

Nightwatcher 141

Chapter 141. Dispirited Gold Gongs

The shockwave spread out fast, its ripples dragging along dust and gravel as it reached the houses nearby, as many living things were silently wiped from existence.

Soon after hearing the sound of the explosion, the four Gold Gongs each adopted different methods to defend themselves, as they utilized the force of the explosion to move outside. They didn't dare to stay at the centre of the explosion.

After everything had calmed down, and the black-robed man had also disappeared, the four Gold Gongs finally breathed a sigh of relief. But, that relief didn't last long, instantly transforming into rage.

"What's the background of that guy? Specifically, I want to know about that arm." The white-robed Arcanist suddenly appeared, his back facing the Gold Gongs.

"That arm?" The sword-wielding Gold Gong asked him back.

"According to my observations, that arm doesn't belong to him. I didn't observe that fearful demonic qi anywhere else." The white-robed Arcanist said.

Jiang Lyuzhong stared at the back of the white-robed Arcanist, "Do you have eyes on your back, Yang Qianhuan?"^[^1]

The white-robed Arcanist, Yang Qianhuan, answered, "I took a look at him before he left."

"..." Helplessly, Jiang Lyuzhong said, "Can't you turn around and talk like a normal person? You weren't like this before."

"Let me refuse you. I, Yang, do what I want, without caring for anybody else's opinion."

"I have carefully observed my teacher and Wei Yuan. Haven't you noticed that one of them always stands in the observation hall with his back facing you, and the other likes to sit in the Bagua Platform with his back facing you?"

"So, We will feel as if Wei Yuan and the teacher are superior to us."

... Words stuck in the four Gold Gong's throats, but they just couldn't spit them out.

Jiang Lyuzhong shook his head and redirected the conversation back to the topic, "According to our investigation, that hand is the item sealed below Sangpo."

The item sealed below Sangpo... Yang Qianhuan frowned. He had just returned to the capital the previous day. He had come here on behalf of the Sitianjian to help in the capture of a lunatic.

He had heard that the Yongzhen Shanhe Temple had been bombed a while ago. But, he didn't pay much attention to it. As it is known, as long as an Arcanist has a Pharmacy and an Alchemy Laboratory, and timely meal delivery, they could stay in their house for decades.

"That monk is probably Henghui." The sword-wielding Gold Gong said.

As he listened to the Gold Gongs talking with each other, More and more questions began to pop up in Yang Qianhuan's head.

"We can discover the whereabouts of Princess Pingyang if we can capture him." Jiang Lyuzhong said.

Princess Pingyang? That Princess Pingyang who disappeared a year ago? Yang Qianhuan remembered this, as Arcanists from the Sitianjian were also invited out when the Princess was disappeared, and the matter had been quite loud.

After hearing this, he couldn't bear the questions in his head, and with his back turned, asked:

"It's just been a few days since the Sangpo case has happened. How could the Nightwatchers have investigated the case so clearly? Um... Why haven't I heard any of this from the juniors at the Sitianjian? Don't tell me that they weren't invited to investigate the case. You guys at the Nightwatchers aren't good at handling cases."

The high-ranking Arcanist didn't understand the situation.

Logically speaking, it was impossible for the Arcanists at the Sitianjian to not discuss the Sangpo case with him. As the Sitianjian often assisted the court in the handling of cases, internal communication about cases was also quite common.

But, Yang Qianhuan hadn't ever heard of Henghui, Princess Pingyang, or the other information that was being discussed.

Yang Yan opened his mouth, a rare occurrence, and said, " We didn't even have a Gold Gong handle the case. It's being handled by a Bronze Gong."

What's that got to do with you? Why is your tone so smug? Yang Qianhuan lampooned. He still didn't turn around and asked, "A Bronze Gong? Can you elaborate?"

"You should know this Bronze Gong, as he is quite famous at the Sitianjian." Jiang Lyuzhong recalled the rumours about Xu Qi'an, and remembered that he had once given a lecture to the White robed Arcanists in the Sitianjian, "His name is Xu Qi'an."

"Xu Qi'an?!" Yang Qianhuan's voice rose a little.

He knew Xu Qi'an. He had known about him since he had returned to the Sitianjian. That man had given a lecture to the juniors at Sitianjian, maybe to posture... that man was a formidable enemy in his dao of Posturing.

