

# TIED TO YOU

## 無線人生：整個世界，只有你連上了我

*A university student able to “see” relationships among people, places and things is dispirited by his lack of a similarly visible connection with his friends until a shimmering, silvery grey thread from a police sergeant reaches out and touches him. Could this be his one hope for true connection?*

Since childhood, university student Chang I-hsien has had an “eye” for relationships. He sees emotional connections as interlinked threads – red for romance, yellow for friendship, and white for esteem. But there’s a problem: no thread has ever connected him with anyone. Not to his beloved Grandma, not to his best mates, ... not to anyone. What’s more, threads heading in Chang’s direction invariably dissipate well before they reach him. Devoid of threads, Chang wonders whether any of his relationships have been genuine.

When Chang first meets Huang Shih-Hung, a police sergeant a few years his senior, at the scene of an accident, he is startled to see a thread connecting them. Moreover, the thread’s silvery grey color is something he had never previously seen. Curious, and fearful of losing his one and only relationship thread, Chang launches a concerted effort to wheedle his way into Huang’s life and eventually starts helping Huang out on cases. Over time, their increasingly close relationship begins churning up long-buried memories.

*Tied to You* is awash in insightful observations on the everyday. The author’s warm, empathetic writing style explores the intricacies of relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. Beck’s deft blending of fantasy, detective, and BL fiction elements infuses this work with unique cross-genre flair and allure, delivering a literary repast that both takes hold of the imagination and warms the heart.



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## Beck

Born in 1979, Beck holds a degree from National Chengchi University's Department of Radio and Television. A long time editor, Beck has expanded into writing fiction and screenplays that center around the idiosyncrasies of everyday life and conversations. Her cross-genre works include the novel and eponymous film *No Pets Allowed*, which was nominated for 2020 Golden Bell Awards in four categories.

# TIED TO YOU

By Beck

Translated by Eunice Shek

## Prologue

Feng Chieh leaned against the overpass railing, taking a slow drag on his cigarette.

Before lighting up, he had grasped the guardrail, bending as he stretched his body out to look around.

However, before he could count the number of floors there were between the bridge and the ground, his hands became coated with a thick layer of dust. Disgusted at the sensation, Feng Chieh recoiled, rubbed his hands on his pants several times, then withdrew a cigarette from his pocket and lit it.

Though already a little past one o'clock in the morning, the bridge still teemed with fast-moving cars and scooters. No one paid any attention to the middle-aged man leaning against the guardrail, smoking a cigarette, admiring the full moon overhead.

At that critical juncture, Feng Chieh's mood was unexpectedly calm.

Just before he'd clocked out, his manager had called him into the office and informed him that he'd already been added to the list of next month's layoffs. At the time, he'd felt that all hope was lost, as if tumbling into an abyss; with trembling footsteps, he hid away in the restroom. Sitting on the toilet seat, he'd wept bitterly.

However, that had been hours ago. Recalling it now, his agitation from before already seemed unreal.

Why? Because he'd realized something. Apart from death, nothing else in life really mattered. Once he'd realized this, nothing could ruffle him.

Having an affair with a saleswoman he'd met through work while his wife was busy caring for their child, and then having the private investigator his wife had hired catch them in bed together? Not a big deal.

Upon seeing his daughter's sleeping face, Feng Chieh had learned his lesson and returned to his family. In order to repair his relationship with his wife, he'd endured every single undignified day, treading on eggshells. Not a problem.

At long last, his daughter was about to start kindergarten and his wife was finally beginning to smile again. It was at this moment that his ex-mistress from several years ago reappeared to extort him.

Paying for the abortion she'd had way back when – also not an issue.

When his wife discovered he'd transferred money to his ex, then furiously taken their daughter and left, and later even sent him divorce papers, already filled out and signed, it still wasn't a problem.

Even losing his job today, thus thoroughly erasing any hope of using his income to pressure his wife into surrendering legal guardianship of his child, or even of paying monthly child support to retain visitation rights – just water off a duck's back.

Truly, honestly, apart from death, nothing else in life really mattered. Having arrived at this conclusion, his mood calmed considerably. None of that shit came close to the nearly burned out cigarette he currently held.

This must be the difference between “I want to die” and “I can only die”.

