jiang Tian stopped his climb up the stairs.

This time round, Zhao Xi stopped joking, He deliberated before asking, “About your mom……”

“She’s in a better state recently.” Otherwise, he wouldn’t have come back here on impulse. After he said that, his brows quickly furrowed for a split second, and added, “Maybe because she heard how Ji Huanyu’s health is failing him.”

“You would tell her this sort of thing?” Zhao Xi was the one who informed Jiang Tian of Ji Huanyu’s ailing health after hearing about it. He thought Jiang Tian wouldn’t bring it up even after he knew, seeing that this name should be the biggest landmine for Jiang Ou.

“I didn’t tell her, she found out from other people,” Jiang Tian said.

This surprised him for quite a while, because Jiang Ou’s reaction upon hearing Ji Huanyu’s name was much milder than he expected; she was

only a little down for those few days, and by the time he flew back here, she was back to her normal state. In comparison, she had a more visceral reaction towards “Sheng Wang”.

Zhao Xi’s voice snapped him out of it. “Your mom hasn’t completely recovered, you sure you want to woo him back?”

It wasn’t that he was trying to discourage Jiang Tian, it was just that he had seen too many repeated reunions and separations; he was scared that the two little brothers would end things on a messy note again.

Jiang Tian was quiet for a fair while. “I’ve said it a long time ago — I don’t owe anyone anything.”

His decision had never been made in lieu of how Jiang Ou would react, but rather, it was Sheng Wang. Before them, there had always been only two paths: separate, or continue together. They’ve tried one of them, and were ruined beyond belief……

This was already the worst it could get.

Jiang Tian recalled the way Sheng Wang was taciturn and reserved that night. Silence, and then he said, “Either way, it can’t be worse than right now.”

Zhao Xi was at a loss of words. He laughed, both conflicted and rueful, “Sure, then Lin-zi and I will be waiting for the meal invitation from the two of you.”

He had watched them for many years as a bystander. He did want to help them very much, and sometimes, he desperately wanted to tell Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang of the things he experienced, the issues he was conflicted about, so that the two of them wouldn’t suffer. Ultimately, they weren’t Lin Beiting and him, and different people have different paths to walk on.

So he might as well give some practical advice.

Before Zhao Xi hung up, he asked jokingly, “Do you want Ge to tell you how to woo someone back after you broke up?”

Jiang Tian: “Go on.”

Zhao Xi did not expect for this secretly shameless guy to seriously intend on listening, and his mind jammed on the spot. Serenely, he spoke, “Based on past experience, a fire would easily spark after you see each other a few more times. If you can’t extinguish it, then argue. If you can’t get anything out of arguing, then fight. And as you fight…...hold on, you’re an adult already, right?”

“.....”

Jiang Tian removed his earpiece, and hung up immediately.

*

Sheng Wang may be hiding in Guangdong, but his days were not peaceful.

First, it was Gao Tianyang — that idiot — who made a ghostly phone call at five in the morning, yelling at the top of his voice as he was removed from the shelter of his quilt. “TIAN-GE’S BACK, DO YOU KNOW?!”

Ever since Sheng Wang started working, he couldn’t be exposed to his phone’s vibration — he would be instantly awake upon hearing that, and

all and any other drowsiness would vanish. As he held his phone, he sat on his bed vacantly for a while, his brain enacting 108 torture methods on Gao Tianyang. He went out of his bed, drank a half glassful of water before saying, “I know.”

Gao Tianyang’s voice abruptly softened. “Oh, you knew? How did you know? Tian-ge contacted you after coming back here?”

“What are you even thinking,” Sheng Wang said, “we met at a dinner.”

Gao Tianyang was speechless for a good while. “Fuck, that’s possible too?”

Actually, when Jiang Tian had just left, Gao Tianyang was very displeased for a while, he was even a little angry. He wanted to say, we’re friends for so many years, how could you just end things without a second thought? Later, he put himself in his shoes and was no longer angry. He only felt bitter.

It was also that period of time when he suddenly came to his senses, and rejected the independent recruitment in order to go to Beijing. With that, Jiang Tian and Sheng Wang could be considered half a matchmaker for him…...just that the matchmaker himself was still single.

Gao Tianyang cleared his throat, and cautiously asked, “And um about that, Chili got me to ask the two of you: do you plan to get back together?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

*Y*ou are so good at picking the conversation topic.

“Why are you asking this?” he asked, exasperated.

Gao Tianyang explained, “So this is what’s happening: Old Song will be on a business trip to Beijing on the 3rd, 4th and 5th. We plan to ask Carp and the rest if they have time, and come together for a gathering and stuff. You and Tian-ge, the two of you....y'know?”

Sheng Wang was currently in a chickened out state. He imagined that scenario — everyone there was an old classmate, they knew everything. What if he and Jiang Tian weren't on the same channel, and act awkwardly around each other…...it was no different from being paraded on the streets, naked. The thought of it alone was enough to stop him from breathing.

Therefore, he hesitated a bit, saying, "How unfortunate, I'm on a business trip in Guangdong. You should call them anyways, it's been a while since everyone met. Don't need to include me for the headcount."

Gao Tianyang was a little disappointed, and hung up after an "okay".

He may have managed to send Gao Tianyang away, but there was still a Zhang Chao waiting behind.

This frontliner for gossip was possibly damaged from all the back to back meetings, and came to get a rise out of Sheng Wang out of boredom. He had stayed in the university for the past two days, and maybe it was coincidence or fate, but he ran into Jiang Tian quite a few times. Meeting alone wasn't enough, he even took pictures.

Sheng Wang spent his day wrangling a client, and received an entire chain of messages from him after he returned to the hotel at night. His WeChat vibrated a few times, and all of them were large images.

Sheng Wang opened them up and stilled — he went straight to the couch by the window and sat down, flipping through them piece by piece. He did have Jiang Tian's pictures in his phone, sealed away in a private album. It was either pictures secretly taken while he was asleep, or their shadows when they were shoulder to shoulder. Due to the obscurity of their relationship, there were rarely full frontal shots. The ones that Zhang Chao sent were uncommon in comparison.

He saved all of them, one by one, and stopped for a moment when he was saving the last one; there were a few girls looking at Jiang Tian in that one.

Dazedly, he flashbacked to the days in Fuzhong. There were also oftentimes when girls would smile and giggle as they pass by, constantly

turning back to look at him. Whereas Jiang Tian had always been cold and aloof, and turned a deaf ear to all the attention he was receiving.

Zhang Chao said: Wow, you have good taste, just a few minutes and there were already two waves of girls who went to talk to him.

Zhang Chao: There’s even some who asked for his number, I saw them eagerly digging out their phone already

Zhang Chao: University girls these days are so vivacious and chatty, it’s pretty lively here

?: ……

?: aren’t you supposed to go for a meeting, and yet you’re doing this?

?: reported

Sheng Wang initially planned to ignore him, but seeing the things he said, he changed his mind for some reason. Maybe he was stabbed by the picture, or he was stabbed by the adjective “lively”.

After snarking Zhang Chao, he closed his WeChat. He showered, changed into fresh clothing, and replied to quite a few messages for work. And then he quietly sat on the sofa for a long time, and sent a message to Gao Tianyang for some mysterious reason.

He said: I'll be back in Beijing on the 3rd, I can probably make it if you put the gathering on the 4th.

Gao Tianyang: ???

*

Yet, man proposes, God disposes. Sheng Wang's business trip ended in advance.

The client he had to deal with was infamous for being troublesome. It was estimated that a week was needed to deal with him, but the client just so happened to have a happy occasion happen to him, and with Sheng Wang's glib tongue, he had managed to settle all the business plans they had to discuss. After buying the fastest flight back to Beijing, he even succeeded to make it back at the very end of the year.

Regretfully, although he managed to make it for the new year, he didn’t manage to meet Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting. His team received the news and immediately snatched a booking at a restaurant, and made use of crossing over into the new year to hold a gathering slash celebratory dinner. He’s the main character, so there’s no running from this.

In this sort of scenario, the main character was the one who had to receive all the egging on, and Sheng Wang was completely reluctant to be that. He actually did learn a couple of techniques from Zhang Chao — he clearly was a “down in five glasses”, but he could manage to deal with most business dinners. But a company meal gathering was different; everyone knew the techniques he knew, so he couldn’t use them at all.

Therefore, tonight, he really did drink a little too much. To the point that when everyone dispersed, he couldn’t tell what day it was a little as he stared at the remnants of the beer in the glass, beneath the dizzying lights.

Perhaps the furnishing in this private room was a little similar to the “In Those Years” BBQ store, or maybe he was making use of the intoxication of the alcohol to submerge himself within old memories with reckless abandon.

He sat for a long, long time, constantly feeling like there ought to be someone who would be there to claim him back. Until someone tapped on his shoulder, asking, “Got a car for you. Can you walk?”

He looked up, and seeing that it’s Zhang Chao who was asking, his eyes sank again in disappointment.

“What’s happening? Are you still okay?” Zhang Chao asked him.

Even his questions seemed to be soaked in beer foam, indistinct and vague. Sheng Wang nodded heavily, and stopped moving again. After a very long time, he finally stood up with the aid of the back of the chair, and said a few lines of nonsense to Zhang Chao.

The drunkenness was too overwhelming, he forgot whatever he said the moment he turned around. Funnily, he was standing up pretty straight,

and didn’t look like a drunkard at all. He notified Zhang Chao, and entered the booked car.

The city was a strange place sometimes; it may be apart from each other by hundreds and thousands of miles in the day, but they are all the same at night. Sheng Wang leaned against the car window, watching the illuminated city, and suddenly recalled the road from Fuzhong to White Horse Alley.

He liked to be like this back then too — reclining against the backseats behind Uncle Xiao-Chen, Jiang Tian’s phone would brighten and dim out of the corner of his eyes, and he would nap away amidst the city lights.

Sheng Wang had a fitful sleep due to the intoxication, it was to the point that he couldn’t tell if he slept in the first place. He only knew he opened his eyes reflexively the moment his phone vibrated.

The driver saw him sit up straight, and laughed with a grimace as he explained, “This traffic is truly terrible, it wasn’t this bad yesterday. Today

is really quite the day for this.”

Sheng Wang halfheartedly nodded at him, and unlocked his phone with lowered eyes, and found himself added into yet another WeChat group chat.

The group chat was formed two-three minutes ago, Zhang Chao was the one behind it. The group name was changed into *Cooperation Team for XXX Project.* He made a bit of simple small talk, wishing them a happy new year in advance, and quite a few people popped up to continue.

Sheng Wang’s reaction was a little lagging for the time being, and had to stare at the name of the group chat for a while before realising that it’s the project Jiang Tian was participating in too. The people who popped up in the chat were those who he had a meal with: Jiang Tian’s professor, fellow doctors, as well as the assistant.

His mind was vacant for a moment, and finally dug out the details from his dulled memory. When he left the restaurant, he was pulling at Zhang Chao, saying that he wanted to get back together, but he didn’t know where to start — he couldn’t even find the right time to say it.

Therefore Zhang Chao made a group chat, and took the lead by saying happy new year.

Sheng Wang held his phone, hesitating. He followed along with a happy new year too. Soon after, a few more people appeared too, replying to his well wishing. But he didn’t manage to see Jiang Tian despite waiting for ages.

Instead, it was the first person who replied who was very strange. Other people all had nicknames, only his alone was empty.

Sheng Wang stared at that WeChat with a frown for quite a while, and suddenly realised something. He opened up the list of members in the group

chat, checking all of them. Everyone present for the dinner that day was there, save for Jiang Tian, with an addition of *this*.

Only at this time, he realised that there was also a cat in this person's profile picture — just that one was kept away in a photo frame, settled on the table. Another one was lying next to the photo frame. Due to the fact that the picture was compressed, it wasn't as obvious.

Sheng Wang's heartbeat suddenly quickened, with every pound like a sledgehammer. He tapped into the profile via the profile picture, and discovered that he had added the other perons a long time ago. He tapped into the chat again, and saw that it wasn't completely blank — there was a neat row of similar lines.

This person had been messaging him from a long long time ago, from the start of the year to the end, for every single holiday, not missing even once.

The most recent message was sent more than 20 days ago; midnight of December 4th, not a single second late.

He said: Happy birthday.

Sheng Wang stared at the screen, not daring to look up or to even blink, just like the time he received a notebook on the balcony.

He told Zhang Chao: he didn’t know where to start getting back together, he couldn’t even find the right time to say it at all.

It was only now that he discovered: the person he wanted to make up with had already spoken up a long while ago, he had been saying it by himself for a long time now.

*

When Jiang Tian received the phone call, he had just showered. He switched into a loose white hooded shirt and a pair of grey cotton long pants. The heating here was very sufficient, his hair dried rather quickly.

He stilled when he saw the identity person calling him, and instantly tapped to answer the call.

Before he could speak, Sheng Wang's voice had already appeared. "Are you in school?"

"Yes," Jiang Tian's brain blanked out for a second, and replied on instinct.

The next second, he heard the sound of wind howling from the other side of the phone. He was starting to realise something, and asked, "Where are you?"

"I'm walking towards the area you live, but I don't know where you stay."

By the time he realised, Jiang Tian had already changed his shoes and was heading downstairs.

It had been ages since Jiang Tian ran like this — this school was stupidly huge, with some places well lit, the others quiet and silent.

There wasn’t anyone on this particular road, with only occasional hushed murmurs coming from passing by couples. He shot past the eyes of a sparse bit of people, and found the person he wanted to find at the corner.

He bent over, panting as he caught his breath, and then looked up at Sheng Wang. That instant, it seemed that he was back to a certain day in high school. Also an abrupt phone call like this, he also cut through the campus like this. He came to a halt at the youth he liked, saying, “I’m here now.”

This time, before Jiang Tian could speak, the now grown-up youth spoke up first. There was a thin layer of mist over his eyes, still glistening like stars in the sky from the streetlight in the distance.

With a heavily nasal voice, he croaked, “Ge, I just drank. Do you still need to claim your lost item?”

Jiang Tian pursed his lips, evening out his breathing, his chest rising and falling. He raised his hand, caressing the corner of Sheng Wang’s eyes,

and grabbed his chin and kissed him.

Translator's notes:

Chapter 47:

Just as he asked, he suddenly heard footsteps coming closer to him from behind. Someone was running over here. He turned around, and saw Jiang Tian stop in front of him.

Maybe it was because of how fast he sprinted, his breathing was a little heavy. His slender arms dangled by the side, and a slightly protruding green vein could be seen near his inner wrist.

He lowered his head to catch his breath, and then removed an earpiece, saying to Sheng Wang, "I'm here now."

Chapter 54:

"Hey, don't stand there, that's the lost and found corner," the cashier lady said.

"Oh, then I'll wait to be claimed," Sheng Wang said.

The young lady doubled over in laughter again.

Soon enough, the lost item was claimed by Jiang Tian along with the pears.

NGL translating this reunion scene was a little difficult through my tears :”D

Please imagine what i went through when i did the lost and found scene in chapter 48,, help

Chapter 099 - Melting

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

I Missed You a Lot, I Missed You Every Single Day.

Sheng Wang wasn’t actually the type to cry.

Every time there was a sour ache building up in his nose, he would widen his eyes or look up. A moment later, the excessive wetness would sink back down by itself. With a few more rapid blinks, the urge to shed tears would be over. Only, the ends of his eyes would redden.

Jiang Tian had seen him this way before, and that was also the only way he had witnessed. A long time ago, he had heard Sheng Mingyang mention that as long as his son did not cry, it would not be a big deal. Judging by Sheng Wang’s habits, he probably did not have any “big deals” after his infancy, and even when his emotions were at the most extreme, the ends of his eyes would at the very most redden. That's all.

But just this time alone, when Jiang Tian pressed a kiss against Sheng Wang's eyes, his lips tasted of nothing but a salty bitterness. He had lost many things over the course of twenty and more years of his life — he had experienced "loss" over and over, but it was the first time he experienced "losing something and gaining it back" for himself.

Turns out, it tasted like saltiness; it was damp, it was turbulent and bitter too.

Sheng Wang's mind was empty, but his heart was full. Jiang Tian was holding his hand, leading him back to where he's staying, all while his head was still up in the clouds. They climbed up the stairs, and entered the house.

He was pressed against the door, and nearly couldn't catch his breath.

Jiang Tian appeared to be cold, but his kisses were always gentle. Back then, even with the inexperienced restlessness of youth, his kisses were solely intimate, while being on the verge of losing control. However, it was all different today. It was as though he was verifying a certain existence for himself, and his kiss was deep and passionate.

At one point, Sheng Wang thought that he wouldn’t know where to start after not doing something for too long; people who had not seen each other for such a long time would end up having nothing to say to each other at all.

That was until he slightly parted from him by mere centimeters, turning aside to catch his breath, and then chasing after Jiang Tian with a kiss by grabbing the back of his neck just like years ago, then he realised — the human memory is much more stable than he ever imagined. Not only in the heart, but also on the body.

Despite having just drank — his slow reaction — not knowing what to do at all — he still had his muscle memory, of the way he was when he was seventeen-eighteen years old. The muscle memory to pursue and to respond to the person he liked, just like instincts embedded deep within his bones.

Etched in my bones, it says: I still love you.

“Wang-zai.” Jiang Tian slightly separated from him, his gaze falling onto him from his lidded eyes, a light gleam in the delirium. His voice was low, and as it rang in the quiet night, it turned his heart into goo. “Let’s get back together, okay?”

When he was young, he always wanted to wait for a bit no matter what he wanted to say or do. He thought that that was being mature and rational. He would wait for them to leave Utopia, for Sheng Wang to understand, for sobriety, for them to grow up……

Later on, he eventually understood: the world is constantly changing, nobody knows what would happen the very next instant. Just like the “we’ll talk about it later” sprouted out at the corner of the stairs the night he turned eighteen — who would have thought the “later” would be so many years later.

Now, he no longer wanted to waste a single second longer.

Sheng Wang was stunned for a long while, and nodded his head firmly. Every move of his screamed that he wasn’t quite sober, his reactions

were a little slow, making him look especially frank and earnest in particular. After he nodded, he lowered his eyes again, seeming rather dejected. “But I’m not quite the same as before, that’s what a lot of people say.”

His dangling thumb started squeezing at the joints of his fingers, unconsciously fidgeting again. He wanted to say, “You can make your decision after waiting for a while”. But before he could open his mouth, he heard Jiang Tian let out a “Mn”, saying, “I’ve heard — more people like you than ever now, more than in high school.”

Sheng Wang was a little befuddled, wanting to say that that wasn’t what he meant. If he was in his usual sober state, he would have instantly realised: with Jiang Tian’s intelligence, there was no way he didn’t understand what he was trying to say. A pity though, that he was still drunk right now, so all he did was to dumbly stare at the other person.

Until Jiang Tian spoke up again. “Then let me do the wooing this time, you can decide if you want to say yes.”

“Nah,” Sheng Wang said, resigned. He was quiet for a moment, and mumbled under his breath, “I couldn’t bear for you to.”

The mannerism he spoke with was clearly no different from the way he was when he was seventeen-eighteen, causing people to want to tease him for no reason at all. But at this moment, Jiang Tian’s heart was filled with nothing but pain. He only watched him peacefully, and then lowered his head to lightly peck kisses at the edge of his eyes — his cheeks — the corner of his lips.

Sheng Wang’s heart itched unbearably much because of him, and couldn’t help but to respond right back.

*

If it wasn’t for a certain furry thing nudging at his legs, startling Sheng Wang and causing him to stumble and knock against the corner of the coffee table, they would have ended up on the sofa or even the bed at this very moment.

With muscle memory at work, as Sheng Wang kissed, he couldn’t help but to gravitate to Jiang Tian’s Adam’s apple. In the past, it was out of mischief and possessiveness, wanting to see his Ge go from his cold and unaffected self to slowly losing control bit by bit, all from his teasing. Now……

It seems to be like that too.

Those devilish thoughts in youthful years always reared its head in similar contexts, he didn’t need to think about them intentionally at all. As long as he was before Jiang Tian, he could gradually — little by little — open himself up.

The coffee table was made of wood, the corners a little sharp. Jiang Tian actually did purchase silicone guards for the corners, but his mind flew to Guangdong with a certain someone, so the guards had yet to even be unpackaged.

Sheng Wang scraped his lower leg, creating a small mark with small beads of blood seeping out. He rolled his pants leg up and sat on the sofa, staring off against the culprit currently sitting atop the coffee table.

Perhaps it was the way the cat's gaze was overly targeted; the last of Sheng Wang's nerves struggled amidst the drunkenness, and felt an enigmatic awkwardness. So he grabbed a cushion for hugging, and quietly covered the front of his hips.

This cat was so spoiled by Jiang Tian that it feared no god — it dared to sit anywhere, and was even completely unafraid of strangers.

The moment Sheng Wang thought of the word "strangers", he was a little displeased. Jiang Tian went inside the bedroom to look for ointment, so while the other person couldn't hear him, he leaned forward, hovering over the cushion, and looked at the cat as he said, "Are you the long lost son of mine?"

The cat possibly thought that he wanted to scratch him, and its head wordlessly backed away from him.

Sheng Wang then asked, "Why have you grown this fat?"

The cat glared at him fiercely, and its ears flattened like an aeroplane.

Sheng Wang still wanted to speak when he saw Jiang Tian exiting the bedroom, a small box on his hand as he said, “It is that one; it isn’t fat, it’s just fluffy.”

The moment he appeared, both living creatures in his living room put an end to the stare off. The cat sat like a human and started licking its paws, Sheng Wang curled back up with the cushion on his lap.

Moments later, he said an “oh” without any further fuss.

“Don’t cross your legs.” Jiang Tian indicated for him to put down the injured leg, and took a bandaid from the box. “I just moved in, so I don’t have anything else.”

“I can do it myself,” just as Sheng Wang’s hand was about to reach out, Jiang Tian already avoided it.

The band-aid was pasted over the wound with a faint scent of bitterness. The tips of Jiang Tian’s fingers landed on the skin of his lower leg, touching and smoothening at the edges of the band-aid. Sheng Wang

curled his leg back on instinct, and silently hugged the cushion even more tightly.

The cat must have been curious about the scent of medicine or something, it suddenly went up to him, and sniffed the inner part of his leg with its wet little nose.

“Is what it’s doing kissing me?” After all, this cat was painstakingly picked out by Sheng Wang years ago; a slight indication that it was being friendly, he would feel that it was truly a charming creature.

Unexpectedly, just as he was somewhat enjoying this form of closeness, Jiang Tian decided to be a wet blanket. “No, it’s just smearing its snot.”

Sheng Wang: “???”

To hell with that.

Sheng Wang kicked him — it wasn’t heavy, more similar to a knee jerk reflex after injuring his leg.

He only realised what he had just done after he kicked him, and was the one who was stunned first. Yet, as he looked up, he saw Jiang Tian keeping away the bandaid box, and then a chuckle escaped from his throat as he looked aside.

Sheng Wang felt like he was a traveller who had been travelling thousands of miles in the snow; he had waited by the bonfire for a long time before he finally felt warmth belatedly. Thawing began from the tips of his limbs, and his blood, now fluid, trickled through his entire body, reaching his limbs and flesh and bones.

Turns out, despite all the years that passed by, no matter if he himself personally thought that they were ruined beyond recognition, he could still bring a smile on that person’s face — just like the way it was before.

Jiang Tian’s low laugh was like a switch. After that, Sheng Wang suddenly became clingy, following him in and out of the bedroom and kitchen, watching him brew up a cup of honey water to dispel the effects of

the alcohol. With an abnormal act of self-awareness, he grabbed it and downed it down.

He gradually became more talkative. At the start, he asked Jiang Tian questions. Asking him why he changed his WeChat account, asking how he did in school, asking if he was living well, asking if he had made any close friends.

He heard Jiang Tian answer that where he lived had pretty good air quality, just that it was barely populated. Whenever it was a holiday, especially before Christmas, the surrounding shops would never open. The only ones with lights coming out were small and cramped marts, but he could never find what he wanted to buy.

There was a Chinese restaurant nearby, but the taste wasn't quite satisfactory. One time, when it was Chinese New Year, a few classmates invited Jiang Tian to go fold dumplings together — but the only vinegar they could find was fruit vinegar. One maverick figured might as well go big or go home, and squeeze in chili sauce and wasabi into the vinegar, both

equally strange in their own rights. A Chinese New Year Eve dinner nearly gave them a lifetime of trauma.

The exchange students often held gatherings and meetups. Jiang Tian was dragged to join in twice, but he honestly wasn't interested, so he never participated ever since.

……

Slowly, Sheng Wang switched from questioning to answering, and talked about himself.

He had always been living a busy life, and would rarely recall the experiences of the past few years — who he'd met, what he did and all; like whatever that happened were left in the past, he wasn't willing to go into the details. Only today, then he truly cut open a slit into these few years, telling Jiang Tian in bits and pieces.

He thought he would feel upset, but as he actually spoke them out loud, he felt that everything was still fine instead.

He spoke of his university life, placing emphasis on complaining about the intoxicating “aroma” that came from the next dorm over, thus forcing him to move out and rent a place rather early. He wanted to keep a cat at one point, so his rented place wouldn’t be too quiet and empty. But everytime he picked, the one that got adopted away years ago came to his mind instead. So he bought an entire set of cat bed, litter box, and cat toys, only to be all set aside.

He even spoke of various clubs and competitions. He actually didn’t remember them all too clearly, but he managed to make them sound extraordinarily lively under Jiang Tian’s attentive gaze. Eventually, as he spoke, his true self started to show, and subtly bragged about his ability to plan events and pull in sponsors in the student council.

He saw Jiang Tian’s raised eyebrows and the astonishment that revealed itself, and it was as though those days of running all over the place and living on a screwed up schedule did not go to waste.

It had been a long time since Sheng Wang had chatted with someone like this, like he had an endless amount of things to say. The same way he really didn’t have much going on back in high school, but was still able to go back and forth with Jiang Tian on his phone, and spend his entire day on WeChat in the gaps in between classes.

At one point, Jiang Tian was starting to get worried that he would be thirsty, and his eyes swept across his lips quite a few times. He finally couldn’t stand it anymore, and got up to go to the kitchen and poured him a glass of water. By the time he came back with the glass, the person who was going on about wanting to cross over into the new year with his eyes wide open had already fallen asleep.

He had already showered, the reserved and mature shirt removed, and dug out a loose T-shirt and sweatpants from the closet to wear. Due to the way he was curled up, the contour of his shoulder and back was rather striking. The cotton material was wrapped around his waist, creating a thin and clean line.

He still liked to sprawl over the pillow as he slept, his hair messily falling onto his face. Due to the over-sufficiency of the heating, there was always a few bits of dampness by his forehead, the exact same as many years ago.

Jiang Tian drank a glass of water himself, propped himself against the edge of the bed, and kissed him. Sheng Wang licked his lips unconsciously, and turned his head to another direction, burying himself deeper into the pillow.

He suddenly recalled the day after Fuzhong's cultural festival; also a late night just like this, Sheng Wang tyrannically took over most of his bed on the lower bunk. He had already fallen asleep before he made it to midnight. He also kissed him just like this, and waited for the new year to come in his foggy drowsiness.

In this moment, all the scenes matched up seamlessly, like those years that missed out each other did not exist.

It was December 29th yesterday; he stood on the enormous stage in the hall in Fuzhong, wearing a shirt with another name, playing “Childhood” on the guitar that he learned at the last minute.

Today was December 31st; he switched off the lights and laid on the bed as usual, and the person he liked was mere inches away.

New Year was arriving soon. He closed his eyes in the last few seconds, and grasped Sheng Wang’s fingers, murmuring, “Wang-zai, happy new year.”

I missed you a lot, I missed you every single day.

