



Solitude Ripples From The Past
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1984

Qui Nuoshui finished her breakfast with grim determination, though she suspected her stomach would soon rebel. Her husband read the paper and paid her no heed, so he asked no uncomfortable questions about diminished appetite.

As he did every morning, Qui Changbo looked from the newspaper to his watch and grunted in mock surprise. "Oh, dear, I must hurry or I will miss my train," he said. He folded the paper and tucked it under his arm, picked up his briefcase and hustled for the door. He made a slight detour to peck Nuoshui on the forehead and then was gone.

Nuoshui knew his bustling nature was hollow — her husband took a later train than he claimed. Every morning, he walked down a narrow alley, knocked on an anonymous door, and spent an hour playing The Game of the White Dove. She resented his unneeded lie most mornings — his gambling was of no concern as long as he continued to provide — but today she relaxed at seeing him leave.

Already her stomach gurgled, and she knew that even this morning's small meal would soon reappear.

She hurried to the bathroom and made it just in time.

Even after vomiting, her eyes streaming and stomach muscles strained, Nuoshui smiled. Soon she would be a mother.

The door to the doctor's exam room opened, and Changbo waved to his wife. "Nuoshui, my Peaceful Water, will you please join us?"

Nuoshui almost retorted, "Finally!", but instead she entered the room, her husband closing the door behind her. She wondered why the two men spoke for so long before admitting her.

Changbo's face was bland, and the doctor's back revealed nothing as he wrote on her chart. He turned on his chair, smiling as on previous visits. "Well then, how is our mother to be?"

His jovial attitude relaxed Nuoshui. "I feel quite excellent. The sickness has passed, and my appetite has grown as my body nourishes the baby. Only four months, and I shall be a mother!"

A small crease appeared between his eyes. "Well, I should be the judge of that, now shouldn't I?"

He raised Nuoshui's shirt to expose her belly, just starting to swell as her child grew. He breathed on his stethoscope before pressing it to her bare skin, which Nuoshui appreciated. He made little noises, like, "Hmm," and "Oh" as the examination progressed.

"How is she, doctor?" Her husband sounded nervous, and he glanced over his shoulder at the door.

"I have decided to perform a sonogram," he said.

Nuoshui had never seen the machine so recently introduced to China, but knew it allowed the doctor to see her child, even as it grew inside of her — wondrous technology from the Western devils.

Her friends had spoken of the amazing images, and Nuoshui longed to see her unborn child. The doctor squirted a yellowish jelly onto her stomach and pulled a wheeled machine to the bedside. He placed a molded, plastic device with an uncoiling wire against her stomach and flipped a switch on the main unit.

The sensation was odd but not unpleasant. Her skin tingled and felt both warmed by the machine and cooled by the gel. The screen was turned from her, and as the doctor examined it, he frowned.

Nuoshui felt a stab of fear in her chest, and her baby squirmed. She took her next breath with care.

"Is something wrong?" Her voice sounded weak and uncertain. She reached her hand out, toward Changbo, but instead of coming to comfort her, he went to the doctor and peered over his shoulder.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"Patience, my dear one," Changbo said. The doctor pointed to something on the screen, and Changbo nodded, his face also set in a frown. He exchanged a veiled look with the doctor, but he would not meet Nuoshui's eyes.

"Please, tell me!"

The doctor cleared his throat. "Nuoshui, I regret to inform you that the baby is not developing correctly."

She sobbed once, but caught the second in her throat. She must remain calm, especially if the baby was ill.

"The scan revealed..."

"I don't care," she said. "I will love my child no matter how imperfect." She pushed aside the probe and placed her hands over her belly, trying to protect the life she nurtured within, her fingers squishing in the gel.

Changbo moved to her side. "The doctor and I know what is best," he said. "Plus, we are only allowed one child. We owe it to ourselves to make sure he is perfect."

"Tell me what you know!"

He withdrew, startled. "I know as little as you." He spoke in the same tone as when he exclaimed his lateness for the train. Nuoshui started to sit up; she wanted to go home, now.

The doctor appeared, holding a syringe. "Nuoshui, I am saddened, for the baby you love is even now endangering your life." Before she could protest, he grasped her arm, inserted the needle, and depressed the plunger. "When you awaken, you and Changbo can try again."

