

Nightwatcher

#Chapter 11: Moyu –

Read Nightwatcher Chapter 11: Moyu

11. Moyu

The Official Evaluation was based on the Official Assessment System, and inspections were done every three years, with "Four Cases" and "Eight Laws" as the passing standard.

Unqualified officials were demoted or even stripped of their position.

The case was important for the future, So it was easy to understand. The other party had a distant relative who is interested in this matter. If the relative went ahead to impeach him, He would be fucked.

Changle County had a large backlog of unsolved homicide cases, which could be grounds for criticism by political opponents.

"How did he die?" Xu Qi'an asked casually.

"He went to the countryside to collect rent. When he came back in the middle of the night, He met a thief in the inner courtyard of his house, where he was killed.", A colleague tutted.

"Is there any evidence?" Xu Qi'an asked.

"His wife heard the sound, and when she went to check, the man had already died in the courtyard. But we found some footprints in the outer wall."

"Is it possible that his enemy disguised himself as a thief to commit the murder?" Xu Qi'an poured himself a cup of tea and took some candied fruit from his colleague, which he put in his glass.

His tone was similar to his tone when discussing murder cases with his colleagues in the police station.

"I have asked his wife, children, servants, and neighbours. The deceased didn't have any enmity with anyone recently."

"Did you ask the Night Patrollers?"

"The city guard said there were no suspicious people nearby that night."

There were three walled areas in the capital, the palace, the inner city, and the outer city.

Although there were Night Patrollers in the outer city, there was no curfew, and the city gate was not closed until 12 o' clock at night. Merchants could enter and leave the city gate freely as long as they left a report in advance and hold a voucher.

This system had greatly improved commercial activities in the capital and promoted economic development.

Xu Qi'an nodded, "So, If it's a thief, They should be someone acquainted with the area around the well in Kangping Street."

"How can you tell?"

"The thief could enter and leave the house at night without being spotted by the Patrol, which means he was sneaky and well aware of the the their patrol patterns." Xu Qi'an instinctively reached for a pack of cigarettes in his pocket while analysing the case.

He was disappointed to find it empty.

He couldn't help but think of when he was working in the police station, where everyone gathered in groups of twos or threes, discussing cases.

As a result, He became influenced by his colleagues and became addicted to smoking.

Several colleagues were taken aback, and looked at Xu Qi'an.

"That's very reasonable."

"Why didn't we think of this?"

"Ningyan has become a lot smarter after entering the prison."

No systematic method was used to solve cases; arrests and case handling were all based on experience and the runner with the best performance would become the constable.

"You didn't think of it, but Constable Wang must have thought of it. Have you inquired in the west of the city?" Xu Qi'an was low profile and didn't show off.

The colleague replied, "I have been inquiring there for two days, but no suspects have been identified."

The west of the city was a slum, filled with lowlifes, people good and bad all mixed together. If there were any disturbances of the peace, the bailiffs would head out with some assistants, and if they caught one, they caught one.

"How much money was stolen?", Xu Qi'an subconsciously reasoned and asked.

A colleague glanced at Xu Qi'an, whose tone suddenly seemed similar to the County Magistrate, and replied, "No money was stolen. The deceased just came back from collecting the rent, where he only collected loose silver, copper cash, and rice. How could it be possible to escape with a large sum of money?"

That's not right!

Xu Qi'an narrowed his eyes, If I was the thief and was stealing money, I would definitely choose to steal the day after rent collection, not the day of rent collection.

He didn't express his doubts, quietly eating his sunflower seeds while listening to his colleagues talking.

It's a pity such a beautiful woman is going to be a widow at such a young age. With her figure, those breasts, aiya, you wouldn't find such a beautiful person at the Goulan. Even if it takes a tael of silver to sleep with her for a night, I'd do it."

"She's not that young any more. She's 20 years younger than that Zhang, and seems to be in her early thirties. A woman of this age can't stay widowed."

Hearing this, Xu Qi'an said with emotion, "A 30 year woman is great, They know their way around the bed, and the taste is the best."

This old saying didn't get the approval of his colleagues. They looked at him and joked, "How could a virgin like you, who've never been to the Goulan, know jack shit?"

If you want to practice as a martial artist, you can't lose your virginity before you break through to Qi Training.

If one wanted to walk the path of a martial artist, then before they surpass the barrier to Training Qi, they must not loose their virginity. Once their *yuanyang* is released, it would become difficult to ever open the "gate of heaven".

Therefore, the *Ruyi Jingu Bang* that Xu Qi'an carried for nineteen years, hadn't been used to subdue a single demoness.

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The Back Hall where the Magistrate lived.

The dark-skinned Constable Wang, who looked like a old farmer on the field, lowered his head, listlessly listening to the Magistrate's Scolding.

The county Magistrate's surname was Zhu, he was rich and fat, from Yanzhou, a top three *Jinshi* in 20th year of Yuanjing, good at business talk but bad at public affairs. He was a scholar who lacked professional ability, but knew how to act as a official.

His advantage was that he still had a bit of a conscience, so he was greedy, but not that greedy and incompetent, but not to the point where it actively caused harm to the people.

His disadvantage was that he showed a bad temper to his subordinates, and he was quick to curse up a storm.

"Incompetent, How incompetent could you be?"

After knowing that Constable Wang still didn't find anything yesterday, Magistrate Zhu was furious.

"You are a experienced veteran but were stumped by a mere murder case for so many days."

Constable Wang caught the sweat in his forehead while feeling a chill in his back.

The Official Evaluation was just around the corner, and Magistrate Zhu was getting more irritable lately... Clerk Li didn't dare to intervene, even if he had been friends with Constable Wang for more than a decade.