Translator’s notes:

In cn, how the cat was sitting was described as □□ “paralyze-sit”, meaning to sit down , to slump etc etc

You also get cute pictures when you search up □□□, the same type of joy you get if you search “cat sitting like human” :3c

Many thanks to xiyang for the translation for this line: *Etched in my bones, it says: I still love you.*

CN raws: □□□□□□□□□□

(my skeletons/bones say, I still love you) but ugh it goes beyond skeleton or bones though they just don’t hit the same way as □□

Chapter 100 - "Wangzai"

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“What’s the Name of the Cat?”

The first day of the new year, Sheng Wang’s phone began vibrating at 6am.

Eyes not even opened, a head full of morning grumpiness, he reached out from the quilt and groped around by the side of the pillow. However, instead of touching his phone, the vibration stopped on its own.

(t/n: Morning grumpiness is translated from □□□, a cn term referring to general bad mood/irritability people would have upon waking up)

A question mark slowly rose over Sheng Wang’s head, still groggy from sleep.

He was still in the momentary post-hangover blackout stage, and did not instantly realise where exactly he was. Neither did he immediately recall what he experienced last night, he was merely robotically going through the motions every morning — the alarm clock’s ringing, he has to turn it off and wake up.

However, he didn’t need to turn it off before the alarm stopped on its own today. And then there was someone who caught his hand — still messily feeling around — and stuffed it back under the quilt.

Enveloped by warmth again, his consciousness began wavering and sinking back down once more. He was dazed for a few seconds as he laid over the pillow, and suddenly realised that something’s wrong — he looked up with a start.

The curtains weren’t open, it was impossible to tell the time of the day. Instead, there was a warm darkness in the house.

Jiang Tian seemed to have just woken up too, and traces of drowsiness could still be found on his countenance. Sheng Wang saw him grab his phone from the bedside cabinet, glance at the screen and say, “6.05am, you have to work?”

The pitch of his voice was rather low, bringing with it the hoarseness that came from the yet to dissipate drowsiness. After he said that, he added on as though he was afraid *someone* couldn’t tell the days apart, “It’s the New Year today.”

Actually, Jiang Tian also usually got up at this time. He would go for a morning jog if the weather was fair, or head to the laboratory bright and early if it was raining. However, the demonic deep wintry winds of Beijing come in gusts after gusts, and when it gets bad, it could even push tinier girls backwards. So he may be getting up early and all these few days, but he wouldn’t go looking for suffering in the wind.

Today was a rare exception; it wasn’t that he couldn’t get up, he simply wanted to nourish the harmless little habits of a certain someone back, like the sleep-ins on holidays.

Sheng Wang showed a hint of confusion. His eyes were bright in the darkness nonetheless, staring at Jiang Tian unblinkingly; like he was gradually sorting through the events of last night that led to this morning.

A few seconds later, he flopped back onto his pillow, softly answering, “I’m not working.”

To a certain degree, he was honestly a little alike to that cat son of his. The moment they startled awake, they would explode into a ball of fur out of alarm; once they discovered that there was nothing wrong, they would gradually soften up again, and melt back into his den.

He finally realised that he could have a sleep in, and his taut nerves relaxed too, allowing drowsiness to envelop his mind once more.

“I did have something on,” his voice was raspy and slurred, like he was unwilling to move his tongue even a little more. The pauses between every line was rather long, like an aimless, thoughtless casual chit chat while being half-awake. “The client is a monster. I was supposed to be away on a business trip for seven days, taking up the entire new year break.”

Jiang Tian enjoyed the grumbling that he had not heard for a long time very much. He didn’t say “I’ve heard”, only grunting affirmatively, allowing Sheng Wang to continue lazily.

There were gaps in the train of thoughts of a drowsy person, the content was all over the place too. After he finished the “supposed”, his breathing slowed down, like he had already fallen asleep.

A few seconds later, he suddenly said, “That client looks like Big Mouth Xu, y’know? I want to hide my phone whenever I see him.”

Jiang Tian chuckled.

Sheng Wang’s reaction was no longer catching up to the contents of his words. He was done grumbling before he recalled that he ought to ask “do you still remember administration’s Big Mouth Xu”. Upon hearing Jiang Tian’s seamless chuckle, the alert branches of his nerves relaxed once more.

It wasn’t just him who kept thinking about the days of Fuzhong all along. Whatever he remembered, Jiang Tian remembered too.

Time did not insert silence, confusion and pauses in their conversation and laughter — like they had spent the past few years together, shoulder to shoulder.

It was at this exact moment that Sheng Wang finally — truly — relaxed entirely. He switched to a more comfortable position, and half buried himself in the pillow, his voice muffled, “I’ve finished an entire week’s worth of work in two days, so I get to rest today.”

He felt Jiang Tian ruffle the back of his head, messing his hair up; he didn’t want to budge at all, so he fell asleep again pretty soon.

By the time the two truly got out of bed, it was nearly 10 in the morning.

When Sheng Wang sat up, he saw his long lost cat son of many years, sleeping on top of the quilt. It picked a gap between the two, and filled up the gap with itself. It slept in the shape of a long noodle, as though it was surviving in a fissure.

Sheng Wang had never truly owned a cat, and was too terrified to move due to its sleeping position. “If I shift my leg even a little, wouldn’t it

get squished to death?”

“It wouldn’t,” Jiang Tian lifted the quilt up and got out of bed, “it would kick the person away.”

The cat awoke from the two’s movements, and its neck stretched up with a dazed look on its face. Its nose was pointed up as it stared at Sheng Wang, face to face. Sheng Wang watched it roll around a couple of times, and was at the verge of falling off the bed as it dangled by the edge. Sheng Wang couldn’t resist and held one of its paws. “Would it fall off if I let go?”

“It wouldn’t, it’s not that foolish,” Jiang Tian said once more.

Sheng Wang let go, and the cat plopped onto the floor.

Jiang Tian: “.....”

The look on his face was comparable to eating food that had gone rancid. The foolish son rolled over all at once and shot out of the room, Sheng Wang laughed so hard that he collapsed back onto the bed.

Jiang Tian went to wash up with a long face, and took out two eggs from the refrigerator, cracking it into the frying pan. He had never been

picky with food at all, and only had two requirements: completely cooked, and not poisonous. Therefore, despite living overseas for so long, the growth of his culinary skills was rather slow. After much pondering, he figured that fried egg was the only one that was the least easy to mess up, as well as matching to *someone's* extremely picky taste buds.

Sheng Wang found a new toothbrush and towel under his guidance, and began to stroll around the kitchen with the cat in his arms after he washed up.

Jiang Tian glanced at him a few times, and finally couldn't help but bring up, "Do you plan to eat fried egg with cat fur?"

Sheng Wang's throat itched upon merely hearing that. He silently went further away, and stuck his hand deep into the depths of the cat fur, combing through it. He did end up with a handful of cat fur.

"Why are you like a dandelion?" Sheng Wang dusted the fur off his hand, and pulled out a roomba from the side of the sofa, switching it on to get it to suck the fur away.

A short while later, his own son struggled and jumped down. It sat on the roomba, surveying its territory.

He suddenly recalled the way he dragged his grandfather to survey the streets when he was a kid. He touched his nose, thinking to himself, *it's really "related to me by blood"*.

Only, this flesh and blood son of his was honestly a little too heavy. The roomba struggled on its own for a while, and died on the spot, not moving anymore.

Sheng Wang beckoned at the cat, wanting to get it to come down. He opened his mouth, but only to realise that he still didn't know the name of the cat.

He turned and called out to the kitchen, "What's the name of the cat?"

Jiang Tian happened to come out of the kitchen with two plates of fried egg in his hands. He settled the plates on the dining table, and glanced towards here. For some reason, his reply was ambiguous. "You can call it anything."

Sheng Wang: “?”

As they spoke, the doorbell suddenly rang.

Sheng Wang stood up, and went to open the door on instinct.

It was Jiang Tian’s fellow doctor who arrived, the one who asked “Why didn’t you say that you have an old classmate” earlier. Sheng Wang tried his best to recall the WeChat contact card, and remembered that his name seemed to be Chen Chen.

It was a holiday for the New Year today, with snowfall in Beijing too. Chen Chen and the few discussed, and planned to go to Xishan to ski, then treat the professor to a sumptuous meal to welcome the New Year next. However, they discussed for ages and Jiang Tian still did not appear in the group chat, so he decided to pop over and ask.

They could be counted as something like shixiongs and shidis, they all knew Jiang Tian was used to getting up early, no exception for all 365

days of the year. Therefore, he did not think carefully before he pressed the doorbell. He unexpectedly opened the door to a handsome young man wearing a spacious white T-shirt and grey sweatpants, looking at him in complete confusion.

(t/n: Shixiong and shidi: Chinese Martial Brothers, who learn from the same teacher. In modern context, this works in a similar fashion too; they share the same academic advisors. Shimei and Shijie are martial sisters — or rather, everything can be summed up in junior/senior relations, kinda)

Chen Chen's first reaction was: "Sorry, wrong door."

He closed the door perfectly naturally as though he was minding his own business, and looked up again…...no wait, it *is* this place!

He silently opened up the door again, and saw that handsome guy laugh awkwardly, "Dr. Chen, you're here to find Jiang Tian?"

Chen Chen found a bit of his mind back from the cloud of confusion, and stared at the handsome guy's face for a few seconds — he realised at last, this was the talented youth he saw at the dinner that day — Jiang Tian's old classmate.

He still recalled the awkwardness that filled the table when he said the wrong thing, and then stiff and yet ineffable atmosphere between Jiang Tian and this classmate.

And with another look—

It’s 9+ in the morning, snow was cascading outside. There probably wouldn’t be an ordinary friend who would come all the way here, braving through the wind and snow out of complete boredom — just to be a mere guest.

And said old classmate was still in the clothes Jiang Tian often wore at home; his hair wasn’t even completely styled, there was cat hair on his pants.

After rationally analysing everything, there was only a “what the fuck” left in Chen Chen’s mind. He understood at long last why the atmosphere around those two was so enigmatic that night.

That was no reunion of two old classmates, it was old flames being unforgettable, attracted to each other like magnets!

(t/n: Original phrase in cn: □□□□□, “the (heavenly) thunder attracts/hooks the (earth) fire/possibly a volcano (???), it’s a phrase used to describe the powerful energy of nature, but also commonly used to describe attraction between people.)

The group so called shixiongs had been long used to Jiang Tian’s cold personality; not going to dances, not going to gatherings, rarely eating together with his closest fellow doctors, completely unmoved by so many interesting and lively shijies and shimeis’ show of interest towards him. Yet, some girls come back stronger than ever despite setbacks, the more they couldn’t get a reaction from him, the more they chased after him.

Even with all that, nobody managed to bag despite so many years.

Never did they think……

Chen Chen’s spirit had ascended to the heavens as he stood outside the door, and as for Sheng Wang, he was already slightly embarrassed. Fortunately, the cat son had come near him during its patrol, and couldn’t bear to leave him to deal with that alone; it dashed over here to rescue him.

Sheng Wang scooped the cat up, holding it in his arms. Jiang Tian washed his hand, and came out of the kitchen at last.

“Who’s here?” He walked over, and saw Chen Chen, who was standing dumbfoundedly.

There was suddenly an additional cat and person before him, and Chen Chen finally came back to himself.

Jiang Tian asked, “Why are you here? Is it the project?”

Chen Chen immediately waved. “Nope! There’s nothing about the project at all. Today’s a national holiday. It was just that I didn’t see you out on your morning jog, and was a little confused, so I came over to check up on you.”

Jiang Tian silently glanced outside the window — snow filled up the entire view. “Morning jog in this weather?”

Chen Chen: “.....”

For the first time in his entire life, he genuinely felt that a high EQ was a goddamn brilliant thing — unfortunately, he had none of that. Chen Chen’s eyes shot all over the place, and in the end, he gave two awkward

laughs, touching the cat in Sheng Wang's arms, saying, "Couldn't I be here just to pet the cat? Right, Wangzai?"

In actuality, he had never pet Jiang Tian's cat before, he was scared to death of furry animals like this. He only knew its name because of the professor. However, a cat that can save lives is a good cat, so after he greeted the cat, he then said, "Okay, I'm really just here for a look, that's all. If there's nothing else, I'll be leaving now."

After saying that, he slipped away like a fish, even remembering to help Jiang Tian shut the door. Due to how quickly he made his escape, he did not even notice the way the two in the house went completely silent after he called out "Wangzai."

Sheng Wang stood for a while as he hugged the cat. He turned to ask Jiang Tian, "Was he calling out to the cat just now?"

Jiang Tian's gaze was lowered as he looked at him, his lips moved soundlessly. It was plain that he did go through much inner conflict for a

while before he completely gave up, and turned on his heels with a stony look on his face.

That fleeting expression was extremely alike to the way his face would look when he sneakily expressed kindness and goodwill in his youth, and then had it instantly exposed right before him.

Sheng Wang’s eyes crescented as he started laughing all of a sudden, mercilessly following behind him — like a tail he couldn't get rid of. “Ay, don’t run away yet.

“Ge.” Sheng Wang refused to spare him on purpose.

Jiang Tian had already turned deaf; he took a carton of milk out from the fridge on his own accord and headed towards the kitchen.

“Jiang Tian.” Sheng Wang dallied into the kitchen as well.

Jiang Tian took out two glasses and poured the milk in.

“Dr. Jiang.” Sheng Wang was still beckoning behind him, like he’s summoning a spirit.

Jiang Tian crumpled up the carton and tossed it into the trash bin. He went back to the dining table with two glasses.

“I’m already sharing the same name as the cat, am I not allowed to ask for an explanation?” Sheng Wang followed along, and teased him, all while on the verge of laughing.

Jiang Tian put down the glasses, and watched his lips, opening and closing. He closed in, and sealed them shut. He kissed Sheng Wang until Sheng Wang couldn’t hold the cat anymore and had to grab onto the chair for support. He then straightened up, stating, “You should talk less often instead.”

Sheng Wang’s legs turned jelly from the kissing, and disdained himself for that on the inside for a bit. What left his mouth instead was a “dream on”.

Just as the two were messing around, Sheng Wang’s phone suddenly vibrated.

All his heart was on Jiang Tian; he accepted the call without even seeing who it’s from, and there was still mirth in his voice as he said a “Hello”.

The other person seemed to be taken aback by his mirth, and only said a while later, “What are you doing, sounding so happy? Are you in Beijing for these two days? Dad happens to have something on and is here now, want to come out for a meal?”

Translator’s notes:

Fun fact: the line “however, a cat that can save lives is a good cat” likely came from/is a play on the line “It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice” spoken by Deng Xiaoping. This was taken to mean that as long as the economy works, it is a good economy.

Also: the Wang-zai vs Wangzai distinction. Back in chapter 95, when Jiang Tian was watching the video of drunk Sheng Wang on his phone, his professor did come over and ask what's the name of his cat. He gave "□□", which is indeed both sheng wang's nickname AND the cat's name, so his answer could be taken both ways and also serve as a pretty obvious foreshadowing. However, in this tl, I've taken upon drawing that distinction via "Wang-zai" and "Wangzai", the former being Sheng Wang's nickname as the "zai" is a diminutive (am I even using this correctly) for Sheng Wang's name, specifically the "Wang" part. "Wangzai" serves as the full and proper name for the cat, so no hyphen :3c

Chapter 101 - Loosening Up

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“I Know, I’m Wrong, I’m Trying to Get a Lighter Sentence for Confessing,” Sheng Wang Insisted.

Sheng Wang’s mind went vacant for a split second, and the mirth began fading away from the edges of his eyes, the corner of his lips.

Jiang Tian lightly bumped his cheek with the glass of milk. He received it and drank it. Out of the corner of his eyes, he could see Jiang Tian replying to the messages from his shixiongs in the group chat.

Sheng Wang watched for a while, and settled the glass down. He said to the person on the other end of the phone, “Sure, you set the time?”

Sheng Mingyang had been waiting for his reply. Upon hearing that, he smiled, “I’ll reach here in the afternoon, and will be free for these two days. Your father as of now isn’t as busy as you, so you should pick the time instead.”

Sheng Wang said, “Then how about tonight? What time will you arrive? I’ll go fetch you.”

When Jiang Tian looked over at him, he had already hung up.

“Do you have work again?”

Sheng Wang draped a hand on his shoulder, and tossed his phone by the table. “Mn. I snuck a look just now, do you have to treat the prof to a meal today too?”

Such is the world of adults, they get busier as the holidays arrive.

Snow swirled around in the air of Beijing during the New Year, the glorious dream of hiding away indoors for the day was killed in its roots by plans. Jiang Tian was summoned away by the shixiongs, mainly to celebrate the Gregorian New year with the professor, and also to gossip about the status of his relationship with his “old classmate” along the way. As for Sheng Wang, he went to see Sheng Mingyang.

Despite the poor show of weather, it was still the New Year after all, and everywhere was absolutely flooded with people. Sheng Wang reserved a table in Hot Pot Sun — it was less noisy here.

(t/n: Hot Pot Sun or □□□□ “villa hotpot” is a luxurious hotpot chain restaurant set in a villa (no surprise here). Expenditure is an estimated 650RMB per person :X #TIL)

Sheng Mingyang took off his jacket, draping it over the back of his chair. He folded the sleeves of his shirt over his grey cashmere vest, and scanned around, saying, “Isn’t there a mall and restaurant below that block of yours? Why did you want to come all the way here?”

“Don’t you like the wagyu beef here quite a bit?” Sheng Wang said.

Sheng Mingyang stilled.

He did quite like the wagyu beef here, and had invited his friends and summoned Sheng Wang here for a couple of meals previously. Maybe he casually mentioned it in passing, or he didn’t explicitly state it, but either way he no longer had any impression. Unexpectedly, his son still remembered.

The father and son relationship between them for these few years had always been like this. Sheng Wang was filial, very filial; he took care of all sorts of things in all sorts of areas, right down to the smallest details, even to the point that it could be counted as serene. He grew up matching the expectations Sheng Mingyang held towards that tiny little thing years ago: outstanding amongst the crowd, handsome and refined. Rationally

speaking, he ought to feel relieved and glad, but he would always feel desolate in certain moments.

People say that there has to be a tug of war between father and son on the issue of getting his say, just like male animals fighting over the territory; from controlling to being controlled. Some people could spend their entire lives fighting over this.

But they were different — he disliked poiseless racket making, neither did Sheng Wang like a war that disregarded the feelings of others.

Sheng Mingyang at one point thought that he was lenient; he and his son took up their own spaces equally, and got along in harmony. A long time later he then realised: he had never stopped drawing out his territory. Only, everytime his territory expanded, Sheng Wang would move to the side a little. He did it without putting up a fight, ending up going further and further away.

By the time he finally realised, he could not even catch sight of his shadow anymore.

Occasionally, he would miss the fidgeting and clumsy Wang-zai a little, the Wang-zai who would show disdain over how his voice messages were too long and would only listen to the beginning, who would freely change his personal alias according to the content he shared with him. He would hang up directly if he was in a bad mood, and if he was happy, he would call him “Old comrade Sheng Mingyang”.

He would often get headaches over that in the past, but now he no longer has the chance to enjoy it anymore.

Sometimes, at his most dejected, he wanted to ask with the bravery alcohol would lend him, “Is this your revenge against your father?”

But he knew that that wasn’t the case — Sheng Wang’s heart was soft, he wouldn’t do it on purpose. It was precisely because he wasn’t doing it on purpose that Sheng Mingyang felt even more dejected and upset.

The trip to Beijing this time wasn’t actually that needed, whether he wanted to come was up to him. But last night, when he was washing up

before sleeping, he looked in the mirror, and to his disbelief, he found white hair growing by his temples. Not a couple of strands — no — it was as though they sprouted out overnight.

He pushed aside his hair and stood before the mirror for a while, wanting to see his son for a bit all of a sudden. He wanted to have a nice meal with Sheng Wang on the first day of the new year.

Perhaps he was getting old, as compared to having a successful career and looking respectable, he would rather Sheng Wang use the tone he had when he was 10, saying, “Comrade Sheng Mingyang, you’re growing white hairs.”

Instead, when he looked up, he only caught Sheng Wang closing the menu, smiling at the waiter genially. He turned and asked, “Dad, do you want alcohol?”

He would be lying if he said he wasn’t disappointed. Sheng Mingyang was silent momentarily before he waved, “Nah, water will do.

I’ve seen quite a few who got gout from drinking; I have to control my intake a bit.”

If it was little Sheng Wang, he would have definitely said “it would be too late by the time you limp”. Now, he merely nodded, saying, “You should probably drink less if it isn't a business dinner.”

The server served the fish maw chicken soup base and two small dishes of dippings. Sheng Mingyang drank a mouthful of plain water, and lightheartedly started another conversation topic. “I went to Hangzhou a while ago, and had a meal with Xiao-Pang. He even complained to me, saying that your schedule gets all topsy turvy whenever you get busy — it’s difficult to catch you.”

The Xiao-Pang in Sheng Mingyang’s mouth had the full name of Pang Xie, with the WeChat name of Bajiao Crab. He had stayed in touch with Sheng Wang on and off throughout the course of this many years. He went to university in Guangdong, and Sheng Wang had met up a couple of

times with him before. He also did visit Beijing. After graduation, they were so busy with work they spun all over the place like a spinning top, and so meeting up for casual chit chat became a much more herculean task.

Pang Xie came from a relatively well off family, and couldn't bear to stay under the control of others after a couple of months at a job upon graduation. So he borrowed a bit of venture capital from his father, quit his job and took the plunge to make more money. Due to his sufficient upholding of righteousness and loyalty, along with the ability to speak and drink well, he seriously did end up doing quite well.

For a period of time, Sheng Mingyang ran into an obstacle in his business ventures, and wanted to find someone to clear the way a little. After ending up with his son, it was Crab who Sheng Wang found.

With the connection of two sides, Sheng Mingyang voluntarily went across the ranks of seniority, and became business partners with Crab.

"It's still okay," Sheng Wang finished setting aside the dipping, and passed the empty plate to the server. "He was super excited over becoming

a dad the last time, didn't I stay up chatting with him all the way until 3am?"

Sheng Mingyang started smiling, and flipped through a few photos on his phone showing them to Sheng Wang. "Have you seen that kid of his yet? I managed to get a glimpse when I went over that day. Delicate features, looking pretty proper."

"You can already tell that the baby has delicate features only after a few months?" Sheng Wang was exasperated. "You even said administration's Dean Xu looked proper back then too."

Sheng Mingyang had to take quite a bit of time before he recalled who was the Dean Xu he spoke of. He stilled.

For these few years, whenever the father and son met up for a chat, they would rarely mention the people and things in Fuzhong. It was a taboo topic; the moment it was brought up, 80-90% of the time the chat would end in silence. Sheng Mingyang did not like to court for a snub.

This was the first time Sheng Wang brought it up on his own, and it was in a joking tone even. A wave of sourness hit Sheng Mingyang's heart

for some mysterious reason — it was as though a rock he had been prying at for a long time finally showed some signs of loosening. As a father, he was nearly touched.

The saturated golden yellow colour of fish maw chicken soup simmered in the pot. The server scalded the wagyu beef for them, and placed it onto their plates with chopsticks. Sheng Mingyang lowered his head among the steaming air. Due to how quickly he was eating, the tip of his tongue even got scalded.

He drank a few mouthfuls of water in a row, wanting to continue the conversation as well as the pleasant mood surrounding it. Therefore, he extracted as much as possible using Crab. He chatted about how he got married immediately upon graduation, about how he had finally finished paying off the loan from his dad this year, about how the family of three had a similar look to them, faces all that foretold great fortune. His parents didn’t do anything at all as of late, and revolved around their granddaughter all day long. If the girl asked for the stars, they wouldn’t bring the moon

His spirits were so high that he accidentally talked his way into a dangerous topic.

Sheng Mingyang said, “When you get a tiny little thing for me too, dad can retire at last and enjoy domestic bliss.”

This line happened to pop up solely because he was following up on the conversation, and the moment he said that, he could already feel that it was quite inappropriate. Upon seeing Sheng Wang’s chopsticks — they stopped— he even felt more regretful. However, in lieu of the server still scalding meat for them, he gradually relaxed again — there’s an outsider around, Sheng Wang wouldn’t go too far to say something too extreme.

Sheng Wang only paused for a single moment, and continued dipping his food into the sauces. After taking that bite, he drank a mouthful of water before settling his glass down, saying, “I’m afraid that’s probably out of the question. How about I get you a cat instead, or maybe I’ll adopt one in the future. You get to decide if you get a grandson or a granddaughter.”

Sheng Mingyang just picked up a piece of beef with his chopsticks, and stopped in his actions upon hearing that. Chopsticks hovering in their

air, he stiffened for a few seconds before he smiled pacficatingly. “Sure, you’re still young. I know you young people are always like this at this age. If I ask, the only answer is a no, and anymore questions, you wouldn’t even want it anymore. Let’s not talk about this for now, in the future—”

Sheng Wang cut him off, but his tone was very tranquil. “It will probably be like this in the future too.”

Sheng Mingyang looked up. Just as he was about to speak, Sheng Wang continued, “Jiang Tian is back in the country now.”

Silence instantly unfurled between the father and son. Sheng Mingyang finally lost his appetite, and settled the chopsticks down. He shot a look at the server, and the server finished scalding the last piece of meat without looking anywhere else at all, placing it onto the plate, said a “please enjoy” before leaving as the situation called for.

That instant, time seemed to have reversed back to a certain day years ago. They also sat in the car in silence like this, until one of them spoke

first.

Back then, it was Sheng Mingyang. This time, it was Sheng Wang.

He said, “It happened a few days ago. He’s back in the country for a project, and we met at a business dinner.”

Any expression on Sheng Mingyang’s face was indiscernible. His brows were furrowed, and only continued the conversation after a good while. “And then?”

“When you called me this morning, I was over at his place.” Sheng Wang paused, and frankly admitted, “I still like him, and I still plan to be together with him.”

Sheng Mingyang’s fingers, resting on the table, twitched.

For a split second, he thought, *if only we aren’t in this restaurant, if only there aren’t so many people around*…...but he quickly realised: so what if they were alone? Sheng Wang wasn’t the youth that would leave just because he tugged at him anymore.

And then later, an awareness surged up within him like it was high tide. He understood at last why there was joy in Sheng Wang's voice the moment he picked up the call, and also understood why the rock was loosening up.

How absurd. As a father, he had been anticipating this day in apprehension, but at the same time, he wanted to smother all of these back down. He wanted the result, but not the cause behind it,

However, none of this was up to his prerogative. He could only choose to accept it in its entirety, or completely shatter everything.

Sheng Mingyang zoned out for a fair bit as he stared at some random spot on the table. He took a deep breath before he looked up. "What if my attitude is still the same as before."

"That's perfectly normal." Sheng Wang said, "If you're willing to change just like that, I'm more surprised instead. But what I want to say now is different from before."

“That time, you said I should try telling everyone around me that I like men, see what their reactions are like,” Sheng Wang gave a smile that was barely there. “You weren’t here for the past few years, so perhaps you didn’t know — I’ve told many people before. As long as they ask, I dare to say it. I reached a pretty funny result, actually. Not a single person pointed at me, asking if I’ve gone insane.”

Sheng Mingyang blurted, “Those are all outsiders, of course they wouldn’t care about you!”

“So if the outsiders don’t care, then what exactly is my family worried about? Worried about people saying that I’m ridiculous, that I’m screwed up? What a strange logic, don’t you think so?” Sheng Wang stopped smiling, and said, a little resigned, “Dad, other than you, I’ve genuinely never heard a single person say something like that to me, ever.”

Sheng Mingyang instantly quieted.

