

# Spring in the Shabby Lane

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SPRING IN THE SHABBY LANE

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# Chapter 01

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On an early spring night, the streets were quiet and deserted, enveloped in darkness with no signs of light or pedestrians. Joseph Cooper carried his laptop and walked alone through this black void.

Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks.

Slowly, he turned around and cast a glance behind him.

The street remained empty, devoid of any presence. At the distant intersection, the traffic light turned green, and the flickering lights pierced through the cold mist. A gust of cold wind blew from an unknown direction, causing the maple leaves on the roadside to rustle and drift. One of them lightly brushed against Joseph's shoulder before descending to the ground in front of him.

Joseph glanced at his watch; it was now ten o'clock in the evening.

After a moment of contemplation, he silently turned back and continued walking. The fallen leaf on the ground was carelessly trampled, scattered into dust.

It had been a while since Joseph realized he was being followed.

His car was temporarily out of commission due to an engine problem. The distance between his workplace and home was not far, and the residential area was known for its safety. After careful consideration, he decided to walk to the office during the time his car was being repaired.

The surroundings near the lake were tranquil, with a newly constructed art gallery and maple trees planted around. The wind whispered through, creating a delicate rustling sound, with no other noises to be heard. This road ran adjacent to the backside of the art gallery and seemed somewhat secluded compared to the rest. In broad daylight, it appeared serene, but at night, the illumination was dim, engulfing the entire stretch of road in darkness.

The decision to purchase a house in this location was made by the older generations in Joseph's family, and they were satisfied with it, claiming it was a good choice. Joseph was accustomed to tranquility and had no objections.

Within his mind, there existed an extraordinary, acute intuition that could perceive anything deviating from the ordinary. One day, at a certain moment, he sensed the presence of a flickering shadow behind him, accompanied by faint, intermittent breathing.

Within a few steps, Joseph rapidly contemplated the possible scenarios and devised strategies for various contingencies. He even adjusted his body posture to prepare for potential close contact.

However, that gray shadow always maintained a certain distance, cautiously and clumsily trailing behind him. It neither drew closer nor dared to retreat.

This stalking continued until Joseph walked out of that street, where it reluctantly ceased. The intermittent breathing sound vanished completely.

Several consecutive days passed in the same manner.

On a night after finishing work, Joseph set aside some time to ponder the recent occurrence. He meticulously reviewed his interpersonal relationships, confirming that he had no prior conflicts with anyone. Therefore, he tentatively categorized the follower as a stranger.

Whenever Joseph dealt with a situation, he first assessed its severity before determining the appropriate course of action. Generally speaking, being repeatedly followed would undoubtedly cause distress and panic. After careful thought and evaluation, he ruled out the feasibility of private confrontation and concluded that the most efficient course of action would be to report it to the authorities.

With this in mind, he picked up the glass of water from his bedside table and took a sip, preparing to rest.

Suddenly, his phone vibrated with a buzz, displaying a message on the screen, forecasting snowfall for the next day.

The next day didn't start off well. It was the beginning of the year, and the office was swamped with tasks. Joseph Cooper silently worked at his desk all day, rarely taking a break.

People hurried back and forth between the office and the hallway, filling the air with the rustling sound of papers. However, Joseph's corner remained quiet—no one dared to disturb him. Nobody dared to disturb him throughout the entire year.

When his mind finally shifted away from work, he found himself on his way back home, taking the same old road. The forecast was accurate, and snowflakes gently started falling from the sky. The snowfall was not gentle, though. Carried by the wind, it grazed his eyes like gravel, bringing him back to a clearer state of mind. This spring had lost its spring-like appearance.

He recalled the thoughts from the previous night and reached into his pocket to retrieve his phone. However, at that moment, his hearing seemed unusually sharp in the cold. He caught a faint sound of footsteps on the snow behind him, concealed beneath the wind. Joseph came to a halt.

He put his phone back in his pocket and swiftly turned around, running towards the source of the sound. In the flurry of snowflakes and the dimness of the darkness, he finally caught sight of the elusive figure.

Without hesitation, he caught up and grabbed the person's arm. It was a thin arm, easily held in his grasp. The person's immediate reaction was not to flee but to desperately shield his face with the other hand. Unfortunately, the pale light

from the nearby 24-hour ATM illuminated his face with distinct clarity.