Li knew that the county magistrate always wanted to get a promotion, and promotion required two conditions: Backing and Achievements!

If you only had backing and no Political Achievements, It was easy to be impeached and the position would be unstable.

A stable rise was only possible with Political Achievements and Backing together.

Where does the achievement come from?

The official Assessment is a important standard to assess achievements.

A quarter of a hour later, Magistrate Zhu looked away and took a sip from his teacup.

According to the customs of the officials, Having tea meant seeing off guests!

Seeing this, Li pulled Constable Wang, who lowered his head and remained silent, to leave in embarrassment.

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Constable Wang returned to the lounge with an ugly face, which caused the messy room to suddenly quieten. Everyone looked at Constable Wang cautiously.

"Boss, Did Magistrate Zhu scold you again?"

Constable Wang rolled his eyes, grabbed the teacup and took a sip, " Damn it! Where can I find the culprit? I'm so unlucky today. I also lost a cash^[^1] of silver."

That money was lost by you... Xu Qi'an shrank his neck and drank some tea to cover up his guilty conscience.

The silver obviously had nothing to do with you.

After listening to Constable Wang's complaint, A minor officer quickly gave him a bad idea, "Why don't we do some *moyu*?"

Xu Qi'an frowned.

Moyu, "feeling for fish", a technical term in low-level official circles!

It meant: Find a substitute for the culprit.

Restricted by technology and equipment, many ancient cases were unsolved, and the detection rate was extremely low. Sometimes, officials seeking political achievements, pressured by superiors, or forced by some other reason would find a culprit to replace the criminal to show some work.

The process went like this: first, the local officials select a group of old criminals who often commit crimes, write their names in paper and fold them, and touch a paper casually.

Whoever was touched would become a scapegoat - the fish.

That's why it was called *moyu*.

After the unlucky guy was locked up, the officials went to the lockup and have the staff perform a set of assembly line operations called "Beating into submission". Even the toughest people would be willing after this.

The superiors were satisfied, the official in the middle was appreciated, the staff were rewarded; win, win, win for everyone.

The scapegoat wasn't wronged, they were after all a cancer to society regardless, so sending them off to reincarnation earlier was also a benefit to society at large.

There were many similar operations in the officialdom.

Constable Wang nodded, "That's the only way, young Li, you can handle this matter, pick a few scapegoats, older ones."

Just as young Li was about to nod, Xu Qi'an frowned and said, "Wait! Boss, there are many doubts in this case. It's possible to solve it."

Xu Qi'an couldn't accept this truth.

Although he hadn't been a policeman for many years, His three views as a policeman still existed in him.

Although the scapegoat was a bastard who would have already committed many crimes, they weren't guilty of death. Even if their crimes are enough to have them killed, there was still some space.

Looking for a scapegoat would be a waste if the real culprit was still at large.

Constable Wang lowered his face, and gave him a unhappy look silently.

Everyone tried to persuade him:

"Ningyan, don't worry about it."

"The boss is scolded everyday, You can't do anything about it. And besides, they are bastards that regularly commit crimes."

Those with a better relationship with Xu Qi'an said, "Ningyan's family has just encountered a catastrophe, so it's inevitable that he's a little sensitive to such things."

Constable Wang turned a deaf ear to their words, stared at Xu Qi'an unhappily and said with a sullen look, "Tell me, How could we investigate?"

"Give me the dossier!" Xu Qi'an said straightforwardly.

[^1]: Cash (weight)

12. Sharp Like a Tiger

Constable Wang sat at the head seat, face gloomy, silent.

These few days, the first thing that Magistrate Zhu had done after getting out of bed, was to ask about the progress of the case, and when Wang did not give a satisfactory response, scolded and cursed him out.

He alone had to carry all this pressure and stress, his subordinates hid under this umbrella he provided, and not only did they not help him take some pressure off, but they also argued up at him!

Constable Wang thus had a reason to be angry. He thought that the was carrying stress that a man of his age was not meant to carry.

After receiving the case dossier, Xu Qi'an sat at the table, focused on the page. Around him was his coworkers, who occasionally exchanged looks silently.

Xu Qi'an's thoughts were very well set out; convince old Wang that the best method was to solve the case.

If this really didn't work, then he'd invite old Wang to go play around in the "Peach Garden", as after all they've known each other for that many years, the boat of friendship wasn't that easily rocked.

Furthermore, Xu Qi'an preventing the moyu was not just because his worldview could not accept it, but also because he wanted to take some of the pressure off his boss.

The victim was called Zhang Yourui, 51 years old, a wealthy merchant who lived on Kangping street. On the edges of Changle County he has a dozen or more acres of farmland, in the city he has three stores, selling silk, makeup, and general goods respectively.

His first wife died early, and so later he married a woman twenty years his junior. Zhang Yourui has an only son, from his first wife. He does not have any other descendants.

A twenty year gap, an old stick in a new fish, a pear blossom weighing down the crab apple... Xu Qi'an silently scolded him.

This is that so-called "As long as you're working hard and making money, your future wife is still in nursery?"

Four days ago, Zhang Yourui went to the countryside to collect rent, returning to his home at 4 AM. His wife, sleeping in the house, suddenly heard a scream, and when she went outside to check, Zhang Yourui had already died within the courtyard. His wife saw a black shadow climb over the wall...

The events were just like thus.

When Xu Qi'an read to the coroner's account of the autopsy, he noticed another suspicious point.

Resisting any urges, he continued reading on, looking through witness statements from the victim's family and servants. Closing his eyes, he slowly organised and worked through the details in his mind.

Constable Wang hmphed coldly, and ridiculed "May I ask Bailiff Xu, who was the perpetrator, and where could we find them?"