A long while later, his voice was solemn as he held his glass. “That’s what they’re saying to your face, how do you know what they’d say behind

your back?”

“There are so many people on the streets, so many things that they can say behind my back, it’s countless. Like oh, this person’s smooth, that person’s wooden, this person’s too tall, that person’s too short, this person’s super amazing shining in gold, that person’s is a piece of garbage, totally useless. So those who talk about my interest in men behind my back, how are they any different from what I’ve said just now? Who *doesn’t* get talked behind the back?”

Sheng Mingyang was wordless.

Sheng Wang watched him, and continued, “That time, you even asked me: If I didn’t feel like it’s absurd, why was I upset? What else could it be, dad?”

Of course Sheng Mingyang knew why he was upset, just that he secretly switched out the main idea as he interrogated him. He told Jiang Tian before that “Sheng Wang has a soft heart”, how would he not know why his son was upset.

The world was like a giant cycle. In order to make him happy, Sheng Wang had never been happy ever since for these few years. Now it was him who was tip-toeing around, all in exchange for a smile from Sheng Wang.

Sheng Wang said, “I dare to go to the public cemetery now, I also dare to tell my mom that I like Jiang Tian, and that I want to be together with him. I think my mom probably wouldn’t scold me; she might even wish me a Happy New Year.”

He was quiet for a fair while. Looking up, he said to Sheng Mingyang, “Are you able to say this to me?”

For that one very split second, Sheng Mingyang was this close to saying that. But perhaps he had been silent for too long, and his tongue and teeth had rusted over. His heart ached bitterly, but no matter what, he couldn’t bring himself to say those three words.

Sheng Wang didn’t force him either. He had the dignity and versatility of an adult, yet a heart of cotton like the way he was as a youth.

They finished this meal in near total silence. Sheng Wang initially wanted to drive him back, but Sheng Mingyang claimed that the road would be too slippery from the snow, telling him to not bother with all that trouble of travelling back and forth.

Perhaps that's just how it is between father and son; those things that they want to hear couldn't leave the other person's mouth no matter what, but useless nagging always came out as easy as water. In the end, it was Sheng Wang who still called a car for him.

When Sheng Mingyang boarded, Sheng Wang helped to support the door for him as he stood by the car window. Before departing, he said to him, "Dad, Happy New Year."

This line stabbed at his heart, an awful numbness spreading.

Sheng Wang stood beneath the yellow streetlight for a while, until that car melted into the chain of headlights that formed along the street. The snow stopped for an afternoon, and began drifting down all over the place

again. Sheng Wang pulled his scarf up, and just as he was about to head to the parking lot, he saw a familiar figure heading down from the overhead bridge, an umbrella in his hand.

That person remained the same as he was as a youth, still preferring to leave the front unbuttoned. He seemed both tall and lean and desolate in the northern night. The edge of his coat was flying up from the wind, bits of snow landing there, dotting spots of wetness.

He went to the store front as he came down from the stairs, and swept away the snow on his front before saying to Sheng Wang, “You didn’t use an umbrella again, do you enjoy getting soaked?”

Sheng Wang’s features, stiff for the entire night, had finally relaxed once more. He dangled the keys in his hand, “I drove.”

“Why did you come here?” Sheng Wang went towards the car, shoulder to shoulder with him.

Jiang Tian pointed at the business district opposite. “Happened to be eating over there, decided to come here after you mentioned Hot Pot Sun’.”

“Thank god I stood for a while then, otherwise would you have to chase after my car?” Sheng Wang said.

“Have I gone nuts? To chase after the car in the snow?” Jiang Tian said plainly,

“Makes our bond seem way deeper.”

“Then forget about it.”

Sheng Wang’s free hand silently stuck a middle finger out. Before it was completely straightened, it was pressed back down by his Ge with an accuracy.

“How did your work chat go?” Jiang Tian asked.

Sheng Wang sat in the driver’s seat, and was buckling his safety belt with his head lowered. He started the car, wiping away the thin layer of snow on the windshield. The car had converged into the traffic on the main street before he spoke, “Actually, it wasn’t for work. My dad looked for me for a meal, so I came out to him for the second time while I’m at it.”

Jiang Tian was this close from being scarred in regards to “Sheng Mingyang finding Sheng Wang on his own”, and upon hearing that, he instantly looked over with a frown.

Sheng Wang internally said, *maybe I should have spoken after I floored the gas pedal*. He spared a free hand, blocking Jiang Tian’s eyes. “Hey, I’m driving. It’s too easy to get into car accidents in the snow, do not disrupt me with your gaze.”

“Then, you lied to me, saying that it’s for work?”

“I know, I’m wrong, I’m trying to get a lighter sentence for confessing,” Sheng Wang insisted.

Jiang Tian glanced at the look on his face, and internally said, *who are you trying to caox here, the hell do you know*.

“Mainly because if I go by myself, it’s called trying to reason with an old comrade. If it’s two of us, that’s called a protest — wouldn’t he end up flipping a pot?” Sheng Wang watched the traffic ahead with a smile, and a

moment later, he was serious once more. “Don’t worry, it wouldn’t be the same as last time anymore.”

A long while later, Jiang Tian gradually relaxed at last, and grunted a reply. “Mn.”

Sheng Wang said, “I think my dad is loosening up a little.”

Translator’s notes:

This is the last chapter with >4k words in CN raws ^_____^

Chapter 102 - Neutered

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can! Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

Warning: this chapter has a scene of Two Bros Helping Each Other Out, and is vaguely rated as mature.

If nsfw scenes are described as 'cars', then this is the vague outline of a bicycle. Those who are familiar with musuli's writing like global university entrance examinations/qqgk should be aware that its around the same level, aka barely nsfw.

If you want to skip past it, look for where // starts and ends.

It’s Wang-zai’s Birthday, So Let’s Tease Him for a Bit~

(t/n: This chapter was the second update posted on Sheng Wang’s birthday back when the story was still serialising.)

Sheng Wang certainly knew that there was no way Sheng Mingyang would come to an acceptance within the span of a single meal, but he could feel the wavering and hesitation coming from the other person — that was enough. On the way back, he slowly cheered up again, and was even a little carelessly excited. But soon, he thought of two other people again.

“When is Auntie Jiang and Grandpa Ding coming over?” Sheng Wang asked.

Jiang Tian’s fingers — which were in the midst of typing replies to messages — paused. “There’s still a while.”

Before he came back to this country, Old Man Ding’s nursing home had cooperated with a travel agency, and arranged for a travel-style healing trip for a group of old people with similar symptoms, ensuring that they

would always be in a relaxed state of mind. The main form of travel was with nursing and recovery at its core, it wouldn’t be tiring, and they would rest for a bit every few days. Jiang Ou followed along; on one hand, it’s to take care of the old man, and on the other, it’s for herself to relax a little too.

According to the itinerary, it would be the end of the month by the time they arrive in Beijing,

Sheng Wang recalled the way Jiang Ou was utterly hysterical, and was still a little shaken by that. However, he also remembered the way Jiang Ou was gentle and amiable at the very start, spoiling him as though he was her own son.

According to everyone, travelling can relieve stress. With her own innate self, she wouldn’t exactly go from kind to evil. So while he remained apprehensive, there was a slight trace of hope within him. Sheng Mingyang was already starting to loosen up — Jiang Ou wouldn’t be so bad to be completely unmoved at all.

Now that he was thinking that way, everything seemed to be heading towards a good direction — all that there’s left was time.

Sheng Wang was in a decent mood, and detoured to Shijingshan in his car.

Jiang Tian may not be familiar with the roads in Beijing, but no matter what, he wouldn’t reach the point of not being able to tell north south from east west; at the very least, he could still tell the road signs.

He stared at the giant road sign, asking, “You’re going back?”

“I’m getting some change of clothes,” Sheng Wang had already treated Jiang Tian’s place as his own territory as a matter of factly. He had decided on his own to exhaust the final holiday in the New Year there, and after he spoke, he then recalled that the owner of the house himself was sitting right next to him. He then affectedly asked, “Can I stay over at your place for these two days?”

Jiang Tian actually did quite enjoy the way Sheng Wang forcibly took over his territory like that. The lights of the city appeared like dots of stars outside the car; the effects of the alcohol were a little strong. He reclined

against the passenger seat. His tone was rather flat as he lazily teased Sheng Wang, “Give me a reason.”

“You’re putting up airs now?” Sheng Wang thought, and said, “I want to caress the cat, does this reason work?”

Jiang Tian said, sounding indifferent, “Rejected.”

Sheng Wang: “Its name is already Wangzai, do I not have the right to caress it?”

Jiang Tian: “Mn, you don’t.”

Sheng Wang changed his mind without even thinking. “Does it work if you’re the one I’m caressing instead?”

After he said that, he felt like something about that sentence was rather wrong somehow, and the car very quickly fell into an strange silence. Sheng Wang struggled a little, and said, “No wait, I’m not trying to act like a pervert in the middle of the streets, maybe I should change the verb.”

“Touch? Forget it.”

“Play with? That’s not right either.”

The more he said, the more lewd the line was, the more perverted he sounded.

Just as he was still trying to come up with more words, he heard his Ge say, completely monotone, “Shut up already.”

Sheng Wang couldn’t resist anymore, and burst into laughter for quite a while as he held the steering wheel. Jiang Tian rubbed his head heavily.

Due to the way this perverted talk honestly burned at the ear, and imagining it was even more so…...in any case, the cold and mighty, austere Dr. Jiang chose to be silent on the journey back, not quite paying heed to anyone else. Only when Sheng Wang went back to his residence and started picking out clothes, he then came back online again.

Sheng Wang took two sets of T-shirts and long pants for home wear, he said, “I have that there.”

Sheng Wang then took the shirts he had to wear for work, he then also said, “I have that there.”

In a nutshell, he would claim that he already had it no matter what he took, causing Sheng Wang to feel unsure as to whether he should cry or laugh. In the end, he piled all the clothes on top of him, asking, “Ge, tell me the truth. Do you have a fetish for me wearing your clothes?”

Jiang Tian moved his lips wordlessly, and took the clothes, turning to leave with a look on his face that said that he was completely done, leaving Sheng Wang’s eyes to be filled with delight. He picked an entire huge bag of stuff from his closet.

Jiang Tian placed the giant lump of things into the backseats, and asked in confusion, “What’s this that you’re taking.”

Sheng Wang buckled his safety belt, and backed out of the neighbourhood. “Cat toys. I’m lodging over for two days, I’m in its territory, of course I have to gain its favour, right? Kids from single parent families are usually more sensitive.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

The snow gradually stopped once more, a vast patch of white filled up around them. The car passed through the whiteness in the night, so quiet that languidity would sprout within the hearts of people.

Sheng Wang stopped at the red light at the entrance of the street. He suddenly heard Jiang Tian say, “When do you intend to let it return to a family with both parents then?”

His voice was low, matching rather nicely with the darkness of the night. Sheng Wang touched his right earlobe, his heart itching a little. “Doesn’t it count as one now?”

“What kind of family with two parents has one of them staying for only two days with a suitcase in hand and then running away afterwards?” Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang let out an “oh”, and turned to look at the passenger seat as the red light counted down. “Ge.”

“Mn,” Jiang Tian replied.

“Are you inviting me to move in with you?”

“Are you agreeing then?” Jiang Tian asked.

The red light jumped to green. Sheng Wang's gaze returned back to the front, and stepped on the gas pedal. He teased, "Wow, this is something major. I gotta give it a little more thought."

In the gap of waiting for the green light, he imagined along the lines of Jiang Tian's invitation — they live together in a corner of the university, raise a cat together, and then gradually sway over their family with the power of time.

For an instant, he felt like this life was familiar, and his mind was momentarily vacant before he recalled dazedly; that's the future university life he and Jiang Tian had envisioned, the day Jiang Tian turned 18 and they were hidden away in his room.

Fate is sometimes an inexorable presence in this world. Inexorably, they still ended up living the life they had once imagined, just that it was a couple of years late by accident.

*

When they went back, the single-parent-family-raised cat son did not appear to welcome them, which was out of the ordinary. Instead, it was gazing into the far distance, two paws resting against the window sill. Who knows if the cat was engaged in deep philosophical thought, thinking.

Jiang Tian checked around, and discovered that it was because the bowl for cat food was empty.

Just as he opened the box for cat food, the Watcher of the Far Distance who was previously contemplating life pounced over like it was flying. It pawed at the legs of his pants, rubbing its face all over it. Its nose was even tilted up, dotting little kisses, trying to act obedient.

Sheng Wang’s giant bag of cat toys had already been left untouched in his own house for too long, now that he finally grasped the opportunity to play with it, he instantly poured all of them out. He opened up the packaging, trying them one after another.

This person did not sit on the sofa despite the availability of one, and sat on the carpet with his legs crossed instead, hitting it off with the cat.

(t/n: The original phrase for "hitting it off" was □□□□, which means to end up *fighting* (like into a ball/cluster/group), but it could also mean to get along with someone/a group, like a new student appearing in class and then assimilating/blending in well.)

Jiang Tian observed from the side for a while. He discovered how someone may be going on about wanting to “gain the favour of the cat”, but whatever shady business he was engaged in was asking for a beating. The cat child stood on its hindlegs, its paws were reached out to bat at the cat teaser. Yet he had to tug at the cat’s leg as if he was launching a sneak attack, and then watch his cat son lose its balance, falling onto the floor with a poof.

The cat was too annoyed, and turned around, wanting to escape. Yet he insisted on holding onto one of the cat’s hindlegs, preventing the cat from escaping no matter how the three other legs kicked about. He forced the cat’s hand to the point that its paw was reached out, eagerly trying to slap him — his hand reached up, and ended up high-fiving the cat instead.

With that — over and over again — the cat didn’t dare to go near him anymore, and sprawled on the windowsill, aggrieved and woeful.

Sheng Wang was ignored no matter how he waved the cat teaser, and couldn’t help but to turn and ask Jiang Tian, “Why does it keep looking outside the window? Back then, when I wanted to keep a cat, I’d done my research. It says that if the cat keeps wanting to go outside, it’s possibly in heat.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

His stomach was full of retorts, just that he didn’t know which line he should pick to throw it back at Sheng Wang. In the end, he settled for exasperatedly saying, “It’s not in heat, it had been neutered already.”

Sheng Wang let out an “oh”, and went to fiddle with his cat teaser again.

A few seconds later, he abruptly realised something, and whipped around to ask, “What did you say? You’ve neutered it already?”

Jiang Tian was a little baffled. “Mn, why?”

“You gave it the name Wangzai, and then you *castrated* it???” Sheng Wang was incredulous.

His expression was honestly so animated that Jiang Tian was stunned for a while before he couldn’t resist anymore, and started laughing as he squeezed a tiny cotton mouse.

“You’re *laughing*?” Sheng Wang tossed the cat teaser aside and pounced over, dragging his Ge down from the couch. As he tickled him, he said, “You’re totally full of bad intentions, why didn’t you call it Xiao-Jiang instead? Don’t you dare run away—”

Jiang Tian chuckled while avoiding him. “How old are you already, still using this trick?”

Sheng Wang said, with absolute conviction, “I’m eighteen!”

//As he mocked, his hand reached inside Jiang Tian’s pants, initially wanting to say “how about you get a taste of that too”. However, with all that messing around, the two became aroused as they were entangled up with each other.

Sheng Wang propped himself against the carpet, slowly turning flushed.

He pulled Jiang Tian down and kissed him, and then peppering kisses from his jaw down to his neck. Just as he was about to be up to a little mischief, he felt a hand reaching in.

He suddenly curled a single leg, his hand grasping onto Jiang Tian's wrist. He wanted to stop him, but he wasn't resolute about it at all — instead, it was more like he was covertly aiding him. A moment later, his eyes narrowed, and his forehead rested against Jiang Tian's shoulder, a cloud mist fogging up his pupils.

Jiang Tian's Adam's apple was rather red too, and his gaze lowered down like the direction of his thin eyelids. He suddenly stopped as the other person still sat on the fence.

Sheng Wang was starting to be unable to bear it anymore, and turned aside, giving him a bite. His voice was raspy as he called him "Ge".

Jiang Tian shut his eyes before he opened them again. He watched the other person's eyes — always bright and clear — tear up, and then he

lowered his head, muffling back the noises that threatened to spill out of him.//

……

By the time the two were done messing around, the carpet was a mess, and the cat had long since disappeared to who knows where.

Sheng Wang reached out and grabbed a glass of water. He drank two mouthfuls before passing it to Jiang Tian. He kissed the other person's jaw, seemingly still wanting more. He asked him like he was doing so for fun, "Ge, do you know that there's also another method?"

They were adults after all, he was certain that Jiang Tian did know. He merely wanted to casually be a pervert for a bit, and would stop after he scratched that itch. Unexpectedly, his Ge's gaze swept over from the end of his eyes while he was drinking water, saying, "I don't know."

"....."

Sheng Wang internally said, *are you for real*? He continued asking in bafflement, "It's fine if you haven't watched anything, but have you not

heard of it at all?”

Jiang Tian withdrew his gaze, and turned to face up as he took yet another mouthful of water. And then his elbow was propped on his curled knee, his thin and long fingers pinched the mouth of the glass in circles as he asked, “No, why don’t you demonstrate?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

At this point, he was finally certain: *someone’s* ability to play stupid in order to mess with him was totally refined to the point of perfection.

Translator’s notes:

Apparently there’s a more….*risque* edition of the car outline here before the author deleted that, and someone had pasted in in the comments section of the official site. I cannot ascertain for myself whether it’s 100% the slightly less uncensored edition, but I’ll translate it anyway.

>

//As he laughed and cussed, his hand reached towards the direction of Jiang Tian's groin, initially wanting to say "how about you get a taste of that too". However, with all that messing around, the two became aroused as they were entangled up with each other.

Sheng Wang propped himself against the carpet, a wave of red slowly creeping up his neck.

He licked his lips, pulled Jiang Tian down and kissed him, biting too, and then peppering kisses from his jaw down to his Adam's apple. Just as he was about to play a little mischief, he felt a hand reaching inside his long pants as it slid down his hip bones.

He grasped Jiang Tian's wrist, and arched inwards while folding up a single leg. His eyes were narrowed, and his lips were pressed onto Jiang Tian's Adam's apple as he let out a couple of breathy pants. Jiang Tian's Adam's apple was rather red too, and his gaze descended upon him, down from the direction of his thin eyelids. He kissed Sheng Wang's lips, trailing to [the edge of his neck], and then suddenly stopped as the other person still sat on the fence.

Sheng Wang was starting to be unable to bear it anymore, and turned aside, giving him a bite. His voice was raspy as he called him “Ge”.

Jiang Tian shut his eyes before he opened them again. He watched the other person’s eyes — always bright and clear—tear up, and then he lowered his head, muffling back the noises that threatened to spill out of him.//

>

Also omfg stop bullying wangzai!!! It already lost its balls what more do u want from him @ wang-zai

Also also fun fact: in the lines “I want to caress the cat, does this reason work?” and “Does it work if you’re the one I’m caressing instead?”, the word Sheng Wang used was actually □, an action that means rubbing along/up and down (using the hand). This particular word has been used in the context of going to eat skewers, petting a cat/an animal...as well as handjobs, or at least hand on dick action _(:3□∠)_ and so what Sheng Wang said in the second line could be read as “Does it work if you’re the

one I’m rubbing instead” _(:3」∠)_ I initially wanted to use “grope” but who the hell gropes a cat (??), so I just went for caress… idk man

Chapter 103 - Gathering

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can!
Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

Current Boyfriend, Thank You Very Much.

As people say, desiring food and sex is only part of the human nature. It would have been fine if certain things weren't brought up, but once they were brought up, they couldn't help but to cause one to think more about them.

When Sheng Wang was seventeen, he felt like he couldn't withstand another person's touch at all, even kissing a little bit with Jiang Tian would cause him to get a reaction. Messing around to the point of locking themselves up in the bathroom couldn't be anymore usual. That couldn't even be said to be young people being full of vim and having a furnace inside the body, more like a straight up having a Sun.

(t/n: A bit of TCM theory and stuff here: original text was young people having a massive amount of "qi" and "inner fire", which in other terms is something something yang energy thus Horniness)

Later on, after Jiang Tian left, he became uninterested in those earthly desires. He filled his days up with way too many things, so busy to the point

that even sleep was an activity done when he found the spare time to. Naturally, he wouldn't have the time to think about those and what nots.

Now, everything has changed once more.

Sheng Wang sat cross legged on the floor, and in between being on his phone, his eyes drifted to Jiang Tian's hand — currently petting the cat — for the third time, watching his thin and pale and slender fingers appearing and disappearing amidst the cat's fur. He kept thinking about how those fingers sank into fabric a short while ago, as well as the outline of his fingers and joints contracting and relaxing beneath the fabric……

He stared at it for a few minutes, and stood up while looking perfectly composed. He dug out a bottle of iced water, chugged down two mouthfuls, and then grabbed his fresh clothes, entering the bathroom for the second time. He felt like he had once again returned to being seventeen, when the inner fire in him roared, the sex — no wait, the *sun* had started rising again once more.

Dr. Jiang’s research abilities were too strong, allowing one to retain youth forever.

As Sheng Wang silently cursed himself out for being a pervert, he also sneakily went to search up some things. As the saying goes, the motivation behind top students striving and forging ahead came from “maintaining a vigorous curiosity towards the world”; this applies to proper issues, and also for the not-so-proper issues.

The last time he had watched something like that was actually year one of university; three out of six people in his dorms were all seasoned perverts. They had a wide variety of resources, they had anything you wanted. Not even two months passed since school opened when they rallied under the flag of “sharing good things together will deepen bonds”, and meticulously selected a few videos, forcing Sheng Wang and the rest to watch all of them.

Those few bros did have good intentions, and they picked up what they’d considered the crème de la crème according to their aesthetical

framework. The only problem…...was that Sheng Wang did not share the same frame as them at all.

They liked those with nice voices, big boobs and skinny waists. The remaining part would suffice with being simple and straight to the point. For Sheng Wang, the one with the nice voice was his Ge, the one with the nice body was also his Ge. Due to having dated before, straight to the point wasn't working for him. Therefore, that afternoon, his viewing experience only consisted of two words: I'm blinded.

Those few videos managed to directly send him from a serene heart and mind to straight up no longer having any needs any more, and was on tenterhooks for a very long period of time after that.

However, the spirit of human nature is of goldfish, and recovering from the scars is enough to forget what caused the pain in the first place.

Therefore, many years later, with the original intention of "deepening bonds", Sheng Wang reached out the hands of sin on his own accord. He wanted to explore and filter out what he's watching by himself — it had to be better than whatever those bros picked out in any case.

Besides, his goal wasn't just to spice things up; he just wanted to see how things should be done in a more scientific way.

Unfortunately, the young master had forgotten one thing — those which were filmed down, they usually wouldn't be quite scientific. Some images, when freeze-framed, looked rather artistic and intimate, as though they were truly a couple. But the moment it started moving, all that was left in Sheng Wang's mind was "what the hell".

Jiang Tian received a phone call from the professor before he slept, and was on his mailbox on his computer as he went to the living room, chatting for a long time. As Sheng Wang listened to English shooting out of his mouth like it's nothing in a calm and rational way, he sat on the head of the bed, searching on and off for "Heart".

(t/n: This is actually a children's novel by Edmondo De Amicis, the title has been translated into "The Education of Love" in Chinese.)

When Jiang Tian returned to the bedroom, young master Sheng happened to be watching one where the person dared to stuff anything and

everything inside. He caught the movement by the door out of the corner of his eyes, and put on a show of being calm while removing his earpiece. He then closed the laptop up with a pop.

“What were you looking at? Why does your face look so awful?” Jiang Tian’s eyes sized up his face, and asked in bafflement.

The young master thought, and said, “Horror film.”

Jiang Tian’s expression turned even stranger. “Which one can scare you to the point of looking like this?”

“Didn’t catch the name.”

“What was it about?”

“.....” Sheng Wang’s expression was complicated, like a cat laid down upon the neutering surgery table. He wanted to say something, but changed his mind. “The mystery of black holes, I guess.”

Jiang Tian: “?”

Perhaps that film was honestly too terrifying; when Jiang Tian was typing out an email at the head of the bed, a certain person zoned out for a

while as he petted the cat, which was deep in sleep. He fiddled with his phone a few more times before he laid down.

By the time Jiang Tian turned to look after he sent the email, he was already asleep, sprawling over the pillow. His messy fringe half covered his eyes, his mouth was slightly open, the curvature of his back was like a line with a dip.

Jiang Tian watched him for a while, his eyes lowered. His pointer finger reached out to pick at Sheng Wang's hair. He suddenly recalled how someone was fiddling on his phone with his legs crossed, extremely similar to the way he changed his profile picture for fun back in those days.

A thought popped up in his head, and he tapped into WeChat to check.

Perhaps they were telepathically connected, there really was a change to Sheng Wang's personal information page. The blank profile picture he had been using ever since he started working had been removed at last, changing into a cartoonish render of a palm.

Jiang Tian knew about his habits all too well, and did not need to look carefully at it before he knew this hand was cropped from a Wangzai sticker, sprawled out. And a certain person's nickname switched from a question mark to a line: I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine

(t/n: Newest profile picture is the final picture here!)

Jiang Tian: "....."

What kind of eyes-blinding film he watched that was enough to scare him into being like this?

*

"Thanks" to his itchy hands, Sheng Wang no longer thought about those obscene things for the next few days straight. In reality, he had also forgotten about other things due to the mess he made. Only when he received a call from Gao Tianyang afternoon on the 4th, did he remember that there was a gathering of friends waiting for him.

"Same old same old, BBQ skewers!" Gao Tianyang's voice was as loud as it always was, and it was apparent he was in high spirits, "It's the

one the three of us went to last time, the one by the train station entrance. The roasted oysters and razor clams are so freaking good, I've told Old Song about them quite a few times, and even sent him pictures. He has been craving for them for a long while now, this time he specifically requested to eat those."

Naturally, Sheng Wang didn't have any particular opinions. His taste buds were way too picky, and shops that had passed his inspection definitely were definitely way less risky than those new shops he had yet to try. Besides, that place was honestly quite decent. He had met up with Zhao Xi and Lin Beiting there twice.

He had the bad habit of presenting treasures in the past — whenever he ate good food, heard of something fun, he always wanted to find Jiang Tian to experience them together. Later when they weren't together, the habit couldn't be gotten rid of no matter what. So he could only skip a step — he thought of it in his heart, and treated it the same as actually having happened.

Every time he went to that BBQ store, he would think: Jiang Tian would probably like the deep-fried lotus root sandwich here. The meat isn't too filling and oily, the lotus root is crunchy too. If he ever gets the chance on a certain day, a certain month, a certain year, he would like to drag Jiang Tian here for a try. He didn't know how long it would take for the "certain" to arrive, so he could only treat it as a delusion from the start to end.

(t/n: The CN name for the dish: □□ (.) Essentially imagine lotus roots with a pork patty in between, and then the entire thing is deep fried :D)

He did not expect his delusion to come true. Sheng Wang was in an excellent mood, and worked at a highly efficient rate too. He finished everything early under Zhang Chao's curious and suspicious gaze. The moment it was time to clock out, Sheng Wang had already worn his coat and left. He carried the wind with him as he entered the lift, the gust causing two new female interns to blush.

He received a message from Zhang Chao on WeChat the moment he just sat down in the car: I've known you for so long and this is the first time I've seen you rushing to end work. Is this the power of old flames?

As Sheng Wang pulled out from the parking spot with a single hand on the steering wheel, his other hand hurriedly typed: current boyfriend, thank you very much.

Zhang Chao: ???????