Feng Chieh lifted the cigarette to his mouth and inhaled deeply. Seeing the glow at its end gradually brighten, he quickly smoked it down to the filter. Right at the point his fingers might be singed, he stubbed it out, then casually flicked the butt off of the overpass.

All right, no point in waiting around any longer.

Feng Chieh extended both hands and leaned forward, all ten fingers pressing new imprints into the dust-coated guardrail.

“Excuse me, sir, do you have a moment?”

Feng Chieh was startled. His raised right leg hadn't yet crossed the guardrail when someone grasped the belt at his waist and pulled him back half a meter.

The person pulling Feng Chieh was young, about college age; he wore an oversized yellow hoodie and jeans, and stood out against the late night darkness. He grasped Feng Chieh with one hand, his phone gripped in the other. On his face was a brilliant, if foolish, grin.

“Sir, could you help me with this gacha game?”

Just his luck – now a weirdo had appeared.

Feng Chieh's brows creased sharply. Swatting the young man's hand away, he adjusted his pants as he tried to side-step his assailant. Surprisingly, the youth was undeterred and quickly kept pace with him, grabbing his arm, the smile on his face just as dazzling as the phone screen he pressed obstinately close to Feng Chieh.

“Please, sir, do this random draw for me. I've already gotten bad cards the last six times I pulled. There's only two chances left, but my luck has been garbage today.”

*Tch.* Feng Chieh clicked his tongue in irritation. His aggravation rose up, unbidden, making him very unhappy. He drew in a deep breath, attempting to call back the spiritual calm he'd only just felt while leaning against the guardrail with his cigarette. He had no desire to be distracted at this critical moment by lashing out at a stranger.

In short, the quicker he could send this person away, the better.

“Where do I press?”

“Right here, this blue gemstone.”

Feng Chieh extended a finger and pressed it against the young man's phone screen. The blue gemstone began to spin.

“Okay, all done – oi, why are you tugging me again?!”

“Let’s see what you won for me...”

Feng Chieh wanted to hurry off, but the young man persisted, gripping his arm and not letting go. He just fixed his gaze on his phone and then let out a whoop.

“Whoa! The ten cards you pulled include three SSRs! Sir, you have a talent for these gacha games! It’s a real shame this talent has gone unnoticed... Could you help me with one more pull? Please!”

The young man once again shoved his phone at Feng Chieh’s face.

The now extremely frustrated Feng Chieh felt he had no choice but to tap the screen again and accompany this student in “enjoying” the game’s animation once more. The blue gemstone spun and emitted an intense white light; five seconds later, ten smaller gemstones burst out of it, bouncing one by one to the center of the screen. There was another round of spinning gems and bright light as, one by one, the smaller gemstones transformed into elegant character avatars.

The gacha special effects were dazzling. They were also a great way to waste time. Feng Chieh’s eyes hardened.

This was truly absurd, completely ridiculous. The last night of his life shouldn’t go like this.

“Ahh, darn. This time there’s only one SR. The rest are all just fodder...” Despite the young man’s noticeable disappointment, he bounced back quickly and turned his head to console Feng Chieh. “But anyway, you still have a real talent for these gacha games. The SSR you pulled just before this was a serious chase. Ah well, such is the gacha life, right? Accept everything calmly and you won’t be disappointed. Life always has its ups and downs too, after all...”

Seeing the youth feign an optimistic smile, Feng Chieh suddenly caught on to the stranger’s purpose in all of this.

“You think I was trying to kill myself?”

“Huh?” The smile on the young man’s face became strained.

Feng Chieh lifted the corners of his mouth, doing his utmost to keep his own smile mild and amiable.

“You’ve misunderstood. I wasn’t trying to kill myself; I just came out for a smoke. I saw the full moon, and wanted to stand around and enjoy it a bit, that’s all. Look – my car is parked by those diagonal white lines over there in the front. Someone wanting to kill themselves wouldn’t put so much effort into parking their car properly, would they?”

“Is that so...”

The young man’s gaze wandered, taking in Feng Chieh’s fingerprints on the guardrail, then drifting over Feng Chieh’s shoulders, looking behind him. Feng Chieh turned his head to look as well, but there was no one there. He didn’t know what this weirdo was looking at, but he had no desire to remain entangled with this fool any longer.