"Don't be hasty, boss." Xu Qi'an opened his eyes, "I saw from the dossier, that there was a footprint left outside the Zhang residence. You used this to deduce that the perpetrator escaped by climbing over the wall, and that young madam's words were truthful."

Constable Wang replied with a "hm."

"The footprint was facing outwards, so it was left when he fled." Xu Qi'an continued.

"What's wrong with this?" Wang frowned.

"Why would he leave a footprint?"

"Because there was mud on his foot."

"Why is there mud?"

"Because beside the wall was a flowerbed."

Xu Qi'an nodded, "Then, why did the dossier not mention any footsteps going into the yard?"

Constable Wang stiffened.

In the ensuing silence, the other bailiffs thought that Wang was losing face, and so replied for him "Perhaps when the perpetrator entered, he noticed this, and so took care not to leave traces."

Another person piped up, "But after he committed the murder, he was desperate to escape, thus in this hurry he left a footprint."

Xu Qi'an looked over them, "There is this possibility. Then since there was a flowerbed under the wall, was there a footprint in the flowerbed from his entry? If the perpetrator could jump from the outside, flip over the wall and land beyond the flowerbed and not leave a print, then when he left there would be no reason why he would leave one."

The crowd looked back and forth between each other, unable to reply.

Without them needing to respond, Xu Qi'an already knew the answer: I don't know.

The bailiffs didn't investigate this detail.

"Ningyan, why does this need so much debate?" someone wasn't convinced.

Xu Qi'an did not respond, rather looking at the frowning constable, continuing, "The victim was killed by a blunt weapon to the back of the head, right?"

Constable Wang nodded, "He died immediately."

"I have a question, why was it a blunt weapon? The perpetrator performed this so cleanly, he must have carried his own weapons with him. Is not using a knife or a sword to kill much cleaner and easier?"

The hall fell silent. It was clear to see, that everyone had seen through the problem with this. Little Li guessed "Perhaps the perpetrator initially didn't want to kill?"

"Incorrect!"

This time, it was not Xu Qi'an that responded, but rather Constable Wang. He stood up, eyes wide, "A blunt weapon to the back of the head, killing in one hit, the perpetrator was looking to kill."

He sat back down, muttering "Yes, indeed, why did he use a blunt weapon, why not a sharp one?"

"Unless the perpetrator did not have one to hand at the time." Xu Qi'an replied.

Light flashed through Wang's eyes, as if he just grasped something that had been eluding him for ages, but had not quite figured out what he had just grasped.

"One more thing, that caught my attention." Xu Qi'an glanced at the dossier, "When we brought in the victim's families for questioning, due to kneeling for too long, Madam Yang of Zhang suddenly fainted. When the doctor attended to her, he found out that she was pregnant."

"A child that would never know his father."

"Such a shame."

The onlookers really made people angry, what with their constant interruptions.

“Madam Yang was married to the victim for the best part of ten years, why did she suddenly get pregnant now?” Xu Qi’an waited until they finished, before finding an opportunity to speak, “perhaps the child is not even the victim’s?”

When a man and a woman are both healthy, it would be impossible for them to not give birth after ten years, unless they specifically took prevention measures.

One of the two must have some sort of health issue, thus making them unable to have children, and with these ancient methods of curing impotency, though they are not entirely useless, the chance of success was still very low.

Constable Wang’s breathing suddenly got heavier, “Ningyan, what are you getting at?”

Xu Qi’an drank a mouthful of tea, remoisturising his throat, “Perhaps it was not a thief who entered the property, rather a case of murder due to an affair. Madam Yang carried a child from her affair. The offending father must be either an outsider, or the victim’s son. When the victim went out to collect taxes, they took the opportunity to meet with each other. Who was expecting that the victim returned in the middle of the night, and caught them in the act. There was an altercation, and so the other man in a fit of rage, picked up a flowerpot or some other sort of blunt object, and beat the victim to death.

“Madam Zhang hurriedly cleaned the crime scene, and dragged the victim out into the yard, pretending that it was a burglar who had broken in.

“Given that they wanted to sleep together, the male must have looked into the patterns of the patrol routes, thus avoiding the patrolling guards. If the bastard really wanted money, he would not have acted that night, but rather waited until the victim had brought the money back, turned it into promissory notes. Those could simply be stuffed into a pocket, and taken.”

The room of bailiffs were speechless.

“This... this... just by looking at the dossier, you could deduce out the perpetrator?”

“Ningyan, don’t bullshit with us.”

“But, doesn’t he have a point?”

Xu Qi’an’s actions made them all feel the same: I have no idea what you said, but you seem really competent at it.

“I’m only making some educated guesses based on the details in the case. This may not be the real situation, and must be proved or disproved.” Xu Qi’an replied.

The process of solving a case was just like that: find leads, analyse and deduce, and finally find evidence and proof.

*The perpetrator got round the patrolling soldiers... the timing of the break in was wrong... he was killed with a blunt weapon, and not a sharp one... Madam Zhang was pregnant... * through Xu Qi'an's reasoning, these seemingly unrelated details suddenly lined up into a logical possibility.

Constable Wang felt as he had just had a door opened onto a new world for his career. Breathing deeply, stilling all the tumultuous emotions, he thought through the reasoning carefully, and found one small point of suspicion in Xu Qi'an's words, "Why do you think the male in the affair was the victim's son?"

"There are two reasons why I suspect him." Xu Qi'an leisurely drank some tea, onlooked by Constable Wang, and his coworkers' anxious expressions, and slowly said:

"The victim's son Zhang Xian said in his statement, that that night he was in the study looking through accounts, and did not sleep with his wife. Given that he was awake, how could he not have heard the commotion in the yard?"

