

Nightwatcher 121

Chapter 121. Spirit Beast

Xu Qi'an braced himself, before stepping out from the eldest princess's side, and cupping his fists, "This is a new work written by this lowly one."

Suddenly, everyone stared over. The second princess examined Xu Qi'an with her shining obsidian-black eyes.

The crown prince frowned.

Displeased, the third prince said, "You're a Bronze Gong. What kind of poem would you write?"

His meaning was euphemistic, meaning, *You're a martial Artist. Do you even know what poetry is?*

"Thud thud..." The eldest princess tapped on the table with her fingers, attracting the attention of the royals. She then said, "His name is Xu Qi'an, and his cousin is a student at the Cloud Deer Academy."

So what? For a time, nobody knew quite what she meant, and she herself seemed to like seeing her brothers and sisters filled with question marks, but deliberately trying to maintain their cool.

A smile appeared on her face, as she elaborated, "*Sending off Ziyang Jushi* is his work, and the poem Lin'an had read earlier is also his work."

The princes at the scene showed an expression of disbelief and turned their eyes to observe Xu Qi'an.

The original author of the famous "Sending off Ziyang Junshi at Mianyang" is actually in front of me!

Yes, it is said that the poem was written by the cousin of a certain student from Cloud Deer Academy. Huaqing had said that this Bronze Gong's cousin was a student of the Cloud Deer Academy... Being the most aware of the rumours, the third prince immediately ascertained Huaqing's words to be true.

Huaqing's loyal dog is the poet who wrote "Its subtle fragrance drifts with the rising moon at dusk"... The second princess opened her charming peach-like eyes to look at Xu Qi'an. Her impression of the bronze gong had changed a little.

Xu Qi'an was taken aback, At first, he believed that his behaviour of sleeping with Fuxiang should have been monitored by the eldest princess.

But he soon figured out that Huaqing, being the one who had the Nightwatchers check up on him back then, would know of his affairs.

The prince questioned, "But I had heard that the poet's name was Yang Ming, and he is a scholar from Changle County."

The eldest princess didn't answer.

Xu Qi'an had to explain himself, "It was a pseudonym used by this subordinate."

The prince didn't continue speaking.

The third prince said, "I found the previous poem to be excellent. *Drunk, he knows not if the sky floats in the water...* It sounds quite artistic, making me want to know the later verses."

The children and grandchildren of the royal family naturally received the best quality education. Even the Second Princess, who only liked to dress up and not study was forced to read the books of the sages for several years as a child.

As they had an extensive cultural background and could appreciate literature, Their attention shifted back to the poem after the third prince spoke. They were even looking forward to the poem, as they now knew Xu Qi'an's identity and talent.

Xu Qi'an slowly said, "*Drunk, he knows not if the sky floats in the water; his dream laden boat sailing atop the Milky way*."[^1]

Drunk, he knows not if the sky floats in the water; his dream laden boat sailing atop the Milky way... The second princess recited it a few times with a low voice. She felt as if these two lines outlined a beautiful scene that could only exist in fairy tales.

On a quiet night, her lying on the bow of a boat, wearing a beautiful dress, while a bright starry sky hung above her head, reflecting the Milky Way on the water.

As the boat floated on the lake, causing ripples, she also fell asleep peacefully.

Princess Lin'an's heart began to beat crazily.

The eldest princess's eyes also flickered, and she subconsciously tried to move her neck, as if she wanted to take a look at Xu Qi'an from the side, but she held back that urge.

She still stayed still, maintaining her posture as a frigid beauty.

Weird silence surrounded them, as the imperial children sampled and appreciated the two lines carefully.

Different from the second princess, the princes experienced a type of ethereal aura that seemed to be beyond the mortal world, a transcendental contentedness.

It was a relaxing ambience, close to all things natural, free of worry, free of the troubles and intrigue of courtly life, free from the disputes and arguments of the mortal world. At the same time, when one awoke from this dream, they would feel a pang of sadness in their heart.

"Good poem, good poem..." The third prince clapped the table, excited as he felt that he had witnessed the birth of a masterpiece. That was an honour no reader would resist.

"Is this a Qijue or a Qilu?"[^2] The seventh prince, who seemed to be the same age as Xu Qi'an, asked.

"No, I only have these two sentences..."

"!!!"

The princes were taken aback and stared at him wielding complicated expressions.

"Don't joke like this." The third prince said, angrily, anxious and irritated, "What comes after?"

He was like a reader tormented by an incomplete novel, that finally got the chance to meet the author, suppressing his emotions that could explode at any time and saying, "I will give you one last chance, start typing!"

"This poem was made on a whim, there's really nothing more..." XU Qi'an also felt ashamed. But, unfortunately, this poem wasn't included in the nine-year compulsory education textbooks.

Of course, He was a cultured person, and he couldn't have only studied the poems in the textbooks. He had the habit of collecting some excellent poems and articles, but he didn't remember them completely. He just remembered their essential lines.

It was the same this time.

"You, you..." The third prince pointed his fingers at Xu Qi'an, his anger making him mute.

The other princes coldly watched this happen, secretly supporting the third prince to deal with this castrated dog.[^3]

The eldest princess appeared in time to rescue Xu Qi'an, saying, "Xu Ningyan, Could you go on a walk with me?"

"Ridiculous..." Looking at the two's departing backs, the third prince slapped the table, expressing his anger.

"It's truly a pity." The crown prince shook his head.

"Ah, I remember now." The second princess suddenly spoke out, "I still haven't asked him how the Sangpo case has been progressing."

So it was him! The crown prince squinted. *No wonder I found the name Xu Qi'an familiar.* He remembered this commoner after being reminded by the second princess.

...

After leaving behind her guards and maids, the eldest princess walked side by side with Xu Qi'an by the lake.

Instinctively, Xu Qi'an moved a step behind her.

"Why were you looking for me?" The eldest princess stared at the calm lake, her voice with the fridity of colliding ice cubes, and the charm inherent to females.

"Your subordinate has encountered some trouble, currently all the leads I have are broken." Xu Qi'an glanced at the eldest princess, and upon finding she didn't seem to care much, began to elaborate on the saltpetre mine case and the case of the lieutenant's death to the eldest princess.

"We had already known all this." The eldest princess didn't show any expression on her face, as she admired the scenery of the lake.

She already knew? Um, With her ability, It's not too difficult for her to not know of the information I found out.

Xu Qi'an gritted his teeth, intending to reveal the internal details, "Why did the Yao bomb Yongzhen Shanhe Temple? That is a suspicious point, and also the breakthrough point of this case."

First I should verify if it is the first Jianzheng. If it is the first Jianzheng, I could form a rough list of the suspects who colluded with the Yao.

After withdrawing her gaze, the eldest princess said in a calm tone, looking at Xu Qi'an, "There is indeed a strong expert or something similar sealed under Yongzhen Shanhe Temple. But, only father the Emperor knows of this secret."

"..." Xu Qi'an nearly couldn't control himself.

"The eldest princess knows even this?"

She realised that something is sealed under Yongzhen Shanhe Temple. Yeah, it's not surprising that she could deduce this, considering her intelligence.

Xu Qi'an hadn't expected the eldest princess to talk about this matter with him frankly. It should be considered that only Emperor Yuanjing knew the secret of Yongzhen Shanhe Temple.

Observing Xu Qi'an's slight change of expression, the eldest princess realized his shock hidden inside. So, she chuckled lightly and threw out an olive branch "You are quite talented. Are you willing to work with this princess?"

That was exactly what Xu Qi'an wished. He wished for this but he didn't dare to say it. But, since the eldest princess directly asked him, Xu Qi'an immediately said,

"This one vows to give his all for your highness."

Xu Qi'an was very familiar with this, as he had spoken similar words to the chief in the same way when he worked at the police station in his previous life.

Of course, I mean giving in my all for work, for mutual benefit. I don't intend to become a dog for imperial power... He silently said.

With the eldest princess's EQ and IQ, I'm sure it won't be hard to maintain a presentable relationship.

The eldest princess put on a bright smile, bright enough to make the lake lose its lustre.

"Tell me of your findings." The tone of the lotus-like eldest princess changed greatly as if the barrier between the two had disappeared.

Xu Qi'an thought about it before he decided to tell the truth. The reason was also quite simple. He had just formed an "ally" relationship with the eldest princess, and he needed to express his value next.

He needed to let the eldest princess realize his excellence.

Additionally, He wanted to know about the thing sealed under Sangpo, which he couldn't do without the help of the eldest princess. Moreover, The eldest princess was the one who had opened up about the topic and told him that the secret was one only Emperor Yuanjing was privy to.

"According to this one's investigation, there must be a behind-the-scenes person behind Zhou Chixiong, who manipulated all this, and also colluded with the Yao." Xu Qi'an said.

A strange look flashed in the eldest princess's eyes, "How could you be sure?"

Xu Qi'an said, "Magistrate Zhao of Taikang County died in the Constabulary Prison this morning. I suspect he was silenced."

The eldest princess lowered her eyes and nodded after thinking.

Xu Qi'an continued, "I have always been wondering why the Yao would want to blow up Sangpo, and, why the behind-the-scenes person colluded with the Yao. So, I sent people to check the documents related to Sangpo, where I found a very strange thing. The time: Five Hundred Years ago!"

Saying that he paused, leaving some time for the eldest princess to be shocked.

But he was disappointed, as the eldest princess just digested the message while frowning.

Cijiu was right... This woman hides a gully in her chest, one of unfathomable depth.

"Five hundred years ago, the crown prince of that time fell into the water by accident and later went mad. And soon after, drowned in Sangpo Lake."

The eldest princess showed a dazed look, "I remember this event."

Xu Qi'an nodded, as he continued, "Five Hundred years ago, Emperor Wuzong revitalized the imperial court and eliminated evil. In this, there was an obstacle he couldn't avoid - the first generation Jianzheng!"

Hearing that, the eldest princess finally changed her expression.

Staring at the immaculate beautiful face of the eldest princess, Xu Qi'an asked a series of questions, "Why is the Jianzheng pretending to be sick? Why is his majesty keeping the item under Sangpo secret? Why didn't the sealed item not die in 500 years? Why don't the Sitianjian arcanists know about the first Jianzheng?"

Is this the distortion of human values or a loss of morality... Xu Qi'an lampooned, "Of course, this is just your subordinate's guess. But, considering the experts from five hundred years ago, it has to be the first Jianzheng."

The eldest princess was shocked and remained silent for a long time when a gust of wind blew to make waves in the lake. She sighed, "So, You are looking for this princess to..."

"Your subordinate wants to check some documents that can't be found outside." Xu Qi'an said, "I found the sealing formation in Sangpo Lake, and the pillars of the formation are engraved with Buddhist Script."

"Buddhist Script?" The eldest princess stretched her hands inside her sleeves subconsciously, then she stared at Xu Qi'an for a few moments before she looked away, and said calmly, "Alright, I'll take you to the Wenyuan^[4] Pavilion after the banquet is over."

Xu Qi'an breathed a sigh of relief, and after thanking the eldest princess, he suddenly heard laughter like silver bells and the sound of splashing water behind him.

Turning his head to take a look, he saw the second princess, wearing a fiery red dress, standing on the back of a monster. She was holding the horns on top of the monster's with her hands, and twisting to stabilize herself, showing off her graceful back.

The monster was fully white, and had fine scales and flat armoured plate on its back, leaving just enough space for a person to stand upon. It was three meters long and had sharp claws on its abdomen, making it look like a dragon.

The eldest princess turned around and introduced, "This beast is called a Spirit Dragon, the only one of its kind in the central plains. It has a docile personality. It is said that it was the water mount of the emperor in ancient times."

"It thrives on purple qi. So, it was kept in the palace by the royal families of all the past empires to indicate their possession of purple qi and their orthodoxy as human emperors."[^5]

The eldest princess continued, "This beast has its unique Qi Watching Technique."

It should be the thing I saw on the lake... Xu Qi'an "mhm"ed. *Purple Qi is the Qi unique to the royals and noble people. This beast lives off purple qi, which indicates it to be a type of auspicious beast.*

The auspicious beast raised its head, sometimes rising, sometimes moving along the water's surface, causing the water lilies to bob up and down. The second princess smiled like a flower in bloom, giggling like a little hen as she happily played.

The princes watched the scene while smiling, while the other two princesses ran to the shore, shouting for Lin'an to come ashore so they could take turns playing.

"Although the spirit dragon is quite docile, it is very proud. It will attack any ordinary person who approaches it. Lin'an can play with it, being a princess." The eldest princess said while curling her mouth and performing an action Xu Qi'an didn't expect her to do.

She brought her index finger to her mouth and whistled vigorously.

Hearing the Whistle, the spirit dragon raised its head high like a snake and turned to the side.

Everyone could see it stiffen for a moment before it suddenly became agitated, and let off a clear loud cry. It shook its head and tried to throw the second princess off as if it felt it shameful to be ridden by her.

"Ah..."

"Plop!" The second princess screamed as she splashed into the lake.

The spirit dragon violently twisted its body and swam toward the eldest princess. While moving through the water, It kept crying, although it couldn't be seen whether it was due to excitement or irritability.

"Whoosh!"

When it approached the shore, it soared into the sky and then fell heavily, hitting its head on the edge of the lake, splashing mud all over.

A few drops of mud splashed into the eldest princess's plain white dress.

The eldest princess was surprised; the spirit beast seemed to be very close to her today. She originally whistled not to summon the spirit beast, but to attract its attention and make it turn its head so Lin'an, who was standing unstably, would fall into the water.

Who would have thought that the spirit dragon would show such a violent reaction, and shake its head to send Lin'an off flying?

Why is the eldest princess like a scholar from Cloud Deer Academy?... So Black-bellied... My little brother is also similarly sinister and vicious... Yeah, The eldest princess had also studied at Cloud Deer Academy... Xu Dalang understood the meaning behind Xu Erlang's warning.

Sure enough, only Black-bellied people understood black-bellied people well.

The movements in the water's surface startled all the princes, and the Crown Prince rushed to the shore first to call the guards for rescue.

"So the spirit dragon does like Huaiqing more."

"Does this mean that Huaiqing has a stronger Purple Qi than Lin'an?"

"It isn't right... the spirit dragon doesn't show much enthusiasm toward us. Look at its attitude right now. I have only seen a similar attitude once when I was a child. At that time, it was facing Father."

"Huaiqing previously..."

Holding the hem of her skirt, the eldest princess walked towards the Spiritual Dragon with a smile on her face, intending to ride on it.

All the princes and princesses, including the crown prince, were watching the scene.

Chapter 122. Princess Lin'an's Summon

Mn, apart from being black-bellied, the eldest princess's desire for victory is really strong... using action theory, Xu Qi'an started analysing her, and deducing the stronger side of the eldest princess's personality.

Eh... Why does it seem to be looking at me!?

The spirit dragon's eyes weren't fierce vertical slits, rather they were round like black pearls, like pet dogs Xu Qi'an had seen in his past life.

Thus, it looked very gentle.

But this wasn't the important part, rather Xu Qi'an had a strange feeling that the spirit dragon was waiting for him.

Indeed, when the eldest princess drew near to the spirit dragon, a scene that caught everyone off-guard happened.

It suddenly revealed its angry, hostile side, roaring a hoarse roar towards the eldest princess, warning her not to come closer.

The eldest princess furrowed her brow, and backed off a few steps.

The spirit beast stopped roaring, and continued to crouch by the shore, like before making that "come ride me" expression.

"Eh, the spirit dragon isn't letting Huaiqing on."

"What's up, is the spirit dragon's mood not good today?"

“That’s not right, with its posture, it’s clearly waiting for someone to ride it.”

The other princes and princesses started talking amongst themselves.