Zhang Chao: Fuck

*

That store was closer to Jiang Tian's location. If Sheng Wang looked for Jiang Tian first, he had to detour instead — so the two weren't mushy enough to forcibly go an entire circle just to walk together. The gathering was set to start at 7pm; he initially had more than enough time to reach there, but the addition of a traffic jam was enough to come for his throat.

Sheng Wang's car stopped and continued and stopped and continued; by the time he finally managed to nudge his car there, it was already 6.55pm. He parked his car, and entered the private room according to Gao Tianyang's message — an entire table of people sat down there, synchronously looking at him with smiles on their faces.

“See, what did I say, what did I say!” Song Sirui tapped the watch on his wrist, saying, “Sheng-ge would definitely arrive on the dot, with an error of less than two minutes. I was spot on, right? Wanna bet, gotta be ready to accept losing, don’t try to get away with this. Pay up!”

The spectacles he wore for so many years had been taken off from his face after he graduated from university, switching into contact lenses instead. He even shot up a bit. Though he might not be considered tall, at the very least he no longer resembled his beansprout self from before.

Ever since graduating from high school, the number of times Sheng Wang had seen most of the people around the table could be counted on his fingers. For those like Song Sirui who had a massive change in vibes, he probably wouldn’t quite dare to say that that’s him if he ran into him on the street. There might even be a few traces of unfamiliarity the moment he just entered. However, the moment words were exchanged, they could instantly travel back to a few years ago.

The table of people took their phones out in sighs and despair, their fingers speedily tapping on something.

Sheng Wang felt a vibration from his fingers, and swiped to unlock the screen. Gao Tianyang had already made a WeChat group chat, and the chat was continuously popping up with red packets; Song Sirui received them until his hands turned jelly.

When he got to Gao Tianyang, that guy acutely retracted that message.

Song Sirui swore a “fuck”, and cursed, “Are you a decent human or not? You want to take back even two bucks?!”

Gao Tianyang appeared to be completely shameless. “Is this the first day you know if I’m a decent human?”

The familiar arguments had appeared once more, and Sheng Wang laughed. He waved his phone, saying, “Hey, isn’t this too much? I wasn’t here yet, and you’re using me as a reason to gamble together? I’m reporting you guys.”

“No don’t, people would only bet if they’re betting on you. If we used Old Song instead, who the hell would have cared, right? He’s not worth that money,” Gao Tianyang said.

“Scram!” Song Sirui cursed across the table. He patted the empty seat beside him, saying to Sheng Wang, “Sheng-ge, please take the seat of honour.”

That empty seat was the nearest to Sheng Wang, so he didn’t think too much about it, and sat down straight after he hung up his coat. Just as he was about to ask if Jiang Tian has arrived yet, the door to the private room was pushed open.

Jiang Tian had something going on with his project, and managed to let Gao Tianyang know ahead of time. Still, he wasn’t considered late in the end, he was behind by only two minutes. He entered, scanned around, and his gaze met with Sheng Wang’s. Just as he was about to speak, a magical sight appeared in the private room—

Carp, Old Song, Gao Tianyang and the rest all lifted their chairs and shifted, everyone squeezing together. In the spot furthest away from Sheng Wang, which was next to Gao Tianyang, yet another empty spot was made. They said to Jiang Tian, “Tian-ge, sit here.”

Sheng Wang: “???”

Question marks popped up all over Sheng Wang’s head and he was dumbfounded for several moments before he finally recalled: oh, these kind hearted residents still thought that his and Jiang Tian’s relationship was still in tatters.

Translator’s notes:

This update is around 15k words (excluding footnotes) and 47 pages in google docs WHEEZES

Fun fact: for the line "He felt like he had once again returned to being seventeen, when the inner fire in him roared, the sex — no wait, the *sun* had started rising again once more", the word used for "sex" was actually also sun, as in, □...which can also be slang for "fuck" so there's that :D

Chapter 104 - Dog Food

Please remember to officially purchase and support moumou if you can! Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

(t/n: Dog Food refers to PDA shown by couples, it is what that gets fed to “single dogs”, a term to refer to single people)

Time Is Rather Magical.

The whole table of geese — no wait, people — were all looking at Jiang Tian with their necks stretched out, appearing to be trying their best to sustain a lighthearted atmosphere; they probably didn't want to worsen the awkwardness between two certain people.

Jiang Tian took off his coat and hung it on the rack under the round gazes of the masses, and then walked next to Gao Tianyang, his hand reaching out to grab the back of the chair. His eyes shifted up, and glanced at that idiot. "You're the one who arranged the seats?"

Gao Tianyang's head was tilted up. "......Ya."

Jiang Tian nodded. He made a thumbs up at him, like he was mocking him or something, and then carried the chair all the way next to Sheng Wang, placing it down with a clang.

……

The entire private room was dead quiet.

Mostly because of confusion.

A server with a round face came in to add in two additional glasses of water for Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, and brought a bucket of crushed ice upon Sheng Wang's request. The server closed the door to the private room. Sheng Wang added a bit of ice to his and Jiang Tian's still empty beverage glasses, and pushed the bucket of ice opposite him, calling out, "Old Gao."

Gao Tianyang's soul only travelled back from the land of confusion after all of that happened. He tugged the ice bucket till it's right in front of him, but forgot to add them into his glass anyway. Instead, he held the bucket tightly, asking, "No wait, what's the situation between the two of you now???"

"It is exactly what you're seeing now."

Gao Tianyang attempted to establish an eye contact of solidarity with Little Chili, but Little Chili's eyes weren't on him at all. Her hand rose above the people squeezing around her, and she explained to Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian, "I didn't want to shift, I've already thought something's not

right the moment you two entered. They're the ones who forced me to, not even a mountain can stop him once he starts squeezing—"

She patted Gao Tianyang's dog head, saying, "Don't look at me, hurry and shift to the side already. My chair has four legs and one of them is still in the air."

Therefore, with question marks still floating above the heads of this group of people, they shifted all of their chairs back with clangs and bangs. And then they turned to look at Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian in unison.

Song Sirui was the nearest, and received the greatest impact. He finally couldn't resist anymore, and asked, "So…...you two are gucci again?"

Sheng Wang made eye contact with Jiang Tian, and turned the glass on the table with a laugh. "Yeah, we're back together again."

The table of people all turned to glare at Gao Tianyang in unison.

"Old Gao, tell me, is this not embarrassing at all!" Song Sirui admonished, "What kind of shitty military intelligence did you give? Are

you toxic?”

“You’re the toxic one, I’m done so dirty!” Gao Tianyang shouted at Sheng Wang from afar, “Sheng-ge! We’ve been bros for so many years, you have to stand up for me! I called you last week, did you not say that if I invited Tian-ge, you wouldn’t come?”

What followed rapidly after this idiot spoke was an “ow”, because his foot received a crushing from Little Chili’s high heels.

Jiang Tian held the glass loosely in his hand, and turned to face Sheng Wang. “You said that?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He sighed and grabbed a menu off-handedly, standing it upright by the side of his face. It shielded Jiang Tian’s gaze from him. He said to Gao Tianyang, “You’re truly toxic.”

“It’s been literal years, and you still can’t tell the situation at all,” Chili added.

One of Gao Tianyang’s foot was tucked away, he looked rather aggrieved. “Who would have thought they would be that fast.”

“How could you say that?” Song Sirui snubbed him, “You can’t just use the word ‘fast’ to describe men.”

“What’s it got anything to do with you? Be more civilized, can’t you see that our class monitor’s entire head is already red?” Gao Tianyang retorted.

Chili rolled her eyes, and hugged Little Carp’s— the class monitor, who was next to her — elbow, saying, “We’ve graduated for so long, this group of boys is still so……”

Idiotic.

Carp said, “Yeah.”

Sheng Wang still liked to spin his pencil around. When he was ordering food, the pencil spun into oblivion on his slender fingers. Jiang Tian was still as taciturn as before, and would occasionally come up with the coldest burns. Matched with the look of utter bafflement on Sheng Wang’s face, or the “are You in lack of a beating” expression, the entire table could lose their minds from laughter.

Gao Tianyang could still gabble non-stop like before, he could slide into conversations between any two people, and any topic could be expanded upon as wide as the sea — he was a tanned “socialite”. Song Sirui was still like a giant goose, catch him and he could get nipped at, and then he would return the nip in even greater force.

Little Chili was as fiery as ever, whoever that joked about her would all be slammed back by her — except now the range of people shrank, and she hit mostly Gao Tianyang.

Carp was studying clinical medicine, and her academic journey was lengthening visibly. Compared to Jiang Tian, who applied for a Phd straight away, she was nothing to laugh at either. She still liked to put her hair up in a simple ponytail, she would still get embarrassed all too easily, and flush till her entire face turned red whenever somebody teased her.

……

They most certainly went to different universities, they went all over the place, they'd met new classmates and friends, they'd gather and chat with them more often, they'd cross each other's paths in life and work. Yet for some reason, if they were asked, the closest group of people to them, the ones they remembered dearly the most...had always been the group from Class A.

Perhaps it was because they had all witnessed each other's era of youth, witnessing their most passionate, but also the most idiotic selves.

The third time Sheng Wang picked out ice cubes into the glass, Carp suddenly couldn't hold herself back anymore. "Do you know that it's currently winter?"

"Yeah?" A small grin broke out on Sheng Wang's face, "It's even more than -10 degrees below outside."

"....." Carp asked in all sincerity, "Aren't you cold?"

"Goddamn, someone finally said it." Song Sirui pulled out a bottle of beer and popped it open with the edge of the table. "I've been wanting to say this ever since the server came in with the ice bucket. Dude, you're

eating ice in the middle of literally winter — are you sure you don't need a checkup at the hospital? See if you have some disorder of not being able to tell the temperature or something."

"To hell with that," Gao Tianyang scolded.

"Old Song, I'm telling you: the popsicles sell like hotcakes the most during winter back in my old school," Sheng Wang said. "Wanna guess why?"

Song Sirui bought into his nonsense, and asked earnestly, "Why?"

"It's because we have central heating." After Sheng Wang said, then let out an "oh" pretentiously. "Yeah, you guys didn't have that, you can't relate to that joy."

(t/n: Southern parts of China, where most of the non-Beijing crew went to, are known for not having central heating provided during winter...although that is apparently starting to change in recent years.)

"I—" Song Sirui was so crossed that he grabbed an empty bowl as a weapon.

Sheng Wang leaned back with a cackle, avoiding his range of attack. Coincidentally, Jiang Tian was right up against his back.

The study rep had failed in his attempt of violence, and even got a mouth stuffed full of dog food in return. He set the bowl down heavily, and could only come up with a “Fuck!”

Carp — who also did not get to experience the joy of central heating — felt the unfairness of it too. She silently poured a half glass full of beer, and joined cahoots with the few JiangZheHu classmates. Under Song Sirui’s lead, they toasted the Beijing delegation in a frenzy.

(t/n: JiangZheHu: short for Jiangsu + Zhejiang + Shanghai)

They may be a delegation, but in reality there were only two of them — Chili had yet to recover from her cold and was supposed to abstain from alcohol due to her medication. Therefore, she sent out her boyfriend. The moment Sheng Wang arrived, he flashed his keys and said he would be driving — so he sent out his boyfriend too.

This stirred up the JiangZheHu delegation’s fighting spirit even more, since despite the years of friendship, Gao Tianyang and Jiang Tian’s ability

to hold their alcohol had always been a mystery. Either way, those present had never witnessed what they were like as drunks, so they insisted on making them drink as much as possible with much enthusiasm.

At the start, they could come up with some semblance of a reason, what with “Let’s welcome Tian-ge for coming back to this country, cheers to that”, “It hasn’t been easy for Tian-ge and Sheng-ge, cheers to that”, “Old Gao has gotten a promotion at work, cheers to that”.

Eventually it became a “I can’t believe Chili managed to stand a dumbass like you, you must drink to that”, “Tian-ge, you have a cat, right? Wishing the cat good health, let’s clink our glasses to that.”

After they managed to come up with all the reasons they could, they had to look for more fun things to do. The whole group of people had aged for so many years for nothing it seemed — when it came to party games for the dining table, their first thought was still the “Seven” from those years ago.

Gao Tianyang was incredibly familiar with the boss here. He raised his hands and volunteered, “The boss has some tools, hold on — I’ll go get them from the server.”

“There’s still tools?” Song Sirui’s capacity for alcohol did grow ever since he started working, and managed to forcibly hold on up till now. His gaze was a little unfocused, that’s all.

Everyone only realised that the so-called “tools” in his words was a set of cards used for truth or dare when he came in with a little box. Pre-made questions and dares were on the cards; whoever lost, whoever had to pick one.

If the person couldn’t make themself tell the truth, nor bring themself to carry out the dare, then they only needed to obediently take a drink. Song Sirui and the few clapped the table in delight when they saw the rules — they were already shameless, and were fine with doing anything. With this, they could skip out on alcohol and hang on for a while more.

However, Jiang Tian was different. It's been so many years, could they really not know Jiang Tian's personality by now? He definitely wouldn't choose any of the two options, and just go drinking straight away. That fit their plan perfectly!

Therefore the table of people rolled up their sleeves and were instantly game.

At the start, Jiang Tian didn't really mind. After all, he had a faster reaction, and had never lost at playing games like this before. However, he eventually became a little resigned…...no matter the speed of his reaction, he couldn't stand up against a certain young master who was acting out knowing just how much he got Jiang Tian wrapped around his fingertips, and was setting him up with everything he could.

After they survived the fourth round by the skin of their teeth, Jiang Tian brought Sheng Wang's drinking glass up and took a sniff.

"What are you doing?" Sheng Wang looked askance at him.

"You added beer inside?" Jiang Tian asked.

“Nope.”

“You didn’t drink much?”

“I’m very sober.”

Jiang Tian looked at the mirth in his eyes that said he’s up to no good, and couldn’t resist after holding back for a few seconds. “Can you tell who’s with who clearly?”

“I totally can,” Sheng Wang said, “If I lose, it’s all on you.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

In the sixth round, the very sober young master Sheng had finally sabotaged his boyfriend off his throne of eternal victory. Jiang Tian side-eyed a certain person with a headache.

Song Sirui was already high from drinking. He stood there, gesturing, “Here! Tian-ge! Pick one: this stack here is truth, and this other stack here is dare. Pick a card from a stack. It’s okay, we won’t force you though; you can just drink if you don’t wanna pick. Not too much, just three glasses is enough.”

As he spoke, he already grabbed the beer bottle, and was absolutely ready to start pouring one out for Jiang Tian, only to hear the other person calmly saying, “Then I’ll pick a card.”

Song Sirui was stunned. “Huh? You seriously want to pick a card? Which stack?”

His words barely came out of his mouth and Jiang Tian had already selected a card from the truth pile.

More accurately, he didn’t select one — he flipped over the one at the very top instantly. The group all closed in to look, and saw what was written on the card: When is the last time you kissed?

This question was nothing out of the ordinary, but it had an unusual effect when used in conjunction with Jiang Tian. Those present had only witnessed his cold and aloof self, and found it difficult to connect him with terms like dating, kissing and all.

A suggestive silence filled up the private room.

Jiang Tian shot a glance at Sheng Wang, and set the flipped over card down at the side of the table, answering plainly, “Today.”

It clearly was a simple word, but Sheng Wang felt his face turning a little red. He maintained a serenity on the surface, and brought the glass up, drinking a mouth of milk with ice added in it. When he looked up again, he discovered that everyone had turned to look at him on instinct.

……

Fuck.

Young master Sheng put down his glass without a single word, and felt like he had managed to set himself up all the way to death.

He reflected for a few seconds, and heard his Ge tilt his head nearer to him, asking under his breath, “Did you have fun being cheeky?”

After a few rounds, nothing had yet to really happen to Jiang Tian, who was being sabotaged; those who were trying to make him drink had first lost it instead. Song Sirui waved his hand, saying, “Nah, I’m not

playing anymore. This is too much to take, I can't stand it anymore. I have to be an absolute moron, what on earth was I thinking, playing truth or dare with two couples. I'm about to explode from all this goddamn dog food!"

From then, the few single dogs started to make a fuss. With the reason being that their spirits were hurt, they dragged Gao Tianyang and Jiang Tian into yet another round of drinks. By the time the two were genuinely a little drunk already, Song Sirui was no longer quite steady on his feet.

His elbow was slung over the back of the chair, and sprawled against it, pulling himself together for a while. He suddenly blabbered, "Tian-ge, Sheng-ge, I don't know if you two…...you two still remember this person."

Sheng Wang asked for a glass of warm water from the server and passed it to Jiang Tian. Upon hearing that, he stilled, and turned to face him. "Who?"

"I've actually mentioned this to Old Gao before—"

"And I told you before not to bring it up." Gao Tianyang's reaction was a little slow already; he called from a few people away.

“Eh, I know.” Song Sirui waved, indicating for him to cut out the crap, “Old Gao said you two probably couldn’t be bothered, but I can’t hold it back, so Imma just make it short.”

“Go on,” Sheng Wang said.

“I’m in the municipal administration, right?” Song Sirui said, “Sometimes, I’ll end up crossing paths with construction matters. And then around the first half of this year, I think, there’s a safety accident that occured in the construction site over in the development zone, so people are getting held legally accountable. Criminal responsibility, in fact. Sheng-ge, guess who I saw in the list of people in charge?”

Sheng Wang had a vague feeling, but he still prompted, “Who? An old classmate?”

“Qi Jiahao.”

Upon hearing this name, Sheng Wang was sent into a trance for a while. Much longer later, he let out a very slight “oh”, and was

unexpectedly undisturbed. “Criminal responsibility? Then wouldn’t he end up with a criminal record?”

“Yeah.” Song Sirui nodded. “Isn’t his dad doing some construction contract thing? Of course, the scale isn’t too big. Didn’t he panic and flunk his gaokao? Think he ended up working under his dad after he graduated. In the end, they didn’t properly follow through with the safety protocols, so those things happened, and they have to pay a lot of money. Apparently they are borrowing money left and right.”

Gao Tianyang cursed from afar. “Deserved!”

Song Sirui said, “I just wanna let you two know.”

Sheng Wang nodded.

He had Qi Jiahao to thank for these friends and classmates finding out about him and Jiang Tian. Ever since that day, his life started to derail, becoming nothing of what it should have been. If he said he didn’t mind, nor did he hold any hatred, he would be lying. But more often than not, he was too busy to even think about that person at all. As time passed, he could not even recall what the person looked like.

When he was seventeen, the person named Qi Jiahao was the fuse that led to the explosive changes in his life to him; now, all he was was a minor character without any defining features in his life. So irrelevant, that he only existed for barely a few minutes in the drunken blabbers post-drinking.

Time is rather magical.

Chapter 105 - Hangover Cure

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Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

Final parts of this chapter is considered Mature, if you want to skip past it

look for //.

if nsfw scenes are known as cars, we have the vague outline of a car ayy

I’m So Tiwed

In the end, Song Sirui swore up to the heavens, garbling, that he did not want to see them until he becomes attached.

Gao Tianyang pointed at him from afar. “Make a more hardcore oath if you dare.”

Song Sirui asked in alert, “Why?”

“Fuzhong will be having a anniversarial celebration this year, you’re a dog if you show up.”

The moment Song Sirui heard that, he added, “The person swearing this oath: Gao Tianyang.”

Everyone, despite their varying levels of drunkenness, all doubled over in laughter. Gao Tianyang swore a “fuck”, grabed the chicken wing bone in front of him, and tossed it over. However, this idiot did not even take a proper shot.

Sheng Wang grabbed the menu with lightning reflexes and blocked it, that was how he avoided the chicken bone from smacking right into his forehead.

“You’re done for,” Sheng Wang grabbed the ice bucket, and Gao Tianyang scuttled away as though he was flying. As he yelled “sorry it’s my fault”, he screamed at Jiang Tian, “Tian-ge, get him under control!”

Jiang Tian leaned against the chair, saying, “Can’t do that.”

There was a slight drawl to his voice; it was apparent that he was a little drunk. His gaze was stuck on the certain someone who was kicking up a fuss.

Gao Tianyang was still hooting about, and weaved around the table in the private room, evading capture. He was originally relying on Tian-ge to open his eyes, and save his life in the nick of time. After going two rounds, he understood at last: a person in love was not a person to count on. He had to shoulder the consequences of the bone he threw.

When Sheng Wang ended up back at his seat, he overheard Carp discussing with him something in her field of work. He actually did give legit answers.

“Aren’t you doing nanotech?” Sheng Wang asked in curiosity as his elbow rested on the back of his chair.

“I’ve taken some classes on clinical science,” Jiang Tian said.

“Which ones?”

“Stuff like the human body, cellular organisms, formation of embryos.”

His gaze swept across Sheng Wang’s resting arm back and forth. When he spoke to Carp again, he reached out and squeezed Sheng Wang’s fingertip. As he answered, he fiddled with it.

Sheng Wang stared at his finger — which was being toyed with — and suddenly felt a little novel. His Ge would rarely fidget around before other people, and moves like this that were filled with intimacy and clinginess were even rarer. Just like the feverish person from those years

ago — probably a product of idle nerves and a relaxed mind, not meaning particularly much. A sudden rear of its head, and Sheng Wang would enjoy it very much.

Sometimes, he felt like Jiang Tian was a pandora's box; he was scared of whatever's in him would spook him, so he would only open up a tiny crack every time, letting those dense and turbulent things slowly seep out. He would seem more gentle that way.

But the more he acted like that, the more Sheng Wang loved to tease him to the point of flipping up the lid. Just like daily life, when the colder he appeared, the more magnetic he was. Sheng Wang did witness the hidden parts of him before.

If it wasn't for the concern that too much alcohol is bad for the body, Sheng Wang seriously wanted to trick him into a few more glasses. He wanted to see the extent he would brazenly relax away. Would he simply flip the lid wide open?

……

The group of people managed to chat until it was nearly 11 before they parted on their own ways. Sheng Wang took a bit of a detour, and only drove towards the direction of the school after he sent Song Sirui and the rest back to the hotel. They passed by a supermarket on the way. Sheng Wang glanced over there and asked, “Did that jar of honey of yours already run out?”

A reply was not heard after asking that question. He turned around to check, and discovered that Jiang Tian had fallen asleep at one point. The streetlight landed on the side of his face, drawing out an outline from his forehead to his upper lip. Piercing, but quiet.

Sheng Wang stalled the car by the parking line at the side of the road, left a gap in the car window, and quietly exited the car, entering the supermarket. He kept thinking about how Jiang Tian was still asleep in the car, so he headed straight to the checkout counter after taking a bottle of honey.

There would always be those couple of racks by the counter that would stock some age-restricted things as though they are putting it on exhibition. Sheng Wang did know about it, it was just that he never found himself caring before. Perhaps he was affected by the footage he watched a few days ago, but his eyes couldn’t help but to drift over to it multiple times.

The hand of a human is naturally born to betray themself. His head was clearly thinking that “Horror Educational Films” cause nothing but suffering, but by the time he came back to himself, there were already two more items on the checkout counter.

He hesitated for a moment, and just as he was about to put back those items, he heard the supermarket doors chime with a “welcome”. Jiang Tian, who was previously sleeping in the car, had woken up for some reason. His eyes swept across the supermarket through the automatic opening doors, and landed at the checkout area.

Sheng Wang instantly turned to say to the cashier, “I’m checking out, thank you.”

He asked for a plastic bag, messily swept everything inside, and especially left it in the backseat after he got onthe car.

“Why did you wake up?” Sheng Wang thought Jiang Tian had gotten over the headiness of the alcohol, but unexpectedly, he merely buckled his seatbelt with his head lowered, let out a grunt, and turned to look at the white plastic bag in the backseat.

A wave of apprehension hit Sheng Wang.

“What did you buy?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Honey.” Sheng Wang answered, as resolute as iron.

*

The first thing he did after entering the house was to settle Jiang Tian on the living room sofa, and then hurriedly enter the kitchen with the plastic bag in his hand. He untied the knot, watching the two additional thingies

inside of it, and thought to himself, *the trauma from the blackhole isn't even gone yet, why did I buy this again? For scientific research?*

He pulled out a random rarely used drawer, stuffed the things inside, and then obediently started boiling water.

The electric kettle was quietly working away. Sheng Wang tore the cellophane seal off the bottle of honey and dumped it into the trash bin. Just as he turned around to go retrieve a glass from the glass cabinet, he saw Jiang Tian leaning against the kitchen door, quietly looking in his direction. Who knew when exactly he came over.

He couldn't remain quite still after drinking, and was always looking for someone. But after he found him, he didn't make himself known, merely standing at a distance that was neither too near nor too far. The light in the kitchen tilted onto the top of his head, but it could not light his eyes up. His gaze seemed both dark and heavy.

"Ge?" Sheng Wang called out to him with the mug in his hand.

“Mn,” Jiang Tian’s eyelid briefly lifted. The shadows casted by his eyelashes became an elongated line. He stared at Sheng Wang for a few seconds, walked over, and wrapped his arms around him from behind.

For an instant, Sheng Wang could feel the muscles on his shoulder blades tense up. Quite a while later, he then gradually relaxed, his gaze downcasted as his chin pressed down on the crook of Sheng Wang’s shoulders.

“Wang-zai,” Jiang Tian called out softly.

“Hm?” Sheng Wang replied.

Yet he didn’t speak — like he simply wanted to just say that.

Before, Sheng Wang always said he wanted to see the way Jiang Tian acted when he is drunk, even slightly tipsy will do. Now that he truly saw it, all he felt was the edge of his heart being pinched by someone, crumbling away into a sour ache.

The cat in the living room had woken up at some point in time, and trotted in, going around the two’s legs, rubbing against the material of the

long pants with its head. It stretched, and ran away; like it simply came over to say hello after hearing its name called out.

Sheng Wang stilled for a second, and suddenly understood why Jiang Tian couldn't be still on his own, and would wake up after falling asleep too. He knew why he was always looking for him, and he also knew why Jiang Tian had given the cat such a name.

Perhaps, when he's living all by himself in a foriegn land, he hoped that the moment he called out this name, he could at least get a response in the house.

Sheng Wang allowed him to hug him for a while, and caressed the side of his cheek. "I'm making honey water for you, it's to negate the effects of the alcohol."

"I saw," Jiang Tian replied in a low voice.

He continued to press down on the curve in Sheng Wang's shoulder; the pitch of his voice was nearly gravel, bringing with it waning intoxication.

Sheng Wang's ears were already sensitive to touch, and hearing him speak so close to the base of his ear was basically a covert form of excitement. The waves and waves of softness in his heart were instantly replaced by something numb and prickling.

He tilted his head ever so slightly, and heard Jiang Tian speak once more, "What did you buy in the supermarket?"

".....Nothing much."

"Really?"

Sheng Wang's tongue darted out to wet the drying edge of his lip lightly. He resisted for a while — failed — and said, "Don't talk right next to my ear."

Jiang Tian didn't move, who knew if it was on purpose or something else. "Why?"

Sheng Wang closed his eyes, and thought to himself, *are you for real, what else could it be*. But the moment he opened his mouth, he felt Jiang

Tian lower his head, slightling brushing it against the side of his neck for a while, and then biting down.

Sheng Wang already had a weak resolve; with his Ge doing this to him, any noise soon ceased to come out of him. He didn't know if he should move his hand down to grab his, or to grip the edge of the glass counter.

His head tilted up. A while later, he turned around to kiss Jiang Tian back, grasping the other person instantly, his fingers disappearing within his hair. He briefly heard Jiang Tian pull the drawer open, and take out the items he hid away inbetween the intervals of their kissing. His voice was hoarse as he said, "Found it."

Sheng Wang's brain was instantly set on fire with a boom.

"Do you really want to try it?" Jiang Tian asked.

