

Nightwatcher 111

Chapter 111. Locking on to a Suspect

Hearing Eunuch Liu's words, the officials from the Ministry of Law thought that the other party was trying to embarrass the little bronze gong Xu. A feeling of schadenfreude welled up within them, and they decided that if Xu Qi'an were to say anything wrong, they would immediately stand and criticise, attacking his face.

Scholars were very good in battles, just not battles involving force.

The government officials and policemen took on a wait-and-see attitude and didn't believe that the reckless bronze gong could find any important clues. Surprisingly, they discovered the Prefecture Governor calming down and sitting erect as he tried to listen carefully.

Lyu Qing whispered, "Don't you remember him? Xu Qi'an, The Xu Qi'an from the Silver Tax Case."

After she reminded them, everyone in the constabulary remembered Xu Qi'an's identity.

No wonder his name seemed familiar to me. So he was the bailiff who turned the tide in the Silver Tax case and solved the mystery of counterfeit silver.

Mn, He is a Bronze Gong in the Nightwatchers now.

No wonder His Majesty appointed him as the Lead Investigator for the case... The officials from the constabulary finally came to their senses.

"I have indeed found some clues." Xu Qi'an nodded.

He didn't want to reveal his findings, since both the Ministry of Law and the Capital Constabulary were his competitors, and he didn't want to share his findings with this group of sons of bitches.

But, he had just noticed the little eunuch taking notes and the active discussion between the people from the Ministry of Law and the Prefecture Constabulary officials. Xu Qi'an realized then that this was an opportunity for him to show off.

It was a chance for him to perform in front of His Majesty.

If I'm correct, this record is going to be handed over to the Emperor. What if Emperor Yuanjing was reading the records and found that the Ministry of Law and the Provincial Government were actively discussing the case and sharing their findings to solve the case while the Nightwatchers remained silent?

How would he react?

Although it was a loss to share his findings, the credit for it will be recorded on paper, anyway.

"I would like to ask a few questions about Constable Lyu's speculation." Xu Qi'an looked over and said methodically.

"I went to Sangpo in the morning to check the scene. The amount of gunpowder required to blow up the entire Temple Suppressing Mountains and Rivers and the high platform is extremely large."

"Yes, that is so. What's the problem with that?" Lyu Qing had also gone to Sangpo to check the scene.

"That's the problem. As you said before, gunpowder is an important strategic material, one that the Imperial court pays great importance to. The security and anti-theft measures used for gunpowder are strictly enforced and foolproof. It's already an extremely difficult task to smuggle that amount of gunpowder, let alone the task of erasing the corresponding traces of smuggling." Xu Qi'an said

"You should know the status of people capable of doing such."

Lyu Qing hesitated for a moment before she answered, "Minister of Industry, or, the two Deputy-Ministers."

Everyone was taken aback by this, even the little eunuch who was busy recording with his head down paused.

Xu Qi'an nodded, "If the Minister of Industry, or the two Deputies were the culprits, everything is reasonable. It isn't impossible for them to bribe the palace servants and the officials from the Court of Judicial Review and the Ministry of Rites. But, will they do this? Were their heads kicked by an ass?"

Lyu Qing knit her brows, "You mean..."

Xu Qi'an said, "Smuggling such a large amount of gunpowder will not stand through any investigation, no matter how deep they try to erase the traces of their crime. I believe that those who can become Ministers and Deputy Ministers aren't that stupid."

Lyu Qing nodded, "Since they couldn't have helped, Where else could the thieves get such a large amount of gunpowder, besides the Ministry of Industry?"

Xu Qi'an said, "Is it possible that the gunpowder was brought in from outside the city?"

Lyu Qing shook her head, "Even if we don't consider the outer city, Entry to the inner city requires taxation. So, the inner city guards will certainly inspect the goods. And it's even more impossible in the forbidden city. How could something as conspicuous as gunpowder be smuggled? Unless the raw materials were brought, not gunpowder...."

Lyu Qing and Xu Qi'an deduced the case as if they were discussing it alone, without anyone nearby. The others also didn't find the need to interfere with their thought process. Eunuch Liu was not in a hurry and listened to them patiently.

The little eunuch in charge of taking notes moved his brush across the paper as if it was flying, writing faster and faster.

Gunpowder wasn't brought in, but raw materials were. Among the raw materials for gunpowder, sulphur and charcoal weren't precious, especially in winter, when the amount of coal consumed in the capital could be frightening... But, saltpetre is strictly controlled by Great Feng... While thinking, Xu Qi'an felt as if a bolt of lightning strike his head.

"The saltpetre mine!?" He stared at Lyu Qing with wide eyes.

The female constable's delicate face froze for a moment before she also understood what he meant, and she exclaimed, "The saltpetre mine!!"

The two's faces were filled with shock. On the other side, Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao looked at each other, and their expressions also changed slightly.

The four of them had personally surveyed the Great Yellow Mountain Range and found the saltpetre mine there.

Lyu Qing calmed down her shock, and started thinking, taking this as a basis, when some doubts arose, "If the thieves were the ones who used the mine, What about the nine missing people?"

Xu Qi'an said, slowly, "It's quite simple. They wanted to frame someone."

Then, he shook his head, "No, they wanted to divert our attention and buy time for them to escape from the capital."

Lyu Qing also nodded slightly, "Yeah, they wanted to make us think that the gunpowder came from the Ministry of Industry, that spies had been planted in the Imperial Court so that the focus of our investigation shifted to the Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Rites and the Court of Judicial Review."

Eunuch Liu frowned, as he found that he couldn't understand the conversation between the two.

Except for the high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Law and Prefecture Governor Chen, who remained as before, the others looked at each other with blank dismay, as they were all unable to understand what Xu Qi'an and Lyu Qing were talking about.

They felt as if they had missed an episode of the show.

Xu Qi'an shook his head again, "If that is the case, There still is an unsolved doubt. How did they transport the gunpowder to Sangpo?"

Lyu Qing said, "It's quite simple. The nine missing officials should have been bribed or coerced. I believe in the former."

That made sense. If the Yao Race wanted to smuggle gunpowder into Sangpo, they must have had accomplices, as they couldn't have done the entire thing without the support of some people in the Imperial Court.

Whether the Imperial Court has traitors or not, Why did the Yao blow up Sangpo?

To be more precise, Why did they conspire to get the sealed item under Sangpo? What use does the sealed item have for them?

While he thought about this issue, he heard Lyu Qing say again, "We seemed to have missed something, because I noticed another detail just now..."

The heroic-looking female Constable stared at Xu Qi'an, "There are Nine missing people: Three palace servants, three officials from the Ministry of Rites, and three from the Court of Judicial Review... How did they smuggle the gunpowder in without the knowledge of their colleagues?"

Xu Qi'an didn't have much knowledge about the process of the Ancestor Worship ceremony, and he hadn't yet found time to interrogate the officials and palace servants in charge of finishing the ceremony. But, after hearing Lyu Qing, he thought of something, "You mean that three people can't smuggle gunpowder in without their colleagues knowing about it? Yeah, why were the nine people arranged separately? Smuggling could have been possible if the nine were all from the Ministry of Rites, the Court of Judicial Review, or were all palace servants."

Lyu Qing sincerely smiled, her face looking bright.

She admired Xu Qi'an a lot. He was smart and could get her thoughts easily. It wasn't tiring to discuss with him, but instead fun.

Xu Qi'an said, "Therefore, among their helpers must include another person, and that person should have the ability to freely enter and leave the imperial city, and can send gunpowder into the imperial city."

After speaking this, Xu Qi'an looked at Lyu Qing again, as they thought about a case.

The case of the lieutenant from the Jinwu Guard.

That case had happened the day before the ancestor worship ceremony, and they were the ones who had investigated the case.

*The lieutenant from the Jinwu guard was silenced... Before being silenced, he had told his wife that he would move his family away from the capital... Before he died, he happened to be on duty... * Xu Qi'an realized something, connecting the saltpetre mine case and the Liu Han case, it wasn't difficult for him to discover something.

The purpose of the Yao race in driving away the Huihu was to mine the saltpetre mines in the Great Yellow Mountains, make gunpowder to blow up the Yongzhen Shanhe Temple and release the item sealed below Sangpo Lake.

They used gunpowder since the Imperial city was heavily guarded and couldn't be easily entered, but gunpowder could be transported in without anyone noticing.

No matter the Sitianjian's Jianzheng, the Human Sect's female National Teacher, or the royal guards' high-ranked martial artists, they could all detect any high-ranks infiltrating into the city, but not non-living things like gunpowder.

Liu Han was just a small lieutenant without many capabilities. How could he bring gunpowder inside the imperial city without his superior not knowing?

He was the actor, while the instigator should be his superior, who should also be the person who silenced him.

Motherfucker, the Yao clans' schemes are like an old sow wearing bras, layer after layer.

Like a booked out whorehouse — everything in perfect order.[^1]

As long as Liu Han's superiors, the Baihu from the Jinwu guards were arrested and tortured, everything will be revealed.

Xu Qi'an immediately locked on to a suspect: Baihu Zhou!

Xu Qi'an got up and cleared his throat, "Eunuch Liu, Sirs, I still have some tasks left over at the Ministry of Industry, So, I'll take leave."

His expression was normal, and his expression also relaxed, "Nightwatchers, Follow me!"

Everyone evacuated the room quickly.

The officials present weren't fools. Although Xu Qi'an behaved as normal, His expression changed several times when he was talking with Lyu Qing. Although they only knew a little of the content of their conversation, it didn't prevent them from guessing that Xu Qi'an had found some important clue.

Everyone immediately turned their heads toward Lyu Qing.

Lyu Qing acted dumb.

Eunuch Liu knocked on the table with his fingers, and urged her, "Did Xu Qi'an discover anything? Has the case progressed? Tell it to me!"

Lyu Qing silently said, *I have done my best. After all, even if I admire Xu Qi'an a lot, we didn't have any other relationships, and it's not like we are fiancées or anything.*

Helping him delay for some time has already proved my loyalty.

Chapter 112. Broken Lead

"Sir Xu, where are we going?" Min Shan asked.

"To arrest a suspect!" Leaving the conference hall, Xu Qi'an did not have any qualms, immediately explaining himself.

Yang Feng and the other bronze gongs looked at Xu Qi'an in surprise. Zhu Guangxiao and Song Tingfeng had thoughts of their own; they had taken part in both the saltpetre mine case and the Jinwu guard case, and so they knew much more than the others.

If Li Yuchun was here, he could also have understood the thought process, but he had gone to ask after Chu Caiwei.

"Boss hasn't come back in so long, does it take all morning to ask for someone?" Xu Qi'an said, brow furrowed, "Did he encounter some difficulty?"

He had just left the Ministry of Law, and gotten on his horse, when he saw two riders galloping towards them, being exactly Li Yuchun and the yellow-skirted Chu Caiwei.

Li Yuchun explained, "Miss Caiwei wasn't at the Sitianjian, she had gone to the palace. I waited by the imperial city gate for a long time, she had just left..."

You've gone again to get food with the eldest princess? You food-eater... in the future sooner or later I'll have her taste me big old stick. Xu Qi'an smiled warmly, "Miss Caiwei, long time no see, you've gotten even more beautiful."

Chu Caiwei's smooth round face wore a sweet smile. She was just about to reply, when she remembered her own status and the watching Nightwatchers around her, and so made a stiff expression and hummed acknowledgement.

The situation was urgent, and so Xu Qi'an told long story short: "Silver Gong Min, take my golden token to the imperial city gates, and arrest Baihu Zhou Chixiong.

"Everyone else come with me to the Zhou Manor."

As he did not know if Baihu Zhou was on duty today or not, he had to split his army down two roads.

Xu Qi'an had a reason to arrange things as he did; the imperial city was at the foot of the son of heaven, and usually wouldn't see any major altercations, as no one even dared. But at the same time, one couldn't just say they wanted a person and got them; they must show authority to do so.

So one silver gong was sufficient.

As for going straight to Baihu Zhou's home, he was likely to try vault the wall in desperation. Xu Qi'an had just used his One Blade from Heaven and Earth, and so his fighting power was at a low, thus needing two silver gongs to accompany him.

...

On the other side, Lyu Qing was reporting on the situation.

"Lord Liu, good sirs, if things go as expected, this matter is very likely to involve the yaoguai."

These words made all the officials present change expressions. The Ministry of Law's Minister Sun also frowned.

One Ministry of Law official did not believe her, saying, "What evidence do you have?"

"Several days ago, this subordinate and Sir Xu had worked together to investigate a case within Taikang County. The one with the Yao monster eating huihu in the Great Yellow Mountains."

"Yao eating huihu?" Eunuch Liu knotted his brow.

"Yes. During the middle of the year, there appeared a monster at the river by the foot of Great Yellow Mountain, which ate several hundred huihu that lived in the area. This subordinate and Sir Xu worked on this case together, and discovered a fully depleted saltpetre mine up on the mountain..."

Lyu Qing described in detail the events of the case for everyone.

This was an extremely good way to delay time, because what she said was not empty words, and so all the important people listened with much intensity, without trying to rush her.

"So earlier when this subordinate was talking to Sir Xu, after layers of analysis and deduction, we discovered that the gunpowder may not have come from the Ministry of Industry, rather being to do with the saltpetre mine on Great Yellow Mountain."

Lyu Qing said.

The Ministry of Law and the Prefecture office's officials all wore serious expressions. This case had implicated the Yao, and on Jiuzhou there were two major groups of Yao: The northern Yao tribes, and the Wanyao kingdom of the southern marches.

The Wanyao Kingdom had long since been destroyed in the sixty-year demon extermination, with the left over remnants still dragging out their feeble existence.

The northern Yao clans and the northern barbarian clans had an alliance, together fighting against the Great Feng, and the many states of the west.

But which camp was behind the saltpetre mine?

Eunuch Liu looked at Governor Chen, the latter exclaimed “oh”, and said on behalf of his subordinates, “There was indeed this matter. The constabulary had only taken on this case several days ago, and the person responsible for carrying it out was Constable Lyu.”

Eunuch Liu’s expression was gloomy, “If we could have found out about the saltpetre mine earlier, then the Sangpo Lake case may not have happened. The monster appeared in the middle of the year, why was it kept quiet until now?”