Nuoshui tried to argue, but her body felt numb, her tongue thick and unwieldy. Changbo took her hand

"Do not worry, my Peaceful Waters. I have chosen what is best."

Though she felt nothing of her body, Nuoshui's soul cried in pain.

2010

Qui Xunbo staggered from the bar; he would have fallen if not for the strong arm of his best friend, Ah Hengkun.

“Easy, my brother, easy. We wouldn’t want you to fall and smash your pretty face, now would we? How would you find a wife then?” Hengkun said.

Xunbo roared with laughter. “Do not speak to me of the impossible. There are no women for us, only loneliness and the death of our ancestral names.” He broke into a sharp cough — the polluted air hurt his lungs after leaving the bar’s filtered environs.

Xunbo pulled a flask from his pocket and upended it. He coughed again, this time from the burning sensation as the last of the clear liquid gurgled down his throat, and hurled the empty flask into a litter-lined gutter. Other men were filing from the bar, singly and in small groups, but they paid Xunbo and Hengkun no heed. Instead, they exchanged lingering glances with one another.

Xunbo staggered to the curb and collapsed into a sitting position, though at times he would list in one direction or the other before catching himself. Hengkun sat next to him and spoke clearly — his muscular frame soaked up more alcohol.

“I might know where we can find a woman,” he said in a low voice. “We will have to share her, and it will cost money...”

Xunbo grabbed his shirt. “Tell me!” Never had he felt such a strong desire to lay with a woman. It felt as though his pants were going to rip from his body, revealing his desire to any who passed by.

“Follow me,” his friend said.

The prospect of female companionship cleared Xunbo’s head. He wondered what kind of woman his friend knew of. Most who showed their body for a price were infected with AIDS, or they had accomplices who would beat and rob you. But the legitimate prostitutes were expensive — on the spot STD testing kits weren’t cheap.

On the other hand, the idea of being with a woman was powerful enough to eliminate his concerns for money or safety.

As they moved through the nighttime streets of the Tiexi District, Xunbo noticed there were men moving about, to and from nightshifts or the after-hours bars. Some of the men moved in small groups that melted into the shadows of dark alleys. Xunbo pretended he didn’t know what they were doing.

No women were in sight — they were precious resources, guarded as carefully as priceless parchments.

“Must we fight in the Wife Wars to find love?” Xunbo knew men who had volunteered to fight in the jungles of Vietnam for the chance to find a woman. Few returned. “Must we kill for love and pleasure?”

“Shh. This is it. Stay here for a moment.”

Hengkun mounted the front steps of a three story building. From the outside, it looked like any other. But Xunbo could hear bursts of laughter and song leaking from within, and like flower scent in the breeze, the sweet music of women’s voices. His desire flared, and he charged up the stairs to where his friend spoke with an older man, arriving in time to see money changing hands.

“Why is it taking so long,” he demanded.

Hengkun held up a hand. “Worry not, my brother, for I have found what we need.”

“Women!” Xunbo realized he was shouting.

“Is this the friend you spoke of,” the man at the door said. He wrinkled his nose.

“Yes.” Hengkun looked at Xunbo. His mouth pinched into a grim line, and his eyes ordered Xunbo to relax. “Not to worry,” Hengkun said, “my friend won’t cause any problems.”

“Well, I guess it will be accepta ...”

Xunbo felt his stomach lurch, and before he could control it, he vomited all over the front stoop of the building. Russian vodka and Chinese beer mixed with his dinner, creating a foaming and reeking mess.

“Hey — hey! Get your friend out of here! Look at what he has done. Who is going to clean this up?” The man shoved Xunbo, who tripped and staggered down the steps. Hengkun shouted, and as he made a move for the man, two burly fellows emerged from the shadowy doorway. Both held authentic Japanese baseball bats.

Hengkun backed away with his hands held in front of him. Xunbo tried to call him a coward, but he couldn’t catch his breath. Hengkun hauled him to his feet and dragged him away from the building.

Xunbo heard the small man shouting as Hengkun dragged him away. “Don’t ever come back here, you two! I know who you are! There will be no women for you!”

A pressure in his rear and tingle of pleasure brought Xunbo back to his senses. It was dark, and someone stood close to him, breathing in his ear.

Xunbo tried to step away, but something bound his feet — he realized his pants were around his ankles, and strong hands at his waist. Glass crunched under his feet, and the smell of garbage filled his nose. Something scurried through the shadows.

