

COP CATCHER

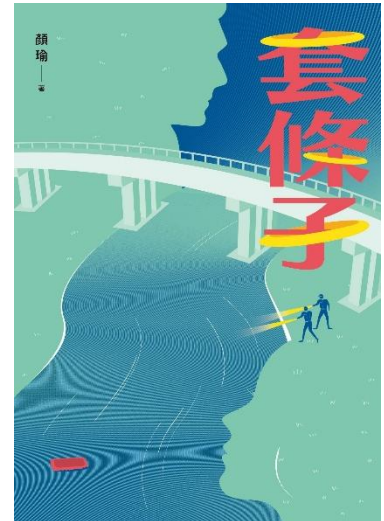
套條子

While working on a stolen car case, a female cop and her half-brother are transported twenty years back in time where they assist their model police officer father on a gang war case. As the investigation deepens, they discover that the killer they seek might be one of their own.

Eager to make her mark and break the stereotypes surrounding women cops, officer Yang Yu-ting sets out to crack a stolen vehicle case with trainee Chou Ming-hsien in tow. Unbeknownst to others at the department, the two are actually half-siblings – their deceased father was also a police officer, the renowned recipient of a national Exemplar Medal for meritorious service. While investigating the stolen vehicle case, the siblings are accidentally transported back in time to assist their father on a gang war case that involved over thirty killings. When they return to the present, they discover their stolen vehicle now hides an important clue to solving the twenty-year-old case. It turns out the police are not only implicated in the three-way gang conflict – the murderer was actually an undercover cop!

As the lines between good and evil blur, an internal power struggle at the police department raises the stakes, forcing everyone to choose ideological sides, and calling into question the trust at the foundation of the police force. None of these developments can be separated from the siblings' paternal legacy; once seen as a deadbeat dad who cast off his wife and children, their father turns out to be a man of principle who had his reasons for keeping his distance. As the truth gradually comes into focus, all of their assumptions will be challenged, from what it means to serve as a police officer to their personal definitions of justice.

Author Yen Yu makes use of his own experiences as a police officer to lend realism to a police novel that challenges the conventional divisions between good guys and bad guys. The sci-fi element of time travel is seamlessly woven into the plot, establishing a link between cases



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separated by two decades while also highlighting thematic questions relating to loyalty, justice, and personal gain.

Yen Yu 顏瑜

A native of Changhua County, Yen Yu is a graduate of Taiwan Police College, a former police officer, and a member of the Crime Writers of Taiwan. Proficient at incorporating social issues into his writing, his works span a range of genres, from crime to romance, sci-fi and fantasy to comedy, though his police novels remain his most representative works. In 2022, he was awarded the Mirror Fiction Million Dollar Award. A number of his works have already sold rights for television and film adaptations.

COP CATCHER

By Yen Yu

Translated by Eunice Shek

Chapter One

“Be honest with me – how many vehicles have you stolen?” asked Chou Ming-hsien as they headed back to the main road. He was riding an unregistered, dubiously acquired scooter. The scooter had both a weak engine and a flat tire, jolting him up and down with every bump in the road as if he were riding a camel. His back was killing him. “This isn’t your first time, is it?”

“This *is* the first time, and we’re *not* stealing it.” Yang Yu-ting emphasized, rolling her eyes. “This scooter doesn’t belong to that police officer; it belongs to a civilian. What does it matter if we’re the ones to return it instead of him?”

“Okay, sure, why don’t you go ask him if it’s the same or not,” Chou Ming-hsien said tartly. “He’ll definitely thank you for solving the case and taking credit for his hard work.”

“I’m warning you – don’t you dare breathe a word of any of this when we get back to the station. Just say we found it by the side of the road.”

“You mean the police station? We’re taking this thing all the way back there?” asked Chou Ming-hsien, unfamiliar with standard police procedures.

“Of course. Unregistered vehicles must be transported to the station.”

“And then what? Who taught you these sus methods? You’re just a rookie; how would you know this stuff?” Chou Ming-hsien asked suspiciously. Even a low-grade hooligan like himself balked at the thought of stealing an unregistered vehicle, to say nothing of his older sister, the cop. “Is this because of Dad?” he asked bluntly.

“No.”

“It’s definitely because of him.” Chou Ming-hsien spoke with certainty.

Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien’s father had also been a cop, and not a typical cop at that. He had been a renowned police officer who had been awarded the national Exemplar Medal, and had solved countless major criminal cases. He was called Yen Tsung-min, Clever Yen; every cop knew his name, because he used unique methods to catch criminals. He thought outside of the box, and was absolutely fearless, even daring to go after corrupt public prosecutors. Thus, he was held in high esteem.

But Yen Tsung-min had passed away almost seven years ago now. Even upon his death, he had never been promoted, remaining a basic beat cop from beginning to end. He also secretly left behind two children: Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien.

“Secretly left behind’, my foot. He didn’t stash us in a corner somewhere. We’re the products of his affairs,” Chou Ming-hsien would say. Whenever his older sister reminisced about

their father, he couldn't hold back a rebuttal: "What's there to respect about a cheating scumbag dad like him?"

Half-siblings with different mothers, Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien were both "Renowned" Police Officer Yen Tsung-min's illegitimate children, born out of wedlock. Neither of them had ever been officially acknowledged, so both of their families were single-parent homes. Before Chou Ming-hsien began elementary school, he saw his father twice a year at most; afterward, that number dwindled. As a result, he felt almost nothing toward his father.

Yang Yu-ting's situation had been about the same. Neither family was Yen Tsung-min's legal family, so although they knew of the other's existence, the two mothers rarely contacted each other. From Chou Ming-hsien's perspective, he and his mother only had each other for survival, so renowned police officer or not, to him it was all a pile of dog crap; he loathed this absent playboy father.

It was only after Yen Tsung-min died that the two families' circumstances took a turn for the better: their mothers – two women whose fates had been filled with trouble and misfortune – began to connect. It was only then that Yang Yu-ting and Chou Ming-hsien met. Chou Ming-hsien recalled that he'd been in ninth grade when he had been taken out of school to attend his father's funeral. During the ceremony, he and Yang Yu-ting had surreptitiously glanced at each other; from then on, it was as if some invisible wall had come down and they saw each other frequently.

Chou Ming-hsien's hatred of his father also gradually diminished. His father was already gone, after all, and the man did have a bit of a conscience in the end, leaving a few million yuan to the two families. For Chou Ming-hsien, this was an unexpected windfall – his father's legacy falling into their hands was like winning the lottery.

It wasn't just money, either; many of their late father's belongings had also been left to the "mistresses". Among these belongings were a number of journals about the cases he had solved, as well as some outdated official documents. Chou Ming-hsien had seen these things at his sister's house, and he felt that her behavior today had something to do with their father – even her decision to become a police officer was because of him.

"Don't study his dubious methods," Chou Ming-hsien said coldly. He thought he understood everything now: his sister had surely read their father's crime-solving journals – that must have been how she learned underhanded tactics like stealing an unregistered vehicle out from under another cop's nose. "They'll eventually come back and bite you in the ass."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Yang Yu-ting played dumb.

"You're all so weird. As soon as Dad died, everyone changed their tune about him. Ridiculous." Chou Ming-hsien snorted.

He wasn't wrong. It seemed to him that as soon as his father died, it was as if everyone forgave the man. His sister had unexpectedly become a cop, and when Chou Ming-hsien's duties were randomly designated for his mandatory military service, to his shock and dismay, he was assigned to the police substitute service. It was simply bad karma!

"Stop babbling and take the scooter to the underground storage area," said Yang Yu-ting, unwittingly releasing the unregistered scooter's accelerator and causing the scooter to lose speed.

They had arrived at their destination: Bridgeside Police Station.

The siblings currently served at Bridgeside under the jurisdiction of Xinzhuang Precinct, New Taipei City Police Department. It was situated on a river embankment beneath the bridge that supported the largest road connecting Xinzhuang and Banqiao, hence its name.

Yang Yu-ting had been stationed here for over a year already, while Chou Ming-hsien had been posted here for only two months. They both kept a very low profile: no one knew that Yen Tsung-min's two children, who had taken their mothers' surnames, were currently working together in Xinzhuang Precinct.

"Yu-ting, you actually found an unregistered vehicle?" At that moment, a portly male cop walked out of the station entrance. He spoke loudly, attracting the attention of the other male officers, who all ran outside.

"*Wooooow*, you really did find an unregistered scooter. Where was it?" someone else asked.

"It's no big deal. We found it while patrolling the river embankment." Yang Yu-ting scratched her head sheepishly.

