

ROU BAO BU CHI ROU

REMNANTS  
of FILTH

5

YUWU





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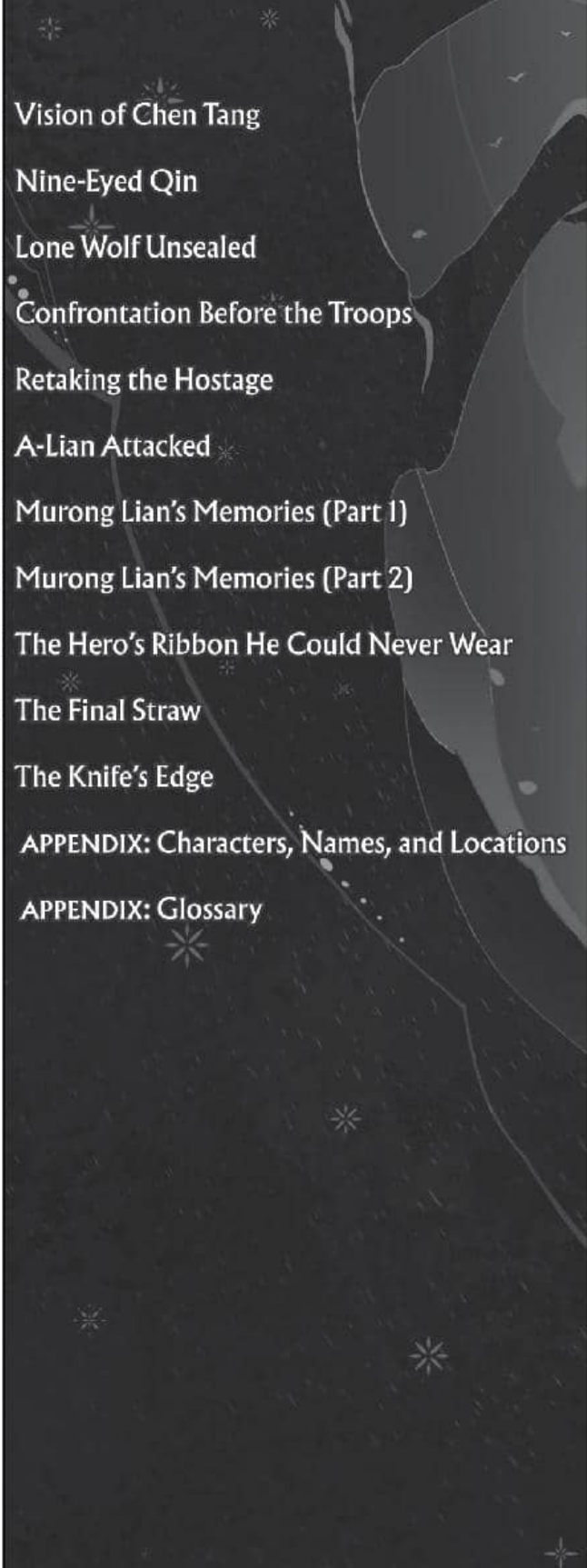
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## Chapter 131: I Love You

**M**O XI'S HEAD snapped up.

Gu Mang's lashes fluttered in the dim lamplight as he slowly opened his eyes, a deep oceanic blue. He stared blankly at Mo Xi. Not yet fully conscious, expression guided only by instinct, his gaunt face was relaxed and soft. He looked unbearably gentle, just the way Gu Mang-gege ought to look.

“My royal highness... Why are you crying...?”

His voice was a murmured sigh. But before Mo Xi had the chance to respond, Gu Mang's dreamlike expression disappeared as wakefulness returned. Mo Xi watched as each remnant emotion of his past—shock, fear, attachment, cruelty, guilt—rushed up like the tide, washing away the tenderness in his eyes.

Gu Mang sat up, yanking his hand from Mo Xi's palms, his true face hidden behind the mask of viciousness he had long grown used to wearing. “Mo Xi, are you out of your mind?! Who let you come to the Asura Room for me? Don't you know—”

Mo Xi's sudden embrace cut him off. The man's warm and sturdy arms wrapped securely around him, as if bringing him out of a frozen lake and into the longed-for warmth of spring.

His blue eyes widened. He was so shocked he forgot what he wanted to say. Mo Xi held him tightly, chin pressed to the top of Gu Mang's head, kissing and caressing his hair. "I already know everything."

At that single, simple sentence, Gu Mang's body tensed. He squirmed, trying to push Mo Xi away. But before he could put his weight into it, he felt a shudder through the man holding him. "Shixiong, don't say any more foolish words, or do any more foolish things," Mo Xi rasped.

Gu Mang was at a loss. All these years, he thought, he had disguised himself very well. He'd built up a hard outer shell so everyone would only see his decisive cruelty and brutal hostility. Yet he'd woken up to discover this mask had been shattered. Before him lay the person he wanted to protect more than anyone, eyes scarlet-rimmed, hand reaching toward his soft, helpless heart.

He refuted it on instinct. "Mo Xi—you only know the half of it. And what does my business have to do with you? I told you a long time ago that we're not the same kind of person. I'm really... I'm really..."