“Relax, Xunbo, relax. You and I are the only ones here,” Hengkun whispered in his ear. “It will be like the other times. Just relax.”

Xunbo tried to resist, but Hengkun reached down and stroked him, sending another burst of pleasure into his brain. Xunbo gasped and bore down, which elicited a moan of pleasure from Hengkun. He knew he would hate himself after, but for the moment, he felt only his body’s desire.

This was not the first time Hengkun had lured him into a dark alley. Xunbo knew he could stop it. His father had insisted he take Ying Jow Pai as a child. Still, it was the only pleasure he could share.

Xunbo wished he were stronger, regretted the wasted nights drinking, and longed for a wife. But that was all vaporous, and for a moment, he had something solid.

Xunbo felt his friend’s breath on the back of his neck, warm and moist with alcohol. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine that Hengkun was a woman. It didn’t work, but it helped.

As the pressure inside mounted, thoughts were overwhelmed by tactile sensation. The feel of the moment mattered above all else. Hengkun put his face into Xunbo’s back and moaned softly, even as Xunbo shook with his own orgasm. For a second, it was more than just sex — it was unity.

Then Hengkun released him, pulled up his pants, and left without speaking. Xunbo peered from the alley, hoping that no one was on the street.

“Are you done in there?” The harsh whisper startled Xunbo, and he spun to find three men, drunk and weaving, looking at him with no shame on their faces.

“Yes,” Xunbo said. He turned and hurried away, the momentary pleasure gone and replaced by familiar, endless longing.

Xunbo returned to the bachelor’s tower with the sour taste of vomit in his mouth and a limp from being The Bitten Peach. He pressed his thumb against the front door, which opened the entrance cubicle, a tiny vestibule designed to prevent more than two people from easily entering the building together. Management discouraged visitors, and the tiny rooms made it impractical.

When the inner door opened, Xunbo's nose wrinkled at the smell. The building housed 3000 men in 10 stories, and no matter how efficient the air conditioning or cleaning crews, Xunbo still smelled stale socks, sweat and the loneliness of young men.

He opened the door to his ninth floor cubicle and squeezed inside. He sat on the bed and stretched his legs, feet pressed against the wallscreen, back against the dresser/pantry/fridge stack. The cramped lodgings were a stopgap attempt to house the hordes of single young men who streamed from the countryside and into the Shenyang Economic and Technological Development Area, looking for careers and wives.

He opened the tiny refrigerator and drank from a bottle of water, swishing it in his mouth to remove some of the bitter taste.

He desired the Meeting of the Dragon and the Unicorn, but at times his base urges overpowered him, and he accepted the limited pleasure of Dragon Preference, though sickly sweet and confusing.

He turned off the lights and hoped there were no dreams.

2015

Xunbo cursed when he saw the file appear on the wallscreen. He kicked it until his neighbor pounded on the wall, but the LEDpaint was undamaged, the results unchanged.

He resisted the urge to have a drink and forget what he had seen.

Still cursing, he copied the results and backed out of the secure server, filling his worm holes. Xunbo possessed a native talent for computer security systems. He earned a large salary once he curtailed his drinking and concentrated on work, but he remained stranded in the bachelor towers. Larger housing went to married couples, and the single men were welcome to fight over the rest.

He folded the bed into the wall and started doing pushups. He switched to sit-ups and then crunches until sweat covered his body and his heart pounded. The dating services recommended exercise and cold showers to help alleviate celibacy's stresses, along with self gratification.

He was still surprised by the last, but the government grew desperate as the male to female disparity increased. Millions of men in their twenties had no prospects for finding a mate. Even the Wife Wars ended when the Vietnamese proved their success against the USA a half century before was no fluke and the cost grew too great to bear.

He exited his room and went to the restroom, paying the extra money for a private shower stall. Xunbo was shocked by what happened in the public showers; he stayed out of dark alleys as well and avoided Hengkun.

The stinging water relaxed his body, but his mind continued to boil. He closed his eyes and saw the damning characters from his mother's file: therapeutic abortion.

Her data point had been one of thousands; a single drop of water that combined with others to drown Xunbo and his cohorts in a sea of men. He had performed a wide-ranging search of the medical term coupled with live birth, male. The correlation had been obvious: first the abortion, then the male birth.