"Not bad, sweetheart." Even the Deputy Chief of Police had hurried outside. He adjusted his glasses as he sized up the scooter, then rebuked the others: "Look at you all! Even this little lady here found an unregistered scooter – what are the rest of you lazing around for?!"

"Yu-ting really is a star, huh."

"This month is crackdown month. Each of you must bring in at least one vehicle. Miss Rookie here has already met her quota. The rest of you had better do the same," the Deputy Chief warned again.

"Yu-ting, show us where to look!"

"Yeah, show us!" The male officers began to jeer.

Embarrassed, Yang Yu-ting smiled mildly, smoothed her bangs, and lowered her head. Only Chou Ming-hsien remained seated on the scooter, chin resting on his hand as he coldly observed the scene before him. It was as if he didn't exist; as everyone praised the discovery of the scooter, their eyes beheld only Yang Yu-ting.

"That hypocrisy was *rank* as hell," Chou Ming-hsien said after the crowd dispersed.

"What do you mean, 'that hypocrisy was rank'?" Still buoyed by everyone's praise, it took a moment for Yang Yu-ting to process her brother's reaction.

"Are you really dumb enough to fall for their flattery? Ugh, *yawn*. Those pungent pigs only like your face; they couldn't care less about your actual abilities."

"You're just jealous. And anyway, I *did* find that scooter."

"The biggest hypocrisy is that you clearly know how fake they are. They just like to sit on their asses and watch female cops do the actual work, but you still intentionally play right into their hands. Otherwise, would you have worked so hard to find that scooter?"

Yang Yu-ting's face fell. "Anything men can do, women can do too, okay?"

Chou Ming-hsien shot back, "But when male cops find unregistered vehicles, will they receive the same treatment? You heard how the Deputy Chief spoke just now: 'Even this little lady

here found an unregistered scooter, tee-hee!' It's like the standard for female cops is lower. So you reek of hypocrisy *and* so-called 'feminism'."

"What B.S. are you spouting now?" Yang Yu-ting's mood soured as she strode over to glare at Chou Ming-hsien. "I *found* that scooter. It was *me!*" She slapped her chest for emphasis. "I just want to prove that policewomen are not inferior to policemen!"

"You're finally 'fessing up, huh? So what you're doing was never about job performance, you just want to prove that feminists are right."

"What's 'feminism' got to do with this? You gross straight guys just spout that word to cover up the sad fact that you can't get a girlfriend."

"Hey! Don't try to change the subject. I can get tons of girlfriends." Chou Ming-hsien fixed his gaze on his sister, smiled, and spoke bluntly, landing the fatal, finishing blow: "You shouldn't have used Dad's secret techniques. If you'd had the guts to rely on your own capabilities to get that scooter, I would have believed you. Do you know what 'fake feminism' is? It's when you find an unregistered vehicle and show it off at the door, eager for all the world to know. That's not impressive, that's just obsequious crowd-pleasing. Everyone still thinks you're just a pretty face."

Chou Ming-hsien's words left Yang Yu-ting speechless with rage. She could only stare numbly at him as her brother pushed the scooter into the underground storage area, then leisurely walked away, vanishing into the station.

Her brother had ripped the rose-colored glasses from her face, flooding Yang Yu-ting's mind with the reality of the outside world, a truth that Yang Yu-ting did not want to face.

Serious gender discrimination existed within the police force. This discrimination was not actually called "discrimination", but was instead made up of deeply ingrained, seemingly reasonable stereotypes: When a criminal case occurred, the commanding officer would invariably dispatch a male officer, not a female one, because female officers, as women, were inherently small and weak; they couldn't chase down thieves or win a fight against a criminal suspect. Even the grannies at the markets knew to find a male officer to report a crime – men could be counted on to get the job done, female officers needn't bother.

The jobs that female cops were allowed to do were extremely limited. Female officers were best suited for clerical work: preparing official documents, taking notes, modeling for PSA posters. If a fight broke out within a precinct's jurisdiction, the female officers should under no circumstances enter the fray – what if they got injured? Female officers were also not allowed to participate in high-speed car chases; it was best if the women remained at the station to await orders, and obediently answer the telephone.

Such was the fate of female cops. Although they were technically police officers, after receiving an official posting, there were very few paths open to them; if they weren't office clerks, they joined the Women's and Children's Protection Division. You never saw a policewoman with a submachine gun, nor did you ever see a policewoman join the Criminal Investigation Division. Such was the reality of being a female cop, a rare and special existence within the police world.