Unexpectedly, he was also responsible for investigating the Sangpo case. He seemed to have done a good job and had advanced to become a Posturing Master... A strong opponent.

"What's the origin of that arm?" Nangong Qianrou asked, her voice tinged with hatred.

"I don't know. But, the owner of that arm should be above the second rank. I don't know much about the Martial system... Heh, It's because I don't bother to understand it." Yang Qianhuan spoke like a lonely, invincible swordsman.

This guy has just been away from the capital for some months, but his condition has gotten a lot worse... This was the collective thought of the Gold Gongs.

...

Due to the last day's exhaustion, Xu Qi'an, still injured, overslept. The sun was already up by the time he had woken up.

Whatever the time was, it had already passed 7. Since he was already late, Xu Qi'an wasn't in a hurry, and he washed up and dressed up slowly. Then, he went over the wall to the main courtyard to have breakfast.

Even far away, He could hear the Glutton of a child crying. Her cry was very loud, just like the roar of a hungry dragon.

As he entered the front hall, he could see that Second Uncle had already gone to work. Auntie and Lingyue, who woke up late, were having breakfast. Xu Lingyin had her hands behind her as she leaned forward, shooting sonic attacks toward her mother.

Beautiful, and with a dignified temperament, Auntie squeezed her brows as she continued eating in silence.

Lyu'e was beside Little Pea, trying to comfort her.

"What's the matter?" Xu Qi'an came in, smiling.

Xu Lingyue's eyes lit up as she turned her head and excitedly said, "Are you resting today, Big Brother?"

"I overslept..." Xu Qi'an said, ashamed.

"Big Brother, Big Brother." Xu Lingyin ran over on her short legs, grabbed Xu Qi'an's arms with her small hand, pointed at her mother and sister with the other, and shouted with righteous indignation, "They robbed my chicken legs. They could even rob chicken legs from children... boohooohoo..."

This? Xu Qi'an looked at his aunt and sister.

Auntie let off a lovable snort, too lazy to explain.

Xu Lingyue helplessly said, "Last night, Lingyin had a chicken leg remaining. She didn't want to eat it then. So, She took it back to the house. Upon getting up in the morning, The chicken leg was missing. She thought that Mother or I had stolen the chicken leg."

This should have happened after I had left last night. Otherwise, Xu Lingyin would be grabbing her mother's sleeve and accusing me of stealing her chicken legs... Xu Qi'an placed his hands on Little Pea's head.

"Your big brother is good at investigating cases. I'll find the culprit for you."

Little Pea was very happy to hear it and believed that her eldest brother was the best — besides his habit of grabbing food. She held on to the hem of her elder brother's clothes and stared at her mother and sister with an aggrieved look.

Xu Lingyue met her elder brother's gaze and said, "I asked the maid who takes care of Lingyin, and the maid said that Lingyin got up in the middle of the night to eat the chicken leg. But, she doesn't believe it at all."

Xu Qi'an lowered his head to meet the little glutton, "Did you eat it?"

Xu Lingyin loudly said, "I didn't."

Xu Lingyue said, "The maid said that she had eaten it with her eyes closed. We found a chicken leg bone next to her bed. The bone had been gnawed clean. That's how she ate it."

"Brother, Sister should have eaten it. Elder Sister is lying." Xu Lingyin couldn't believe that she had eaten the chicken leg that she had been reluctant to eat before.

"Your big brother already knows who ate the chicken leg."

"Who is it?"

The chicken leg has already entered your belly, but your brain doesn't know... Xu Qi'an said, "A ghost."

"A gwest?" Xu Lingyin was so taken aback that her pronunciation wasn't standard anymore.

"Don't scare the child." Auntie unhappily said, and said to the little girl, "You can marinate the ghost with salt and fry it in oil. It will taste even better than chicken legs."

Upon hearing this, Xu Lingyin was afraid of the ghost but yearned for it even more.

...

After having breakfast, Xu Qi'an arrived at the Nightwatcher Office on horseback. Seeing him, Song Tingfeng said, "Ningyan, Duke Wei sent someone to invite you to the Tower of Noble Spirit."

"You didn't say that I was late to work, did you?" Xu Qi'an said.

"I said that you were busy at the latrine." He said, squinting.

"..." Xu Qi'an nodded and went toward the Tower of Noble Spirit.

After communicating with the guard, he quickly went upstairs. The scene upstairs was quick to startle him.