Mo Xi cupped a hand around the back of his head, his voice muddled and slightly nasal. "You're really not like that."

Gu Mang stared at him, speechless. It was as if a layer of ice stood between them with Mo Xi on the outside, trying to embrace Gu Mang trapped within. No matter how cold the dark ice was, Mo Xi would never back down. And so, little by little, the ice thawed. Little by little, it cracked.

"You really didn't want to kill or fight. You never wanted to hurt me. You didn't want to avenge yourself on anyone..."

Mo Xi's voice was low. Earlier he had cried while Gu Mang slept; he was no longer willing to shed tears now that Gu Mang was awake. Gu Mang had suffered enough. He didn't want to make this soft yet tenacious creature worry any more about him or hurt any more on his behalf.

"It's been eight years, Gu Mang. It must have hurt... I'm sorry. I was the one who didn't understand you."

In his arms, Gu Mang's trembling became more apparent with every word. At last, Gu Mang seemed to crumple under a great weight. He shuddered violently; Mo Xi could hear the low sobs trapped in his throat, could feel dampness at his chest.

"No... N-no..." Gu Mang frantically tried to shove him away. Mo Xi had only ever seen his Gu Mang-gege look brilliant and clever. This Gu-shixiong had been backed into a corner yet was still scrambling to lie just to push him away, just to protect him. He was so clumsy—clumsy to the point of stubbornness, clumsy to the point of pity. So clumsy Mo Xi's whole heart, his whole body, throbbed with pain.

Gu Mang didn't know what else he could make excuses for, what else he could offer up in sacrifice. He had always protected others; it was an instinct carved into his bones. Now, no longer able to do so, he was as helpless as a blinded dragon with its claws torn away. He could only repeat, over and over, "It's not like this... You don't understand..."

Mo Xi took hold of his hand, the rims of his eyes red. "Must you keep pushing me away?"

Gu Mang froze.



“It’s been so many years, Shixiong. But do you know what hurt me the most? It wasn’t that you stabbed me or left me. It was that you turned into someone I didn’t recognize at all... Do you know how miserable I was? You wanted to protect me, you didn’t want to implicate me. I know. But I told you long ago—in this world, I have no one dear to me, except for you. When you protected me, why didn’t you think what would be cruelest to me? Did you think I would fear to suffer alongside you, or the criticism of others? What I fear is you never returning to my side, Gu Mang—I’m afraid of losing you!”

Mo Xi closed his eyes. He still held back his tears, but his lashes were wet.

“All these years...I’ve always treated you sincerely. I used to hope my sincerity would be enough to win me yours in return. But after going through so much, it no longer matters if you love me, if you’re willing to be with me... I only ask...”

He stroked Gu Mang’s hair, lowering his lashes as he pressed a kiss to Gu Mang’s temple, forcing down the tremor in his voice. “I only ask that you give me the chance to protect you, to stay by your side. I just want to take care of you,” he said hoarsely. “Will you really not allow me the smallest glimpse of truth? Will you not let me share the burden you carry on your shoulders, even the slightest bit? Gu Mang...I’m one of your comrades and brothers-in-arms, too. Would you rather leave me out in the cold, make me live on through pain worse than death?”

He spoke so genuinely, with such passion, but Gu Mang only felt a terrible agony.

It had been eight years. From the day Gu Mang decided to become a spy, he had planned Mo Xi’s future. They were so young back then, unacquainted with the suffering of love. Gu Mang had naively thought that,

as long as he acted with decisive heartlessness, this young man would feel that loving him was something that hurt too much. If it hurt, Mo Xi would let go. Sooner or later.

Gu Mang had waited. All this time, he had waited. He'd pricked Mo Xi until his hands ran with blood, stabbed Mo Xi until his body was covered with scars, but still Mo Xi never gave up on him.

All these years, he'd hoped Mo Xi would put aside their past love, hoped he could live a quiet life, marry a gentle and virtuous wife, and sire a brood of lively children. Sooner or later, time would wash away the unbridled passion of their reckless youth, leaving only faint ink stains. Such were the considerations he had made on Mo Xi's behalf.

But Gu Mang had made one grave mistake. In this world, love and the lack of it could change, but one's heart would forever be the same. And Mo Xi had never been a careless person. On the day he decided to confess his feelings to Gu Mang, what he gave to him wasn't his love. It was his heart.

His...

Gu Mang suddenly realized something was wrong. Where he was pressed against Mo Xi's chest, he could feel that Mo Xi's spiritual energy flow was weak, his spiritual core almost shattered.

Once more, those scenes from the Asura Room flashed through his mind. Mo Xi's face had been terrifyingly pale when he rescued him. Could it be...

Gu Mang jerked his head up. "How did you learn the truth?"

Mo Xi didn't respond.

“Did you go to Bat Island again? Did you use the Time Mirror?”

As Mo Xi looked down into Gu Mang’s anxious face, into those uneasy and frightened blue eyes, a soft, sorrowful smile spread over his face. “Are you worried about me?” Before Gu Mang could answer, Mo Xi ducked to kiss his brow, as if terrified he might deny it. “I’m fine.”

