

Nightwatcher 101

Chapter 101. House Raid

Even if he was slapped in the ass, the small servant wasn't angry at all. He still maintained a smile on his face, his attitude respectful, almost flattering.

"Wait for a while. I'll immediately go and inform. After she knows about Young Master Yang coming here, Miss will probably be very excited."

Now and then, Xu Qi'an would patronize Miss Fuxiang. So, the members of the courtyard had long since recognized him as the famous oiran's paramour. Even if he dared to act arrogantly toward other guests, he didn't dare to neglect Xu Qi'an.

He'd rather brown-nose as hard as possible.

Xu Qi'an led the Nightwatchers to the courtyard. Fragrant pear trees were planted at the corners, and it had elegant-looking white walls and black tiles.

Upon hearing Xu Qi'an had reserved the venue for the day, The famous oiran immediately asked her maid to delicately groom her face, after which she wore a delicate pale pink floor-length dress, which revealed her exquisite collarbone and fair neck.

Her chest wrap^[^1] was vaguely discernible through her dress.

Fuxiang personally accompanied him, pouring tea and wine for Xu Qi'an, occasionally whispering to his ear, while maintaining her flower-like smile.

All the bronze gongs present were envious.

Fuxiang herself was quite a famous oiran. After the poem *Given to Fuxiang in Reflecting Plum Pavilion* was released, her value also rose massively.

It had been rumoured that she no longer accompanied guests. At the very least, she couldn't accompany ordinary guests anymore.

Even so, many guests still went to the Plum Reflection Pavilion to drink, listen to music, and play drinking games daily, as Fuxiang would occasionally make an appearance as the Game Master and organize everyone to play Drinking games together.

After three rounds of drinking, Xu Qi'an gave Song Tingfeng a wink, after which he got up and said, "Gentlemen, this Xu is far too drunk, I will go rest first, you guys keep on playing."

The bronze gongs didn't have any objection, taking a look at each other before laughing with a knowing smile.

Fuxiang's eyes flickered, and she gave Xu Qi'an a look before he left with his arms around Fuxiang's shoulders.

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After taking a bath, Xu Qi'an changed into a thin white shirt, sitting lazily on the bed, twirling a wine glass in his hand.

"My dear seldom brings his colleagues over for drinks." Fuxiang, who had also finished bathing, sat a little further on the bed as she tilted his head to wipe his hair.

Her skin was tender, her face flawless. Even, she looked a little enchanting and mysterious in the swaying candlelight.

"It's a long story." Xu Qi'an sighed after taking a sip of wine, "A few days ago, two Gold Gongs took a fancy to me and both wanted to recruit me to their side. So, they fought in the Nightwatchers Office."

Fuxiang got off the bed, her skirt falling concurrently to cover her long snow-white legs. Hugging Xu Qi'an from behind, holding a light smile, she said, "Did someone's eyes go red over you?"

"Red-eyed disease^[^2] has existed since ancient times." Xu Qi'an didn't deny it.

"If my dear had said so earlier, I would have entertained your colleagues for you." Fuxiang sounded regretful.

She hadn't paid much attention to the other bronze gongs during the meal.

"There was no need for that." Xu Qi'an cracked a smile.

As a person who didn't lack interpersonal skills, he held Fuxiang in his arms in a step, and tilted the wine glass, causing the wine to flow down Fuxiang's fair neck.

"This style of drinking is fun." Xu Qi'an laughingly bowed his head.

After having a taste of wine filled with Fuxiang's body fragrances, Xu Qi'an made an excuse to go out for a breath, and left the master bedroom, going to the wine room to have a look. His colleagues were cheerfully playing games amidst the music as if they had opened the door to a new world.

If enough money was given, the maids in Jiaofang Si pavilions wouldn't refuse anything, which had been the case since ancient times.

Xu Qi'an jumped on the courtyard wall, after which he took out a piece of paper, igniting it.

He raised his head, as two streams of pure qi pierced through the night sky, quick as a flash.

Various types of qi appeared in his sight, making the world colourful.

Xu Qi'an had learned from Chu Caiwei that the emerald green colour represented the qi of yaoguai. He remembered the green light he saw flashing over Jiaofang Si the night he was on patrol.

That meant that a monster was lurking in the Jiaofang Si. This guess was quite unfounded, since Jiaofang Si was the place where the dignitaries drank and had fun. Such a place hiding monsters should be very unexpected.

But the situation was like this.

This time, Xu Qi'an took on the principle of "no zuo no die"^[^3] and didn't try to spy on the Sitianjian, so he wouldn't get blinded by the Jianzheng's aura again.

He swept over the sky over the Jiaofangsi. But, In the regions where he could see, all kinds of colours flickered, without any hint of green.

"Did the yao leave... Or, did they hide their qi using a special method?" Xu Qi'an jumped off the wall and returned to Famous Oiran Fuxiang's boudoir.

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The white-robed young general Second Young Master Xu fought bravely against the siege of Famous Oiran Fuxiang. After seven attacks and defences, he was finally exhausted and defeated, spitting out blood.

The battlefield had turned messy, and the two armies suffered heavy losses, both needing to recuperate.

With messy hair and flushed cheeks, curled up in Xu Qi'an's arms, her bright eyes flashed, "My dear, Could you redeem me?"

Talking of money hurts feelings... Xu Qi'an, in sage mode, was unmoved.

The famous oiran twisted her body, saying coquettishly, "I just want to be your concubine, and serve my dear."

Xu Qi'an patted her head, and stroked his fingers between her black hair, "Don't make trouble. Our sincere feelings shouldn't be mixed with the stink of money."

Her eyes turning red, Fuxiang said with tears, "You just want to play with me for free, and leave me when you get tired of me."

How did you discover this?! Xu Qi'an thought in surprise.

He reluctantly said, "You are the chief oiran of the Jiaofang Si. It would be impossible to redeem you without 4,000-5,000 taels. Even so, the Ministry of Rites may not agree to it."

"Your servant has saved some money over the years. Also, I've sent some people to inquire. It only takes three years for a Bronze Gong to buy a yard in the inner city." Fuxiang put her arms around him, and begged softly, "My dear, please redeem me."

The charming woman knew to act coquettishly, and also knew to make full use of her assets, her exquisite bulging figure clinging to Xu Qi'an.

Tears appeared in her eyes, making her seem even more pitiful.

Xu Qi'an knit his brows, feeling awkward. If he had met such a girl who could act coquettishly in his past life, and she wanted him to buy something (luxury items), he could handle it.

He was just feeling a little strange. A well-known oiran like her, with a flourishing career and youth being on her side. It was still too early for her to find a good man to redeem herself.

Besides, Although the Nightwatchers were feared by the officials due to organizational reasons, Fuxiang was more than capable enough to be the concubine of a fourth rank official.

"It isn't so urgent. I'll redeem you after saving up enough money.", Xu Qi'an casually put his arms around the oiran's slender figure, putting himself to sleep in three seconds.

In the darkness, Fuxiang quietly stared at Xu Qi'an's face, her eyes clear like glass.

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The next day, in the morning, the group left the Jiaofang Si.

When his colleagues saw Xu Qi'an, they greeted him with a smile, and their relationship seemed to have become a lot closer. If they had regarded Xu Qi'an as a colleague before, Now, they regarded him as a confidant.

The treat seemed to have had a good effect.

Actually, As long as they weren't too red-eyed, or had a higher position, Bronze Gongs in the same level wouldn't hate him without reason.

With his flexibility, adaptation to their fancy, and goodwill, most of them were willing to make friends with Xu Qi'an.

It was also because, In this way, The identity of “the lucky guy who was favoured by two Gold Gongs could be transformed into “The guy favoured by two Gold Gongs, also my friend.”

While chatting along the way, a bronze gong suddenly laughed and said, "Ningyan is truly a talent. He let me know how ignorant I was before."

The other colleagues let out some cheerful ambiguous laughter.

Xu Qi'an shrugged, "I'll teach you some more exciting ways to play later."

Even more exciting... Everyone's eyes lit up.

After arriving at the Nightwatcher Office at around 7 am. They checked in. Xu Qi'an and Song Tingfeng's group went to the side hall of Spring Breeze Hall, where they drank a few sips of tea before going out to patrol the streets when an official hurried over.

"Three officials, Master Li has called for you."

It's time for work... Xu Qi'an and the two hung their sabres and went together to the Spring Breeze Hall.

Meticulously dressed Li Yuchun blended perfectly with the equally meticulously arranged Spring Breeze Hall, without any sense of disharmony.

Brother Chun, Aren't you tired of living like this... Xu Qi'an sympathized with his immediate boss's OCD.

He thought, *Is it possible that when he sleeps with a woman in the future, if he does a position one hundred times, he'll have to do the other a hundred times as well, to not feel uncomfortable?*

Li Yuchun pointed to three warrants on the side of the desk, "We will be raiding a house today, and the three of you will be going on my behalf. I still have to repeat the same rule, Don't take unneeded things."

"After a quarter of an hour, gather in the front yard and go there with your other colleagues."

It turned out to be a house raid!

Xu Qi'an was alarmed, as house raids were one of the main duties of the Nightwatchers, and the targets were criminal officials.

"This is the document." Li Yuchun showed the three the document sent to him.

The target of the house raid was the head of the Finance Department in the Ministry of Revenue, a sixth rank official. He had been exiled and his assets were ordered to be confiscated on the charges of corruption and dereliction of duty.

This house raid meant confiscating property, where all the property in the home would be confiscated. In Xu Qi'an's previous life, It meant depriving the criminal of his/her personal property.

Li Yuchun glanced at Xu Qi'an, before he said, "This person is a subordinate of Deputy Minister Zhou from the Ministry of Revenue."

He meant to tell Xu Qi'an that this was a follow-up to the Silver Tax case.

The downfall of a court tycoon would be accompanied by the dismissal and punishment of officials attached to him. This could be likened to mud accompanied when pulling out a radish from the ground.

Xu Qi'an and the others took orders to leave. On the way to the front yard, Song Tingfeng said, "This is your first time in a house raid, so you won't understand some rules. I'll explain them to you."

"After all the family property is confiscated, the petty official will count all the valuables in the front yard, record them in the register, then bring them back to the constabulary. But, they will not participate in the search."

After speaking, Song Tingfeng gave him a look of "You should understand what I mean".

An old member of officialdom like Xu Qi'an immediately understood his meaning.

"But the rules that boss said..." Xu Qi'an probed.

"Don't worry about him." Song Tingfeng curled his lips, "The boss is just stubborn and doesn't know how to adapt. We have to seek reasonable interests for ourselves."

They were indeed seeking their interests reasonably, Xu Qi'an nodded.

Song Tingfeng was indeed the same kind of person as him, and was unwilling to blackmail merchants and the common people. But now, he was going to raid the house, which belonged to a corrupt official.

The silver was already corrupt, and they were cutting the wool of Great Feng, not of the people.

He had seen this kind of thing too many times, in this life and the other. Xu Qi'an adopted an attitude of neither objection nor approval.

The raid was led by a silver gong, four groups of bronze gongs, and twenty-four white bailiffs.

Every three bronze gongs belonged to the command of a different silver gong. This multi-team system was for mutual supervision and cross-examination.

This system was good. But, after a long time, everyone tacitly took a little, which was equivalent to no one taking anything.

After listening to Song Tingfeng's words, the three arrived at the front yard and saw that bronze gongs were already gathering there.

The leader was a young Silver Gong, in his early thirties. He had thin lips and thin eyebrows. He wasn't easy to get along with, just by looking at his face.

Song Tingfeng led his two colleagues closer to the Silver Gong and took out the warrant in his arms.

After he saw the three of them approach him, the Silver Gong's eyes suddenly became sharp, as he said in a deep voice, "You three are late."

Xu Qi'an said, stunned, "We aren't late."

They had come over as soon as they had received the news. Although they had talked on the road and walked slowly, they should have not taken more than a quarter-hour.

After hearing it, the Silver Gong's eyebrows stood upright, and his eyes sharp. He took off the sabre in the back of his waist as he swung the flat towards Xu Qi'an's face.

As the sabre broke through the air, Xu Qi'an leaned back a bit, avoiding the hit instantly.

As if he didn't expect Xu Qi'an to dodge, the Silver Gong was stunned, and evilly grinned, "How dare you dodge."

"Sir, Sir..." Song Tingfeng hurriedly intervened between the two, and shyly apologized before saying smilingly, "Yes, We were late, Sir. Don't be angry and delay business. Important work is still waiting."

He brought up the matter of the House Raid.

Unexpectedly, the Silver Gong didn't give him any face at all, and kicked Song Tingfeng's lower abdomen with his foot, sending him flying. He struggled a bit, but couldn't stand up.

He was targeting me... But I hadn't offended him... Xu Qi'an felt angry, and subconsciously pressed the handle of his sabre.

The Silver Gong squinted, and instead of being angry, he smiled and swiped at him with a scabbard again, sneering, "What? Do you want to draw a sabre? Are you worthy of it?"

If I draw the sabre, I'll be toast... Xu Qi'an raised his hand to block a few blows, his arm becoming fiery with pain.

As so many people were watching, it was quite embarrassing for him.

Seeing Xu Qi'an's look of timidity, the Silver Gong hit him a few more times before saying with a sneer, "Fuck off in there."

Xu Qi'an's group joined the team.

After them, other bronze gongs came one after another, but the Silver Gong didn't care much about them and let them join the team.

After seeing this scene, Xu Qi'an became sure that the Silver Gong had been targeting him. But he wondered why as he hadn't offended the Silver Gong.

"It's good that you didn't draw your sabre, or you'd be done for." someone behind him said.

Xu Qi'an turned his head to take a look. He was a bronze gong who had drunk flower wine with him last night.[^4]

"I'm not that stupid. It's a serious crime to draw a sword against a silver gong." He said.

The bronze gong nodded, and whispered, "His surname is Zhu, and he's the youngest Silver Gong in the office."

Xu Qi'an said, gloomily, "I don't know him."

The bronze Gong said, "Hey, His father is also surnamed Zhu."

Xu Qi'an wanted to say *You speaking nonsense, bro.*, but he heard Zhu Guangxiao beside him whisper, "Gold Gong Zhu?"

The bronze gong, who had drunk flower wine together, nodded before he continued, "He is the youngest silver gong, and also the most talented man in our capital office. Well, before Xu Qi'an appeared."

"The day before yesterday, I had drunk with a bronze gong under his hand. I heard from him that Silver Gong Zhu didn't like you. He had said multiple times that you were a trivial bronze gong..."

At that time, Silver Gong Zhu scanned the crowd sharply, causing the bronze gong to fall silent.

Chapter 102. More Valuable than One's Life

"Your Mother!"

Xu Qi'an cursed internally, accepting his fate.

He thought back to his previous life, in officer training, when the sergeant would deliberately pick on him. At that time, he could still say: I ain't doing this!

But the Nightwatchers' ranks were strict, and so one couldn't use such extreme a response.

"You're making things hard for me? Then don't blame me when I tell on you to Daddy Wei." Xu Qi'an rubbed his swollen arms, aflame with fury.

After all personnel had arrived, the Nightwatchers and their assistant bailiffs hastily rushed to their destination.

That head of finance whose house they were raiding was surnamed Cheng, with a large three-tiered courtyard house. The house was already surrounded on all sides by the city guard.

After the Nightwatchers had arrived, silver gong Zhu pulled his sabre out, and with his blade like a flash of lightning, cut the "Zhu Manor" sign in half.

Afterwards, he waved his sabre in the air: "Nightwatchers! Open up!"

Like a cloud of angry wasps, the bronze gongs and bailiffs barged into the house.

The servants in the manor were so scared they dared not breathe, shakily retreating to the corners, to the side of the road, to under the eaves.

Only yesterday did they know their master had been arrested, and the manor was about to ask around their contacts. Who knew that they would be raided so quickly?

Xu Qi'an and his two colleagues entered the front hall, and were just about to go to the back courtyard, when they were kicked back by silver gong Zhu.

"You three stay here, don't you dare go anywhere. Afterwards, I will search each and every one of you. If you dare to try smuggle anything, you will be punished according to all possible regulations." he said darkly.

Seeing that Xu Qi'an and the other two were being picked on, some bronze gongs looked on with schadenfreude, others pretending not to see anything, in an effort to protect themselves.

Song Tingfeng dared to be angry, but dared not say anything.

The always silent Zhu Guangxiao bore a dark expression.

Xu Qi'an clenched his teeth, and chose to remain silent. He couldn't fight back at this time, otherwise his fate would be dire indeed.

Watching silver gong Zhu enter the inner courtyard, Song Tingfeng spat in his direction, angrily saying "This damn bastard, breaking one's path to wealth, has no sense of PY trading.[^1]"

"Sorry, I'm weighing you all down." Xu Qi'an said in shame.