A man with a face as gaunt as his arm, panic etched across his features. Within a few glances, Joseph had already memorized his face. Holding on tightly, Joseph knew the man had no chance against him. After struggling for a while, the man despondently lowered his head.

There was a moment of silence before Joseph spoke, "Why were you following me?"

The man's shoulders began to tremble slightly.

Joseph asked again, "Who are you?"

The man continued to hang his head, offering no response.

It was evident that continuing this conversation would be futile.

Joseph quickly turned the interaction into a one-sided declaration, "I hope you understand that your actions may have violated the law and caused me...".

Amidst the sound of the wind and snow, his voice sounded particularly clear and calm. Joseph was tall, even taller than the man, which added a sense of superiority to his clear and calm voice. It was as if he were passing judgment, displaying an air of arrogance.

Before he could finish his sentence, the man, who had stopped struggling, suddenly resumed his desperate at-

tempts to break free. This struggle was particularly intense, as if he was trying to escape from some hideous and embarrassing state. While struggling, the man kept repeating in a low voice, "Please... I beg you..."

He appeared terrified.

Amidst the chaos, the man accidentally bumped into Joseph's ribs, causing him to instinctively release his grip. The man seized the opportunity to break free, running away without looking back, stumbling and appearing disheveled.

In the narrow and silent street, the sound of his broken and heavy footsteps echoed in the wind and snow. His receding figure looked incredibly frail

## Chapter 02

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The man didn't reappear for the next month. Joseph's car had been fixed a while ago, so he didn't have to walk home anymore. During this time, he rarely took the opportunity to review his interpersonal relationships of over twenty years. He never did things twice, so it was a rare occurrence.

His social circle was actually quite clean, mostly consisting of ordinary interactions and connections from his father's generation, so the connections were clear.

With his eyes closed, Joseph recalled the man's face from that night, a face not adept at hiding emotions. There was so much one could see just from his eyes. Average, anxious, cowardly, and...

Inept.

Joseph was certain that it was the first time he had seen this person.

There weren't many surveillance cameras on the road leading to the art gallery, and only a few were scattered at intersections. The man always moved forward cautiously, like an insect in the darkness, and his face was mostly unseen. Once he walked out of that road, he disappeared silently, like a drop of water merging into the sea.

If he were to report it now, on one hand, he hadn't suffered any substantial harm, so there were no grounds for a case. On the other hand, due to the lack of clues, even if an investigation were conducted, it would likely lead nowhere.

And...

Inept.

At first sight, he sensed the man's ineptitude. This kind of ineptitude made the man almost lose any threat, turning all caution and vigilance into a ridiculous fuss.

On his desk lay the freshly delivered documents, with the newly printed paper, smooth and straight, emitting a strong scent of ink. Joseph lightly tapped the paper with his index finger, his eyes devoid of any flicker, appearing indifferent.

Initially, he felt like he had the situation under control, and even now, he still believed so. This was merely an insignificant and inconsequential incident, an extra part of the plan that wasn't worth bothering about for an ordinary person.

Joseph turned to the next page of the documents, as if he had turned away from this matter and the man.

But he was wrong.

It was early March already, and the weather was chilly, the late winter cold settling in. Joseph was working late tonight, and when he left the office building, it was already a quarter past eleven, the outside streets clean and exceptionally quiet.

Then, he saw a figure flickering in the wind, about ten steps away.

That person was looking at him.

Joseph stood still for a moment, then began walking towards him. The man on the other side involuntarily took a few steps back, but eventually stopped, silently waiting until Joseph reached him.

It was the man who had been following him.

Unchanged cowardice, gaunt features, and ineptitude.

Joseph towered over him by a significant margin. He looked down at the man without saying a word, his posture imposing. The man stared at the buttons on Joseph's coat, and finally spoke: "Mr. Cooper..."

His voice was so soft, it was frightening, as if it had shattered in the wind but somehow managed to stick together.

"I know you, Mr. Cooper."

Joseph remained silent.

"I'm... I'm really glad to meet you..." The man struggled to speak, attempting to force a feeble smile.

But he gradually faltered. From his perspective, Joseph's cheeks on both sides were illuminated by the pale lights in the building, appearing utterly ruthless.

That merciless face finally bestowed upon him equally merciless words, "Why were you following me?"