Xu Qi’an didn’t hear their talking, but he knew that this situation couldn’t go on any more. Thinking about it, a spirit beast that likes consuming purple qi not submitting to a princess, rather opening its legs and waiting for you to ride on.

Nothing good could come out of this!

Xu Qi’an thought it was probably his own strange luck that caused this, but he’d rather slowly figure it out himself, even if he didn’t eventually get anywhere, rather than having this secret out in the open!

In this world’s rules of existence, you won’t get out of trouble just because you didn’t know better!

“Eldest princess, this strange beast is very dangerous, let’s leave quickly.”

Taking advantage of the fact that the eldest princess hadn’t yet linked the dragon’s behaviour onto him, Xu Qi’an quickly blocked her path. This way he both increased the spirit dragon’s attention to himself, and made the eldest princess aware that there was something wrong with it’s emotions.

The eldest princess frowned, staring at the spirit dragon for a while, before nodding her head helplessly “Let’s go.”

Xu Qi’an pretended to cover her, letting the eldest princess leave first, before following on himself. When he walked several dozen metres away, he heard the spirit dragon behind him let out a chagrined and mournful cry.

...

Xu Qi’an and Huaiking returned back to the square platform. The second princess Lin’an had already been pulled from the lake, soaking wet all over, wearing a thick large coat, her hands hugging her chest, shivering cold with purple lips.

She pointed at Huaiking, crying “I will tell father, Huaiking, you won’t have end to this!”

The eldest princess replied lightly “What does this have to do with this princess? Clearly today the spirit dragon is feeling angry, and you lost control.”

Lin’an fought and lost and fought and lost, over and over again, and the other princes and princesses had already gotten used to it, talking amongst themselves of the spirit dragon’s abnormality.

“The spirit dragon is indeed not right, its craziness just then was strange.”

“Why is it still by the shore, and looking over this way...”

“From its cries it seems really upset...”

The crown prince, as Lin’an’s full brother, sympathetically looked at his sister for a few seconds, before happily joining back into the conversation, “Perhaps it’s mood isn’t good. The spirit dragon isn’t an ordinary beast; naturally it has it’s own temper.”

However extraordinary though, it was still a beast, and its thoughts could not be sussed out. Their Highnesses talked about it for a while longer, before not paying it any more mind.

The second princess fell into the water, and afraid that she may get a cold, the banquet ended early. The noble princes and princesses all got back in their carriages and returned, leaving their servants to tidy up the area.

The eldest princess took Xu Qi'an through the eastern gate, and reached the Wenyuan Pavillion.

The Wenyuan Pavilion was the royal family's book archives. It was made of seven pagodas, and the number of books stored inside were as many as stars in the sky.

Xu Qi'an and the eldest princess threw themselves into ancient records, and searched for over two hours, finding many records about the first generation Jianzheng.

This person created the arcanist path, but had a mysterious background; he assisted the first emperor in his great cause, and should have been someone who would be highly revered, a servant by the hand of the dragon.

But records about him suddenly stopped five hundred years ago.

Very clearly, someone had struck him from the annals of history. The one who did it was undoubtedly Emperor Wuzong.

In the third archive on the second floor, by the window, the eldest princess sat, half her body shining in the sunlight, her pale round face as if giving off its own light, such that even the fuzz on her face was visible.

She said: "If at that time Emperor Wuzong struck out records of the first generation Jianzheng, then we will not be able to find any relevant information in the Wenyuan Pavilion."

Seeing Xu Qi'an show a disappointed expression, the eldest princess reminded him, "Did you not say that you found buddhist script on the stone pillars? We can try to approach it from that direction."

Over two hours of reading, she was feeling tired, and unconsciously leaned closer to the table. This movement, made her heavy breasts rest on the table.

This woman's chest has a gully... Xu Qi'an looked at it with the corner of his eye, but did not pay attention to it. After all, if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.

And as for this abyss, Xu Qi'an did not dare anger. Unless in the future he can make the abyss move its gaze away shyly.

Changing tacks indeed helped them greatly.

"I've read through *Records of the Great Feng's Geography*, and found that when the Great Feng was founded, there was no Buddhist temple by the capital, nor were there Buddhists spreading their religion. But five hundred years ago, suddenly a Buddhist temple appeared, called Baota^[^1] Temple." The eldest princess was worthy of being called a high achiever; in the field of searching resources, she far outmatched the uncultured Xu Qi'an.

Her long eyelashes trembled, and tiredness flashed in her eyes, which melted slightly that cold and steely gaze. At this time, she seemed to be a jade statue come to life.

The eldest princess was rather pleased by the discovery, continuing, “When the Baota temple was most prosperous, every day the number of people burning incense were like the clouds in the sky, with an endless stream of rich and accomplished people. Their single temple managed to buy nearly 100 *qing*^[2] of good farmland.

“But following the court’s decision to purge Buddhism, Baota temple slowly started declining. Today the few great Buddhist monasteries have not much to do with Baota temple any more.

“Mn, there’s one branch that remains, Qinglong^[3] Temple, located on the White Phoenix Mountain on the western outskirts of the city... hey, are you listening?”

“Don’t talk, you’ll break my train of thought.” Xu Qi’an frowned.

The eldest princess raised her brow, but ultimately resisted, and didn’t speak.

Xu Qi’an was mentally classifying all the possible leads he had.

If Wei Yuan wanted me to target the ones behind the scenes, then the situation with the first generation Jianzheng doesn’t need my interference, but this thing cannot be sidestepped. Only when I unearth the heart of the case can I continue to investigate further...

Currently, the sequence of events of Sangpo Lake goes like this: When Emperor Wuzong usurped the throne, he sealed the first Jianzheng inside Sangpo Lake, using the divine sword that could suppress fortune to assist with maintaining the magic formation that sealed him. This secret is known only by Emperor Yuanjing.

The northern Yao contacted traitors inside court, and blew up the seal in Sangpo Lake, releasing the first generation Jianzheng, trying to cause chaos in the Great Feng Capital. Thus they could use the opportunity and cause trouble in the north.

If I go down this path, then there are two kinds that I need to look into: One, those who are trying to reinstate the original royal line. Two, those who want to usurp the throne.

... Royal family members? But the original royal line became history 500 years ago, so the chance of the first one isn’t high. Then... a usurper? Mm, this hypothesis is more reasonable, but it lacks evidence.

To be able to ally with the northern Yao, and also to be of the royal family... the Zhenbei King!?
Xu Qi’an suddenly opened his eyes wide, shock written across his face.

“What have you discovered?” the eldest princess immediately asked.

I suspect that your uncle wants to become your dad, but I have no evidence. Xu Qi’an shook his head, not answering the eldest princess, continuing his own deductions.

These types of words absolutely could not be said without iron-clad proof. To slander a royal begets death!

Deduction is like doing a maths problem. Any leads must be strung together, assembled together. As long as there is any flaw that could not be proved, then the true answer could be off by a million miles.

So, at this moment I need to do two things: One, confirm that below Sangpo Lake is sealed the Jianzheng; this is the core to all my deductions. And to start solving this, I need to find out what role the Buddhists played here.

Second, I need to confirm whether or not the person who killed County Magistrate Zhao was of the Daoist Human Sect or not. If so, then what are the Daoists doing here, how could they have dealings with the Zhenbei King? Then I need to find evidence of their dealings.

The answer to all of these questions must be gotten within a week. This way, even if I am wrong, I still have opportunity to start again from scratch. If in ten days the progress in the case is still not large, then I can only hug Daddy Wei's leg and cry: this account's broken, can I get a new one.

Xu Qi'an simultaneously continued to think and started planning what he was going to do tomorrow.

Search through resources on the different cultivation systems, and confirm how County Magistrate Zhao died; visit Qinglong Temple, and understand the events of 500 years ago; visit the Zhenbei King's Manor, and see that consort praised as the capital's most beautiful woman.

After making up his mind, Xu Qi'an said, "Your subordinate has some ideas, but before conclusions are found, I dare not speak wildly about this matter to your Highness."

The eldest princess was very clever, and didn't pursue. Nodding, she said, "This princess is tired."

The gold-leaved nanmu carriage left the Wenyuan Pavilion, and parted ways with Xu Qi'an. Xu Dalang pinched his horse with his knees, and the sound of horse hooves echoed towards the eastern gate, before being stopped by a line of guards.

"Princess Lin'an wants to see you!" The captain said.

Princess Lin'an? She and the eldest princess don't get along, and I'm associated heavily with the eldest princess. This probably won't be something good, so no!

Xu Qi'an immediately turned them down, "I have a royal decree to carry out, to investigate a case. Pass a message back to Princess Lin'an, to re-arrange for a different time."

As he said so, he pulled out the golden token.

Who would've predicted the captain showed no signs of fear, laughing "Princess Lin'an is His Majesty's most doted on princess. Your golden token doesn't work here."

From observing her at the banquet, a queen of the club... ah, no. Princess Lin'an is unruly and headstrong. Even though she's not like Lingyue where one punch will send her crying for a long time, but she nonetheless started crying after falling into the water. Not someone with deep thoughts.

Perhaps she'd make things hard for me, but nothing to the point of a Hongmen Banquet,[^4] all I need to do is be careful.

How confident are you... Xu Qi'an exhaled a turbid breath, "Lead the way."

Chapter 123. Forces involved in the Sangpo Case

The second princess lived in Shaoyin^[^1] Palace, which had a spacious and elegant garden.

The chief guard led Xu Qi'an across the large threshold, and around the screen wall, bringing him in front of a courtyard bursting with colour and scenery like the innocent mind of a young girl.

Swings were hanging from the vine racks, tattered clay dolls were piled up in the corner, and various strange things were piled up on the east side of the courtyard.

On the edge of the garden, the second princess Lin'an was kicking around an embroidered ball along with a few maidservants. The women's chattering sound was sometimes mixed with the silver bell like laughter of Princess Lin'an.

"Your Highness. I've brought Xu Qi'an here." The chief guard clasped his fists and said out loud.

The second princess stepped on the embroidered ball and turned around to take a look. She stared at Xu Qi'an for a few seconds, before the corners of her mouth raised slightly, and she kicked the embroidered ball away.

"Boom!"

The embroidered ball flew out, and ripples appeared in Princess Lin'an's skirt, making it look like a flower in bloom.

Xu Qi'an, who had met with a demonstration of authority upon meeting, was terrified. He was about to dodge when he found the embroidered ball miss its target and "peng peng" bounced into the distance.

"... I'll spare you this time" The second princess tried her best to claw back her honour, walking toward the front hall, and said, "Xu Qi'an, you come inside with me. Everyone else wait outside."

In the luxurious and grand front hall, the second princess sat on the large chair, while Xu Qi'an stood in the middle of the hall. The two gave each other a silent look.

Using her status as a Princess, the second princess attempted to subdue Xu Qi'an by using her gaze.

She knew that Huaiqing had raised an eagle for a while when she was young. Eagle eyes were the sharpest, like knives. So, ordinary people couldn't look at it for a long time. Due to this, When raising an eagle, she had to use a sharper and calmer gaze to suppress it.

Once the Eagle Owner looks away, they lose the qualification to be an Eagle Owner.

The purpose of Huaiqing in raising an eagle was to sharpen her eyes. Even until today, the second princess could not stare at Huaiqing for a long time.

But, Her watery peach-like eyes weren't that sharp. So, when she stared at others, she instead ignited their passion to talk.

Xu Qi'an observed the second princess. She had a round face, somewhat similar to Chu Caiwei's face in shape. But, the latter was sweet and restrained, with eyes that seemed to belong to an anime.

The second princess had the beauty of a young imperial sister, with peach-like eyes that attracted affection.

"Xu Qi'an, I had heard that you were Huaiqing's loyal dog." Finding that her fierce gaze couldn't subdue Xu Qi'an, she sneered and tried to attack with words.

"Yes. You can call me Hachi.[^2]" Xu Qi'an said, earnestly.

"What's Hachi?"

"It's a loyal dog."

"Are you joking with me?" Princess Lin'an raised her eyebrows.

"I don't dare." Xu Qi'an said, in a tone that was neither humble nor arrogant.

Princess Lin'an snorted in a lovable way, and then said, "I'm giving you a chance. Immediately join me and leave that woman Huaqing. Otherwise..."

*Join you? I have hugged the eldest princess's jade leg and Wei Yuan's thigh by now. If I turn to your side again... Won't I become a slave of three surnames?[^3]

Xu Qi'an shook his head, "I'm sorry. I have already sworn to give my all for the eldest princess."

The second princess immediately said, "So What? I also want you to serve me like an ox."

Will you give me grass, then? Xu Qi'an understood the situation. *The second princess should have seen me being appreciated by the eldest princess, that I was the eldest princess's henchman, She should have also seen my handsomeness, my talent in writing poetry, and my speaking nicely. So, she must have become jealous and wanted to steal me away from the eldest princess.*

"Second Princess, Don't make things difficult for me." Xu Qi'an sternly refused. People must have a contractual spirit. Since he had promised to give his all to the princess, he could no longer work for others.

"If you don't want to do so," The second princess opened her eyes wide open, sneered, and threatened, "I'll yell 'Indecent' right now, and tell the guards that you were trying to molest me."

"I'm willing to do my best for the second princess, and serve her as an ox would." Xu Qi'an said, earnestly.

The second princess immediately became joyful, "The person who understands current affairs is a hero. You are a talent... Well, From now on, you will come here to meet me and take my orders after noon every day."

"Your Highness, I am tasked to investigate the Sangpo case." Xu Qi'an sighed.

"...that's true." Princess Lin'an thought for a while, "Let's forget about tomorrow. When I want to order you, you will come to meet me."

Xu Qi'an understood that this woman was just messing around. She didn't want him to do anything. She was just trying to find fault with the eldest princess.

The threat before wasn't lethal as well. Exchanging a princess's reputation for a bronze gong's life, This was just losing blood.

Precisely, as he understood it, he changed his attitude and agreed with the second princess. He treated it casually as playing with a child.

"You should go back." The second princess was very cheerful because things were going on according to her expectations.

"Yes."

"Wait!" The second princess called out to him, took off the jade pendant on her waist, and said, "This is my keepsake. You can use it to enter the palace. The guards won't stop you. But, You can only go to this palace, not any other palace."

...This Generous? You're a right brick aren't you? Xu Qi'an's eyes lit up as he took the jade pendant and put it in his robe "From now on, I will do my best and serve your highness wholeheartedly."

Xu Qi'an, the slave of three Surnames, left the imperial city before dusk and rode his horse back to the Nightwatcher Constabulary.

Work hours were over, and only the Nightwatchers and Petty officials on duty were left, causing the office to be much calmer and quieter than in the daytime.

Just as Xu Qi'an entered the Constabulary, a Gold Gong with a high nose and a broad forehead walked towards him. The Gold Gong was Zhu Chengzhu's father, Zhu Yang.

When the two enemies met, there was no battle. They just sullenly looked at each other.

"Gold Gong Zhu, How's young master's injury?" Xu Qi'an smiled, as he took out his gold token and tied it around his waist, confidently.

Zhu Yang glanced at the gold token, and said calmly, "He's lucky and barely scraped by. I'm afraid Master Xu will have to go first."

Xu Qi'an waved his hand and smiled kindly, "I'll wait for him on the road to get acquainted."

Zhu Yang stared at him for a few seconds, then nodded, "Investigate the case carefully."

"Well met, Gold Gong Zhu."

As he walked towards the side hall of Spring Breeze Hall, he discovered that the bronze gongs under Li Yuchun and several bailiffs from the prefecture constabulary were still there.

Upon hearing the footsteps, Li Yuchun came out from the Spring Breeze Hall, and said, "We have some clues about the death of County Magistrate Zhao. Um, It may not be the work of the Dao Sect."

Xu Qi'an nodded. He didn't enter the side hall but followed Li Yuchun to the Spring Breeze Hall.