Lyu Qing was just about to scold Taikang County’s office for not performing their duty, and ignoring the huihu’s lives, but was stopped by a gaze from Governor Chen.

Old Chen sighed, “The monster’s strength was immense, Taikang County also struggled with it.”

Eunuch Liu snorted, “We will report this matter to His Majesty.”

Minister Sun spoke, glancing at Lyu Qing, “What has Xu Qi’an gone to do?”

He seemed to have realised that Lyu Qing was delaying them, and so immediately brought out the problem, not wanting her to dawdle on.

Hearing this, Eunuch Liu hesitated, saying “Given that the Yao have gunpowder, then how could they have gotten past the Great Feng’s royal guards and the city guard, taking the gunpowder all the way to Sangpo Lake?”

“This involves another case.” Lyu Qing replied.

“Another case?” Everyone was shocked. The Sangpo Lake explosion involved this many different events?

Lyu Qing said “The day before His Majesty’s ancestor worship festival, a lieutenant of the Jinwu Guard, Liu Han, died without known cause in his home. This case was also carried out by Sir Xu and I. At that time, Sir Xu had deduced that he had been silenced, but at the time this didn’t have any relation to the saltpetre mine case, so I didn’t join the two together.”

A Jinwu guard lieutenant was silenced... gunpowder being smuggled into Sangpo... All present were clever, and they didn’t have any more doubt.

“Then that Xu just...” some the Ministry of Law and Prefecture Office officials stood up violently.

“Just then, Sir Xu thought of this matter, and suddenly all the pieces fell together. This is why he left in such a hurry.” Lyu Qing said.

Minister Sun said solemnly, “Send an order to arrest all the Baihu of the Jinwu guard, go quickly!”

With a clatter, everyone rose, and rushed out of the conference hall, fighting to be first, not caring about flipped tables or chairs.

The case having been dissected to this level, everyone was very clear that to catch the spy within the Jinwu guard would be to get the most merit.

Lyu Qing slowly let out a breath. She had tried her best.

If it was a fair fight, then Lyu Qing would not have helped Xu Qi'an this much, but his situation was precarious; this case was his only hope for survival.

Lyu Qing thought that as a friend, if she could help then she should.

She followed her colleagues from the prefecture constabulary out of the hall.

Within the vast conference hall was left only Eunuch Liu and the other eunuchs that accompanied him, Minister Sun, and Governor Chen.

Eunuch Liu stretched out his hand, and the accompanying eunuch immediately blew dry the ink marks, and handed over the document to him.

Liu read through its contents carefully. Initially were the discussions of the Ministry of Law and the Prefecture Office, which was mainly arguments and debates, and was rather dry.

Only when Xu Qi'an joined in, did the case start to become clear, and within the time of a stick of incense, they managed to pick up on a suspect.

The progress of the case was so quick it shocked Eunuch Liu. According to past experiences, joining up the Great Yellow Mountain's saltpetre mine, and the death of the lieutenant would have taken two or three days.

From this, it seems that His Majesty's choice of picking Xu Qi'an to be the lead investigator of the Nightwatchers had some deeper meaning... Eunuch Liu had a realisation.

"Little Yun, from today you will stay at the Nightwatchers Constabulary, and be responsible for supervising their work. You must inform me of happenings in a timely manner." Liu said.

"Yes sir!" The note-taking eunuch replied.

...

Zhou Manor.

The black lacquered door was closed tight.

Song Tingfeng, under Xu Qi'an's command, stepped onto the porch, and banged on the door.

"Nightwatchers, open up!"

From within came an old voice, "Master Baihu is ill, and is not seeing visitors. Please return."

Song Tingfeng continued to bang on the door. The person within played dead, not responding.

Being a debt dodger?

Song Tingfeng laughed coldly, and with one foot kicked the door. In a huge boom, the thick wooden door crashed off its hinges, as shards of wood flew.

An old man, wearing light blue clothes, trembled in the corner, looking at these uninvited guests with a frightened expression.

“Leave two to guard the main door. Everyone else, follow Silver Gongs Li and Yang inside.” Xu Qi’an waved his hand, ordering the Bronze Gongs to advance. He and Chu Caiwei would stay behind them.

“You’re the lead investigator, why don’t you go?” Chu Caiwei tilted her head, looking at him.

“In the war of the Mountains and Seas Pass, did you see His Majesty lead the charge?” Xu Qi’an returned her gaze.

Chu Caiwei did not know how to respond. She knew clearly that he was twisting logic, but she was not so clever, and so couldn’t think up of any rebuttal.

“I was originally wanting to give you a great strength pill, it’s whatever.”

“A great strength pill?”

“To restore your health and vitality, et cetera.” Chu Caiwei explained.

As a Feng-Shui Master of the Arcanist path, when she was tending to the ill Xu Qi’an was still in his courtyard lugging rocks.

She only had to glance at Xu Qi’an’s qi to know that he had a massive deficiency.

“Give me one, and tonight I’ll invite you for dinner.” Xu Qi’an poked her with his elbow.

Chu Caiwei stepped back with some disdain, and pulled out a porcelain bottle from her deerskin pouch, chucking it to him, “That’s enough for you to use for a while.”

Strong willed Chu Caiwei, Xu Qi’an just loved girls with this kind of attitude. He headed inside, at the same time tipping the bottle and pouring out a brown pill.

The pill had a strange smell, and when he chewed on it, a rush of spice hit him.

Xu Qi’an swallowed it down, and a few seconds later, felt his stomach become warm, and very comfortable. The feeling of weakness improved substantially.

“Let me say in advance, that this is a side effect of my special martial art, and not because I’m a Ruan Xiao’er.”

“What’s a Ruan Xiao’er?”^[^1]

“Not a good thing.”

He walked and talked, and came to the inner courtyard.

Li Yuchun and Yang Feng met him, shaking his head, “He’s gone.”

The latter added, “Anything of value in the manor has also gone.”

Song Tingfeng dragged over the old gatekeeper, his sabre on the man’s throat, shouting, “Where’s Zhou Chixiong?”

“Master Baihu he... he and his wife and the young masters and misses left the city to visit relatives.”

“Then why did you say he was ill?”

“That’s what Master Baihu told me. This little man- this little man did as he ordered...” the old gatekeeper had a frightened expression on his face, his legs were trembling, and it didn’t look like he was lying.

Xu Qi’an asked, “When did he leave?”

“On the day of the ancestor worship ceremony...” the gatekeeper gulped, and pleaded “Wh- what crime has Master Baihu committed? This small man doesn’t know anything, doesn’t know anything!”

Xu Qi’an waved his hand, indicating for Song Tingfeng to release him.

He then lead the others inside again, and searched room by room. Apart from some rather valuable old artefacts and paintings which had been taken, everything else on the manor was as it once was.

“Baihu Zhou has fled!” Li Yuchun said darkly.

“It may be too early to say that.” Xu Qi’an looked at Chu Caiwei.

The round-faced beauty seemed to mysteriously get his intention, and gracefully leapt onto the roof, her eyes filling with clear light, as she scanned every corner of the Zhou manor.

She was not trying to find anybody, but rather to find something else, focusing on the garden and the stone well.

After a short while, Chu Caiwei jumped down, shaking her head, “There are no corpses hidden on the manor, recently no one has died here... mm, perhaps it could have been hidden by special measures. You can dig the ground three feet, and have another check.”

“No need,” Xu Qi’an sighed, “Dead or fled, this lead has broken.”

But, there was an 8 out of 10 chance that he fled. After all, the people that still remained saw Baihu Zhou and family leave with their very own eyes.

Leading everyone out of the main door of the manor, Min Shan arrived with a few Bronze Gongs. With no time to rein in his horse, he shouted, “After the ancestor worship ceremony, Baihu Zhou asked for a long holiday.”

He saw that everyone else was gloomy, and his heart sank.

“He’s fled.” Yang Feng let out a turbid breath.

...

Just as Xu Qi’an lead his party away, the Ministry of Law and the Prefecture Office’s people arrived to the manor. Seeing the broken-down door, they were rather surprised.

After asking all the servants on the manor, they received word that the Nightwatchers had just come up empty-handed, Baihu Zhou had fled.

Complicated emotions arose within the two groups; they did not know whether to feel happy, or sorry.

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Dusk!

Eunuch Liu made it back to the imperial palace before the gates closed. Under assistance from his "sons"^[^2], he bathed, and changed into more comfortable clothes, and was just having his pre-supper tea.

A small eunuch hurriedly entered, and said in a soft voice, "Father, His Majesty has sent for you."

Eunuch Liu rubbed his temples, and grunted "I know!"

He took another sip, before summoning his sons for a change of clothes. Changing into his dragon robe, he had just crossed the threshold when he thought of something.

"Give us our dossier, the one we brought back today."

The small eunuch went and retrieved it.

They came all the way to the Tranquil Heart Palace, and after notifying them of his presence, was lead inside. He saw the Daoist robe wearing, long goatee flying Emperor Yuanjing.

Emperor Yuanjing was not meditating nor doing work. In his hand he held a book, yet his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Liu Rong, we have sent people to supervise the case. It has been one day, has there been any news." Emperor Yuanjing's tone was calm and emotionless.

Eunuch Liu's blood ran cold. He'd served in the palace for decades, and knew well Emperor Yuanjing's temper. The more he acted like this, the more angry and annoyed he was inside.

"Your Majesty, this is a summary of today's report. Your servant was just about to bring it to you." Eunuch Liu pulled out the thin dossier from his sleeve.

Chapter 113. Reminisce

Emperor Yuanjing's personal eunuch, with a fuchen in hand, came over to take the booklet, handing it over to the emperor respectfully.

Emperor Yuanjing put the book he was reading aside, and took the record, which he began reading carefully.

As he looked through the record, his eyebrows started raising, as anger began to brew within his eyes.

"The entire report is filled with idle talk. Looks like the people in the Ministry of Law are becoming more and more useless." Emperor Yuanjing complained.

He swept a glance toward Eunuch Liu, making him tremble in fright.

Throwing the booklet aside, Emperor Yuanjing spoke with his emotionless yet ever more incisive voice, "Where's the report about the Nightwatchers?"

Eunuch Liu lowered his head, and said softly, "Your Majesty, It's just behind the page you're at."

Emperor Yuanjing raised his brows, then picked up the booklet and continued reading.

As he continued looking, his raised brows started to stretch unconsciously, and the impatience that was beginning to appear on his face slowly turned invisible, as he began reading with greater concentration.

Emperor Yuanjing's posture changed from a side-lying one to an upright sitting posture.

His complexion became even more concentrated, and his eyes became sharper and sharper.

The two eunuchs present unconsciously slowed down their breathing, as they were afraid of disturbing His Majesty, and encountering sudden misfortune.

In the end, after Emperor Yuanjing put down the booklet, the immortal-like aura due to his 20 years of Daoist cultivation disappeared, to be replaced by the majesty and fierceness unique to an emperor of man.

Cold Sweat had already started to appear on Eunuch Liu's forehead.

He had thought that His Majesty would be satisfied, but the current situation seemed to be the exact opposite case.

"Spread the Order!"

Emperor Yuanjing's face looked like an ice storm, and his tone was just as serious, "The county magistrate of Taikang neglected his duties, causing hundreds of huihu around Great Yellow Mountain to be killed or injured. He is to be dismissed and put in prison, for execution after autumn next year."

"Lyu Qing, the constable of the Provincial Constabulary is to be promoted to the Chief Constable of the Six Doors."^[1]

He didn't mention Xu Qi'an, because Xu Qi'an was a criminal himself, and his performance evaluation would be done at the end, with the reward being his life.

"Your servant receives your order!" Eunuch Liu retreated, relieved.

After leaving the Tranquil Heart Hall, he took the little eunuch back with him to the residence without saying a word, after which he let out a long breath.

Although I don't know why His Majesty's complexion became even more serious after reading the following text, but it must have satisfied His Majesty, according to the orders he has given. That means that His Majesty's gloomy mood is due to some other factor.

In Tranquil Heart Hall, Emperor Yuanjing stood by silently next to the window for quite some time.

"Send a notice to lift the ban for entry and exit from the outer and inner cities."

...

By the time Xu Qi'an dragged his exhausted body back home, dinner was already done.

The front hall of the Xu Mansion was brightly lit. Xu Pingzhi and Xu Xinnian were staying there, waiting for him to come back.

"Nian'er, have the kitchen heat up the food and serve it." Xu Pingzhi said.

The handsome Xu Xinnian left the front hall, leaving the uncle-nephew pair there.

The candlelight flickered slightly, showing Uncle Xu's grave and earnest rough 国 shaped face.

Not long after, Xu Xinnian came back, followed by the cooks with the food, which was still hot in the pot, waiting for Xu Qi'an to come back.

Looking at his rugged second uncle and handsome little brother, Xu Qi'an fell into a daze.

I am alone in this world, without a mobile phone, a computer, keyboard warriors, or Japanese educational films.[^2]

I have to live life by lighting candles or oil lamps day by day. When I go to the bathroom, I have to curse and lift the hem of my clothes.

Sometimes, I dreamed, I dreamed that I went back to my previous life, only to wake up with a smile and look at the roof with interlaced beams in a daze.

"I suddenly feel the urge to drink." Xu Qi'an softly cursed and took a jug from the cook.

After the cooks finished taking the dishes, Xu Pingzhi waved his hand to signal them to leave.

Xu Qi'an drank wine, one sip joining another. It wasn't because he missed his past life, but because he suddenly remembered a sentence: Home is where the heart can lay bare and rest.

In this world, you can always find people waiting for you to come home at night, leaving warm meals for you in the kitchen.

No matter how tired, helpless, or lonely you are outside, You'll understand that you are never alone when you come back here.

After drinking half a jug of wine, Xu Qi'an let out a long breath, "An explosion occurred in Sangpo. His majesty ordered me to thoroughly investigate the case, and make meritorious deeds to make up for my sins."

Xu Xinnian nodded slowly, "I already knew this. But his matter isn't something you can meddle in."

"I know. I'm only responsible for the investigation, not pursuing it." Xu Qi'an said helplessly, "But, I have to give it a try. If I don't try, I only have the option of running away remaining."