The man desperately shook his hands, apologizing repeatedly, "I'm sorry... I'm sorry..."

"I... couldn't resist... I..." He whispered softly. In the night breeze, the man's face appeared pale while his ears turned red. He struggled to speak, as if he wanted to say something, but his voice trembled for a while, and he couldn't get the words out, "I... I just... wanted to see you."

The man lowered his head, shoulders hunched, and fell silent.

After a while, Joseph spoke, "Don't follow me anymore."

Though his tone was plain, for some reason, it always carried a sense of hurting someone's heart.

The man's body trembled violently, "I know I've disturbed you; I've always known." He murmured. He paced a few steps in place, seemingly wanting to approach but hesitating. In the end, he could only bow his head and bend his waist, assuming a submissive posture, "Please... I won't do anything... Don't call the police... I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

He begged as if pleading for mercy, speaking in a low and submissive tone, appearing flustered and incoherent at times. It seemed somewhat ridiculous at the moment.

Joseph didn't respond to any of it.

He averted his gaze, turned around, and walked away with steady steps, no different from his usual demeanor.

The night wind grew stronger. The man behind him gradually squatted down, his face immersed in shadow, making it impossible to discern his features. Every now and then, he would raise his head to glance at Joseph's retreating figure, his eyes filled with both longing and sadness.

The man was an unexpected interlude in Joseph's orderly life.

A jarring interlude.

Despite making it clear twice that he didn't approve of being followed, it seemed that his words had no effect. What was once a covert pursuit now became brazen once discovered.

Reporting to the police would only result in coordination at best, and the man would likely be detained for a few days. However, after being released, he might continue to harass Joseph—no, he might not even meet the conditions for detention. Joseph had heard of people like this before, but he never expected to encounter one himself.

The best approach to dealing with such occasional incidents was to ignore them. Ignoring didn't mean compromising; compromise indicated that fear had already taken hold. The stance of ignoring was one of superiority.

Nothing could alter your forward steps. Those who disrupted your life were the ones who had failed.

This was what his elders had taught him, and he deeply believed in it.

Joseph's judgment was correct. Although the man posed little threat, he proved to be quite persistent, more than Joseph had anticipated. Every evening, he could see the man waiting downstairs at the office.

Perhaps the man realized that Joseph wouldn't easily report him to the authorities, and even if he did, severe measures couldn't be taken. This audacity was a result of that realization.

One day, it was particularly late when the man saw Joseph coming out, and he seemed delighted. After hesitating for a few moments, he took a few slow steps forward and stopped at a suitable distance, whispering, "Are you... hungry?"

His voice was timid yet hopeful.

Joseph noticed that the man seemed to be holding something in his arms. He quickly realized that the man had brought food, intending to give it to him.

Why?

This sensation felt strange to him, and he became increasingly uncertain about the man's intentions.

"What do you want?" he asked, "Money." The man replied.

The color drained from the man's face upon hearing Joseph's question. He stood there, pale and clutching something in

his hands, before finally forcing an awkward smile, "I don't want anything... I don't want anything at all... truly."

Yet, the man continued to wait for Joseph every night.

Sometimes, he would still hold something cautiously in his arms, and other times he would stand alone. He would just stand there, never approaching, never speaking, simply watching him quietly.

Joseph never spared him a second glance and never paused for him.

Time flowed slowly, yet swiftly. Between the two of them, a peculiar connection gradually formed, its end unknown.

## Chapter 03

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When Joseph walked out of the bar, he glanced at his watch—it was 11:20 p.m. The street had already become empty, with few vehicles passing by.

The nearest subway station was about a ten-minute walk away. If he walked faster, he should be able to catch the last train at 11:40.

He closed his eyes and pinched his brow, trying to clear his mind in the chilly wind.

He had had a bit too much to drink.

The first quarter review had just been completed, and the company had signed a favorable contract with the government. It stated that they would celebrate with a dinner. When he received the invitation, he pondered for a moment and agreed. There was no reason to refuse, either from the perspective of social etiquette or practicality in life. Furthermore, as someone who had put the most effort into the project, his boss was determined to buy him a drink. It would be inappropriate to decline.

Outside of work, Joseph had very little interaction with the people in the company. Despite his outstanding abilities and high position, he spent most of his time buried in work and rarely engaged in excessive communication with others.