"Secondly, if we cannot find traces of any person breaking in, then it's highly likely that that person never existed in the first place. From this, we can see that the victim's son has the highest suspicion."

They were suddenly enlightened.

Constable Wang asked: "So, the footprint on the wall is likely to be a deliberately left mark, to confuse us?"

Xu Qi'an guessed, "Yes, of course we could go and compare it against the son's shoes."

"He wouldn't have left his own footprint, right?" Wang replied.

Xu Qi'an's whole face lit up in admiration, as he laid his constable with flattery, "Boss is clearly wise beyond your years, you immediately saw the issue. Thou art one of Great Feng's most brilliant constables!"

Earlier, Xu Qi'an had talked at great length, deducing things that stunned his onlookers, forming a new persona around himself, only to turn around and shower him with flattery and praise from all sides, feels good... Constable Wang's dark face burst into a smile.

He felt as if his own image had been raised by quite a bit.

"I will immediately ask for Master Zhu, you guys prepare yourselves, and come with me again to inspect the Zhang residence." Wang's tanned, farmer-like face showed an excited and restless expression.

He pointed towards Xu Qi'an, and let out two tractor-like laughs, before energetically bouncing towards the back hall, to find the Magistrate.

13. Interrogation

Xu Qi'an looked at his, without much optimism.

It was too difficult to obtain evidence after so many days have passed.

"Fingerprints can't be checked, It's almost impossible to obtain evidence in this way. The shoe prints are certainly not Zhang Xian's... Well, after removing these methods, Which methods available in this era can help me solve this case..." He dug deep into his head to find a way.

...

"These subordinates only know to look for benefits. They can squeeze water from stone if it benefitted them but are too incompetent in their work."

The County Magistrate was just letting out his anger in the back hall; a homicide was already a large case, and the victim really just had to have been relatives with Mr Xu^[^1] in the Censorate.

What was an official in the Censorate like?

They praised themselves as being the most incorruptible, but were rabid dogs that would bite whoever they didn't like, would not hesitate to impeach whoever did not meet their fancy.

Thin faced Master Xu, wearing a goatee accompanied him with a smile and said, "If the situation continues like this, they have to moyu."

Every person in officialdom was a wily old fox, the Magistrate knew the virtues of his subordinates.

When it came to these operations in the officialdom, The subordinates were at most at the level of primary school, The ones at the temple were the best at these skills, followed by the border officials.

"Moyu?", The county Magistrate Zhu snorted, "In the past, it would have been fine. Right now, we would be impeached in the Official Evaluation on the grounds of false evidence. How can this official deal with this matter?"

As he was talking, Constable Wang rushed to the inner hall, crossed through the door and stopped. With excitement in his eyes, he said respectfully, "Sir, I have a hypothesis

for the case of Zhang. This one requests you to issue a ticket so this one can arrest someone."

County Magistrate Zhu and Master Xu looked at each other. The former sneered and the latter showed a smile to each other.

Seeing the weird behaviour of two of them, Constable Wang urged, "Sir? Time is of the essence here."

The county Magistrate Zhu patted the table and cursed, "You idiot, You want to moyu at this time. Did your brain get replaced by a pig?"

That trick was fine in normal times, but there was a problem using it at the time.

After the prisoner makes a confession, his confession and case dossier must be submitted to the Criminal Department, and the Criminal Department will give a verdict to the criminal after verification.

With the Official Assessment coming soon, the atmosphere of the capital was tense. While tidying up their tails, everyone watched each other and wanted to catch the tails of their political enemies.

Constable Wang hurriedly defended, "Sir, you misunderstand, this one is really sure to catch the real murderer, not moyu. Please believe me, Sir."

You think this official doesn't know of your capabilities... The Magistrate Zhu was not at ease about this, and he glanced at Old Wang, "Tell me everything carefully."

Constable Wang thought "It's time for me to show off."

"Sir, listen to me carefully, There are many doubts in the Zhang case...."

Old Wang reproduced Xu Qi'an's inference, and told the two officials.

County Magistrate Zhu sneered at first, but his waist straightened unconsciously as he listened. In the end, He was speechless, but he was frowning.

He was deep in thought.

"Wonderful!", Master Xu clapped his hands with a loud 'pop' and became excited, "Very meticulous, very clear. From the inconspicuous details, you inferred the entire story of the case. Even a veteran of the Criminal Ministry couldn't have done more than this."

Although the story had yet to be verified!

But this line of reasoning undoubtedly pointed out a direction to the confused county officials.

Constable Wang smiled, "It's just a small matter."

County Magistrate Zhu snorted, "Tell me, Who taught you?"

Constable Wang stayed silent for a moment, pressed his thoughts into his mouth, and said truthfully, "*Kuaishou* Xu Qi'an."

Kuaishou was not a live broadcast platform, and Xu Qi'an was not the anchor either. Kuaishou was the name of the Fast Clerk, also called the Bailiff.

Xu Qi'an... County Magistrate Zhu took the lead in responding, "So it was him."

The county Magistrate Zhu and Xu Pingzhi had had a few drinks together, and they were fairly friendly. A few years ago, Xu Pingzhi spent twenty taels of silver to get a bailiff position for his nephew.

In Great Feng, the position of an official can be passed to their children. So, a job is as stable as a old dog's golden rice bowl.

"It would make sense if it was." County Magistrate Zhu smiled.

Master Xu's eyes flashed as he thought of the tax and silver case involving the Xu family, and immediately asked, "What do you mean?"

Constable Wang listened carefully.

County Magistrate Zhu smiled, "The tax robbery case raised up a storm in the city. The Xu family was the first to bear the brunt and should have been held accountable. Do you know why the Xu family was able to escape from crime?"