He never thought of giving his life up to imperial whims. If he couldn't find the truth of the case, escape was inevitable.

"This shouldn't implicate you. After all, I haven't committed any major crime." Xu Qi'an said.

The reason why he cursed before is that he had finally found a home that gave him a sense of belonging, but he could have to say goodbye to it in the near future.

The crime Xu Qi'an had committed was fighting with his superior. Although it was a capital crime, It wasn't enough to implicate his family.

In Great Feng, implicating one's family required a very serious crime, and most people weren't even qualified to have their family implicated.

To achieve a crime on the level of "implicating X generations", one of the following needs to be met: 1. Rebellion, 2. Causing heavy losses to the country, 3. Causing heavy losses to the royal family, 4. Standing on the wrong side!

Xu Pingzhi met the second criterion, by losing tax money and causing heavy losses to the treasury. But, this wasn't the norm.

Those who could achieve one of the above four are usually the lords in the court. These lords are the ones whose family is confiscated or executed at every turn.

Therefore, "Implicating" is also jokingly called the privilege of a boss.

Xu Qi'an was at most a death row prisoner. Even if he escaped, he would be a fugitive, and it wouldn't implicate his uncle and aunt.

Uncle Xu nodded, satisfied, "It's good that you can figure it out. You have been stubborn since childhood."

That was the past me. The present me is now very... Xu Qi'an shook his head, "I'm not stupid."

Breathing a sigh of relief, Second Brother Xu said, "If you can't do it, You can go to Yunzhou."

Yunzhou?

Xu Qi'an was taken aback.

He had heard of Yunzhou, the "Cloud Province" before. As it was seriously plagued by banditry, it was also called the Bandit Province. Number Two was also in Yunzhou.

Second Brother Xu said, "Yunzhou is seriously troubled by banditry, and the imperial court has the worst influence there. Even if you are wanted, you will be safe if you escape there.

"If you act more ruthlessly, You can directly fall and become a bandit, which can not only improve your martial arts but also allow you to control power. Many important criminals wanted by the court and desperadoes in the Jianghu like to gather in Yunzhou."

It makes sense. It is safer to hide in Yunzhou compared to other areas. The more chaotic a place, the safer it... Wait!

A lightbulb exploded in Xu Qi'an's head.

If I were Baihu Zhou, where would I escape?

Collaborating with the Yao people, Blowing up Sangpo, perfectly filling up the criteria for "Executing the Entire family" and "Implicating three clans".

It's not safe to hide anywhere, because the court wouldn't let him off.

Where would he hide?

He has two choices, leave Great Feng, or hide in Yunzhou!

Right, Yunzhou.

Xu Qi'an suddenly became excited, and was about to slap his younger brother on the shoulder when he heard his second uncle angrily slap the table, "Don't go to Yunzhou."

The brothers were taken aback.

"Why?" Xu Qi'an was surprised by second uncle's reaction.

"Why would you want to go to Yunzhou? Do you want to become a bandit?" Second Uncle Xu said angrily, "The imperial court suppresses bandits every year. What if Cijiu is sent to Yunzhou to suppress bandits in the future? Have you forgotten the agreement you two made that day?"

What agreement... Oh, Fights among siblings... Xu Qi'an and Xu Xinnian bowed their heads in shame.

I had really forgotten that agreement.

Unexpectedly, Second Uncle still remembered it, and it seemed that he actually took it to heart.

"I know, I know, I'll not go to Yunzhou. I'll go to the Western Regions." Xu Qi'an said.

The foreign girls from the Western Region were beautiful and enthusiastic!

After eating, Xu Qi'an saw Xu Lingyue walking in while holding a bowl of hot milk, pursing her red lips. Her eyebrows and eyes looked gentle.

"Big Brother, drink a bowl of milk to improve your body."

"Lingyue personally went to the street to buy fresh milk for lunch today." Seeing that the relationship between his nephew and daughter had become more and more harmonious, Second Uncle Xu smiled sincerely and added.

"Lingyin drank two big bowls and fought with her sister."

Xu Qi'an took the milk, smelled it, and almost threw up... The milk was fishy and smelly.

The fresh milk of this era was like this, without any messy additives, giving the original taste. At most, it would be heat sterilized.

But it really didn't taste good.

However, even if it was unpalatable, It was indeed something only nobles drank daily, even if the taste wasn't that good.

But, it could really improve the body. So, milk was a must-drink food for noble children every day.

I can try to improve milk... And make a lot of money relying on the secret recipe... Well, I don't know how to get rid of this smell at all. The teacher hadn't taught me this in school... Xu Qi'an sighed, Under the earnest gaze of his sister, he stilled.

She really cared.

Touching the hot bowl, Xu Qi'an suddenly remembered some past events.

When he was in middle school, his parents had ordered milk for him, the kind that was packed in a glass bottle, and it would still be hot when it was delivered to his door every morning.

Xu Qi'an didn't drink it himself, however, but gave it to the goddess in his heart at that time. He thought it was love, but growing up, he found that the girl had someone else's milk sweets in her mouth.

He discovered that he was just a simp.

...

Suddenly, it started raining miserably outside, soaking the dead branches and the stone slabs in the yard.

Xu Qi'an, filled with wine and food, returned to his small courtyard with an oiled paper umbrella.

He lit an oil lamp and opened the window. It was completely dark outside although a little candlelight was stubbornly coming through, and the rain was pattering.

The world felt quiet, quiet enough to make a person think about many things.

Enjoying peaches and plums, in spring breezes, we drank a cup of wine together. Parted by rivers and lakes, on rainy nights, I faced the lamp alone for ten years.

When writing this poem, poet Huang Tingjian was probably in the same mood as him, thinking of some people in his heart.

Perhaps, it was also on a silent, miserable, and rainy night like this.

After some time, Xu Qi'an refilled the lamp twice before he could break free from the feeling of loss.

People can't always immerse themselves in their world. Many things still had to be done.

Xu Qi'an sat at the table, took out the small jade mirror, and entered the information, "Hah, Something has happened in the capital again."

Chapter 114. Simultaneous Deal-Hunting

Only a few seconds after this message was sent out, the first to reply was Two:

【TWO: Has Emperor Yuanjing been assassinated?】

... no, what's wrong with you brother, on and on about when Emperor Yuanjing will die. Has he eaten your rice or stolen your silver?

In his mind, Xu Qi'an applied the label "fenqing" to Two.

An ancient era version of "fenqing".^[^1]

【NINE: Yesterday the inner and outer city gates were sealed, forbidding commoners from entering or leaving. I figured something had happened.】

Jinlian Daozhang was still hiding in the capital, silently healing his wounds.

Xu Qi'an had just half-completed his reply, when the lurking One actually beat him to the punch in showing off, throwing out a sentence that made everyone in the Earth Book Group Chat speechless:

【ONE: Sangpo has been blown up. Yongzhen Shanhe Temple has been destroyed, and the thing that was sealed underneath Sangpo Lake has escaped. Its whereabouts are unknown.】

Such an explosive message, was met with complete silence.

The Earth Book chat group fell into a three minute long silence. No one spoke, no one expressed their shock.

【TWO: What did you say? Sangpo Lake has been blown up? Yongzhen Shanhe Temple has been destroyed? ONE, you're not messing with us?】

It was reasonable for Two to have such a reaction; this was comparable to Emperor Yuanjing being killed by a common man who had broken into the palace.

It was the same level of unbelievable.

It was like a group of eunuchs in discussion, a fantastic load of BS.

Four was in a similar level of disbelief. He understood what type of place Sangpo Lake was more than Two, and knew how heavily guarded it was.

But One was not the type to shoot at random.

【FOUR: THREE, was this what you wanted to talk about?】

【THREE: Yes. Sangpo was destroyed. The location of whatever was under Yongzhen Shanhe Temple is unknown.】

With Three's backing, no matter how much disbelief they were in, there were no two ways about it. One and Three were both in the capital, and knew best what happened there.

【NINE: Unbelievable news indeed. Are there any relevant leads, ONE?】

Interesting, Jinlian Daozhang didn't ask me as a Nightwatcher, rather directly asking ONE. Is this to say, that he thought that for this kind of high-level secret, the chance that ONE knew something relevant was higher than me?

But given this, that's got to be too callous... is it deliberate? Or is it because the impact of Sangpo exploding was too large, making his thoughts not careful enough.

【ONE: This case was given to the Nightwatchers Constabulary, the Ministry of Law, and the Capital Prefecture to investigate simultaneously. I do not know of the details.】

Everyone in the Earth Book Group Chat could not hide their disappointment. Even One, whose status in court was incredibly high, didn't know of detailed information, then Three definitely wouldn't know anything.

【THREE: That's convenient, from relevant sources, our Academy does know a few secrets. A rough overview of the case progress as of now.】

THREE knew?

THREE knew!?!

He had just said, that it was from sources that the Academy had. It seems that the Cloud Deer Academy has quite a few insiders in the various constabularies around the capital.

Seeing Three say this, even Five, who usually didn't care for the goings on inside the Great Feng's capital, came to eat popcorn.

【FIVE: THREE, your Academy's tendrils are deep, things that even ONE doesn't know, the Academy knows about. Saying this, what position are you in the Academy really?】

Could a normal student really know such important secrets?

【THREE: I naturally have my methods.】

Xu Qi'an didn't explain; the importance of leaving things blank was that the more clever a person was, the more likely they were to thin too much.

They will doubt Number Three's status as a regular student, but also doubt that Three might have some other identity. Lacking evidence, the more they thought the messier their thoughts would become.

Mn, ONE is a problem, he (she) wasn't so easy to lead astray. No matter, I don't have any issues with ONE for now. Furthermore, I'm more and more sure of his (her) status — at least I can lock it down to a specific range.

【THREE: Then, what will you use to exchange for my information?】

Seeing this, everyone had a strange feeling. They thought that unknowingly, they started owing more and more.

If THREE were to do business, he would definitely be a successful businessman...
Number Four sighed internally, and replied 【FOUR: Recently I have just been focusing on cultivation, and have not anything of value to exchange. I'll owe you for now.】

【TWO: I'm busy clearing out bandits. Mn, when I figure out the different camps behind the various powers in Yunzhou, I'll be able to repay THREE.】

As they typed, Two felt a strange sense of sourness for themselves.

【FIVE: Recently I've come across some important information, but this information would reveal my identity.】

【FOUR: Heh, you're from the Southern Marches, right.】

【ONE: Probably an aristocrat from the shaman clans.】

【TWO: And one that likes fighting.】

【FIVE: You... you all know?】

Is this not obvious? You have such a good grasp of the Wanyao Kingdom's history, and constantly call yourself "your auntie", and you yourself revealed before that your dad's social standing is very high!

FIVE seems to not be the brightest bulb in the box... seems to be on the same level as my Miss Caiwei... Xu Qi'an judged.

He renewed his judgement of the people in the Earth Book Group Chat:

One has a high standing in the inner circles of court, and was a chronic lurker.

Two was the number one fenqing, but was very clever. That day it was him (her) who had tested himself and One during the ancestor worship ceremony.

Four had a good relationship with the sect leader of the Human Sect, and was originally an official. Now, he travels across the land.

Five was a woman, of the Shaman clans of the Southern Marches, not the brightest bulb in the box.

Six was wise but rash individual, with very high cultivation.

Seven had ran, their Earth Book fragment was in the possession of Two. Two and Seven's relation was very special.

Eight was in life-or-death trials, and had been under for a long time.

Nine was the founder of the Heaven and Earth Society, Jinlian Daozhang, a LYB.

Five was silent for a long while, before talking again: 【FIVE: Fine, Auntie is from the southern Shaman clans, I'll be frank with you. I have important information that I want to share. THREE, I'll use this to exchange for your Sangpo Case.】

【NINE: FIVE, this poor Daoist's injuries are not yet healed. If you want to speak, then first make sure everyone agrees to owe you a piece of information, or its equivalent in silver.】

Everyone in the Heaven and Earth Society fell silent, implying that they agreed to owe Five information of their own.

【FIVE: The Gu God[^2] has begun re-awakening.】

The Gu God? A beyond-rank existence, the creator of the shaman path? Xu Qi'an was shocked. Even though from his freeloading of information inside the Heaven and Earth Society, he had learned a bit about how these "deities" could still exist;

But he still thought that was a bit far-fetched.

The Earth Book Group Chat had no more messages for a long time. It seemed that the shock this message brought to everyone was not less than Sangpo Lake being blown up.

【FIVE: Yesterday, from the abyss came out a wisp of the Gu God's aura. The low level Gu insects that were kept in our village all exploded, whilst the high level Gu went

mad, and started attacking our people. Auntie's vital Gu[^3] also nearly lost control. Dad said, that after several thousand years, the Gu God has finally started re-awakening, but this isn't any good news.】

【TWO: Not good news?】

【FIVE: Mhm, the Gu God is the origin of chaos. Consumption and reproduction is seared into its most primal consciousness. If it were to reawaken, then every living creature in the Southern Marches would reproduce, or be consumed by it. It will turn the entire Jiuzhou into a world of only Gu! Thus, us shaman clans are currently gathering our masters, and in a few days they will enter the Abyss, and find out the situation.】

Fuck me, this *is a thing? The Gu God is this kind of creature?*

Xu Qi'an took a fright; definitely not because his mind added some tentacles, some Silver Surfer type things, rather because he was really stunned by the unhallowed nature of the Gu God yes!

Xu Qi'an desperately wanted to know more about the Gu God, but no one else asked.

【NINE: This is indeed shocking information.】

【THREE: Daozhang, has the Gu God been sleeping because it had been sealed?】

Xu Qi'an decided to ask for more information in a roundabout way.

【NINE: I don't know. The existence of the Gu God is far too ancient. Before humans had learned to write, it had existed. You can ask FIVE, but, just the information that the Gu God is reawakening, may be somewhat above the value of your Sangpo Case.】

Above the value of my Sangpo Case? Xu Qi'an was unconvinced.