He was tall, close to six feet three, but his frame was slender and well-proportioned, so he didn't appear cumbersome or clumsy. However, the contours of his face were rather sharp, giving him a somewhat fierce look. It was precisely because of this that Joseph possessed an imposing presence, both in height and appearance. He never diminished this pressure for others' sake.

Conversations with him could only be conducted with difficulty, looking up at him, never receiving a considerate stoop to listen.

In truth, nobody had ever seen Joseph angry. He seemed emotionless, his face always the same, unchanging. This unpredictable temperament only made people timider and more apprehensive. The employees at the company could only maintain a respectful attitude on the surface and try to minimize their interactions with him.

So, at the celebratory dinner, Joseph sat alone in silence, eating his food and sipping some tea, appearing out of place.

After the meal, everyone enthusiastically suggested going to a well-known bar for further relaxation.

At this moment, the boss finally remembered Joseph, who had already consumed a fair amount of alcohol. With a slightly flushed face, he patted Joseph's shoulder, "Joseph, don't hold back. Enjoy yourself... At a time like this, you shouldn't be reserved. If you don't go, it's like disrespecting me."

Joseph was patted on the shoulder by his boss, and the scent of alcohol permeated his entire body. He glanced at his watch and nodded slightly, agreeing.

In the bar, his boss truly didn't hold back, pulling him to sit in the center of a booth, pouring drink after drink for him. Everyone was letting loose, their enthusiasm in full swing, creating a lively atmosphere.

Joseph tried to decline a few times, but of course, he was unsuccessful.

So, he had no choice but to accept the drinks, drinking them one after another. The bar was noisy, with blue and purple lights shining on the dance floor, casting a purple hue on his boss' flushed face. From a distance, he seemed like some kind of otherworldly creature, blending in with the others.

"Joseph... you've got quite the tolerance!" His boss handed him another drink, his hand trembling slightly, spilling most of it.

Joseph took the glass, raised it in a toast, and drank it all in one go.

After a few bottles, it was his boss who got drunk first.

Amidst the chaos, Joseph found a moment to visit the restroom. As he rinsed the alcohol stains off his hands with cold water, he realized that the alcohol had quite an aftereffect.

Continuing to stay here would be of no benefit to himself.

After taking a short break, he turned back to where he had been. The atmosphere was no longer as lively as before, with many people already drunk, sprawled on the couches in disarray. The stench of alcohol and vomit permeated the air, truly unseemly.

Picking up his coat, he bid his farewells and left.

The restaurant chosen by his boss was elegant and well-known, although it was situated in a somewhat remote location. The nearby bars were even more secluded. The entrance of the bar acted as a boundary, completely separating the liveliness within from the sparseness of the street outside.

Between the tranquility of this world, everything seemed submerged in water, frozen. The scent and flavor of alcohol wafted through the air more intensely, like small, bright flames greedily devouring his consciousness.

Joseph simply walked, as he always did. Neither fast nor slow.

He walked along the long road, entering the entrance of the subway station, descending down the stairs step by step, like a traveler with no obstacles, sailing smoothly.

Nevertheless, with each step, his brow furrowed tighter, like a bow being constantly stretched. Bowstrings had their limits; if stretched taut for too long, they would snap.

So, he stopped.

Joseph briskly turned into the restroom on the side of the corridor, walked up to the sink, and leaned on it with both

hands. He closed his eyes, pausing for a long time, before finally overcoming the discomfort brought on by the alcohol.

"Nothing should deviate you from your original path."

"Self-discipline and moderation are virtues."

"Do you understand, Joseph?" The old man took off his glasses and spoke in this manner. Underneath those lenses were eyes that were identical to his own.

When he opened his eyes, the remnants of the alcohol-induced haze still lingered.

He stood upright, turned around, and saw a person standing at the entrance.

The face was blurry, somewhat indistinct.

The person approached, gently holding his hand, "Mr. Cooper, are you okay... I saw you with your colleagues today... I..."

The voice was also indistinct.

His body felt heavy, clearly burdened. He had to use a handkerchief he found somewhere, dampened it with water, and gently wiped his face, displaying utmost caution and meticulousness.

Joseph stood there, unmoving.

As the person continued to wipe, it seemed like he was whispering something. However, the voice gradually faded, and the movements eventually ceased.