Besides Wei Yuan, the tea room accommodated four Gold Gongs, all injured. Yang Yan's arm was hung up with gauze as if his bone was broken.

Jiang Lyuzhong's forehead was tightly bandaged, and he only wore a single boot, as the other foot was bandaged thick.

Nangong Qianrou looked normal on the outside, but his face was as pale as paper.

The other Gold Gong, the one who he didn't know, His head was wrapped in bandages, and he looked like someone who had his head broken in a street fight.

The scene was both absurd and comical. A group of dignified high-ranking martial artists was like a bunch of street rascals that lost a group fight, dispirited, and injured.

"Pfff..." Xu Qi'an couldn't hold himself back and turned his head to smile.

"What are you laughing at?" The four Gold Gongs stared expressionlessly at him.

"I didn't laugh..." Xu Qi'an refused to admit anything.

Wei Yuan had Xu Qi'an come over, pointed at the seat opposite him to let him seat down, and said, "Henghui appeared last night. His target was the Minister of War's Mansion."

Xu Qi'an was quick to lose his smile, and turned serious, "Then the Gold Gongs..."

Wei Yuan nodded, "They were injured by Henghui. Last night, We set up traps at the Mansion of the Minister of War and the Mansion of the Prime Minister. There were four Gold Gongs and the Jianzheng's third disciple, Yang Qianhuan. These five fourth-rank experts weren't able to capture Henghui."

Xu Qi'an was both shocked and not shocked upon hearing about the ending. He was shocked at the number of fourth-rank experts mobilized. He wasn't shocked, as he felt that the item sealed under Sangpo should be that powerful.

"Did you get a clear look?" Xu Qi'an asked about the sealed item.

"A severed hand." Jiang Lyuzhong replied.

As I thought... It was the weird hand. Xu Qi'an looked at Wei Yuan, "What's its rank, Duke Wei?"

"Rank Two, At the very least." Wei Yuan said.

At least rank two. But, there's a high possibility of it being rank one... Otherwise, It would be killed rather than sealed... Xu Qi'an guessed, "What is the origin of the sealed item? Is it related to the Yao?"

"This matter involves a huge secret. I don't know the specifics." Wei Yuan refused to disclose the background.

A severed hand, from an expert. This item is related to the Sitianjian, the royal family, and Buddhism. It is also related to history five hundred years ago. Thinking along these lines, Xu Qi'an glanced at the Gold Gongs, hoping to get some clues from their expressions.

The gold gongs didn't pay attention to the observation of the little Bronze Gong.

"Henghui has a Magical Artefact that could shield his qi. It's not certain if he has left the city yet. I have already reported the situation to His Majesty." Wei Yuan said.

"You continue to check using your means."

Xu Qi'an understood the eunuch's hint, "Where's the Minister of War?"

"He's under house arrest in his mansion, protective custody." Wei Yuan took a sip of tea.

"I will go and investigate soon." Xu Qi'an understood his meaning.

Wei Yuan pointed out, "Minister Zhang is a senior officer of the second class. So, propriety should be paid attention to. It's a rule that the qi-watching technique isn't used for those above the fourth class. But, you can bring an Arcanist along with you.

He means that an Arcanist's accusation couldn't be used as evidence. But, It will be a valuable reference to check... XU Qi'an clasped his fists, "Yes Sir."

After taking another look at the dispirited Gold Gongs, he let out another "Pfft", and quickly left before the Gold Gongs got angry at him.

Chapter 142. Question and Answer

“That little bastard, he’s getting more and more cocky.” Jiang Lyuzhong let out a deep breath, and exclaimed “discontentedly”.

“If he wasn’t so cocky how could he dare to attack his superior?” The sword-wielding Gold Gong laughed.

“It’s a shame that he’s under Yang Yan, you might not know, but his aptitude is...”

Wei Yuan gave Jiang Lyuzhong a look, interrupting him, “You’re one for talking.”

Jiang Lyuzhong immediately shut his mouth.

The sword-wielding Gold Gong raised an eyebrow, asking “What’s his aptitude, what’s the rank, Jia?”

Jiang Lyuzhong deliberately smiled and did not respond, “you’re too naive” written all over his face.

Not Jia? It couldn’t be Upper Jia could it? The sword-wielding Gold Gong turned to stare intently at Wei Yuan, “Duke Wei?”

Wei Yuan leisurely drank tea, not responding.

This attitude made this Gold Gong more and more curious, and made his mind start to work over.