A scan of the raw data had revealed his mother's name.

The metered shower cut off. Xunbo subducted his anger, but now it seethed beneath the surface. He returned to his room and the phone was ringing. Xunbo saw his mother's name, Qui Nuoshui, flashing on the screen once again. "Answer," he snapped.

"Xunbo, my darling. Oh, sorry, I caught you coming from the shower." His mother's image appeared on the wallscreen, smiling. Her

gray hair was bound in a small bun and she squinted, even though she wore glasses.

"Hello, revered mother," Xunbo said.

His mother's smile wavered for an instant. "Why have you not visited, son? Your father and I have missed you."

Xunbo snorted. "I've been busy, mother, working and trying to find a mate."

Her smile disappeared. "It is a shame that so many young men cannot find a wife," she said, and shook her head. "I do not understand why there are so few women."

Xunbo closed his eyes and ran a hand down his face, a failed attempt to contain his anger. "How dare you say that to me? I know what you did!"

"Xunbo, what are you talking about?"

"I know about your therapeutic abortion," he said.

His mother looked away from her wallscreen. "It is true. The first baby I made was not right, and your father decided to terminate it."

"Ha! The only thing wrong with the baby was her sex," Xunbo said. "The numbers do not lie. I have scanned hundreds of medical databases, and I promise, you are no different than thousands or even millions of women who had an abortion followed by the live birth of a son!"

His mother's eyes were wide. "Xunbo, what you have done is illegal. You could go to jail," she said, and her voice dropped to a whisper, "Or worse."

"If my life is worth nothing to me, then I risk nothing by losing it."

His mother started to cry, but he paid no heed. He was thinking that if this rumor were true, perhaps others were credible as well. Xunbo knew he would do anything now. He would even enjoy it. Killing another man was the best thing he could do, for himself and for his country.

"Xunbo, my beloved son," his mother said, her voice broken by sobs, "please, you can't believe your father and I would do this to you?"

"I know you did — and I will Pluck the Bamboo Leaves."

His mother wailed. She too listened to the rumors. "No, please, my only son..."

He interrupted her and spoke harshly. "Would you prefer that I kill your father and take you for myself?" He cut the connection before her horrified expression changed.

2017

Xunbo celebrated his 30th birthday by sparring with a classmate, Baikun, who stood in front of him, wagging a sword. The blade was embedded with millions of nanosensors that would soften the blade where it contacted skin, but it would still leave a welt, encouraging a vigilant defense.

Xunbo flexed his fingers and felt the blades on the back of his hands pop out; he flexed again and they were sheathed. His grip was that of the Eagle Claw, and his eyes never wavered from the prey.

Baikun lunged and Xunbo parried with his forearm. The stiffsuit protected his body with the exception of six spots — a patch on each thigh exposing the skin which covered the femoral artery, his heart so it could be stabbed, his throat for slitting, his eyes for gouging and the back of neck to expose the brain stem.

Soon it would be for real.

His classmate lunged again. Xunbo batted away the tip and slipped in close. He grabbed, but Baikun slipped away. He knew the danger of grappling with a Ying Jow Pai practitioner.

Xunbo feinted, and followed with an attack, exploding from his stance. He made contact, moved his hand up Baikun's chest without losing contact, and popped the blade into his classmate's neck.

Baikun grunted in pain even though the blades went soft.

"Match!" Their instructor came forward. "Xunbo, when you first arrived, I warned you that you would never be able to master the Eagle Claw in such a short time. While you have not achieved the highest levels, and never will, I judge you fit to Pluck the Bamboo Leaves."

Xunbo bowed to Baikun, then to his instructor.

"Now, go forth, and find yourself a wife."

That night, Xunbo replaced the sparring blades with carbon composites, their leading edges a single atom wide. He packed away his few possessions in a duffel bag and lay on his bed. When he left tomorrow, he would take the claws, the stiffsuit, and the bag, with 1 million US dollars and fresh underwear, and the room would be empty.

emptier, he amended.

Whatever the outcome, he had no plans to return.

Bright headlights blinded Xunbo for a moment, and he moved aside as the car crept through the dark, narrow street. He watched it pull around

the side of the warehouse and honk twice. A door rolled up, and Xunbo saw the backlit form of a man holding an old Kalashnikov.

He wondered if his wife was in the car, or one of the others that had already passed.