The man was slightly shorter, and he tilted his head up slightly. Within his line of sight, Joseph had his eyes closed, his brow furrowed deeply, and his temples bulging with veins. From this vantage point, he appeared even more terrifying.

With just a glance, he quickly lowered his head.

But after lowering his head, his gaze returned to the center of Joseph's legs, where his suit trousers were slightly bulging, clearly indicating an erection.

The man clenched and loosened his grip on his coat, repeating this action three times.

After a long time, he finally mustered the courage to reach out and lay his hand on the black fabric.

## Chapter 04

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At midnight, the subway station stood desolate in its remote location, devoid of any human presence within its vast expanse. In a corner of the public restroom, the intermittent moans served as the sole embellishment to this silent spring night.

The restroom walls were adorned with white tiles, which, due to the warmth of human flesh, gathered a misty fog.

The man was firmly pressed against the icy wall. His clothes had rolled up to his chest, and his wrinkled trousers bunched up unattractively around his ankles.

His face, chest, and hands were all pressed tightly against the wall. It was cold, so cold that the blood beneath his skin seemed to slowly evaporate. There was no focus in his eyes; they were hazy, as if staring into emptiness.

A pair of hands tightly grasped his waist, pulling his waist and buttocks outward, allowing some warmth to linger in his abdomen, protected from the chilling touch of the tiles.

The man was too thin, his pale skin clinging to a thin layer of flesh, meandering along the contours of his bones. Those curves were too barren, too emaciated. All in all, it was an undernourished, unappealing body.

To compensate for this flaw, he seemed to be desperately displaying his submissiveness and obedience, allowing the man behind him to derive more pleasure.

His body was being violated.

The scorching and massive member tore through the tight passage, penetrating swiftly, then slowly and thoroughly withdrawing before thrusting in again. This relentless cycle repeated without mercy.

His body was shriveled and dull, his intestinal walls dry and resistant, incapable of retaining or grasping.

The sexual organ didn't linger, penetrating deep and withdrawing, deep and withdrawing. Blood continuously seeped from the cracks of their union. It was akin to a sharp knife slowly cutting through the body. Due to the pain, his entire muscles involuntarily contracted.

The man felt immense pain, unlike anything he had ever experienced. Nevertheless, he still mustered a smile, shaking voice trembling as he said, "Don't stop... Don't stop..."

And of course, that sexual organ did not stop for a moment.

Time seemed indefinite, and at last, a thin layer of fluid mixed with blood secreted within the intestinal walls, facilitating smoother movements. The hands on his waist exerted even greater force, increasing the speed of thrusting. The man's body was jolted back and forth, with the pronounced shoulder blades vigorously swaying and rocking, singing a lullaby.

The sexual organ intensified its force, delving deeper. Gradually, instead of withdrawing after a short distance, it thrust further, as if attempting to bury itself in the man's abdomen, obliterating this vessel along its path. Due to his thinness, a fearsome bulge was distinctly visible in his lower abdomen, undulating against the flesh and skin.

The speed of thrusts became unbearable for the man. His eyes were completely clouded, no longer emitting faint moans. Now, he was unable to utter a single word, as if his entire being was on the brink of being swallowed by that sharp dagger within his body, pitiful indeed.

Finally, that sexual organ reached an unprecedented depth and paused, beginning a prolonged ejaculation.

A copious amount of viscous semen freely cascaded onto the man's intestinal walls, leaving him trembling and weak, emitting a scream of impending death.

His fingers curled up, tightly clutching the tiles, almost drawing blood.

"This is him..." The man thought, somewhat captivated, "This is his..."

His lovelorn and lowly heart found immense solace, to the point of experiencing a perverse sense of happiness. The body that had endured pain and suffering finally obtained the stimulation of pleasure. The limp sexual organ before him lifted its head slightly, dripping a few drops of fluid.

The hand on his waist let go.

The man collapsed to the ground, falling onto the filthy surface mixed with blood and semen. He was utterly exhausted, utterly disheveled, covered in filth.

Through his blurred vision, he saw the person behind him stand in place for a moment, adjusting his tie, before stepping over him and walking away.

Not once did he look back.

And he himself, at midnight in the subway station restroom, gasped for breath on the ground like a piece of trash.