Of course, he did know what Sheng Wang meant by the other method. After all, he did chance upon it before, and it became a personal trauma to

him for a long period of time. That made up his complete understanding of the state of disgrace in his childhood and his youth, because even Ji Huanyu himself had treated those instances as shameful things that cannot be mentioned any more than strictly necessary.

He once thought he would be quite repulsed by this sort of thing — until he fell for someone, until he started to be unable to help himself, until he had urges and desires. He loved to see the way Sheng Wang was when he’s lost to those feelings; his skin very white, the edges of his eyes very red. In heated moments, his brows liked to crinkle slightly, a thin layer of mist would curtain his pupils; a sun sunken in the ocean waters, the light and waves interweaving to form a dense fog.

But for certain things, wanting to do them from actually doing them was rather different. So every time, he would stop at a degree that could be accepted in a normal state. He was worried that if he truly went all the way, Sheng Wang would think that it was a disgraceful state every time he thought back about it.

However, he was weak against someone’s repeated teasing, intentional or not. Therefore, he asked Sheng Wang in all seriousness once: Do you really want to try it?

Sheng Wang did for a split second want to beat the drums for retreat, wanting to say “I was buying it for fun”. But he couldn’t find himself caring about anything at all after kisses and kisses coming from Jiang Tian. Maybe, in his bones, he was still the person he was at seventeen, who would throw all caution to the wind and give in to impulse after kissing with his boyfriend for a bit.

……

How they came out of the kitchen, how they fumbled their way into showering, and how they even ended up on the bed, Sheng Wang could no longer clearly recall.

// He sprawled across the pillow, and a wave of red gradually crept up on his back. His forehead rested against the back of his hand. In a certain moment of flustered daze, he turned around to take a look — he saw Jiang Tian’s lidded eyes, his dark pupils and his thin white wrist.

He was being explored.

The awareness of this fact caused the frames of his eyes to flame red. He rapidly blinked and turned back around. Next, he heard Jiang Tian say, “Wang-zai, you’re a little too warm.”

He buried himself even deeper within the pillow, the flush seeping up to the roots of his ears.

Shortly after this, his waist twitched, and a single leg curled up, his knee cap tightened. He reached out to hit the person behind him, and managed to grab the person’s wrist that he’s using to support himself up at the side in the midst of delirium.

Due to the lubricant of sweat, his fingers ended up slipping into the gaps between the fingers of the other person’s hand.

“Ge,” his voice was extremely hoarse as he breathed out, “you can start now……”

Soon, his eyes narrowed in the midst of the entering action, letting out a few quick pants escape his lips. A layer of water covered his eyes and lashes. //

Translator’s notes:

“Perhaps, when he’s living all by himself in a foriegn land, he hoped that the moment he called out this name, he could at least get a response in the house.”

^^^^ lines that gave me depression 101

Also read the second title/whatever you call after the main title in uwu speak

“I’m so tiwed” ← “I’m so tired”

It’s something like that in CN too trust me

Chapter 106 - Branches

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Guide to purchasing moumou on jjwxc.

Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

I’m Gonna Starve to Death Soon, Dr. Jiang. Won’t You Spare Me Some Food?

Zhang Chao arrived at work on the normal dot, and saw that that a certain workaholic seriously wasn’t there. More asking led to the discovery that he had taken leave, and so he was instantly a little worried. He hurriedly sent a message on WeChat to check up on him. However, he waited for nearly an hour before he got a single sentence in reply.

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: accidentally fell asleep again just now, just saw this

Zhang Chao was a little confused. Not only did the workaholic rarely request leave from work, the frequency of him sleeping through this time was miniscule too. That particular word “again” stood out, causing him to worry more.

Zhang Chao: Are you alright?

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: I’m fine, just a little unwell

Zhang Chao: Oh, I saw that your particular leave is for personal matters. Why didn’t you ask for sick leave if you’re unwell?

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: too lazy to go to the hospital

Zhang Chao: Are you kidding me? Why aren’t you going there?

Zhang Chao: Don’t you dare treat this lightly

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: ?

Actually, Zhang Chao did have his reasons for asking this. After all, Sheng Wang used to not take sick leave even though he was running a high fever — he did eat his medicine with much self awareness though, and even put up a whole act of being picky with the components of the medicine and its side effects. Zhang Chao would be filled with annoyance every time he saw that, and would attempt to persuade earnestly “going back for a nap and skipping out a couple of those bottled ice water and that would be better than any medicine”. Sadly, the other person would not listen.

In lieu of all that, he had obediently asked for leave without him nagging away at all — how sick must he be?

Zhang Chao made up all sorts of scenarios in his head, and got increasingly worried — until the other person took a picture of the thermometer.

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: see this yet? Perfectly normal temperature, I'm really okay

Zhang Chao: Then which part of you is unwell?

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: …….

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: I sprained my ankle

Zhang Chao was about to send something else when the other person flung over three memes of bowing in a row, and then asking him: aren't you busy today?

He wanted to say "Funnily I really am not that busy", but the moment he said that, karma instantly came for him. He was summoned away by two emails and a phone call, and no longer had the energy for gossiping.

Sheng Wang stared at the screen for a while, made sure that there was nothing else from Zhang Chao's end, then tossed the phone aside, getting up. He went to take the third shower he would be taking counting from yesterday night to today.

He wore loose black jogging pants, and just as he went to look for a clean T-shirt in the closet while drying his hair, he heard the door to the house open. Jiang Tian was already back.

Sheng Wang shot a glance outside of the room, and set the towel at the side as he passed by, picking a grey T-shirt. After he got the sleeves on and was now tugging the shirt down through his head, Jiang Tian had already walked in, and rested a hand on his waist.

Sheng Wang only got half the shirt on, and the muscles of his waist, exposed to thin air, tightened up subconsciously under his touch. He hurriedly pulled the shirt down, and grasped Jiang Tian's fingers, saying, "No more no more, I don't want to ask for leave two days in a row."

Jiang Tian: “.....I only wanted to ask if you’re feeling unwell.”

Sheng Wang silently turned back to look at him. “It wouldn’t be this spot that is unwell.”

Jiang Tian’s gaze darted down. Just as he was about to switch to a different place, Sheng Wang immediately held him down, “Fine, it’s alright, I don’t feel unwell at all. Stop moving already.”

Just as Jiang Tian was about to open his mouth again, Sheng Wang continued, “Ge.”

The moment a certain someone called out to him like that, Jiang Tian was already defeated. He really didn’t intend to do anything at all, and was so wronged that his face was entirely wooden. Yet, Sheng Wang continued line after line, not giving him any chance to speak at all; it might even be intentional, even. In the end, he could only end this with sealing up his lips.

As Sheng Wang kissed, he could feel the resentment, and melted into laughter.

Jiang Tian backed away a little, and asked, “You really feel unwell?”

Actually, it wasn't so bad to the point of unwell — he's just a little embarrassed. Last night, when Sheng Wang was covered in sweat, the corners of his eyes were red, the sounds that came out of him were all muffled into the pillow, he then realised: his Ge was truly someone who had taken specialised classes in clinical studies of the human body……

Despite the slight discomfort at the start, said feeling was replaced by those emotional and biological reactions later on. Otherwise, he wouldn't have weakened at the touch in the shower afterwards and ended up going yet another round.

"I'm alright," the young master forcibly clung onto his pride, "It's mostly because of my weak resolve that I asked you to stop moving about randomly."

"What do you mean?" Jiang Tian raised an eyebrow, and lowered his head, asking, "Explain a bit, I didn't get it."

Sheng Wang said internally, *I would be buying into your bullshit if I repeat myself.*

He turned Jiang Tian around, hooked an arm around his shoulders and nudged him into the kitchen, saying, “I’m gonna starve to death soon, Dr. Jiang. Won’t you spare me some food? I’ll help you.”

Dr. Jiang — who was not well-versed in the culinary arts actually — had forgotten his own cooking level with the arm hooked around his neck, and asked, “What do you want to eat?”

“I even get to order?” Sheng Wang thought, and said, “Then I wanna eat sweet and sour ribs, stone pot frog, black pepper beef slices, fish head with chopped chili, and braised tofu with crab meat.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Sheng Wang stood with a sloppy posture, a hand stuck inside the pocket of his long pants, the other hand hooked onto him. He shook him as he said, “Wake up, I’m done ordering.”

Jiang Tian’s expression was indescribable. “I’m awake.”

“Then why are you so silent?” Sheng Wang suppressed his laughter.

Jiang Tian side-eyed him, saying, “Will you dare to eat it if I dare to cook it?”

Sheng Wang asked, “Does it cover sending me to the hospital?”

Jiang Tian: “I can roughly pass for having studied medicine.”

Sheng Wang: “Goodbye.”

Jiang Tian only needed to head to the laboratory in the afternoon. He took a look at the time, asking Sheng Wang, “You really want to eat those? How about we go out and eat?”

The young master’s face was completely wooden. “If you can find a restaurant where I can eat standing up, I’ll go out with you.”

“.....”

Dr. Jiang silently reflected for a few seconds. Sheng Wang had already walked to the side, and dug through the fridge.

“I was just saying, that’s all. There would be something wrong if I don’t get too heaty if I seriously eat those foods.” Sheng Wang did not want to ask for consecutive leaves. He picked here and there while holding the

fridge door, and then grabbed a packet. “I want to eat pasta, is this cooked here?”

Jiang Tian actually did know how to cook this.

Not only did he know how to, he even made it better than ordinary restaurants — he knew which ingredients Sheng Wang liked and disliked. The final product he adjusted it into was entirely catered to Sheng Wang.

In order to take care of the young master’s “I Am Unwell”, Jiang Tian did not bother with plating the food. The two stood by the pot with a fork each in their hands and shared the food, chatting as they ate.

However, just as they only took a couple of bites, the cat son had trotted over with its nose wrinkling. It had found a corner to tuck itself away early in the morning, and Sheng Wang had wanted to grab the cat out for some fun while he was bored waiting for the food. He somehow did not manage to find it, and now it ended up coming uninvited.

Just as Sheng Wang called out “son”, the son had reached its claws out, hugging the leg of his pants. This pair of pants was loose, and he did not tighten up with the strings after he showered, and so the cat nearly tugged his pants down.

He hurriedly tugged it, and asked Jiang Tian, “Why is it pulling at my pants?”

“It wants to eat pasta,” Jiang Tian said.

Question marks appeared all over Sheng Wang’s head. “Aren’t cats carnivores? Did it mutate under your care?”

Jiang Tian bent over, grabbing the back of the cat’s neck and setting it aside as he said, “It likes the smell of milk and cheese. Who knows where it learnt it from.”

As Sheng Wang watched him trick the cat son back to the living room, open up a can and then come back, he wanted to laugh for some reason. He then had a moment of gladness; he was glad that he didn’t pick another gift those years ago, that he found him such a cat.

Zhang Chao's WeChat message popped up as Sheng Wang was halfway through the meal. He replied with a couple of lines involving work, and then took a picture of the spaghetti, sending it over while he's at it. He knew the other person had in a fit of motivation found a private coach for him to work out. His meals consisted of the healthy diet the coach customised for him, the kind where he had to take pictures of and show the coach every day.

As expected, the other person replied with a long chain of censored words, saying that he had not eaten food with toppings for a long time, and got Sheng Wang to scram. So he did.

However, barely a few minutes passed before Zhang Chao asked humbly: Does it taste good?

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: it tastes delicious

Zhang Chao: You're saying it's delicious with that picky tongue of yours? Which restaurant is it?

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: my house

Zhang Chao: You can cook? Who are you trying to fool? There's nothing but mineral water and the few tins of beer we brought back last time in the fridge, the hell kind of food you can cook.

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: who told you that I'm the one who cooked it

Zhang Chao: ?

Zhang Chao: ……

Zhang Chao: To hell with you! I'm leaving, TTYL.

This person insisted on asking, and then got pissed off enough to leave after he asked. Sheng Wang let out a cold laugh.

"Who're you laughing at?" Jiang Tian asked.

"Zhang Chao," Sheng Wang said, "that colleague of mine."

Speaking of which, he then recalled something, and pulled down the previous chat record, showing them to Jiang Tian. "This morning he kept asking me which part of me is unwell, and forced me to say that I sprained my ankle."

After complaining, he turned off the screen on his phone and tossed it back inside his pants pocket. He twirled another forkful of pasta, and just as he delivered it into his mouth, he heard his Ge suddenly speak, “You can actually rest for a week if you sprained your ankles.”

Sheng Wang’s hand, which was holding the fork, stilled. He looked up at Jiang Tian.

He suspected that his Ge was being a pervert, but he had no proof.

*

The days of two people and a cat were too carefree, causing one to accidentally lose track of time. Jiang Tian only realised that it was near the end of the year when he dug out his phone one day and checked it after leaving the laboratory.

Chinese New Year this year was rather early — January 25th. Jiang Ou and Old Man Ding were supposed to return at that time initially, and make it just in time for the Spring Festival. Unexpectedly, an incident abruptly cut in, and disrupted the original plan.

On the 17th, Jiang Tian suddenly received a phone call. The person who spoke was female. The moment the other person spoke, she asked, “Are you Mr. Ji’s family member?”

He had honestly heard “Mr. Ji”, this particular form of address, so rarely to the point that he nearly didn’t react properly for a split second. The other person continued in the few seconds he paused, saying, “The current state of his health isn’t so good right now, and he can’t really walk or talk properly. So he got me to help him make this phone call.”

Jiang Tian frowned, and swallowed back down the “I don’t know him”.

Zhao Xi had informed him, as early as the start of last year, that something was wrong with Ji Huanyu’s body and that he was already hospitalised.

Back then, Du Cheng didn’t hold on with the brain cancer for too long, and his breathing stopped in a day in the winter break. Apparently, on

the final day itself, the hospital had tried to persuade Ji Huanyu to bring him home; most patients want to return back to their roots when they are on the deathbed. However, Du Cheng's old home had been long gone — he had lived in both Beijing and Shanghai for a while, and then stayed for many years overseas. He had travelled to many places, but not a single one was the one where he could lie down and leave. In the end, it was the hospital bed where he reached his final breath.

However, at that time, Jiang Tian's and Sheng Wang's side was already caught up in a mess. No matter if it's Sheng Mingyang or Jiang Ou, nobody had the spare time to keep an ear out for Du Cheng. By the time they finally knew, the passage of time had altered everything.

There was no longer any movement on Ji Huanyu's end after Du Cheng's death. Reportedly, he had been extremely disheartened for a long period of time, nobody knew if it was because he had completely ruined the life of the ex-wife he had once liked, or if it was because his lover had passed. If it's the former, he had always been selfish, and did not have the

conscience to feel that. If it’s the latter, his heart was never that entirely into it.

Let alone other people, not even he himself knew clearly why.

In any case, in that period of time, he did all sorts of things, like a puddle of mud. The consequence was the bunch of diseases he contracted, and then he fainted one day. By the time he woke up, he could no longer walk. Neither could he speak all that clearly.

He wasn’t short of money at all, and could support long-term medical fees. There was even a nurse who would help him left and right. Yet, what he wanted most the entire life was his face; he couldn’t stand spending his days like this at all. So as other people were able to recover a little after going for physiotherapy and medical treatment, he was unable to at all. Vitality and energy was disappearing from his body at a rate visible to the naked eye — a mere year and a little more, he was already in a terrible state.

The nurse said, “He said he wanted to see you once again, he felt that he owes you quite a lot. He still has some properties and money, and there isn’t anyone else he could leave them to.”

It was snowing in Beijing again. Jiang Tian listened to these words as he stood downstairs, and was quiet for a while with furrowed brows. “I don’t need it, tell him to find someone else to give them to.”

Despite that being what he said, the Saturday three days later, he still made a trip to the hospital — he heard that Jiang Ou had returned in advance.

Chapter 107 - Weeds

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Link to the raw text/where you can buy: here

“Don’t Overthink It, Nobody Wants Those Properties and Money of Yours.”

It is unfortunate that fate really does exist between people; no matter if it’s a blessed one, or one that is bound for doom.

When Jiang Tian and the rest were all in Jiangsu, Ji Huanyu was also in Jiangsu — Du Cheng wanted to return to his old home, he wanted to be the falling leaf that returned to its roots.

Now Jiang Tian and the rest were in Beijing, and Ji Huanyu happened to be in Beijing too, because he didn’t have Du Cheng’s way of thinking — he was an orphan, and the thing called home wasn’t anything of any particular importance to him. He would rather have a better hospital with better conditions, so he would appear more dignified.

Jiang Ou did not inform anyone before coming to the hospital.

She would always remember that horrible night from a long time ago. That day, every single person in a hospital had the tracks of their life shifted

onto a different fork, and the journey down took five-six years. The web of relations between these people was a convoluted mess of tree roots; but upon closer inspection, in the true heart of the matter, the source of everything was but rotten business between her, Ji Huanyu and Du Cheng.

In her most broken moment, she was once disoriented by those intersecting relations, and could not stop splitting hairs no matter what she did. Later, she spent two years on medication and healing, and slowly sorted things out with guidance. She finally realised the biggest hurdle she had to cross over was herself.

People are simply like this sometimes: the ones most involved in the situation know the least. When she’s in a good state, she would question herself: such a simple principle, how was she unable to sort these things apart clearly before? When she’s not doing so well, she would then feel that there was no end to these troubles.

Only when she heard that Ji Huanyu was hospitalised, then she truly changed; like she had been drifting amidst the cloudy fog for quite a while,

and had suddenly plummeted to the ground.

The doctor advised her to try to go to the source of the problems herself. Therefore, when she received the carer's call, she decided to come see Ji Huanyu. This time round, there was nobody else around, nobody was getting implicated, she would cross this hurdle herself.

It was just that before she headed upstairs, a brief interlude occurred at the entrance to the hospital. She happened to be alighting the car, tightened up her coat, and was about to head inside when she suddenly caught a glance of a person in a navy blue coat talking on the phone in the near distance. He was facing this direction with his side, and a hand was still on the car door.

Jiang Ou was nearsighted, but her degree wasn't particularly high, so she didn't wear her glasses on a daily basis. From this distance, she was only certain that the other person was a tall, thin, pale and immaculate young person with an outstanding air about him. She couldn't see his features properly. But the moment he turned around, Jiang Ou felt that the

way he was holding the phone and talking was calm and aloof; he was a little alike to Jiang Tian, and she even nearly mixed them up.

Fortunately, she reacted in time: Jiang Tian did not have a coat of this colour, and would rarely wear a black scarf this thick. Therefore a laugh escaped from her as she shook her head and went straight inside the hospital.

It’s been such a long while since Jiang Ou saw Ji Huanyu — the last time she saw him, it was even in Du Cheng’s ward.

That day, the person rushed here in the middle of the night, bringing with him the wintry coldness and signs of having just been beaten up by Jiang Tian, so he was the opposite of the way he was usually impeccably dressed; he was a little unkempt. In her mind, that was Ji Huanyu at his most undignified.

Right at the very start, when she heard that Ji Huanyu had fallen ill right, she continued imagining based on the way he was that night — a little

thinner, a little paler, a little sloppier. Due to her utter detest for him, she even uglified him to a certain extent.

But by the time she truly saw Ji Huanyu in the hospital ward, she still stopped in her tracks.

If it wasn't for people informing her in advance, there was absolutely no way she could tell that this was the person whom she had been entangled with for more than a decade.

The "liar" that once had a good appearance wore an entirely non-form fitting scrubs for patients. A nurse supported one arm, and his other hand was holding a steel rod propped up against the ground — it was indeed a walking stick, but just that this word seemed to not fit at all when used in conjunction Ji Huanyu.

He was hunched over as he slogged to the bathroom, a tiny step after another. However, he caught sight of someone at the entrance out of the corner of his eyes, and so he slowly turned his head to look……

And so Jiang Ou saw a pasty white, bloated face.

It is said that the mannerism one walks with would affect their bones and the energy they gave off. After a long time, even their appearance would change. Once upon a time, when Jiang Ou and Ji Huanyu were still on good terms, she would often hear praises from people, saying that her husband was a beautiful elegant man. And now, there was no trace of the past self to be found on this bloated and sluggish man.

Jiang Ou saved up a chest full of things to say, but the moment she saw him, all of them instantly vanished without a trace.

For those very few seconds, she even found herself at loss. She was thinking: who is this pasty and bloated middle-aged man? Why did he subconsciously use his hand to shelter his face the moment he saw her, and then tug at the nurse toduck inside the bathroom in a hurry, causing him to appear even more ridiculous?

Several moments later, she then came back to herself, letting out a soft “oh” in her head. *This is Ji Huanyu.*

This really is…...Ji Huanyu.

She melted down over a person like this, forcibly grabbing onto the only person she could hold on to — Jiang Tian — and then wasting an entire five-six years away in this mundane world.

How ridiculous.

Ji Huanyu stayed inside the bathroom for a long time. Who knew if he was genuinely facing some inconveniences, or he wasn't mentally prepared to see other people. By the time the nurse helped him outside again, Jiang Ou had already helped him partially close the door to the ward.

Ji Huanyu trundled back to the bedside, a little by little. He used to have such lively eyes; when needed, they could be gentle, they could be passionate. But now, all they do is to stick to the ground, making him appear both weak and apathetic.

The nurse helped him onto the bed, and then adjusted the inclination of the bedrest. She pulled a chair to the bedside, and said to Jiang Ou, "Please take a seat, ma'am."

“No need,” Jiang Ou said, “I’m just here for a short visit, standing is fine.”

The nurse initially wanted to stay by the side, but Ji Huanyu waved his hand, and slurred, “Go outside.”

“Then……” the nurse hesitated, then left, happy to have some free time. There were only two people left inside the ward.

Jiang Ou said, “Did you invite me here to see how terribly you’re doing, Ji Huanyu?”

The other person still refused to look at her, sitting at the head of the bed with his head hung low. Despite the difficulty he faced upon walking just now, he did appear alive to a certain degree. Now that he’s back on the bed, the lifeless numbness enveloped him once more. Much later, he then blinked his eyes, saying ambiguously, “Xiao-Ou, hey, I’m sorry.”

More than a decade ago, when Jiang Ou heard him say that, she always felt a little wronged. Five-six years ago, when she heard him say

that in the hospital, she was so enraged she turned hysterical.

Now that she heard him say that once more, she ought to jeer at it, and feel like it would be beneath her to care. But at this moment, she felt more serene than anything else.

A foreign Ji Huanyu dragged her out from the shadows of the past, turning her into a mere bystander. She stood by the side of the bed, bag in hand, watching a patient she was in no way familiar with at all saying things that completely did not affect her.

In that instant, she suddenly understood why the doctor advised her to come see this person.

Only when she truly meets him will she truly understand: time changes people, changes things. The person she once liked, was once exhausted by, was once hated, had long since ceased to exist. It had been a silhouette in her memories that had been torturing her all these years.

“Are you still that disgusted by me?” Ji Huanyu said.

Jiang Ou looked at this unfamiliar middle-aged man, and suddenly felt a little like laughing — which she did in her heart anyway, and then her feelings turned complicated.

She brushed back a strand of hair that had fallen to the side of her ear, and took a deep breath, saying, “Whatever.”

It would honestly be a little too ridiculous to use the word “hate” on a person in this state.

Ji Huanyu’s eyes shifted up, his movements still slow; regardless, he caught the emotions in her gaze.

He schemed competitively for decades, all for some dignity. No matter if it was liking or hatred, as long as he wasn’t being looked down on, he could accept all of them with ease. At one point, he felt that literally anyone in the world could show him the face of contempt because of certain things, anyone in the world but Jiang Ou — because she would simply refuse to see him for the rest of forever, or hate him.

He had never expected that in the end, he saw what he wanted to see the least in the eyes of the person he least expected to.

Maybe…...this was the greatest form of retribution he had coming to him.

He would rather Jiang Ou go hysterical the way she was a few years ago, her eyes red in the same way — yelling at him — hitting him — venting her suppressed anger and woes. However, all Jiang Ou did was to dig her phone out and check the time, then saying to him, “I don’t know what I want to say either. I don’t feel like saying what I initially had in mind, so that’s all, I suppose. Just take it that I came here for a quick visit after the phone call, and will be leaving soon. You……”

Jiang Ou was at a loss for words for a moment. “Try to recuperate, and do some physiotherapy.”

Ji Huanyu revealed a self-mocking grin with much difficulty; when that kind of expression appeared on the current face he had as of today, it

looked more like a spasm of his muscles. He opened his mouth, wanting to say something.

Jiang Ou cut him off there and then. “Don’t overthink it, nobody wants those properties and money of yours.”

This line was funnily no different from what Jiang Tian said. Ji Huanyu gradually lowered his head, and stared at an empty spot in thin air. He no longer moved. He spent his whole life disregarding any honour, all for his personal gains. Consequently, in the end, when he finally had a rare show of conscience and wanted to give out what he had in hand, nobody wanted it anymore.

Jiang Ou took one last look at him, pushed the door to the ward open, and left the ward.

This ward was at the end of the corridor, next to it was a wide glass window. The sunlight of deep winter shone in, but it carried no warmth at all. The deathly white was a little piercing to the eyes.

She walked a few steps further away, and sat down on a long empty bench. She appeared all tranquil when she said what she said in the hospital ward, but the moment she sat down, she still couldn’t help but zone out. The same way students who toiled away for their studies for more than a decade would always end up sinking into a space of emptiness after gaokao is over.

She couldn’t quite name the feeling, and neither could she really describe it as a sense of loss, or finally having a weight lifted off her shoulders. Only when someone sat down next to her and presented a cup of water before her, then she was startled.

“Xiao-Tian?” Jiang Ou received the water, and looked at the person beside her in a daze.

For a moment, she suddenly felt a bizarre sense of unfamiliarity. Perhaps it had been too long since she sat with Jiang Tian together in peace. It was as though she had a boring, dreary dream that just dragged on and on, and was suddenly startled awake. That tall and thin son who would always purse his lips tightly and look aside had already become an adult.

“Why are you here?” Jiang Ou asked in a daze, “When did you arrive?”

“Quite a while already,” Jiang Tian said.

The moment he received the news that Jiang Ou came to Beijing, he immediately went to the hospital. He practically arrived a second apart. What was different however was that he was delayed a few minutes downstairs — he saw Sheng Wang.

Jiang Tian did not intend for Sheng Wang to come here, so when he called him, he only said he had something on, and would be back later. However, the other person hit the nail right on the head with a guess. Still, he did not want to let Sheng Wang come face this rotten mess left by the past, so with some kissing and coaxing, he got the other person to wait for him in the car.

When he rushed to the ward, Jiang Ou just happened to finish leaving the door partially closed. He did not want to actually see Ji Huanyu, so he leaned against the door outside, and overheard the two’s conversation in its entirety.

Translator’s notes:

This chapter used to be titled “whatever”.

Chapter 108 - Trimming

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“I’m Not Seeking Your Opinion, I’m Just Letting You Know.”

Jiang Ou held the paper cup he gave her in her hands and took a sip; the temperature was just right. She swallowed the water, and suddenly realised that her son had always been like this throughout so many years: he didn’t talk much, but always took care of people very well. It was precisely because he took care of people too well, and was too mature, to the point that sometimes even she forgot that he was barely any older.

“Did you take your medicine?” asked Jiang Tian in a low voice. He sat with her for a while.

Jiang Ou nodded. “I especially took one pill before coming here.”

Interactions between this mother and son seemed to always be like this. Jiang Tian was no good at casual chitchat, he was no good at helping someone cope with their issues, and was even worse at finding topics that

could cheer people up. Every time, he would quietly stay within where she could reach him, like a steady but quiet shadow.

Jiang Ou stared at the shadow he casted beneath his feet for quite a while, and suddenly heard him ask, “Did you have fun?”

She paused, and was a little surprised. She thought Jiang Tian would cut straight to the point, ask about what she and Ji Huanyu said. She did not expect that after so many years, Jiang Tian had actually learnt to be tactful.