Song Tingfeng rolled his eyes, his gaze falling on Xu Qi'an's arm: "I'm seeing you rubbing your arm a lot, are you hurt much?"

Laughing bitterly, Xu Qi'an pulled up his sleeve, to reveal that his arm was already swollen and red.

"That piece of shit used qi?" Song Tingfeng's expression turned.

An average officer beating his subordinates would at most cause some minor bruises, and would absolutely not secretly add qi to their blows. Causing pain and causing actual injury were two different things.

But that Zhu was another level of mean-spirited.

"Just with this injury, you can report him. When we get back, go find boss, boss won't tolerate this." Zhu Guangxiao said.

Song Tingfeng glanced at him, shaking his head, "Don't cause boss more trouble."

Even though they were both silver gongs, but Zhu's father was a gold gong, and a person with such a big tree to lean against was not someone Li Yuchun could afford to get on the bad side of.

Song Tingfeng continued, "Forget it. If you get put with him next time, just admit your misfortune."

I will report him, but not to brother Chun, but rather daddy Wei... Xu Qi'an dropped down his sleeve.

The "house raid" was different to what Xu Qi'an had in mind; there weren't any sounds of smashing and crashing about. Quite the opposite, the bronze gongs and white bailiffs were all very careful with their task.

A random flowerpot in the study, could be a piece of porcelain worth over a hundred taels. A small desk used to put papers, could be a few taels of silver alone.

Suddenly, the three of them in the front hall heard the sharp screams and cries of a woman, along with her pleading.

"What's going on?" Xu Qi'an's expression changed, turning to look at Song Tingfeng, "The sentence said only a house raid, no other arrests."

The sentence given to Minister Cheng was only to be exiled, and have his property confiscated. No one else would be arrested along with him.

This implied that his family would at most be evicted from the manor; they weren't guilty of any crime.

Song Tingfeng said hesitantly, "Perhaps the women in the manor are rather pretty... they want to play... this type of thing happens all the time."

"Fuck!" Xu Qi'an cursed, rushing to the back courtyard with large steps.

In the courtyard, a woman's sharp cries echoed throughout the manor, along with a man's perverted laugh.

"Bang!"

Xu Qi'an headed towards the source of the commotion, kicking open a door, to see a bronze gong he didn't know was currently pulling at a middle-aged woman's clothes.

That woman had well-defined features, pale skin, and on her body was only left a *dudou* undershirt.[^2] She was crying in utter despair.

The bronze gong jumped in fright, his face losing colour. If it was only a moment later, then would he not have been scared into paranoia. He turned his head in anger to look at the door.

Xu Qi'an stared back at him coldly, scanning the plaque on the bronze gong's waist, "You continue. I've remembered your name, afterwards I'll personally go to Duke Wei and report you."

Wei Yuan's name carried heavy weight. The bronze gong glanced at the woman, then glanced at Xu Qi'an's dark face, making sure it was not a joke, before hesitating.

Xu Qi'an did not pay him any more attention, and making best of what little time he had, started kicking open other doors in succession, like a cannon, and similarly frightening his colleagues off their imminent misdeeds.

I haven't seen that Zhu... Xu Qi'an's heart sank, and without hesitation, kicked open the door to the last room.

As expected, revealing silver gong Zhu.

And as for him, he was in the middle of pinching a girl, a wicked smile on his face, slowly ripping off her clothes layer by layer with twisted enjoyment.

That girl was no more than twelve or thirteen. Tear tracks shone down her face, and she was making choked sobs, wanting but not daring to cry.

At that instant, Xu Qi'an's anger reached boiling point, yet he did not rashly run in, staring daggers at silver gong Zhu.

"Piss off!" Silver gong Zhu's face was sullen.

Xu Qi'an did not piss off, staring a Refining Spirit master eye-to-eye without a hint of timidity, spitting out word by word: "You dare to touch her, I will report you to Duke Wei."

Hearing his words, the young girl's eyes shone with newfound radiance, finally finding a lifeline to clutch at.

This altercation drew the attention of the other bronze gongs and assistant bailiffs. They stood not far away, looking in shock at this famed bronze gong facing off against the silver gong.

"Sure, you worthless thing."

He had disliked Xu Qi'an's spotlight earlier, but now his feeling towards the bronze gong was that the quicker he died the better.

Silver gong Zhu grabbed the girl by the neck, holding her up in the air, and walked out of the room with great strides.

Xu Qi'an felt a surging wave of qi, and instinctively put a hand on his sabre hilt, backing off cautiously, avoiding the sharp edge.

Silver gong Zhu carried the girl to the courtyard, and threw her atop the stone table. He turned, and with a twisted smile said:

"What will you do?"

The veins in Xu Qi'an's forehead bulged.

"Ningyan..." Song Tingfeng ran over with an awful looking expression, putting a hand onto Xu Qi'an's right hand, on his pommel, saying with gritted teeth, "Don't start, don't start, you know the consequences..."

His voice was pleading.

Xu Qi'an found a bit of calmness again, and understood Song Tingfeng's warning.

Firstly, a bronze gong attacking a silver gong was an enormous violation; if he were killed on the spot he would only have himself to blame.

Put it another way, the reason that Zhu pulled the girl into the courtyard to assault her in front of everyone, was to provoke Xu Qi'an, and force him to attack.

Giving Xu Qi'an no path forward but death.

Secondly, how could a refining qi beat a refining spirit?

Both status and strength disallowed it.

Xu Qi'an did not give up, meticulously repeating himself: "If you dare touch her, I will report you to Wei Yuan."

Silver gong Zhu laughed maniacally, "You can go tell on me, but only after I enjoy this little beauty."

Other bronze gongs might have been afraid of Xu Qi'an's threat, but he was not.

With a gold gong as his father, added onto the fact that he had done everything properly, he was not afraid of problems he could not solve, or calamity.

What is it really to abuse a few women of a criminal family?

Furthermore, it wasn't the first or second time he had done it; every year with so many officials found guilty, and suffering house raids, even if their family's women weren't sentenced on association, were they really able to get off scott free?

They also had to pay something.

Silver gong Zhu laughed derisively, and made to start assaulting the girl.

Some bronze gongs turned their heads, some whistled, laughing strangely.

This only just secondary school aged girl facing such a fate, deeply pierced at his 21st century transmigrated soul.

“Let her go!”

Song Tingfeng heard his companion’s words, they were very light.

But his expression was that resolute, that unconsciously, Song Tingfeng took a step back.

Xu Qi’an’s eyes were calm, his breath calm, all his emotions were flattened into a calm lake. In an instant, he had entered an optimal state.

With the thumb of his right hand, he lightly pushed off the hand guard of his sabre, letting the blade come out of its scabbard an inch.

“Sching!”

The sound of a sword leaving its scabbard resonated around the courtyard. Silver gong Zhu suddenly rose, gaze cold, lashing out with no hesitation, his blade humming towards Xu Qi’an.

He had long anticipated this.

A raging torrent of qi came crashing forth, like the sea tide. Xu Qi’an was like a stone monolith, resolute and unyielding.

Everything had come to this point, he had reached his peak!

“Sching!”

Another sound of sword leaving scabbard.

Everyone only saw a thin blade of light appear and flash away, only saw Xu Qi’an’s hand move slightly.

That somewhat straight looking sabre, was still in its scabbard, as if that sound was merely an illusion.

Silver gong Zhu did not move, his wide, staring eyes frozen in place.

A few seconds later, the silver gong at his chest split, falling to the floor with a crash.

Immediately afterwards, a sabre gash split open his chest, as fresh blood sprayed out, spraying on Xu Qi’an’s face and body.

In absolute silence, he toppled over backwards.

Moments later, Song Tingfeng was the first to react, rushing towards silver gong Zhu with a face as white as a sheet, feeling for his meridians.

“He’s not dead, he’s not dead...” Song Tingfeng yelled hoarsely, “Someone save him!”

The scene immediately became chaotic. A group of silver gongs started trying to stabilise silver gong Zhu, channelling qi into him, giving him medicine. They then picked him up, and carried him off, planning to take him to the constabulary for further treatment.

Another group drew their sabres in a wave of “sching!” sounds, surrounding Xu Qi’an.

The silent Zhu Guangxiao, hand on his sword hilt, stood in front of Xu Qi'an.

"Ningyan..." Song Tingfeng's face became even whiter. With great difficulty, he squeezed out the words "Flee..."

Xu Qi'an, who with one strike used up all his qi, shook his head, his face full of tiredness. He laughed, "If I flee, what happens to my uncle and auntie?"

Song Tingfeng became angry. He pulled at Xu Qi'an's robe, pointing at the dazed young girl, shouting with gritted teeth, "Is it worth it? For a girl that you don't even know, is it worth it?"

"She's still a child..." Xu Qi'an stared back at him, "There are some things, that are more valuable than one's life."

He started walking away, lightly. No one dared to stop him. When he took a step, the Nightwatchers would back off a step.

After about ten steps, Xu Qi'an took off his plaque and scabbard, and threw them on the ground. Then, he made an action that no body could understand.

With eyes turned towards the heavens, he raised his hand, and gave a military salute.

So many years apart, on Xu Qi'an's face flashed again that overflowing youthful vigour, that he had when he first graduated police academy.

Even if he was covered in blood.

Chapter 103. Waist Chop^[^1]

Nobody understood Xu Qi'an's military salute, but Song Tingfeng understood the murderous intent coming from some of the bronze gongs, all subordinates of silver gong Zhu.

"Capture him! Don't let him escape." Song Tingfeng yelled loudly, and rushed forward to push Xu Qi'an down and twist his hands behind his back, after which he took a look at everyone present.

"Bronze Gong Xu Qi'an attacked his superiors. He broke the law and should be sent to the constabulary for trial."

Zhu Guangxiao came over and wordlessly took off the rope around his waist, using it to restrain his colleague by himself.

After seeing the two restrain Xu Qi'an, the other Bronze Gongs nearby were slightly relieved.

Song Tingfeng's face changed colour, and he whispered in Zhu Guangxiao's ear, "You take him to the office. I'll move first and report this matter to be boss. Remember, don't let Silver Gong Zhu's subordinates escort him, and don't let them harm him."

After saying that, Song Tingfeng clasped his fists together and said, "This person had come with us on Silver Gong Li's orders, so we are also responsible for his crime. We will escort him back to the office, and everyone else can continue on the House Raid.

"Alright!"

"Thanks."

The bronze gongs present nodded.

Since Song Tingfeng had promised to do the work, Even if the criminal escaped, it would not be their business, anyway.

Additionally, The task of raiding the house hadn't yet been completed, and everyone present wanted to make some money, given the opportunity.

Song Tingfeng found a few colleagues who they had played Russian Roulette together with last night in the Jiaofang Si to escort Xu Qi'an together.

Old Song was probably angry, and ignored Xu Qi'an the whole way, even kicking him once or twice.

After leaving the mansion, he galloped away at top speed.

Xu Qi'an, tied up with ropes, and on horseback was escorted by four bronze gongs to the Nightwatcher's Office.

At that time, his adrenalin consumed, Xu Qi'an finally began to worry about himself.

He surely feared death, but he didn't regret his actions. The criminal official's family members were innocent, and should have able to leave without having anything done to them.

Xu Qi'an had been adapting to the rules and regulations of this era, and was trying his best to integrate to the world. This is what he had said to Xu Xinnian.

He had also been persuading himself.

At least for now. As an eighth rank martial artist, I could only adapt to the environment.

But, when he saw the fate of the girl, Xu Qi'an faith in justice, which had been cooling down, suddenly became hot and boiling. He had regained his original heart.

...

Li Yuchun was working in the hall, when his ears moved suddenly. He raised his head and waited for a few seconds, when Song Tingfeng rushed to the Spring Breeze Hall.

"What's the matter?" Li Yuchun asked.

His hasty footsteps indicated that he had something important to report.

"Xu Qi'an almost killed Silver Gong Zhu. Boss, you have to save him quickly." Song Tingfeng spoke very fast. Not waiting for Li Yuchun to respond, he continued, "Zhu Guangxiao and others are currently escorting him back to the constabulary. Gold gong Zhu will find out very quickly, I fear that Xu Qi'an wouldn't even have the opportunity to enter the constabulary."

Li Yuchun did not ask any further, suddenly rising, and with Song Tingfeng at his heels, sprinted out of Spring Breeze Hall.

His target was very clear; Yang Yan's Divine Spear Hall.

The only people who could deal with gold gongs were other gold gongs.

As the two of them walked at top speed, Li Yuchun said, "What happened?"

Song Tingfeng, panting slightly, replied in a rush: “That Zhu wanted to assault a girl of the criminal’s family, Xu Ningyan made to stop him, the two of them had an altercation, and with one strike Xu Qi’an seriously wounded silver gong Zhu, his life is in danger...”

After Song Tingfeng had finished, he continued to add details, including before they had set out, silver gong Zhu’s singling out of Xu Qi’an and deliberate bullying.

Assault a girl?

If Li Yuchun initially thought Xu Qi’an was somewhat in the wrong for attacking silver gong Zhu, he was now unequivocally on Xu Qi’an’s side.

“In a moment when we see gold gong Yang, you repeat what you just said. But remember this: don’t mention silver gong Zhu deliberately singling out and bullying Xu Qi’an.” Li Yuchun instructed him.

Song Tingfeng was dazed for a few seconds, before suddenly realising what he meant, and vigorously grunted agreement.

If he were to tell about the altercation in the constabulary, gold gong Yang perhaps would have thought that Xu Qi’an and silver gong Zhu’s altercation had some personal disagreements within.

This would then be equivalent to fighting because of personal enmity.

But if he were not to mention this, then Xu Qi’an would purely have been upholding justice, yes, only upholding justice.

The squad makeup of house raids was designed to allow people to supervise each other, to prevent corruption and secret smuggling of confiscated goods.

But whatever side Xu Qi’an stood on, he had still made a mistake, a very serious mistake. His correct course of action would be to report it back to the constabulary, and not privately deal with the matter himself, causing grave injury in the process.

In any constabulary, any violation when an subordinate attacks or kills a superior, would be a crime sentenced to chopping at the waist.

“He, can he be saved?” Song Tingfeng asked hoarsely.

“...” Li Yuchun looked at him, “I don’t know.”

The two of them came to divine spear hall. Yang Yan did not go to the Tower of Noble Spirit to accompany Wei Yuan, rather was sitting in his own building meditating.

He seemed to not even want to open his eyes, continuing to reverse breathe, running his qi through microcosmic orbits.

Given any other time, Li Yuchun would have waited patiently, until the orbit had finished before reporting his matter.

But today, he couldn’t wait. Li Yuchun said solemnly, “Gold gong Yang, there’s been a serious matter.”

Yang Yan opened his eyes, expressionless, replying without annoyance or anger: “What matter?”

Li Yuchun glanced at Song Tingfeng, and the latter immediately recounted everything that had happened earlier, about the altercation with silver gong Zhu during the house raid, hiding any hint of personal grudges.

Li Yuchun then added, “With gold gong Zhu’s temperament, I’m afraid Xu Qi’an won’t be able to come back.”

Yang Yan showed a serious expression, “I know.”

He rose, and with one step disappeared from the room.

...

Zhu Yang^[^2] was one of the Capital’s ten gold gongs, a fourth rank martial artist. In his early years he was in the military, from a squad leader working his way all the way up to being a Baihu captain. He was later picked by Wei Yuan and invited into the Nightwatchers organisation.

He was one of Wei Yuan’s direct gold gongs, his status only slightly less than that of the two adoptive sons.

Zhu Yang had three sons: the eldest was a useless student and an inept martial artist, the second was a passable scholar, currently working as a clerk in the government.

Only his third son had brilliant natural aptitude, being the youngest silver gong in the entire Nightwatcher organisation, and was doted upon by Zhu Yang.

At this time, one of the silver gongs under his command barged into his office in panic, with a nasty expression on his face, “Sir, sir, things are bad, Master Zhu is in a serious matter...”

Zhu Yang, who was intently reading a dossier, suddenly looked up, hearing the silver gong say, “Master Zhu was gravely injured by a bronze gong, currently on the verge of death. He’s already been brought back to the constabulary and is getting emergency medical treatment. Your subordinate has sent people to ask for the Sitianjian’s arcanists.”

Lead by the silver gong, gold gong Zhu rushed to his son’s Falcon Hall, and saw his unconscious young son, saw the huge gash on his chest.

His subordinate bronze gongs took turns to give him qi, maintaining his body’s function, whilst two physicians in the constabulary were attending to him.

Gold gong Zhu’s face became dark, “How is the situation?”

The two physicians seemed not to hear him, not stopping in their movements, stopping blood, applying medicine, acupuncture, and sewing up the wound.