## Chapter 05

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On Monday, Joseph arrived at the office punctually. He parked his car, picked up his bag, and entered the corporate building, waiting for the elevator. A few colleagues who happened to be passing by nodded at Joseph as a way of greeting, "Joseph." They acknowledged him briefly.

Once the elevator reached the top floor, Joseph proceeded directly to his office, working diligently until late in the evening. This was Joseph's usual routine. To others, he appeared as a rather uninteresting individual, lacking vitality and exhibiting a rigid, monotonous demeanor.

Many people felt a sense of apprehension upon meeting him for the first time. However, as time went by, they discovered that what was truly unsettling about Joseph was not his stern countenance, but rather his character beneath the icy exterior. He approached each day as a task and lived his life as a mission, devoid of personal preferences or aversions, focusing solely on what was reasonable and just.

At ten o'clock in the evening, Joseph left the building. Despite it being March, the cold winds were the only remnants of winter, with no more snowfall. There was no one outside the door. Joseph observed his surroundings quietly for a moment, then shifted his gaze and headed towards the parking lot. The air inside the underground garage was bitterly cold, and the lights lazily scattered throughout, flickering here and

there. Joseph's car was parked furthest inside, its light extinguished long ago under the frigid temperature, revealing a deep shade of blue-black on the ground.

Next to his car, there was a figure.

Joseph halted his steps.

As he noticed him, the figure slowly rose, hesitantly approaching him and flashing a smile: "Mr. Cooper..."

While speaking, the man tried to grab Joseph's sleeve. He wore worn-out clothes, and his wrists bore some bruises, remnants from that day.

"I... I'm not sick..." The man was thin, his voice barely audible, as if murmuring to himself, "Don't worry... It was all my fault that day..."

Joseph stood there silently, his face tinged with an iron-grey hue due to the dim, ashen lighting—cold and stern. Yet, he did not shy away.

Thus, the man managed to gently hook Joseph's cuff. His movements were cautious and timid, his fingers lightly grazing the fabric, fearing to provoke Joseph's anger.

A prolonged silence instilled a sense of dread, resembling a silent and perilous indulgence. The man took a deep breath, trembling as he continued, "If... if Mr. Cooper is willing... I can... I can do anything..."

Joseph brushed his hand aside.

Just like brushing off specks of dust from his clothes, seemingly indifferent and casually dismissive.

Unfortunately, it still wasn't a refusal.

The man's face turned ghastly pale, as if deeply embarrassed. They remained in this standoff for quite some time before the man shakily reached out his hand again. However, this time, it wasn't directed towards the sleeve; it was towards the trousers.

Joseph was much taller than the man, who bent down with lowered head, standing side by side, resembling a master and his servant. The servant cautiously unbuckled Joseph's belt, pulling it out little by little, pausing as if afraid that Joseph would abruptly stop him.

As the man unzipped the pants, he knelt down, closed his eyes, and whispered softly, "Please."

Please, don't say no

In stark contrast to these audacious actions, the man's oral skills were abysmal. It was as if he had never performed such acts before, oblivious to the art of concealing his teeth and unaware of the sensitive spots on the male genitalia.

Just taking Joseph's member into his mouth was enough to bring tears to his eyes. It took him a considerable amount of awkward and clumsy licking before the thick and long phallus swelled. Joseph stood in place, hands hanging at his sides, his gaze lowered towards the man on the ground. His expression remained calm, unaffected.

The man knelt on the ground, struggling to prop himself up, tilting his head back to swallow, tears streaming down his eyes. There was very little space in his mouth for the sexual organ to thrust, and the glans pressed against the soft flesh of his throat, eliciting painful grunts.

Afterward, he coughed repeatedly, choked by the semen, collapsing to the ground, huddled with his shoulders trembling. It seemed that even he didn't believe he had brought much pleasure to Joseph.

Trembling, he lifted his head to gaze at Joseph, his eyes filled with adoration. It was as if he were gazing upon countless deities, as if the next moment he would prostrate himself, offering reverence and worship, hoping for just a fleeting glance.

"...Shall we continue here?" the man asked softly.

"No," came the reply.

Upon being rejected, the man quickly lowered his head again, remaining silent.

It is difficult to ascertain how a particular sexual encounter begins in one's life. Apart from those few fortuitous encounters, many seem to be associated with a state of "tilting," from confusion to clarity, from passivity to initiative, from accident to consent. Once it involves sex, all boundaries become ambiguous.