Taipei had more than one overpass, after all.

“Of course it is. Don’t worry so much, I’m fine. Hurry up and go home.”

Feng Chieh reached out and patted the young man’s upper arm. All he wanted was to turn around and leave, but he was once again grasped by the wrist.

“I don’t believe you.”

The young man gripped Feng Chieh, his gaze fixed on him, his expression very grave.

That face, up till now full of smiles, and those words (*Sir, could you help with this gacha pull?*) were in the end all just a farce, a vivacious performance. Feng Chieh burned with anger. Yanking himself free from the young man's grip, he cursed:

"Whether you believe me or not is none of *my* damn business! I want to go home and go to sleep."

"Y-Y-Y-Y-You can't!" The young man let out an anguished cry, and even threw himself bodily on Feng Chieh. "I'm truly very sorry – I say dumb things and don't understand what other people are thinking, so I couldn't come up with a better, more sensitive way to make you change your mind. But *please* reconsider! Life is so long – better things will surely come your way..."

Hearing the fool utter such nonsense while trapped in a bear hug made Feng Chieh even more furious. He barked out a caustic laugh.

"Hah! I was caught having an affair, my ex-lover emptied my savings account, my wife took my kid and left me, and today I got laid off. You tell me, what good things could possibly come along, hm? You tell me!"

"Well... Uh, in any case, there surely will be something..."

The young man trailed off, stretching out his neck as his gaze fixed firmly on Feng Chieh's back. Seeing his foolish demeanor, the furious Feng Chieh forcefully slapped and hit the stranger's back, struggling to break away from his vise-like grip.

"Fuck! Even you can't think of anything! Let me go!"

"No... Ow! Ow, that hurts!"

Late at night, by the overpass guardrail, the two men tussled, arguing and yanking at each other.

Apart from death, nothing else really mattered; a calm mood; a final cigarette under the beautiful moonlight – what nonsense! Feng Chieh decided that once he'd freed himself from this "Good Samaritan", he would throw himself off this bridge right in front of the fool's face. Let this idiot forever rue the day he meddled in someone else's business.

On the road in front of them, a scooter stopped. The two people on the scooter both took out their phones and aimed them at the ongoing scuffle, though it was unclear if they were recording videos or calling the police.

Irritated, Feng Chieh grabbed a fistful of the young man's hair and yanked, but quickly relented after hearing his opponent's cry of pain. His hands, accustomed to typing on a keyboard, were actually quite unfamiliar with violence. Although he had imagined sending enemies flying with a single punch like action movie heroes did, it went without saying that, no matter how hard he shoved or hit, this maniac remained tightly twined around him and wouldn't let go.

"Beep boop, beep boop. Daddy, answer the phone. Daddy, answer the phone."

The childish voice of a very young girl called out from the breast pocket of Feng Chieh's button-down shirt. Both men, taken by surprise, paused their grappling.

*Daddy, answer the phone. Daddy, answer the phone.*

The ringtone that his daughter recorded for him had been set specifically to his wife's phone number. But what reason would his wife have for calling so late at night, over a month after they'd separated...? Recalling the faces of his wife and daughter, all the energy suddenly drained out of Feng Chieh's body.

"Hey, Daddy, hurry up and answer the phone."

The young man, wrapped around Feng Chieh like an octopus, suddenly loosened his grip and lifted the phone from Feng Chieh's pocket, urging him to answer.

The call was from his wife, no doubt about it. Perturbed, Feng Chieh pressed the button to take it.

"Hello? Is this Chieh? Sorry for bothering you so late at night..." His wife's voice sounded weary, and also a little bit sniffly. "Tung woke up at midnight and won't stop crying. She keeps saying she needs to find you. I don't know what nightmare she had, but could you soothe her?"

"Yeah, sure, of course... Hello, Tung? What's the matter? Tell Daddy, don't cry. Did you have a nightmare? No, Daddy didn't get eaten by monsters, Daddy is just fine. Yep, that's right, on Sunday, Daddy will take you out to play. Mommy can come too... Does Mommy want to come? Tung, why don't you ask her for me..."

As Feng Chieh spoke on the phone, tears sprang to his eyes. He held the phone with both hands as he comforted his daughter, desperately trying to hold back sobs that he soon wouldn't be able to repress.