“If the sword wound would have been half an inch deeper, his heart would have been cut open. If that were the case, even the Sitianjian’s arcanists would not have been able to do anything.” A physician looked up at gold gong Zhu, explaining.

“It was the silver gong magic item that blocked the otherwise life-threatening attack, luckily saving his life, but the blade qi has entered his internal organs. If they are not pulled out with qi, then Master Zhu would only be able to live another hour.”

“When are the Sitianjian’s arcanists coming?” Gold Gong Zhu’s voice sharply rose.

“We’ve already sent people, they’ll arrive very quickly.” The silver gong who led him replied.

Gold gong Zhu nodded, “Who did it?”

The silver gong replied, “Bronze Gong Xu Qi’an, under Li Yuchun...”

Xu Qi’an?

Gold gong Zhu had heard of this small character. Jiang Lyuzhong and Yang Yan fought just because of him. He was only a small bronze gong, how could he have hurt his son?

“When gathering, that small bronze gong was late. Silver gong Zhu punished him for it, who would’ve thought that he had taken a grudge. When raiding the house, silver gong Zhu did nothing more than tease a few of the criminal family’s women, and he immediately attacked him.”

This silver gong had only heard from the bronze gong that had reported to him. The events were indeed like that, however he himself made the recounting softer, mixing up the reasons and putting implication on different events.

He placed the blame for the altercation on Xu Qi’an. After all, he couldn’t say in front of the man’s father: “Your son raped a woman, and was struck down for it.”

Looking at gold gong Zhu’s iron-grey face, the silver gong continued, “That Xu Qi’an is already being escorted back, he’s probably nearly at the constabulary now.”

After confirming that the Sitianjian White Cloaks had enough time to get here, Zhu Yang looked deeply at his unconscious son, before turning into a gust of wind and disappearing from the room.

Rushing out of the constabulary, gold gong Zhu looked down the street, seeing six riders slowly approaching. On one of the horses sat Xu Qi’an, hands tied with ropes behind his back.

Five others surrounded him, escorting him back to the constabulary. The other Nightwatchers were still performing the house raid, making an inventory of the goods.

Gold Gong Zhu stared at the small bronze gong on the horse, without any anger or murderous intent, channelling some qi into his fingers. “Sching!” Zhu Yang’s blade flew out of the scabbard by itself, and under control of his qi struck towards Xu Qi’an.

Everyone was caught by surprise, including the bound Xu Qi’an.

“Ding!”

Another bronze gong’s sabre suddenly flew out of its scabbard, blocking the knife edge that was flying towards Xu Qi’an.

The two blades clashed in mid-air, making a clanging sound.

Xu Qi’an had long expected this, but his back nonetheless erupted in cold sweat.

The expressionless Zhu Yang faced him, as if he was merely stepping on an ant. His face finally darkened, and he turned to look at the stiff-faced man behind him, trying to keep his anger down,

“Attempted murder on a superior, according to the law must be executed. You cannot protect him.”

“If he’s to be executed then I’ll do it.” Stiff-faced Yang Yan faced that burning gaze, saying calmly, “When did you get to act on my people?”

“Sure. Then this matter will be decided by Wei Yuan.”

The two of them immediately headed towards the Tower of Noble Spirit, to find Wei Yuan to arbitrate.

After being permitted in, the expressionless Yang Yan, and the bursting-with-anger Zhu Yang climbed the building, meeting Wei Yuan on the seventh floor.

Wei Yuan stood at the balcony, back facing the tea room.

Nangong Qianrou stood at the threshold between the balcony and the tea room, his back to a wall, his face cold with a hint of amusement.

“Duke Wei!” Zhu Yang clasped his fists, “My Son Zhu Chengzhu^[^3] was severely wounded by Xu Qi’an, and is still in critical condition.

“Please take responsibility for your subordinate, and severely punish Bronze Gong Xu Qi’an.”

He raised his head, to look at Wei Yuan’s figure, and seeing that he did not turn, continued, “Duke Wei, this matter...”

Zhu Yang recounted everything he was told.

Wei Yuan turned, pacing back to the tea room, and sat by the table.

Yang Yan said: “Father, I have a different recounting of events here. Zhu Chengzhu took advantage of the house raid to attempt to assault the women, and was stopped by bronze gong Xu Qi’an. Not only did Zhu Chengzhu not stop what he was doing, but rather pulled the girl into the courtyard, and made to assault her in front of everybody. Xu Qi’an’s persuasion did not work, and in anger acted.”

It must have been hard for gold gong Yang, his entire daily allotment of words was pretty much spent.

“Piss!” Zhu Yang erupted in anger, “Clearly it was bronze gong Xu Qi’an harbouring thoughts of revenge.”

As if no one was present, Wei Yuan arranged the porcelain, and started making tea, waiting for the two gold gongs to finish arguing — mostly Zhu Yang shouting and cursing; Yang Yan did not give him any attention.

“Given that there are differences, then we must compare accounts.” Wei Yuan said.

Very quickly, Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao, along with the other bronze gongs that had returned already, were summoned to the hall, including Xu Qi’an himself.

He was surrounded by everyone else, his hands tied.

“Say clearly!” Wei Yuan looked around at everyone, saying warmly.

The bronze gongs all lowered their heads, not daring to look back at him, even if this great eunuch always bore a warm and kindly demeanour.

Zhu Yang’s eyes stared sharply at the silver gong that had reported back to him, “Tell everything exactly as you heard it to Duke Wei.”

That silver gong repeated his report, its contents identical to what Zhu Yang said.

The bronze gongs frowned.

Zhu Guangxiao pushed Song Tingfeng; he himself was the silent type, not one for words, and thus could only rely on his more extroverted friend to speak for him.

In front of Duke Wei, I’ll also tremble when I speak... Song Tingfeng drew a deep breath, “Duke Wei, your subordinate has a report.”

After receiving Wei Yuan’s nod, Song Tingfeng said in a low voice, “When we gathered, we didn’t arrive late, but silver gong Zhu specifically singled us out, striking me and Xu Qi’an.

“During the house raid, he forced us three to stay in the front hall, and not enter the inner courtyards. A higher ranked official cannot be talked around, so we did as told.

“Only when we heard women’s cries from the back yard, was Xu Qi’an not able to resist any longer, rushing over. He shouted down the other bronze gongs, but couldn’t do anything against silver gong Zhu.

“Silver gong Zhu knew the law, yet still broke it, and not only did he not stop, rather he pulled the girl into the yard, and made to assault her in front of everyone, thus forcing Xu Qi’an to take action.”

Song Tingfeng clenched his teeth, saying loudly, “Duke Wei, you may ask any other bronze gong present. We all witnessed this.”

The same situation, two similar ways of retelling it, yet two completely different notions.

In that silver gong’s report, he emphasised that Xu Qi’an took advantage of silver gong Zhu’s lapse in attention to attack, to repay a personal grievance.

But in Song Tingfeng’s report, the core point was that silver gong maliciously provoked him, and constantly singled him out. Xu Qi’an resisted for a long time, and finally could not see past the silver gong’s sin, and thus attacked in anger, to uphold justice.

Wei Yuan looked at the other bronze gongs.

The other bronze gongs all had heads lowered, not daring to speak.

In a fight between deities, they couldn’t afford to offend either side.

Wei Yuan said warmly, “Say the truth, and you will not be in any trouble.”

Their minds were put at ease, the bronze gongs exchanged glances, before one of them muttered, “Xu Qi’an and the other two didn’t come late...”

The other resisted, but couldn’t resist any longer, saying “Song Tingfeng’s words are true. Silver gong Zhu carried the woman into the courtyard, and was about to assault her in front of all of us. His words were provocative towards Xu Qi’an.”

This was the benefit of a group comprising the people of many squads. If all the bronze gongs were under silver gong Zhu’s command, their words would have perfectly lined up with Zhu’s side, pointing the spearhead at Xu Qi’an.

Zhu Yang snorted coldly, “Even so, the constabulary must sort this matter.”

He delicately shifted the conflict. No matter what the reason for this matter was, Xu Qi’an had nearly killed a superior, this was something that was without doubt.

Even if his son made a mistake, but when did it come to a small bronze gong to mete out punishment? Furthermore, the violation of assaulting a criminal family’s women was not a serious one; a light punishment would be docking pay, a middling would be imprisonment and demotion, and most heavy would only be being terminated from their job.

To cause so much commotion, how many Nightwatchers were now watching? He didn’t believe that Wei Yuan would be biased towards a bronze gong, even if that bronze gong was regarded highly by two gold gongs.

Wei Yuan said: “Zhu Chengzhu knew the law and broke it. To ignore the law, he will immediately be terminated, and never employed again.”

Zhu Yang’s face turned.

Wei Yuan continued, “Bronze gong Xu Qi’an attacked a silver gong, and caused grave injury. This is a most serious violation. He will be imprisoned, and sentenced to be chopped at the waist in the market street, in seven days time.”

Zhu Yang closed his eyes, saying nothing more.

“You are dismissed, don’t disturb my reading.” Wei Yuan waved his hand.

Everyone bowed, and was about to leave, when they suddenly heard Xu Qi’an say in a low voice, “Duke Wei...”

Under everyone’s gaze, he walked forward two steps, and asked, “*With sincere heart serve the world, and not for self nor profit nor greed,* are these words from the heart?”

When asking this, Xu Qi’an’s gaze never moved from Wei Yuan’s eyes.

Wei Yuan laughed, “Of course they are.”

Xu Qi’an nodded. He looked around at everyone else, and stopped when he got to Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao’s faces, almost as if giving the colleagues that cared about him an explanation: “*Your food and your money, the flesh and blood of the people. The people are easy to abuse, the heavens are hard to cheat.*”

He straightened his back, “These are also words from my heart.”

Chapter 104. Xu Xinnian I Would Sell My Body to Save Big Brother

After everyone left, Yang Yan sat down by the table, brows furrowed into a deep knot. He took the cup of tea Wei Yuan handed him, but did not drink for a long time.

Nangong Qianrou rolled his eyes, and asked for him: "Father, will you really kill that person?"

Yang Yan immediately looked towards Wei Yuan.

"Is there something wrong with my judgement?" Wei Yuan asked back.

Nangong Qianrou and Yang Yan shook their heads at the same time, the former smiling playfully, "Indeed, you're correct, but is father really willing to kill him?"

Wei Yuan took a sip of tea, and sighed, "I've said before, that he's a natural martial artist. That spirit is quite rare indeed."

With one blade he gravely wounded a Refining Spirit silver gong, how long has he been in Refining Qi?

...

Spring Breeze Hall.

Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao, with heads lowered and depressive moods, followed Li Yuchun back. Throughout the journey, Brother Chun was unimaginably silent.

Earlier, he had waited at the foot of the Tower of Noble Spirit, waiting for the incident to be resolved, and had received the news that Xu Qi'an was sentenced to waist chopping in seven days' time.

Li Yuchun said not a word, taking his two subordinates back.

"Drink some wine with me. I know you two have some secret stashes that you'll sneak drinks from on shift."

One couldn't hear any emotion in Li Yuchun's words, they were so calm as to be frightening.

Song Tingfeng opened his mouth, finally managing to squeeze out an "Okay."

Li Yuchun was a stiff, old-fashioned obsessive person, the silver gongs familiar with him would say that he stuck to the rules, those that didn't would make fun of him not knowing how to be flexible.

But no matter if they knew him well or not, no one in the constabulary really looked down on him. Quite the opposite, all of them in their hearts admired him, even if they wouldn't admit as much.

Li Yuchun's old-fashionedness leaked into every aspect of life, such as not permitting alcohol on shift.

Song Tingfeng retrieved his secret stash of alcohol from the side hall, along with three porcelain bowls.[^1] One of them originally was Xu Qi'an's.

Li Yuchun did not drink quickly, but drank bowl after bowl, not saying anything in between.

Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao silently drank with him.

One pot of wine was consumed very quickly. Li Yuchun, supported by his tipsiness, said, "I know Wei Yuan has his difficulties. Xu Qi'an did do wrong."

"What is assaulting a criminal family's woman really, does it really deserve death? That idiot nearly killed someone, nearly killed a silver gong."

Once Li Yuchun broke the silence, he continued pouring his heart out, "I thought I was stupid enough, I never thought that this guy is even dumber than me. If I'd known, I wouldn't have taken him, annoying."

"What could Wei Yuan do? Even if his aptitude... was better than average, it's gotten so big now, that everyone in the constabulary is watching. Would he really publicly show bias? Then where would that Duke Wei's authority go? To build up a reputation takes months and years of building, yet it can be broken in an instant. If he were to bias towards Xu Qi'an, who would obey Duke Wei in the future?"

"Good, now one is fired, one is chopped at the waist, a fair and just resolution. Ha, ha, ha."

"For a long time after, everyone in the constabulary won't dare to break the rules. Xu Qi'an won't be wronged in death."

Li Yuchun returned the bowl to Song Tingfeng, cursing, "What damned bowl is this? The decorations aren't even symmetrical."

Song Tingfeng looked carefully at it, and only then did he discover the bowl that he had used for half a year, really did have asymmetrical decorations.

The wine was gone, and he wasn't in the mood for conversation. He and Zhu Guangxiao returned to their side hall, without making a sound.

In the quiet Spring Breeze Hall, Li Yuchun sat stiffly for a long time, before slowly rising. Walking to the corner, he picked up a feather duster, and started to brush down every part of the hall that could accumulate dust.

He re-arranged his books, his vase, his table and chair, making them tidy and symmetrical.

Then, he took off his name plaque and sabre, and took off his Nightwatcher uniform.

Folding the uniform tidily, placing the sabre and plaque on top, Li Yuchun picked them up in both hands, and left the Spring Breeze Hall.

He walked straight towards the Tower of Noble Spirit.

On the way, he drew the attention of many bronze gongs. They pointed at him, muttering quietly amongst themselves.

Within these, there were those who had heard about Xu Qi'an severely wounding Zhu Chengzhu, and there were those who knew nothing, and were just there to eat popcorn.

"What's going on?"

“Haven’t you heard? Silver gong Zhu was nearly killed by a bronze gong, the one who struck him was Xu Qi’an, mn, Li Yuchun’s subordinate.”

“What’s silver gong Li doing?”

“I don’t know, let’s go and see.”

Three, five, seven, eight... the Nightwatchers following behind Li Yuchun slowly increased in number, becoming a rather large group.

They followed him all the way to the Tower of Noble Spirit.

Under the cautious and warning gaze of the guards by the tower, he stopped. With both hands he carried his uniform, name plaque, and sabre, completely ignoring the group of followers behind him.

“This subordinate is Li Yuchun, who joined the Nightwatchers in year 20 of Yuanjing, who has always upheld his duty with all required diligence. Always with belief in clearing out corrupt officials and civil servants, to serve the country and its people.” Li Yuchun’s voice was resonant.

“In sixteen years of service, I have never broken my duties of the law; never taken a bribe; never oppressed the innocent. I thought that with burning passion I could exchange it for a clear heaven and earth.

“However, in these sixteen years, I have seen my colleagues bully the common people, extort the merchants. Every single house raid, always embezzle silver and goods, rape and abuse the women, if this is tolerable, what is not?

“If one has no principles, how could he uphold principles? If oneself is not righteous, how could he right others? Today Li Yuchun cannot resist any longer, and so asks for resignation, or death.”

After he finished, in front of all the speechless faces of the surrounding Nightwatchers, he forcefully threw the uniform, the name plaque, the sabre all onto the ground, discarding them like worn out shoes.

After challenging Wei Yuan’s face in front of everybody, in front of the Tower of Noble Spirit, Li Yuchun turned to leave. No Nightwatchers stopped him, none spoke.

“This... do we stop him?” Someone asked in a low voice.

The surrounding Nightwatchers coldly stared back.

...

Xu Qi’an, in prison uniform, sat in the Nightwatchers’ prison, his back to the wall, smelling the unique rotten and damp smell that only jails had.

“Three times here. In my last life I was a policeman, but now in this I’m a regular at the jails.” Xu Qi’an laughed to himself, sighing about how unpredictable fate was.

The jail was silent, with only occasional sounds of cursing coming from neighbouring inmates. Most people kept their silence.

The criminals who were interred here were for the most part death row criminals, who had long become disheartened. Initially they would cry injustice, curse up a storm, but after they were invited out by the jailers to a friendly conversation, they figured out how to behave themselves.

They also understood the reason why everyone stayed silent.

No one wanted, before their deaths, to suffer through inhumane torture.

Xu Qi'an closed his eyes, thinking about whether or not he had any chance left to live.

The Cloud Deer Academy's scholars might come cause a scene, but they have no official ranks, and so can't easily get their way around officialdom. "Physics" also wouldn't be of any help, as after all this is the Nightwatchers' constabulary.