“It was pretty good. Not too tiring, it’s very relaxing,” Jiang Ou gave a very small laugh. When her brows relaxed, she was still genial and mild, just that the many years of emotional suffering had made her look more weary than she was at the start. “The old man liked it quite a lot too. He found two chess buddies, and even got to know an old lady that knows how to play the piano.”

Jiang Tian let out a “Mn”, and tilted his head in the direction of the ward, saying, “Then why did you bother responding to him?”

The mirth on Jiang Ou's face dropped, and much longer later, she let out a soft sigh. She knew it — tactfulness is only temporary, her son still had the cold and stubborn temper which didn't do things in a more roundabout manner.

"Just wanted to try," Jiang Ou said.

"Try what?"

"Try the doctor's advice, see if I can truly get better."

"Why did you suddenly want to try?"

Jiang Ou opened her mouth, wanting to say *because I know how tired the people around me are, and also how tired you are*. But with the reality of the five-six years of living in a foreign land right before their eyes, this line seemed especially useless — she couldn't bring herself to say it. Furthermore, she would still get stressed out for no reason due to a couple of lines, she wasn't that completely recovered yet.

She had nothing to say in response to his question, and was about to crack a joke, saying, *who even interrogates their mom that intently like this?* But she suddenly recalled what the doctor once mentioned, saying that in this mother-son relationship, her role was more like the junior; more often than not, she was relying on and *not* taking care of the other person. It had been exactly this before, just that she did not consciously realise it, only classifying this as Jiang Tian being more independent — even if she wanted to take care of him, she couldn't find anywhere to start.

Later on, she became paranoid and terrified due to Ji Huanyu and Du Cheng, feeling like nobody could be trusted and was worth pouring her feelings into. The only exception was Jiang Tian.

Therefore, not even she herself realised that she had treated her son as the straw she clutched at, her survival instincts pushed at her to hold onto him with a death grip. She feared that the moment she turned around, even this sole exception would disappear too.

Seeing the way she was in a trance and did not know how to reply for a long time, Jiang Tian pursed his lips and lowered his eyes. His wrists

rested on his kneecap, his ten digits loosely intertwined. A moment later, he asked another question. “How was your chat with him?”

“Who?” Jiang Ou’s mind went blank for a while before she realised that he’s talking about Ji Huanyu. Therefore, she zoned out a little, and answered, “It’s different from what I’d imagined it would be.”

Jiang Tian turned to look at her. Her brows were lightly knitted as she deliberated, “I thought I would feel very uncomfortable, break out into cold sweat and all, but I didn’t. He changed quite a lot, I nearly couldn’t recognise him. Maybe it’s because he isn’t doing so well either, I actually don’t have anything to be angry about instead.”

This time Jiang Tian did not speak. He was silent for a long while, so long that even Jiang Ou couldn’t sit quite still anymore, and snuck two glances at him.

“Xiao-Tian?” Jiang Ou called out to him.

“Mn.”

“Don’t you think mom is being quite ridiculous?”

A corner of Jiang Tian's lips quirked; it could not be counted as a laugh at all. He said, "No, I just couldn't figure something out, that's all."

"What couldn't you figure out?" Jiang Ou asked warmly.

Jiang Tian did not even look up. He said plainly, "You can say 'whatever' even to Ji Huanyu, so why couldn't you do it for me too?"

Jiang Ou's heart was abruptly jerked, like someone had used the sharpest fingernail to pinch the bit of flesh on the mouth of her heart.

Although he may be direct with his words, he had never asked her something like this before, out of the fear that she would get insomnia from anxiety, or have another emotional meltdown. He held down his own temper, and after so many roundabout poking about all these years, today was the first time he was unable to hold back.

"Am I more unacceptable than Ji Huanyu?"

His tone was actually calm, like he was genuinely perplexed by this. The more he was like this, the more Jiang Ou felt the jerk in her heart, the more it ached.

Once bitten, twice shy. After thinking herself into a corner all these years, all she was scared of was just that she didn't take care of him properly, terrified that Jiang Tian had walked onto the same wrong path that Ji Huanyu did…….All it came down to was that she did not want Jiang Tian to be any similar to Ji Huanyu at all.

However, she never would have thought, after going through so many twists and turns, Jiang Tian actually placed himself on the same scale as Ji Huanyu. And as for her, she was tongue tied, and actually had no idea how to refute at all.

She wanted to say *of course not, how could it be? You and Ji Huanyu are as different as heaven and earth.*

But after blindly looking around, she discovered to her horror: throughout these years, every single thing she did seemed to be the exact opposite of that stand. Every reaction of hers seemed to be screaming “you will accidentally become that scumbag at any moment”.

The most terrifying of all, was that if it wasn’t for Jiang Tian asking this directly, she would have never realised this at all.

But……

“I really didn’t mean it that way, Xiao-Tian.” Jiang Ou took a sip of water, and slowly held down her feelings while holding the cup. The process of facing Ji Huanyu just now gave her experience; she consciously recalled that instant just now, doing her best to reimagine herself as a bystander. The one sitting opposite her wasn’t her son, but an unfamiliar youth who was attempting to have a heart to heart talk with her.

She wasn’t that easily prone to anxiousness anymore, and was much older than a few years ago. She was just devastated……

All these years, in order to avoid any extreme changes in emotions, and also due to medication, she had not sorted out her thoughts for a long time. Or rather, it had been eons since she even carried out the action of ‘thinking’, to the point that at this moment, too many words came forth to the edges of her tongue, but she did not know how to speak them.

Much silence later, she finally found a start. “I did try before.”

Jiang Tian looked up.

This seemed like encouragement. She pinched the cup, continuing, “Mom really did try to understand before. For this one period of time, I was doing okay and didn’t need to take medication, I spent many days thinking about it. Why do parents all wish for their kids to properly get married and properly have children? My mom — your grandma — had told me why before. She said she thought of what if I get too old, and she wouldn’t be around, what would become of me when I’m all lonesome? Having someone by me is good enough, having someone reliable to take care of me is all she needed to stop worrying. Actually, I’m not that different too, I was just thinking……”

She paused, the rims of her eyes reddened a little. She lowered her head for another sip of water before continuing, “My son was all alone as a kid, there was always nobody around to take care of him. In reality, blaming this all on Ji Huanyu was useless too; I’m not one to speak, I’m not even as close to you as an old man with zero blood relations. But the old man is old already, his body isn’t as good as before. Including me, everyone will have to go at one point or another. If you’re not married by then, you will be all alone. Sure, it doesn’t matter if nothing goes wrong, but what if you fall sick? What if you run into trouble? What happens if you get older later?”

Jiang Tian moved, “Marriage doesn’t promise these things either.”

“I know.” Jiang Ou spoke slowly, her voice constantly nasal at this point. “See, mom did try to think this through before. Later on, I told myself, marriage doesn’t represent much actually, it’s possible you’ll get divorced eventually. I myself am a walking example. But I have you — who else do you have in the future? Back then, I just kept thinking and

thinking and thinking, and spiralled into that train of thought for several days — I couldn't leave."

Jiang Tian was deep in thought for a long while, and then turned to face Jiang Ou. "At the start, when you came to fetch me at Wu Tong Wai, were you thinking about having someone to take care of you when you're seventy-eighty years old?"

"Of course not," Jiang Ou said.

"Then why do you want me to think about that?" Jiang Tian said.

He wasn't interrogating her, his tone wasn't harsh either; the same old cold and plain, with a few degrees of resignation and defiance. But Jiang Ou was stumped by that anyway.

"The Old Man didn't get married and didn't have kids, now he still has someone taking care of him. Ji Huanyu only has a nurse next to him," Jiang Tian's thumb rubbed at his joints, and said, as though he was in a trance, "Who knows what will happen in the future? Is there any point in planning so many years ahead?"

“How would you know if you didn’t try?” Jiang Ou said.

“I did, when I was eighteen.” Jiang Tian said.

Jiang Ou was suddenly unable to speak anymore.

His eighteenth birthday was a disastrous turning point. From then onwards, Jiang Tian never celebrated his birthday. No matter who tried to prepare one for him, be it her, Old Man Ding, the professor, his classmates or his neighbours, they would always be rejected. He seemed to be scared of that day — loathing it, even.

Every time she thought about this, Jiang Ou’s heart would ache so much that she couldn’t breathe.

She hurriedly lowered her head, and took a few sips of water.

The corridor wasn’t actually that warm, the water cooled rather quickly. Jiang Tian reached out to take her paper cup, and turned to head to the water refill room.

These few years, Jiang Ou had watched the his silhouette many times. Maybe it was because this floor was overly spacious, but it made his silhouette even more quiet and lonely. The corridor was long, the water room was at the other end.

For that one instant, Jiang Ou had an illusion. Like that lonesome view of his back would walk on a narrow path for eons; no matter how he walked, he would not reach an end.

She gripped her fingers, and then suddenly got up, following after him.

Jiang Tian was mixing water into warm water in the water refill room, the steam rose above the rim of the cup, forming a cloud of mist over the stainless steel water cooler. Out of his peripherals, Jiang Ou followed over, and stood next to him.

A few seconds later, he heard the other person softly ask, “Does it have to be Xiao-Wang?”

Jiang Tian stilled, and his pointer finger nearly got scalded by the hot water.

His gaze lowered, and he rushed to turn off the tap. He held the slightly scalding water cup, and stood there for quite a while before he spoke, “Why couldn’t it be him?”

Why could she treat Ji Huanyu with composure, but was always so sensitive whenever she heard of Sheng Wang’s name?

There was barely any colour left on Jiang Ou’s face, making her look a little pale. “Because I really did treat Xiao-Wang as my own son.”

She knew Sheng Mingyang had the heart of a businessman; he would be good to Jiang Tian, but it would be too much for him to treat him like one of his own. But she wasn’t one — for a very long period of time, she really did treat Sheng Wang as a second son, one that she personally gave birth to. It wasn’t because of the depths of her feelings for Sheng Mingyang, but it was because she had treated Sheng Wang as the Jiang Tian in another space and time.

“I’ve told you before, right? I’ve heard many, many stories of Sheng Wang as a kid, and thought that he was very similar to the way you were as a kid. Only, he grew up like that under his care, you grew up like this under my care. I would often think: if I’m a better mother, if I’d accompanied you more, spoilt you a little, would you have become like Xiao-Wang? Would you laugh, throw little tantrums, and get mad? I’m not saying that his personality is better than yours, I’m just thinking…...if so, would you have not mature so early, would you have less concerns, and would you be able to smile a little more?” Jiang Ou said.

She really did treat Sheng Wang as her son — how was she supposed to accept the truth that her two sons were together?

Jiang Tian didn’t speak after hearing that from her, standing in only silence. He stared at the slightly swaying lines in the cup, zoning out. Much longer later, he suddenly spoke, “Have you seen him before this?”

Jiang Ou didn’t get what he was saying at first. “See who?”

“Sheng Wang.”

“.....I have not.”

“You should take a look at him,” Jiang Tian said.

“Why?’

“When I saw him a month ago, he already couldn’t smile, couldn’t throw little tantrums, and couldn’t get mad anymore.” The corner of his lips jerked, self-mockery laced his smile. “You spent five-six years, only to raise yet another Jiang Tian.”

Jiang Ou stopped breathing; her heart was might as well scratched wide open, leaving a gaping wound, blood seeping out drop by drop. She was in utter anguish; maybe it was because of Jiang Tian who said something like this, or because of Sheng Wang who had become “Jiang Tian”. Or maybe…...it was because of her, the one who wore everyone down into “Jiang Tian” after all these twists and turns for so many years.

She suddenly recalled the young person she saw outside the hospital, and opened her mouth in a daze, asking, “Did Xiao-Wang come here?”

“He did, I didn’t let him come up here,” Jiang Tian said.

She wanted to ask why on instinct, but fortunately managed to put a stop to that before those words escaped her mouth — she would just be increasing the awkwardness otherwise. She still wanted to ask “are you two together again”, but didn’t manage to bring herself to ask that. Because she said “whatever” to even Ji Huanyu, she didn’t know what ground she had to ask this question at all.

It was as though the moment she asked, she would be putting the two and Ji Huanyu on the same line, and this ought to be what she wanted to see happening the least.

She did not find the ground to ask this on, but Jiang Tian volunteered to speak. “I probably can’t find anybody else.”

Jiang Ou stilled,

“I want to be with him for a long time, I don’t want to miss a single year,” Jiang Tian looked at her. “If you can’t accept this, I will still visit you

on my own, nothing will change. If you can, then we will visit you together."

He paused. "I'm not seeking your opinion, I'm just letting you know."

Chapter 109 - Phone Call

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“I Know You’re Not Coming Back Alone, Isn’t That Room Still in the House?”

Some things cannot be resolved in a simple matter of a few words, there has to be time left for the person to process it. Jiang Ou did not have any obvious emotional issues, which was already the greatest sign of success; the rest will have to be left to time. In the end, Jiang Tian did not let her come in contact with Sheng Wang either. He helped Jiang Ou book a car, and accompanied her downstairs.

The driver got up from the driver’s seat and helped to open the car’s door. Jiang Ou sat at the back, straightened her clothes, and gave in in the end — she turned around to look outside via the back window of the car.

She saw Jiang Tian striding in the other direction away from the door. When he reached the corner of the hospital parameter, someone came out from the car parked by the side of the road.

Jiang Ou could only see the familiar navy blue coat and the thick black scarf he wore around his neck from such a far distance.

That is really Sheng Wang? Jiang Ou looked at that young man vacantly.

She could still recall the indifferent and mature air of the person as he spoke on the phone — perhaps he was talking about work matters, so he gave people the impression that he was methodical and capable, the one who would stand out the most if he was placed in a crowd — that wasn't the Sheng Wang in her memories. It was to the point that in her fleeting glance, she genuinely mistook him for a stranger that resembled Jiang Tian.

"Is the temperature in the car just right?" The driver queried as he started the car.

Jiang Ou snapped out of her thoughts, and gave a hurried yet courteous smile. "It's pretty good."

As she turned back around, she could still vaguely see the young man leaning over the car window, smiling as he waved. The instant he faced

Jiang Tian, there was finally a shadow of his past self; like he was still the animated youth who would laugh, who would throw little tantrums.

Jiang Ou watched him dazedly for a while. She finally turned back around, and her eyes lowered in silence.

*

Sheng Wang briefly scanned around behind Jiang Tian, and did not spot any other familiar figure. Although that was entirely expected, he still felt a little disappointed for some unfathomable reason.

As a result, just as he was about to buckle his seatbelt after he sat back on the driver's seat, Jiang Tian closed in and kissed him for a while.

Sheng Wang was a little stumped. "The windshield is transparent."

Jiang Tian sat up straight, and buckled in his seatbelt too. "Do you mind that?"

"Of course I don't." Sheng Wang touched the corner of his lips, "I was worried that you thought the windshield was unidirectional."

".....Am I retarded?"

(t/n: Yes I am aware this is a slur, and I translated it as it is. While I'm not quite sure whether the author does know if it's a slur within the Chinese context, please refrain from passing too much

judgement over this.)

Sheng Wang started laughing.

That wasn't it, actually. He merely felt that this move was a little unusual, coming from Jiang Tian. He was worried that the conversation between mother and son did not go well. However, upon hearing the familiar tone of mockery from his Ge, he relaxed again.

Everything was much better than what he imagined.

"Is auntie going back by herself?" he asked.

"Mn, it was out of the way," Jiang Tian said.

Sheng Wang kind of wanted to laugh, thinking, *there's no way she'll take my car even if it's convenient*. His Ge had always been straightforward and forthcoming, having to come up with a crappy excuse of "out of the way" must have truly been hard on him.

Sheng Wang considered himself as handsome and considerate, of course he wouldn't expose him on the spot. As he searched on the GPS, he asked, "She's not living in the nursing home anymore, right?"

“Not for a long time now, she rented an apartment with the old man nearby.”

“What apartment?”

Jiang Tian eyed him from the side. “Am I that easily tricked?”

Sheng Wang muffled his laughter as he typed, his wrists resting over the steering wheel. A while later, he raised the phone screen at Jiang Tian. “You think I wouldn’t know where she stays if you don’t say it? I’ve asked Xi-ge before I came here.”

He tapped on the route on the screen, “See, it’s — su—per — convenient.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

A certain someone found joy in watching other people expose him while he’s a teenager; now he’d grown some guts, and started to do it himself. Jiang Tian faced-off with him for a while with a stiff look on his face, and suddenly reached out to pinch the back of his neck. “If you want to laugh, go laugh your heart out at the back. I’ll drive.”

“Don’t treat me the same way you carry the cat.” Sheng Wang was ticklish all over, and every spot was enough to come for his life; Jiang Tian’s touch was even more terrifying. “Let go! I don’t trust that capitalism-bred driving skills of yours.”

“Try it.”

“What do you mean ‘try’, there are two lives aboard this car, hello, Ge.” Sheng Wang brushed his hand off, and switched gears, turned on the lights, lifted his foot off the pedal all in one shot, genuinely afraid that he would be shooed to the backseat. “I’m still young, I have a career, a family……”

Jiang Tian listened to a certain person spout nonsense as he leaned against the seat. He missed this nonsensical talk very much, the way noise and clamour once filled up his every single day. In his most ideal imaginings, he would get to listen to this for the rest of his life.

“I may be pretty handsome, but you still shouldn’t harm me.” Some people can roughly pass as reasonable at the start, but later on, it would all become unadulterated bullshit.

Jiang Tian lifted an eyebrow amidst the lights of the cars in the traffic, drawling, “I didn’t hear about you having a family when you were biting my shoulder last night.”

Sheng Wang let out a cold laugh, and stopped at the junction. Perhaps it was because of the red light shining down on him, but a wave of crimson blanketed his neck and face; his complexion was rather undisturbed, however.

He blinked as he watched the cars ahead, saying, “Of course I do, managed to cheat him into dating me when we’re too young. My family member is a PhD who came back from overseas, he’s both tall and handsome. Envious yet?”

“Envious of who?”

“Me, who else?”

Jiang Tian shook his head. “I’m more envious of that family member.”

Sheng Wang narrowed his eyes, and only touched his earlobe after quite a while later.

Although he was recognizant of this fact early on, but he really wanted to say, his Ge was truly secretly shameless…….

*

The last few days before the Spring Festival, everyone was mechanically busy. Gao Tianyang and Chili had booked tickets a long time ago, and asked when will Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian go back to Jiangsu.

Sheng Wang answered, “Why do you have to bring this topic up out of all things.”

Gao Tianyang did a little thinking, and figured, yeah, to Sheng Wang, there was only his ancestral home and Sheng Mingyang in his hometown. Now that someone is currently in the state of being out of the closet, going back will only add on to his dear old father’s frustrations. As for Jiang Tian…...Jiang Ou was already in Beijing. Other than the old house at Fuzhong’s entrance that has already been rented out, there was similarly not much to look at in Jiangsu.

These two people’s circumstances were rather special; no matter if they stay or leave, the outcome would be pretty awkward.

Gao Tianyang said, “How about you two just draw up an itinerary, find an obscure spot, and have a seven-day vacation instead!”

Jiang Tian was used to travelling around for some sightseeing during festivals for the past few years, and was already subconsciously looking for tickets to various places of interest. However, he was stopped by Sheng Wang, “Why are you taking him seriously, there’s no such thing as an obscure spot during the Spring Festival — there’s more than a billion of us out there, hello?”

After much inner turmoil over two days, they booked a flight to Jiangsu in the end.

Firstly, it was because Class A’s WeChat group started to explode with activity before the New Year, agreeing to pay their teachers a visit after the New Year. Secondly…...when there were still three days left until Sheng Wang went on leave, he suddenly received a call from Sheng Mingyang.

Ever since the dinner on New Year's Day, there had always been a few traces of lingering awkwardness between the father and son. For a very long period of time, Sheng Mingyang did not share with him articles on keeping the body healthy, nor did he share anything in Moments. He was abruptly dead silent; nobody knew if he was going through some inner conflict, or he was simply giving him the cold shoulder.

This phone call was the first time he contacted him after New Year's Day. The moment the call was picked up, both of them were silent for a few seconds. In the end, it was Sheng Mingyang who spoke up first. "You're coming back for the Spring Festival?"

He did not use "are you coming back", going for the half-certain sentence structure straight away. This was standard fare from him, to use what appeared to be a gentle method to cover up the forcefulness within. But for some reason, when used in this occasion, it seemed more like a twisted form of concession instead.

Sheng Wang was stunned, and did not instantly speak. In those few seconds, he acutely felt that Sheng Mingyang was a little nervous — his usually domineering father, seriously got nervous as he waited for his reply.

He did not expose his nervousness, and immediately answered once he came back to himself, “We’ll go back if we manage to snatch up the tickets, it’s a little hard to book hotel rooms in the Spring Festival too.”

Actually, he had already decided to not go back before this phone call was made. After a whole year of business, enjoying a world of two with Jiang Tian at home for the Spring Festival seemed pretty good too — much better than going out just to watch the back of people’s heads.

But he didn’t mention the original plan, only pushing the reason to the sparse availability of tickets; this was like an unspoken form of evasion, so he wouldn’t cause the person on the other end of the phone to feel hurt.

Upon hearing his words, Sheng Mingyang immediately said, “Why do you need to book hotels? Why are you staying in a hotel when there’s a house back home for you to sleep in?”

With that, Sheng Wang could no longer evade the question. He hesitated for two seconds, and said in resignation, “I’m not going back by myself.”

He no longer spoke after he said that.

The phone was quiet for a while — it was as though the off switch had been pressed on Sheng Mingyang, he could hear how stiff he was from his voice alone. A good while later, he finally said ambiguously, “I know you’re not coming back alone, isn’t that room still in the house?”

This time, it was Sheng Wang who was left tongue tied.

Intelligent people never needed to make things obvious whenever they spoke to each other, everyone knew how to infer. Sheng Mingyang was plenty smart, and Sheng Wang surpassed him as his successor. Yet, just this once, he wanted to be an idiot.

His lips moved — he looked up at Jiang Tian, who was opposite the dining table — and then asked Sheng Mingyang in seriousness, “Dad, do

you mean what I’m thinking?”

Sheng Mingyang was silent for a moment, and did not answer this question directly. “I just saw Old Xu make a post in Moments, saying that those classmates of yours are planning to go back to school for a visit.”

Sheng Wang’s heart pounded a little heavily. He waited for him to continue.

“Doesn’t that include the both of you too,” Sheng Mingyang said.

Sheng Wang replied with a “Mn”.

Sheng Mingyang then continued, “I have a lot of things going on this year, I can stay for basically only two days, for the 30th and the first day. I can have a couple of meals, and then I’ll have to leave on the second day in the morning.”

(t/n: A reminder that they are speaking in chinese/lunar calendar terms, 30th of the last month of the chinese calendar, and then first day of chinese new year)

Sheng Wang let out yet another “mn”, just that his throat was a little hoarse; it wasn’t as clear. “Yet another bunch of work dinners?”

“Got to go around during Chinese New Year.”

“Take a look at your legs before you drink,” Sheng Wang said.

Sheng Mingyang was quiet again for some reason. Many moments later, he finally said, “Can you still snatch up the tickets if you buy it now?”

Sheng Wang said, “It isn’t as difficult to buy plane tickets.”

Sheng Mingyang said, “Sure.”

Just one word, and the weight he had been shouldering for the past few years was gone by more than half. Only when he felt his back, the tendons, the strings and everything all slowly relaxed, then Sheng Wang realised: before this, he had been tense all along.

“I’ll get Auntie Sun to clean up the room a bit when it’s confirmed that you’ll be back,” Sheng Mingyang spoke again.

Sheng Wang thought, and said, “Then, let’s give auntie a little break. My room needs only a little cleaning, she can ignore the one next door. There’s no need for two rooms.”

Sheng Mingyang digested his words, and realised that he shouldn’t be looking at these words beyond its surface level, and hung up without a

second word.

Sheng Wang complained to Jiang Tian, pointing at the phone, “See this, he hung up on me. He doesn't wanna respond to me anymore.”

Jiang Tian thought about what he said just now, and was a little speechless. “You really did agitate him like that?”

“Didn’t do any less of it when I was younger either,” Sheng Wang thought about the daily life of talking off his head with Sheng Mingyang when he was young; it was as fresh as yesterday, but it also seemed like those days had passed for many, many years.

He plucked out the last green grape and tossed it into his mouth. He carried the bowl with only the empty stem left in it and walked towards the kitchen. When he passed by Jiang Tian, he reached his head out to give him a peck on the corner of his lips. He shook his head as he said, “The old comrade has gotten old and can’t withstand teasing anymore. *I’m* the one who hung up on him in the past.”

Translator’s notes:

[this is also sort of for the next chapter too]

Chinese New Year is also referred to interchangeably with “Spring Festival”, and the rush of everyone all over China travelling back home to reunite with family is also notorious for the sheer high traffic. The dinner the night before Chinese New Year, Chinese New Year Eve’s dinner (□□□) is very significant because for one it’s for family to gather together, yknow, and Sheng Mingyang’s implicit acceptance of Jiang Tian’s appearance at the dinner can be seen as a significant sign that he’s slowly backing down/changing his mind, and gradually moving towards acceptance.

Chapter 110 - Hometown

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"There’s Air Conditioning in the Classroom; See, My Hand Is Warm.”

Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian bought an early flight for the 24th, and the moment they have just landed, he received a message from Sheng Mingyang on WeChat, saying that he had another work dinner to attend in the day, so the two of them will have to go home and rest for a bit by themselves. The Chinese New Year eve dinner was already booked in advance.

In the past, no matter how busy Sheng Mingyang was, he would definitely make sure that the eve of Chinese New Year would always be free. This year, with him suddenly having to attend the dinner, it was pretty easy to figure out that he was avoiding them.

As he hoped for them to come back for the new year, he also couldn’t quite afford to let go of his pride. The small building in White Horse Alley was a special existence — it had witnessed separations and reunions

between two families and four people. He honestly did not know what's the first thing he should even say to Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian upon seeing them arriving together — hand in hand — in that sort of scenario.

The old comrade had been astute for a good majority of his life, and was apt at saying all sorts of pretty words in different scenarios. When it came down to it, his son was still the only one who he didn't know how to deal with.

Sheng Wang knew the mindset he held, of course, so he merely accepted the location of the restaurant his father shared in silence, and did not call him out on it.

As they were waiting for their suitcases, Sheng Wang received a phone call. Jiang Tian listened to him confirm the location and the zone the car was parked at, and asked, "Who called?"

Sheng Wang said, "Uncle Xiao-Chen."

It's been ages since Jiang Tian last heard this address, and was briefly stunned before he came out of it. Sheng Wang had already pushed the

suitcases here. He reached his hand out and snapped his fingers right in front of Jiang Tian, saying, “Come back to life.”

Jiang Tian pressed down his meddling fingers. “He’s already here?”

“Yup, he’s at the parking lot already.”

Jiang Tian turned to look at the directions to the car park above him on instinct, but Sheng Wang dragged him towards the direction of the escalator instead. “Why are you looking at the sign? I’m all that you need to look at.”

Jiang Tian had only ever departed from this airport, he had never gone through arrival before. Sheng Wang did come here quite a few times throughout these years, with every time being in a rush. This time was the only exception.

The young master was visibly in a good mood, and somewhat carried the air of the emperor on tour, boasting in front of his Ge without any qualms, “Not so sure about the other places, but I am seriously familiar with airports — I can be a living GPS for you, all for free.”

Jiang Tian was pushing the luggage trolley. “Mn, the free ones are more prone to issues.”

“Bullshit.” Sheng Wang stuck his hand out, “You can pay me if you insist.”