Constable Wang said immediately, "I heard that it was Master Xu from the Royal Guard who assisted in handling the case. His Majesty was tolerant and saved him from punishment."

This is what he had heard from Xu Qi'an just now.

Master Xu glanced at the look of County Magistrate Zhu, and asked hesitantly, "What's the inside story about this case?"

The details of the missing tax silver case wasn't accessible to the rank of Master Xu, but County Magistrate Zhu was the head official of Changle County. Although he was just a small fish in a place like the capital where the honourable and powerful gather, He couldn't have sat in his current position without backing.

County Magistrate Zhu snorted, "Xu Pingzhi is just a vulgar Martial Artist, He's just a scapegoat in this case..." Suddenly he paused, as if he didn't want to say too much, and said, "It's not him who saved the Xu family."

"Who is it!" Constable Wang asked subconsciously.

Master Xu flashed the answer in his mind, waiting for the follow up from County Magistrate Zhu.

"It was Xu Qi'an who solved the truth of the tax and silver case. This matter is recorded in file. This official has an old classmate who works in the Capital Prefecture government." The county magistrate said, "The son takes on the father's crime, and for it he atones. Although he's just his nephew, the idea is the same."

Master Xu took a sigh of relief, "After that incident, Xu Qi'an should've been locked up in the government prison, how did he solve the case?"

County Magistrate Zhu said in deep thought, "I thought that was unbelievable, but I understand it now."

Master Xu also thought of the method, "Only the dossier?"

Using only the dossier... Constable Wang was confused, but this kind of official secret could occasionally be heard from the three officials above him.

He couldn't believe that Xu Qi'an did such a great action in this tax silver robbery and rescued the Xu family.

Constable Wang thought, "How could this happen, it doesn't make sense."

When this kid arrived first, he was simple and stubborn, and only knew how to silently get on with his work. He was very much a numbskull.

Such a numbskull, how could he have solved the case in a blink of an eye?

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When Constable Wang returned to the lounge with the warrant, Xu Qi'an had fallen asleep on the table. He had thought too much last night, and only went to sleep after midnight.

Others reached out to wake up Xu Qi'an. Constable Wang immediately stopped them and said in a quiet voice, "Let him sleep."

He picked two people casually, "Follow me to the Zhang house."

The three bailiffs, with their own deputies, a total of nine people, hurriedly left the Changle County Office.

The deputies were temporary workers, part of the corvee system. They are comprised of common people, and do the work without pay, food or housing.

But they had a important advantage: They never had to become scapegoats.

Xu Qi'an, awakened by the "Mighty" voice, wiped the saliva from the corner of his mouth, and walked towards the county hall.

He assumed that the people had already been arrested and brought back, and the Magistrate was in the hall interrogating them.

In the public hall, there was the magistrate, and the various other staff and the attendants.

Before the large table, there were three squads of government officials standing to the left and right, and two people were kneeling in the middle: a young man in embroidered moiré blue robes and a beautiful woman in a purple skirt.

The woman looked frightened and restless, while the young man was relatively calm

"Bang!"

Zhu county Magistrate slapped the gavel angrily, and said loudly, "Who is under the hall!"

The woman glanced at the young man subconsciously. The young man gave her a calm look and straightened his waist, "This humble citizen is Zhang Xian."

The woman said in a low voice, " This civilian is Yang Zhenzhen."

County Magistrate shouted, " How did you two kill Zhang Yourui, speak the truth!"

The young man Zhang Xian was shocked, "Why does the honourable Magistrate say so? How could this Humble citizen kill his biological father?"

County Magistrate Zhu said, "Where were you when the incident happened?"

"I was in the study."

"Why were you not with the madam?"

"This humble citizen was looking at the accounts."

"Do you have a witness?"

"How could there be a witness in the middle of the night?"

Zhang Xian's answer was clear and neat. He didn't panic. So, he either had a clear conscience or had already made a draft of the events.

Based on his reasoning, Xu Qi'an preferred the second possibility.

Although he didn't have a alibi, there was no evidence to prove that he was the murderer. The reasoning is inference but couldn't act as evidence. Without real evidence, There could be no suspicion for crime...

The county magistrate turned to look at the woman and said, "Madam Yang, this officer asks you, you and Zhang Yourui have married for ten years and didn't have a child. Why are you pregnant now? Honestly, did you go to bed with your stepson and murder your husband?"

Yang Zhenzhen was taken aback and cried, "My lord, this humble woman was wronged, and she isn't in good health. In recent years, she has been treated every day and finally got pregnant with her husband's flesh and blood. How can the lord accuse me of killing my husband and conduct this injustice."

And burst into tears.

How could the truth be found in such a trial? Xu Qi'an looked at the watery woman for a moment and thought of a good idea.

[^1]: A different Xu: Xu from the Censorate has the surname 徐, Xu Qi'an has the surname 许

14. The Mind Game

"Smack!"

Magistrate Zhu again smacked the table, shouting angrily "You say you saw a black shadow vault over the wall, why then when the bailiffs went and searched your courtyard, they found no traces of footsteps in the flowerbed, nor traces of flowers or plants being broken?"

Madam Yang stared blankly, her beautiful almond eyes looked left and right, "This... this..."

Zhang Xian immediately answered, "Sir, how would my mother know how the intruder entered our home? Even if your bailiffs cannot figure out any clues, does not mean you can put the blame on us mother and son."

*The fuck are you "mother and son"? Don't insult that phrase... that's your stepmother... * Xu Qi'an couldn't listen any further.

runners

Magistrate Zhu shouted, "You have a sly tongue, don't you? Come! Bring out the torture devices"

The way investigations worked in this era were all like this: forcing answers, using torture devices; that was all that could be done, when evidence was insufficient.