The Sitianjian Arcanists definitely would try to save me, but unless the Jianzheng himself showed up, they probably wouldn't have a chance. And to make the Jianzheng himself show up, my status is not enough... Xu Qi'an oh Xu Qi'an, just because you've felt the warmth of Fuxiang's breasts, have you forgotten how cold this society is? It's been two months and you still haven't gotten Chu Caiwei into bed.

The Earth Book was taken by them, otherwise I could have tried to ask ONE to save me, I don't know if his (her) position is high enough...

As he thought and thought, he fell asleep, and when he woke up the prison was silent, and out of his small window was a deep dark night.

Sleep recovered the energy that was sucked dry by the *One Blade from Heaven and Earth*, the price was that his stomach now rumbled heavily.

Using the faint light of the oil lamps in the corridor, Xu Qi'an saw that by the bars was placed a bowl of white rice, and two fat, big-eared rats were in the middle of enjoying their meal.

"Fuck, you fucking Shuke and Beita,^[^2] stealing my food!"

Xu Qi'an cursed in anger.

With no food to eat, he could only sit and meditate, reverse breathing and cycling his qi.

After who knows how long, the sky finally lightened.

The sound of footsteps came from the corridor, as two jailers walked over, and opened the cell door.

Xu Qi'an opened his eyes.

"Out." A jailer barked.

Xu Qi'an, wearing shackles on his hands and feet, was brought to the torture room.

Many rays of sunlight filtered in from holes in the wall, beating back the darkness of the torture room, but unable to dispel in anyway its cold gloominess.

By the interrogation table, were sat two young figures. One had red phoenix eyes, willow like brows, and delicate features. The other had red lips and white teeth, and was beautifully handsome in every way.

Two rabbits walking together, how could you tell if I'm male or female?

Nangong Qianrou laughed mockingly, "Delicate and effeminate."

He very much disliked this scholar's attitude; from when he came into the constabulary to coming here, he always had his head raised, chest out, and when he looked at someone he used not his eyes but rather his nose.

This arrogant aura instinctively made people hate it, the same aura as the other scholars of the Cloud Deer Academy, same as the white cloaks of the Sitianjian.

Xu Xinnian gave him a side-eye, and said lightly, "Only women and lowly people are hard to raise."

"And who is the woman?" Nangong Qianrou laughed, a dangerous glint flashing in his eyes.

"I was too abrupt." Xu Xinnian cupped his hands and made a Confucian greeting, "May I ask what is Miss's beautiful name?"

"..." Nangong Qianrou wanted to kill.

Having had his full of sharp-tongued performance, Xu Xinnian laughed coldly, and raised his head again.

Seeing this at the threshold and hearing their conversation, Xu Qi'an came out in cold sweat for his younger brother.

He thought *Cijiu, this beauty is a high-ranked martial artist, you're a small eighth-rank scholar, you need to know when to keep your head down.*

Nangong Qianrou tilted his head, looking at Xu Qi'an, rising, "One stick of incense's time."

And left, just like that.

Xu Xinnian stared at his cousin in silence.

"Why has Cijiu come, aren't you studying in the Academy?" Xu Qi'an said.

"Yesterday, one of your colleagues came to the manor with a message, telling us of your situation. Father travelled overnight to the Academy to tell me." Xu Xinnian let out a turbid breath, "I came back to the manor last night, and at first light when the inner city gates opened, I came to find you."

He had brought his teacher's letter, and had a Juren qualification himself, and only with that could he enter the prison.

"Everyone at home is worried about you, mum didn't sleep the entire night." Xu Xinnian said.

Xu Qi'an nodded.

“Lingyin is also really worried for you, in the morning she only drank one bowl of porridge.”

“It’s hard for her.” Xu Qi’an was moved.

Xu Xinnian nodded, agreeing with his cousin’s view, and continued: “My teacher suggested that I go to the eldest princess, she may be able to save you. As for our teachers... Wei Yuan’s relationship with the Academy is not very good.”

Xu Qi’an said hesitantly, “Cijiu, do you blame big brother?”

Xu Xinnian replied solemnly, “Big brother, you’re not practiced at your craft, you didn’t even kill the piece of trash.”

Xu Qi’an laughed out loud, “That’s like a scholar...” as he laughed and laughed, he finally fell silent again, before saying softly, “I’m sorry.”

Xu Xinnian did not respond.

The torture room became silent, as the two brothers did not speak for a long time.

Finally, Xu Cijiu sighed, “I will save you.”

Xu Qi’an nodded, pretending that he did not feel moved, saying, “Given that you’ve come, could you help your big brother to run an errand. Do you have silver on you?”

“Naturally.” Xu Xinnian replied.

How could he have visited if he didn’t have silver?

“Mm, go find the warden, say that you want to retrieve one of my possessions, if it’s still there. It’s a small jade mirror. Take the mirror, go to the welfare home in the eastern district and find a monk. Say to him: Please pass on the message, THREE has been imprisoned in the Nightwatchers’ prison, please help. Xu Qi’an!”

Once the earth book mirror had accepted an owner, others couldn’t log on and chat, thus he needed Six to send the message for him.

He had faith that the clever One would see the message, and know exactly what to do. Because in the earth book group chat, the only one with power in the capital was Number One.

Number One also owed him one.

Of course, Number One might just flat out refuse to save him, but that would be another matter.

Furthermore, asking Xu Xinnian to retrieve the earth book fragment was Xu Qi’an’s test towards Wei Yuan.

Testing if he really had the heart to kill him.

Xu Xinnian stared at him for a while, asking, “If it’s not there?”

“Then don’t worry about it.”

Watching his older cousin being swallowed up by the darkness of the corridor, Xu Xinnian left the torture room, and found the warden. Brazenly, he handed over thirty taels silver worth of banknotes, saying, "I need to retrieve one of my cousin's possessions."

The warden naturally had no objection; money makes everything easy.

He immediately led Xu Xinnian to the storehouse, and took out a sack. Inside were all the items that were found on Xu Qi'an.

"You cannot take away the bronze gong, the sabre, the waist plaque, or the uniform." the warden said.

These were all the Nightwatchers' things.

Xu Xinnian searched around briefly, and came into contact with a small mirror, made of jade. On the surface of the mirror was lightly drawn images of a crossbow, of silver banknotes, and other strange pictures.

Chapter 105. Explosion

Xu Xinnian swapped back his cousin's possession for thirty taels of silver. Stuffing the small jade mirror into his sleeve, he left the prison, and at the doorway came across Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao, who had been waiting for a long time.

Song Tingfeng said: "We've already got the permit for entry into the Imperial city. You haven't been there before, so how about we take you."

Xu Xinnian bowed and expressed his thanks.

Song Tingfeng waved, "As long as we can save him, anything can do."

The three of them rode on quick horses to the Imperial City gates. Song Tingfeng took out the entry permit from the Nightwatchers, and was easily permitted entry.

On the way, they were interrogated non-stop by any Jinwu guards they met, followed by the Yulin Guards.

They finally reached the palace, and was stopped again.

The Nightwatchers' entry permit could only get so far. To go further, would be the Imperial Palace itself. Even though it was very large, it was nominally the Emperor's home.

Xu Xinnian said, "This one is a student of the Cloud Deer Academy, and has known the eldest princess for a while. Please send the message that I ask to meet her."

Everyone knew that the eldest princess studied at the Cloud Deer Academy, so the guards did not make things hard for him. After asking the three of them to wait, he went off to find her.

After fifteen minutes, the guard returned, saying "Follow me."

He led the three of them into the Imperial Palace, warning, "Be careful of where you look, what you speak, take care of your words and actions."

Xu Xinnian slightly lowered his head. Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao knew the rules, and walked with quick footsteps with their heads lowered.

Even though they have entered the Imperial Palace, they were still only permitted to walk along certain routes. If they took a wrong turn, and got questioned by the royal guards, if a permit book didn't come out then blades quickly followed.

After walking for a long time, they finally came to the eldest princess's Embracing Moon Palace, where she lived. There were already two palace maids waiting by the great red doors.

The palace maids greeted them, and after Xu Xinnian returned the greeting, led the three of them into the palace..

Through corridors and courtyards, the three of them were led to the ornate drawing room.

A beautiful woman in royal dress was sat at the table facing the door, one hand holding a book, the other a cup of tea, sipping it in an elegant and carefree manner.

"Your Highness, the guests are here." The maids said, before turning to leave.

Xu Xinnian bowed and cupped his hands, saying loudly, "Xu Xinnian of the Cloud Deer Academy greets the eldest princess."

The eldest princess smiled lightly, "For what has Cijiu come today?"

She knew Xu Xinnian; when she was in the Cloud Deer Academy studying, they had met a few times. But only on that day when she ordered people to investigate Xu Qi'an, did she have a deeper impression of this student.

Cijiu... Xu Xinnian was stunned for a moment; he wasn't surprised that the eldest princess remembered him, this princess was naturally clever and talented above her peers. She had an eidetic memory, and knew very well how to keep talent around her.

What he was surprised by was that the eldest princess actually remembered his courtesy name, yet he had never had a formal meeting with her.

The eldest princess calling him like this was in reality somewhat unbecoming of her status, but undoubtedly pulled closer their relationship, making Xu Xinnian feel very appreciated.

Xu Xinnian himself wasn't a simple man either, and very quickly calmed his mood, replying earnestly, "Cijiu's elder cousin is in dire trouble, please may the eldest princess help him."

The eldest princess's expression froze for a second, as her delicate and elegant face betrayed a hint of surprise, "What's happened."

Xu Xinnian told the eldest princess what had happened, with Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao filling in some of the gaps.

Afterwards, Xu Xinnian cupped his hands again, "My Cousin's actions were indeed rash, but they were undoubtedly righteous. If he had not acted, then that poor child would have suffered silver gong Zhu's abuse.

“Righteousness is such, that it does not bias for power, it does not care for profit.[^1] Even though my cousin is not a scholar, this morality fills all us scholars with deep respect and admiration.”

The reason why he quoted from the classics, was to cause the eldest princess to relate to his arguments. She was at least half a scholar.

The eldest princess thought for a moment, before asking “What punishment did Wei Yuan give?”

“Silver gong Zhu would be terminated, and never employed again. My cousin... he will be chopped at the waist in seven days.” Xu Xinnian said solemnly.

The eldest princess became silent, her inner thoughts undetectable under that calm cold face.

Xu Xinnian sighed in his heart; this princess wasn’t any soft feeble woman, she had a strong sense of independence, sometimes even verging on domineering.

That type of person always has her own ideas.

“This is a letter from my teacher, Scholar Mubai, and scholar Youping, asking the eldest princess to help.” Xu Xinnian decided to use his trump card.

From his sleeve he pulled out the three great scholars’ letters.

“Clang...”

As the letters came out, the jade mirror also slid out from his sleeve.

Xu Xinnian picked it up unhurriedly, stowing it safely, before handing over the letters.

The eldest princess took them, and after reading through them, said calmly, “I know. But though the Nightwatchers serve the royal family, they only listen to His Majesty my Father alone. I can only try my best.”

Xu Xinnian took a deep breath, “Thank you, princess.”

The maids saw off Xu Xinnian and his group, and when they came back, the eldest princess ordered, “Send someone to the Nightwatchers constabulary to ask Duke Wei, find out the details behind the altercation between bronze gong Xu Qi’an and silver gong Zhu Chengzhu.”

“Yes!” the maid replied.

...

Leaving the palace complex, leaving the imperial city, Xu Xinnian and the two bronze gongs bade farewell.

He rode on his horse, slowly travelling towards the outer city, a cloud of worry over his face.

I can’t put all my chips on the eldest princess. Though she’s agreed to this matter, how much effort she was willing to put in is as yet unknown.

Father has gone to the Sitianjian, but I don’t know if those arcanists have any way of saving big brother...

In the coming spring examinations I must pass, I must climb higher, control more power and influence, otherwise I can't do anything.

Xu Xinnian took off his waterskin, and washed his dry mouth. Through his clothes he touched the jade mirror.

When he got to the East city, it was nearly dusk.

The east city's welfare home was in the poor slums. Here were gathered the bottom of the capital's society, peddlers abound, pickpockets a-plenty.

The people he met on the way all wore worn and tattered winter clothes, with thin faces, and the expression they had when looking at him was like wolves eyeing their prey.

But Xu Xinnian's Confucian robe made these peasants who were on the precipice of hunger keep clear heads.

The mud houses of this area were all worn and broken down, placed with no rhyme or reason. Everywhere on the side of the road was rubbish, and through the air floated a light smell of urine and feces.

It was clear to see that in the summer, flies would abound.

A young boy with a sallow face, plucking up his courage, came up and stopped Xu Xinnian's horse.

"Master, please could I have some money... I've not eaten for seven days." the boy said.

If you hadn't eaten for seven days, you'd've starved to death... Xu Xinnian instinctively wanted to mock him, but then swallowed it back down.

From his wallet he took out a nugget of silver, and threw it over.

This boy's face was sallow, his eyes listless, even if seven days was a bit much, but he had certainly not eaten for a long time.

Seeing this, it was not just the boy whose eyes lit up, but also the other peasants, old or young, at the side of the street.

Greed and desire shone in their eyes.

Seven or eight boys followed the first one's example, and surrounded Xu Xinnian's horse. The older peasants started to crowd over silently.

"Master, could I have some spare change."

"I haven't eaten for ten days."

Both adults and children surrounded his horse, very much making to not let him go until he gave them money.

Xu Xinnian's sharp eyes beat back a man that had tried to reach out to grab at his wallet, as he shouted "Quiet!"

The clamour stopped in an instant, as everyone all unconsciously stopped talking.

“Sod off!” Xu Xinnian gathered his qi in his *dantian*, and shouted again.

The adults and children who surrounded his horse suddenly all felt a strong sense of fright, that instinctively pushed them away from the horse, not daring to let them get closer.

The eighth rank Confucianist “Self-cultivation” could to a limited extent control the speech and manner of others, being able to make laws follow words in the shallowest sense.

Xu Xinnian shook his head helplessly, and urged his horse on. Not long after, he came to the welfare home.

He dismounted, and fearing that his horse would be stolen, lead it across the threshold.

In the yard, an old clerk was currently tidying the courtyard. He raised up his old wizened face, asking, “Young Master, for what are you after?”

Xu Xinnian said, “Is there a monk in the home?”

The clerk replied, “You mean Master Hengyuan... he left, it’s been about two days...”

Xu Xinnian frowned, “When will he come back?”

“I don’t know, he said he had news of his sect-brother, and needed to leave for a few days.” the old clerk shook his head.

Xu Xinnian left the welfare home in disappointment, leaving the east city.

...

Dusk. Finishing dinner, the eldest princess summoned to her study the captain of the guard in her palace; the captain had gathered information from the Nightwatchers’ constabulary.

Wearing a resplendent dress, the eldest princess stood by the window, giving the captain an unbelievably beautiful shadow to look at.

She listened quietly to everything he had to say, before asking, “Did Xu Qi’an originally have any grudges with silver gong Zhu?”

The captain shook his head, “Your servant has already asked around, the two of them shouldn’t have known each other. However that silver gong privately did harbour resentment and jealously to bronze gong Xu Qi’an.”

“Were Minster Cheng’s family sentenced by association, and sent into the Jiaofangsi?” the eldest princess asked.

“They were not.” the captain replied.

The eldest princess didn’t continue, thinking for a while, and said casually, “What do you think of this matter?”

The young captain hesitated, “Your servant has asked around, in role call, bronze gong Xu Qi’an did not turn up late, but still suffered a beating from Zhu Chengzhu, showing that he wanted to provoke matters... in these years, the Nightwatchers have indeed again and again committed acts such as assaulting criminal families’ women.

“Some were meant to be sent to the Jiaofangsi anyway, thus they are not of concern, but even those who had no such sentence still commonly suffered to the demon’s claw.”

Similar matters happened time and time again, it was only just that nobody wanted to represent these women of convicted criminals is all.

Convicted officials were criminals anyway, if the wall fell everyone was happy to give an extra push.

The captain continued, “Your servant has also found out, that at the time silver gong Zhu had the idea to force Xu Qi’an to act first. He succeeded, only that...”

The eldest princess laughed lightly, “Only that he never thought that a small insignificant bronze gong could unleash that much energy in one blow.

“Alright, you are dismissed.”

The captain left the study.

The eldest princess sat by the window, staring into the quiet courtyard, her eyes dark and deep.

...

Late at night.

The moon scattered down a cold radiance, the calm Sangpo Lake reflected its shadow.

The clanking of armour, the tidy thud of footsteps echoed around Sangpo Lake, coming from the patrolling royal guards.

The cold night wind blew by, blowing ripples into Sangpo Lake, breaking up the silver pieces of light.