【FIVE: Haha, THREE, if you want to know more about the Gu God, you can make a deal with me.】

【THREE: What do you want?】

【FIVE: My brother hasn't married yet. I heard that your Great Feng's Zhenbei King Consort is the number one beauty in the world, I want her to be my sister in law.】

You're talking out your arse... if I could do this wouldn't it be better for me to have her alone, why should I give this beauty to your brother... Xu Qi'an replied 【THREE: A consort isn't enough, the eldest princess is also a legendary beauty, along with the Great Feng's national teacher. I'll give you three for the price of one.】

【FIVE: Sure yeah!】

【ONE: If it's just this rubbish, then I'll go to rest. Please may the two of you hold your tongues.】

One jumped out to interrupt the conversation.

Five did not continue messing around, because she also wanted to know the details behind the Sangpo Lake Case, writing: 【FIVE: All I know is that the Gu God is the origin of the shaman path, is the origin of all Gu in the world.】

Seeing that Five had finished, Xu Qi'an searched around for some words, and started to share what he knew about the Sangpo Case.

【THREE: Under Sangpo Lake is sealed something, perhaps having to do with the Yao people. Currently, the officials of the Great Feng have initially confirmed that the power behind the Sangpo Lake explosion is likely to be the Yao. But they don't know if it's the northern clans, or the Wanyao Kingdom remnants.】

Xu Qi'an was not afraid that this information would make people guess at his identity.

Because at the time there were lots of people in the conference hall. The Ministry of Law, the Prefecture Office, and the Nightwatchers were all present. The Cloud Deer Academy's source was not necessarily the Nightwatchers.

Yao?

How has this involved the Yao? Why did the Yao blow up the thing sealed under Sangpo Lake?

Everyone in the Heaven and Earth Society had a head full of fog.

However, they did realise one thing, and that was what ever was behind the Sangpo Lake explosion was not anything simple.

If they wanted to uncover this, then they'd probably have to figure out what on earth was sealed there.

【ONE: Impossible, the guard around Sangpo Lake is tight. Even a high-rank master would not be able to infiltrate in. How did the Yao blow up Sangpo Lake? Where did the gunpowder come from?】

【THREE: This, the court has already figured out. A saltpetre mine was discovered on the Great Yellow Mountain in Taikang County, but it was already depleted. The ones who harvested it were the Yao. ONE, your avenues of information aren't enough. Furthermore, the spy who communicated with them were also discovered. He is Baihu Zhou Chixiong of the Jinwu guard, however he and his family have fled.】

【ONE: Then this lead is broken.】

【THREE: Heh, not necessarily. Not long later, the court will definitely send out a wanted notice. Zhou Chixiong would either have to leave the Great Feng, or hide somewhere same. Where do you think he would hide?】

Two immediately responded: 【That doesn't need thinking, it's Yunzhou.】

No one knew more about the situation in Yunzhou than him (her).

At this point, Xu Qi'an's goal had been reached. He had wanted to use this topic, to ask Two to help him keep an eye on Yunzhou, and see if they were able to catch this Baihu Zhou.

But according to his persona, he shouldn't really care much for a fugitive. Because he was a patriot? This was hardly an excuse.

【ONE: TWO, you have some influence in Yunzhou, can you help me look out for this Zhou Chixiong?】

Nicely done... Xu Qi'an felt excited.

In One's heart, Two seems to be more effective than the local government?

【TWO: I refuse.】

【ONE: I will give payment.】

【TWO: No, I refuse to help you!】

One did not say anything more, and the Earth Book Group Chat fell into a short silence.

ONE and TWO seem to not be on good terms... no one else tried to help... perhaps before I joined the two of them had some sort of argument?

Mn, this won't do. If TWO doesn't help, with how big Yunzhou is, how could we pull out Zhou Chixiong?

I need to come out. With this I'll be owed a favour from ONE, and can redeem the favour TWO owes me.

Profit!

Xu Qi'an wrote: 【Two, could you help me look out for Zhou Chixiong. I'll take this as being for the favour you owed last time. As for ONE, my apologies, you owe me another one. What do the two of you think?】

Chapter 115. A Secret from 500 years ago

【TWO: Alright, I'll give you some face, THREE, and take care of this matter. I still have some face in the region of Yunzhou. As long as Zhou Chixiong is in Yunzhou, I can find him out.】

Such a confident tone? Xu Qi'an was more sure that Number Two wasn't from the Imperial Court. There were two reasons for his guess: First: They curse Emperor Yuanjing to go to heaven every day.

Two: Banditry was quite serious in Yunzhou right now. Refugees could be found everywhere, and the court's presence was declining as well. If Number Two was from the Imperial Court, they wouldn't have dared to make such a guarantee.

Hiss... Not from the government, but passionate about suppressing bandits every day, Number Two should be a chivalrous person.

【ONE: Okay】

A deal was concluded and the conflict was resolved.

Everyone in the Heaven and Earth Society breathed a sigh of relief. *Number Three is worthy of being a scholar, he's very skilled. Normally, Number One and Number Two would never make a deal like this.*

Daoist Jinlian was correct to bring Number Three into the Heaven and Earth Society.

After Number Three joined the Heaven and Earth Society, the frequency of conversation in the Earth Book increased, and the number of people exchanging information also started to increase.

Everyone found his presence welcome.

【FOUR: Why did the Yao covet the item sealed under Sangpo? Well, I think it should have been done by the Northern Monster Tribes. Historically, No conflict has occurred between Great Feng and the Southern Marches Wanyao Kingdom.】

The Northern Yao and Great Feng were like fire and water, while the Nanjiang Wanyao Kingdom held enmity as vast as the endless ocean toward the Buddhists from the Western Regions.

Boss had said that the northern barbarians and the northern Yao have frequently harassed the border in recent years, and show signs of resuming the war. So, It is reasonable for the Northern Yao to secretly do things in the imperial capital... Xu Qi'an felt his heart sink.

【FIVE: So, What was sealed under Sangpo, for the Northern Yao to plan so much for it?】

Why so many questions, little girl? Uncle can't give you any answers, because uncle also wants to know... Xu Qi'an lampooned.

【NINE: No matter what, it should be something that can cause harm to the Great Feng's royal family. I hope it won't harm the ordinary people in the capital.】

Seizing the opportunity, Xu Qi'an sent a message,

【THREE: Sitianjian's Jianzheng is said to be sick. What do you think? According to the secret information obtained by our Cloud Deer Academy, there is indeed a formation at the bottom of Sangpo Lake. I believe it to be the work of the Sitianjian.】

【TWO: As if. How could a First Rank Expert get sick?】

Number Two denied it.

【FIVE: Um, A First Rank Expert is an existence at the top of the pyramid, and it's impossible for them to get sick, let alone one from the Arcanist system.】

The Arcanist system began as Physicians.

Number Four also expressed his own opinion:

【FOUR: The attitude of Jianzheng might mean that he didn't want to participate in this matter.】

Number Four is a smart person, and he thought similarly to me as well... The Jianzheng didn't want to involve himself with this matter... What with his ambiguous attitude, Isn't his task guarding the capital?

Xu Qi'an went silent.

【ONE: I can repay part of the debt right now. Information about Sangpo, its value shouldn't be so high. Do you want to hear it, THREE?】

It isn't worth much, but you want to repay last time's debt... Isn't this a bit too much, Number One. Do you want to shave wool off me?

Xu Qi'an was a little annoyed since he was making a loss in the transaction. But, he needed relevant information about Sangpo very much.

As the clue from Baihu Zhou was broken, he needed to find a point of attack yet again.

Xu Qi'an wrote a message, using an indifferent tone, 【Let me see.】

【ONE: I checked the records about Sangpo, and found an important point in time. Perhaps, the item sealed under Sangpo is related to it.】

Number One paused for a while, before sending a message" 【Five Hundred Years Ago!】

【ONE: About five hundred years ago, the crown prince was swimming in Sangpo Lake, but accidentally fell into the water. He went insane due to the incident and drowned in Sangpo not long after. But, Another Important Event occurred Five Hundred years ago. There are few words about it in the history books, and the Ruling and Opposition both keep it secret.

【I think THREE should know what I'm talking about.】

I don't, I don't know anything... No, I haven't even read the history books!

Annoyance rose in Xu Qi'an mind, as he thought, *Why doesn't Baidu exist in this world? If it did, everything could be solved with a little search, such as the basic necessities of life, food housing, and transportation. Including illness... well, You may need more than some skills, Let's meet in your next life.*[^1]

Um, I could find Cijiu. Cijiu has read history books thoroughly, and he is a Straight A student.

Xu Qi'an's little brother's voice and smile appeared in Xu Qi'an's mind, and he was surprised to find that Number Four had rushed to answer: 【Contention for the Throne?!】

Looking at this, Xu Qi'an was relieved, because he knew that one of the others would ask for his place since everyone in the group, except Number One and Number Four, were illiterates who hadn't finished nine years of compulsory education.

【TWO: Contention for the Throne?】

【FIVE: Contention for the Throne?】

【FOUR: Five hundred years ago, a rebellion occurred from within the Great Feng royal family. The leader of the rebel army back then was King Pinghai, who later became Emperor Wuzong.^[^2] Although Wuzong whitewashed his actions as removing evil from the court to cover up his act of usurping the throne, it wasn't ever a glorious act. The historians of later generations kept the secret, and only dared to write: In the years when heaven collapsed, the world was overflowing with devils, but Wuzong rose in the east to quell the chaos!

【The current Great Feng royal family are all descendants of Wuzong from back then.】

【FIVE: What does this have to do with Sangpo?】

This girl clearly wasn't quite smart.

【TWO: Is ONE suspicious that the sealed item below Yongzhen Shanhe Temple is related to the royal family five hundred years ago?】

【ONE: Don't you all find it strange that the Jianzheng pretended to be sick?】

A certain important figure of the royal family five hundred years ago could be sealed under Sangpo... The past details regarding the usurping of the throne is a taboo. So, the royal family didn't want to reveal this secret. This could be why only Emperor Yuanjing knows of it... The death of the crown prince five hundred years ago might not be an accident. Was it revenge?

The sealed person is a member of the royal family, so the case could be considered a matter of the royal family. Did Jianzheng feign sickness because he didn't want to participate in this matter?

The Northern Yao should have done this to make the Great Feng capital fall into chaos, or even cause turmoil within the court. That way, they could take the opportunity to make some moves in the north.

Xu Qi'an gasped, and his back stood upright suddenly. The Sangpo case went even deeper than he imagined.

I should better run away. I think the risk of running away is lower than the risk of participating in this case.

Xu Qi'an was terrified.

【THREE: By the way, I forgot a thing. I found some characters engraved on the seal under Sangpo. I found them very interesting. I thought that I should share it with you all. Well, I'll share them for free.】

He didn't send "Does anyone here know what font this is?". Doing so would be stupid of him.

If this was just a font from ancient times, his low level of education would be revealed, and he would no longer continue using the identity of a Cloud Deer Academy student.

So, Xu Qi'an wrote two of the curved characters on the mirror surface of the small jade mirror.

【THREE: Two curved and twisted characters.】

【NINE: This is Buddhist script.】

Buddhist? Xu Qi'an froze up.

【FIVE: How did Buddhist script appear in the Sangpo Formation?】

It's good that there is a group member with a low IQ in the group... Xu Qi'an smiled, and waited for some big boss in the group to explain.

【FOUR: It stands that this shouldn't have happened. It's impossible for the royal family to allow the Buddhists to participate in such a secret matter.】

The others also expressed puzzlement one after another.

After waiting for some time, No-one sent any message to the group, indicating that everyone had their guesses about this.

Xu Qi'an asked: 【THREE: It's been some time since I haven't seen SIX in the group.】

【NINE: SIX seems to have encountered some trouble. He has already left the Welfare Home on the east side for some time. This Daoist will try to find him.】

Is baldie a trouble magnet? Why is he always in trouble... Xu Qi'an lampooned and waited for the time it takes for an incense stick to burn before he confirmed that all the other group members had gone offline.

You should inform before going offline, you guys with no morals.

...

After blowing out the oil lamp, Xu Qi'an lay on the bed with the small jade mirror under his pillow. He looked at the dark roof, allowing his thoughts to ferment.

If the one under Sangpo is an expert from the former royal family, This matter would be troublesome. I would definitely be beheaded for learning this secret... On the contrary, I would not be afraid of being silenced by Emperor Yuanjing if the other party makes trouble and put their identity out in the open.

Wei Yuan had said that other people will do the task of recovering the sealed item. I don't need to intervene at that stage. My task should be to find the spies behind the Sangpo case... But Baihu Zhou has already escaped. This clue has broken, and I can only pin my hopes on Number Two.

Wait, something doesn't match up. Xu Qi'an's eyes suddenly lit up in the darkness as he found that he had ignored something.

When discussing the case with Lyu Qing in the conference Hall during the day, We had determined that it was impossible for the nine missing people to secretly smuggle gunpowder into Yongzhen Shanhe Temple.

And Baihu Zhou was from the Jinwu Guard. The Jinwu Guard's task was to guard, not handle the Ancestor Worship Ceremony. That means that he had no chance to enter Yongzhen Shanhe Temple.

There must have been another behind-the-scenes person guiding him.

That behind-the-scenes person joined forces with the Yao to cause the Sangpo case and release the sealed artefact in Yongzhen Shanhe Temple.

My real mission should be to find that guy.

Turning over and sitting upright, Xu Qi'an clenched his fist in excitement.

Chapter 116. Fright but no Danger

The total number of constabularies and government offices in the capital numbered 134. Excluding those without any real authority, and those that belonged to the military, the total number of officials that ate officials' meals numbered over ten thousand.

And of these, people who could attend morning court only made up a tenth of their number. As for officials, lords, royal family who could enter Jinluan Hall^[^1] and speak directly with the emperor himself, at most numbered around a hundred.

At 4 AM^[^2], the many martial and civil officials gathered outside Meridian Gate, in groups of two and three, exchanging idle chatter, occasionally hiding sharp jibes in soft words.

"His Majesty has been much more diligent in attending court."

"Well the official evaluation is here after all."

"Last official evaluation, His Majesty wasn't this industrious."

"Naturally it's because of the Sangpo Case. Aye, this has been an eventful autumn. Today His Majesty will probably let off some temper, you make sure you're not the one he's targeting."

"This official is just a civil servant, the Sangpo case has nothing to do with this official, or with any of us."