The youth beside him handed over a packet of tissues. Feng Chieh took them and pressed some to the corners of his eyes, then lifted his head and shot a quick glance at the stranger.

After their tussle, that meddling young person's hair was tousled, his clothes were in disarray, and he looked very much like he'd been put through a wringer. He squinted slightly and his gaze, now both relieved and satisfied, drifted toward Feng Chieh...and over his shoulder.

What the hell was he looking at?

Feng Chieh's apprehension was quickly extinguished by the voice on the phone. His wife had taken the phone back from their daughter.

"Thank you. Tung wouldn't stop crying. No matter what I tried, nothing helped."

"It's nothing. I'm her father, of course I should do this much."

"Tung really misses you."

After saying this, his wife fell silent. Feng Chieh didn't dare respond; the tears he'd worked so hard to hold back seemed to have all collected in his throat. The pain in his throat was unbearable, blocked by the thousands upon thousands of words he ached to say and the tears he could barely hold at bay.

He drew in a cautious breath, waiting for his wife to break the silence.

"I really miss you too. To be honest, I knew you hadn't really gone back to that woman... I was just...so angry..."

On the other end of the line, his wife's voice was choked with sobs.

## Chapter One: The Faded Noticeboard

“At 1:30 a.m. on the eighteenth, the local police station received a phone call from a concerned citizen about two men, whom they suspected of being drunk, fighting on an overpass. Police officers immediately rushed to the scene. Upon reaching the overpass, however, they found only a middle-aged man sitting beside the guardrail, holding a phone and crying loudly. The man said he wasn’t drunk but that, because he’d just lost his job, he had temporarily taken leave of his senses. Fortunately, a strange young man had arrived just in the nick of time and prevented him from making a grave mistake. After receiving consolation and care, the man calmed down and pledged to the police that he would never again take life so lightly...”

*“A strange young man had arrived just in the nick of time”, huh.*

Chang I-hsien lifted his head to glance at the morning news broadcast on the breakfast shop’s TV as he lifted the medium sized cup of warm milk tea to his lips.

Although too late to capture live footage of the incident, the news station had still dispatched a film crew to the overpass in question. A petite female reporter stood before the camera, reading loudly off a teleprompter. On the road behind her, a river of cars flowed past unceasingly.

How come they hadn’t filmed the handprints on the guardrail? That image was truly haunting.

Chang I-hsien inhaled the last mouthful of milk tea and hauled the backpack at his feet up onto his lap, his line of vision pulling back to observe the scene before him.

As he watched, his female classmate seated at the same table was hastily stuffing her mouth full of dan bing.

Seeing her cheeks bulge as she chewed reminded him of a hamster. Chang I-hsien said to her, “There’s no rush. We don’t have class this morning, after all. Take your time.”

She nodded. The speed of her chewing slowed, though her expression revealed a bit of embarrassment.

Lin Ya-ting was an introverted girl with delicate and pretty features, her skin fair and unblemished. When she spoke, her voice was rather thin. After being in the same classes for two years, it could be said that they were well-acquainted, but she still often gave Chang I-hsien the impression of a small, easily frightened animal.

For some reason still unclear to him, Chang I-hsien frequently encountered Ya-ting at breakfast shops and food stalls, and it was for this reason that they often hung out together outside of class. Chang I-hsien pondered this. He knew he was absent-minded and, although he couldn’t say for sure, it was certainly possible that his somewhat haphazard pace of life had fallen inadvertently into step with her own unhurried way of living.

Seeing several pieces of dan bing still on her plate, Chang I-hsien returned his gaze to the TV once more.

It seemed there really wasn’t much news to report of late: this report was already dragging on a bit too long. Anyway, that case of the mysterious youth saving a salaryman from suicide had

ended peacefully. The report concluded with interviews of the police officers on duty that night at the local station who had been dispatched to the scene.

“We are very grateful to the concerned citizens who took heroic action and filed a report just in time to prevent a horrible disaster from befalling that family. We encourage everyone to continue showing care and consideration to the people around you.”

A veteran police sergeant stood before the camera, awkwardly expressing gratitude for the civilian assistance and explaining the government decree to raise awareness. A younger colleague stood a ways behind him in the background.