"This afternoon, Prefecture Governor Chen invited some white cloaks from the Sitianjian to interrogate the jailers and wardens on duty that night. They confirmed that there wasn't anything wrong with them. It was also confirmed that County Magistrate Zhao did die in the morning without sound in the prison."

Li Yuchun poured a cup of tea for Xu Qi'an, both his subordinate and superior, and continued, "The Daoist Yin spirits could indeed do this, and they can also bypass the wardens and jailers silently. But, after checking the information, I found that another system can do the same."

Xu Qi'an took a sip of tea and listened patiently.

"The warlocks!" Li Yuchun said.

"The Warlocks?"

"Have you heard of the Church of the Warlock God?"

"I had heard you say, boss, that Warlock God was a beyond-rank. Was the Church of the Warlock God established by the Warlock God?"

Li Yuchun said, "Yes, the Warlock God is the god commonly believed in by all the countries in the northeast, and the Church of the Warlock God also has supreme power in the northeast, just like Buddhism in the West."

Monarchy was followed in the Great Feng. The same holds for the Northern tribes as well.

But, theocracy was followed in the Western Regions and the Northeast, with the Churches being the masters.

"Are Warlocks as advanced as the Dao Sect in the field of the primordial spirit?" Xu Qi'an inquired.

"No. No system can compare with the Dao Sect in Primordial Spirit." Li Yuchun shook his head and said, "But, fourth-rank warlocks are called Warlock of Dreams, who can weave dreams and kill people in their sleep."

"Seventy years ago, a war had occurred between the Northern Yao and the Church of the Warlock God due to territorial disputes. According to the information sent back by the spies from the Nightwatchers, a group of 2,000 Yao soldiers died silently in the barracks. They didn't have any wounds on their bodies. They all went to sleep, but never woke up again."

Rank four Warlock... Why are the Warlocks involved now... This case is too complex.

The Human Sect of Daoism is currently the State religion of Great Feng, and their Sect Master is the National Teacher. That's already the highest status they could have. What benefit could they gain by helping King Zhenbei to usurp the throne?

They couldn't upgrade anymore, they had already hit the level cap.

Therefore, It's more likely that the Church of the Warlock God was involved. If County Magistrate Zhao was killed by a Warlock of Dreams, then the forces behind the Sangpo case would be The mastermind behind the scenes (King Zhenbei), The Northern Yao, and the Church of the Warlock God in the Northeast.

Xu Qi'an took a sip of tea, unable to hide the exhaustion in his eyes.

"We gained something, at the very least. We can rule out the Human Sect as a culprit, and the case has made some progress.

"Boss, Report this to Duke Wei."

Li Yuchun nodded, with worry covering his entire face, "I've always felt that the end of the Gengzi year is the beginning of great chaos."

"Let's just solve the case. We don't have to drink contraband oil and worry about the country and community." Xu Qi'an patted him on the shoulder, after which he left the Constabulary.

The darkness had set by the time he had returned home. He had remained hungry all day, and his stomach was rumbling. After eating the food warmed up by the cook and the milk offered by little sister Lingyue, he returned to the small courtyard and fell asleep.

On the third day, Xu Qi'an rode to the yamen at the brink of dawn, and happened to meet Chu Caiwei, who was wearing a light yellow dress, and riding a horse across the street, trotting over.

She held the rein in one hand and held an oil paper bag between her arms using the other, revealing half a steamed bun, which was trying hard to jump out following the bumps of the horse.

"Do you want to eat it?" Chu Caiwei generously handed over a steamed stuffed bun to him, and continued, "It's meat."

Xu Qi'an felt the emotion he felt when learning that Xu Lingyin only drank a bowl of porridge because of worrying about him. *This foodie treats me as one of her own.*

Xu Qi'an took the bun and put it in his mouth while throwing the reins to the petty official at the door.

Walking inside while eating, he asked, "Any clues?"

Chu Caiwei said, "I asked Senior Brother Song Qing. He said that the Magical Treasures capable of blocking the Qi Watching Technique, outside the Sitianjian and the palace, could only be in Buddhism. Well, .ot a Buddhist Temple for mortals. Qinglong Temple."

Qinglong Temple?!

The inheritor of that Baota Temple..." Xu Qi'an was surprised, but not that surprised.

As I thought, Buddhism is inseparable from the Sangpo case.

The Sitianjian, The royal family, the Church of the Warlock God, The Northern Yao, the Zhenbei King, the Buddhist Sect... so many forces involved in this small Sangpo Case.

Chapter 124. Qinglong Temple

Finishing his bun, Xu Qi'an sent Zhu Guangxiao and Song Tingfeng to notify everyone else in the group to gather in the front courtyard.

Currently, Xu Qi'an's group composed: Gold Jade Hall, Suppressing Evil Hall, Spring Breeze Hall, Chu Caiwei from the Sitianjian, and six bailiffs from the prefecture office.

In total, 24 people.

The two silver gongs Min Shan and Yang Feng were responsible for auditing the Ministry of Industry's gunpowder production and past records. This task was both complex and time-consuming.

Xu Qi'an internally had already come to the conclusion that the gunpowder did not come from the Ministry of Law, but just out of caution, he did not stop the investigation there.

Today, he was to leave the capital. Knowing how many powers were involved in the Sangpo Case, Xu Qi'an followed his heart and brought on as many people as he could.

He first went to the imperial city, and whilst the others were stopped outside, only the foodie Chu Caiwei was able to follow him in.

This miss was a regular of the imperial city; she could come and go as she pleased, and had extraordinary status.

"Didn't the eldest princess give you a jade pendant?" Xu Qi'an asked.

Chu Caiwei nodded.

"I also have one." Xu Qi'an pulled from his pocket a jade pendant, and proudly showed it off.

"That seems familiar... ah, from princess Lin'an?" Chu Caiwei exclaimed tenderly.

"I'm now princess Lin'an's, she recognises my merits. Seeing that the eldest princess didn't give me a jade pendant, she quickly gave me one, expressing that she looked on me more highly than the eldest princess, and could be relied on." Xu Qi'an told the big-eyed Chu Caiwei about yesterday's events.

"She's really dumb." Chu Caiwei giggled, mocking Lin'an.

Big brother, don't mock second brother. Where do you have the right to mock Biaobiao... Xu Qi'an agreed, "Yeah, not every woman has the same cool intellect as Miss Caiwei."

On Chu Caiwei's round face, her smile became ever sweeter.

Not long later, they came to the Huaiqin King's Manor. The Zhenbei King's royal title was King Huai^[^1], and he was Emperor Yuanjing's blood brother, thus his manor name had the character "qin" added to it.

In front of the door were two white marble lions. The door was two *zhang* tall, with golden rivets laid out in neat rows. The door knocker was larger than on the manors of any ordinary nobility.

Apart from being high-class and magnificent, Xu Qi'an could not think of any other words to describe it.

In front of the door were stood a row of armed and armoured soldiers, their expressions solemn.

"This official is Xu Qi'an, the lead investigator of the Sangpo Lake case, personally appointed by His Majesty. I would like to visit the King's Consort, please pass on the message to her." Xu Qi'an showed his golden token.

One of the solders gave Xu Qi'an a side-eye, and replied "The Consort is not seeing any guests. Please leave."

Xu Qi'an's eyebrow jumped, and was just about to scold him, when he heard the solider laugh coldly, and add "This is also His Majesty's order. Even if the eldest princess wanted to see our consort, she must also do so on our consort's terms.

"Piss off, don't use chicken feathers to call the shots.^[^2]"

With great realisation, Xu Qi'an let out an "ohh," and laughed: "So the gold token His Majesty personally bestowed amounts to chicken feathers... this person is slandering His Majesty, and has committed lese-majesté^[^3]."

With one hand on his sabre hilt, he laughed fiercely, "This official will now arrest the criminal, anyone who tries to interfere will be killed under the law!"

Sching!

The black-gold long sabre came out of its scabbard half an inch, as the flowing qi vibrated the air. The guard who had mocked Xu Qi'an knew that he had spoke wrongly, and his face slowly turned white.

The captain of the guard stared heavily at his subordinate unable to hold his tongue, and came over to Xu Qi'an. As he walked, his armour clinked like a stream.

"Sir, the Zhenbei Consort is not in the manor."

"Where did she go?" Xu Qi'an sat astride his horse, looking down on him.

"This subordinate is only a door guard, how would I know where the consort has gone. But she is indeed not in the manor; this morning she had just left the city, about an hour before your arrival." The guard captain spoke with a very respectful manner.

Xu Qi'an nodded slightly, his attitude unyielding, "This official is now arresting a criminal, if you lot do not want to be accused of harbouring a criminal, then help me arrest this person."

He pointed to the soldier who had mocked him.

"Sir!" the captain became desperate. Internally he was bursting with anger, but he didn't dare show it, saying earnestly, "The King's consort is really not here."

As the guards of the king's manor, they didn't need to give face to any ordinary official or noble.

But the one facing him was holding a golden token, and had also taken advantage of his underling's crime as leverage, so the captain could only try to make peace.

Only then did Xu Qi'an believe him, and turning his horse around, lead Chu Caiwei away.

"This consort of ours is certainly something, even the eldest princess can't see her at will."

Chu Caiwei, meeting everyone's expectations, completely missed the fact that Xu Qi'an' was testing her, and replied promptly "The consort's standing is very special."

"How special?"

"This is a secret." Chu Caiwei smiled, showing her teeth, "Don't pry too much into this, it won't do you any good."

She then proceeded to make a stern face, and warned, "Don't you dare use food to bribe me."

"Why?"

"Because I'm afraid I can't resist..." she said aggrievedly.

...

In the western outskirts of the capital lies a White Phoenix Mountain. From the western city gate, it took only an hour to get there.

The White Phoenix Mountain's name came from a species of white wild bird that roosted on the mountain. Their feathers were very long, almost like phoenixes, hence its name.

But these White Phoenixes that lived on the peak have nearly gone extinct, and really it was all the Sitianjian's fault.

Some years ago, a physician from the Sitianjian went to White Phoenix Mountain to pick medicinal herbs, and on the way captured a few white phoenixes. He took them back to investigate, only to find that the white phoenix meat could improve a man's vitality...

Coming to the foot of White Phoenix Mountain, the experienced and knowledgeable Lyu Qing told this tale, laughing.

Song Tingfeng had a thought, and hesitantly said, "Boss, I have a friend whose health isn't the greatest, I want to hunt a few white phoenixes for him."

Silver Gong Min Shan stared at him, "What time is it, that you're still thinking of wild game? This is an urgent matter, if you delay the case, who takes responsibility?"

Li Yuchun frowned, and didn't respond.

Xu Qi'an laughed, "This visit to White Phoenix Mountain mainly is to understand a few events from the long past; we're not in that much of a hurry. Tingfeng, remember to come back quickly."

Hearing this, Min Shan said shyly, "Sir Xu, how about I accompany Bronze Gong Song? I can look after him."

You need to look after each other to hunt some birds? Xu Qi'an glanced at him, "You also have a friend?"

Min Shan felt all the men stare at him with strange gazes.

Silver Gong Min felt somewhat desperate, and after an age only managed to squeeze out one sentence, "Whether it restores vitality isn't important, I mostly want to know what a nearly extinct bird tastes like."

Everyone roared with laughed. Once Xu Qi'an had stopped laughing, he made a serious face, saying "I was just joking. The background of the Sangpo case is complicated; in the capital I don't care where you go, but outside of it, do not leave the group."

The twisted mountain trail pierced deep into the forest. At the foot of the mountain was a large *paifang* gate, upon which was written "Qinglong Temple".

Qinglong Temple wasn't full to bursting with guests, but nor was it lonely and stagnant. On the way, they would occasionally see groups of commoners who had come up the mountain to offer incense.

By the paifang gate was parked a resplendent horse-drawn cart, with about a dozen armoured soldiers guarding it.

This carriage felt very familiar to Xu Qi'an. It was made with nanmu wood covered in gold leaf, and every detail was carved out and decorated with jade and gold. It was the same carriage that he saw that time when he went to the Jiaofangsi.

The person in the cart had asked Xu Qi'an to play pitch pot for her, using two hundred taels of gold to exchange for the bodhi prayer bracelet.

Right, Jinlian Daozhang said that the woman in the carriage will have some kind of destiny with me... who could she be? Golden Nanmu was used exclusively by the royal family, but the eldest princess and the second princess's carriages all don't look like this. Some regional lord of the royal family? Or, a consort of the Emperor?

No no, definitely a consort, don't scare yourself.

Even if she was a consort, she had to be on the same level as Auntie to pass... he thought.

Tying his horse to the wooden post, and leaving the bailiffs from the constabulary and a Bronze Gong to guard it, Xu Qi'an lead the other Nightwatchers up the mountain.

Barely taking several steps, Xu Qi'an felt something soft under his foot. He had trodden on a scented sachet.

I've changed to picking up perfumed sachets instead of silver today?

He naturally bent his waist and picked it up, examining it closely. The scented sachet was exquisitely made, embroidered with intricate cloud patterns. Its material was extremely expensive, definitely not something an average rich family's daughter could get.

On one side of the sachet was embroidered a gold "Nan" character, on the other a "Zhi" character. The golden threads were sewn into intricate and beautiful knots.[^4]

Xu Qi'an caught a whiff of a wonderful scent, like perfume, like sandalwood incense, but also more like the fragrance of a woman's body.

"Wait a moment..." from behind them came a crisp voice.

A young girl wearing a light blue gown caught up to them, not being scared in the slightest at the sight of the Nightwatcher uniforms. She pointed to the sachet in Xu Qi'an's hand, and let out a breath, saying "Our Madam dropped this."

She wore a maid's bun, yet the material used on her clothes was more luxurious than many a rich man's daughter.

Xu Qi'an instinctively looked towards the luxurious carriage at the foot of the mountain, "Your madam?"

"Don't ask too many questions, hand the sachet back." The young girl's tone of voice was strong.

"What sachet?" Xu Qi'an stowed the sachet into his robe.

"You..." the young girl stared at him with anger, "You wait right here."

Picking up her skirt, she rushed down the stone stairs. Xu Qi'an didn't continue walking, waiting right where he was, watching her go up to the carriage, and say something to the window.

"Ningyan, don't cause trouble. That carriage is used specifically by a royal family member." Li Yuchun said with a frown.

Xu Qi'an was only under decree to investigate the case. In Brother Chun's mind, he was still his subordinate. Brother Chun didn't want to see Xu Qi'an step on too many toes as he investigated.

Even if he managed to use the merit of this to atone for his crime, if he had disrespected people he shouldn't have disrespected, then that would all be for naught.

...You don't understand, that woman and I have joint destiny!

Xu Qi'an shook his head, not explaining, still watching everything going on by the carriage.

However the result made Xu Qi'an disappointed. He indistinctly saw the window open a sliver, as the person inside seemed to be examining him.

Being so far away, he couldn't see anything in the darkness of the carriage.

The window quickly closed again, being shut tight. A few seconds later, the carriage started moving, slowly travelling away.

I guess the time hasn't come... Xu Qi'an sighed, "Let's go. Let's see the head monk in Qinglong Temple."

...

A group of uniform-wearing Nightwatchers swarmed into the temple, and immediately received a deacon's reception.

This deacon was a round-faced chubby monk, with kindly looking features, and looked to be in his forties. Placing his hands together, he said "This monk is the supervisor at Qinglong Temple, my dharma name is Hengqing^[^5]. Sirs, please follow me inside."

He lead the party into the temple, and enthusiastically told them about the Qinglong Temple's history, calling themselves the orthodox descendants of the west, and practicing Buddhism, worshipping the Buddha."

Xu Qi'an's eyes scanned over towering pagoda after towering pagoda, and waved, "Call your abbot over, this official has a few questions."