"Oh, then who does it have to do with?"

Everyone exchanged glances, smiling.

Who did it have to do with?

Naturally it had to do with the Jinwu Guard's leading general; it had to do with the protectors of the capital and the royal family, the Nightwatchers.

Naturally, it had to do with the leader of the Nightwatchers, the azure-cloak Wei Yuan.

In front of the Meridian Gate, Wei Yuan, a body clad in azure, stood solitary, seeming apart from the many officials around him.

Wei Yuan was a very special person. At court, there was no eunuch who controlled greater power than him. Even the great eunuch by the emperor's side, did not have much political power of his own.

Only Wei Yuan was different. He was the Nightwatchers' leader, as well as a Censor, a chief inspector of the Imperial Censorate.

These two offices all had the authority to supervise the many officials in government.

Emperor Yuanjing's intent was very clear; Wei Yuan is my blade, if any of you misbehave, then that blade will fall on your neck.

Not only was Wei Yuan Emperor Yuanjing's weapon that he used to balance power at court, but he also had the use in bearing all the hate.

The civil and military officials did not dare hate the Emperor, but they could vent off steam at Wei Yuan.

As of this moment, Yongzhen Shanhe Temple had been destroyed. So the fact that Emperor Yuanjing, who was always lazy in matters of governance, would be attending court, clearly implied that he had some anger to let off.

Wei Yuan would be in the vanguard facing his anger.

The other officials were very happy to sit and eat popcorn.

At 6 AM, a resonant bell's ring broke the quiet of the night, seeming faint and lonely.

The many officials slowly started filing their way through the gradually opening eastern gate; the members of the royal family made their way in from the western gate.

Emperor Yuanjing sat high on his dragon throne, expressionlessly looking down at the several hundred officials, who were making their way through the Meridian Gate in an orderly fashion, military and civil splitting apart.

There were another hundred or so officials, nobles, and royal family who entered Jinluan Hall.

As the procession finished, a deputy of the Ministry of Law stepped forward, announcing loudly, "Last night, a criminal broke into Sangpo Lake, and destroyed Yongzhen Shanhe Temple, this is a disgrace to our Great Feng! Wei Yuan, as the head of the Nightwatchers, failed in his duty to protect the royal family. Your servant asks Your Majesty to have this official beheaded, to appease the masses."

"This servant agrees!"

"This servant agrees!"

Immediately several deputies immediately jumped out, asking Emperor Yuanjing to chop off Wei Yuan's damned head.

The arguments and attacks at court fundamentally had no difference from buying vegetables at the vegetable market. Normally they'd exaggerate, and will ask for beheading, confiscation of property at the drop of a hat.

No matter if the situation was serious or not, cutting off their damned head is always the right thing to do.

If the emperor would not agree, then they would haggle down, from beheading to exile, from exile to removal from office.

One couldn't start at removal from office anyway; you must give His Majesty room to haggle down. Otherwise, he'll look at you, *you lads don't even give me an opportunity to haggle down?*

Then clearly he's done nothing wrong.

Beyond the officials' expectations, Emperor Yuanjing immediately swatted back the request to have Wei Yuan impeached, and furthermore praised Wei Yuan for the progress made in his work.

This made the other officials confused, as they started muttering amongst themselves.

"Quiet!"

Emperor Yuanjing's personal eunuch smacked his whip on the floor, his sharp voice warning the many officials.

This matter came to a conclusion, yet the requests for Wei Yuan's impeachment did not stop, rather changing tack.

Another official from the Ministry of Law stepped out, saying "The Nightwatcher Xu Qi'an, killed a guard outside the front door of the Ministry of Law, and violated imperial authority. Your servant pleads with you to severely punish this criminal, and execute his entire family."

Wei Yuan, who during calls for his own impeachment could not care less, at this squinted his eyes, and stepped up, "Your Majesty, the Ministry of Law's guard captain prevented the Nightwatchers from doing our jobs, for unknown reason. Your servant suspects that the Ministry of Law's Minister Sun had conspiracy with the perpetrators to destroy Sangpo Lake. Please may Your Majesty strip him of office, and throw him in prison, for your servant to interrogate."

The Censorate's officials stepped up in turn to back him.

"Nonsense!"

"Your Majesty, Wei Yuan is speaking slander, he should be punished."

"Your Majesty, there's a big problem with the Ministry of Law. Your servants back stripping the Ministry of Law's officials of their roles and arresting them for interrogation."

The two sides immediately started a war of words, as other factions occasionally got a word in here or there, fanning the fire. Within the court, the many parties and factions entered fierce fighting.

The Prime Minister, the Ministers of the six ministries, and Wei Yuan, along with a few other important people, instead closed their eyes and breathed meditatively.

Emperor Yuanjing was not in the least angry. Only when seeing that the officials had just about finished their arguments, did he indicate to the great eunuch to shout at them for order, bringing quiet back to Jinluan Hall.

“The bronze gong Xu Qi’an, has a crime on his shoulders, and so his actions are bound to tend to the extreme. You are to co-operate in solving this case, and not to interfere with each other. If this happens again, we will severely punish those involved.” Emperor Yuanjing said solemnly.

Wei Yuan opened his eyes, as a surprised expression flashed across his face.

He knew that Xu Qi’an would not come to any trouble, but he didn’t think that Emperor Yuanjing would personally speak on behalf of that small Bronze Gong.

Emperor Yuanjing scanned over his officials with sharp eyes, and continued, “From today, the curfew on the city gates is to be lifted. Any sixth rank or higher officials in court, are still forbidden from leaving the capital.

“The royal court is adjourned!”

...

Xu Qi’an awoke perfectly at 6 AM. After washing and getting dressed, he went to uncle’s house to get breakfast.

When he was still a small bailiff at the Changle County Constabulary, he needed to get to the office by 6 o’clock, for the morning headcount, equivalent to clocking in for work.

After becoming a Nightwatcher, upon consideration that Xu Qi’an was still dirt poor and couldn’t buy a house in the inner city, so his arrival time was delayed from 6:15 to 6:45.

This gave him an extra half hour to make his way there.

On this matter, the Nightwatchers Constabulary was rather progressive.

It was getting to winter, and the morning temperature was very low. People couldn’t help but be sealed into their warm covers for an extra few hours.

The full-bodied and beautiful auntie was one of these people, being still in bed. The melon-seed faced graceful younger sister was also stuck to her bed.

“Go call Lingyin up. If she gets into a bad habit from young, it’ll be hard to fix it later.” Uncle Xu said.

Xu Qi’an suspected that he felt that the dinner table was not lively enough, since Xu Xinnian had left for the Cloud Deer Academy well before 6.

He said that this morning the Cloud Deer Academy were holding lectures, and he needed to leave the city by quarter past to be able to catch it.

Thus by the table were left only Uncle Xu and Xu Qi’an.

Xu Qi'an thus went to the inner courtyard, and knocked open Xu Lingyin's bedroom door. The person who opened it was Xu Lingyin's maid.

The small maid half-expectantly half-cautiously half-shyly said "Da- Dalang, what are you doing?"

It was still dark, and he'd come knocking. Could it be that Xu Dalang wanted to take advantage of the darkness to do something to her?

Xu Qi'an said he was coming to wake up Lingyin.

He entered the room, and saw Xu Lingyin was still curled up under her thick blankets, like a pillow hidden under them, only a little thing.

Xu Qi'an immediately smacked her on the arse, smacking her awake.

Xu Lingyin opened her eyes blearily, wiping away the spittle on her face, and said indistinctly "iss bigh bwother..."

"Get up, breakfast."

"Oh..."

"Then get up!"

"zzzzZZzzzz....."

"Today's breakfast is steamed lamb, steamed bear paw^[^3], steamed deer tail, roast duck, roast chicken, roast goose, salted pork, salted duck, braised chicken..."

Thud thud... Xu Lingyin suddenly stretched and contorted on the bed, her four limbs kicking. Her brain was still sleeping, yet her body couldn't wait to go and have breakfast.

The maid looked after Little Pea as she brushed her teeth and washed her face. Xu Qi'an carried her towards the front hall, her chin resting over his shoulder, her bum in the air, wanting to sleep but also not daring to sleep, afraid that she'd miss out on all the delicious food.

"Don't sleep, big brother'll sing you a song."

"Oh..."

"*Good little bunny, open the door for me, quickly, quickly, I want to come in.

No no no no no no no, hubbie isn't home, no one can come in.*"^[^4]

...

Coming to the main hall, Xu Lingyin was shocked and speechless to find bao buns, bean porridge, and youtiao, and was so upset that she began crying.

"This isn't the breakfast I want, my steamed lamb, steamed bear paw, steamed deer's tail, roast duck, roast chicken, roast goose, salted pork, salted duck, braised chicken... where is it?"

You remembered all of this!? Xu Qi'an rolled his eyes, "Big brother was lying to you."

Xu Lingyin cried “Wah!”, and putting both hands behind her back, her head tilted forward, started attacking Xu Qi’an with sound.

...

After breakfast.

“If I’d have known not to call her, this racket is making my head hurt,” Uncle Xu with his hand on his head, walked away cursing.

“Indeed, I’ve finally understood Auntie’s difficulty, Auntie’s worked hard.” Xu Qi’an walked away cursing.

Leaving Xu Lingyin in the care of the maids, simultaneously crying and eating.

Even though there was no steamed lamb, steamed bear paw, steamed deer tail, roast duck, roast chicken, roast goose, salted pork, salted duck, braised chicken, which made her really upset, but she could eat at the same time as being upset.

...

Wei Yuan left Jinluan Hall, and was just thinking over the state of play in court today, when he suddenly heard someone shout “Duke Wei, please wait for us!”

Turning his head, he saw it was Eunuch Liu.

Before Wei Yuan was where he was now, he had worked in the palace, and had a good relationship with Eunuch Liu. Smiling, he said “Lord Liu, what is it?”

Eunuch Liu looked left and right, before pulling out a piece of paper from his sleeve, and stuffed it into Wei Yuan’s hand, “We copied it. Duke Wei can have a look.”

Wei Yuan smiled a knowing smile, “Some other day, I must come to the palace and have some wine with my Lord.”

Exiting the Meridian Gate, and entering his carriage, Yang Yan in the drivers seat silently started driving the cart towards the constabulary.

Wei Yuan pulled out the paper, and started reading it, a smile forming on his face.

“Father, what are you reading?” Nangong Qianrou asked curiously, lazily leaning back in the carriage, acting as Wei Yuan’s bodyguard.

“I originally thought His Majesty will make things hard for me, who would have thought that I very easily got by.” Wei Yuan smiled.

“Easily got by?” Outside the carriage, Yang Yan asked in disbelief.

On the road towards court, Wei Yuan had modelled how the state of play in court may develop in his head. He had this habit; model before, review after.

In his original prediction, when he attended court there would definitely be calls for impeachment, Emperor Yuanjing would use this to scold him, and then give him some level of punishment.

Wei Yuan guessed right; the Sangpo Case became his political enemies’ main line of attack.

But he did not expect that things were bypassed so easily.

Nangong Qianrou frowned, "No one used the opportunity to attack father?"

Smiling, Wei Yuan handed over the crinkled up paper.

Chapter 117. The Item Sealed Under Sangpo Lake

Nangong Qianrou took the dossier and looked over it. It reported the analysis of the case by the officials of the Prefecture Constabulary and the Ministry of Law.

There was not too much value, and he scanned over it, before his eyes fixated on something.

His face appeared more serious and attentive.

The gunpowder used to blow up Yongzhen Shanhe Temple had actually come from the saltpetre mine at the Great Yellow Mountains... The Lieutenant that was silenced. A Jinwu Guard conspiring with the Yao... The context behind the Sangpo case finally cleared up to him.

Nangong Qianrou couldn't hide his surprise. He hadn't paid that much attention to the case, but he had been aware of its happenings. As for the Lead Investigator, Xu Qi'an, he had the mentality of neither harming nor helping.

According to the experience of Gold Gong Nangong, it was impossible to have any progress in the case before three, or even five days had passed.

He had never expected there to be such a harvest in just a single day.

"A talent in solving cases." He squinted his flowery pupils, as he finally found some respect for Xu Qi'an.

"A talent in solving cases?" Yang Yan's voice came from outside the carriage. Interested, he asked, "Did you mean Xu Qi'an?"

Gold Gong Yang attached great importance to Xu Qi'an, and thought that he was a young man worth his nurture.

Nangong Qianrou snorted, "You were just lucky to get such a talent for yourself."

Yang Yan let out a content "Heh", and adjusted his focus back on driving the carriage.

After they arrived back to the Nightwatchers Constabulary, and to the Tower of Noble Spirit, Wei Yuan said, "Let Xu Qi'an come to see me."

...

Xu Qi'an was currently in the Archives, searching for information. As Number One had said, The incident of Emperor Wuzong usurping the throne had occurred 500 years ago.

Likewise, the records of the royal family before that time, except for the founding emperor, were very vague. They should have been destroyed, leaving only the names for record.

But he could be sure of one thing, The one sealed below Sangpo Lake wasn't the unlucky emperor who was usurped by his cousin.

That emperor had an heir at age fourteen.

As it is known, before reaching the Refining Qi Realm, Martial Artists are hungry and without abalone... Well, It's not that they don't have abalone, It's just that the time hadn't come to enjoy them.

"Look up the details of every expert who was above the third rank five hundred years ago. Don't miss a single person." Xu Qi'an took over the next task, which was checking the experts in the royal family 500 years ago.

"Yes!"

The nearby seven-eight petty officers took the orders.

On the table by the window, a girl wearing a light yellow dress was holding her cheek with one hand, while stuffing her face with fish balls using the other. Her legs were dangling under the table, occasionally revealing her flower embroidered boots.

"Miss Caiwei, I suddenly remembered something." Xu Qi'an tried to reach for the fish balls, but his hands were slapped out by the oval-faced beauty.

Xu Qi'an sighed, "Are the fish balls so delicious?"

"Delicious!" Chu Caiwei nodded.

"I also want to eat, but not these." Xu Qi'an said. 3

"What will you eat then", Chu Caiwei asked.