Jiang Tian dug his phone out from his pocket, and slapped it onto his palm — he lifted it up again before he could grasp it, “I need some proof first.”

“What proof?”

“That you’re worth the price.”

“Go ahead and ask, I can point out the location of literally any shop here.”

Jiang Tian let out yet another “Mn”, asking, “Where is the west?”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

Alright, guess this entire part went wrong.

The young master had ran freely in the Jianghu for several years, he had been to many different places all over the country, but he still was

unable to tell north south from east west. The living GPS met its Waterloo barely seconds into operation, and did not scam in a single cent.

During the Spring Festival rush, everywhere was busy; the car park was flooded with people. The private cars and booked cabs all formed a long jam, it was impossible to tell who's who in the crowd. Sheng Wang called Uncle Xiao-Chen's phone, and so a "where exactly is the car" began a back and forth Q&A session.

Xiao-Chen had used countless different descriptions, and in the end, he said on the verge of a breakdown, "I'm right behind a white car, and my car has double flashing lights."

Sheng Wang said, "Uncle, literally most of the cars here are white, which one *doesn't* have flashing lights on? How about you give me a general area, and we will look for you along the way."

Xiao-Chen said again, "Northish part of area K."

Sheng Wang was silent for two seconds. He shoved his phone at Jiang Tian straight away. "You do it, I only recognise left and right and front and backt."

His Ge did not forget to ask, "Aren't you a living GPS?"

“It’s closed down now.”

Jiang Tian spent merely two minutes before he found the car. The living GPS went from closed down to shutting down entirely.

Xiao-Chen funnily did not change at all — his haircut was still the simplest kind, and the clothes he wore for this season was the unchanging short jacket with its collars flipped up. He came out of the car to help bring in the suitcases. When he saw Jiang Tian, he briefly stopped in his tracks, and then said wistfully “You’ve grown taller again, and still as handsome as ever, huh?”

*

Some places are just like this: the existence of a single person, a single road, a single block of building are enough to let people feel like they are dreaming about their youth again. Jiang Tian sat in the backseat of Xiao-Chen’s car, watching Sheng Wang getting increasingly sleepier as he leaned by his side; that was what he was feeling. It was to the point that for

a moment, he even wanted to roll his sleeves up to his elbows, as though what he was wearing was still that blue and white uniform.

Xiao-Chen still had something else to do; after he sent them to the entrance of the courtyard to White Horse Alley, he drove away on another road. Jiang Tian watched Sheng Wang key in the password at the door, and discovered that digits were unchanged despite so many years passing by — it was still the one he was told of at the start. And after the door was opened, the faint scent of detergent inside was the same as before.

In these few years, every time Jiang Tian thought of this house, this scent would always float up in his nose. That was his last memory of this place, and not a particularly good one either. It was such that when he smelled it, he unconsciously felt like he had just sprinted for a few thousand miles.

Fortunately, the person he couldn’t find no matter what back then, was standing next to him at this very instant; he was chatting and laughing,

he was within reach. So that scent became gentle too, and was no longer that empty and desolate.

The moment he hooked his fingers around Sheng Wang's, he came to a clear realisation at last: they would have much, much time ahead of them, so much that it could gradually bury those years full of loss, full of hurt, full of emptiness.

*

The lighting in the building was great, but as long as it was shortly cleaned up before with nobody being around for a while, the house would become dark and cold. Sheng Wang was the same as before; the moment he changed his shoes, he would start looking for the remote, switching on the air conditioner as he walked. Who cares where he would actually be spending his time at, either way, none of those that should be switched on would be missed out. The temperature indoors during the summer would be cold enough to warrant wrapping themselves up in a quilt; the winter would be warm enough for them to go around in a single layer of clothes. Nobody

knows where on earth he acquired this questionable habit that he had since birth.

Jiang Tian followed behind him. The trace of discomfort he felt at the entrance earlier slowly faded away in all sorts of little actions Sheng Wang took, not a single bit was left.

The young master shot straight to the second floor like he was catching a thief, and twisted open the door to the bedroom where Jiang Tian used to live. “I knew it!”

“What?” Jiang Tian asked.

“Didn’t I say cleaning up one room is enough?” Sheng Wang pushed the door completely wide open, and tilted his chin towards the inside, saying, “There — the old comrade did not cooperate at all, he got Auntie Sun to clean two up.”

When he was a teenager, he felt that Sheng Mingyang had never listened to him. Now that he saw this sort of behaviour, all he felt was some amusement.

Sheng Mingyang demonstrated the flexibility a businessman ought to have. Despite how unwilling he was, he still fully displayed the graciousness of a senior in the issue of tidying Jiang Tian's bedroom. The bedsheet and duvet cover were all new, he did not settle for letting Auntie Sun just change them out; the quilt had been sunned at the very least, it was fluffy and warm……

Of course, his mindset of wanting Jiang Tian to obediently sleep in here was as clear as day.

Sheng Wang twisted open the knob on the door to his bedroom, and wanted to laugh even more at the end.

It was because there were two sets of quilts on the bed, looking incredibly out of place. It was obvious that it wasn't Auntie Sun's usual tidying methods. He beckoned at Jiang Tian, and bent over to check the corner of the sheets. He then pinched the corner of one, saying, "See this? You can tell: this duvet cover isn't covering the bed properly, even a caving in an area. It has to be what my dad did himself."

From this, it could be deduced that Auntie Sun initially laid out one quilt in here, and after some thinking, Sheng Mingyang thought, that can't do — what if the two insist on squeezing on a bed? Therefore he obstinately added yet another one. Sheng Wang saw the old comrade's struggle in the sunken corner of the sheet.

He laughed with a hand on Jiang Tian's shoulder for quite a long while, and then took his phone out to take a picture of the corners. He sent it to Sheng Mingyang on WeChat.

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: dad, you did this?

A moment later, Sheng Mingyang replied: Where would I find the energy to

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: ok

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: then I'll go ask Auntie Sun, how did her craft worsen this much after a year of not seeing her

With the push of these lines, those few bits of pride and reservedness the old comrade once held had completely shattered into pieces. The

moment Sheng Wang just replied, he chased him down with a call, his tone extremely resigned, “You’re already home?”

“Just came in,” Sheng Wang said.

“I can’t leave anytime soon, you two will have to make do for lunch first.” Sheng Mingyang was deep in thought for a moment, and finally brought up the other person on his own accord, “Don’t get food delivery. If I recall correctly, Xiao-Tian knows how to cook, right? There are ingredients in the kitchen, or you can give Sun-jie a call.”

Jiang Tian was a little surprised when he heard the address “Xiao-Tian” coming out from his mouth again.

Sheng Wang winked at his Ge, and said to the phone, “We’ll be heading to Wu Tong Wai later. Grandpa Ding just got home yesterday, so we’ll probably be settling our lunch there.”

“Sure, the private room I booked tonight should have enough seats. If the old sir is fine with it, we can have a Chinese New Year’s Eve dinner together.” Sheng Mingyang had always been like this, setting aside other

issues, he would never neglect a single bit of the courtesy and respect he ought to give.

Sheng Wang let out an “okay”, and casually chatted a little while more. Before he hung up, he added on mischievously, “Oh yeah, dad—”

Sheng Mingyang thought he still had something to say. “Hm?”

“I’ve been on speaker mode all along.”

“You……”

Sheng Mingyang was silent for two seconds, and hung up straight away.

*

It was already nearly noon by the time the two were done tidying up and headed to Wu Tong Wai. The aroma of food wafted all over the alley, there were even various old men and women strolling around, holding their grandchild's hand. When they saw Jiang Tian, they would say, tugging at him, “It’s been a few years since I saw you, how grown up you are!”

Jiang Tian had probably not been made to make so much small talk in such frequency for his entire life, and yet, there were only so many questions that old people could ask no matter what they say; he was forced to be a repeater. Sheng Wang grinned as he watched the show from the side, both hands tucked in his pockets. It’s fine if he didn’t help, but he purposely prompted the old folks to ask a couple more questions.

A straight and simple alley somehow caused them to spend half an hour walking through it. By the time they made it to the end, Dr. Jiang’s face was already paralyzed. He side-eyed a certain person, asking, “Was it fun?”

“It’s alright,” Sheng Wang couldn’t even hide the mirth in his eyes even if he wanted to.

But soon enough, he could smile anymore — the moment he stepped into the tiny yard he hadn’t been to for a long time, the old man who was busy watering and trimming the plants turned around.

When Old Man Ding had a stern face, the wrinkles by the corners of his mouth would be downturned, making him appear fierce and unapproachable. However, the moment he saw clearly that it was Sheng Wang, those stiff, straight wrinkles curved, and his entire person became amiable and kind. He took off his presbyopic glasses, set down the old fashioned giant scissors, and grabbed Sheng Wang with his dried twig-like hand.

For that one split second, Sheng Wang thought he would call out a couple of “Xiao-Wang”, or made a mistake and say “Xiao-Tian.” And then he would exclaim like those old people in the alley, saying “It’s been so long since I last saw you, look at how grown up you are”, making small talk.

Unexpectedly, the old man simply squeezed his shoulders, saying in displeasure, “Why are you dressed in so little again! Aren’t you cold during class?”

Sheng Wang was stunned for a few seconds.

Jiang Tian whispered next to his ears, his head lowered, “There isn’t anything else wrong with the old man, his concept of time is sometimes a little messed up, that’s all.”

……*Maybe he still thinks that we would come here every day.*

Sheng Wang let out an “oh”, and covered the old man’s hand instead. He lowered his head, blinking rapidly until the warmth in his eyes receded. He then said to the old man, “It’s fine, grandpa. There’s air conditioning in the classroom; see, my hands are warm.”

Translator’s notes:

Old Man Ding was trapped in that summer too…

[evil comment found in the comment section from the raws]

“So, does it mean that in those six years, Grandpa Ding would also ask Jiang Tian ‘Why isn’t Xiao-Wang coming over for dinner’?”

Chapter 111 - The Human World

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He Instantly Heated Up After He Was Done Eating

Other than the occasional bursts of confusion, the slight hunch of his back, the old man was fine everywhere else. His voice was still as loud as before, he still looked as fierce whenever he kept up a stern expression. His greatest hobby was still watching television, the channels forever looping between military affairs, the news, and agriculture. The moment the television started jamming, he would roll up his sleeves and apply his slaps. If there was still a naughty creature like Gao Tianyang who climbed his roof, he could most definitely grab a broom and beat the person down.

Initially, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian agreed before this to cook, but the moment they finished washing their hands, they were chased out of the kitchen by the old man like he was rushing ducks. He said with a fierce look, “What has it got anything to do with the two of you, stay outta the way.”

“I still can, you know,” Sheng Wang struggled, “You should let me have a try if you don’t believe it.”

“Shoo!” The old man was merciless. “Who’s gonna eat it if you give me a pot of broken dumplings again?”

“Don’t worry, I eat what I make,” after Sheng Wang said that, he stuck a finger out and poked his Ge.

Jiang Tian: “.....I’ll eat it, too.”

The old man rolled his eyes. “Who else other than Jiang Tian would play along with you.”

Sheng Wang laughed as he leaned against the side of the kitchen door, an arm hooked around Jiang Tian. The old man gestured at them with the kitchen knife, and then with a loud holler, summoned in the Mute who just entered.

Actually, in the past few years, Sheng Wang would pass by Wu Tong Wai for a short while every time he came back to his home. The old man wasn’t around, Xi Le’s Boss Zhao wasn’t around either; he was worried that the Mute’s days would become both boring and dreary. Unfortunately, every

time he came by, the door to this courtyard was always locked. The Mute was always busy at some random spot, picking up scraps, or tending to his little vegetable field.

It was later when Sheng Wang finally heard from Zhao Xi that his parents couldn't stay put in Beijing at all — every time their health were doing slightly better, they would constantly come back to Jiangsu. Quite a significant number of months was spent in their home, their roots; half of it was because they couldn't let Xi Le go, the other was because of this lonesome mute friend.

When Sheng Wang heard that, he felt that the ties and bonds between people often run much deeper, much longer than they seem on the surface.

The Mute had been ecstatic for the past few days. In his eyes, the friends and neighbours he was familiar with had all come home, one group after another, it was extraordinarily lively — it's the way it ought to be for the New Year.

He had been spending all his time in Xi Le recently. Boss Zhao had acquired a huge batch of top tier longan and candy jujubes, he helped to

pack them separately and seal the bag up. On the last day before the New Year, he brought back with him two giant packets — one of the old man, one for the two young'uns.

Both Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian didn't actually quite like to eat overly-sweet things, but they were plenty happy to receive it. They knew, to someone the Mute's age, the best blessing for the New Year is that everyday in the future will be just as sweet.

The two were no good at preparing new year gifts for their seniors. They initially bought tonic as per the norm, as they wished for the older people to live a long and blessed life after all. However, they changed their mind again as they waited for the food, and snuck over to the nearest shopping centre. They bought two smartphones that were old people friendly.

No need to mention why for Old Man Ding; he had always been using the phone, they were merely helping him upgrade into the newer generation. As for the Mute……

Their hearts really couldn’t bear to see the way he was all by himself, especially when the noise and life faded away. He would stand there, gesturing with “uh-uh-ah-ah” coming out of his throat; the sight of it was so heart wrenching that one wouldn’t bear to leave. Although he still wouldn’t be able to make phone calls despite having a phone, he could write at the very least.

Sheng Wang helped him set up the input method, guiding him on how to use it step by step. “You can chat about whatever you like, you can send it to Boss Zhao, to the old man, to me and to Jiang Tian too.”

The Mute and the old man were thrilled upon getting new things, and spent a whole afternoon sending messages to each other while sitting directly opposite in their small rattan chairs. It was funnily more effective than their invented sign language.

Jiang Tian pointed at the old man’s back. “Does this look familiar to you?”

Question marks rose all over Sheng Wang’s head. “No…? Why?”

Jiang Tian: “It is to me.”

“Why?” the young master asked in seriousness.

However, Dr. Jiang said without batting an eye, “That’s your posture when you sent messages on WeChat during class before.”

Sheng Wang: “.....”

He quieted for two seconds. He held the flesh of the tangerine he just finished peeling in his mouth, and then chased his Ge out with the tangerine peel.

Tonight’s dinner was booked at a private restaurant. The boss was a classic Beijingese, and Sheng Wang loved his cooked hawthorns, boiled shrimp balls and sweet pease pudding; he sent out the imperial edict to eat there every other day. Save for the lack of time to accompany him, Sheng Mingyang would satisfy any requests of his, and so with this he became on good terms with the boss.

Actually, Sheng Wang’s taste buds changed after he grew up — but the old comrade’s rate in which he learned new information was akin to changing a new generation of mobile phones: always behind the young

people by a few steps. It lingered in all those years ago, stubbornly remembering those three dishes.

This had to be the Chinese New Year eve's dinner with the most people present; Sheng Wang even brought along the old man and the Mute, but it wasn't lively at all. After all, comrade Sheng Mingyang still had some objection in his heart, chit-chatting was sustained all by EQ; its content, upon recalling, was nothing to write home about. It wasn't exactly cheerful, but it wasn't really depressing either. Most of which were insignificant and lighthearted matters.

The old comrade had been to too many work dinners, and had a bit of "occupational disease" — he felt that the dinner couldn't go to waste, and some development should more or less happen. Therefore, as it reached its end, he was suddenly unable to hold himself back, and attempted to push forward development—

He swirled the last bit of alcohol in his glass, and tried to play it casual as he asked, "Xiao-Tian hasn't graduated, right?"

Jiang Tian nodded. “I still have two more years.”

“Then you still have to leave after you’re done with the project?”

“Yes.”

The old comrade let out an “oh”, took a sip of alcohol, and gave his son a meaningful look. However, his son suddenly spoke, “Since we’re on this topic, I’m filling you in on something first.”

Sheng Mingyang instinctively felt alarmed. His fingers, holding the glass, came to a pause. He asked, “About what?”

Sheng Wang said, “I’ll probably go overseas at that time too.”

Sheng Mingyang was agitated. “What do you mean you’re going overseas too? What are you doing overseas?”

“My company does outpost personnels,” Sheng Wang said, “I had a chat with them a while ago……”

Sheng Mingyang spat out blood internally, and put down the glass quietly. The old comrade did not care about the hell kind of chat he had, he only knew that he had a moment of regret.

It was like he had played a round of fancy pool, and a strike of the cue stick sent it knocking into a black ball. After bumping all around the table for ages, it clashed against a white ball with a bang, and then both ended up in the pocket. When he sent Jiang Tian away at the start, no way in hell he thought that there would be such a roundabout sequel to this. After more than six years, he sent Sheng Wang out at last.

But he couldn't say anything to object — he was the one who delivered the first strike back then.

The old friend running the restaurant gave them a lamb spine stew on the house. The comrade ate a bit as he chatted, and he instantly heated up after he was done eating; his mouth hurt. Even more so when he went home and saw the two young ones entering the same room.

In comparison, Sheng Wang was in a rather good mood.

Although the atmosphere for the dinner was still far from "joy and harmony", that was still within expectations. In reality, the fact that they

could have a complete dinner at the same table together already did imply the beginning of the melting of the glacier.

In addition, at 12 midnight on the dot, Jiang Tian received a message from Jiang Ou. Its content was rather simple — it was nothing else but wishing her son a happy new year, telling him to rest appropriately. Only, she added an additional line at the end of the well wishing.

She said: Everyone drank, right? Remember to brew up some honey water, so there wouldn’t be a headache tomorrow.

The message may be sent to one person and all, but it was clear that this wasn’t meant for only one. Perhaps it was just a simple show of concern, irrelevant to anything else. However, when Sheng Wang saw this message, he felt for some inexplicable reason that maybe after a year or two, they might really end up sitting around at the same table together; like that night many years ago in Wu Tong Wai, enjoying a good meal of dumplings.

*

The morning on the second day of the New Year, Sheng Wang still accidentally overslept a little despite setting an alarm.

It was past eight in the morning by the time he opened his eyes. The bedroom door downstairs was wide open, the bed neatly made. Sheng Mingyang had already left for his morning flight, and did not manage to have a departure breakfast with his son in time.

Of course, it was possible that he did not want to have that meal on purpose, seeing that the old comrade was still heated up, a giant blister having formed by the side of his mouth.

The air condition had barely been shut off when Sheng Wang switched the all of them back on one by one while looking for food downstairs in his sweatshirt and long pants. He scratched his head as he searched through the entire kitchen, and ended back up at the fridge again. He saw the note stuck on top of it.

Sheng Mingyang wrote in neat handwriting that Sheng Wang did not inherit. Compared to Jiang Tian’s, Sheng Mingyang’s handwriting was a little thicker and rounder — it was clear that he was the businessy type.

[Rushing for flight, not sure when I'll be back. If I'm still not home by day seven, you and Xiao-Tian should head to Beijing on your own. — Dad]

When Sheng Wang was gripping the slip, Jiang Tian came over with the scent of mint from having just washed up. A certain young master loved to keep the air condition on all night, and his throat would be dry and heated when he woke up in the morning; not even the humidifier could save him.

Jiang Tian took out a bottle of water from the fridge, uncapped it, and then took two gulps to wet his throat before finally asking, "Your dad left this?"

"Yeah," Sheng Wang's voice was still hoarse from not being completely awake yet. "You haven't seen his notes before, right? Let me translate this for you: I've left, you two are on your own, hurry and screw off after the holiday is over."

Jiang Tian gave a brief grunt in reply, and bumped a certain person's bottom lip with the mouth of the bottle, asking, "You haven't drank any water yet, have you?"

"Oh, I forgot." Sheng Wang took a few gulps using Jiang Tian's hand. "I was just thinking why is my throat so sore, I even thought you must have sneakily done something to me while I was dead asleep."

After he said that, his mouth was open, wanting to drink more. Jiang Tian had already taken the bottle away, turned around, and left.

The young master's attempt at drinking water was in vain, and followed over with a grin. "Hey, don't run away, Dr. Jiang. Why couldn't you take a little teasing?"

Jiang Tian switched on the television, and sat down on the sofa with half a bottle of water. He selected an app with the remote. "Do the teasing in front of your father if you dare."

"No way, a middle-aged man's circulatory systems aren't all that unclogged, don't give him a blood clot." Sheng Wang took the bottle out of his hand, saying, "Besides, in the eyes of comrade Sheng Mingyang, his son

is refined and polite, he isn't lecherous at all. If there's something, it has to be someone else's fault."

After he spoke of himself, he pondered, and said to Jiang Tian, "I can nearly imagine my dad's impression of you in his mind."

Jiang Tian: "....."

The young master held the bottle in his mouth, thought and said, "You have been wronged, so to make up for it, I've decided to cook breakfast for you with my own two hands. Happy?"

Dr. Jiang did not feel happy at all. He glanced at a certain person, dug his phone out from the pocket, and started going through the food delivery app. Sheng Wang set the water bottle aside, pressed down on the sofa with a knee, and hooked his arm around his neck. "What's the meaning behind you looking through the food delivery app now?"

Jiang Tian was trapped in the crook of his elbow, and his throat bobbed as he chuckled.

Although Jiang Tian had not a single drop of hope for a certain person's culinary skills, he could still be persuaded to be a white mouse this one time. Either way, back in that year, a certain person had colluded with Old Man Ding to feed him all sorts of weird things. An additional round wouldn't hurt.

After all, that's the boyfriend he picked for himself; what else was he supposed to do.

Jiang Tian initially wanted to keep an eye on him with the guise of "helping", but someone went straight for locking the sliding door. He gestured a "please" at him through the glass door, indicating for him to stay far far away; he wasn't allowed to intervene at all. So, he could only stop at that.

Sheng Wang actually had his reasons — the moment Jiang Tian left, he took his phone out from the pocket of his long pants, opened WeChat and started chatting with Gao Tianyang and co.

The main group for Fuzhong Class A had been ridiculously active, and it was for no reason other than the fact that they hadn't settled on the

date to return back to school. Most people were free from day three to day five, and with more room for choices, the harder it was to settle on a date.

Due to his own personal agenda, Sheng Wang wanted to get Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui to subtly guide the group. It was best that they set the reunion on tomorrow, as it would be Jiang Tian's birthday.

Unassuming Gao Tianyang: that's easy! isn't saying "happy birthday Tian-ge" in the group chat good enough?

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: no, that's too high-key. I'm scared that he wouldn't even go if he knew.

Da-Song: why? he's celebrating his birthday, shouldn't he be all happy and stuff?

Sheng Wang's thumb hovered over the keyboard, recalling what he had heard before returning to Jiangsu—

They would be coming back for only a week, and the cat son would easily fall ill if its environment is changed too hurriedly. Therefore, before

they left, they left their door card to Chen Chen, who's Jiang Tian's shixiong for his PhD. Chen Chen would send them a short video every day when he fed the cat, and as such he became familiar with Sheng Wang too. They would occasionally chat a little. That day, one thing led to another and so it was brought up. Chen Chen said something that caused Sheng Wang's heart to secretly ache for Jiang Tian for a long time.

He said: Jiang Tian never celebrated his birthdays, the more we prepared, the more he hid. Most of the time, he's already gone a few days prior to it. We don't know why he shunned it so badly.

Sheng Wang stood with downcasted eyes for a while, and squeezed his fingers as he typed: either ways, just don't bring it up

The good thing was that Gao Tianyang and Song Sirui knew everything about the two of them, and he didn't need to explicitly say anything before they already got the main gist of it. The two didn't ask any further questions, neither did they insist on going about it ostentatiously. They sent an emoji that said "okay", and tunnelled back to the class group

chat. With the intervention of a few lines, they managed to settle on the date they returned to school.

Translator's notes:

In TCM terms □□ means suffering from excessive internal heat, it can occur from eating food that is too heaty, lamb being a well known example. When you suffer from excessive internal heat, you're more likely to get mad/pent up 'energy', □□ is also a way to describe getting mad/angry, so there is kind of a pun there which I used the term "getting heated up" to replace it, in the sense that Sheng Mingyang was literally 'heating up' because of the lamb but also because of Anger. Hopefully it makes sense.

Chapter 112 - The Height of Youth

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In This Human World, the Blazing Sun Is Just Right. The Wind Soars Past the Tips of the Tree Branches; at This Moment, They Are at the Height of Their Youth.

Young master Sheng was good at arranging subtle surprises like this, and gatherings, and breakfast — this person was busy chatting on WeChat, and his already terrible culinary skills were straight up further discounted. He was up to his neck in trying to manage to cook. He had no idea how to deal with the wok that was sizzling all over, and stood 800m away from the stove. He gestured with the spatula from far, all because he was tall and had long arms.

The glass door was locked, and the kitchen was enveloped in smoke and flames. He squinted for several while before he realised that he forgot to turn on the kitchen hood. By the time he turned on the kitchen hood and briefly relaxed, the rice grains and egg were starting to stick to the bottom.

In any case…...the effect was rather ‘surprising’.

Jiang Tian curbed his worry and curiosity, and waited for nearly 20 minutes in the living room. Just as he placed his phone down and was prepared to go inside the kitchen and check up on him, a certain person had come out with a plate, bringing with him the smell of smoke and fire.

It wasn’t a description, he genuinely smelled like smoke and fire. Jiang Tian choked on the smell and coughed.

(t/n: To “smell like smoke and fire” is to smell mundane, down to earth, more human etc, to “not consume the smoke and fire of the human world” is a saying to describe someone as beyond mortal, because they do not eat. That’s the gist, but in this case, Sheng Wang literally smelled like that.)

He grabbed the mineral water bottle with the remaining bit of water left from just now and took a drink. He glanced at the content of the plate without a single word, and his expression instantly became a little numb.

What on earth is this pile of charred black stuff?

Dr. Jiang was this close to saying that out loud, but the moment he recalled that the chef was his Wang-zai, he silently choked back his cutting words. He cleared his throat, “And this is—”

Sheng Wang placed the plate on the coffee table, forcibly stayed unashamed, wincing a little guiltily, “Soy sauce fried rice.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Sheng Wang wanted to ask, *why are you so silent*, but he already knew why even without asking. The two somehow managed to recreate the atmosphere of mourning all over a plate of rice, and after standing-off for several seconds, the young master laughed first.

Dr. Jiang instantly couldn’t keep it up anymore. As Sheng Wang collapsed onto the sofa with laughter, he pointed at the plate, and said calmly, “I thought you didn’t want to do this anymore, and made this with engine oil for me.”

“Screw off, I was totally serious.” The young master sat up straight and began quibbling, “I just didn’t keep a good control over the portion, that’s all, and the colour of the soy sauce Auntie Sun bought back this time is a little dark.”

“Here, say it again.” Jiang Tian took his phone out, and opened the voice recorder app. “I’ll play it for Auntie Sun next time.”

Sheng Wang said, petulant, “I suspect you’re trying to pick a fight.”

“If I don’t pick one, I will have to eat this.”

“So what if you took a bite? It just looks a little more tragic, but what if?” The young master dug out a spoonful himself first. It barely entered his mouth before he silently took the spoon out again, his expression speaking of extreme distress.

Jiang Tian suppressed his laughter as he asked, “What do you feel?”

Sheng Wang: “Bleh…...it’s way too much.”

At this point, a certain person had given up on struggling, and obediently took his phone out to order two sets of porridges.

Ever since the young master had messed a meal up, he had become rather obedient, with guilt in his heart. After all, he wanted these two days to be a little more perfect for Jiang Tian, and so he decided to quit all the tormenting, and become a boyfriend who’s at his every beck and call.

Previously, Sheng Mingyang was home, and so they were more or less a little reserved. Besides, they were all adults already, customary acts

for Chinese New Year and all have to be carried out properly, and so they did not have the chance to go out on their own.