Qinglong temple was the only Buddhist temple in the capital region, and as the deacon said, is the inheritor of the west's Buddhism.

Before coming here, Xu Qi'an had done his homework. Qinglong Temple's abbot was a fifth-rank Silacarya^[^6], and easily outranked them all.

But Xu Qi'an was not in the least afraid, because the early stages of the Buddhist cultivation path were not skilled in physical melee, eighth rank Warrior Monks aside.

The Buddhist ninth rank was called Sramanera, or Acolyte. This rank was very interesting, as its core principle was to follow commandments; if one does not break their vows for three years, they would rank up. On the surface this seems easy, but it was not so.

The commandments of the Buddhist sect were strict and numerous, one could very much accidentally break one.

The eighth rank were Warrior Monks, who were not too different from martial artists. They also could fight.

The later seventh rank Dharmacarya, sixth rank Dyanacarya all weren't very able to fight.^[^7] Only when they got to the fifth rank did this change.

It was worth mentioning, that when Xu Qi'an was in the Constabulary archives looking up resources, he found a very interesting tidbit: The rank after ninth-rank Sramanera was immediately a seventh-rank Dharmacarya.

It skipped the eighth-rank warrior monk.

His resources did not say why this was the case, and time was urgent, so Xu Qi'an didn't bother spending the time to investigate the Buddhist cultivation path. He could only guess that within the Buddhist sect there were probably two separate cultivation paths.

"The abbot is meditating, and so is not available. If you have any questions you can ask me." Hengqing lead everyone into the tea room, and ordered an acolyte to serve tea.

"The temple has magic items that can block the Sitianjian's qi-watching?" Xu Qi'an sat cross-legged on a prayer mat, and immediately got to the point.

"What does Sir mean?" Hengqing put his hands together, shaking his head, "The temple does not have these kinds of magic items."

"Master, monks shall not lie." Xu Qi'an's gaze was sharp.

Hengqing lowered his head, not meeting Xu Qi'an's gaze, saying "Everything this monk says is the truth."

"Is it that after the ninth rank Sramanera, one can lie with abandon?" Xu Qi'an smiled, his eyes remaining cold.

Hengqing's head did not move, as he ignored Xu Qi'an, not caring in the least for the cold gazes of the Nightwatchers surrounding him.

You really won't cooperate without force? Xu Qi'an felt somewhat angry.

Chapter 125. A Secret

"Ai, It seems that this was destined to be a fruitless trip." Xu Qi'an finally took his first sip of tea since entering the temple, and sighed.

"Master, Do you know of the Sangpo case circulating in the capital recently?"

Master Hengqing didn't speak.

After signalling his colleagues to be silent with his eyes, Xu Qi'an continued, "I was appointed as the lead investigator of the case by His Majesty. It's not because the Emperor recognizes me and appreciates me..."

Xu Qi'an let out a long sigh as if he wanted to stop speaking.

Master Hengqing couldn't help taking a glance at him.

"As it happens, this matter has been in my mind for a long time. Now that I'm in the temple, I'll talk about it with you, master." Xu Qi'an said after a while,

“A few days ago, I was ordered to raid the house of a criminal official. His Majesty was kind and didn't implicate the family members in the mansion. But, when the house was being raided, Some colleagues saw the beautiful women in the mansion, causing them to want to spoil them... One of the girls was merely twelve or thirteen years old.

“As I couldn't stand it, I stopped them immediately, fought with my superior, and almost killed him. I was sentenced to be chopped at the waist for this. So, His Majesty handed over the Sangpo case to me, and had me perform meritorious service to offset my crimes.

"My friends say that I had been too impulsive. The correct way to handle this was to bear it first and report it to the Constabulary later. But, in that case, the girl would have already fallen prey..."

Xu Qi'an showed a painful and entangled expression, "It is said that the Dharma is boundless and can save myriad sentient beings. I want to ask the master if I did the right thing or not."

Lyu Qing was taken aback, astonished. She hadn't known that such a story lay behind Xu Qi'an's imprisonment.

He is different from other men... An gentle light emerged in the eyes of the female constable.

Master Hengqing was slightly moved. He hadn't expected this court dog to be a warm-hearted person. After reciting the Buddha's name, he said:

“As long as the benefactor[^1] has a clear conscience, you will not be touched by karma.”

"Master also believes that I did something wrong." Xu Qi'an dully said.

After hesitating for some time, Hengqing said, “You have a good heart, and mercifully saved people, what sin is in that?”

Xu Qi'an asked, "Then, Why did the imperial court sentence me to death?"

Master Hengqing pacified him, "The world is like a sea of bitterness. Being inside it means that you can't stop yourself sometimes. Sometimes, a kind heart may not lead to a good outcome. However, even if it is late, a good outcome will never be absent. The Sangpo case is so, a heaven-mandated turning point for the benefactor."

"Master, I'm enlightened!" Xu Qi'an seemed to have realized something, turned his head, and said to everyone:

"Everyone should have heard it. Master Hengqing said that the Great Feng is a sea of bitterness, and the Sangpo case is the retribution brought about by the royal family. Why are you all in a daze? Come and arrest him."

Clang clang clang... Everyone stood up immediately, as the sounds of blades being drawn resounded through the quiet room.

...

The Zen Chamber.

The abbot of the Qinglong Temple, Master Panshu was sixty-two years old. His bald head wasn't as shiny as it was in his youth, and his white beard had grown to reach his chest.

A Fifth Rank Silacarya, He had remained in this realm for more than 20 years.

The Buddhist system paid attention to a single word, "Enlightenment". Some monks may have practiced Zen for decades, yet not go further until their deaths.

However, some monks could suddenly realize the unity of all dharma in a single night, like a sudden spring breeze, saving them decades of hard work.

Master Panshu could have been the former or the latter, but nobody could be any sure if he could achieve enlightenment before he actually did so.

This could be described as Schrodinger's Enlightenment, or Quantum Buddhism.

"Abbot, abbot.." A deacon shouted anxiously from across the courtyard, "A group of Nightwatchers came to the temple and arrested Courtyard Master Hengqing, saying that he slandered the Imperial Court and the royal family."

Abbot Panshu opened his eyes and said softly, "I know."

The door of the room opened on its own, after which Master Panshu disappeared from the room.

...

The Nightwatchers escorted Master Hengqing outside the temple. As they accompanied him, more and more monks gathered, giving off hostile gazes. They gave off the appearance of forming an encirclement as if they would immediately fight with this group of court dogs if some took the lead.

But the Nightwatchers had too strong of a background. They could fight with this group today, causing a group of strong ones to raze the Qinglong Temple the next day.

Therefore, no one made any rash moves.

"Master, you don't have to be afraid. At the Nightwatcher Office, You will be released soon if you cooperate with us." Xu Qi'an consoled.

At the time, Xu Qi'an's smile was a devil's smile to Master Hengqing. He didn't feel any consolation in his words at all.

"Amitufo!"

A majestic but benevolent voice sounded, calming down the hostility and anger of the monks.

Xu Qi'an saw an old monk, wearing a red and yellow cassock appear three feet ahead out of nowhere, blocking the way of the Nightwatchers.

"This poor monk is Panshu."

"Abbot Panshu!" Xu Qi'an put his palms together and greeted him back. He said, "I have something I wish to inquire Abbot about."

"Come along." Abbot Panshu sighed.

Coming this time to the Meditation Room, except for Xu Qi'an, all the Nightwatchers including the three Silver Gongs were blocked outside.

Towards a fifth-rank expert, Xu Qi'an also had a much more serious attitude. A fifth-rank Silacarya corresponded to the fifth-rank Transforming Force of the Marital Arts system.

He was an expert beyond the Bronze skin and Iron Bones level.

"Master abbot, I was decreed by the emperor to investigate the Sangpo case. I accidentally found that a Baihu in the Jinwu guard could deceive the Arcanists of Sitianjian. After inquiring about it, I heard that the Qinglong Temple has a Magical Instrument with similar effects." Xu Qi'an warned,

"This case is quite an important case. Even for the safety of the Qinglong temple, Master Abbot must tell the truth. I am not threatening Master at all. I hope you understand my situation."

"The temple indeed has a Magical Instrument, which can be used to cover up the aura and hide from prying eyes." Abbot Panshu said, in a gentle tone.

"Is that Instrument still in the temple?"

"It's not here." The abbot shook his head.

Xu Qi'an didn't speak, instead, he waited for an explanation.

Abbot Panshu paused for a few seconds, sighed, and said, "The reason why Hengqing lied to Sir is probably that this involves a scandal in the temple. If it spread out, It could also bring great disaster to the temple.

"This poor monk once had a disciple. His dharma name was Henghui,^[^2] and he was quite talented and diligent. This poor monk originally had high hopes for him, but he didn't have clean roots and had an affair with a female pilgrim. He stole the magical instrument and eloped with her, fleeing the capital."

Xu Qi'an narrowed his eyes, looked at the abbot, and asked, "What's the identity of the female pilgrim?"

Abbot Panshu clasped his hands together, and chanted the Buddha's name in a low voice, before he finally replied, helplessly, "Princess Pingyang."

"!!!"

Xu Qi'an felt as if he had been struck by lightning.

In the Great Feng, the word "Princess" without any landed titles could be used by the following: the Emperor's *shu* daughters, the crown prince's daughters, imperial princes' daughters, and other kings' daughters.

Strictly, except for the eldest princess who was born to the empress, the other three princesses were all *shu* daughters. However Emperor Yuanjing only had these four daughters, and rare things are precious, so they were all given landed titles, and could be considered Princess Royals.

Although the crown prince did have a daughter, she was still young, and so could not be involved in such matters as elopement.

Thus, Xu Qi'an deduced that this Princess Pingyang, as a non-Princess Royal, was a daughter of a king in the royal family.

This case is turning more complicated, the deeper I investigate. What was the role of the monk who eloped with a princess in the case? Xu Qi'an asked, "When did it happen?"

"More than a year ago." Abbot Panshu replied.

"Thank you, Master. You have clarified many doubts I had. I still have another thing to ask you."

"Please."

"Qinglong Temple descends from the Baota Temple established by monks from the Western Regions, doesn't it?"

Abbot Panshu said nothing, acquiescing.

"After the Yongzhen Shanhe Temple was blown up, I found a large formation at the bottom of the lake with Buddhist script engraved. The formation was arranged five hundred years ago, and the Baota Temple also appeared in the capital five hundred years ago. Even more interestingly, Emperor Wuzong also happened five hundred years ago..." Xu Qi'an stared at the abbot.

"Does Buddhism from the Western Regions have any relevant records of that time?"

After finishing speaking, Xu Qi'an observed that Monk Panshu's facial expressions turned ugly quickly, as he lost the indifference particular to an eminent monk.

"Sir, I want to ask one thing.." Abbot Panshu raised a burning gaze at him, wanting to say something, but pondered on it for a long time.

"The thing under Sangpo, really... escaped?"

"Indeed it has!" Xu Qi'an gave an affirmative.

Abbot Panshu seemed to have suffered a great blow, as the fear in his eyes was difficult to calm down. His hands trembled slightly, he joined his palms together and chanted the Buddha's name to cover up his state.

Such a reaction... Xu Qi'an was a little surprised. He felt the old monk's reaction being a little too extreme. So, he got straight to the point, "Is the one sealed under Sangpo the first Jianzheng?"

The old monk didn't reply but continued to lower his head and recite the Buddha's name, his bald brows trembling.

After some time, Abbot Panshu calmed down, and said in a deep voice, "This poor monk doesn't know what is sealed below Sangpo. But, A saying has been handed down since the establishment of the Baota Temple: The monster of Sangpo escapes, and the world descends to Chaos.

"The Baota Temple was built to guard the seal in Sangpo, back then. Later, the imperial court became afraid of the prosperity of Buddhism and ordered the removal of Buddhism. The eminent monks retreated to the Western Regions, leaving just the Qinglong Temple.

"Before they left, the eminent monks had told us to pay close attention to the state of Sangpo, and report immediately if any abnormality happened."

It seems as if Buddhism cares more about Sangpo than the royal family of the Great Feng.

Um, The first Jianzheng is a first-rank expert. So saying that the world will descend to chaos isn't wrong. After all, First Ranks are pinnacle experts.

"This poor monk only knows this. Do you have anything else to ask?"

"I'm done."

Abbot Panshu nodded, and his body suddenly disappeared, as if it had been edited out of the picture.

Xu Qi'an's eyes widened, and he thought enviously, *This technique is a little handsome.*

After the conversation was over, The sun was shining brightly, and it was almost noon. Xu Qi'an and the others stayed at Qinglong Temple to have a vegetarian meal.

"The vegetarian food in Qinglong Temple is quite delicious." Chu Caiwei ate two bowls in one go and was holding the third bowl as she praised with satisfaction.

The white rice in Qinglong Temple was mixed with black rice, millet, and corn. Sesame oil was poured into the mixture while steaming. The rice grains were plump, crystal clear, and fragrant.

The vegetarian dishes were also prepared with great care, and they excelled in colour, flavour, and taste.

Sitting beside her, Xu Qi'an happily watched her eating with such joy, and said with a smile, "Female Donor, don't eat by yourself, this little monk is here for alms."

Chu Caiwei protected the bowl, and rolled her eyes, before she said angrily, "Is there any difference in what you and I are eating?"

Xu Qi'an shook his head, "Little monk doesn't do fasts."

"So?"

"Little monk eats fast."

...

Everyone was quite satisfied with the vegetarian dishes at Qinglong Temple. Their only regret was the absence of White Phoenix meat to nourish their body.

Master Hengqing, who was also the Courtyard head, sent everyone over to the gate of the temple. The city people tricked him too hard, and so in anger he didn't speak to them the entire time.

Xu Qi'an suddenly remembered something, and asked, "Master, Do you know a monk named Hengyuan?"

Master Hengqing's face quickly changed colour.

Chapter 126. The Eldest Princess's Summon

Courtyard Master Hengqing asked falteringly, "How does Sir know?"

It was Xu Xinnian who told this dharma name to him. That day when Xu Xinnian went to the welfare home to find Number Six, he found that the latter had already left. When Xu Erlang told Xu

Qi'an this, he said: "The official told me that Master Hengyuan has left, supposedly to investigate leads about his sect-brother."

"How I know isn't important, I'm the one asking you." Xu Qi'an's expression was serious. To this monk who wouldn't co-operate without violence, he didn't deign to give any manners.

In one-to-one combat, this courtyard master of the Qinglong Temple could most likely wipe the floor with him.

But Xu Qi'an had his brothers too, as well as the royal court behind his back.

Master Hengyuan hesitated for a moment, before saying "Hengyuan is a warrior monk of the temple. His personality is rash, and he is quick to anger. Because of his actions, he often would accidentally harm other brothers, and be punished by the abbot. Last year, he was expelled from Qinglong Temple."

So SIX is a Qinglong Temple monk... a Warrior Monk? No wonder his body is as solidly built as a Lu Zhishen... SIX said his sect-brother had been captured by traffickers... is the brother that SIX is trying to find Henghui?

But Henghui eloped with Princess Pingyang... but, Henghui stole Qinglong Temple's magic item, yet that magic item was found on the Jinwu Guard Baihu Zhou Chixiong's body. Does this imply, that Master Henghui has already suffered some unforeseen accident?

Or, he is also involved in the Sangpo Case. If the latter is true, what was his aim? Also, where did Princess Pingyang go?

This trip to the Qinglong Temple had been more fruitful than he first expected.

...

Even though he deliberately tried to rush along the way, urging his horse onwards, he only returned back to the Nightwatchers Constabulary over two hours later.

Xu Qi'an let his group rest, before shutting his door, and starting to analyse and summarise the new information gained today.

Then, he took out the Earth Book, and wrote: 【THREE: Is there still no news of SIX?】

No one responded.