"Do you want to continue?" Joseph adjusted his pants, taking a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe away the dust.

"What... what?" The man remained kneeling on the ground, only realizing after Joseph had nearly finished wiping.

"...Yes." He said, his eyes sparkling as he took a few steps forward, "I want... I want, Mr. Cooper."

Joseph neatly folded the handkerchief into a square and gently tossed it by the man's feet.

"Then let's continue."

Having said that, he got into his car and drove away.

## Chapter 06

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An unspoken understanding of their sexual relationship had formed between them.

The man had no idea what Joseph was thinking, nor did he understand why Joseph allowed him to get so close. But the man was incredibly happy—blissfully happy—as if a long-held dream had finally come true. He paid no heed to whether this dream was like a moon reflected in water or a flower in a mirror; he plunged headlong into it.

Every time he waited for Joseph, despite the cold wind, his face would blush slightly. When he spoke, his gaze would flicker, too timid to look up at the person opposite him.

Truly, it was an inappropriate spring passion for someone of his age.

The road that had once been followed remained as desolate as before, but it had acquired a different flavor. The large shadow beneath the maple tree had become the spot where the man performed oral sex on Joseph.

The man was truly clueless. After practicing several times, he showed no improvement, while Joseph remained silent, refusing to offer any guidance.

Kneeling on the hard ground, his head held high, the man tightly gripped his pants, his jaw moving up and down in

vague swallowing sounds. The maple tree seemed to soften, releasing a few leaves that gently fell between his knees and the pavement.

Beyond a low, latticed iron fence, the contours of the art museum hidden in darkness could be seen. The dim black-blue lines symbolized the world's deepest indifference.

In subsequent encounters, Joseph would push the man's head away before he had licked for long. The man huddled his shoulders, reaching out to adjust Joseph's pants, only to be pushed away.

"No need," Joseph said.

Joseph tidied his own clothes, took out a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his hands, and straightened himself up—he had been slightly leaning before—making himself even more unattainable.

The man remained kneeling, at a loss, repeatedly apologizing.

Except for the first time, Joseph never engaged in sexual activity with him outdoors.

On several occasions, after the man finished performing oral sex, he timidly suggested taking it further, but Joseph would furrow his brow slightly, clearly expressing his disapproval, although he never said anything.

It seemed as if he found it dirty.

So the man dared not bring it up again.

Eventually, they resorted to the compromise of a more commonplace location: a hotel.

It wasn't the kind of budget hotel favored by college students; in fact, it had an excellent location. Upon entering the gate, the spacious courtyard was adorned with greenery, and the hotel building, dark and imposing, seemed to create an isolated sanctuary within the city center, imbued with a serene tranquility.

Coming here to engage in sexual activity felt as though it would taint this tranquility.

Joseph always carried himself like a master, waiting for the man to attend to his every need.

After entering the room, the man stood nervously for a moment before closing his eyes and undressing. The weather in late March hadn't warmed significantly, and there was no heating in the room. The exposed skin shivered with a slight chill.

When he undressed to his lower half, the man couldn't help but open his eyes and see Joseph sitting in a chair, impeccably dressed, and looking down at his watch.

That expression made it seem as if everything was a waste of his time.

Finally, the man finished undressing, and he noticed Joseph's gaze lingering on him, scrutinizing without leaving a trace.

"Your socks," Joseph said.

Man panic-strickenly glanced at his ankles and realized that his socks were still on. He quickly bent down and removed them as well. Finally, Joseph approached, gripping his waist and half-dragging him towards the edge of the bed, pushing him down. The man buried his head in the sheets, surrounded by darkness, yet able to hear clearly the sound of a condom being unwrapped behind him.

The man, after all, wasn't like a woman. There was no chaotic scent about him, and as he claimed, he was clean, a seemingly honest person who dared not engage in promiscuity.

His skills in bed were also lacking.

Just as lacking as his oral skills.

But Joseph didn't need someone to vigorously moan and groan in bed. This time, just like in the subway station restroom, he entered the man directly, gripping his waist tightly.

It was tight. Yet, with enough force, the barriers formed by flesh and muscle gave way.

Truly cruel.

The man cried out, trembling all over. From the back, he appeared excessively thin.