Thus, very commonly were people beaten into admitting guilt.

But what else could be done? Finding evidence was too difficult, there were not the tools nor the technical knowledge to, thus torture played a vital role.

It had its advantages and disadvantages.

Zhang Xian shouted, "Is the magistrate trying to beat a confession out of us? My uncle works at the Ministry of Rites, do you sir not fear getting impeached?"

This so-called uncle, was in fact several times removed. However even if their familial relations were distant, their personal relation was very close, since the ZHANG family often sent some of their profits this uncle's way.

With one sentence, Zhang Xian struck a sore spot. Magistrate Zhu's brow twitched; he knew enough about the Zhang family's background.

"You dare to threaten this official? Give him twenty strikes of the cane!"

Four runners approached. Two used rods to trap his neck, the other two pulled down Zhang Xian's trousers. They started to use force, and the smack, smcack, smack sound of a cane being applied filled the room.

Zhang Xian screamed in pain.

Magistrate Zhu's expression was dark; twenty strikes was not enough to get a murder confession out of the man. Fifty, though, had a chance, though it could also just as well kill him.

Furthermore, even if Zhang Xian admitted to the murder, when the case was eventually transferred to the Ministry of Law, he could still turn it on its head. After all, one must not forget, he had an uncle in the government.

If that time comes, it could instead be the Magistrate, that would have a confession beaten out of him.

Leveraging the time when Zhang Xian was being beaten, Xu Qi'an waved his hand towards one of Magistrate Zhu's assistants.

The assistant hesitated, before silently stepping back a few steps, and then jogging over.

"Help me take a message to the Magistrate, for him to pause the interrogation a moment. I have an idea." Xu Qi'an said quietly.

"What idea could you have, don't speak nonsense, and get me involved." The assistant did not believe him.

"Doing this won't get a results. The Magistrate sir is already far too deep into this to back out, he will accept. Afterwards, I'll invite you for drinks."

"Sure..."

The assistant quickly jogged over to Magistrate Zhu, bending over to whisper in his ear. Zhu immediately turned his head, to look at Xu Qi'an. He hesitated a moment, before turning his gaze away, striking his gavel: "Take those two away for now, the court is adjourned."

...

The inner hall.

Magistrate Zhu took the cup of tea from a maid, and slowly drank a sip.

Having been in the government system for many years now, and at least somewhat knowing all of the unspoken rules in officialdom, Xu Qi'an immediately copied Magistrate Zhu, and took a small sip too.

"Xu Ningyan, what idea do you have?"

Xu Qi'an was shocked at his attitude: it was unexpectedly warm and kindly, without any hint of official sternness.

In his mind, Magistrate Zhu was never so courteous to the staff in the constabulary. Could it be that after he transmigrated, his face got more attractive?

“I can try.”

“Not using torture?”

“Naturally.”

Magistrate Zhu was more curious, as he put down his teacup, looking at Xu Qi'an intently, “Elaborate.”

You don't even understand game theory, what use is there in telling you really... Xu Qi'an laughed, “Magistrate sir, allow me to make some suspense for a moment, you sir just wait and listen for the good outcome.”

Yang Zhenzhen was brought to a quiet room, her watery eyes darting about, as she sat down with unease.

Creak...

The wooden door opened, and a young man wearing a bailiff's uniform walked in, standing tall, with well-defined rather handsome features.

“Don't be afraid, I'm just here to chat.” The young man even started making tea, smiling at her, “You can call me Xu Sir.”

Xu Snake?[^1]

Having never received such good treatment, Yang Zhenzhen did not speak, cautiously watching him.

Xu Qi'an looked back at the beautiful woman, deserving to be someone sought after by a wealthy man, she had a natural grace, with a beauty that was only slightly worse than his own Auntie.

Her age was good, too, only thirty. In his previous life, thirty was the most perfect age to enjoy.

“I see your luxurious clothing, it looks like Zhang Yourui treated you well.” Xu Qi'an broke the silence.

Yang Zhenzhen gave an noncommittal response.

“To be honest, what I think is that for a woman of your age, to not have given birth in that many years, Zhang Yourui must have a problem.” Xu Qi'an continued.

Yang Zhenzhen initially thought that this was going to be another investigation, and did not expect that the young man's attitude and tone was so kindly.

Completely different from how she expected an official to act.

Furthermore, usually when talking about a couple not being able to get pregnant, usually the blame would be pushed on the woman. Xu Qi'an's words thus struck a chord. She slowly let down her barriers, and cried,

"It was all this commoner's fault, this commoner's womb is not healthy enough. After finally getting pregnant after all these years, it had to be now that my husband would be killed."

As she spoke, her eyes became red.

"The dead cannot come back to life," Xu Qi'an comforted her, before asking "Did Zhang Yourui often go to the brothels?"

"Of course he did," she replied, "from ancient times, of all the wealthy men and important officials, who doesn't go to the brothels?"

Fuck me, what are you saying... fifty years old and still going to the brothels, the vault must be empty... I can almost guarantee that the child inside you is your neighbour Old Wang's... both women that get around and virgin maidens are all pretty easy to get pregnant.

"I suddenly understand you so much," Xu Qi'an clicked his tongue, "A woman is like a wolf when she is thirty, and a tiger when she is forty, and at fifty she's sitting on the ground in the dust. Zhang Yourui has lived half a century, going to brothels and ignoring you. Seeking someone else is an understandable action.

"But killing? That's not right."

Yang Zhenzhen's face turned, "This commoner doesn't know what Sir you are talking about."

Xu Qi'an laughed, "I read the dossier, that Zhang Xian is younger than you by a full seven years."

She kept a straight face, "Sir, what does this mean?"