After a long time, Jinlian Daozhang jumped out to claw back some respect for everyone: 【NINE: Not yet.】

Xu Qi'an astutely noticed, that Six may have found out something, or have fallen into a dangerous situation, otherwise he couldn't have gone so long without responding.

【THREE: Jinlian Daozhang, have you still not located that Earth Book fragment?】

【NINE: Perhaps it has been hidden by some sort of magic.】

【TWO: Why does the big baldie always get into trouble?】

Two butted in.

【NINE: All this time he was investigating how his brother had disappeared. Perhaps, he has suffered retribution from the powers behind the Earl Pingyuan.】

No, he had found a lead... but the result is the same. No matter what, SIX has gotten into big trouble.

【FOUR: If the Earth Book fragment has fallen into an outsider's hands, then we can only be like before, and not send any messages.】

【TWO: If it's fallen into the Earth Sect's hands, then all of us could face danger.】

Everyone in the Heaven and Earth Society felt anxious, as well as mounting stress.

Not only were they worried about Six's safety, but if they were to stop sending messages the hard-fought information exchange forum the Heaven and Earth Society had built up would be dead in all but name.

In the worst case, if in the eventuality the fragment falls to the Earth Sect, then even if they were not scared of an average Earth Sect daoist, facing the sect leader would be a different matter.

Numbers One and Three would be alright; the Earth Sect would not dare fight into the capital, but everyone else would be in danger.

【TWO: Oh yeah, THREE can help.】

【FOUR: Right, if THREE can use his connections at the Cloud Deer Academy and secretly help Jinlian Daozhang, then the difficulty in finding SIX would be much lowered.】

Unconsciously, the Heaven and Earth Society began to rely more on Three, than the always lurking One.

For anything to do with the Great Feng capital, the first person they thought of was Number Three.

...Why do I feel like I'm being used by everybody?

SIX's identity and status was first found out by me. If I were to spread this out now, then the risk of being exposed would be great. I need to create a time difference... mn, unless the Heaven and Earth Society all know of SIX's background.

【THREE: Do you know SIX's background? Apart from being a Buddhist disciple that is.】

【TWO: Nope, SIX called himself a wandering Buddhist, and planned to stay in the Capital for a long time.】

SIX is pretending to be an outsider... mm, this monk's intelligence has to be stronger than Lu Zhishen!

Xu Qi'an made a plan, writing: 【You guys don't need to worry about this matter, I'll consult with Jinlian Daozhang. I'm clearer on SIX's status than anyone else here. Daozhang, tonight could you come over to mine? I have a few things to discuss with you.】

“!!!”

Seeing Three's words, the Heaven and Earth Society members felt their blood mysteriously run cold, a feeling like a sword was hanging over them.

*Number Three has figured out SIX's identity. From his words, he seems to have some knowledge over SIX's situation? They've clearly only had brief interactions... indeed, all the scholars of the Cloud Deer Academy are very capable... * Two thought with some trepidation.

*THREE's not bad. He joined the latest, yet his display of skill, cunning, and ingenuity makes one speechless. I look forward to the day I return to the capital and can meet him. I can learn much from this person... * Number Four felt genuine appreciation.

【FIVE: Woah, then whatever you do don't investigate my identity, otherwise I'll be very angry.】

Five immediately threw out what was in her heart.

【ONE: THREE, as for the Sangpo Case, have you any more exact information?】

【THREE: I've not been watching the Sangpo Case these few days.】

Seeing this, One retreated back below the water.

Arranging a time with the Daoist Jinlian, Xu Qi'an left the side hall, and immediately went to the Tower of Noble Spirit, asking after Wei Yuan.

In the well-lit tea room, Wei Yuan sat alone in front of the table, playing Go, his left hand against his right, as if performing a lonely one-man play.

Wei Yuan didn't even raise his head, laughing “Playing half a life of Go, again and again I fought and lost, and lost and fought, until eventually I climbed in skill, and beat national master after national master. Unknowingly, I could not find any more opponents to play against.”

Last time when you played against the Jianzheng, didn't you draw? Xu Qi'an lampooned.

“But outside of the go board, the number of Opponents I have is enough to make one's head ache.” Wei Yuan put down a counter, and rubbed his temples,

“What is it?”

“Your subordinate wishes to report the progress in the case to Duke Wei.” Pausing, Xu Qi'an continued, “Yesterday at dawn, the Taikang County Magistrate Magistrate Zhao was silenced whilst in his cell. At this time the Prefecture Constabulary has not yet announced this.

“The way Magistrate Zhao died was strange; there was no poison, no wounds, and it looked completely natural.”

Wei Yuan’s expression suddenly froze. After a few seconds, with flashing eyes, he asked “What do you think of this?”

“Your subordinate has looked through the records, and discovered that the only ones able to do something like this, save the Daoist Yin Spirit, would be the Church of the Warlock God.”

Xu Qi’an drew in a deep breath: “The Sangpo Case involves the Yao and the Church of the Warlock God. Your subordinate has racked his brains, thinking who in court, apart from that person, could conspire with these two powers simultaneously?”

Thud! Wei Yuan’s palm fell on the go board, as all the stones trembled. With sharp eyes he stared at Xu Qi’an, “Leaving here, you may not say this to anyone.”

Xu Qi’an quickly lowered his head, explaining “But, but your subordinate can’t really investigate further...”

“You are dismissed.” Wei Yuan said coldly.

“Yes sir!” Xu Qi’an left the tea room.

Hearing Xu Qi’an’s footsteps slowly disappear, Wei Yuan methodically tidied up his go pieces, and washed the teapot. Changing to a robe of azure, he came to the head of the stairs, and ordered the clerk on duty:

“Prepare a carriage, this official wishes to enter the palace.”

...

Xu Qi’an could only curse that he had no cigarettes; he could only sit there and think. He listened to Lyu Qing and the three Silver Gongs talk about the case, his own mind wandering elsewhere.

The Zhenbei King is far in the marches, and I can’t exactly run over there to investigate. Furthermore, I don’t even dare to, unless His Majesty personally issues a decree, a gold token would not be able to work a smidgen on that god.

Far in the marches... heh, he has himself a perfect alibi alright.

But there are no perfect crimes in the world. As long as they were done, then there must be cases, the crucial thing is if I can catch these cases or not... mn, the Zhenbei King isn’t in the capital, but he needs a messenger, and that messenger must be someone in Court.

The Zhenbei King lead he could not investigate for now, because Wei Yuan didn’t want to help him. If Wei Yuan could personally get a royal decree, then there would be no problem.

Fortunately. a cunning rabbit never has one hole, and a clever person never has just one path.

The trip to the Qinglong Temple wasn’t done in vain; the temple’s Master Henghui is an avenue of entry. But to continue on from this entry point, he would have to find Six.

This was why Xu Qi’an wanted to meet the Daoist Jinlian in the night.

“Thud thud...”

The sound of knocking interrupted Lyu Qing and the three Silver Gongs’ discussion. They instinctively frowned, and looked outside.

The silent Zhu Guangxiao stood by the door, “Ningyan, the eldest princess is asking after you.”

Lyu Qing and the others looked towards Xu Qi’an.

What does Huaqing want with me... does she miss me? Aiya, didn’t we just meet yesterday? It seems to be one of those one day apart is like three autumns long!

The extremely beautiful, cold, graceful woman appeared inside Xu Qi’an’s mind, alongside those mighty breasts that could be rested on the table.

Clearly her appearance was cold like a celestial, yet her body was that of a seductive demoness.

...

The imperial gardens.

Curtains hung down on all sides of the pavilion, blocking out the cold winter wind. The fire from the charcoal stove warmed the inside.

A Daoist-robed Emperor Yuanjing and an azure-cloaked Wei Yuan were playing Go.

One of them was an emperor, yet he rarely wore a dragon robe.

One of them was a servant that supervised the many officials, yet always wore an azure cloak.

Compared to these two old folks with their unique mannerisms, His Highness the young crown prince’s clothes had not one lapel out of place, as he stood respectfully behind Emperor Yuanjing.

“Yesterday, the national teacher refined a batch of golden pills, later we will send someone to give you one.”

Emperor Yuanjing twirled the go stone in his hand, looking for a long time, and shamelessly took three black pieces from the board, laughing “One golden pill for three pieces, is not unreasonable?”

Wei Yuan nodded, “Not unreasonable.”

They played another few moves, and Wei Yuan smilingly took six of Emperor Yuanjing’s white pieces, “Your Majesty’s camp is rather disorganised, your servant will help you clear it up.”

Emperor Yuanjing was expressionless, saying lightly “These years, the one we have relied on the most is still you, Wei Yuan. We often think that if you hadn’t entered the palace, and gone the righteous path of the imperial examination, the Empire will have gained a new tailor, and we wouldn’t be worrying over these scattered matters.”

Wei Yuan’s expression suddenly froze, and then immediately returned to normal, smiling “Is your servant not doing Your Majesty’s bidding anyway?”

His Highness the Crown Prince’s brows were furrowed, as he stared intently at the go board.

Not because his father and Wei Yuan’s war on the go board was very exciting or brilliant, but because he was chewing over their words.

He felt as if he was looking at flowers in mist, seeing, but also not seeing.

Of the two people that sat in the pavilion, one had focused on Daoist cultivation for twenty years, yet still firmly grasped the balance of power in court, his Emperor's heart still pure as ever. The other controlled the Nightwatchers Constabulary as a eunuch, skilled in civil and military stratagems, making countless scholars burst into cold sweat.

Their conversation must have value, very subtle value.

As the crown prince fell into a reverie, he heard Emperor Yuanjing say "How is the Sangpo Case going? The dossiers handed in by the Ministry of Law and the Prefecture Office are all a load of rubbish. We remember, that the lead investigator of the Nightwatchers is that criminal Bronze Gong, surnamed Xu, right?"

Chapter 127. Huaiqing: Me or Lin'an, You can only choose one of us

"Xu Qi'an." Wei Yuan enunciated clearly, his expression serious.

Emperor Yuanjing obviously didn't bother to remember the name of a small bronze gong. He looked at Wei Yuan, surprised that the powerful eunuch said the name of a bronze gong with such solemnity.

"He's a talent. He was the one who found about the connection between the Lieutenant and Zhou Chixiong, and was also the one who pointed out the source of the gunpowder." Emperor Yuanjing took a sip of tea, looking down at the go board, simultaneously making a move and continuing:

"So many days later, what's his progress like? I heard from Eunuch Liu that the kid has been leaving early and returning late. The recording eunuchs couldn't find him at all."

"He has indeed found something." Wei Yuan continued along the topic, "The magistrate Zhao of Taikang County died in the Constabulary dungeon in the early hours of yesterday."

Emperor Yuanjing nodded along, "Governor Chen had already reported this matter."

Wei Yuan continued, "His death was natural. He hadn't been injured, poisoned, or suffocated, nor had any other external means been used on him. This is either the work of a Yin Soul of the Dao Sect or a Warlock from the Northeast."

Thud... The white piece in Yuanjing's hands fell to the chessboard.

The emperor with thick black hair and wrinkles at the corners of his eyes remained silent for a moment. Then, he picked up the fallen piece with a smile, threw it in the chess case, and said

"Playing for so many years, We haven't won even once. How boring."

Wei Yuan got up and bowed.

Emperor Yuanjing then turned his head to look at the crown prince, and asked, "We had heard that the Spirit Dragon went berserk the day before yesterday and threw off Lin'an into the lake."

The crown prince bowed and replied, "At the time, Lin'an was riding the Spirit Dragon to play on the water, when Huaiqing whistled to distract it, only then did it throw Lin'an into the water."

The crown prince and Princess Lin'an were born of the same mother, and as her full brother, him about Huaiqing bullying her like this was perfectly normal.

A grounded statement, but inside he leant towards Lin'an. In his father's eyes, this was a type of "simplicity".

The crown prince continued, "But I have been thinking of one thing, that I still haven't been able to figure out."

Emperor Yuanjing nodded, and said, "The Spirit Dragon's reaction was too extreme."

Except for the Emperor, the Spirit Dragon treated the Princes and Princesses Royal equally, even the Crown Prince.

Crown Prince or not, they were fundamentally the same before they truly ascended to the Honor of Nine and Five.[^1]

"There's even more, Father." the crown prince said, "Not only did the Spirit Dragon throw away Lin'an, but it also swam quite excitedly towards Huaiqing. It even bumped its head against the shore while urging Huaiqing to ride."

Emperor Yuanjing's pupils suddenly became sharp, as he stared at the crown prince, "Did Huaiqing ride?"

The crown prince shook his head, "What's strange, was that the Spirit Dragon resisted Huaiqing and forced her back when she was about to ride. it"

Hearing this, Emperor Yuanjing frowned, thought for a moment, and said, "Come with us. We will be taking a look at Spirit Dragon."

Emperor Yuanjing left in his dragon chariot.

The crown prince and Wei Yuan followed him. Before getting on the palanquin, Wei Yuan asked casually, "Your Highness, who else was there at the time besides Princess Huaiqing?"

The eunuch beside him lifted the curtain of the palanquin, but the crown prince didn't get in, instead answering Wei Yuan, "Coincidentally, The Bronze Gong under Duke Wei was also there."

Xu Qi'an... Wei Yuan stilled.

For the crown prince, a bronze gong was not someone he would be concerned about. He had remembered him purely because of the excellent half-poem.

If not, Huaiqing did have numerous subordinates, the crown prince didn't bother with irrelevant details.

As he thought, the crown prince opened the curtain, only to find that Wei Yuan was still standing.

"Won't Duke Wei be coming?"

Wei Yuan finally came to, and also entered the palanquin.

The crown prince still didn't put down the curtain, and said smilingly, "However, the bronze gong is pretty interesting. I would have never thought that a bronze gong would have such poetic talent. That day, when we held a banquet by the lake, he wrote a poem on the spot to relieve Huaiqing's trouble."

The crown prince means to tell me that the bronze gong under me is under Princess Huaiqing's command... Wei Yuan smiled indifferently. But, the last statement aroused his interest. Raising the curtain, he asked, "What poem did he write?"

Whether "On the road ahead, surely will be friends dear and true; Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you?", or "Delicate, tilting branches reflected on clear and shallow water; its subtle fragrance drifts with the rising moon at dusk.". They were all masterpieces in the eyes of Wei Yuan, who had been exposed to a lot of poems and books.

These two hundred years, every scholar of the Great Feng will remember that talented poet.

The crown prince recited, loudly, "*Drunk, he knows not if the sky floats in the water; his dream laden boat sailing atop the Milky way.*"

Good poem!! Wei Yuan's eyes lit up, as he was amazed by these two lines.

Silently, the crown prince waited for a while. Sure enough, he heard Wei Yuan questioning from the opposite palanquin, "Where's the second half?"

The crown prince's mouth twitched, as he replied, "There's nothing more."

Nothing more... Wei Yuan fell silent.

Seeing the other party go silent, the crown prince immediately felt happy.

...

Xu Qi'an entered the palace. In the elegant garden belonging to the eldest princess, he saw the eldest daughter of the emperor, who seemed to be lacking a little in the breasts department.[^2] She was wearing a beautiful palace dress, decorated with red plum blossoms on a white background.

She had styled her hair into the popular hair bun, with gorgeous jewellery inserted to complement her charming and beautiful face.

After Princess Huaiqing had her maids prepare tea, she smiled and asked, "How's the case progressing?"

She should be asking about the results of investigating Qinglong Temple... Xu Qi'an said, "I have indeed found some clues."

Just yesterday, we had worked together in the Wen Yuan Pavilion to research the rise and fall of the Baota Temple and its current inheritors. The eldest princess should be asking about Qinglong Temple.

Hearing him, Princess Huaiqing's eyes lit up, as she raised expectant eyes toward Xu Qi'an.