An aptitude of Jia, wouldn’t be enough to not tell me about it... could it really be Upper Jia?[^1] But that’s impossible, an aptitude of Upper Jia hasn’t appeared for several decades... but doesn’t their attitude not perfectly prove this thing... if this is the case then I have no reason not to fight for Xu Qi’an.

From Duke Wei’s attitude and concealment, perhaps this is to prevent conflict between Gold Gongs because of wanting a person... mmn, I can secretly plan to get this person over. What’s a young man most attracted to if not Silver and Women?

The stiff-faced Yang Yan broke the silence, and moved the topic, “Father, what’s His Majesty’s attitude?”

Wei Yuan rubbed his forehead, sighing, “Find Henghui’s whereabouts as quick as possible. During the official evaluation, even I cannot defend against a sea of impeachment calls.”

The four Gold Gongs’ expressions became serious; the fact that Wei Yuan had actually said something like that, meant that the situation was very serious indeed.

But this was not anything out of the ordinary; even ignoring the fact that Wei Yuan as a eunuch controlled the Nightwatchers, and have little in the way of good relations with the court’s many officials, to let a criminal commit massacre in the city walls and casually retreat away would be enough to rouse all the officials’ fears.

“We will do our utmost.”

Wei Yuan nodded, “Don’t make those empty words. Recently rumours from the court have been saying that the constabulary’s Gold Gongs are one useless thing after another, relying on a Bronze Gong to do their cases.”

Father's valuing Xu Qi'an more and more... Yang Yan and Nangong Qianrou exchanged looks, seeing each other's emotions.

This matter must be done well, Henghui must be found sooner rather than later. At least in these kind of matters, Xu Qi'an isn't able to do much, and won't be able to butt in to take all the glory.

...

Xu Qi'an came to the Minister of War's manor with his group of people investigating the Sangpo Case. After showing the golden token, and after the servants had passed on the message, he lead Chu Caiwei, Li Yuchun, the other silver gongs, and the city constabulary's Lyu Qing into the manor.

The ministerial manor's front door, as well as the surrounding walls had all been destroyed, as if it was in the middle of being demolished; a startling sight.

"The minister's manor is really stylish huh." Entering the manor, Lyu Qing exclaimed in a low voice.

"This manor, must be at least over ten thousand taels of silver..." Li Yuchun estimated.

Upon hearing this, the servant who was leading them let out a snicker. *Ten thousand tales? You naive bumpkins, ten thousand tales is hardly enough to buy out our Minister's manor.*

Base martial artists.

Xu Qi'an kicked him on the buttocks, scolding "Lead the way properly, running dog!"

The servant lowered his head, and hurriedly increased his pace.

Talking about "running dog", Xu Qi'an thought of the queen of the dance floor Princess Biaobiao. He wondered if she tried to provoke Princess Huaqing today, only to be strung up and beaten by the latter.

In the guest room he met the Minister of War Zhang Feng, a steady and serious man, with salt-and-pepper grey hair, and a thin goatee.

He sat there silently, giving of an aura of stateliness, of one who has been in such a high position for such a long time.

"Greetings, Minister Sir." Xu Qi'an clasped his hands.

Zhang Feng nodded, "From what the palace eunuchs have said, Master Xu's case-solving speed is extraordinary, ability outstanding. Not only has the progress of the Sangpo case raced along, but the culprit behind the Massacre of Earl Pingyuan's family has also been found."

"The Minister praises me too highly." Xu Qi'an felt that there was something hidden behind those words.

"You wish to ask if this official has some relation to the culprit, thus suffering his revenge in the night?" Minister Zhang asked.

"Indeed." Xu Qi'an didn't think that he would be so cooperative.

Minister Zhang looked at Xu Qi'an without expression, before suddenly his expression darkened, his voice became intense, as he smacked the table and shouted "This official also wants to know!"

This official also wants to know why so long after the Earl Pingyuan case, have the Nightwatchers still not caught the culprit?

“This official also wants to know why the Nightwatchers have time after time let the criminal go?”

I’ve just sat down and you want to put on a show of might… Xu Qi’an could only clasp his fists together, replying, “Please may the Minister sir be calm.”

Minister Zhang gathered his emotions, and sighed, “Though today I did not attend court, but I still know of the events last night. I would not have thought that five high-ranked martial artists working together could still not capture the criminal, rather it was the four Gold Gongs who were hurt.

