

All the Feels

Lien Kui had warned me. ‘Wear a mask when you go to Mr Jiǎng’s.’

Did I listen? *Pfft*. No.

I’ve been to the Chinese herbalist inside Atria loads of times. The smell doesn’t bother me.

The stench in Mr Jiǎng’s shop—a blend of durian fruit, singed hair, and Satan’s rubbish bin—overwhelms my senses the moment I enter. I bury my nose and mouth into the crook of my elbow and ring the bell on the counter.

Mr Jiǎng appears from behind beaded curtains. ‘Can I help you?’

I lower my arm. ‘Yes. I haven’t felt right lately. I’ve seen my GP; had some tests done. There’s nothing *medically* wrong.’

He nods. ‘I see. Symptoms?’

‘I’m lethargic all day even when I’ve slept eight hours. My brain is a constant fog. I’m irritable, forgetful, tearful. I have no motivation.’

‘May I ask your age?’

‘Twenty six.’

‘Maybe....’ He sweeps his arm over his middle. ‘Pregnant?’

I shake my head. ‘I’m self-partnered.’

His eyes narrow.

‘Single.’ I sigh. ‘I’m desperate, Mr Jiǎng. This has gone on for too long.’

‘I have just the thing.’ With that, he shuffles through the beaded curtains and returns a moment later holding two small, corked bottles. He slides them across the counter.

‘Special potion for brain stimulation. Schisandra, Holy basil, walnut....’

‘Is it *legal*?’ I ask, picking one up.

He makes a face. 'Of course it's legal. I'm a doctor.'

'Will this definitely help?'

'Yes, help,' he says. 'Take two. One today, one in nine days. Do you understand?'

'Yes.'

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The potion smells like piss and tastes just as grim, but I empty the first bottle in one go.

My mood lifts in an instant. The mind fog clears. My pulse quickens, my heart flutters, butterflies take flight in my stomach. I glimpse my reflection in Mr Jiǎng's mirror. My eyes sparkle, my skin glows. When I step outside into the warm June sunshine, I notice a spring in my step, like I'm floating on air. I greet passersby with spontaneous smiles and hum show tunes for no reason. I have an uncontrollable urge to shout, 'I'm queen of the world!' from the highest rooftops.

This sensation... Why, it's **almost like being in love!**

I reach into my bag for the second bottle. Mr Jiǎng said take two. I swig from it and my mood lifts some more. All the good feelings intensify. And for the next nine days, I'm more productive than I've ever been. I go out with friends and feast on delicious meals. Flirt with handsome men. Go with the flow. Enjoy the moment and live my best life.

On the tenth day, I wake up feeling empty and alone. Nausea churns my stomach. My chest aches. Tears come out of nowhere.

I ring Mr Jiǎng.

'Drink the second bottle,' he says.

'But you said take two. I've drunk the second bottle already.'

'I see. You didn't listen. What you're feeling is heartache, and only time can heal a broken heart.'