But Gu Mang’s heart seemed to rend apart. A flood of guesses rushed into his mind like the tide, then retreated, leaving one clear answer in the sand. This time, Gu Mang didn’t ask. Tears streamed down his soft cheeks as he mumbled, “It was the jade scrolls...”

His long lashes fluttered closed. Gu Mang tried to hold on, to push down his emotions, to say something to clearly demarcate the chasm between them.

But...

It had been eight years. He had committed every cruelty between life and death, but nothing could stop Mo Xi from chasing after him, from walking along this little path filled with thorns. He had left behind obstacles and dangerous hindrances, but none had halted this youth’s dogged footsteps. His little shidi had still caught up to him. When he turned in the darkness, he found his beloved from eight years ago was no longer young. He was covered in dust, spattered in blood. The only thing that hadn’t changed were those bright, obstinate black eyes.

The lover he had relinquished ran toward him, overtook him, and stood in the thicket of brambles, panting as he said—*Shixiong, Gu Mang, I’ve come to find you. Let’s go home.*



That layer of ice shattered completely, bursting into gleaming motes of light. The man who had lain frozen and dormant beneath the ice was finally taken into his little shidi's arms.

Gu Mang could bear it no more. That bowstring strained to breaking for eight years finally snapped; he burst into sobs. "I'm sorry... I'm sorry..."

*I was the one who looked down on your affection and misread your stubborn, immovable heart. I was the one who made rash choices in your stead and didn't ask which path you were willing to walk.*

*I was the one who disrespected your wishes, who mistook what you cared about most, and imposed my plans on your life.*

*I was the one who deceived you all along...who didn't give you the chance to walk with me...*

*It's been eight years. I've injured you, harmed you, estranged you, stabbed you. I've disappointed you in so many ways, I even nearly killed you—*

*Oh, why didn't you turn back, my little dummy, my princess, my highness? Why did you still risk devastation to uncover the truth, and then rush to my side, covered in wounds? Why are you so, so silly?*

"Mo Xi, I'm sorry..."

The hand caressing Gu Mang's hair stilled. Misunderstanding Gu Mang's intent, Mo Xi said, "Don't worry, I know what you've chosen, and I know what you've had to face, endure, and sacrifice... You don't need to apologize to me. In truth, as I told you long ago—if you really don't love me

and don't want to be involved with me, I won't force it. As long as you come back..."

As he spoke, the rims of his eyes slowly reddened, his lips gently brushing Gu Mang's brow like the most devout prayer.

"As long as you're okay, as long as you let me stay by your side and give me a chance to share your burdens... Gu Mang, my dear shixiong, that would be enough for me."

At this point, he feared his embrace would make Gu Mang uncomfortable. He lowered his head and longingly pressed his jaw once more to Gu Mang's forehead, preparing to let go.

Strong arms suddenly wrapped around him. Gu Mang clutched at him like a beast separated from its pack finally returning, his throat already choked with sobs. This lost and wandering man, who had been alone too long, endured too much, and swallowed a secret in silence for eight years, at long last broke down weeping in his lover's arms. Pressing his forehead to Mo Xi's heart, he howled with grief, as if to shed all his heartache and suffering with these tears.

Gu Mang hugged Mo Xi tight around the waist, the slender ends of his eyes pitifully wet and red. Between sobs, he spoke the words that had festered in his heart all this time, the words that had nearly rotted to their core: "It hurt too much... Mo Xi... It really hurt too much..."

He clung to Mo Xi like a drowning man clinging to a piece of driftwood, despairing and exhausted. Mo Xi's heart clenched; he caressed Gu Mang's hair, murmuring in a low voice, "I know, I know..."

“I did everything alone... I had to do everything alone... All those years, I couldn’t say a word about how I really felt to the people around me. I killed the citizens and cultivators of my own nation, killed my comrades... It hurt so much... Mo Xi...”

“I know... I know...” Mo Xi’s voice was tearful.

“I thought I would go insane... Like there was a knife stabbing at me, every day and every night, every hour, every moment, but I had to say, *stab me harder, stab me more...*” Gu Mang trembled, closing his eyes in anguish. “I didn’t want to kill anyone... I wanted to come back to Chonghua... I wish Lu Zhanxing were still alive, I wish none of it had ever happened...”

“I know. Go ahead and say it—you’ll feel better once you say it. I’m here with you, I’ll stay by your side...”

But Gu Mang had stopped speaking; he stared ahead with blue eyes washed clear by tears. After a long while, he murmured, voice low, “I didn’t want to leave you either...”

“I—” Mo Xi had intended to continue comforting him, to keep saying *I know, I understand*, but this shocked him to stillness. For a long moment, neither of them broke the silence. There was only the pounding of their hearts: *Thump, thump, thump...* So urgent and fast. As if some truth that had been buried deep within for many years was straining to break out.

Gu Mang was an indomitable person, always emanating a courage that reassured others. But right now, he was timid, like someone who had long wallowed in poverty cautiously reaching out to take hold of a precious gift he thought he would never receive.