"You're an old eagle eating a young chick."

"This commoner doesn't understand." This time, Yang Zhenzhen really didn't understand.

"Then I'll say something that you do understand." Xu Qi'an replied solemnly, "Madam Yang of Zhang, you spend your time alone at home, and naturally became lonely, so you enticed the son, and carried out unvirtuous things.

“That night, you took the opportunity for when Zhang Yourui was out in the villages collecting rent, to sleep with your stepson. Who knew that Zhang Yourui came back last night, and caught you in your adultery. Father and Son started fighting, and you used a flowerpot to kill Zhang Yourui from behind.

“To cover up your crime, you two pulled Zhang Yourui’s body into the courtyard, pretending it was a burglar who had broken in, and killed him. Zhang Xian deliberately left a footprint on the wall, to support your claim.”

Yang Zhenzhen’s face was a deathly, deathly white, as she stared at Xu Qi’an, not quite believing her ears.

“I didnt, I’m innocent, I was wronged!” she shouted loudly, hands clenching into fists, palms wet with sweat.

She’s panicking… Xu Qi’an, having put in all the hard work in the interrogation, brushed aside any hint of kindness, and with an emotionless face, coldly said “You are not curious why I know so much? Well, Zhang Xian already confessed.”

No, this can’t be… Yang Zhenzhen thought, as her face got whiter still. She forced herself to be steady, and still replied “This commoner is innocent.”

“Do you think your adulterous partner couldn’t confess?” Xu Qi’an maintained his emotionlessness.

Even though there weren’t any sort of angry words or threats, this nonetheless made Yang Zhenzhen’s even more fearful, made her hair stand on end.

“Because you thought you had covered it up flawlessly, yet there was flaw after flaw after flaw.

“Zhang Xian only left an exiting footprint on the wall, yet did not make a print entering the courtyard. If the burglar was fit and well, then when he left he would have used even more of his energy, vaulting straight over without leaving a footprint, this is the first flaw.

“Secondly, Zhang Yourui died to blunt force trauma, and not from a sharp weapon. According to the laws of Feng, every trespasser in the night are sentenced to eighteen strikes of the cane. If the trespasser is killed by the residents, there is no penalty.”

Xu Qi’an tapped the table, continuing, “May I ask, who would enter a house, to rob it of its valuables, without bringing a weapon? But Zhang Yourui died to blunt force.”

Yang Zhenzhen’s face stiffened.

“I haven’t finished…” Xu Qi’an laughed coldly. He had broken down Yang Zhenzhen’s mental barrier, and now to deliver the killing blow.

[^1]: The author used the English word "sir", which sounds similar to the Chinese word for snake, 蛇 shé

15. The Everlasting Desires of Mankind Since Ancient Times

"Thirdly, Why did the County Government insist that you killed Zhang Yourui instead of the thief?"

"You were quite thoughtful to drag Zhang Yourui's body into the courtyard disguised as a thief, but you made some mistakes."

"When Zhang Yourui died, the corpse was lying in the courtyard, with his feet facing the room and his head facing outside. This means that the murderer attacked him from behind with a blunt weapon."

"How could this be possible? If the murderer was a thief, they would've either stood still or retreated when they saw the homeowner returning. Why would the thief kill a person and still return empty-handed?"

Yang Zhenzhen was stunned. She didn't expect the murder to have so many flaws.

Xu Qi'an's words had a powerful impact on her, and she felt that her actions had been exposed to broad daylight and she couldn't hide anywhere.

Panic almost overwhelmed her.

"You won't speak? Zhang Xian didn't have anything to say, so he confessed to your actions. He also said that you had shamelessly seduced him. He didn't want to pester you anymore, but you threatened him with the child in your stomach. That night, It was you who took advantage of the chaos to kill Zhang Yourui."

"Zhang Xian is an innocent victim. He knew that there were many flaws in your story and that he was in danger, so he pleaded guilty to the county magistrate. He is willing to donate 500 taels of silver to clear the relationship and pin the blame on you, so you will be responsible for the sin of killing your husband."

Yang Zhenzhen became more frightened as she listened and her expression increasingly became desperate. After learning that Zhang Xian betrayed her, her face turned pale as if it didn't have blood at all.

"You know what Zhang Xian is like as a person", Xu Qi'an said deliberately.

Xu Qi'an didn't know what Zhang Xian was like as a person, but he knew that this type of relationship, where it was more sexual desire over true love, was never the most stable.

Moreover, Zhang Xian was a rich second-generation^[^1]. As he was quite rich, he could eat a lot of abalones, So he wouldn't hang himself on a piece of abalone.^[^2]

Yang Zhenzhen started to become desperate.

"But", Xu Qi'an followed persuasively, "Master County Magistrate is a ray of light in this dark world... He's the meaning of integrity and justice. He didn't believe in Zhang Xian's one-sided words and ordered me to come over and inquire about the case, The county magistrate promised to be lenient if you confessed and spare you from the death penalty."

Yang Zhenzhen raised her head immediately, tears filling her eyes as if she was grabbing a straw, and said mournfully, "Really?"

Xu Qi'an nodded, "Really."

Seeing that Yang Zhenzhen's mind was finally shaken, Xu Qi'an immediately opened the door and greeted the scribe at the door to come in and take notes.

Yang Zhenzhen's psychological defence was finally broken and she told the truth about the incident.

She did have an affair with her stepson and was pregnant with his child. However, there was some discrepancy with what Xu Qi'an said. However, She didn't take the initiative. The process of hooking up with Zhang Xian was summed up in eight words: Stepson please respect yourself, Stepson please take initiative.

Zhang Xian had been coveting the beauty of his stepmother for a long time, and while she was alone in an empty room, He saw a seam and entered it.