Now that he's thinking about it, they had once both lived in this city for many years, but they never had the chance to openly go out on a date, to travel and have fun. The teenage years were stuck to those few locations, and all the places they went to belonged to the same patch of sky above Fuzhong. They were supposed to be 'unstoppable', but never did they ever truly go 'unbridled' before.

Now that there's suddenly plenty of time, he kept wanting to slowly fill up the holes left by those regrets.

Sheng Wang said, how about we go out for a bit in the afternoon? Is there any place you want to go?

Jiang Tian took his phone out and went through a few pages. "There's a lantern festival tonight, do you want to see it?"

Sheng Wang thought to himself, *Ge, are you messing with me?*

Every Chinese New Year, from the first day to the 15th, there would always be a lantern festival. It is indeed the biggest event of the year, but there are also truly a lot of people. They were basically there to wilfully suffer. However, just a few minutes ago, he swore to be a good and obedient boyfriend, and so — as he held down his pain — he nodded without any hesitation.

Yet, what he did not know was that Jiang Tian wasn't interested in this either. He merely thought that he wanted to go out and have fun, so with the mindset of letting him be he forced himself to pick one.

So, the beginning of tonight began with such a misunderstanding. Neither of them held much expectations, and were even prepared for their feet to be stomped on until they turned swollen. And yet, as they were truly standing there, holding each other's hand in the sea of people like it's perfectly natural — laughing and chatting like the countless couples around them — leisurely making their way forward — they felt like they would not have it any other way

They passed by a rare patch of empty ground; Sheng Wang tugged at the person next to him, saying, “Ge, look at me.”

When Jiang Tian turned around, he lifted his phone and took a picture of them beneath the lights.

Next to them was the ceaseless stream of people, behind them were the lights that dimmed and glowed, strung up along the stretch of river. They were lit up from the ancient times to this day, lasting for eons.

He wanted to print out this picture, and slip it into that photo album too. The seasons on this earth changed again and again; they were still together.

In the holidays, the liveliness would always be slow to end, slightly resembling the nightless city filled with lights. By the time the two got home, it was already past eleven.

Sheng Wang took off his scarf and hung it on the clothing rack by the entrance hall. He switched on the air conditioner in loud succession.

“Did you have fun?” he asked.

Jiang Tian pointed at his shoes, which were stepped on countless times. “What do you think?”

Sheng Wang was nearly losing his mind from laughter. He nudged his Ge upstairs. “Don’t feel sorry for the shoes anymore, go shower already, Dr. Jiang. I’m too full from eating, so I’ll be taking a stroll in the living room for digestion.”

Jiang Tian watched his eyes — bright as the stars — and wanted to say something for a split second. In the end, he still headed upstairs. He did know the reason behind Sheng Wang busying himself for the whole day, but it had genuinely been a long while since he last celebrated his birthday. It was to the extent that as he watched the time inch closer to midnight, his nerves would subconsciously get tensed up, like he was still filled with trepidation that had stayed in his heart for several unending years.

Out of some unknown mindset, he stayed in the bathroom for a long time, and leaned against the basin, drying his already half-dried hair. He only snapped out of it when he heard the sound of the doorbell downstairs.

He tossed the towel into the washing machine, and headed downstairs with the phone in his hand.

He thought that he would still be a little unused to all these. But as he sat down on the sofa and saw the transparent cake box with a familiar style, he then realised belatedly that repulse wasn't what he felt on all those occasions — it was longing.

He longed for the person in front of him saying "happy birthday" to him to be Sheng Wang all too much — nobody else could do, it had to be him. He was like a childish brat who lost his things, and insisted on having that item returned to him in perfect conditions before he could make peace with himself.

"I still looked for the same cake shop to order from. The fondue isn't cracked this time, I've checked," Sheng Wang said.

The colour palette of this cake was much alike to the one a few years ago, but it wasn't crowded with many tiny figures like last time. There were only him and Jiang Tian on top of it, as well as two cats. One was curled up,

quietly sleeping away — that's the "Leader" he once had — and the other one was still playing, "Leader's" legacy.

Sheng Wang said, "I used to like dragging in a bunch of people whenever I wanted to do something, now I'm not doing that anymore."

When he was young, he loved to use grandiose words, even his promises would involve a lot of people without realising at all. It was later when he finally understood: he couldn't help other people make promises on their behalf. When would he be coming, when would he be leaving, how long would he be staying with him, he could — and he should — only say "I".

I will spend every birthday with you from now onwards, I will always be by your side, I love you.

The second hand moved to 12 tick by tick, everything about the setting was the same as before. It was still this sofa, it was still these two particular people. Sheng Wang leaned in, and gave Jiang Tian a kiss. "Ge, you're 19 now, I love you."

He kissed him again. "You're 20 now, I still love you."

“And also the 21-years-old you.”

……

For every count of a year, he would kiss him. From 19 to 24, from his lips to his jaws to his Adam’s Apple. The last one was on his heart. He said, “Happy birthday, Jiang Tian.”

Jiang Tian pressed his forehead to his, and his brows lightly knitted. Maybe he was allaying the pangs of pain in his heart, coming in dense and quick pricks, or he was holding back the turbulent emotions he was currently feeling.

He caressed Sheng Wang’s face, tilted his head and pressed his lips to his. It was gentle and lingering, and then it was forceful. In the end, he was practically pressing down on him as they kissed till they ran out of air.

……

They nearly did it once on the sofa, and had to rely on that last bit of rationality left in them to enter the bathroom in Sheng Wang’s bedroom.

The mist on the glass door made it slippery. As Sheng Wang gripped the edges, he suddenly recalled something Jiang Tian once said a long, long

time ago. He said that the soundproofing here wasn’t as good as he thought it was.

Who knew what he recalled, but soon enough, Jiang Tian watched a wave of flush crawl up his back and shoulders.

The atmosphere tonight was too good, the two were a little lost to the madness.

Sheng Wang barely changed into fresh clothes before it’s pushed up again by Jiang Tian. He sat on his knees, biting the edge of the shirt, and turned to look up uncontrollably. By the time he looked down once more, his gaze was already unfocused, but glinting from the light too.

*

When all was said and done, they didn’t sleep for too long either. Sheng Wang thought that the two of them would be arriving on the dot again for the rare gathering, but unexpectedly, he was already wide awake past seven in the morning.

The gathering would be held at 10 in the morning. When they were done getting ready and arrived at Fuzhong, it wasn't even 9.30am yet.

The temperature of winter in this city wasn't that low. If there was a sunny day, it would even give one the illusion that spring was about to arrive; it was just that the air going up their nostrils was still so goddamn icy.

The high school campus was much different from the university one. As long as school wasn't in session, there would barely be anyone around. The quiet was a spacious kind, but it wouldn't be desolate. It was like a dense forest covered in snow, teeming with life that was hidden away, ready to burst forth any time soon.

In order to blend in with the atmosphere unique to secondary schools, Sheng Wang did not wear a coat today, and especially wore an athletic jacket. He was both handsome and cool, causing the sparse few girls who passed by to lightly exclaim.

Year twos and threes would have lessons starting from day five of the New Year in Fuzhong. An extremely small portion of residence students had already come back to school in advance. Sheng Wang heard the sound of people at last when they passed by the basketball court, and coupled with the sound of the basketball landing on the floor, it added some dashes of colour to this winter day.

Those few boys were a little curious about the passing-by strangers too, and looked at them from the corner of their eyes. They ended up losing control of the ball, and with a slip of the hand, the ball hit the edge of the backboard, bouncing all the way out of court. It landed near Jiang Tian’s foot.

One of the boys whistled, and raised his hands high up in the air, the pose of someone ready to receive the ball.

This was an unspoken rule between schooling boys: the person on the court would raise his hands, the person out of the court would pick the ball up and toss it back, no need to even say anything at all.

He bent over to pick the basketball up. Just as he was about to throw it back, he heard someone snapping their fingers in the near distance. He turned around to look, and Sheng Wang smirked as he did the ball-receiving pose too.

Jiang Tian scoffed, and tossed the ball to his own people in a show of extreme biasness.

Just after the ball was passed over, he saw the the troops of Class A coming in groups within sight, arriving at 10 on the dot, walking along Road #3.

Gao Tianyang had spotted them from afar, yelling, “Tian-ge, Sheng-ge! You guys seriously reached here so early?!”

Two other people hollered along, “What is it? You want to play basketball?”

“Sure! It’s been so long, my hands are itching to play.”

Jiang Tian raised his hands at the group of classmates in the distance.

He turned around, and saw Sheng Wang rolling up his sleeve, dribbling the ball a couple of times, and then jumping before the hoop.

The basketball crossed between his legs, going from his left hand to his right, drawing out a smooth arch in mid-air. It spun one round in the hoop, high up above, and fell down through the direct centre with a whoosh.

For that one split second, it almost gave him the illusion that they were still in Fuzhong; they only had a long, drawn out holiday, that’s all.

Road #3 was still so lengthy that there was no end to it, the luxurious branches and the leaves atop of the parasol trees still flourished

In this human world, the blazing sun is just right. The wind soars past the tips of the tree branches; at this moment, they are at the height of their youth.

End of main story.

Chapter 112.5 - Extra

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It’s the rainy season as of late, the sky was an ashy grey, everywhere was wet and damp. The people here seemed to dislike using an umbrella especially, they always wore hooded shirts with cowboy jeans, and hurried through the puddles of rainfall.

Today may be a rare rest day where there’s nothing to do, but Sheng Wang was too lazy to leave the house. He initially wanted to cuddle his Ge and experience a day of “rejecting morning assembly” like an incapable lord, but was unfortunately summoned out of bed by a video call.

“This has to be a disturbance of the citizens, I’m suing you after I’m back from my holiday.” After Sheng Wang washed up, he sat down on the living room floor with his legs crossed and yawned. His laptop was placed on the coffee table, and on its screen, wasa close up of Gao Tianyang — this idiot’s — giant face.

“Sorry, forgot the two of you aren’t in the same old place, there’s an additional three hours time difference between us now.” Gao Tianyang put his palms together on the screen, “Feel free to sue me when you’re back, I promise I won't activate Lawyer Li first.”

“Screw off, Chili wouldn't be aiding evil.”

Gao Tianyang laughed mischievously, a smugness that was asking for a beating.

“Where’s my Tian-ge?”

Sheng Wang was too low on the ground and his line of sight was blocked by the bar counter. He couldn’t spot him after looking left and right. “He’s probably still washing his face.”

Just after he spoke, he heard the sound of sizzling coming from the kitchen, and added, “He’s heating up the pot already.”

Gao Tianyang hadn’t realised what was going on. “He’s washing his face with the pot?”

“.....” Sheng Wang asked in exasperation, “Did you drink tonight?”

“Eh, I did drink quite a bit, for reals.”

It was approximately night back in the country, and it was late night too. Gao Tianyang was perfectly lively instead. He was practically glowing, a stark contrast to young master Sheng — not only were the young master’s eyes dazed and his voice nasally, there were still a few tufts of hair that stuck out from his head from sleeping just now. Those two tufts of hair were plenty stubborn, and no matter how he brushed it, they still stuck out.

The good thing was that he didn’t need to go out and meet visitors, and neither did a friend like Gao Tianyang count as a person. So after the hair remained stubbornly sticking out despite the young master running his hand through it a few times, he gave up and decided to let it be.

“Alright let’s cut to the chase. When are you and Tian-ge’s holidays?” Gao Tianyang asked.

“You mean a normal holiday or long break?”

“The longer the better.”

“Let me see, there’s barely a few months left in this year too.” Sheng Wang flipped through the calendar. “July, there’s fewer things going on in July, and he happens to have a break too—”

Just as he spoke, he felt someone picking at the tufts of hair sticking out on his head. A look behind him, and it revealed that Jiang Tian had come over at some point in time, with two cups of oat milk in his hands.

“Tian-ge,” Gao Tianyang called out.

Jiang Tian greeted him, and passed a cup of milk to Sheng Wang.

“What a rare sight, Sheng-ge’s actually drinking something warm?” Gao Tianyang saw the steam from the rim, and joked, “Where’s your standard ice water?”

“I’m banned from it,” Sheng Wang said.

“That’s under his purview too?”

Jiang Tian sat down on the couch behind Sheng Wang with the other cup of milk in his hand, his lengthy bent legs coincidentally becoming a backrest for a certain person. His elbows rested on his knees as he said to Gao Tianyang, “Ask him about how long has it been since he recovered from stomach aches.”

“Stomach ache?” Gao Tianyang immediately took out all sorts of articles that Chili used to scare him with. “Then you really gotta be careful, if it’s the recurring type, it’s better if you go to the hospital for a check up. Why the sudden stomach pain?”

Sheng Wang laughed awkwardly, and pointed behind him with his thumb. “His fault.”

Gao Tianyang: “Huh?”

“He somehow acquired a bag of bread crust, and pan fried an entire pot of spring rolls with that that day.”

“And then?”

Gao Tianyang wanted to say “So you got food poisoning?”, but due to his Tian-ge’s stare, he swallowed back the words that were already in his mouth. It was also fortunate that he didn’t say it, because what closely

followed up was Sheng Wang saying, “He performed above his usual standard and it tasted kinda good, so I have to show him some face and support him, right?”

“So?”

“He got a stomach ache from overeating,” Jiang Tian pressed a certain person’s thumb back down, and concluded.

The young master touched his stomach, still shaken.

Gao Tianyang: “.....”

He thought to himself, *I swear I have a girlfriend, how the hell am I still eating dog food?*

Thankfully, the two showed mercy, and did not stuff him with so much dog food that he would burst. Sheng Wang obediently drank a mouthful of hot milk, and went back on track. “We have a break in July, any later would be that period of time during Christmas and New Year.”

“You’re coming over?” Jiang Tian asked.

Gao Tianyang said, “Yup, I’m gonna look for you guys.”

“A vacation?”

“Nope,” Gao Tianyang waved, “Honeymoon.”

“Go find Chili if you want a honeymoon, why are you looking for us?” Sheng Wang was full of questions.

Jiang Tian was even more confused. “You want to get married? You’re not even saying that you want to get married first?”

“Am I not saying it right now? I didn’t know I’m going to get married if it’s earlier too,” Gao Tianyang scratched the back of his head, and said with a dumb smile, “I just proposed today.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Some giant dumbasses are honestly admirable, already planning the honeymoon right after proposing.

“How did you propose?” Sheng Wang asked.

Gao Tianyang narrated his absolute cracky course of events and the misunderstanding caused by all his fumbling in excitement. Sheng Wang’s face went numb from all of that.

Jiang Tian had always been good with his words. The moment he opened his mouth, he asked, “And Chili seriously said yes?”

Gao Tianyang said, “Maybe my crying was too pathetic or something, she couldn’t bear to say no.”

He pondered for two seconds, and added on with much self awareness, “Maybe it’s also that she wants to hurry up and bring me back already, so we wouldn’t embarrass ourselves.”

Sheng Wang imagined that scene, and laughed until he nearly slumped onto the floor. Jiang Tian stopped him with his leg.

He took a sip of milk to slowly get over it. “I was just wondering why you look so radiant today. Then what do you two plan to do later?”

“We want to get our marriage cert on September 1st.”

“September 1st.”

“The day school opens,” Gao Tianyang said.

Sheng Wang thought about the significance of this day, and felt a slight sense of gratification — thank god, this idiot’s romantic cells haven’t completely died out yet.

“Chili doesn’t want to be too traditional, so I thought we should come out for a vacation after we get our marriage cert, relax and all,” GY said. “Isn’t Small Mouth in Canada already? I don’t know if he will be busy in the later half of the year, I’ll go ask him later.”

Small Mouth Xu was the exact opposite in nature from his father. He’s more quiet, he loves plants. So he picked a field related to forestry, and quietly threw himself into Mother Nature.

Jiang Tian said, “We met him a while ago.”

“How did it go?”

Sheng Wang said, “He was on duty in a helicopter that day, talking on the walkie-talkie on his shoulder. He even had a gun because he was worried that he would run into a bear. He’s pretty cool and all, but he’s injured too. His arm got bitten by poisonous insects, and it was nearly shining from the swelling.”

Gao Tianyang: “.....Then I should really pay him a visit.”

“You can forget about it,” Sheng Wang said, both amused and distressed, “Don’t agitate single bros while you’re on your honeymoon,

okay?”

“Small Mouth is such a quiet person,” Gao Tianyang disagreed, “He definitely wouldn’t be provoked.”

“He would,” Sheng Wang said.

“How did you know?”

“Experience,” Jiang Tian said out of the blue.

Gao Tianyang: “???”

Sheng Wang said, deeply anguished, “The two of us were chased back by him.”

“.....” Gao Tianyang thought, and said, “I’m honestly not surprised by that.”

Gao Tianyang and Little Chili really did get their marriage certificate on September 1st this year, commemorating the day they met each other in the campus of Fuzhong, the day they met each other in their youth. The honeymoon was set to begin on the later third of December. Of course, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian did not head over early to be their third wheels, merely helping them arrange their itinerary and book hotels.

Only in the last two days of the honeymoon did Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian pack their luggage and head to Venice to meet them, as well as sending them off.

The lodging for those two days was booked in advance by Jiang Tian, it was a homely place with a nice ambience. The landlord spoke with heavily accented English, telling them how to cross over the bridge to the island, which ticket they should be purchasing for the most convenience, and even gifted Gao Tianyang and Little Chili a newlywed present.

The island wasn't particularly big, walking around didn't take up too much time. The flowing stream of water meandered through the gorgeous rows of houses, and exquisite arch bridges were between rows after rows.

In the evening, Chili was looking at handbags in a shop located in the corner, hunting for souvenirs to bring back to Little Carp. Gao Tianyang accompanied her. Young master Sheng waited by the bridge with his hands in his pockets for a bit, and while his Ge wasn't looking, he snuck to the

artisan gelato shop nearby to buy a few scoops of gelato. As he paid for the goods, he was caught redhanded by Jiang Tian.

“Who’s the one who sneezed thrice in a row yesterday?” Jiang Tian asked with furrowed brows.

As the young master protected his gelato scoops, he pushed him out of the shop, all the way to a corner of the wall that was against the wind. He ate a scoop of gelato first, and then tilted his head to bring his Ge a kiss that was cold and sweet.

“Okay, now that you’ve eaten it too, you do not have the grounds to reprimand me,” Sheng Wang brazenly shrugged, and before Jiang Tian could catch him, he turned and ducked inside a gift shop next to him.

Jiang Tian touched the remaining scent of ice cream by the corner of his lips, and followed inside too.

This shop wasn’t huge; fancy textiles and carpets were hung all over the place. There were tiny trinkets made out of bronze and glass on the shelves — quills, crystal balls and stuff. The stained glass window had an

elaborate pattern with heavy colours, to the point that the lighting was rather dim in the shop. With the fragrance in the air, the shop appeared to have a mystical aura; it even seemed pretty legit.

An old lady crouched behind the desk, colourful strings braided in her fluffy long hair. She wore a giant shawl, and her head was lowered, doing her own thing. She didn't quite pay any attention to customers.

Sheng Wang plucked at the wind chime hanging by the shelf. Just as he was about to exit, Gao Tianyang came in with a few giant paper bags in hand. Chili basically had zero resistance to these intricate looking items, and went quite a few rounds in the shop. She was jumping at the chance of buying that quill pen gift set.

"You want it?" Gao Tianyang asked.

"Nah, it's for Carp," Chili said, "What do you think? Is it pretty?"

Jiang Tian took giving suggestions very seriously. "Why does she need a quill to write?"

Chili: "....."

“How about this?” She pointed at another feather accessory, “It also looks quite pretty, it can even be a necklace.”

Gao Tianyang said in confusion, “Is putting bird feathers on the body supposed to look good?”

Chili: “.....”

In the three co-shoppers, one had a shitty sense of aesthetic, the other two were pragmatic. Entering a gift shop with this sort of style was a mistake. The “only idiots will buy things like this” were written loud and clear on their faces. Chili rolled her eyes, and no longer bothered with them. She picked a few things according to her taste, paid, and left.

No matter what happened, this trip did not go to waste. When they did a count of their items by placing all things on the table, they then discovered that they had honestly bought a lot, and a lot of things. However, within this, there was still something they had never seen before.

Chili had sharp eyes, and took out two accessories from the corner. She said in confusion, “Eh? Who bought these two?”

“Wasn’t it you?’

“It wasn’t me, I took the sweater necklace, not this.”

Gao Tianyang was stumped. “Huh?”

Jiang Tian glanced at him, and placed the accessories into the pocket of his pants, saying, “I bought it.”

Question marks rose above Gao Tianyang and Little Chili’s heads.

Sheng Wang turned to look at Jiang Tian, and with his extraordinary understanding of his Ge, he somehow saw a trace of embarrassment beneath his Ge’s calm exterior.

He couldn’t hold it in and wanted to laugh, so he asked with a hand on Jiang Tian’s shoulder, “Ge, why did you buy this in secret?”

Why did I buy this?

Because, as they left the shop, Jiang Tian was the last to leave as he was replying to messages on his phone. He suddenly heard the foreign old granny who was minding her own business with her head previously lowered, speak with heavily accented English. “Take this pair of trinkets with you.”

Jiang Tian stilled, and turned to look at her.

Two rather ordinary keychains rested on her wizened and aged fingers. It was the first time she interacted with the customer. The thin and long chain from her spectacles dangled before her, the spectacles slipping beneath her nose. She looked at him through the lenses, her pale blue eyes were on him as she repeated, “Take this pair of trinkets with you, you two will be in love for the rest of forever.”

The three had already left the shop. Jiang Tian looked at the entrance, and saw Sheng Wang’s head turn around; he seemed to be looking for him.

His features softened, and received the keychains on the old person’s hands. He said in a deep voice, “Thank you.”

At that moment, the setting sun shone on the meandering channels in Venice. The stained glass window was rimmed with gold, the feather on the keychain had a radiant outline.

The flow of time was like this blessing; gentle, and everlasting.

Weibo Extra (Sheng Wang's Birthday)

Sheng Wang’s birthday - posted on musuli's weibo

04/12/2020

The wall clock quietly ticked to 11.59pm; his phone was buzzing non-stop.

Jiang Tian swiped open the screen, and saw a certain person’s profile picture tyrannically residing in the pinned chat in Wechat, new messages cheekily popping up on after another.

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: Jiang Tian

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: Jiang Tian

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: Jiang Tian

Jiang Tian’s fingers moved to reply to him with a series of punctuation: ……

A certain someone instantly perked up: it’s already 11.59

Jiang Tian: ……

True, it was indeed 11.59pm already. Another minute — no — 39 seconds more, and it would be Sheng Wang's birthday. Theoretically speaking, they should be together at this moment, preparing to bring out the surprise present, or blowing off the candle on the cake.

Unfortunately, reality wasn't like that.

It was because an hour ago, the young master had "travelled up to heaven down to earth, over the hills and mountains", going against all obstacles (including, but not limited to, grabbing his waist blocking his hand, trying both forceful and gentle methods, coaxing and lying), and forcefully found the gift, opening it up in advance.

As for the birthday cake, it had died a heroic death under the claws of a certain person (more than half was eaten, a failed attempt at smearing it on the family member with the surname of Jiang was made). The candle was lit up and blown out in a completely blindsided manner.

Therefore, after finishing off this major job, the birthday star himself washed his hands of the mess he made, and escaped into the study room like his butt was on fire. Next, he opened WeChat, and started being up to no good.

The current progress was that Jiang Tian had shut the world out on the sofa, and as for a certain person, he counted down knowing damn well what happened, and asked for a surprise from him.

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: there’s still 10 seconds left, Jiang Tian Gege

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: where’s my surprise

Jiang Tian's eyes looked up at the fork and spoon that were left on the table after a certain person ate, as well as the gift box that was already opened up. He lifted his phone, took a picture as evidence, and then walked towards the study room with proof in hand.

Before he opened the door, he replied: There is no surprise, but I do have a life

I No Longer Want This Hand Of Mine: ?

The gift was already unwrapped — might as well unwrap the person instead.

Weibo Extra (Jiang Tian's Birthday)

Jiang Tian’s birthday - posted on musuli’s weibo

27/01/2021

The sun at Wu Tong Wai was extremely pleasant these two days. Old Man Ding’s doorstep was incredibly lively too — someone had set up a square table and short stools on the concrete floor, and a whole bunch of old people basked under the sun and played chess.

When Old Man Ding brought the Mute with him to fight on the battlefield of chess, Sheng Wang and Jiang Tian were dealing with the cat in the house.

It was rare that they were on a break, the two of them brought the cat to the pet hospital for vaccinations.

Due to the foreign environment as well as the fact that it got jabbed, the cat was being a huge coward for the time being. It clung onto Jiang Tian

with all four limbs, and couldn’t be taken off him no matter how he tried.

Lint roller in hand, Sheng Wang had no idea where to even start. He poked at his cat son’s round and rotund head, saying, “This is really too much. Before we left the house, you were clinging on to me to the point that I got fur all over me like a dandelion. It’s barely been a while, and now you wouldn’t even look me in the eyes?”

The cat shrunk its neck with a scowl, glaring at him woefully.

The young master stood off against it for a while. He looked up and said to Jiang Tian, “It hates me.”

Jiang Tian: “.....”

There’s something wrong with you.

Sheng Wang poked at the cat’s head. “Look at it, it’s totally unhappy.”

Jiang Tian: “It just got jabbed, how happy could it be.”

Sheng Wang: “Then it’s just being unreasonable. I’m the one who hugged it outside, you’re the one who sent it onto the examination table. You’re the one it should be glaring at. Why were you spared? You get special rights just because it’s your birthday?”

I really do get it.

The moment he finished saying that, it was as though the cat understood, and its head nudged against Jiang Tian with all its might.

The young master looked for a while, and held the kitten by the scruffs of fate, saying, “Nope, you gotta come down.”

He extracted the cat who was being all huggy and kissy over Jiang Tian, glanced at his Ge, and then lowered his head to speak to the cat. “What am I supposed to do when I get home now that you have used these tricks up?”

Jiang Tian stilled in the midst of drinking water, and looked at him from the corner of his eyes. A moment later, he said, “You can try it again.”

“What, what? What try again?” Old Man Ding pushed the door open and entered. It was clear that he had won at chess, and was absolutely pleased.

Jiang Tian: “.....”

Sheng Wang saw the look on his Ge’s face, and doubled over in laughter with the cat in his arms.

The old man had no idea about the context at all, and patted Jiang Tian, “Why the long face on your birthday. Come, stick your hand out, I’m giving you something.”

“What is it?”

“It’s something good, hurry.”

Jiang Tian stuck his hand out.

Old Man Ding gave him a white rabbit candy.

Jiang Tian stared at the milk candy meant for coaxing kids in silence. A certain person at the side was already in stitches.

The old man was sometimes clear headed, sometimes confused. Nobody could tell where the boundaries lie, so they could only let him be.

He was pleased as punch as he said, “Spoils of war, I’ve just won it. I kept this especially for you, hurry up, unwrap and eat it already.”

Seeing Jiang Tian obediently unwrapping the candy, lowering his head and putting it in his mouth, the old man ruffled the cat’s head in satisfaction, turning around and leaving. “Wait, the Mute and I will cook up a table of food for you.”

Shortly, Old Man Ding went back to the room for a pair of scissors, and saw an additional lump in Sheng Wang's cheeks.

The old man was getting confused again. "Why is the candy with you instead?"

The young master put his jacket back on again — now free of cat fur — and tossed this difficult question back to his Ge in retaliation. "Grandpa, it's a long story. Let Jiang Tian explain it to you."

Jiang Tian: "....."

The old man turned to look at him, waiting for an explanation.

A few seconds later, Jiang Tian figured he might as well screw it all. "I don't know, either way it disappeared after I ate half of it. You should ask the candy itself."