“This official can naturally see that the Nightwatchers are loyal and devoted to the crown. It’s a shame that the Jianzheng is ill, and unable to act, making us all like scared birds, so scared until we’re scared to death.”

His expression had the seriousness of a superior, his voice was gentle, emphasising with his subordinates, making one involuntarily be impressed by him.

Xu Qi’an also felt his impression of the Minister of War improve, but he quickly came to his senses.

You first put on a show of might, yet at the next you do a 180 and show sympathy and understanding, inadvertently making one feel a sense of camaraderie with you.

A person who could play politics up to the second rank of officialdom is never a simple one.

Xu Qi’an coughed, clearing his throat, testing “The criminal who massacred the Earl Pingyuan’s family is the same one that attacked your manor last night.

“He is a monk of Qinglong temple, with the name Henghui.”

“Henghui?” The Minister of War frowned, “This official does not know such a person, or why he would attack this official’s manor in the night. Given that he’s a monk of Qinglong Temple, then why doesn’t Sir Xu go and find the Qinglong Temple’s people, rather than coming to see this official?”

“Henghui is merely a monk, and naturally would not be known to the Minister Sir. However, a year ago, he eloped with a female pilgrim, and there was no more sign of him. That female pilgrim was Princess Pingyang.”

“Princess Pingyang?” Zhang Feng’s expression became shocked, as if not daring to believe, “So Princess Pingyang had eloped.”

Xu Qi’an was observing him the whole time, wanting to glean his true thoughts from the minute expressions on his face, yet he was unsuccessful.

There were no flaws.

After a few more questions, Xu Qi’an planned to change his target, “Is Master Zhang, Zhang Yi here?”

Zhang Feng sent a servant to fetch him, and not long after, a sickly looking Zhang Yi with heavy bags around his eyes came into the room.

...Your bags could almost rival Song Qing's... Xu Qi'an asked "Master Zhang, do you know a monk called Henghui?"

"No." Zhang Yi shook his head.

"Then do you know one called Hengqing?"

"No."

"Do you know Hengyuan?"

"No."

"Do you know Pingyang?"

"No..." As the words left his mouth Zhang Yi quickly realised what name he had said, "You mean Princess Pingyang? Naturally I know her."

You're clearly acting perfunctory... Xu Qi'an nodded, smiling, "I've asked all my questions. My thanks for Minister Zhang and Master Zhang for your cooperation."

Leaving the minister's manor, Xu Qi'an turned and asked "During the questioning earlier, what was true, what was false?"

The round-faced Chu Caiwei rolled her eyes, "Not one word was true."

Xu Qi'an was momentarily dazed, "Who are you on about?"

Chu Caiwei pursed her lips, "Both father and son... oh, the last sentence was true, Mr kidney weakness does indeed know Princess Pingyang."

Zhang Feng speaking falsehoods with a straight face I can understand, but why would Zhang Yi also lie? Then there's only one possibility, that Zhang Yi had some involvement in Henghui and Princess Pingyang's elopement.

Hypothetically, if Zhang Yi did not know anything, then Zhang Feng wouldn't have any reason to reveal such a secret to his son. Sometimes ignorance is the best protection, and with Zhang Yi's image as a master of timekeeping clearly not very reliable, if I were Minister Zhang I would not reveal anything that could lead to the destruction of my House to someone so unreliable, even if it was my son.

What's interesting is, that night when Henghui killed the Earl Pingyuan's youngest son, what he said was "I came to seek revenge."

This case is becoming more and more convoluted, and also more and more interesting. I feel like I'm close to the truth behind it... mn, the truth behind the elopement of Henghui and Princess Pingyang. Once I get to the bottom of this matter, maybe I can continue investigating the Sangpo case. Xu Qi'an was immediately roused.

...

At the end of work, after running around all day, Xu Qi'an bade farewell to Chu Caiwei and Lyu Qing. After the two of them had left, Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao in tacit cooperation came out of the side hall. The three of them tacitly climbed on their horses, and tacitly went to the Jiaofangsi.

After so many days of high intensity case solving, Xu Qi'an felt he needed to relax a little bit, alleviate some of that stress on his spirit.

After all sleeping was sleeping, whether it was at home or on Fuxiang's bed. Furthermore, Fuxiang had repeatedly sent people to tell him that she missed him dearly, and wanted to invite him to the Reflecting Plum Pavillion for tea.