Yang Yu-ting had been a cop for over a year; naturally, she was well-aware of this fact. The Chief of Police had expressed concern for her many times, asking if she wouldn't rather be an

office clerk instead of going out on late night patrols; after all, wasn't it dangerous? But Yang Yu-ting had refused every time.

Although this "protectionism" wasn't exactly discrimination, it still made Yang Yu-ting very uncomfortable – for one particular reason: her father had been a renowned police officer. She wouldn't dare say that she wanted to become someone like her father, but at the very least, she wanted to be worthy of his respect.

Chou Ming-hsien had been right about many things. Tonight's bizarre "unregistered scooter heist" was indeed taken from her father's playbook. Yang Yu-ting had squirreled away many of her father's belongings, including all of his crime-solving journals and official case photographs; she kept boxes upon boxes of them in her room. Since becoming a police officer, she hadn't once tidied them away.

In the past, her father had arrested a public prosecutor, hunted down a drug cartel, and even apprehended a superior officer and sent him to prison. Yen Tsung-min had been a legend, and many traces of his words and deeds could be found amidst his belongings.

Her father had also once stolen an unregistered vehicle. In his journal, he had amusingly described it thus: *"I had my junior imitate a dog barking across the way, and succeeded in capturing the target's attention. I then sailed away on the motorbike."*

All of his belongings were equally as interesting. It was only after Yang Yu-ting became a cop that she realized the rabbit hole she'd fallen into – she had developed an infinite curiosity about her father. She might have chosen to become a cop due to her mother's encouragement, and because it was a lucrative career to support her family, but later, the more she went through her father's belongings, the more they fascinated her.

All this time she had been working herself to the bone, striving to be like everyone else, to prove herself equal to the other police officers, because her father, perhaps inadvertently, had often revealed his impatience with female cops. Nowhere in his case notes was there any record of him cooperating with female officers; he viewed female cops as troublesome burdens and never permitted them to be involved in a case.

Yang Yu-ting was deeply bothered by this point, and tonight, her brother had exposed the truth: that everything she had fought for ultimately came to nothing. Everyone still only considered her a "little lady" instead of a proper police officer. By working so hard to be the first to locate an unregistered vehicle, she had only made herself more laughable. At least it seemed that way based on what the others were saying. They wanted to take her out for drinks after work, and hold a banquet to "celebrate her achievement".

Hmph. Holding a celebratory banquet just for an unregistered scooter? Yang Yu-ting knew exactly what those guys were planning. There was no way she'd ever enjoy the true equality she'd fought for. She would never be able to wipe away her identity as a female cop. The only one who didn't view her through a distorted lens was the very person who scolded her about "fake feminism" – her younger brother.

"I heard Yu-ting just found an unregistered vehicle?" Her ears picked up an ominous voice. The Chief of Police had unexpectedly descended from the second floor. It was already late, past

one o'clock in the morning. Two drunks could have been hitting each other with bottles of alcohol at the station entrance, and the Chief still would not have come downstairs. With no other possibilities present, it seemed that Yang Yu-ting herself was the reason for the Chief's visit.

The Bridgeside Station Chief of Police was in his fifties, and was considered an honest, sincere man who treated his subordinates well. However, his health wasn't good and he didn't get around well. After some warning signs popped up during his most recent health check, he decided to retire at the end of the year with no regrets.

"Even Yu-ting was able to find an unregistered vehicle." Wide-eyed, his cheeks ruddy and plump as he drew breath to speak, the Chief's views were identical to the Deputy Chief's. His words rendered Yang Yu-ting's whole body taut with nerves. "So why haven't the rest of you found anything yet? You can't do better than a woman?"

By the time he finished speaking, Yang Yu-ting was about to snap. Could they please just stop this ridiculous comparison?!

"Come, everyone, stand up," the Chief said, motioning to the crowd.

Yang Yu-ting was flooded with a sense of foreboding.

"Give Yu-ting a round of applause. She's the first at our station to bring in an unregistered vehicle!"

"Another round!" The Chief was in high spirits. "Yu-ting is an inspiration to us all."

Everyone began to clap.

And clap.

And kept clapping.

It was all too much for Yang Yu-ting. Was this a prank? But judging by the way the Chief's eyes crinkled as he smiled, it really didn't seem like it.