"I want to eat up your beautiful face." Xu Qi'an gave off a sunny smile.[^1]

Chu Caiwei's face reddened, followed by her willow-like brows furrowing together. She wanted to scold him for being a pervert, but also felt that these words sounded warm, and different from the obscene language this pervert usually spat out.

She didn't know whether to be angry or not. If she didn't, then where was her respect as an unmarried lady?

Xu Qi'an astutely changed the subject, "There's something I'd like to ask Miss Caiwei about."

Chu Caiwei swallowed down the fish ball in her mouth, as her red lips flashed brightly with a layer of grease, looking soft and attractive. She made a stern face, "What?"

"What methods are there to block the Sitianjian's Qi-watching technique?"

"High level masters can all suppress their qi, but this is all relative. I'm just a seventh rank Feng-shui Master, so the martial artists who could get by me must at least be fifth rank. Sixth ranks aren't possible." Chu Caiwei said proudly.

I'm an eighth rank Refining Qi, then to be able to get past my Qi-watching technique, Baihu Zhou must be Bronze Skin and Iron Bones, but he clearly isn't... Xu Qi'an nodded, and continued,

"Apart from this?"

"Then you use magic items." Chu Caiwei liked teaching, and so without Xu Qi'an asking further, she started explaining eagerly:

“In the world, magic items are split into two kinds: One, tools and weapons which our Sitianjian Masters of Formation refine and carve formations onto. Two, items that through complete luck gain divine abilities.

“For the latter category, there are many types. For example, a thousand-year tree being struck by lightening, causing the left over lighting wood to gain incredibly tough and strong properties.

“Also as an example, items which high ranked masters carry on their persons, after years and years of influence nurture under their qi, will gain some divine abilities. But these types of items are mostly the extension of that high-ranked master’s abilities.”

“Does the capital have any magic items to hide qi?” Xu Qi’an got right to the point.

“Our Sitianjian has some, but as for other places...” Chu Caiwei tilted her head, thinking for a while, “I need to get back to ask Brother Song.”

“... Alright, then I’ll leave this with you.”

As the two were typing, the petty officials had already laid out all the high-level martial artists that had existed in the past 500 years.

There were not many, barely over a dozen, all of which were suspected of being high-rank martial artists.

Official records would not directly write who was which rank, and so the petty officials had to deduce their rank based on 500 years of records from different generals and military officials.

Such as the Zhenbei King, having guarded the north for several decades, he had experienced over a hundred battles in his life, and so without a doubt, he must be a high-level martial artist.

Xu Qi’an scanned over the list, and was disappointed to discover that fourth-ranked martial artists were the most common, third rank only had a couple, and there were no second rank, let alone first.

“To be sealed under Sangpo Lake, second rank would be a minimum. Otherwise, just the first-rank Arcanist Jianzheng could easily take care of them; there would be no need to seal them up. Could it be that my thoughts were wrong, and that sealed under the lake was not a person, but rather an object?”

“Wait... Jianzheng!?” Xu Qi’an’s blood ran cold, and his breaths instinctively became more sharp.

He had thought of a thing; the job of the Jianzheng was to guard the capital, was to be the guardian god of the Great Feng. At least this generation of Jianzheng was.

Then, at the time when Wuzong wanted to usurp the throne, they must have had to face the Jianzheng.

A bold guess materialised in Xu Qi’an’s mind, a guess that made him quake.

“Caiwei, is our teacher the first generation Jianzheng?” Xu Qi’an controlled himself, preventing his voice from shaking.

“Nope. Master is the second generation Jianzheng.” Chu Caiwei’s answer made Xu Qi’an feel as if his blood was boiling.

I know what’s sealed underneath Sangpo Lake... Xu Qi’an gulped, “How did the first generation Jianzheng die?”

Chu Caiwei shook her head, “Don’t know. Master never told us about how the grand-master passed.”

It’s the first generation Jianzheng! What’s sealed under Sangpo Lake is the first generation Jianzheng!

Xu Qi’an trembled at this guess.

No wonder only Emperor Yuanjing knew of this secret, no wonder the Jianzheng would fall ill, no wonder the northern Yao would scheme out such a display.

If the first generation Jianzheng were to escape, then the capital would be in big trouble... no, the first generation Jianzheng had already escaped.

At this moment, the desire to escape the capital welled up inside Xu Qi’an.

I must flee, flee at once... take uncle and auntie and flee together... if the first generation Jianzheng has escaped, then there must be a storm of blood. That’s a first rank, the entire capital will turn into a Sura battlefield.[^2]

As he thought, Xu Qi’an’s desire to escape actually lessened.

Emperor Yuanjing let him use merit to atone for crime, and so Wei Yuan would be responsible for keeping watch over this death row prisoner. If he fled, then he’ll drag Wei Yuan down.

Of course, this wasn’t the most important reason.

Xu Qi’an could still run, but the capital’s common people couldn’t run. If a battle between first-rank masters happened in the capital, then how many would die?

Everyone in the city.

Emperor Yuanjing this old son of a turtle[^3], he’s safe in the imperial palace protected by many masters, but what about the common people?

The gratitude and grudges of first ranks, I can’t interfere with at all... if I were to reveal this, reveal this thing, then I’ll naturally have done a lot to help.

He immediately made up his mind!

Anything that he wasn’t sure on, he’d go find Wei Yuan!

Even though he didn’t want to admit it, but Wei Yuan this famous schemer did give him a feeling of safety.

If Wei Yuan was an average official, then Xu Qi’an could only run to the Sitianjian and find the Jianzheng.

Luckily at this time, a clerk came over. Seeing Xu Qi'an, he was delighted, "This subordinate has looked for Sir Xu for a long time, Wei Yuan wants you."

How convenient... I want him too. Xu Qi'an said goodbye to Chu Caiwei, and followed the clerk to the Tower of Noble Spirit.

Entering the tallest building in the constabulary, and coming to the seventh floor, Xu Qi'an saw the azure cloaked, white templed Wei Yuan.

And his two gold gongs.

"Your progress in the case is not bad, it's a shame that that lead is broken. The court has already sent out a warrant for Zhou Chixiong's arrest, but they won't be able to find him within half a month; that's not realistic." Wei Yuan sipped tea, his tone kindly, "What do you plan to do now?"

Xu Qi'an stood in front of the table, thinking for a moment, and saying truthfully "Your subordinate guesses that Zhou Chixiong still has co-conspirators. But I have no leads."

This case was more complicated than the tax silver case. Of course, he wasn't the lead investigator in that case, only responsible for poking holes and providing theories. Everything else was done by the Nightwatchers and the Prefecture office.

Even though the lead was broken, Xu Qi'an already had a general idea of how to continue the investigation: First, start from magic items that could block qi-watching.

Second, start searching through the list of people who had both the authority and ability to smuggle in gunpowder.

The second idea was bound to be time-consuming, without a guarantee of any useful information.

"Duke Wei..." Xu Qi'an asked tentatively, "If after half a month, your subordinate still hasn't solved the case fully?"

"If it comes to it, I will arrange to fake your death. Then, you can go into the Jianghu, and be a spy for the Nightwatchers." Wei Yuan took a sip, "The intelligence network of the constabulary stretches to all thirteen provinces, as well as all the major Jianghu powers. If we don't train spies, then this breadth cannot be had.

"Your temperament is not suited to government; Jianghu is your real world. Really if it were not for the Sangpo Case, then I would have already arranged for you to leave the capital."

To the Jianghu... Xu Qi'an thought in a trance.

"As a blade by my side, a blade that cannot see the light of day, would you feel wronged?" Wei Yuan laughed, like a warm and open teacher, "Your personality is soft on the outside, hard on the inside, as well as rather extreme. I both really appreciate you like this, and also do not like you like this.

“My mind is very clear about the various corruption in the Nightwatchers Constabulary, but human nature is fundamentally like so, light and dark mixing. How many people are like Li Yuchun? If the Nightwatchers were all made of Li Yuchuns, then they would not be able to suppress a full court of officials.”

Xu Qi'an frowned, “I know this principle. So human nature needs to be regularly beaten, regularly deterred, to clear out corruption and evil. Is Duke Wei not too lax?”

“What time is opportune is also important.” Wei Yuan was not angry, explaining with a kindly expression, “The ways of the Great Feng's officials are rotten, the path of decline is already well underway. If you want to change this way, then you need to temper your brightness, bring yourself in agreement with the obscurity of others,^[4] and then break it with one strike. The day you don't have any tripping stones in your path, is the day you can reveal your ambition.”

Wei Yuan's meaning was, when in the future he comes to fight against his political enemies, if he has no more stones in his path, only then could he make his move, and sweep away this miasma-like corruption. The more Xu Qi'an thought about this, the more he thought it had a point.

“If you are in officialdom, you are held down by rules, and cannot but temper your brightness. Otherwise, you will only get into disaster after disaster, or have all your sharp edges eroded blunt, losing a martial artist's fire and fury. Either way, it's not worth it. But if you enter the Jianghu, you'll have no such worries.” Wei Yuan said gravely,

“Anyone who angers you, who stops you, who gets in your way, all you need to do is kill. Move with your heart, and care not for laws and rules. The so-called ‘using might to break restrictions’ speaks of this idea.

“Many martial artists lose their morality and their original heart in this journey, becoming cold-blooded killers. This, you must take care about.”

Xu Qi'an had held it in for ages, and finally, “Your subordinate doesn't want to go to the Jianghu. I want to work hard and try my best here.”

He didn't care about political power, rather about his family. He cared about uncle and auntie, about Xinnian and his sisters.

This would be like in his previous life, in the rat-race, his boss saying “I'm sending you to out of province to expand our business. You'll be stationed away long-term.”

You say: “I don't want to go.”

The boss says: “No, you do.”

At least Wei Yuan was not that type of boss. He didn't force him, rather laughed without concern, saying “If there's nothing more, then you can go.”

No, I have something... Xu Qi'an cupped his fists, saying solemnly, "Please may Duke Wei dismiss his attendants, your subordinate has an important matter to report."

He wants to dismiss us again!?!

Nangong Qianrou and Yang Yan looked at Xu Qi'an expressionlessly.

Chapter 118. Silenced

Wei Yuan waved his hand, dismissing his two adoptive sons.

A first time is anger, a second time is familiarity, Nangong Qianrou this time couldn't be bothered to complain or mock, leaving silently.

Yang Yan stood at the bottom of the tower, waiting for his adoptive father's conversation with Xu Qi'an to finish.

In the tea room remained only two people. Azure-cloak Wei turned over an upturned teacup, and poured Xu Qi'an a cup of tea, "About the Heaven and Earth Society?"

"Your subordinate has received some information from the Heaven and Earth Society, from the Southern March Shaman Clans." Xu Qi'an felt rather doted on as he took the tea, and took a sip. The tea was mildly bitter, with a sweet and fragrant aftertaste.

"Number Five of the Heaven and Earth Society is a Shaman clansman, with some status. Yesterday through the Earth Book she wrote that the Gu God in the abyss has shown signs of reawakening."

Wei Yuan's expression froze for a moment, "Before the sixty-year monster extermination, the Gu God was suppressed by both the Shaman clans and the Wanyao kingdom, it would be no matter then. But now the Wanyao Kingdom is destroyed, its lands covered with Buddhist monasteries, with few top rank masters. If the Gu God were really to reawaken, then just the Shaman clans alone most likely could not resist it."

As he spoke, worry flashed across his eyes. The Earth Sect leader has fallen to the demonic, the Gu God is beginning to re-awaken, the Cloud Deer Academy saw clear qi rushing to the sky... all of these things one after another, all foretold calamities ahead.

Movement all across the land, always foreshadowed chaotic years.

"These years, the Buddhist sect's ambition for expansion is growing ever wilder," Wei Yuan sighed.

Xu Qi'an had a thought, "When the Buddhists destroyed the Yao kingdom, was it to expand their religion?"

Wei Yuan sneered, "Could it be that it was for the common people under heaven?"

Pausing, he asked, "What do you have to report to me?"

Xu Qi'an recollected himself, saying "Your subordinate has already discovered what is sealed under Sangpo Lake. This matter involves a secret from 500 years ago, and a great calamity may be brewing because of it. Your subordinate is weak, and so doesn't dare to hide anything..."

Hearing this, a strange expression flashed across Wei Yuan's eyes, but he hid his own surprise very well, asking "What is sealed?"

"It's the Jianzheng, the first generation Jianzheng." Xu Qi'an, with an attitude like he was sharing a large secret, lowered his voice and spoke very quietly, lest it get out, "Under Sangpo Lake is sealed the first generation Jianzheng. That year when Wuzong us... used non-traditional methods to gain the throne, the first generation Jianzheng didn't support him. After Wuzong ascended to the throne, the history books then didn't have any more mention of the first generation Jianzheng."

Wei Yuan listened patiently, and nodded slightly, "Your analysis is well reasoned."

Xu Qi'an took advantage of the opportunity, "Emperor Yuanjing hasn't announced the situation even today, and so everyone has been deceived. But, if the first generation Jianzheng and the current Jianzheng were to fight, the capital..."

He didn't continue, knowing that with Wei Yuan's mind, he would understand what he meant.

Wei Yuan swirled his teacup, looking at the blue decorations on it, and mysteriously changed the topic: "Have you felt aches from your dantian recently?"

Xu Qi'an did a double take, *how did Wei Yuan know?*

Recently when he had been reverse-breathing and refining qi, his dantian had felt swollen and achy. It was like there was a fire in his stomach, that wanted to burn out something, but that something would not budge. He had been thinking of finding a day to ask Miss Fuxiang to help him, but his duties were too heavy, and so he couldn't find time to go to the Jiaofangsi.

"Not bad," Wei Yuan nodded, "This represents that you are already near the peak of refining qi. Afterwards, this swelling, aching feeling will move to your central dantian, then your upper dantian. When that happens, you will be able to reach Refining Spirit.

"I can read books, but martial arts not so much. However, I've collected some experience, and can give you a few tips.

"When the ache has reached your central dantian, I will arrange for a visualisation^[^1] art to be sent to you, this can increase the speed that you'll reach Refining Spirit.

"When you reach Refining Spirit, then you need to again start to refine your body and soul, trying to gain perfect control over your body... but this can all be worried about later."