This bronze gong hadn't disappointed her till now, considering his top quality case handling ability and observation skills.

In the beginning, when she had recommended him to the Nightwatchers, the eldest princess had the idea of making him her subordinate. But she expected the process to be: Observation, Hinting, Helping, and Joining.

Unexpectedly, Xu Qi'an was very flexible and cunning and finished the last step way ahead of schedule.

“When the Lieutenant Case happened, I used the Qi Watching technique to observe Zhou Chixiong. At that time, he didn't show any sort of abnormality. Only recently, I realized that the Qi Watching Technique had been blocked by a special magic item.

“I ruled out the few such magical instruments in the Sitianjian and the palace. After some investigations, I found that the Qinglong Temple had a magical instrument that could hide one's aura.

"Still, It isn't certain that the magic item with Zhou Chixiong belongs to the Qinglong Temple."

The eldest princess asked, "Is the magic item still in Qinglong Temple?"

Xu Qi'an shook his head, "It's already been lost. Your subordinate was about to report this matter. About a year ago, a monk named Henghui in the Qinglong Temple awakened a heart for the mortal world, and eloped with a female pilgrim, stealing that magic item in the process."

The eldest princess immediately said, "Eloping is eloping, but why steal the magic item?"

The woman was smart and immediately pointed out the crux of the matter. Xu Qi'an said, "This matter needs to be investigated, and requires the Eldest Princess's help."

"My help?" Delicate eyebrows were raised, as she was also surprised.

"Does Your Highness know Princess Pingyang?" Xu Qi'an's words sounded like lightning in the princess's head, as her jade-like cold face showed emotion for the first time.

"Is this true?" Her voice trembled, and her eyes focused on Xu Qi'an.

"This is what Abbot Panshu of Qinglong Temple had revealed to your subordinate. We could only verify its truthfulness after investigation."

Boldly assume and carefully verify. He would not believe anything without any evidence.

Princess Huaqing didn't speak for a long time, as the hall fell into silence. Breaking the quietness, She sighed softly,

“Pingyang is the daughter of King Yu's main consort, and also my cousin. You have already met my third brother. He has always regarded himself as a scholar. Unlike my other siblings, he was taught literacy by Uncle King Yu.

"Uncle is an erudite and talented scholar. He had once studied under Great Scholar Zhang Shen and is proficient in the art of war. He has even been an official at the Ministry of War. There have even been rumours of him entering the cabinet and competing for the position of Prime Minister."

Impossible... Xu Qi'an couldn't believe it, *Couldn't only scholars enter the Grand Secretariat? Besides, The Prime Minister has more power than even Wei Yuan. Could Emperor Yuanjing rest easy having a royal become the Prime Minister?*

However, Xu Qi'an knew that he couldn't lay any praise on his historical knowledge, and he didn't know anything about the situation at the court. So, He didn't refute it on the spot.

"Uncle has the support of the Meritorious Aristocrat bloc. There have been Meritorious Aristocrats at the helm of the cabinet, as Prime Minister. The examples aren't singular either." Princess Huaqing explained.

"Over the years, Since the founding of Great Feng, the aristocrats have gradually been squeezed to the sides, and they have long since lost the ability to compete for the position of Prime Minister."

So, King Yu is the general pushed on by the Aristocrat Bloc, isn't he? Does this involve the struggle between the Civil Official Bloc and the Meritorious Aristocrat Bloc?

Some thoughts flickered in Xu Qi'an's head.

Princess Huaqing continued, "Royal Consort Yu was a talented woman. It's a pity that she only gave birth to a single daughter for Uncle King Yu. Uncle is someone who isn't easily swayed in love, as hadn't established another Royal Consort till now. He also regards the child left behind as a treasure.

"However, Pingyang disappeared a year ago. At that time, Father had dispatched the royal guard to search all over the city. Even the Arcanists of Sitianjian were dispatched, but they didn't find any traces of Pingyang.

"This incident dealt a great blow to King Yu. He became bedridden not long after, as he suffered from depression. The Arcanists were also helpless, as heart diseases are hard to heal."

Xu Qi'an continued "eating popcorn", as he tried to digest the shocking news.

The royal guard had searched all over the city, with the Arcanists cooperating. But still, Princess Pingyang's whereabouts wasn't found... Therefore, that magical item was needed. Otherwise, It would have been difficult to move Princess Pingyang out of the Imperial Capital.

No wonder Henghui wanted to steal it. The situation demanded so.

The two didn't speak for a long time, thinking along with each other. After some time had passed, Princess Huaqing sighed, "You continue to investigate. If you encounter any troubles and obstacles that you can't bypass, you can come to me."

Xu Qi'an nodded.

"I heard that Lin'an looked for you yesterday."

Xu Qi'an found the princess's pupils suddenly turning dark, all of a sudden.

It sounded like: Did your ex-girlfriend come to look for you yesterday?

Xu Qi'an said helplessly, "Yes, Princess Lin'an insisted that I took refuge in her and work as a bull for her. She even gave me a jade amulet."

Her Highness was still expressionless, "Why didn't you reject her?"

Xu Qi'an said, wryly smiling, "Princess Lin'an said that she would accuse me of molesting her if I didn't agree."

Is this enough of a reason? You princesses want to do something. I'm just some small fry. Can I even do something?

Xu Qi'an thought that the eldest princess was a humane, tolerant, and considerate mature woman, and wouldn't say anything because of such a trivial matter.

The result...

The eldest princess mercilessly exposed him, "Intelligent as you are, You should be able to see the threat in that kind of bluff."

The woman looks frosty on the outside, but she's pure domineering at the core... Xu Qi'an looked at the eldest princess in surprise, and quickly lowered his head, "I understand. I will return the jade token to Princess Lin'an, and cut off contact with her."

"I'll exclusively serve your highness from now on."

I swear to leave aside Biaobiao's graciousness and serve you as a cow would.

The eldest princess nodded in satisfaction.

At the time, a noise came from the outside.

"Second Princess, you, you can't go inside..."

"Get lost!"

Amidst the sounds, a figure in a bright red dress broke into the hall. The oval-faced Princess Lin'an glanced at the hall, only to see her loyal dog going after its previous owner again.

Immediately, she became furious as her brows stood upright. Her eyes widened, and she angrily said, "Running dog, You dare to betray me. Have you forgotten who you are?"

Sighing inwardly, Xu Qi'an subconsciously looked at the eldest princess, hoping that she would come out and settle things for him.

Who knew that the eldest princess was pure darkness on the inside, she looked at him, sporting a half smile, her eyes indicating: Choose One.

Chapter 128. Opportunity From All Directions

Xu Qi'an felt rather fucked over.

Yesterday, when he took the second princess's jade pendant, he knew that one day in the future he would have to face this situation. He didn't expect that it would be so quick.

If this situation happened in his past life, then he would most likely respond with one sentence: Only little children do multiple choice questions!

At the most he would get two slaps in return.

But in this setting, he may suffer two bowl-sized scars.

"This subordinate came over to ask the eldest princess about a question, related to the Sangpo Case." Xu Qi'an turned, facing Biaobiao and clasping his fists, implying that he had official business.

But he overestimated the second princess's intelligence, or underestimated her headstrong nature. She put her hands on her hips, and snorted coldly "Why didn't you come to ask me?"

Hearing this, Princess Huaqing immediately laughed coldly, “Lin’an’s biggest strength is her self-confidence.”

Even an idiot could hear the mockery.

The eldest princess is taking fire for me... Xu Qi’an let out a sigh of relief, *you fight, just pretend I’m invisible.*

The second princess and her sister had bad blood between them; since they were little they fought, and even up to now they fought both openly and secretly, neither backing down.

“Huaqing, Xu Qi’an is my person, he’s accepted my jade pendant, and has already agreed to work for me.” The second princess, still with her hands on her hips, laughed coldly, “When a fine eagle finds a tree to roost, does it ever hear the blathering of stingy people? If one wants a horse to run, why not give that horse grass to eat? I’m much more generous.”

Seeing the eldest princess not speak, she walked to Xu Qi’an’s side, her beautiful eyes violently cutting into Xu Qi’an, before continuing to proclaim her authority, “If you want to use my people, that’s fine, but you must get my agreement. Today this princess’s mood is not good, and I don’t want you to summon my subordinate.”

Princess Huaqing took a sip of tea, and did not reply, smiling, seeming very confident in herself.

The second princess hated most this posture, as she gave the eldest princess a sharp stare, then saying to Xu Qi’an, “Are you still not leaving with us?”

Xu Qi’an did not move, not looking at the second princess or the eldest princess, “Your Highnesses, this subordinate is a Nightwatcher, and we are loyal to His Majesty.”

“Shut up!” The two princesses exclaimed simultaneously.

“...”

Xu Qi’an understood now. The two princesses’ strife was so immense, and it wasn’t even single-sided: The second princess Biaobiao liked to provoke the eldest princess, and the domineering eldest princess also liked to challenge her on everything.

He was just a small lowly simp stuck in the middle.

This was like two rich family daughters fighting over a toy, and then letting the toy pick who it was going to follow.

Meeting the two princesses’ gazes, Xu Qi’an let out a slow breath, and looked towards Lin’an: “Please may the second princess forgive me, but your subordinate has public matters to discuss with the eldest princess.”

His words were very tactful, but in reality he had already given his intention; he had picked the eldest princess.

The second princess suddenly bit her lip, her peach blossom eyes becoming watery. She looked deeply at Xu Qi’an for a moment, before turning and leaving.

She'd lost again. Again she'd lost all face in front of Huaqing. The latter sat proudly, letting a small Bronze Gong cut away her pride.

The proud and arrogant Princess Lin'an had never felt so chagrined, and had never lost so badly before.

She left in silence.

Xu Qi'an pretended not to see the second princess's departure, continuing to talk calmly for a while with Huaqing. He suddenly touched his chest, seeming to think of something, and laughed helplessly,

"Aiya, I haven't returned the jade pendant to the second princess. Then, your subordinate should take his leave?"

The eldest princess nodded agreement, her spirits high.

Xu Qi'an leisurely left the courtyard, and apprehended one of the guards by the door: "Where has the second princess gone to?"

The guard pointed in a direction.

Xu Qi'an, like a wild dog free from his leash, rushed in pursuit, and after a few minutes, he saw the second princess's fiery red figure, leading two palace maids, walking quickly, her shoulders trembling slightly.

"Second princess, please wait." Xu Qi'an caught up to them, and shouted.

Princess Lin'an heard it, but did not respond, rather walking even quicker, her hips swaying from side to side, her dress hems flapping behind her.

Xu Qi'an quickly caught up again, and blocked their path. He hadn't even started speaking, when he was briefly stunned: "Your Highness is crying?"

Your mental fortitude is a little too weak no...?

Princess Lin'an immediately turned her head away, giving him a beautiful side profile, saying coldly, "Running dog, what are you doing following this princess, are you trying something sinister?"

Her eyes were red and swollen, tear streaks still visible on her snow-white cheeks, having clearly cried in distress.

However, it made her peach-blossom eyes ever more enticing.

Seeing that princess Lin'an didn't continue walking, nor did she call for anybody, Xu Qi'an immediately felt glee, feeling that he could still save the situation.

In a serious tone, he said "Your subordinate is loyal and devoted to Your Highness, and not to anyone else."

Princess Lin'an vigorously turned her head back round, laughing coldly, "Xu Qi'an, do you think we can be played with?"

This loyal dog of Huaqing, double-dealing under the table, still wanted to have his feet in two boats, hateful behaviour.

If not for his talent in poetry, if not that Huaqing paid him attention, she would never have bothered with this wretched man.

Princess Lin'an's opinion of Xu Qi'an had sunk to the bottom of the valley.

"Perhaps, in Your Highness's eyes, this subordinate is a shameless dog that seeks opportunity from all directions," Xu Qi'an sighed, "Your subordinate cannot argue against this. Please may Your Highness take back this jade pendant. Such a good jade pendant would not suit being put in my grave."

The second princess had had enough of Xu Qi'an, and was just about to take back the jade pendant, when she heard that last sentence. Briefly dazed, she blurted out "What did you say?"

Xu Qi'an did not respond. He had his head lowered, holding the jade pendant out with both hands, saying "The second princess is generous, never before has any important person wanted to give this subordinate their personal pendant, your subordinate is immeasurably thankful. The second princess treats people with sincerity, how could your subordinate not know what is good or bad for himself."

He sighed mournfully, and raised the jade pendant higher, "Perhaps I have no destiny with the second princess, please take it back."

The second princess was slightly moved, but she didn't forgive him. After all, as Emperor Yuanjing's favourite princess, she had heard enough flattery.

But this man's expression seemed rather genuine, his tone of voice also sincere, and so the second princess was willing to hear his explanation. She said "What did you mean by put in your grave?"

Xu Qi'an laughed bitterly, "I originally thought the second princess had investigated me..."

I really hadn't... Princess Lin'an felt somewhat guilty, but then suddenly thought of something, saying in shock "The waist chop sentence?"

That day when Huaqing recommended him, Lin'an was also present.

From what Huaqing said, because he had attacked a superior, he was sentenced to be chopped at the waist... Princess Lin'an pursed her lips, and took the opportunity to wipe away the tear tracks on her face. Her tone became softer, but the little temper was still there, as she hmped "What does this have to do with Huaqing?"

"The eldest princess is very interested in the Sangpo Case, and wishes to know about the newest developments. She said that as long as I report regularly, she would agree to plead my case to His Majesty after the investigation is over, no matter if I had enough merit for atonement or not." Xu Qi'an earnestly looked at the second princess,

"So your subordinate thought, Your Highness has treated me with earnestness, but I am a guilty person, and so am unable to repay the second princess's grace. Thus, I wanted to side with the eldest princess for now, and only after I have escaped my crime, serve Your Highness fully!"

If earnestness could be turned into energy, then the earnestness in Xu Qi'an's eyes would be like an ocean tide, softening the second princess's heart greatly.

She said angrily "Why don't you talk to me? His Majesty dotes on me the most, I can plead your case. Would this not be better than Huaqing?"

As she said this, she saw a multitude of emotions flit over Xu Qi'an's face, looking touched, also looking shocked.

She then heard this small bronze gong say with trembling voice "Your Highness... really would be willing to plead to His Majesty for me, a small bronze gong?"

So he thought that I wouldn't want to help him, so he put Huaqing as his saving grace...

Princess Lin'an felt both angered and amused. In reality, those earlier were just empty words, but up to this point now, she couldn't really change course, and so nodded,

"Naturally. We do not mistreat our subordinates."

Xu Qi'an stared at her for a long time, before clasping his fists, saying solemnly word by word, "Your Highness, your subordinate right now only wants to buy a plot of land."

Lin'an didn't understand, exclaiming "A plot of land?"

Xu Qi'an replied seriously "The land I stand on with unwavering loyalty!"

Princess Lin'an was dazed, as she felt touched. No one had ever said this to her before.

In an instant, all the hatred she had towards Xu Qi'an evaporated. If earlier she had just wanted to fight over a toy with Huaqing, now she genuinely felt that having a subordinate like him was not a bad thing really.

But thinking how this small bronze gong had earlier just driven her to tears, she snorted, and softly scolded him "Running dog!"

... Success!

Xu Qi'an silently let out a sigh of relief, feeling a weight being lifted off his shoulders.

Coming to these kinds of two-choose-one situations, he would never think of how to solve the problem, rather thinking of how to solve the person that had created the problem.

The core factor: to separate them, and then solve things one by one.

The eldest princess was a domineering woman, who was also clever, thus in somewhat public circumstances, he must lean towards her side, and give her some face.

The second princess was childish and headstrong, both a punching bag and a surface-level person, an enticing thing that liked to provoke trouble. But her thoughts were shallow, she was a princess spoiled rotten, so even if she had her tempers often, she was easy to coax.