A delicately cut paper person, about a palm’s width in height, rode the wind, floating down over the lake’s surface, landing on the platform in its centre.

It lay silent for a few seconds, before shakily standing up, and with its small legs came to the temple door, squeezing in through the door cracks.

After a few seconds, a very dim firelight could be seen lighting up through the cracks. Soon after, came a “Boom”, like thunder striking, as bright searing flame swallowed the Temple Eternally Suppressing Mountains and Seas.

The frenzied force sent waves of water many metres high, sending broken roof tiles, stone bricks, timber frames scattering out several dozen metres far, crashing into the lake surface.

The sound of the explosion was heard several hundred li away. The royal guard near Sangpo Lake felt at the same time an earthquake, as well as saw the tongue of fire that rose into the sky.

Chapter 106. Recommendation

The Yuanjing Emperor awoke abruptly from his dreams. The vast, expansive palace hall was definingly silent. The eunuch that accompanied him was slumped over his small table, sound asleep.

He had no concubines in his bed, nor any maids in his room. For over twenty years Emperor Yuanjing had cut himself off from worldly desires, and cultivated Dao, thus the great bedroom of the emperor had become a forbidden place to all the palace's concubines.

As to the Yuanjing Emperor's cultivation, the concubines' feelings could only be described by one sentence:

A scholar staying by the candlelight studying hard — pulling an all nighter! (The Abalone's dry!)
[^1]

Naturally, this was said with a complaining tone, but the Yuanjing Emperor never ever cared what his concubines thought. As an emperor with many children, concubines had long since been unnecessary.

If he had started cultivating twenty years earlier, his ministers and servants would have risked their life to admonish them.

"Has Your Majesty woken up?" The great eunuch had a shallow sleep, and immediately woke up, coming to the dragon bed with some panic.

"What time is it?" Emperor Yuanjing rubbed his temples.

"4:15 in the morning." As the eunuch spoke, he turned to the teapot on a small stove nearby, and poured Emperor Yuanjing some warm water.

Having served the emperor for so many years, certain things he didn't even need to ask.

Emperor Yuanjing drank the water, and slowly let out a deep breath, "After the ancestor worship, we have felt ill at ease. Arrange a palanquin to the Lingbao Temple, we wish to cultivate with the national teacher to calm our heart."[^2]

Master and servant walked out of the bedchamber, and suddenly heard a clear bell's ring break the night's silence, echoing into every single corner of the palace city.

The imperial palace entered battle-readiness.

Emperor Yuanjing frowned, and saw a squad of royal guards running over at full speed, their expressions terrified.

The leading guard shouted, "Your Majesty! There was an explosion at Sangpo Lake, Yongzhen Shanhe Temple has been destroyed! The three hundred soldiers on guard have all lost their lives, there were no survivors."

Emperor Yuanjing froze in place.

A long time later, he said solemnly, "Notify Wei Yuan, to immediately bring men into the palace. Notify the national teacher, to see us. Notify the Jianzheng... say the temple has been destroyed."

...

That night, the Sitianjian Arcanists all suddenly awoke for no particular reason, frightened as if the end days had come.

...

The first to arrive was the female national teacher. She stood on a seven-star sword^[^3], soaring through the air.

A lotus crown on her head, wearing a yin-yang daoist robe, her wide sleeves fluttering in the wind, the aura of a celestial being came like a tide.

One couldn't tell how old she was, but her appearance was incredibly beautiful, her stature beyond ordinary. She simultaneously had the tenderness of a young girl, as well as the charm of a mature woman, having both mortal and immortal grace.

It was as if her beauty was a myriad mountains, a myriad plains away; it could be seen, but never reached.

“National teacher...” Emperor Yuanjing opened his mouth, before sighing, “The thing underneath Sangpo Lake has gotten out.”

The female national teacher nodded slightly, her voice indistinct yet crisp, “This poor Daoist already knows.”

Wei Yuan arrived next, bringing the two gold gongs on shift at the constabulary, as well as his two adoptive sons, four high-rank martial artists in total.

Combined with the palace's own masters, the group of martial artists, together already frighteningly strong, along with the sect leader of the Human Sect, surrounded Emperor Yuanjing as they rushed to Sangpo Lake.

Over a thousand royal soldiers were congregated beside Sangpo Lake, holding torches. The high-ranked martial artists within the contingent were gathered together, waiting for Emperor Yuanjing.

Yongzhen Shanhe Temple no longer existed. The tall platform was half ruined, and on the water's surface floated broken wooden beams.

Seeing this scene, Emperor Yuanjing's brow twitched violently, as he shouted, “Where's the divine sword?”

One guard clasped his fists, “We've already sent people to retrieve it.”

Emperor Yuanjing drew in a deep breath, and walked to the shore. He stretched out his hand, fingers curling.

Within the water flashed a ray of bright yellow light, as a three foot long brass sword flew out of the water, landing in Emperor Yuanjing's hand.

After examining it closely, and confirming that the divine sword was undamaged, Emperor Yuanjing let out a sigh of relief.

The national teacher on her seven-star sword, holding a *fuchen* in her hands, flew around Sangpo Lake, and pausing in midair, said “Your Majesty, there's nothing unusual with Sangpo Lake.”

Nothing unusual... Emperor Yuanjing's gaze darkened slightly.

Wei Yuan turned, and asked the general of the royal guard, “Where are the corpses of the dead?”

A dozen or more corpses were brought over to him. They all died in the exact same manner, their bodies deflated and dry, as if they had been exposed to the elements for decades.

“All the other soldiers died in the same way,” A general responded, carefully glancing at the Yuanjing Emperor, “Your Majesty... your servant did not notice any strong enemy entering...”

The general knew very clearly, that the reason for this sudden change probably had something to do with the incident at the ancestor worship ceremony.

Though the generals had their guesses, they were still subjects, and knew what should be said, and what shouldn't.

Emperor Yuanjing's sharp gaze swept over the corpses. Tilting his head, he looked over at Wei Yuan: “Wei Yuan, come with us to the Imperial Study.”

...

Brocade drapes hung low, and rosewood incense burned in the bedchamber.

The eldest princess was suddenly awoken by the sound of the bell. In the instant she opened her eyes, she did not go to get dressed, rather pulling out the long sword that was hung above her headboard, and hardly after the metallic sching had faded, she in her white nightdress had already rushed into the front hall.

The tall, cold beauty, holding a long sword flashing with cold light, her hair like a waterfall cascading down, with a somewhat casual messiness.

The white body-hugging nightdress framed an extremely stunning body, one not of those weak and frail women, rather the type that gave off the energy of regular gym training. If Xu Qi'an were here, he would sigh and exclaim: That woman is for me.

“Your Highness...”

The maid in the side hall also awoke, and ran over in a flurry, grabbing the eldest princess's royal dress.

“Change it for the agile wear.” An aura of authority swirled around the eldest princess.

After she had changed into more practical, more agile wear, with a crossbow at her left waist, a hand-cannon at her right, the longsword in her hand, the eldest princess led her guards, and with fiery speed ran towards the Yuanjing Emperor's residence.

The eldest princess was stopped by the guards who surrounded the emperor's residence. At times like these, princes and princesses were not allowed to go near the Emperor.

Who know if it was the scheming of some prince.

The eldest princess did not try to force her way through. Her gaze went past the soldiers, and landed on a familiar figure, the Nightwatchers, and the high-ranked martial artists in the royal guard.

What's happened... the soldiers would not have sounded the alarm unless a strong enemy had come... but if it was a master from an enemy country, this situation seems far too peaceful. Furthermore, no one from the Sitianjian has come...

The eldest princess grasped her sword, thinking over the matter.

At this time, the Crown Prince of the Eastern Palace, and the other princes and princesses all arrived with their contingents.

“Huaiqing!” The crown prince was in full military gear, his expression solemn.

“The situation is as yet unknown.” The eldest princess succinctly responded.

The almond-eyed, stunningly charming second princess saw that the eldest princess was in her agile clothes, her expression less cold, and more fierce, as if at the drop of a hat she would strike at someone. The second princess opened her small cherry mouth, but ultimately decided to stay silent.

A big incident had happened today, and so she didn’t bother arguing with Huaiqing.

Fifteen minutes later, the Imperial Study door opened, and the azure-cloaked eunuch walked out.

“Duke Wei...” the eldest princess had the closest relationship with Wei Yuan; she could almost be said to be half a disciple.

Wei Yuan sighed, “Yongzhen Shanhe Temple has collapsed. This was the work of a criminal, but he has long gone.”

The princess and princesses let out exclamations of shock. The Eastern Palace Crown Prince squinted, suppressing his inner feelings. Stepping forward, he asked, “Does this have anything to do with the incident at the ancestor worship ceremony?”

He shook his head, “His Majesty has ordered me to discover everything behind this case in half a month, and capture the perpetrator. I have honestly told His Majesty, this case is not an easy one...”

Saying so, he left.

The eldest princess’s eyes flashed.

The Imperial Study’s doors opened again, and the great eunuch, wearing a black silk cap, with a tan four-clawed dragon robe, walked out.

“Your Highnesses, His Majesty invites you in.”

With the crown prince at their head, the eight princes and princesses that had come to see what was going on all entered the Imperial Study.

The Emperor’s desk was placed in the front hall, with no one beside it. The great eunuch lead them to the inner hall, to see drapes hanging low, and the Yuanjing Emperor sat cross legged on a putuan cushion. Sat opposite him was the graceful and beautiful female national teacher.

The distance between the two of them was not far nor near, keeping a distance suitable for Daoist friends to talk about the Dao.

Over these years, Emperor Yuanjing had followed this female national teacher in his cultivation, to great results. Originally Emperor Yuanjing was bogged down by government and responsibility, and his hair greyed early. At not much past thirty, his temples were already white.

As he cultivated with this Human Sect leader thought, over twenty years his hair had turned a glossy black, his health and vigour had all started improving.

The crown prince would love to secretly stick a pin in a voodoo doll and curse him.

As for the other princes' views of this female Daoist, they were half full of admiration and longing, and half full of fear and loathing.

"National Teacher, our heart is still not calm." Emperor Yuanjing broke his cross-legged stance, opening his eyes, and sighing.

"Your Majesty has emotional trouble, and must take the corresponding treatment." The female national teacher spoke, her voice carrying the warmth and grace of a mature woman.

"We indeed have emotional trouble..." Emperor Yuanjing stared intently at the beautiful features of the Daoist priest, laughing "We have always been waiting to practice dual cultivation with the national teacher."[^4]

Hearing this, the expressions of the princes and princesses became strange.

Only the eldest princess did not show any hint of emotion; her thoughts were very deep.

Ten years ago, the Yuanjing Emperor had asked to practice dual cultivation with the national teacher. She did not agree, so Yuanjing set out an imperial edict, wanting to grant her the title of "Celestial Consort".

The National Teacher still didn't agree, but the Yuanjing Emperor still required her to lead him in his cultivation, and so he gave up.

Outsiders thought the Yuanjing Emperor only wanted to go after her good looks, or that this was one of the reasons, even if it was not the main one. The princes and princesses however knew most of all that their father wanted this for himself.

In his back palace, there were three thousand great beauties, what kind of woman could he not get?

That king consort praised as the capital's greatest beauty, was once someone also in the palace. But at the time, the Yuanjing Emperor, who had cut off mortal desires for cultivation, did not lay a single finger on her.

What their father wanted was eternal life.

Though not receiving a satisfactory answer, Emperor Yuanjing did not seem to mind. He pushed open the drapes, and led the group of his children into the front hall. Sitting at the high seat by the table, he said "There's no need to worry, the incident is over."

The crown prince, as the eldest child, the leader of the other princes and princesses, cupped his hands, "Father, did this have anything to do with the incident at the ancestor worship ceremony?"

Emperor Yuanjing's brow furrowed; he did not want to explain.

The Crown Prince secretly gave the second princess a look. Wearing a beautiful and resplendent dress, with a charming and graceful look, Princess Lin'an laughed, taking a cup of tea from the great eunuch. With her waist swaying she came to Emperor Yuanjing's side, and coquettishly said:

"Father, Sangpo Lake is our royal family's forbidden area, which scoundrel could sneak into Sangpo lake, and destroy the founding emperor's temple? Could he also sneak into Lin'an's manor?"

She made a brow furrowed, extremely scared and pitiable face.

The second princess was doted on most by their father, because she knew how to act coquettishly, and knew how to tug at Emperor Yuanjing's heartstrings.

Emperor Yuanjing was a mighty, controlling type. He did not necessarily like the extremely talented and domineering eldest princess, but he loved dearly his soft and vulnerable second princess, who relied on him, who could act kittenish.

The black haired emperor in the prime of his life, patted the second princess on the head, and comforted, "Nonsense, this is the forbidden palace, which scoundrel could come and go as they please?"

The crown prince made the opener, the second princess played support, and now the eldest princess stepped forward, bowing, "Earlier your daughter met Duke Wei at the door, in his words he expressed to me his difficulty, probably hoping that your daughter can help him secure a few extra days for his investigation."

Hearing this, Emperor Yuanjing snorted.

The eldest princess continued, "Father, your daughter just so happens to know a master at solving cases. If he could join the case, within half a month, the rocks will appear above the water, and all will be clear."

Chapter 107. Using Merit to Atone For Crime

Instantly, the other princes and princesses turned their heads to look at the eldest princess. Princess Lin'an, who was hugging Emperor Yuanjing's arm, also could not resist and turned to look.

The Crown Prince glanced at the eldest princess from the corner of his eye.

A thought bloomed in all their minds at this moment.

Huaiqing wants to promote one of her people.

There were two ways for princes and princesses to expand their power and authority. First, they could win over courtiers. Second, they could promote their followers to high positions.

In terms of the first method, Emperor Yuanjing had a strong desire to control. He also had a deep Imperial Aura, so deep in fact, that the princes, including the crown prince, didn't dare to form their own factions this blatantly.

The latter, however, was their usual method.

But it also depended on their timing. The princes and princesses didn't feel that this was an opportune time since the task was too difficult.

Emperor Yuanjing narrowed his eyes, and smilingly said, "Who do you wish to recommend, Huaiqing?"

The eldest princess replied, "Xu Qi'an, a Bronze Gong from the Nightwatchers."

The second princess seemed to have realized something, "Aha!", saying innocently, "Is he that Bronze Gong who displayed deep admiration towards elder sister on the day of ancestor worship? I remember elder sister talking and laughing with him."

Her words were quite incisive.

In front of the Emperor himself, she secretly gave the eldest princess a good verbal jab.

It must be known, that the eldest princess hadn't married yet. Emperor Yuanjing had been obsessed with cultivating the Dao in recent years, causing him to not care about the marriages of his children. But the eldest princess attracting bees and butterflies like this wouldn't do.

The eldest princess added, "Father should have heard about this person. He is the nephew of Baihu Xu Pingzhi, who was implicated in the Silver Tax case."

Emperor Yuanjing finally showed interest, "We remember a person who refined fake silver. If it weren't for the inconvenience of storing fake silver and the huge amount of salt consumed in its production, we would have had Sitianjian refine a large quantity."

The raw material for the fake silver was salt, and salt was too expensive. After listening to the report of the Arcanists in Sitianjian, Emperor Yuanjing gave up his idea of mass-producing fake silver.

"Additionally, when this person was on duty in Changle County, he performed very well and repeatedly solved murder cases." The eldest princess added some more oil to the fire.

Smilingly, Emperor Yuanjing said, "Given that's the case, you don't need to do anything more, right?"

The eldest princess bowed her head, and sincerely said, "Father, Bronze Gong Xu Qi'an clashed with a Silver Gong yesterday, and seriously injured him as well. People who commit this offense, according to the law, shall be chopped in half."

"Right now, that person is locked up in the dungeon. Your subject and child asks Father Sir to allow him to perform meritorious service to atone for his crimes."

The eldest princess didn't explain the reason for the conflict, nor did she defend Xu Qi'an, for she knew that they weren't important.

Father doesn't care whether he was right or wrong. Father only cares if he could complete his work.

Sure enough, Emperor Yuanjing didn't think of this matter for a second, as he quickly nodded and said, "Since Huaqing vouched for him, we will allow him to atone for his crime and handle this case. If he doesn't find the culprit who destroyed the Temple of the Founding Emperor within half a month, we will immediately have him killed."

"Thank you, Father."

The princes and princesses left the royal study and joined their respective guards, while the eldest princess received her sword back from the chief guard.

The second princess held the arm of her elder brother, the crown prince, and said pitifully, "Ah, Huaqing acted earlier than me."

The crown prince shook his head, "This isn't a good thing. Even Wei Yuan found this case tricky. Huaqing merely made an idle move. It will be a pleasant thing if the Bronze Gong really solves the case. Well, If he doesn't, Huaqing won't be losing anything, but he will lose his life."