Though Wei Yuan is prodigiously clever, but what talent does he have in martial arts? Hehe, this is more fair...

Xu Qi'an made a touched expression, "Thank you Duke Wei for your nurture. Your

subordinate will jump through fire and flames, through hardship and turmoil, and will be loyal even to the death.”

“Tsk,” Wei Yuan laughed, “You’re not a idle-brained young man, but sometimes you’re even more idle-brained than one.”

This isn’t being idle-brained, this is principle, this is trust, learn some Marxist-Leninist philosophy… Xu Qi’an lampooned. At the same time, he thought with some sadness, *This is the divide between me and this era.*

“There’s something else, that I think you need to know. Today His Majesty decreed to remove the curfew on the entering and exiting the city.” Wei Yuan looked at Xu Qi’an, the smile on his face strange, as if mocking him, as if making fun, as if deriding him.

“???”

Xu Qi’an’s face stiffened.

That’s impossible, that’s not reasonable!

Emperor Yuanjing’s attitude has a problem. The first generation Jianzheng has just escaped, and his first target would be the current Jianzheng and the royal family. In this situation, wouldn’t a normal course of action be to surround from all sides, and remove this hidden problem once and for all?

What meaning is there to opening the city gates? To indicate friendliness to the first generation Jianzheng, and for everyone to live peacefully?

Impossible. Even if Emperor Yuanjing is hardly worthy of his job, he is still not an idiot. Furthermore, the current Jianzheng wouldn’t agree to Emperor Yuanjing’s betrayal and revolution.

Yes, that damned old man Jianzheng’s attitude is very strange. Your teacher has already jumped out of the coffin, would you not lead the Arcanists under you, and with one foot on the coffin lid shout: Little ones, help your teacher press flat this old thing’s coffin lid!

Rather he pretends to be ill!

Does this have some sort of deeper meaning. Such as, the first generation Jianzheng has been sealed for 500 years, and is not at his peak of power, currently hiding somewhere nursing his wounds?

To deliberately open the gates, is to lure the snake out of its nest, and using this opportunity to change the battlefield away from the capital?

“Little friend, do you have many question marks?” Leaving the Tower of Noble Spirit, Xu Qi’an laughed bitterly, “Yes.”

Xu Qi’an gathered the men under his command, and gave three orders. First, Chu Caiwei of the Sitianjian was responsible for investigating traces of any qi-obscuring magic items.

Second, Min Shan and Yang Feng were to continue to investigate the production of gunpowder at the Ministry of Industry, and looking through records.

Third, go to the council office, and investigate the Taikang County Magistrate.

The first two weren't anything special, but the third one no one understood why.

Xu Qi'an explained: "Do you not think it's strange, how did the Yao know that on Great Yellow Mountain there was a saltpetre mine?"

Hearing this, everyone hesitated.

"Right? Or did the Yao hid amongst the huihu to mine the mine?" Xu Qi'an laughed coldly, "Naturally there was conspiracy between humans and Yao. Great Yellow Mountain is within Taikang County, and so the Magistrate definitely has issues."

The three silver gongs, the over a dozen bronze gongs were filled with a sense of awe.

Bronze Gong Xu's thoughts were meticulous, his experience plentiful; the golden token wasn't given to him without reason.

The three groups parted ways at the constabulary gate, each off to do their own task.

Xu Qi'an looked at Chu Caiwei's figure, riding away on her horse, and suddenly thought that one day, being on bottom would also be something very enjoyable.

"Boss, say, why didn't His Majesty summon the Sitianjian's arcanists, and interrogate the many nobles of court one by one?"

"You just asked Miss Caiwei to investigate qi-obscuring magic items." Li Yuchun looked at what was originally his subordinate. He had now become his subordinate's subordinate.

After a pause, he added implicitly, "Arcanists are still people."

Because they are people, they can be bribed. For normal small cases it'd be whatever, but if it involved the many dukes in court, an Arcanist's word would not be enough. Emperor Yuanjing is both very suspicious, and also has a boundless lust for power... Xu Qi'an nodded slightly.

Beside him, Song Tingfeng found a moment to get a word in, "Ningyan, aren't you very familiar with the Sitianjian's Miss Caiwei?"

Xu Qi'an nodded.

Song Tingfeng searched around for some words, before asking "I have a friend, who's recently been somewhat... deficient... I'd like you to help me find some medicine to recover some... vigour."

A friend, sure... Xu Qi'an did not poke holes, saying with a smile, "Tell your friend, play less Russian Roulette."

Li Yuchun frowned, a confused look on his face, "What roulette?"

Xu Qi'an, Zhu Guangxiao, and Song Tingfeng exchanged looks, smiling.

...

Cloud Deer Academy. The Dean Zhao Shou had just finished his class that had lasted just over two hours, and after reminding all his students to work hard, lightly waved his sleeve, "Whence I came, is where I return."

He disappeared into thin air.

All the students were already used to this sight, and did not find it at all interesting. They started talking about what important matters recently happened in the capital.

“How did Sangpo Lake get blown up? Our Great Feng’s founding emperor’s place of ascension, was blown up by some small criminals? Indeed they are a bunch of useless fools, if it were our Cloud Deer Academy guarding the capital, then this matter would have never happened.”

“If we tolerate this then what do we not tolerate?”

The students’ discussions were filled with anger and emotion, and they habitually smeared heaven and earth, looking with disdain of all that were not scholars.

Xu Xinnian had gathered his books, and was about to leave, when another student behind him shouted, “Cijiu, in a bit let’s go wandering around the mountains.”

To go walking in the middle of winter, are you drinking the north-western wind? Xu Xinnian shook his head, and replied “*If with dark hair still he does not study now; Regret it will be when his hairs turn grey.*”

He turned to leave, when he heard another voice say with a sarcastic tone, “Xu Cijiu today is in the Self-cultivation Stage; he’s long since different from us. I’m afraid he doesn’t deign to hang out with us any more.”

Xu Xinnian turned to look, the speaker was Zhu Tuizhi. That day when sending off Ziyang Jushi to Qingzhou, originally it was meant to be him who got Ziyang Jushi’s jade amulet.

Only that Xu Xinnian had stuck a bar in his way.

Furthermore, he and this person’s relationship wasn’t great. Before they had spat out perfumed words at each other.

Xu Erlang laughed coldly, “The day is clear, do not wrong others. Since when did I ever hang out with you?”

Zhu Tuizhi was furious, “Xu Xinnian, don’t think that just because you’re eighth rank, everyone is underneath you. You are merely one step ahead.”

To Xu Xinnian’s crossing into Self-Cultivation, the academy’s students were both admiring and jealous.

Xu Erlang said lightly, “Was I proud? that with hardly any effort, I have stepped into Self-Cultivation. Was I proud, when a few days ago I visited the eldest princess, and got her praise? Later I will go ask my teacher, to stabilise my cultivation, and listen to the secrets of the seventh rank, was I proud?”

He examined Zhu Tuizhi’s face, and suddenly snickered.

“What are you laughing at.” Zhu Tuizhi looked back with angry eyes.

Xu Cijiu said derisively, “Some people’s faces, are so ugly that they are an injustice.”

... The other students felt as if they had been offended against.

Zhu Tuizhi exploded on the spot, and flew over to fight with Xu Xinnian, but was held back by his schoolmates.

“Tuizhi, there’s no point in arguing with him.”

“Xu Cijiu’s mouth is as sharp as a martial artist’s sabre, let’s not argue with him.”

“... Don’t be rash, you’re not his match. No matter if using words or fists.”

Xu Xinnian left arrogantly.

These people, if you don’t care about them for a while, they think they can jump about.

On arguing, Xu Cijiu has never been beaten.

...

The Capital Prefecture Office was responsible for managing the fifteen surrounding counties, and so the Taikang County Magistrate was imprisoned here.

Xu Qi’an lead his group of people into the office, immediately heading for the vice-governor’s office. The vice-governor wasn’t there, and the assistant who was his place asked with a frown, “My sirs, do you need something?”

Song Tingfeng said, “We want to interrogate a criminal official, the Taikang County Magistrate Zhao.”

The assistant asked again: “Do you have a note from the Governor Sir?”

Song Tingfeng shook his head.

The assistant immediately became non-accommodating. “Then please return.”

To interrogate someone without even having permission, are the Nightwatchers not too domineering? Outside you’d still need to accommodate them a bit, but this is inside the office. Can you just say and get your way?

“Bastard thing!”

The vice-governor, who had just returned, had heard his words, his face turning. He quickly walked over, and shouted right into his face.

He then ordered someone to take Xu Qi’an’s group to the dungeon.

“Vice-Governor Sir...” the assistant felt wronged, “This doesn’t follow regulations.”

“Bullshit, what’s rules over your life?”

“Sir, what do you mean?”

“That person is called Xu Qi’an, the Xu Qi’an that killed someone in front of the Ministry of Law’s front door. You want to go down with this madman?”

“... Thank you sir for saving my life.”

The prefecture office's dungeon Xu Qi'an had lived in before, and had some relationship with Shuke and Beita inside.

Lead by the jailors, they came to the cell that held Magistrate Zhao.

"Get up, there are important people who want to ask questions." The jailor used his baton to strike the bars.

Magistrate Zhao, wearing a prisoner's gown, lay on the straw mat, his back to everyone, unmoving. As if he couldn't hear them.

Chapter 119. The Three Elements of Social Interaction

The jailor shouted a few more times, yet Magistrate Zhao did not move an inch.

Xu Qi'an's heart sunk, "Open the door."

The jailor took out his key and opened the door, and with raging anger pulled at Magistrate Zhao, "Are you deaf?"

Magistrate Zhao's body limply rolled over.

At this time, the jailor realised something was not right. He checked the Magistrate's pulse, and his face turned, "He- he's dead..."

One step too late... Xu Qi'an sighed internally.

The Taikang County Magistrate was arrested last night and put into jail. He received the news this morning, and immediately came over, but was still one step too late.

The culprit is either someone within the constabulary, or someone who had been monitoring Magistrate Zhao's movements all this time, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to silence him in time... Xu Qi'an flipped open Magistrate Zhao's eyelids, then opened his mouth and looked at his tongue, then took off his prisoner gown and performed a basic post-mortem examination.

No sign of poison, no sign of struggle before death, livor mortis has only happened recently, time of death should be no more than five hours ago. Cause of death unknown... Xu Qi'an estimated, saying "Leave two people here to watch over the body. Everyone else come with me to see the governor."

A criminal dying inside the prefecture constabulary, meant that Governor Chen Hanguang would have to take the responsibility.

Xu Qi'an found the inner hall, and got notice that Governor Chen was still asleep. After a runner passed on the message, he waited outside for half a stick of incense's time, before seeing Chen Hanguang, who had changed into tidy official robes.

Governor Chen's face was as normal, without any hint of sleepiness, smiling slightly, "What does Sir Xu need this official for?"

The morning court was at six. Normally, the many officials would have to already be outside waiting by four in the morning.

Thus, when the morning court adjourned, returning back to their offices and taking a nap was the normal mode of operation for the Great Feng's officials.

"I came to interrogate the Taikang County Magistrate Zhao, but I found that this morning he died within the prison." Xu Qi'an immediately got on topic.

"What!?" Governor Chen turned pale with fright.

The jailor, who was brought over by Xu Qi'an, said trembling "Governor Sir, he indeed..."

Governor Chen frowned, but eventually thought that it wasn't such a big deal. After all, Magistrate Zhao was already condemned to death, to be executed in the following autumn.

"How did he die?" Governor Chen picked up his teacup.

"He was silenced." Xu Qi'an said.

Governor Chen's hand trembled, and the boiling hot tea splashed out. He paid it no mind, his eyes opening wide, "Silenced?"

Clearly, old Chen hasn't realised the severity of the situation... Xu Qi'an explained, "Sir, how do you think the Yao discovered the saltpetre mine? Great Yellow Mountain is an ordinary old place, so much so that the huihu who lived nearby didn't know of the saltpetre mine's existence. How did the Yao find out?"

Governor Chen stood up in shock, "You mean..."

Xu Qi'an nodded, "I suspect that this has something to do with the Magistrate, so I came today to interrogate him. Who knew that I was still one step too slow, and he had already been silenced.

"The lead has broken yet again. Ai, His Majesty ordered me to discover who is behind this in half a month, it's too too hard.. Right, a small eunuch came to the Sitianjian today, asking for me to report the progress on the case."

Governor Chen's expression changed several times, as he finally cupped his hands, "Sir Xu, this office is willing to assist you, the three houses and six departments can all be ordered by you sir."

Xu Qi'an laughed, "Master Chen is too generous. The fact that Magistrate Zhao died in the jail is an unforeseen accident."

No one cared about whether a death row prisoner lived or died, but what if that death row prisoner had something to do with the Sangpo case? Especially as the official evaluation draws near.

Such large information, if it were to be spread publicly, then Governor Chen may get demoted. As for Xu Qi'an, he'd already be dead, and so going after Governor Chen didn't have much meaning. To him it was merely whether he wanted to say it or not.

Therefore, the just-promoted to Lead Constable Lyu Qing was summoned over. Governor Chen said sternly, "From today, you will follow Sir Xu, and listen to his orders."

Following Sir Xu's orders... a few days ago Governor Chen said, that this is an opportunity. If we could solve the case, then he could enter cabinet... does he want me to "lay low" beside Xu Qi'an and be an insider?

Lyu Qing thought with surprise.

“Don’t think random thoughts, just earnestly assist Sir Xu.” Governor Chen said deeply.

Is this really true? He- he can make Governor Chen bow down!?!

Lyu Qing stared at Xu Qi’an for a while, before saying “Your subordinate will follow your word.”

...

Very quickly, Magistrate Zhao’s autopsy was completed; death from natural causes.

The less seams in the situation, the stranger it is... first we can exclude it being a martial artist who silenced him. Xu Qi’an thought with furrowed brow.

Martial artists fundamentally can be described by four words: Stubborn, obstinate, crude, rash.

Explosive power pretty much defined what a martial artist was. To kill Magistrate Zhao was as easy as stepping on an ant, but it could never be done so silently and mysteriously, without leaving any hints.