She felt like it was her birthday party and she was being forced to listen to everyone sing "Happy Birthday" to her: awkward, humiliating, like death by a thousand cuts. If it hadn't happened tonight, she likely could have accepted the praise with pleasure, without suspicion of ulterior motives, but Chou Ming-hsien had just exposed her, like the emperor with his "new clothes", and the applause grated harshly in her ears.

She would never again go out hunting for unregistered vehicles, seek the limelight, or show off like an idiot.

"Thank you, thank you." Yang Yu-ting's expression stiffened as she acknowledged everyone's praise and slowly headed toward the stairs.

"Thank you, Chief. I'll take my leave now."

She wanted to dig a hole and bury herself in it. Her heart felt like it was about to shatter. She wanted to scream at the whole world to just *shut up*, to stop using her identity as a female cop as an insult.

Yang Yu-ting headed straight for the third floor. It was currently past 1 a.m.; her shift ended at 2 a.m. In theory, she should deal with the scooter that she'd just found before clocking out, but she needed a break. It could wait until tomorrow.

Bridgeside Police Station had a total of four floors. The first floor held the on-duty desk and crime-reporting area, the second had meeting rooms and office storage cabinets, and the third and fourth floors contained dormitories.

As soon as Yang Yu-ting entered her dorm, she saw an uninvited guest lounging on her bed, one leg crossed over the other as he played a game on his phone.

“You have a lot of guts coming in here. You are aware this is the *women’s* dorm, yes?” Yang Yu-ting scolded him as she shut the door. Her “guest” was none other than Chou Ming-hsien.

“Women? Where?” Chou Ming-hsien looked around, then returned his gaze to his phone, saying casually, “Bro, go hide. I won’t tell anyone that you snuck in to peep at the ladies...”

“You brat, why don’t you go back to your own dorm?”

“There’s a guy there whose feet smell like ass. The women’s dorms smell better,” replied Chou Ming-hsien.

“If someone comes back later and sees you...”

“None of the other women are here. I checked already – they’re both off today.”

“You...” Yang Yu-ting was speechless. She could only head to her wardrobe to take off her uniform jacket and pull out her hair clips.

This brother of hers was really too sly. Last month, he had been deferential and respectful, discreet and polite to everyone. Now, he was sneaking into the women’s dorm, and keeping tabs on everyone’s comings and goings.

“If you keep doing this, we’ll be discovered sooner rather than later.” Yang Yu-ting walked into the bathroom to wash her face.

“That *would* be annoying, you should probably be more careful,” Chou Ming-hsien said, grinning at her, appearing completely unruffled.

“I’m serious. If it’s discovered that we’re siblings, there is a one hundred percent chance that I, your esteemed mentor, will be transferred.”

“Then I won’t be forced to call you ‘mentor’, will I?”

“Have you locked up that scooter yet?” Yang Yu-ting asked, recalling that scooter they’d expended so much effort to acquire.

“Yeah. It’s hidden in a place where it absolutely won’t be ‘stolen’ again.”

“Where did you hide it?” Yang Yu-ting asked nervously, oblivious to the double entendre in Chou Ming-hsien’s words. “Agh, you’d better have hidden that scooter well, otherwise it really might get stolen.”

Yang Yu-ting clearly remembered an entry written in her father’s journals in which an unregistered vehicle placed within the police station had likely been stolen by a colleague who then solved the case and took all the credit. So, she knew they had to do their level best to hide the vehicle well and chain it down, or quickly solve the case and return the vehicle to its rightful owner, if they were to avoid complications.

Chou Ming-hsien only laughed loudly. “Miss, who would dare to steal your scooter? Right now, literally the whole world knows you found an unregistered scooter – if it did go missing, the Chief would immediately send everyone out to search for it and return it to you.”

“Hmm, you have a point.” Yang Yu-ting was once again rendered speechless by her brother. He really was too clever by half; she felt that even if he didn’t have the heart of a police officer, he certainly had the mind for it.

Yang Yu-ting finished fixing her uniform and equipment. All she had to do now was wait for her shift to end. She sat before her desk feeling incomparably exhausted. The *Six Codes* sat atop her cabinet; she had bought it to prepare for the National Police Exam. By that point, her rejection of her father had already passed away with him, vanishing like smoke and clouds, only to be overtaken by a sense of immense curiosity and exasperated frustration.