"Hmph, Huaqing's heart is truly black." The second princess wrinkled her small nose and asked, "Elder brother, What's going on in Yongzhen Shanhe Temple?"

Talking on the road, the crown prince looked around, before he finally said in a low voice, "This case doesn't seem to be simple, otherwise it wouldn't make Wei Yuan so frustrated. I'm afraid that only the Emperor knows of the secret."

Of course, I'll also know the secret in the future. He silently added. At the same time, the face of the female national teacher who looked beyond earthly matters appeared in his mind, inciting his resentment.

"Lin'an!"

The eldest princess suddenly shouted, calling the brother-sister pair to stop.

The crown prince and the second princess turned their heads together, and Princess Lin'an replied fiercely, "What do you want?"

At the same time, she hugged the arms of her brother, the crown prince, tightly.

The eldest princess held her sword while she came over, saying, "Nothing..."

While a relaxed expression appeared on the faces of the brother-sister pair, a sword suddenly hit the second princess's raised buttocks.

Feeling the sharp pain, the second princess's face turned pale first, after which she cried "Waah", continuing to point at the eldest princess while screaming, "Huaqing, I will kill you."

The other princes and princesses came over to pretend to persuade them, acting as peacemakers.

The crown prince seriously said, "You are going too far, Huaqing."

"I'm just testing Lin'an's martial arts. If Lin'an doesn't accept, then she can also test me." The eldest princess turned around gracefully, Her black hair swishing and unfolding, showing off her agile and resourceful beauty.

The second princess looked at her back and cried, "I will complain. I'll complain to father about this."

The crown prince helplessly said, "Let's wait for another day. Father probably doesn't want to talk with you currently."

If conflict or fight occurred between princes, Emperor Yuanjing would definitely take care of them, and would strictly control and severely punish them.

However, for fights between princesses, everyone would act as if they were settling minor quarrels.

The main reason for this is that most of the princes have cultivated Martial Arts, and injuries would be common in their fights. Among the princesses, however, only the eldest princess had cultivated martial arts. So, if there was a fight between princesses, they would just slap below the ears a bit gracefully. When angry, they would grab the hair and try to bite.

As these fights harmed the image of the royal family, they were unwilling to make this a matter of importance, and such fights were mostly solved in private.

Princess Lin'an gritted her small silver teeth, and scolded, "You just wait, I will snatch all your belongings."

...

The next day, Early morning.

Wei Yuan, who had just finished meditating, received an order from the palace.

"This servant has brought his Majesty's orders. Duke Wei, please go to the dungeon and invite that Bronze Gong." the little eunuch who delivered the command said humbly.

"His Majesty today did not eat much, his thoughts are heavy. We hope that Duke Wei can solve this case as soon as possible."

After having someone send the eunuch away, Wei Yuan smiled.

Yang Yan, who was accompanying his father to have breakfast, heaved a sigh of relief, "It seems that father doesn't need to bother to save him."

Nangong Qianrou let out a "hah" and laughed at Yang Yan, the fool who cultivated martial arts until his brain was cultivated stupid, before saying:

"What do you think father said to the eldest princess last night?"

Yang Yan thought over it for some time, before he realized something.

Yesterday, the princess sent her subordinates to investigate the conflict between Xu Qi'an and Zhu Chengzhu. Presumably, she was more interested in investigating a single person.

Father had also hinted to the eldest princess last night, and due to the tacit understanding between smart people, the eldest princess took the opportunity to recommend Xu Qi'an to his majesty, and let him get the opportunity to use meritorious service to offset his crimes.

This way, Xu Qi'an can be justifiably exonerated, without anyone else pointing fingers at him.

Yang Yan had long since expected his adoptive father to rescue Xu Qi'an. He knew that sending Xu Qi'an to the dungeon and sentencing him to be waist chopped after a week was only for the people in the office to see.

The greater the authority, the lesser the flexibility.

He frowned, "But, what if Xu Qi'an doesn't solve the case even after half a month?"

Wei Yuan smiled, "Then he only has the option to die, and then enter the Jianghu. Xu Qi'an will transform from a bright chess piece to a dark piece."

Father values him quite much. Nangong Qianrou and Yang Yan smoothened their expressions.

Wei Yuan seemed to have remembered something, and he squinted his eyes before he said, smilingly, "Send someone to inform Li Yuchun that His Majesty has especially allowed Xu Qi'an to use meritorious service to atone for his crimes, and, he, Li Yuchun, will be reinstated."

Pausing for a bit, Wei Yuan showed an expression that looked like a smile and yet not a smile, at the same time, "Act somewhat grandly."

...

Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao, led by the jailers, went to the dungeon, bearing joyful faces to pick up their colleague from prison.

At that time, Xu Qi'an was emptying the contents of his bladder, holding the wall with one hand, and his little brother with another. Startled by his colleagues and the jailers' sudden appearance, his hands trembled slightly.

"Damn it..." Xu Qi'an cursed, before wiping his hands on the prison uniform.

"Ningyan, you don't have to die, Ningyan!" After the jailer took out the door key, Song Tingfeng said, laughing.

"His Majesty has allowed you to use meritorious service to offset your crimes."

His Majesty?!

Xu Qi'an was taken aback, his first thought being, *Fuck, is Number One His Majesty?!*

He immediately denied his guess, and patted Song Tingfeng's shoulder calmly before saying with a deep voice, "What's going on?"

Being in a hurry to share the joy, Song Tingfeng didn't realize that he had been plotted against and continued telling Xu Qi'an about the details.

An explosion happened in Sangpo, and Yongzhen Shanhe Temple collapsed. Xu Qi'an's pupils shrank, as his thoughts immediately led to the strange cry he had heard on the day of ancestor worship.

That meant He hadn't guessed wrongly before.

The cry for help wasn't aimed at him. He had just heard it due to some special reason.

Therefore, Whose cry for help is coming from the interior of Sangpo Lake?

"What happened to the Divine Sword enshrined in the temple?" Xu Qi'an asked after thinking for some time.

Song Tingfeng shook his head, indicating that he didn't know about it, and said, "Boss was fired because of you. After you were imprisoned in the dungeon, he ran below the Tower of Noble Spirit, reprimanded the entire office, and slapped Duke Wei's face in public.

That's indeed something Brother Chun could do. Xu Qi'an was moved.

When retrieving his uniform, sabre, and badge from the warden, Xu Qi'an was relieved to know that his jade mirror had been taken away by his cousin.

As expected, Wei Yuan didn't intend to kill me at all. Even if his majesty didn't pardon me. Dad Wei would have saved me using a reasonable excuse.

After leaving the dungeon, the two walked toward the regions outside the office. When they approached the gate, they heard the sound of a gong beating.

Li Yuchun entered the Office surrounded by several Bronze Gongs. The leading bronze gong was beating a copper gong, and shouting,

"Silver Gong Li to be reinstated!!!"

Petty officials and Nightwatchers, all came out to look at the commotion and directed towards Li Yuchun.

Blushing, Brother Chun bowed his head and scurried out.

Not far away, his three little brothers looked at each other, and Xu Qi'an suggested, "Boss is celebrating his reinstation. Let's not bother him."

Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao also nodded, the three reaching agreement.

Wei Yuan deliberately did this to Brother Chun, surely. Yesterday, you slapped him in the face in public, Today, he slaps you in the face with drums and gongs. Looking at this, Xu Qi'an decided that he wouldn't easily offend Wei Yuan in the future.

People who have lost a golden opportunity, generally are rather petty.

Xu Qi'an's whole body stank, and he was also anxious to go home and announce the good news, so he didn't stop for very long in the constabulary. Riding on top of his beloved mare, he galloped towards home in a rush.

After half an hour of travel, he returned to the Xu Mansion.

Gatekeeper Old Zhang almost cried with happiness after seeing him. Xu Qi'an threw the reins to him and went to the yard, intending to announce the good news to his family.

At that point, his family had already had their breakfast. Second uncle had gone to work, leaving Xu Xinnian alone to stay at home, talking to his mother in the back hall.

After seeing Xu Qi'an, auntie's beautiful eyes lit up. But, she immediately suppressed her joy and gave her nephew her habitual look of disgust.

Xu Xinnian was also pleasantly surprised, "Did the Eldest Princess make a move so soon?"

Xu Qi'an was startled for a moment, before his thoughts quickly fell into place. *No wonder Emperor Yuanjing would know about such a small character like him, otherwise this wouldn't have made sense.*

The Eldest Princess recommended me to the Emperor... mn, I can't rule out Wei Yuan finding the opportunity to give him a chance to atone for his crime with merit.

"Don't be optimistic so early, lest an accident happens." Xu Qi'an took a glance at his aunt and paused, "Let's talk later. I've made auntie worry a lot these past two days. I'm ashamed of myself for that. I've heard Cijiu say that auntie stayed up all night due to me."

Soon upon hearing that, the pressure cooker in auntie's head exploded, and she raised a sharp gaze towards her son, who remained speechless, raising her snow-white sharp chin, "Hmph~"

Xu Xinnian continued speaking, "Father had gone to Sitianjain yesterday, wanting to ask the white-cloaked arcanists to intercede, but he received some bad news."

Hesitating for some time, he said, "Jianzheng is sick."

"What?" Xu Qi'an questioned him, "The Jianzheng? Sick?"

A First Rank Arcanist, sick!

Moreover, a first rank of the system whose first steps are saving lives and healing the wounded.

Veteran detective Xu Qi'an immediately started to deduce if it was related to the change in Sangpo.

It can't be that Sir Jianzheng shut himself on the Bagua platform, looking at the world, looking, looking, and eventually catching a cold?

"I don't know the exact situation." Xu Xinnian said, "I'll go to the Imperial Guard to find father and reassure him."

Mother, who always complains about my cousin, was worried that she didn't sleep all night. I can't imagine how bad Father must be feeling.

"Okay!" Xu Qi'an said, "I'll go and see Lingyue and Lingyin first. I have to return to the office for something a bit later."

The Sangpo issue can be thought of later, Let's not rush it now.

"By the way, I left that mirror in the study. You can go get it yourself later. The monk you asked me to find has already left, saying that he had found a clue about his junior brother."

I knew that Number One couldn't be the emperor. In actuality, Number One didn't even know about the matter. Really, Dad Wei and the Eldest Princess are the really reliable ones.

Upon arriving at the backyard, Xu Qi'an saw that Xu Lingyin was sitting under the eaves with her mood downcast and posture small.

No one was playing with her, and no one was in the mood to talk with her as well.

The stupid kid also knew that something had happened to her elder brother, so she wasn't happy enough to play with the small geese. So, with her head lowered, she scribbled on the ground with a branch.

"Huh! Whose stupid kid is this?" Stopping not far away from her, Xu Qi'an smiled.

Xu Lingyin raised her head and stared at him blankly. After a few seconds, her small face was filled with a bright smile.

"Big Brother!"

She stood up and opening her hands, rushed with chubby legs toward Xu Qi'an.

Xu Qi'an also went up to meet her. Just as Xu Lingyin reached him, Xu Qi'an quickly turned his body, hugging the older sister behind her.

Xu Lingyin, who had missed her target, turned around in a daze.

"Wahhhh.... Big Brother...."

Xu Lingyue tightly wrapped her arms around Xu Qi'an's waist and buried her soft body in her cousin's arms, where she wept bitterly.

His younger sister was grasping his waist tight, her hair exuded a delicate fragrance, her body giving off a faint smell of rouge and gouache.

Xu Qi'an patted her back and comforted her, "It's all right. Big brother is back."

Without care, Xu Lingyue twisted her slender waist and continued crying.

Xu Lingyue was already very sad when her eldest brother was imprisoned in the Ministry of Justice last time. However, the case back then only led to imprisonment, as it was due to a personal grudge.

But this time, The Nightwatcher who came to the mansion had said that her elder brother would be chopped at the waist in the vegetable market after a week.

The nature of the two was completely different.

Of course, Xu Lingyue's concern over this was also due to the rapid improvement in the relationship between her cousin and her during this period.

Aha, the Younger sisters of this era are far superior. So adorable. Hugging her delicate body, Xu Qi'an thought of something.

In my previous life, I didn't have a younger sister, but I did have a cousin. But she didn't act like a baby, didn't show weakness by crying, and only sneered at me with disdain: Ha, idiot

"Big brother, big brother" Xu Lingyin jumped up and down, and said happily, "I'm going to tell mother. Mother definitely doesn't know you're back."

Xu Qi'an wanted to tell her that he had come in through the door, not jumped in from the wall. After thinking about it for a while, he felt that he didn't need to explain it.

He nodded, "Go!"

"Oh" He called Xu Lingyin again, and asked, "Are you so happy because you can eat three bowls of rice at dinner?"

Xu Lingyin was taken aback. She didn't expect her elder brother to know her thoughts. *Elder brother is really amazing.*

She ran away in fear.

Chapter 108. Lead Investigator

Xu Lingyue was probably an over-imaginative person, whose personality was rather reserved, her emotions being heavily weighted down. Seeing big brother return completely unharmed however, finally that weight in her heart dissipated, and she burst into tears.

All the way until the maid walked outside, and saw brother and sister hugging each other, exclaiming delightfully "Dalang has come out of jail?"

Only then did Xu Lingyue realise that she was still an unmarried young woman, and pulled herself out of big brother's embrace, simultaneously sobbing and lowering her head, her face burning red.

Xu Qi'an pulled his sister by the hand into a room, where the maids made them tea, and then retreated to beside the door, listening to the young Master and Miss talk.

"Go tell the others to boil some water, I want a bath." Xu Qi'an ordered the maid.

The maid went out to pass on the message, but little did she expect that all the other servant's faces turned, and they all refused.

With great chagrin the maid returned to tell young Master Xu. Young Master Xu was also very angry, thinking *either you people are off your horses, or I Xu Dalang can't lift my sword any more.*

"Then you can help and boil some water."

The maid felt even more chagrined, but didn't dare to refuse, and so left with pursed lips.

Xu Qi'an turned, laughing, saying to Xu Lingyue "His Majesty has allowed me to use merit to atone for my crimes. I'll be fine for now."

Xu Lingyue nodded, her graceful melon-seed shaped face showing some anxiety, "Why did you attack your colleague?"

Xu Qi'an thus briefly recounted what had happened. Listening to this, Xu Lingyue was furious, her delicate hand curled into a tight fist, "I always believed that big brother does good."

Her face split into a glittering smile, her eyes full of pride.

In an instant her beauty could move mountains, and Xu Qi'an could not resist pinching her cheek.

Xu Lingyue lowered her head in embarrassment.

After bathing, Xu Qi'an put back on his Nightwatcher uniform, and sat with Xu Lingyin underneath the eaves, each holding a large bowl of egg and shredded pork noodle soup.

The whole scene was warm and peaceful.

Xu Qi'an said, "Lingyin, can big brother swap your eggs with his pork?"

Xu Lingyin thought for a moment, before shaking her head, "No. Mum said that last time big brother cheated me out of a bun."

"Then do you think big brother is cheating you?"

She tilted her head, thinking hard, "I forgot."

Xu Qi'an said, "Sooo, why would big brother cheat you? No way is big brother trying to cheat you out of your egg, big brother is only..."

He didn't have time to finish, before he saw Xu Lingyin "puh puh" spit too large globs into her noodles.

Xu Qi'an's face froze.

Xu Lingyin said, "Second brother taught me."

... Intellectuals really aren't any good things! Xu Qi'an lowered his head, eating his meal, giving up on persuading his young sister out of her egg.

"Ah?" Xu Lingyin opened her eyes wide, looking at the bowl on her leg, and then looked at big brother, startled and confused.

Xu Qi'an patiently explained to her, in a pop-science way: "When you've fallen over before, and gotten a scratch, did your dad not use his spit to wipe your injury?"

Xu Lingyin nodded.

Xu Qi'an said, "This is because spit... mn, it can kill dirty things. Thus we can deduce, that once spit leaves the mouth, it is poisonous. We can then deduce, that your egg noodle soup is poisonous, and can't be eaten."

After he had finished, Xu Lingyin's small round face had turned white.

"Will I die?" Xu Lingyin pouted, trying to hold back tears.

"Die? No, but it'll make your stomach hurt for many days."

Xu Lingyin nodded, and continued eating her noodles peacefully.

Xu Qi'an: "???"

...

After he had finished, he came to Xu Xinnian's room, and found his jade mirror in his brother's study. As Xu Qi'an put it back into his robe, his gaze suddenly landed on a few sheets of paper on the corner of Erlang's table, which was held down with a paperweight.

The papers were packed with tiny cursive characters, detailing analysis of Xu Qi'an's current situation, and thinking whether or not the Sitianjian or the Cloud Deer Academy could help.