The first thing Xu Qi’an thought of was the Daoist yin spirit, because in ancient times the Daoist yin spirit was also called the envoy of ghosts, who could take people’s lives in their dreams.

Let’s first rule out Jinlian Daozhang that LYB, he has no relation with the Sangpo case. Then that leaves just the human sect...

Xu Qi’an pulled at his hair in frustration, and felt his own hairline slowly start to recede.

How does this involve the Human Sect now? Can I even investigate the Human Sect? Moving over the fact that the Human Sect’s leader is the national teacher, the Earth Sect’s sect leader is already second rank, the Human Sect one shouldn’t be far behind.

If she squeezes her thighs I’d be crushed to death!

Mn, it doesn’t have to be the Daoists. I don’t understand much about the other cultivation paths, so I mustn’t decide so soon... ai, I need to take advantage of the golden token and get some better knowledge of the great cultivation paths.

Xu Qi’an discovered that Lyu Qing was secretly appraising him. A faint hint of tiredness could be seen on the female constable’s face.

“Constable Lyu, have you not been resting well recently?”

Lyu Qing smiled, “Work has been hectic.”

She already knew the reason that Governor Chen chose to co-operate. Though Xu Qi’an was just finding holes, these holes weren’t easy to find. If he hadn’t realised that there was a problem with the Taikang County Magistrate in time, then maybe this issue would have been suppressed by Governor Chen.

“Constable Lyu is more capable than many men.” Xu Qi’an praised.

She was in her late twenties, still quite young, and had already become the chief detective in the capital city police. Her future was boundless.

And she wasn't even married!

In his previous life, Xu Qi'an had never known any woman with such great promise, only older "leftover women" who get annoyed that their boyfriends often end up pulling other girls.

When Xu Qi'an left the constabulary, accompanying him were six bailiffs, who were placed under his commands. Their cultivation were all not bad, with two Refining Qi, and four Refining Vitality.

He sat astride his horse, thinking of what to do next.

Half a month wasn't long, nor was it short. Solving cases requires feeling along the vine for melons, and couldn't be rushed.

Rather it was Wei Yuan's attitude that made him confused, was he not too cool and collected?

Wei Yuan definitely knows something. Emperor Yuanjing's attitude is currently ambiguous, and the Jianzhen is pretending to be dead... this isn't reasonable. No matter what mind chess is going on between these important figures, the indisputable truth is that the first generation Jianzheng has broken free. I can't relax just because they're calm, because those high above may not care if the common people live or die.

No, I must find out what happened with the first generation Jianzheng. Wei Yuan seems to not want me to get involved, worrying that I would get caught up in it... I can roundaboutly save the country! I'll reveal this secret subtly to the eldest princess... no, not reveal, hint. A very subtle hint, so that she can link up the strings herself.

Thinking this, Xu Qi'an was no longer hesitant, saying "You go to the constabulary and wait for me, I'm going to go into the palace."

Everyone looked over, confused.

Xu Qi'an explained, "I'm going to see the eldest princess."

He can see the eldest princess? Not only is Xu Ningyan on very good terms with the Sitianjian Arcanists, but he also knows the eldest princess... Lyu Qing's heart jumped.

The others all expressed confusion and surprise. Li Yuchun was the most collected; he knew that the reason Xu Qi'an could enter the Nightwatchers Constabulary, was because the eldest princess recommended him.

Parting with the group, Xu Qi'an spurred his horse on towards the imperial city.

The eldest princess had come of age long ago, and had her own manor inside the imperial city. Xu Qi'an reached Huaiqing Manor, and after asking a guard, found out that the eldest princess usually lived inside the imperial palace itself, and rarely came back here.

The imperial city was like a miniature version of the inner city. It had temples, administrative offices, constabularies, city walls, defences and storehouses, as well as gardens and parks.

The outer city was home to the common people, the inner city was prestigious officials and the upper class. As for the imperial city, that was the residence of the nobles and great servants.

Without the golden token, Xu Qi'an wouldn't even be able to get in.

As for the imperial palace complex, also called the palace city, it was the home to the Emperor. Living here were the concubines, as well as the princes and princesses. Of course, princes and princesses who had come of age must move away from the palace, and live in the imperial city.

But Emperor Yuanjing had been focusing on Daoist cultivation, and so did not pay much mind to his concubines or children, so these rules had become lax.

Today there were still many adult princes and princesses living in the imperial palace.

As for the palace, Xu Qi'an couldn't just enter, even if he had the gold token Emperor Yuanjing bestowed. He was just planning to ask the guards to pass along a message, when he suddenly heard the rattling of carriage wheels.

Stretching his head to look past the gate, he saw a line of resplendent horse-drawn carriages coming over.

Made of Nanmu wood specially used by the royal family, covered in yellow silks and opulent decorations, covered with gold leaf and jade stones, luxurious beyond belief.

A uniform row of top-of-the-line sports cars... Xu Qi'an thought.

The guard, having just taken three cash of silver from him, laughed on seeing the carriages, "The second carriage is the eldest princess's. You can see that on the yellow silk is sewn a 'Qing'[^1] character. It seems that I don't need to pass anything on."

The guard returned the silver to Xu Qi'an.

"No need to bother..." Xu Qi'an pushed it back to him, "Brother, there will be times later where I may still need you."

He planned to nurture his relationship with the eldest princess, so that he can hug this leg too. In the future perhaps he may regularly come over and "build relationships", so getting on good terms with the guards is a must.

To put it bluntly, a smoke can pry open a man's mouth, money can entice a man's heart, and to eat seafood together can make you see each other as brothers.

The three elements of social interaction!

The guard appreciated Xu Qi'an's gesture, and added "The first carriage is His Highness the crown prince's one. The third is the second prince, the fourth is the second princess... they're probably off somewhere for a banquet. If you can attend, then remember to put on your best display. You may have yourself a meteoric rise."

"Eldest princess, your subordinate Xu Qi'an has an important matter to report!" Xu Qi'an shouted loudly.

Chapter 120. Impromptu Poem

The guards turned their heads and looked over, their gazes sharp, before continuing on.

The window of the carriage that was embroidered with a “qing” character opened, and a pale jade like hand pulled aside the blinds. Xu Qi’an saw the eldest princess’s pale, graceful face, as her red lips moved: “Follow on.”

He felt a wave of glee, and was just about to urge his horse forwards, when out of the corner of his eye he saw the window of the fourth carriage open, and a round, beautiful face appear within it, charming and brimming with emotion.

That is the second princess? Ss... the emperor’s daughters are all really beautiful... Xu Qi’an drew back his gaze, and silently started comparing the two princesses.

To different types of women, no matter how impossible it was to sleep them, you’d still compare which one was hotter, even if there was no real use.

Because that depended on your personal tastes.

Even if many men have said, that they like black silk wearing dommes, or scantily clad lolis... even the ones who would sleep with anyone and everyone, even these sex addicts have the types they like the most.

Xu Qi’an did not rank which one out of the eldest or second princess was more beautiful; just from first impressions of the two princesses, the eldest princess was more cold, like a lotus flower on a snowy mountain.

You knew clearly that she was noble and refined, graceful beyond others, but you still couldn’t resist thinking of teasing her, then seeing her embarrassed and shy expression.

As for the second princess, Xu Qi’an hadn’t interacted with her much, but just from that first glance, in his mind had already formed a picture of a pair of hot pants stretched around large round buttocks, a sports top that just covered her round breasts, pale long legs ending in a pair of white tennis socks, soaring through the dance hall, her long hair flying like crashing waves.

In his era, she would be the queen of the dance floor.

It is said that the women who loved to dance never found it difficult to conceive, but the second princess after all was from this ancient era, and so Xu Qi’an could not be sure.

...

The princes and princesses were heading out today to go dine together and stretch their legs, and they had picked a small lake in the imperial city that had rather good scenery.

Beside the lake was planted evergreen pines, juniper, as well as patches of currently withered flowerbeds. When spring comes around, the scenery would be even more beautiful.

Today the sun was warm, there was no wind, and it was a good day to sunbathe.

By the lake there was a square platform. The servants carried over the tables, lit some rosewood incense, and from the food boxes brought out dishes upon dishes of exquisite food.

Xu Qi’an leashed his horse to a tree, and silently followed behind the eldest princess. Two maids carried her dress hems.

The eldest princess's hair bun was very simple and clean, and a buyao hairpin, with golden tassels and round pearls, with a worth of cities was stuck through it. When she walked, the tassels swayed back and forth, adding to her beauty.

The two of them did not speak, but naturally as Xu Qi'an followed her he fully took the role of her bodyguard.

The other princes and princesses also got out of their resplendent carriages. Xu Qi'an scanned over them: their appearances were all not bad, the crown prince wore a white dragon robe, his hair under a golden crown, extraordinarily handsome.

Of the four princesses, the eldest and the second princess were all extremely beautiful, beauties at the top of the league.

As they sat, the second princess, whether deliberately or not, stole the position that was originally meant for the eldest princess.

No one scolded her, as if the princes and princesses were all used to it, pretending not to see.

The eldest princess however did not sit where the second princess was meant to sit, rather sitting at a different table.

The eldest princess and the second princess don't get along? Xu Qi'an remembered this detail.

The crown prince looked around at all his brothers and sisters, and said: "We haven't been out together in a while."

The other princes all agreed, whilst the princesses smiled.

Xu Qi'an's eyes fell on the lake. He saw that in the small lake, there were groups of black shadows darting through, not knowing what was living in it.

The crown prince became the leader of the banquet, being the one to start conversation, and oversee the feast.

The drinking games in the feast only came in so many types; the more refined the game the less there were of them, and all present were high of status, and so couldn't play things like finger guessing or dice rolling.

There were still several types of refined games though, and excluding composing poetry, "flying flower" word games were the hardest.

The crown prince opened with the topic of "water", with the opening character of "water".

In the second prince's poem, the second character was "water", and so on and so forth.

There were more princes present than princesses, and when the first round finished, the seventh prince racked his brains, and was still unable to think of a poem with the character "water" in last place, and so was made to drink.

The eighth prince had long since died young.

The ninth prince was responsible for carrying on this flying flower game, and like the crown prince, started off with the first character as "water".

When it got to the second princess, her bright all peach-blossom eyes were open wide, her shining black pupils turning and turning, as she said crisply, “I have one, *Delicate, tilting branches reflected on clear and shallow water.*”^[1]

The bright sunlight shone down on her body. She wore a crimson palace dress, wearing resplendent and ornate jewellery. Not any woman could rein in such a luxurious to the point of tacky dress.

But when it came to her, it made her look ever more beautiful.

The eldest princess’s noble aura was in her bones, whilst the second princess was more like a beautiful and noble canary; no matter how luxurious she dressed, it would only add to her beauty. But if she were to wear more ascetic dress, she would probably not be able to match the eldest princess.

The crown prince laughed, “I’ve heard this poem before, it came out from the Jiaofangsi, seeming to be composed by some scholar from Changle County. It was praised for being one of the best praising plum poems, the best in recorded history.”

The elegant second prince, with an aura like a scholar, commented “A shame, such an unparalleled work, was given to a prostitute. What a waste of talent.”

Stories of love between talents and prostitutes, were very widespread and common, and were very popular. But this was indeed not something that ought to be announced publicly, especially in the eyes of the royal family.

The third prince was a scholar, and was extremely pained by it.

How is this a waste of talent? After oiran Fuxiang got this poem, her value skyrocketed, and in one day became a star of the Great Feng, and I also formed a good relationship with her exchanging seafood, clearly this is a win-win!

Xu Qi’an wasn’t bowed.

The drinking games continued, and when it got to the eldest princess, she faced the same difficult problem as the seventh prince.

Poems that had “water” in them as the last character were as rare as phoenix feathers, and even though the eldest princess was an accomplished student, she didn’t have much experience in the area of poetry. Her graceful brows were slightly furrowed, and she hesitated for a long time.

Seeing this, the second princess laughed “Huaiqing is our Capital’s number one most skilled woman, surely she could match a small poem.”

The second princess is indeed a little “biao”^[2]... from now I’ll call her Biaobiao! Xu Qi’an thought.

In reality to many men, a proper “biao” actually was more attractive. Of course, Xu Qi’an was not that type of man.

The many princes and princesses looked over with smiles. The eldest princess’s abilities were outstanding, far above her brothers and sisters. Even though she was a woman, she still made people jealous.

For her to be put down a notch in her most proficient field, everyone was very happy to watch.

The eldest princess didn't look at her brothers and sisters' mocking gazes, rather turning her head slightly, and very lightly looked at Xu Qi'an, who was standing by her side.

...what are you looking at?

Xu Qi'an sighed internally, *the eldest princess ain't bad, she knew that I have a matter I need to see her about, and so she's first getting a pre-payment.*

What's Huaiqing looking at him for?

The second princess hadn't stopped looking at the eldest princess, waiting for her to lose, before jumping out herself and pointing at her, "Ha, you finally admit that you're a purely ornamental spear!"

Who could have predicted that Huaiqing wasn't in the least bit panicked, and even exchanging looks with that small Bronze Gong.

The other princes and princesses pretty much all noticed this, but their internal monologue wasn't as colourful as the second princess's.

"*Drunk, he knows not if the sky floats in the water,*" Xu Qi'an hesitated for a moment, before saying a line as quiet as a fly.

He had quickly worked his brain, yet of all the poems that ended with water, he could only think of this one.

The eldest princess nodded her head slightly, before saying loudly, "Drunk such that I know not if heaven is at the water."

The second princess was dazed for a moment, before a feeling of disappointment welled up inside her. This damned sister Huaiqing still had a few tricks up her sleeve.

The other princes and princesses all frowned, thinking deeply, and then all looking over at the third prince. The third prince shook his head, "Huaiqing, why has third brother not heard of this poem before?"

The eldest princess smiled lightly, "This is a new poem."

The second princess immediately got energy, and said with a pampered voice, "Oh, you're being lazy, and blindly composed a sentence to deceive us. Drink three times!"

"To compose a poem impromptu is also acceptable," the crown prince laughed, "but Huaiqing, you must make a full poem for us."

The third prince nodded, "Big brother is right."

The second princess turned her head, and looked at Xu Qi'an, as if saying: It's over to you.