“Ya-ting.” Chang I-hsien waved at Lin Ya-ting, gesturing for her to look at the TV. “That officer in the back is pretty hot.”

She lifted her head to glance at the screen. In a quiet voice, she said, “He’s okay, I guess.”

“Really...? I think he’s pretty hot, though.”

“Eh, maybe. But anyway, he’s not my type.” As she spoke, she watched Chang I-hsien’s face. Within her round, limpid eyes, so similar to a hamster’s, I-hsien saw not a single iota of fear.

Chang I-hsien’s instincts were not at all reassured. He stole a glance at the top of her head and realized the red thread stretching toward him from her back had brightened. It was more distinct than it had been a few months ago.

“Ya-ting, did you see the anonymous joke shared today? I think someone from our class did it. Its use of intentionally incorrect words matches the vibe of our algebra teacher...”

“I’m full, let’s go.”

“Huh? Uh, go where?” It took Chang I-hsien a moment to respond.

“To the library. Didn’t you say you wanted to get a book?” With a faint smile, she said, “I want one too.”

She stood up, hoisting her enormous tote bag over her shoulder. Chang I-hsien followed behind her as they left the breakfast shop.

This time, the red thread on her back was pointing directly at his face.

As the two of them headed down the road to the library, no matter how Chang I-hsien tried to dodge it, Lin Ya-ting’s red thread remained stubbornly fixated on him, making him feel like he was prey caught in the gaze of a snake.

But, on the other hand, weren’t snakes technically small animals too...?

\*

Since childhood, Chang I-hsien had possessed an uncanny ability to see people’s “threads of attachment”. Extending outward from people’s backs, they were suffused with a faint light. These threads emerged from the space between a person’s shoulder blades and unspooled toward another person or thing.

These threads came in various colors, and could be seen more clearly at night than during the day. Also, the farther out they stretched, the fainter they became; if they were unable to connect with someone else’s thread(s), they would disappear after about half a meter.

After extensive observation and analysis, Chang I-hsien had more or less figured out the meaning behind each thread color. Blues, greens, and other cool colored threads were beliefs, values, and so on; warm colors represented attachments toward people. Attachments to family and friends tended to be yellow; romantic feelings tended toward red. White and very pale colors usually meant material desires.

Everyone had threads.

In Chang I-hsien's eyes, these threads represented the connections between their host and the world; the more threads one had, the more desires and attachments they held toward people, places, and things.

This special ability to see "threads" was a huge assist in Chang I-hsien's own interpersonal relationships.

For instance, when helping search for lost property and pets, he simply needed to lead the owner around until he saw which way a particular thread was pointing, and then head in that direction. More often than not, they'd end up at what they were looking for. In another example: when picking out gifts or helping make a decision, he merely had to observe others' threads; from there, he usually would be able to tell which option they truly desired the most.

Every time he received comments like "I-hsien is really good at choosing things" or "I-hsien seems oblivious, but he's actually quiet observant!", he always felt a huge pang of guilt.

In truth, he had absolutely no understanding of what others wanted or liked. He could only "see" these desires. For example, he only knew Lin Ya-ting had fallen for him when he saw her red thread pointing toward him.

Lin Ya-ting had very few threads attached to her body. Chang I-hsien had supposed that meant she wasn't interested in much and desired little; there wasn't a lot she cared about. People with few desires didn't have to think about or respond to much, so he'd always thought getting along with her would be relaxing – at least, so he'd presumed until that faint red thread directed toward him appeared and wouldn't fade.

Up until yesterday, the thread had remained a faint red. But today, it had suddenly become a bright, clear scarlet. Who knew what had happened last night to change her mind so much, or that such mental changes could bring about such tangible consequences.

Chang I-hsien was a bit vexed.

A couple was sitting on the bench by the school gate. With just a brief glance out of the corner of his eye, Chang I-hsien was able to see how in love each was with the other. The young man's peach-pink thread and the young woman's purplish-red one were firmly intertwined. Also, they both had other white and yellow threads tightly interlinked. They leaned in close, side by side, looking like two multi-colored wires connected to a huge battery.

This is how it looks when two people have a mutual emotional connection. Their threads naturally entwine whenever they approach each other.