Old Cijiu has some talent... Xu Qi'an laughed, and left the study.

On a quick horse he rushed back to the constabulary, and went immediately to see Wei Yuan.

Wei Yuan had already waited for a long time, and seeing him pointed to the seat by Yang Yan, saying kindly "Sit."

Without expression Yang Yan handed over a dossier.

Wei Yuan said, "For this case, I have asked Gold Jade Hall, Spring Breeze Hall, and Suppressing Evil Hall to work together, and you will be the lead investigator!"

Xu Qi'an was shocked.

Wei Yuan laughed, "Hasn't His Majesty personally given you the order?"

As their gaze crossed, Xu Qi'an suddenly understood; Wei Yuan wanted to use this case to promote him... he was immediately placed in the role of lead investigator, and not an assistant.

Xu Qi'an opened the dossier, and after reading through carefully, immediately asked "Is something sealed under Sangpo Lake?"

Wei Yuan's eyes flashed with a strange glint.

Yang Yan's stiff and rarely-emotional face also showed a shocked expression.

The truth of something being sealed under Sangpo Lake, had only been told to him by Wei Yuan this morning. Nangong Qianrou, who was smarter than him, also found out last night of the incident at Sangpo Lake, and only then thought back to that day when he was looking through archives with his adoptive father, before forming a vague guess.

He didn't dare be sure, until only this morning when his adoptive father very matter-of-factly told him the truth.

But this little bronze gong somehow immediately worked out that something was sealed under Sangpo Lake.

Wei Yuan suppressed his surprised expression, and laughed, "Tell me your reasons."

Xu Qi'an still had a crime hanging over his head, and couldn't wait to prove himself to Wei Yuan, saying "Even though Sangpo Lake is our Great Feng's forbidden place, but to an outsider, the only thing that was worth fearing would be the Nation's Guardian Sword."

Looking down at the dossier, he continued, "But on here, it's written that the Guardian Divine Sword was undamaged. Then the perpetrator's target would have to be something else."

"Thus your subordinate thought, that there must be something under Yongzhen Shanhe Temple. But why would this thing have to be put under Sangpo Lake? So your subordinate made a bold guess, that that thing may need the Guardian Sword to keep it sealed."

In reality, Xu Qi'an had done a reverse-deduction after getting a definite answer.

His clear thoughts and intricate logic after taking on Yang Yan's dossier, made him ever more appreciative of this small bronze gong under his command.

Not only was his aptitude exceptional, but he was also clever, able, and deserved to be nurtured.

"Duke Wei knew all of this, right..." Xu Qi'an tested.

Wei Yuan honestly shook his head, "His Majesty did not say clearly, but I have a few guesses of my own..."

His face was serious, his tone containing warning: "Your job is to find out who exploded Yongzhen Shanhe Temple. Retrieving that item is none of your concern. If you encounter trouble that you cannot overcome, just tell Gold Gong Yang, he will help you.

"His Majesty has bestowed you a golden token,^[^1] you may use it to move around in the Imperial City. Apart from the back palace, and a few other special places, with this plaque you may walk anywhere unhindered."

After receiving his mission, Xu Qi'an took his leave.

Wei Yuan watched him leave, and after hearing the light footsteps recede down the stairs, turned to Yang Yan, asking "I heard that the Jianzheng has fallen ill?"

Yang Yan nodded.

Wei Yuan's eyes were deep and calm, as he fell silent for a long while, "Old thing!"

...

Leaving the Tower of Noble Spirit, Xu Qi'an immediately ran towards Spring Breeze Hall, saying "Boss, immediately gather the two silver gongs from the Gold Jade Hall and the Suppressing Evil Hall at the front of the constabulary, at greatest haste!"

Li Yuchun had a face full of confusion. After a while, he stared hard at Xu Qi'an, "Are you the boss, or am I the boss?"

The young brother was now ordering him by gestures?

Xu Qi'an flashed his gold token, "I'm the lead investigator appointed by His Majesty. Today we'll call each other by our role. I'll call you Boss, you call me Sir.

"Boss, could you help me gather the two silver gongs."

Li Yuchun walked away gloomily. *Call each other by role? Something feels off somewhere.*

The silver gong of Suppressing Evil hall was surnamed Yang, with the given name Feng^[^2], and was a dark skinned, tall, thin, middle-aged man, with a large mole on his forehead.

The Gold Jade hall's silver gong was a man with a full bushy beard, called Min Shan^[^3]. There was a diagonal sword-scar on his face, making his look especially fierce.

Along with the Spring Breeze Hall's Li Yuchun, the three silver gongs and twelve gold gongs, very quickly gathered together at the front of the courtyard.

According to the "tradition" of the constabulary, before going out to do an assignment, everyone must first gather in the front courtyard, where the squad leader would give briefing and encouragement.

At the same time, it was done for other Nightwatchers to see.

"Last Night Sangpo Lake experienced an explosion, Yongzhen Shanhe Temple was destroyed. His Majesty's draconic grace^[^4] was stunned and furious, and so ordered the constabulary to find who is behind this case within half a month, and capture the perpetrator." Xu Qi'an had one hand on his sabre, his back straight, his eyes sharp;

"Under His Majesty's orders, I will personally investigate this case. You, as this case's assistants, must attend to this with full energy, and pay back his royal grace."

In his heart, Xu Qi'an added, *If you do well you'll sleep with a beauty, if you do badly it's off with your head at the market.*

"Yes!" Everyone shouted at once.

Because they were all silver, bronze gongs under Yang Yan's command, they were all rather obedient. They were only a little bit unwilling, as after all Xu Qi'an was a bronze gong, where did he get the experience or ability to do a case as big as this?

They also didn't know why His Majesty would specifically pick him to be the lead investigator.

Leaving the Nightwatcher constabulary, getting on their horses, the full-bearded Silver Gong Min asked "Sir Xu, where do we go?"

"Naturally to the scene of the crime." Xu Qi'an responded.

A line of people rushed towards the Imperial City, picking the most direct path: directly through it.

In reality, they could have gone around the Imperial City and still reached the crime scene, but Xu Qi'an had his gold token, and so what saved time, goes.

In any case, the first principle was to fight for every second.

Under the lead of the royal soldiers, the Nightwatchers came to Sangpo Lake. The scene here had changed drastically; the long walkways along the lake shore had all been destroyed in the explosion, and the white marble podium in the centre of the lake had disappeared into thin air.

The water's surface was clean, with nothing floating around, making it hard to imagine that just a few days ago this place had been the site of a grand ancestor worship ceremony.

By the side of the lake was moored a small boat. Xu Qi'an said, "Let's go have a look, we'll need to go on the water."

Xu Qi'an leapt onto the small boat first, secretly putting a hand into his robe, and tapped the back of the jade mirror, pouring out the "magic book" that the great scholar had given him. He tore a page out, and clutched it in his hand.

The other silver gongs followed him, leaving the twelve bronze gongs and a squad of Royal Guards ashore.

Li Yuchun pulled the oars, paddling the boat to the centre of the lake.

The tall and thin silver gong Yang Feng glanced at Xu Qi'an, and suddenly said, "Sir Xu, I'll go down."

Xu Qi'an said, "Then I'll come down with you."

As he said so, he set the page alight, and activated his qi-watching technique.

Sching... he drew his sword, clutching it in his mouth, and jumped into the water.

The icy cold water attacked his pores, as a line of small bubbles streamed from the side of his mouth.

He tried his best to open his eyes wide, looking at the situation underneath the surface.

The white marble platform's foundations stretched all the way to the bottom of the lake. The place where the platform broke was a dozen feet below the surface.

The sound of hidden currents swirling reached his ears, and Xu Qi'an turned back, to see Silver Gong Yang had followed him.

The dark-skinned Silver Gong Yang also examined the remnants of the marble platform, and immediately had a deduction. He held it in his mind, planning to test this small bronze gong when they got back ashore.

At this time, Silver Gong Yang realised that Xu Qi'an had followed the platform foundation all the way to the lakebed.

He rushed to follow. The deeper he got, the more cloudy his vision was, until finally all that was left was darkness.

Silver Gong Yang thus didn't continue to follow, and floated back up to the surface.

Splash...

He burst out of the water, and climbed back onto the small bloat, simultaneously using his qi to dry himself of the icy cold lake water, and also looking around at the others:

“Sir Xu has gone to the bottom of the lake. It is pitch black down there, you couldn’t see anything.”

Chapter 109. Make Trouble

Xu Qi'an reached the bottom of the lake pretty quickly, qi circling in his eyes, making them look like two small lanterns in the darkness.

Silt had been piled up in the bottom of the water. Concurrently, taking the white jade platform as the centre, many white pillars had been arranged on the river according to a certain pattern for the protection and support of the centre platform.

This seems to be a certain formation... Xu Qi'an made a guess.

In the capital of the Great Feng, only the Arcanists from the Sitianjian could arrange such formations. That means Sitianjian Arcanists had also participated in the construction of Yongzhen Shanhe Temple in that era.

This implies that Old Man Jianzheng is another person privy to the secret apart from the current majesty... Is old man Jianzheng actually sick? Or Did he get into a predicament due to the current situation of Yongzhen Shanhe Temple?

Sss... What's the secret hidden here?

The force looking for the secrets of Sangpo Lake and the force that destroyed Yongzhen Shanhe Temple are definitely ruler-level extreme forces... I'm just a small bronze gong. It's as if I am a small fish in a pond near a battlefield of deities...

Even if I find out the truth behind the case, will the imperial family allow me to live?

Thinking of this, Xu Qi'an felt his heart become heavier.

Wei Yuan has pointed out a direction for me. If I encounter problems that I couldn't solve, I should notify the Constabulary, Gold Gong Yang would help me... His implication is obvious. I'm just a pawn laid out casually, a hunting dog sent out for tracking. If I can't complete the task, I'm going to have to feign death to get away from the capital.

As these thoughts flickered in his mind, he swung his limbs to reach toward the stone pillar closest to him.

The surface of the stone pillar was carved with twisted and weird feeling tadpole-like characters.

Xu Qi'an guessed that this should be a certain script, but he couldn't decipher it due to his low education level. He could only forcibly try to remember the characters.

After checking the other stone pillars, where he discovered the same script, Xu Qi'an was motivated to leave the dark lake bottom by his thalassophobia.

When standing in silence in the depth of water, his mind always seemed to conjure up an image of a pair of cold eyes staring at him from behind, or a huge black figure emerging from the darkness in front of him.

Xu Qi'an got out of the water and returned to the small boat, after which he returned the black gold long sabre from his mouth back to its scabbard, while his qi evaporated dry his soaking clothes.

A cloud of steam rose from the water body.

Li Yuchun stared at him with surprise *This kid was promoted to the Refining Qi stage not long ago. How's his Qi mechanism this strong already?*

"Your qi mechanism doesn't look like it belongs to a newcomer to Refining Qi." Li Yuchun said, puzzled.

"I just meditate for two hours every day." Xu Qi'an showed an innocent expression.

"..." Brother Chun waved his hand, not wanting to carry on this conversation further. He pointed his fingers at Silver Gong Yang, and said, "Yang isn't still convinced, so he came to analyse the situation at the bottom of the water with us, and he did gain something. He has said that he'll not be convinced until he sees that you have analysed the same things as him.

"Everyone is from the same team. There's no need to hide anything."

The tall and lanky Yang Feng smiled, not refuting his words.

Xu Qi'an took a glance at the bearded Min Shan, who didn't say anything, rather looking like he was waiting for him to speak.

Xu Qi'an rolled his eyes "Looking at the point of breakage, we can infer that the explosion occurred at the temple, not in the bottom of the water. In addition, most probably, the gunpowder was hidden in the temple after the ancestor worship ceremony. Well, It shouldn't exceed an hour after the ancestor worship ceremony was completed.

"Gunpowder has a strong smell, so if the gunpowder had been hidden in the temple ahead of time, His Majesty would have surely smelled it upon entering the temple. The only chance the thieves had would be after the ancestor worship ceremony. Go and arrest all the palace servants involved at the end of the ceremony, the officials of the Court of Judicial Review, and the officials from the Ministry of Rites as well. Arrest and interrogate them one by one. Silver Gong Yang can handle this matter.

"Additionally, Inform the Constabulary to ask His Majesty for some white cloaks from the Sitianjian to cooperate with the case. Boss, you can handle this. Mmn, I want Miss Caiwei from the Sitianjian to come and help me.

"Silver Gong Min, you'll follow me to the Ministry of Industry. I want to check the records of entry and exit to the gunpowder factory. It should be impossible to smuggle such a large amount of gunpowder."

After pausing a little, he continued, "But, we have to take a look at the bones of the dead soldiers before we do all this."

The three silver gongs looked at each other, thinking, *This little brother is quite reliable, He arranged tasks reasonably, and his thought process is quite clear, his logic just as rigorous.* Yang Feng and Min Shan, the two silver gongs, put away all their contempt towards him.

They knew that even they wouldn't be able to find such a clear direction for investigation this quickly. They would have needed to think for a long time before they cleared their minds.

The corpses of the soldiers were collected in the barracks. The royal guard led them to a tent on the outskirts and opened the curtain to reveal corpses covered with white cloths.

Similarly, corpses could also be found in the other two large tents nearby. Among the soldiers patrolling nearby Sangpo, among the 312 people, nearly all of them died at the time.

Xu Qi'an lifted the white cloths and looked at the tragic state of each corpse.

"You can also do autopsies?" Finding that his expression had gotten serious, Yang Feng couldn't help but ask, "What did you find?"

"I found something big."

"Tell me." The three silver gongs were inspired by his words. Even the royal guard squad leader, who had lead the way, couldn't resist turning his head.

Xu Qi'an slowly said, "I found that I am just a little bronze gong. When encountering combat situations, I still need three sirs to work hard."

All the soldiers had died in the same way. They had all been drained of blood through some evil technique. No other wounds can be seen on their bodies.

This kind of technique couldn't be resisted by a mere Refining Qi martial artist.

If he encountered the thief, Xu Qi'an could only wave his hand: Go, Silver Gongs, I choose you!

He will, obviously, remain at the back.

...

Xu Qi'an took Min Shan to the Ministry of Industry. With the gold token, they were unimpeded in the road.

He found the officer in charge of the gunpowder factory and said, "I want to check the production and use records of gunpowder in the past month."

It was quite easy to falsify accounts, with the most common method being to exaggerate the usage. For example, It may take only 200 kilograms of gunpowder to manufacture a batch of shells, but it could be recorded as 300 kilograms of gunpowder used instead.

Another example is, when making gunpowder, the raw materials could be used to make two hundred kilograms of gunpowder, but the number of raw materials could be kept low so the excess gunpowder could be kept privately.

But, none of these methods could withstand investigation, as every crime leaves traces.

Xu Qi'an didn't trust the officials from the Ministry of Industry, so he had officials sent over from the Nightwatchers Office. Dozens of people rushed over to the Ministry of Industry in haste.

The process was cumbersome, and it involved a lot of work, as it was necessary to go to the places where the raw materials were collected to collect evidence and verify the accounts.

...

After having lunch at the Ministry of Industry, Xu Qi'an comfortably sat on the big chair, picking his teeth, as he watched the petty officials and the bronze gongs in their work.

Yang Feng, who was in charge of investigating the Court of Judicial Review, the Ministry of Rites, and the palace servants, sent someone to report.

"Three officials from the Court of Judicial Review and the Ministry of Rites are missing, and three palace servants are also missing." The bronze gong acting as a messenger said.

"When did they disappear?" Xu Qi'an sat upright, breaking free from his lazy mood in an instant.

"The people responsible for concluding the ancestor worship ceremony were all detained by the Ministry of Law and the prefecture constabulary, and they refused to hand them over." The bronze gong said, helplessly, "Silver Gong Yang is currently confronting the people from the Ministry of Law, but the stalemate can't be resolved."

"Do they dare to rob suspects from us?" Xu Qi'an raised his eyebrows.

Although it hadn't been long since he joined the Nightwatchers, He had already been contaminated with the arrogance and domineering attitude common amongst them.

The Bronze Gong explained, "The Ministry of Law and the Prefecture Constabulary have also received an order from His Majesty to investigate this case. As they were all decreed by the emperor, they didn't worry about us. And Silver Gong Yang doesn't have the gold token given by the emperor as well. So, he had this one come and inform you, sir."

Usually, the status of Nightwatchers was higher than other constabularies, with one exception, that is, an imperial decree.

"Let's go and get the suspects!" Xu Qi'an showed his temper.

It wasn't surprising that the emperor let the Ministry of Law and the prefecture constabulary get involved in the case at the same time. Many major cases had been similarly investigated by multiple parties, as a single government office had limited manpower and couldn't devote all its time and resources to a single case.