Knots of young men dotted the area, talking softly or standing in silence. Some smoked, the tips of their cigarettes flaring as they puffed nervously. Others did warm-ups, stretching their muscles, staying loose. The older men passed around flasks and eyed the talent pool.

Xunbo breathed deeply and looked up at the stars, dimmed by the industrial haze that plagued every city. A door in the front of the warehouse opened, spilling forth a soft, yellow light, and the men started moving forward.

Inside, Xunbo and the other competitors paid their entry fees, in most cases life savings, and were placed in individual cubicles. Xunbo pulled on his stiff suit and sat in the padded chair, waiting for his number to be called. Since he had paid 1 million black market dollars, he qualified for the top tier entry. He wouldn't have to fight his way through one of the brackets of 64 or 32. He would fight a one on one match.

Winner take all.

As such, he could expect an opponent who was successful, confident, and motivated — a dangerous combo for someone with training. Xunbo continued to breathe, deep controlled breaths that calmed his body and spirit.

Time passed. He could hear a whisper of cheering and yelling leak through the soundproofing. He ignored it.

Some time later the door opened, and a man wearing a headset beckoned to him, punching at his handheld computer.

"Qui Xunbo, follow me. Your fight draws near, but first there is a protocol."

Xunbo followed the official down a dim hallway, where the roar of the crowd made the ceiling tiles dance and rain dust. They entered a small room and Xunbo got his first look at his competitor, also flanked by an official.

He was taller than Xunbo, and he stared with dark eyes, trying to dominate Xunbo before the fight began. His muscles were bubbled, and Xunbo suspected he had been using a synthetic steroid to prepare for the battle.

One wall was a floor to ceiling mirror, which depolarized to become clear glass. On the other side stood a third official.

“Qui Xunbo and Jin Yin, I present the spoils of victory.” He stepped aside to reveal a young woman. She was pretty, as were all women, but Xunbo recognized she was blessed with a special beauty. He looked at her smooth face and glossy black hair and decided she was young — around half his 30. She was of average height but blessed with curves that made her look taller. Xunbo felt a burst of lust, an uncomfortable feeling for one in a stiff suit.

Xunbo and the girl made eye contact, and he watched her startled expression when she recognized his longing.

She smiled nervously and looked to her father, who stood beside her with one hand on her shoulder. He wore simple clothing, and Xunbo noticed his hand was chapped and calloused.

A farmer who came to the city for the purpose of selling his daughter. He would take home half the purse, or 800 thousand US dollars, while the winner would take home the girl and the other \$800,000. The remaining money was raked by the house for overhead and bribes, with organ sales producing the profit.

Disposing of bodies wasn't easy or cheap, and the flow was steady.

The girl's father spoke. “To whichever of you will become my son, I welcome you to my family.” He hesitated. “To the loser, may you realize your dreams in the next life.”

Xunbo was led from the room, but not before he cast one last look at his enemy. Yin looked calm and confident. Xunbo took a deep breath and popped his claws in and out. He relaxed, knowing it was the key to applying Ying Jow Pai.

A few minutes later, he was escorted into the fighting area. He continued to breathe deeply, soaring high above the screams, the curses, the encouragement, a single voice named Crowd that threatened to overwhelm him. Soaring on the wings of an eagle, Xunbo wielded his claws, ready to strike.

His opponent strode into the middle of the ring. He affected a strut that brought fresh screams from the crowd. An official waited until they stood a meter apart.

“When the gates close and the horn sounds, the fight will commence. It will continue until one of your stiff suits sounds the Bamboo Chimes. The gates will open and the winner will be eligible for medical treatment, with all related costs deducted from the winner's purse,” the official said. He spoke by rote, and Xunbo wondered, how many young men had he watched spill their blood?

“Bow to one another,” the official ordered. He and his opponent did so. Their eyes met, and Xunbo saw flat blackness.

The horn sounded and his opponent unsheathed a long dagger. Xunbo took a deep breath. One last hurdle, one final humiliation — it would take bloodshed to achieve his desires.

Death caused by his father’s selfishness, a pattern that repeated itself millions of times over, whether in the jungles or steppes of foreign lands, or the alleys of major cities, or the deathrings in anonymous warehouses. None of those men did anything to deserve it. Their society hadn’t forced them to risk everything for the most basic of desires — procreation. Their parents had.