Yang Zhenzhen was half coerced and half willing.

It is said that cheating, brings you a moment of enjoyment now, but will bring the whole family crashing down. During the incident that night, the father and son had a conflict where Zhang Xian beat his father to death with a vase.

To get rid of the crime, he confessed to Yang Zhenzhen and pretended that a thief had committed the crime.

It's a pity that these two were ordinary people, unprofessional, and they made too many mistakes, while also encountering the likes of Xu Qi'an.

After making the transcript, Xu Qi'an and the scribe left the Arrest Room.

The scribe had been in the county government office for more than 20 years but was convinced by Xu Qi'an's coquettish operation, "The old man has worked in the county government for half his life, and has never met a person like you."

The prisoner's dilemma is a common routine... You ancients are making a fuss of small things. Xu Qi'an waved to him, "It's a small technique."

He chose Yang Zhenzhen as his breakthrough point because she didn't know the law well. She had long hair and short knowledge, just like most women in this era.

When the county magistrate tried the case, Xu Qi'an observed it and noticed that Yang Zhenzhen's personality was weak and that she lacked an opinion.

So, This idea came up.

He deceived Yang Zhenzhen just then. According to the law, after committing adultery and murdering her husband, a woman was to be executed by *Lingchi*^[^3], and the adulterer was to be beheaded. It was impossible to be exonerated from a capital crime like this.

In this case, It was Zhang Xian who committed the murder, and Lingchi was the punishment for those who kill their father. Xu Qi'an had no problem killing a bastard who killed their father. He just thought that Yang Zhenzhen was an accomplice, and her crime wasn't great enough to lead to death.

This point conflicted with the legal concepts he had followed in his previous life.

"Every era has its own rules, and the way to survive lies in conforming to the general trend." Xu Qi'an put this idea in his heart.

Zhang Xian, who saw Yang Zhenzhen's confession, was caught off guard and confessed in despair.

Xu Qi'an went to the inner hall with the two confessions.

Magistrate Zhu was holding cup of tea in his left hand, a book in his right, reading intently. He heard someone come in, and seeing Xu Qi'an, put his tea and book down, "How did it go?"

Xu Qi'an presented the two confessions, "Fortunately, everything went well."

Zhu immediately grabbed the confession, shook the paper, and inspected it carefully. After inspection, He threw the dossier and cursed furiously, "Bastard, Bastard!"

Old Zhu felt that his three views as a scholar had been challenged.

After showing his anger, his impression of Xu Qi'an rose to its highest point.

"Ningyan, This officer will remember you for a good job and ability."

"It's all due to the education of the magistrate. This one has only learned a few insignificant tricks from the magistrate.", Xu Qi'an lay on the flattery.

County Magistrate Zhu was very pleased.

...

After getting off work at just past 4 PM, Constable Wang said that he would treat everyone to a drink, and took eight bailiffs to the pub.

The silver standard was stable, and you could book a sumptuous dinner in a big restaurant for a single cash of silver, not to mention in a pub.

Because of his divine-like reasoning and even more astonishing interrogation, Xu Qi'an became the protagonist. Even Constable Wang was interested in the interrogation.

"The woman had a soft personality and couldn't stand fright. It was not a big deal.", Xu Qi'an was a wily old fox, and never boasted about himself and never left the crowd. But Constable Wang and his colleagues found him enjoyable and felt they had opened a door to a new world.

With courtesy, they toasted Xu Qi'an.

After drinking for three rounds, the conversation between the elders eventually turned to the brothel and goulan.

In this regard, Constable Wang was the protagonist. He patted Xu Qi'an on the shoulder, "Ningyan, I'll take you to the goulan to play around, and taste some meat."

Everyone laughed ambiguously since they knew that Xu Qi'an was a virgin.

"Boss, will you treat us?"

"It'll take a lot of money." Constable Wang refused.

No treating, Xu Qi'an said solemnly, "I'm not such a person."

I'll not be able to practice Qi in my life if I lose my virginity.

There was a lot of knowledge to be learned about the traditional culture of brothels. Xu Qi'an listened attentively and concluded.

The Goulan was a whorehouse, which was aimed at ordinary people... the qinglou
*brothel was more upscale, and the clientele were wealthy businessmen and
dignitaries... Isn't this the model of Hair Salons and Clubhouses?*

In Great Feng, the Jiaofangsi was inevitably to be talked about when it came to brothel culture.

"The ladies of the Jiaofangsi are really beautiful." Constable Wang said with emotion, "They are all the family members of criminals, all of them have delicate skin and tender flesh, and you can pick water from their skin."

"At the beginning of the year, I went to play with the county magistrate. I was lucky to have seen Miss Fuxiang^[^5], with a beautiful face like the moon."

"Who is Fuxiang?" Little Li asked, "Boss, did you sleep with her?"

"Fuxiang girl is a *oiran*^[^4] of the Jiaofangsi. If I hadn't already had a girl that night, I would have slept with her." Constable Wang blew cowhide as if it didn't need money.

"How much does it cost to sleep with her for a night?", Xu Qi'an asked.

"30 Taels."

Xu Qi'an grabbed a handful of peanuts for Constable Wang, "Boss, eat some peanuts. Let's get drunk."

*Is it gold inlaid with jade... 30 taels of silver could buy several ladies for playing with at home... * Bah, since ancient times, The only lasting desire of mankind is to drive up the X price!

I would be pretty stupid to go to the Jiaofangsi and sleep with the oirans.

[^1]: 富二代, *fuerdai*

[^2]: An abalone is a type of fish. This is a euphemism.

[^3]: Death by a thousand cuts

[^4]: See [Oiran](<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oiran>), it's the same in China

[^5]: 浮香