While Multi-Party Investigation had obvious benefits, the disadvantages were also quite obvious, Grabbing Credit.

It's not that I'll be fine if the Sangpo case is solved. I have to make actual important contributions to the case so that the imperial court can exempt me from the death penalty. If I don't make any contribution, I'm afraid that I can't escape the punishment of being beheaded in the vegetable market... If you want to obstruct me from handling the case, don't blame me for being impolite.

Not delaying in matters of life and family, Xu Qi'an grabbed the black-gold long sabre on the table and looked around at the petty officials before he said in a loud voice:

"You all continue to investigate. Thoroughly check all the production and consumption records from the middle of this year till now. If someone finds any clues, he'll be rewarded twenty taels of silver."

As the chief investigator, he had the right to dispense some rewards, and the rewards came from the Nightwatcher Office.

The eyes of the petty officials from the Nightwatcher office began shining.

Twenty taels of silver were equivalent to their income over half a year.

After leaving the petty officials behind, Xu Qi'an took the silver gong Min Shan and the Bronze gongs along with him and hurriedly left the Ministry of Industry, after which he rode a fast horse, rushing to the Ministry of Law.

As the Ministry of Law wasn't too far away, Xu Qi'an reached its red lacquered gate within the time it took for a stick of incense to burn.

The gate was heavily guarded, with two rows of armoured soldiers standing guard.

Yang Feng and six Bronze Gongs had been blocked outside, and the two sides were confronting each other.

"The Ministry of Law has been ordered to investigate the case. Anyone who hinders the Ministry of Law from handling the case will be killed." A middle-aged officer was at the front, holding a sabre with one hand while he scolded the Nightwatchers.

Behind him, dozens of officers were holding the hilts of their sabres.

The blue veins in Yang Feng's forehead were about to explode, as he had never been so aggrieved. Never did such a small fry dare to scold him in the face before.

Although he was holding the handle of his sword, he didn't dare to act recklessly. The Chief Investigator wasn't here, so he couldn't claim that he was acting on his orders. It was impossible that the Ministry of Law didn't know that the Nightwatchers were ordered to handle this case, so they were deliberately blocking him out of the door.

They were deliberately disgusting them, making a trap for them.

"Humph!" The middle-aged officer at the lead sneered and held his sabre in one hand when he saw a group of Nightwatchers arriving on horseback.

"The Ministry of Law is handing a case. Anyone who doesn't have anything to do with it will be considered to be trespassing, and will be shot or killed."

As soon as he finished his words, he saw the young Bronze Gong riding the foremost horse, pull out the military crossbow from his waist, and pull its trigger without hesitation.

Chapter 110. Cases that the Ministry of Law Can't Solve, I'll Solve Them!

"Whoosh!"

The crossbow bolt came soaring through the air.

The middle-aged soldier's long sabre came out of its scabbard, and met the incoming bolt, sending it careening away. The spiteful energy that had been brewing in the contingent erupted in an instant.

This small bronze gong dared to shoot a bolt at them, to kill him then and there would serve him right! The Nightwatchers were always domineering and aggressive, if they did not retaliate, then when else?

The middle-aged soldier raised his sabre, shouting, "Those breaking into the Ministry of Law, die!"

The sharp ring of metal emanated out in a wave, as all the soldiers drew their blades, their expressions solemn, making to enter battle.

Xu Qi'an's pinched his horse with his legs, as the horse leapt several *zhang* high. In the air, his right hand fell on the hilt of his long black-gold sabre.

The middle-aged soldier laughed ferociously, a strong torrent of qi covering his blade, as he met the bronze gong.

In mid-air, a blade flashed bright, as Xu Qi'an crossed paths with the soldier, to land steadily at the door of the Ministry.

Only then, did both sides react. No one, not even the other Nightwatchers, expected Xu Qi'an to be so decisive.

In their minds, Xu Qi'an would show his golden token, and shout back the guards. This method was the softest, and was the least likely to cause unexpected problems.

With sabre in hand, Xu Qi'an shook his wrist, and a line of blood spattered onto the ground.

The middle aged soldier wobbled slightly, before falling over backwards.

Another soldier came up to check, feeling the middle aged lieutenant's neck, exclaiming, "He's dead!"

The Nightwatcher's faces turned.

A conflict was a conflict, even if everyone had made to be ready to fight, but if anyone was killed then the problem would be raised to a new level. Furthermore, the one killed was the Ministry of Law's soldier.

Even the most brazen Nightwatchers, did not do anything so far as killing a man on the street in front of any of the six ministries' main doors.

Whoosh!

The soldiers all turned, facing Xu Qi'an. The aura in the air was like a cask of dry gunpowder, able to be lit by the smallest spark.

This damn special skill is really a one-pump wonder... it is nowhere near capable to support me in a long battle. In the future it might be best for me to change it out.

Forcefully resisting the wave of tiredness, Xu Qi'an pulled out his gold token, and showed it to everyone, "Under orders by His Imperial Majesty to solve this case. Any who try to stop this official will be killed!"

With a cold and fierce gaze he scanned across the soldiers' faces.

"Still not retreating?" he shouted.

Under the awe of the gold token and the lieutenant's corpse, the soldiers retreated.

Xu Qi'an slid his sabre back into its scabbard, and led the two Silver Gongs, and the twelve Bronze Gongs forcefully into the Ministry of Law.

On the way, Yang Feng and Min Shan examined Xu Qi'an non-stop, as if they were getting to know this person all over again.

Min Shan frowned, "Is this not too impetuous? Killing someone outside the front door of the Ministry of Law, and someone with an official title at that. Are you not afraid of consequences later?"

Xu Qi'an, who had killed for the first time, still had some vicious aura on his face, glanced back at the bearded Silver Gong, "Will there be a later?"

Min Shan did not know how to respond.

Xu Qi'an laughed coldly, explaining, "I'm already in dire straits. To me now, progress means living. Leads mean living. Whoever dares to stop me from investigating this case, are wanting my life.

"The Ministry of Law has never gotten along with the Nightwatchers. Alongside the city constabulary trying to snatch some merit away, these people are stumbling blocks in my way. If I don't harden my heart, in the future there will be a second, a third, a fourth person who will come forward and stop me. If I don't kill them, they will indirectly kill me.

"Today I've killed someone who doesn't know what's good for them. Tomorrow anyone else who doesn't know what's good will then be scared, cautious. This is also a convoluted way to reduce bloodshed."

As Xu Qi'an spoke, he looked at the two Silver Gongs' eyes, and laughed with a smile that never reached his eyes, "All of us are under Gold Gong Yang, and you still doubted me, not believing my abilities. What then for the capital constabulary? The Ministry of Law?"

Very clearly, this was about asserting strength.

The two Silver Gongs Yang and Min laughed, "Sir Xu, we indeed underestimated you."

This "Sir Xu" was said from the heart, and not because of some imperial decree.

The Ministry of Law was very large, and so on the way Xu Qi'an apprehended a clerk to lead the way.

The clerk couldn't even win a fight against a chicken, and so naturally was scared of these Nightwatchers and their fierce and demonic auras. He didn't dare refuse, and so lead them to the conference hall.

Passing through the great hall, they came to the Ministry of Law's conference hall. This was a wide room, with no table, only chairs lined up neatly in rows.

Two groups of people sat on either side, looking distinctly different.

On the left was the crimson robed, pheasant emblem second-rank official, the High Minister, leading the many officials of the Ministry of Law.

On the right was the crimson robed, wild geese emblem fourth rank Governor Chen of the Capital Prefecture, and his officials.

In the middle sat a eunuch, wearing a tall ceremonial cap, and a dragon-robe. His face was clean without hair, and his eyes were thin and squinty, with an ambiguous aura.

Two other eunuchs attended to this one.

Reaching the door, the clerk was like a small quail, saying with a trembling voice, "A- all sirs... the Nightwatchers have arrived."

In the conference hall, about a dozen powerful officials simultaneously looked over.

Xu Qi'an met these big shots' gazes head on, crossing over the threshold, cupping his fists, "This official is Xu Qi'an, my greetings to all sirs."

He scanned over the group, and saw a familiar woman; one of the Capital Prefecture's constables, Lyu Qing.

The latter also noticed him, as a thick confusion flashed through her eye. Especially as she saw the two Silver Gongs, and the other Bronze Gongs subtly making Xu Qi'an out to be their leader, she became even more stunned.

An official of the Ministry of Law glanced at Xu Qi'an, saying lightly, "Such a large case, and the Nightwatchers don't even send a Gold Gong. Tomorrow, this official will definitely send a letter of impeachment."

Xu Qi'an replied lightly, "Since when did the Nightwatchers need to compromise with the Ministry of Law to investigate a case?"

He paused, continuing, "I heard that the Ministry of Law has arrested many officials and civil servants from the High Court, the Ministry of Rites, and the Palace. Additionally, the Ministry has prevented us Nightwatchers from interrogating them. Minister, dare I ask what is the meaning of this."

Minister Sun, whom he had met once before, did not speak. He didn't even look at Xu Qi'an once, rather emotionlessly picking up his teacup, and taking a sip.

In officialdom, sipping tea implied that one wanted you to leave.

The corner of Xu Qi'an's mouth curled upwards. He did not continue to argue, rather silently finding a place to sit.

In everyone's eyes, he had admitted defeat, and had tolerated Minister Sun's display of authority.

Just then, a clerk came rushing in in a panic. Glancing at the Nightwatchers, he rushed head-lowered to an official of the Ministry of Law, and whispered a few words into his ear.

That official's face turned, as he rose, smacking the table, thrusting his finger towards Xu Qi'an and the others, shouting "What reason is this, it's as if you're above the law!"

All the officials in the room frowned.

Minister Sun said, "What's happened?"

That Ministry of Law official, with an excited expression, cupped his hands, "Minister Sir, Lord Liu, these Nightwatchers have committed murder in front of my Ministry of Law, and killed someone with an official rank at that. What brazenness, what madness! They must be severely punished."

Everyone was shocked. Even the book-holding, squinted-eyed eunuch looked over at Xu Qi'an with disbelief.

Minister Sun's expression did not change, as he lightly tapped his chair's armrest, "The Ministry of Law has authority over punishments, over laws, acting with the authority of His Majesty, to uphold the rule of law for all people. Come and..."

"One moment!" Xu Qi'an interrupted loudly, wearing a cold smile, "This official is under imperial decree to investigate this case. If the Ministry of Law dares to make roadblocks, and stop the progress of this case, this official holds the golden token, and will kill first and ask questions later. Furthermore, this official suspects that the Ministry of Law has conspiracy with the perpetrators, and is the original culprit of the explosion at Yongzhen Shanhe Temple. Minister Sun, how about you come round our Nightwatchers Constabulary?"

This unyielding?

The prefecture office's officials exchanged looks in disbelief. Was this really the words a small bronze gong dared to say?

Minister Sun was a second-rank official with heavy political power, one of the many dukes at court, and this bronze gong in front of them dares say such brazen words, it's as if he didn't even deign to treat Minister Sun as an equal.

The prefecture's officials could not resist sneaking a glance at their boss, only to find that Governor Chen's gaze was angled at a 45 degree angle towards the sky, pretending not to see.

"Rash!"

"You dare slander the Minister, have you any brains?"

The Ministry of Law's officials burst in anger.

Yet Xu Qi'an was even more crazed. He took a step forward, one hand on his sabre hilt, examining the people from the Ministry of Law:

"Cases the Ministry of Law cannot solve, I'll solve them. People the Ministry of Law cannot kill, I'll kill them!"

"Also!" Xu Qi'an pulled out the golden token that was bestowed by His Majesty. With a flick of his wrist, the golden token spun out of his hand, sticking into the floor, sending up a faint cloud of dust.

"If the Ministry of Law dares obstruct me on this case, then I'll kill the Ministry of Law's people too!"

"Is this not clear?"

The conference hall fell silent. The furious officials suddenly had their anger pinched, not because they were scared, but because they were stunned.

What's happened to the Nightwatchers Constabulary? What's happened to Wei Yuan?

Why would they send such a idiot young man to solve the case, is this not offering your political enemies the dagger to kill you?

Just from those words alone, he could be thrown in our Ministry of Law's prison, and never be let out ever again. Tomorrow, the Ministry will implicate Wei Yuan too, see what excuse he has to give.

"Haha!" The dragon-robed great eunuch laughed, "Indeed are the young energetic, showing themselves off to the full extent!"

He looked around at everyone, "Let me introduce this Bronze Gong to everyone. He was recommended by the eldest princess, and personally appointed the lead investigator by His Majesty.

"Also, because he had severely wounded one of his superiors, he was sentenced by Duke Wei to be chopped at the waist in seven days. His Majesty was merciful, and allowed him to use merit to atone for crime."

Personally appointed by His Majesty, no wonder he's so domineering... wounding a superior, chopped at the waist in seven days, no wonder his murderous intent is so strong!

The Ministry of Law's officials suddenly fell silent.

This was a cornered rat, a crazed person at the end of the road. Solving the case was his only hope for life. This type of person easily became extreme, and if they were to push him over the edge, he may be willing to bring a few over with him.

This could be seen by how unhesitating he was to kill an official.

Seeing that the Ministry of Law's officials all decided to avoid making disadvantage for themselves, the great eunuch gestured down, "Everyone sit. The Sangpo Lake case involves a lot of things. His Majesty places more importance on this than the tax silver case, and so specifically appointed me to oversee it, oversee you solving the case.

"The Nightwatchers came just on time, saves me making an extra trip to find you."

This eunuch clearly is biased towards me... or rather to say towards the Nightwatchers. Is this one of Wei Yuan's contacts?

Xu Qi'an cupped his hands, and returned to his seat.

Song Tingfeng knew well how to play support, running over and pulling out the gold token, and handing it over with both hands, "Sir, your token."

Xu Qi'an, as if displaying his authority, scanned over everyone, before taking the token, "Mn."

His second assertion of strength worked very well.

Making himself look like a crazed man with little hope left, could solve many problems going forward. However much the Ministry of Law and the Prefecture Government wanted to argue, they must first weigh up the benefits and disadvantages. The person they'd have to face, would be an insane person who would sooner pull his blade on you than talk.

As for what problems this could bring in the future, Xu Qi'an did not care. First, he believed that Wei Yuan would shelter him from the wind and rain; second, if he couldn't complete the case, he wouldn't have to care about the future. Either he died, or he would leave the capital forever.

Eunuch Liu sipped tea, saying "The three offices recently all had disappearances. The people who have disappeared are very likely to be spies, who helped the culprits steal gunpowder. What are everyone's opinions?"

Governor Chen said, "This office has already sent people to investigate nine dead people's families. They are all still in the capital, and did not know of their loved ones' disappearances. This governor deduces that the nine of them did not escape. Rather, they were silenced."

Eunuch Liu nodded slightly.

An official of the Ministry of Law said, "In the three offices, there must be more spies, more hidden spies. It would be them who had silenced these people, and resolved all those who knew."

Eunuch Liu frowned, thinking.

Xu Qi'an silently listened from the sidelines. Given that he was here attending the meeting, then the use of the arrested people would not be large.

Because he only needed to listen to the Ministry of Law and the Prefecture office's conversation, to know everything that he needed to know.

"I'm afraid it's not only the Court of Judicial Review and the Ministry of Rites, even the Ministry of Labour will have spies." Lyu Qing said.

Everyone looked towards the only woman.

Eunuch Liu examined her, nodding, "Continue."

Lyu Qing continued, "Your subordinate has searched through their family backgrounds, their contacts and acquaintances, as well as their own abilities. They were far from being able to smuggle so much gunpowder out of the factories. Thus, the Ministry of Labour must have spies helping, and their official ranks would not be low."

Official ranks would not be low...

"Gunpowder is a strategic resource which the court places extreme importance on. All manner of secrecy and anti-theft measures are all very holistic. If not for high ranked officials in the Ministry of Law assisting, then this matter could not have been done."

Her logic was clear, her deductions reasonable. As they listened, everyone non-stop nodded their heads, completely revising their opinion of this female constable.

Xu Qi'an noticed, that one of the eunuchs by Eunuch Liu's side was writing frantically, as if he was making notes, making minutes of the meeting.

Is this for Emperor Yuanjing to look at?

The ol' Emperor is much more attentive of this case than the tax silver one... mn, with good reason. I don't know what on earth came out of Sangpo Lake.

If it was not an extremely scary, extremely important thing, it would not have been sealed under Sangpo Lake.

Xu Qi'an thought.

The dragon-robed Eunuch Liu looked towards the Nightwatchers, looked towards Xu Qi'an, asking "Sir Xu has maintained his silence. As the lead investigator of the Nightwatchers, what have you discovered?"

The prefecture office and the Ministry of Law's officials all looked over.