As long as you had a silver tongue, you could turn hatred into love. She was a woman wants to hear sweet words.

Using these two princesses' personalities, Xu Qi'an in his Sura battlefield quickly thought up of a practically perfect stratagem.

Not only did he head off danger, but he also got the second princess to agree to plead his case, buying him insurance for the future.

And he didn't have to spend a single copper coin.

In front of the second princess, Xu Qi'an carefully stowed the jade pendant back into his robe, as if it wasn't a jade pendant, but rather a priceless treasure.

The second princess's gaze instantly became much softer.

"Then, your subordinate will take his leave?" Xu Qi'an planned to get out of there.

"What are you rushing for!" Princess Lin'an snapped, "You are this princess's subordinate, we still have orders for you."

She had chipped off the corner of Huaqing's house, so naturally she must show this off to all her brothers and sisters. Only then would she have face, would she make Huaqing have no face.

"Your Highness's wish is my command." Xu Qi'an said helplessly.

The carefree second princess realised that she didn't have anything to do. Tilting her head, she said "Mn, it's a good day today, and there's no hateful thing Huaqing, this princess wants to go play with the spirit dragon. You follow us, and we'll not need our guards."

...

Emperor Yuanjing stood by the platform, examining the spirit dragon lying by the lake shore. The latter looked back with its two lively, black button-like eyes.

"What's wrong with you? Lin'an has played with you ever since she was young, why did you throw her into the water that day?" Emperor Yuanjing scolded the spirit dragon.

The spirit dragon was an ancient mythical beast, that lived off purple qi. It was different from the Yao, and if one had to find some other creature of the same type, then one could only pick another mythical beast, the Gu God.

The population of spirit dragons was very small, and their lives were very long, having been the beast that had accompanied the many royal families all throughout history.

No matter if it was the Great Feng or an earlier dynasty, they always raised a spirit dragon in their palaces.

"Tsch..."

The spirit dragon lazily snorted, lying by the shore without much energy, not paying much mind to Emperor Yuanjing's scolding.

Its black, button-like eyes looked up at the emperor.

Are you getting on or not?

The crown prince beside him observed the spirit dragon. He remembered that that time it was also lying by the lake shore, though it seemed much more respectful, much more on edge than now?

That time he was far away, and so could not see clearly the spirit dragon's expression and posture, and only had a vague impression. Thus, the crown prince could not be too sure.

The spirit dragon was the water mount of all the emperors in history. In ancient times, the lands of the Yao and Man were not so clearly split as they were now, rather often overlapping.

Thus often there would be people being eaten by Yao, or Yao being hunted down by man.

Mankind was not skilled in the water, and so were helpless against the monsters in the lakes and rivers. Only the human emperor could easily enter the water and slay these monsters.

And the reason he could was because of the spirit dragon, who lived in the water and the air.

Nowadays, the Great Feng's emperor naturally did not have to enter the water and fight with monsters, and so their water mount has now become more of a thing to appreciate.

From when he started Daoist cultivation, Emperor Yuanjing had not looked upon the spirit dragon for a long time. He could not help but think back to the time when he first came to the throne, the feeling of riding the spirit dragon through the rivers of the capital.

"We've not been close to you for many years, you've probably been quite lonely." Emperor Yuanjing sighed, and lightly jumped onto the flat armoured piece on the spirit dragon's back, his hands holding onto the sides.

The spirit dragon let out a long happy cry, as its four limbs moved, its body gracefully winding, taking Emperor Yuanjing frolicking in the lake.

...What a sight! The crown prince gazed at this scene, and thought to one day when he would ride the spirit dragon, his princes and princesses standing by the shore, looking on with admiration.

Just at this time, the spirit dragon frolicking through the water suddenly roared, as if suffering some sort of excitement. It raised its head high, roaring an ear-shattering roar, and simultaneously shaking its neck, throwing Emperor Yuanjing off.

Chapter 129. Fear

The moment the Spirit Dragon threw off Emperor Yuanjing, Several High-rank martial artists by the lake quickly reacted and leaped out like sharp arrows, their feet trampling on the water's surface forming groups of exploding whirlpools.

Emperor Yuanjing stabilised his body in mid-air, the tip of his foot tapping lightly on the water's surface, floating towards shore like a feather.

Although he had given up on martial arts, and had children at a young age due to his status as a royal, he had been practicing Daoism under the guidance of the National Teacher over the years, and had made significant achievements. If he hadn't, his hair wouldn't have turned black again.

Emperor Yuanjing was both angry and surprised. He hadn't expected the Spirit Dragon to treat him this way.

"Roar!"

The Spirit Dragon's anger remained undiminished even after it shook off Emperor Yuanjing. It knocked off an approaching high-rank martial artist and sent him flying. Qi burst out in mid-air, swaying the water of the entire lake.

The Imperial Guards moved to subdue the Spirit Dragon, who went mad for no reason.

"Don't hurt it." Emperor Yuanjing shouted.

Boom boom boom... More than a dozen jets of water rushed up from the surface, accurately hitting the guards who were floating or stepping in the lake. They had already stepped into the Bronze Skin Realm and were resistant to physical damage, but they were smashed to a sorry state by the water jets, unable to encircle the Spirit Dragon.

The Spirit Dragon was good at controlling water, and extremely fierce in the lake.

However, no one expected the Spirit Dragon to raise its head high, roar, and leave the lake to rush towards the shore.

What happened? The Spirit Dragon seems to be stimulated by something... Emperor Yuanjing realized something was up, and said deeply, "Block it!"

ka ka ka ka...

The huge body of the Spirit Dragon rose ashore, smashing slender cedar after cedar. It ran wildly, its sharp claws easily crushing the stone tiles on the ground.

Where is it going?

"Father..."

"Your Majesty."

The crown prince and Wei Yuan rushed over.

Emperor Yuanjing waved his hand, indicating that he was fine.

"Father, what happened to the Spirit Dragon?" The crown prince was panicking, as he had never seen the Spirit Dragon go out of control like this, even in his childhood.

It had a docile personality and treated his several imperial brothers and sisters kindly, and never showed any violent tendencies.

"It's fleeing." His face sullen, Emperor Yuanjing answered in a confident tone.

Spirit Dragon is fleeing? Why did Father describe it as fleeing? What is it fleeing from? Is it even afraid of something?

However, what place could be safer than the Imperial City?

The Crown Prince was puzzled by this. But, Emperor Yuanjing didn't give him a chance to inquire, as he ordered the guards to prepare their horses and chase after Spirit Dragon in the direction it was fleeing.

As a symbol of the orthodoxy of the royal family, the Spirit Dragon, a spirit beast that thrives on purple qi, was not allowed to get lost.

Emperor Yuanjing pursued the paw prints, and the Imperial guards also followed him closely on both sides, fearing that he might fall in an accident.

Not long after, Emperor Yuanjing saw Spirit Dragon on an Archery Tower. Its sharp and hard claws clung to the tower, deeply embedded in the stones.

Its neck swelled, as it let out a forlorn and bitter roar, trying to knock back the experts from the palace who hindered it, while it readied its tail to attack.

The two sides had reached a stalemate. The Spirit Dragon's scale armour was hard and it was hard for swords to leave any marks on it. Its strength in anger couldn't be underestimated as well. The imperial guards were worried about hurting it, and it was difficult to subdue it with bare hands, as well. So, they could only fight while waiting for their colleagues to fetch a magic weapon that could restrain the Spirit Dragon.

Bang bang bang... The Archer Tower continued to crack under the whipping from Spirit Dragon's tail and finally collapsed.

Tens of Imperial Guards rushed forward.

Emperor Yuanjing breathed a sigh of relief after seeing the scene and was about to remind them to not hurt the royal spiritual beast.

Before he could speak, however, Spirit Dragon rose to resist, overturned the imperial guards, and rushed towards a particular direction with a clear goal in sight.

Looking in that direction, Emperor Yuanjing's pupils shrank violently.

He saw a red dress, and his beautiful lovable daughter, Princess Lin'an, who he loved the most.

At that moment, Princess Lin'an was with two court ladies, and a Bronze Gong, who was wearing a Nightwatcher uniform.

"Protect Lin'an!" Emperor Yuanjing shouted.

...

Motherfucker, this is docile?

Xu Qi'an hadn't expected to encounter such an incident at all. He had been conversing with the second princess on the way, using the conversation skills he had accumulated over his previous life. He amused the princess with his humorous style and interesting word choices, enhancing their friendship.

He was thinking of sending her to the small lake where Spirit Dragon stayed and playing with her for a while. After that, He would go back to handling the case by himself.

But he came across this matter...

Just as he was about to say, "Princess, This place is dangerous. Your subordinate will now escort you back." when Spirit Dragon came over.

The spiritual beast was quite powerful, its strength not lower than a sixth-rank martial artist. Xu Qi'an wanted to escape, but he found the second princess freezing up in fright upon laying his eyes on her.

Her charming round face had gone pale, her eyes frozen, and she was unable to think out of fear.

Xu Qi'an looked from the corner of his eye, seeing the experts from the court flying towards him. He also saw Emperor Yuanjing galloping towards him on horseback, and also the dazzling glossy black button-like eyes of Spirit Dragon.

It was like a frightened child throwing itself into its father's arms upon finding him.

Hm?

Did this guy sense my arrival and come out to find me?

Then, Xu Qi'an understood the Spirit Dragon as a beast with wisdom.

Aside from joy, Spirit Dragon's eyes also showed fear from within. But, the time didn't allow him to think deeper about the matter.

The ground trembled, as Spirit Dragon tried to pounce.

Xu Qi'an immediately decided. Without hesitation, He stood in front of Princess Lin'an, placing his tall and straight back in front of her.

Xu Qi'an held down the handle of his sabre with a hand, slightly bent his knees, calmed down all his emotions, and flicked his thumbs after accumulating force for some time.

"Clang..." Alongside the crisp sound of unsheathing, A thin dark golden line flashed across to cut a deep knife mark, three feet long and two fingers wide.

A shocking scene happened. The frenzied Spirit Dragon slammed back. Its four claws were bent, its toenails ploughed furrows on the ground, as it finally stopped in front of the knife marks.

It doesn't dare step over the line?

The scene was deeply imprinted in Princess Lin'an's heart and was also seen by Emperor Yuanjing, Wei Yuan, and the crown prince.

"Ang!"

Lying on the ground, Spirit Dragon let out a little anxious cry.

Xu Qi'an easily understood its emotions. The Spirit Dragon wanted him to run away. Precisely, run away together with it.

It's very anxious, very scared. It seems to have been threatened by something... But it calms down in front of me... Still, Its fear hasn't weakened a single bit... It wants me to run away with me, or It wants to run away with me... Xu Qi'an gradually formed a guess.

"Don't be afraid. I'm here." Xu Qi'an said.

Thinking Xu Qi'an's words were directed at her, the second princess felt secure.

Hearing Xu Qi'an, the Spirit Dragon lost its anxiousness. Downcast, It let out a listless cry.

At the time, a group of Imperial Guards finally arrived, dragging a large golden net together.

"Whoosh!"

The big net was thrown, covering the three-metre-long beast.

"Tuk tuk tuk..." Emperor Yuanjing rode over to check on Princess Lin'an carefully. Seeing that she was indeed alright, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Father..." Princess Lin'an closed her mouth, trotted to the side of the horse, and took hold of Emperor Yuanjing's sleeve.

Emperor Yuanjing fell easiest to this kind of behaviour and comforted her gently.

Then, the over fifty black-haired Emperor thoroughly observed Xu Qi'an.

"Your subordinate greets Your Majesty." Xu Qi'an bowed and clasped his fists.

The Feng Dynasty had one convenient rule, that except on some special occasions, You only needed to salute when meeting the emperor, without kneeling and kowtowing.

Emperor Yuanjing nodded slightly, "Good job. What's your name?"

"Your Majesty, this subordinate is Xu Qi'an."

Emperor Yuanjing was stunned and looked at him again, still surprised, "You are Xu Qi'an?"

"Yes!" Facing Emperor Yuanjing's puzzled expression, he explained, "I had encountered some difficulties in the investigation of the case, So, I went to the palace to ask the Eldest Princess for some advice."

Emperor Yuanjing didn't continue asking. He nodded, his eyes falling on the sabre in Xu Qi'an's hand, "Show me the sabre."

Xu Qi'an offered the black gold long sabre with both hands.

An imperial guard stepped forward to take it and handed it over to Emperor Yuanjing. The latter looked at it carefully, exclaiming, "A good sword!"

Wei Yuan came over and answered, "It was given by Sir Jianzheng."

Jianzheng? Emperor Yuanjing frowned, probably as he couldn't understand why Jianzheng would give a precious sabre to a small bronze gong.

"Your Majesty, Xu Qi'an is proficient in alchemy and is friends with the Arcanists of Sitianjian. I have once seen him giving a lecture on alchemy." Wei Yuan said.

Xu Qi'an saw a look of surprise in Emperor Yuanjing's eyes. But, the old emperor quickly restrained himself, smiled, and said, "We remember. You had shown some skills in Alchemy in the Silver Tax case."

Emperor Yuanjing handed the sabre to the imperial guard, who returned it to Xu Qi'an.

Wei Yuan is helping to shape an image of a capable minister for me and increase my weight in the emperor's eyes... Wei Yuan, no, he's Daddy Wei from now on! Xu Qi'an was moved.

Princess Lin'an shook the emperor's sleeve, and said softly, "Father, Xu Qi'an saved me. You have to reward him."

"He should indeed be rewarded." Emperor Yuanjing nodded, stared at Xu Qi'an, and said loudly, "Nightwatcher Xu Qi'an has contributed and saved Princess Lin'an. He shall be rewarded with a thousand taels of gold and five hundred bolts of silk.^[^1]

"Father!" Princess Lin'an was still unwilling. She pointed to Xu Qi'an and said, "He saved your child's life just now, and your child wants to pay him back. I ask you to spare him the death penalty."

Emperor Yuanjing immediately raised a sharp gaze toward Xu Qi'an. Seeing his docile appearance, Emperor Yuanjing restrained the sharpness in his eyes, shook his head, and said, "We have already

given him the opportunity to make meritorious deeds to atone for his crimes. If he solves the Sangpo case, he will naturally be spared the death penalty. An emperor's words are like gold and jade, how could they be changed halfway?"

Lin'an still wasn't convinced, and shouted, "If he doesn't solve the case, He will still be dead. What's the use of awarding him a thousand taels of gold, then?"

Emperor Yuanjing said, helplessly, "I will handle it when the time comes."

He didn't want to say these words in front of Xu Qi'an, in case he would become confident and delay the progress of the investigation.

So, he continued, "The time limit is still half a month. If you can solve the case, You will naturally be spared of the death penalty. If not, even if Lin'an has interceded for you, we will exile you to the frontier even if we don't have you executed. Do you understand?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty!" Xu Qi'an said loudly. He observed Princess Lin'an winking at him playfully, her smile like a blooming flower.

This investment did have a lot of returns. Even if I can't find the mastermind behind the Sangpo case, I don't have to die. I will be exiled at most. I don't have to worry about it, being the servant of three families that I am.

Emperor Yuanjing glanced at the pacified spirit dragon. Breathless, he said angrily, "Drag this beast back to the lake."

Spirit Dragon glanced at Emperor Yuanjing, propped up its body with its paws, and pointed its nose down at Emperor Yuanjing.

"Okay, piss off back by yourself." Emperor Yuanjing shouted at it.

The guards withdrew the big net, and Spirit Dragon went back leisurely by himself.

After Emperor Yuanjing finished taking care of the second princess, he clamped his horse's belly and followed behind Spirit Dragon.

Xu Qi'an silently looked at the back of Emperor Yuanjing.

Before, When Princess Lin'an had pleaded for me, He had pointed a sharp gaze at me... Does he think that I induced Lin'an to do so?