Xunbo looked more closely at his wary opponent. He wondered at the grip his opponent used — never in his training had he’d seen the odd grip. Yin Jin — silver and gold?

Xunbo fainted forward, and his opponent danced backwards, skittish as cat during the annual Lunar New Year’s fireworks display. He almost tripped over his own feet, and Xunbo wanted to laugh aloud. Yin Jin — a rich kid.

The idiot didn’t know how to fight! He might be successful in his father’s office, but that meant nothing here. Still, he could be faking, and even an amateur could get lucky.

The crowd screamed for them to engage. Xunbo circled to his left, keeping his strongest arm and leg between himself and his opponent. It was like Hengkun in the alley — Yin would be used to dominating people.

Xunbo made eye contact, and as predicted, his opponent stared him down with unwavering, unblinking patience. Xunbo forced his body to relax from its fighting stance, drooped his shoulder and lowered his head several inches. He would make his enemy believe he was subservient.

The man moved warily forward, and now Xunbo shied backwards. He noticed his opponent switch his grip on the knife to a proper one, and puff out his chest.

His attack was clumsy though, and Xunbo parried it away. He watched the man’s eyes go wide, and before he could react, Xunbo slid in close, their stiff suits pressed against one another. The Crowd’s screams rose.

Xunbo snaked out his left arm and caught his opponent’s knife hand at the wrist. The man’s breath became hoarse, a harsh panting Xunbo felt with his exposed eyelashes. He smelled of sweat and endorphins, fear and guilt. For a flash, Xunbo desired him.

“No!” With his right hand, he punched at his opponent’s exposed chest, popping the blades with a flick of his wrist.

They buried themselves in his enemy’s chest, and Xunbo felt the warmth of the blood through his stiff suit. The man sighed and went slack, and Xunbo heard the Bamboo Chimes tinkle with death’s wind.

Xunbo pushed the body away and watched it slump to the ground, sickened by what he’d done. For his wife, though, he would gladly do it a thousand times more.

2019

Xunbo greeted the doctor with a sense of preordainment. The moment was fated, his actions forgone, but the impetus still surprised him. He hadn't expected to act as his wife's agent.

He still felt confused as to her logic, but her arguments had been convincing.

"Doctor, I want to select the sex of my child."

"Don't you know that is illegal," the doctor said. He frowned and eyed the closed door. "For good reason. It has caused many problems."

Xunbo knew. "This is not about selfishness. How much?"

"Mr. Qui, I assure you, it isn't about..."

"How much," Xunbo said through clenched teeth.

"Sir, the laws..."

Xunbo reached out and put a hand on the doctor's arm. He squeezed with the Eagle's Claw until the doctor quieted. "I will have a daughter. Name your price."

The doctor admitted to a figure. Xunbo raised an eyebrow.

"Mr. Qui, by combining your gametes in the laboratory, we are able to determine the sex of every embryo created. It is simple, straightforward lab work, though it is costly. Plus, there are ... additional operating expenses. Still, that price is a guarantee."

Xunbo shrugged and piled the bundles of black market US dollars onto the exam table. He had brought twice the amount and would have gladly turned it all over — and the thought that struck him was like lightning, or his wife's smell, like Hengkun's touch and Yin Jin's dying gasp — overwhelming, unavoidable, and true.

Xunbo pulled the rest of the money from his pockets and set it down. Seen together, it made an impressive pile. Xunbo watched the doctor's eye widen in delight, and his hand reached forward to collect the money.

"One moment," Xunbo said. "Twice the amount, twice the children. Doctor, my wife will have twins — a boy and a girl."

The doctor stared at him for a moment, processing Xunbo's words, and a frown started to crease his brow. Xunbo pulled out his top-of-the-line pocket computer, removed the memory stick with all his personal information, and set it on top of the money.

The doctor's frown evaporated like morning mist in slanting rays of sunlight.

The doctor stashed the money in a biowaste container no one was likely to investigate, pocketed the computer, and nodded to Xunbo. "Call your wife in and we will begin."

"Very well, but Doctor..."

"Yes, what is it?"

"The second child — that will remain our secret."

"Your wife... the twin taxes..."

"My problems," Xunbo said.

The doctor shrugged his surrender and glanced at his hidden stash. Xunbo went to call his wife from the waiting room.

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