The rumours were correct. Emperor Yuanjing is indeed a person with a strong desire to control... indeed, the emperor who seeks longevity has a strong desire for power.

I'm exhausted... I didn't dare to do anything in front of this type of expert. Even if I put on a look, or changed my expression, they could guess my thoughts... My acting skills were okay then. The expression of sincerity and fear were also pretty good.

...

The high platform, by the lake.

Emperor Yuanjing stood on the bank, speaking in a low voice. Spirit Dragon poked its head out of the water and rested on the edge of the high platform.

One man and one dragon talked for a long time, before Emperor Yuanjing left, still angry.

Wei Yuan went up to Emperor Yuanjing. Observing his gloomy face, he comforted him, "Your Majesty, You don't have to be angry at a beast."

"Hummph, it just doesn't take us seriously anymore." Emperor Yuanjing's anger persisted, "When we talked to it, it ignored me."

Naturally, he hadn't asked for the reason why the Spirit Dragon suddenly went mad.

"The Spirit Dragon won't go mad for no reason at all. Wei Yuan, pass on our order. The defence of the imperial city should be strengthened. No one is allowed to enter or leave the imperial city after the curfew."

Wei Yuan nodded.

Emperor Yuanjing walked in silence for some time, when he suddenly asked, "Why did the beast suddenly stop its anger?"

Wei Yuan shook his head, "Maybe it used up its anger at that time."

He did have a guess in mind, but it was too absurd.

Chapter 130. Auntie, Shall I use Gold to Hurt Your Face, or Silk to Hurt Your Face?

Xu Qi'an?

But although last time the spirit dragon started suddenly being excited, Xu Qi'an was by Huaiqing's side, this time Xu Qi'an wasn't even present.

There must be some other reason for the spirit dragon's craze, yet after so many guards failed to stop it, only when it came to Xu Qi'an did it behave itself again.

This doubt flashed in Wei Yuan's mind, but was quickly discarded again.

He had audited Xu Qi'an's background; absolutely clean, completely ordinary. To rope him in with the spirit dragon would be going a bit too far.

The spirit dragon suddenly calming down could be attributed to "having already vented his anger," or "not wanting to hurt Princess Lin'an".

Perhaps His Majesty also thought as much.

A servant and a ruler slowly walked towards the palace, not riding their palanquins. Emperor Yuanjing suddenly said "The Zhenbei King hasn't returned to the capital in some years, hasn't he."

Wei Yuan's eyes flashed, as he said with a smile "It has been some years."

Emperor Yuanjing nodded, "After spring next year, we'll summon him back. We have also missed him."

...

Xu Qi'an drove the carriage down the wide streets of the inner city, two contingents of armoured soldiers guarding either side.

In the carriage was sat Wei Yuan.

"Duke Wei, what's wrong with that spirit dragon? To raise such a dangerous beast inside the imperial city, are they not afraid it'll hurt somebody?" Xu Qi'an tested him.

Wei Yuan's kindly voice came from within, "The spirit dragon at heart is docile. For non royals, as long as they do not touch it, they will not be attacked."

"Are there no exceptions?" Xu Qi'an asked, trying his best to make his voice calm and collected.

After a while, Wei Yuan said faintly, "No."

... Xu Qi'an fell silent.

The silence carried on for a long while, before Xu Qi'an broke it again: "Duke Wei, I've discovered a few things, making this case ever more of a conundrum. Your subordinate can't quite grasp it all."

"Do speak."

"Today your subordinate went to Qinglong Temple, and learned of a secret. There was a monk in Qinglong Temple, dharma title Henghui. Over a year ago he fell in love with a frequent female pilgrim to the temple, and thus stole a qi-blocking magic item from the temple and eloped with her." Xu Qi'an said, "That female pilgrim is the same Princess Pingyang that has been missing for over a year."

From the carriage came Wei Yuan's low voice, "Why did you not tell me of this when you first made your report."

Because I wanted to first show off to the eldest princess... ah, no, to improve relations... Xu Qi'an went a bit red, and tried to search around for a suitable excuse:

"Before I had hard provable leads, I didn't dare mislead Duke Wei. Only after seeing the eldest princess, did I know that Princess Pingyang eloped, and that this matter could involve the conflict between the aristocrat bloc and the civil officials."

"Your subordinate currently cannot be certain that Princess Pingyang and Henghui have anything to do with the Sangpo case. Even though the Jinwu Guard Baihu Zhou Chixiong had a qi-hiding magic item on his person, he's already escaped the capital, and so who knows if it's the same magic item as the one from Qinglong Temple."

Wei Yuan did not reply.

The carriage arrived at the Nightwatchers Constabulary. Xu Qi'an brought out the small wooden step, and welcomed Wei Yuan down.

Wei Yuan had both hands in his sleeves, and looked at him without much emotion, "Come with me to the Tower of Noble Spirit."

Is he going to scold me? Xu Qi'an followed helplessly, as the two of them entered the tower one after another. Wei Yuan ordered Xu Qi'an to make tea, and he himself stood on the balcony looking at the scenery.

Time passed second by second in silence, until Xu Qi'an called out that the tea was ready.

He really only had to boil water, and steep tea leaves. It was very simple.

Wei Yuan came to the tableside, and glanced down, shaking his head, "The first cup must be discarded. It cannot be drank directly; it is too bitter, and would hide the fragrance of the tea."[^1]

Are you teaching me how to do things?

"Your subordinate is merely a crass person without much experience..." in his mind Xu Qi'an pictured an arrogant and domineering expression, whereas in real life his face showed a sparkling lowly smile.

Pata... Wei Yuan drew a brocade covered box from his robe, and smiling, said "Have a look inside."

Xu Qi'an opened the brocade box. Inside was a round pill, about the size of a lychee fruit, bright and limpid yellow. A rich medicinal scent wafted into his nostrils.

"This is a golden pill that His Majesty bestowed. It can strengthen your body, increase your qi. The national teacher refined these for many months, and only came out with one pot. It might as well be priceless." Wei Yuan closed the brocade box, and then tapped on its lid with his finger, "It's yours now."

Xu Qi'an was in disbelief.

"This thing has no use to me, nor does it have much use for high ranked martial artists. Thinking about it, currently the person that needs to improve the quickest is you." Wei Yuan smiled, "Given that I said I'd nurture you, then naturally I'd follow through."

"Thank you, Duke Wei!" The delight and emotion on Xu Qi'an's face came from the heart. In his mind, he sighed with emotion, as some words of wisdom flashed through his mind:

Simp to the end, and all you deserve shall be yours.

"Once you digest the golden pill, your qi mechanism should rush to your central dantian. When that time comes, you should start learning visualisation early, strengthening your soul. This way, your cultivation progress will be at least a third quicker than other martial artists your rank." Wei Yuan said.

This is the benefit of having your back to a large organisation, hugging big legs! If not for this, then I might very well end up like uncle, stopped dead at Refining Qi... Xu Qi'an felt glad that he made the best choice back then.

When he found out that Nine and Six were playing Mafia, that he didn't risk meeting Nine and rather going to find Wei Yuan, telling him the truth.

If this had not been the case, he could not have gotten Wei Yuan's appreciation and trust.

If he did not gain Wei Yuan's trust, and only his appreciation, then he may have had to slowly accumulate merit, rather than just getting a golden pill dropped on him for nothing.

“Duke Wei, the rank after Refining Spirit is Bronze Skin and Iron Bones, how does one practice this?” Xu Qi’an asked attentively.

“When you reach the peak of Refining Spirit, when your qi, blood, and spirit start to merge, at this time, your body will undergo a remoulding and transformation. During the transformation, one would use sticks to strike one’s body everywhere, like a blacksmith striking his metal, removing all impurities, and refining his steel.”

Strike one’s body everywhere? Then what would happen to my little brother? This isn’t stress that I should be under at my age... what if eventually the chicken’s flown and the eggs are broken? Xu Qi’an was full of confusion and worry. In front of Wei Yuan, he did not have the courage to say such coarse language.

“That was the ancient method.” Wei Yuan chuckled, adding on, “Times have changed, and now the way martial artists refine themselves is through medicinal baths.”

Xu Qi’an let out a sigh of relief, and continued asking “When your subordinate was reading through records, I found that the description of the fifth rank Transforming Force went like this: Endow life to every part of one’s body, to wield like one’s own arm, but also in detached independence.”

This description was very esoteric; the body is one whole, and already had life. How come then it would talk about “Endowing life to every part of one’s body”?

Except making them have their own independent thoughts, but this was impossible. Even though men have two heads, they only have one brain. The other head currently was not qualified to have a brain, let alone anywhere else.

If other body parts had their own thoughts, then the fingers will say: “I’ve climbed on top of high peaks, and delved into deep valleys.” The mouth would say, “I’m clearly here to eat food, and yet *some* people would rather use me to lick.” The little brother would say “I’ve once ventured deep into the tiger’s lair, in and out seven times, fighting dauntlessly, yet eventually I was caught in the tiger’s mouth, and could only spit blood and flee.”

As he thought, Xu Qi’an thought this was more and more absurd, yet more and more comical.

Wei Yuan examined him, and noticed his subtle emotional changes. Shaking his head, he said “When you reach that level, I’ll tell you more specifics. If you know now, then you’ll think too much, and worry too much for nothing.

“Alright, take the medicine here, let me see if the golden pill can help your middle dantian fill or not. Not everyone is guaranteed to have such a strong effect, I’m only judging based on your aptitude. Whether you succeed or not can only be known when you take it.”

Wei Yuan held some anticipation.

Xu Qi’an hummed in assent, and opening the box, took the pill.

He vigorously chewed on the pill, and swallowed it down. A few seconds later, his stomach started to become hot, as if a fire was lit under it.

The fire roasted his stomach, just barely peeking over his tolerance threshold.

Not daring to dally, Xu Qi'an sat down cross-legged and began to meditate, reverse breathing and moving his qi through microcosmic orbits, leading the heat cycling around his body.

Whoosh, whoosh...

The expansive tea room resonated with strong and energetic breathing, as if from some huge beast.

Wei Yuan narrowed his eyes, quietly observing Xu Qi'an.

An hour later, Xu Qi'an felt the heat in his stomach start to dissipate, as qi filled his body. He felt better than ever.

With me now, even if the enemy had a silver gong to protect them, I can still strike and kill a refining spirit silver gong... Xu Qi'an was delighted at the change in his body.

"Not bad, you are indeed a rare prodigy in martial arts." Wei Yuan praised.

He rose, and took out a thin book from the bookcase that he had prepared earlier, along with a painting scroll, and handed them both to Xu Qi'an. "In the book is recorded a visualisation technique, learn from it. This painting is the thing you will be visualising."

Xu Qi'an opened the scroll. Upon it was drawn a giant, his head butting against the heavens, his feet spread across the earth. His bearing, every single vein in his muscles, all were rendered with immense detail.

But what shocked one the most was that posture, one that dared attack the nine heavens, that dared walk over the nine hells, as if nothing in the world could frighten him.

"The idol used in visualisation affects a martial artist's state of mind. These emotions were embedded into the painting as the artist drew it. I picked for a long time, and thought that this one suited you best." Wei Yuan did not forget to impart more knowledge.

Xu Qi'an felt as if he had received a legendary treasure, carefully stowing away the painting and book, before asking tentatively, "Duke Wei, can I perform visualisation with someone else? Mn, I'm talking about my second uncle."

He felt that it was best to be truthful in front of Wei Yuan, and not try to play any small tricks. That would never make it past the devilish intellect of this great eunuch.

"As long as you return the painting within three months. Whatever you do in that time, even gifting it away, I don't mind." Wei Yuan said, before reminding him: "Any idol images, are all expensive as cities. If you damage this, then half your life's salary will be gone."

Immediately, Xu Qi'an felt that this painting was much more of a headache.

Thud thud thud... footsteps came from the stairwell, as Nangong Qianrou entered with a dark face. His gaze fell upon the visualisation image in Xu Qi'an's hand and paused, before he went over next to Wei Yuan and whispered something into his ear.

"I know," Wei Yuan let out a breath, face expressionless, "When we were playing Go, he had already hinted towards me. Our emperor here can tolerate corrupt officials, but he cannot tolerate any challenge to his authority."

Three of his spies in the Imperial Palace had been rooted out.

Xu Qi'an lowered his head, pretending that he didn't hear.

Wei Yuan laughed, "Wait a bit more. The gold and silk that His Majesty rewarded you is almost here."

At dusk, the palace servants delivered the gold and silk that Emperor Yuanjing had rewarded him: one thousand taels of gold was just about sixty *jin*, and was placed in a large suitcase.

Five hundred bolts of silk, four *zhang*, filled two entire carts.[^2]

It was nearing the end of work, and the Nightwatchers in the constabulary hadn't left yet. They looked in surprise as the palace servants led the horse drawn carts into the constabulary.

Xu Qi'an, having received notice, came gleefully out to welcome them. After handing everything over, the palace servants drove the empty carts away.

Xu Qi'an called Song Tingfeng and the rest to come help pack, putting the gold and silk on carts they had borrowed from the constabulary.

"Ningyan, you're rich!" Song Tingfeng was both happy and jealous, vigorously clapping Xu Qi'an on the shoulder:

"I don't care, but next month's Jiaofangsi fees are on you."

Xu Qi'an glanced at Lyu Qing, and angrily replied "Bullshit! I don't even go to the Goulan."

Saying this, he turned to open the box, and took out four ingots of gold, giving one to Li Yuchun, Min Shan, and Yang Feng, "You share these around with our other brothers."

Then, he threw one to Lyu Qing, smiling "Constable Lyu, don't turn it down."

Lyu Qing nodded.

A martial artist should have alacrity! Xu Qi'an laughed.

"Thank you, Sir Xu." The twelve Bronze Gongs, the six prefecture bailiffs, all shouted in joy.

The spectators watching felt a wave of admiration and jealousy, wishing that they could join Xu Qi'an's group. One ingot of gold was five taels in weight, and when exchanged equalled forty taels of silver. Which superior was so generous as to give out 160 taels of silver with a wave of his sleeve?

"This money is..." Li Yuchun asked.

"When I was in the imperial city I saved princess Lin'an, and so His Majesty rewarded me. Mm, I can't really elaborate further." Xu Qi'an replied.

Not because of progress in the Sangpo case?

Everyone was stunned for a moment, and suddenly felt the silver was somewhat hot to the touch. They felt bad talking it. Originally, they thought that His Majesty was so pleased at the progress in the case that he rewarded Xu Qi'an.

Xu Qi'an waved his hand, "It's been hard on everyone these days. This official does not mistreat his colleagues."

Lyu Qing smiled, and glanced at the bailiffs behind her, along with the Bronze Gongs, finding that their expressions had subtly changed.

She laughed happily.

Xu Qi'an looked left and right, "Where is Miss Caiwei?"

"Probably in the Sitianjian."

No, she's definitely in some restaurant eating her heart out... Xu Qi'an's heart said.

After leaving work, the Bronze Gongs guarded this caravan towards the Xu manor.

Xu Qi'an sat on his horse, thinking that with this gold, even if he had to leave the capital in the future, his family would have more than enough silver, completely making up for the loss during the tax silver case.

Auntie can also joyfully buy jewellery, wear new clothes, Lingyin can go regularly to Guiyuelou to eat, and Lingyue's dowry... mn, Lingyue's still little, not in any rush to marry.

In the future when Erlang enters officialdom, he'll have some money to build some relations. Uncle the poor man wouldn't have to put his whole salary towards family costs, and can go a bit more often to the Jiaofangsi.

Auntie probably hasn't ever seen this much silk in her whole life... aye, my hand's getting a bit itchy, when I get home should I use silk to hurt her face, or gold to hurt her face... Xu Qi'an felt amazing.