Given that that's the case, Xu Qi'an thought, he'd better oblige.

At this time the sun hadn't gone down yet, and the government offices was still in the evening rush hour. Thus there weren't many guests in the Jiaofangsi, with few figures in the alleys.

"I want to sleep with the new maids." Song Tingfeng said.

"The new maids are not good value, their asking prices are ... somewhat high." Xu Qi'an piped up earnestly.

"New Maids" in the Great Feng were the women who had not slept with a customer, and were not necessarily those who only sold their skills and not their bodies, but rather more like a form of hype and sensationalisation.

The Jiaofangsi didn't only have adult women, but also many young girls, who were taught skills in song and dance, as well as skills in attending to men.

Of these girls raised in the Jiaofangsi, if their skills and appearance were average, then they were relegated to the lowest level of dancers and singers. The prettier, more skilled ones became the "new maids".

When the new maids had gained enough fame, it would bring about a seafood auction that roused men's spirits.

"It's not worth it." Xu Qi'an tried to persuade him.

"I've already said, a guy like me isn't suited to marrying and making a family, there's no point in me saving my silver." Song Tingfeng was very honest.

Xu Qi'an wondered if this person had a phobia of marriage.

"I want to marry." Zhu Guangxiao said simply.

But the price of drinking games in Fuxiang's courtyard was expensive, and this orian had a special relationship with Xu Qi'an, so even if they stayed in the Reflecting Plum Pavilion, they would only be able to sleep with the maids.

Old Guangxiao had some money now, and he wanted prettier women.

The three of them parted ways, and Xu Qi'an entered the Jiaofangsi.

Chapter 143. Jiuyin Zhenjing^[^1]

"Is this Young Master Xu?"

Xu Qi'an heard someone calling his name behind him.

Holy crap, did I just get recognized by an acquaintance while visiting the brothel? While cursing, he turned to the other side, before sighing in relief.

Behind him was a handsome young man, wearing azure clothes, quite similar to that of the youth guarding the door of Reflecting Plum Pavilion.

"Young Master Xu, our Miss Mingyan^[^2] wishes to invite you to drink tea." The handsome young man said while presenting a flattering smile.

Mingyan... Xu Qi'an tried to remember the name for some time when he knew who this Miss Mingyan was. She was also a Famous Oiran, famed for her dancing skills. She was on the same level as Fuxiang previously was in.

Of course, the currently hyped Fuxiang wasn't at the level she was at before.

Of course, Fuxiang now was the most hyped Oiran, far beyond what she was before, riding atop all the other oirans at the Jiaofangsi.

Skilled in Dancing huh... as everyone knows, the effects of dance and yoga are the same! Xu Qi'an eyes sparkled, and he said while smiling, "Lead the way."

The handsome youth also smiled, and he led the way, bowing, "Please come with me, Master Xu. This way, this way please..."

If Xu Qi'an were invited over, Miss Mingyan would be overjoyed, and not be stingy at all in rewarding him. But, If he returned empty-handed, he could not have avoided a scolding.

At the entrance of the Reflecting Plum Pavilion, the gatekeeper that was just about to receive Xu Qi'an came out. Seeing the scene, his face changed colour. As he opened his mouth, intending to save Master Xu and scold the colleague who wanted to poach his game.

After thinking about it though, he had an idea: *My status isn't enough to intervene. Even if I do, I may earn Master Xu's ire.*

After gritting his teeth, he closed the door and hurried to get inside the courtyard.

"Something's happened, Elder Sisters!" He entered the wine room and shouted at the maid who was wiping the tables and taking cold dishes to the kitchen.

The beautiful maid frowned and looked over, "You look panicked. What happened?"

The little guard was very anxious, and poured over his concerns, "Young Master Xu was snatched away. Even more, he was snatched right outside the courtyard gate. He was invited over to Miss Mingyan's courtyard."

"What?"

"That bitch! She dares to snatch our miss's man?"

The maids were all startled. The tall maid shook off the wet cloth in her hand, picked up the hem of her skirt, and rushed to the master bedroom as if she was about to report sensitive military information.

...

Over in the master bedroom, Fuxiang was lazily lying on her bed, wearing a plum blossom dress, as she held a book in her hand. She was simultaneously enjoying some jewel-red grapes, as well as reading a famous tale about gifted scholars and beautiful women.

The fruit platter in front of her was filled with seasonal fruits, like grapes, sugarcane, bananas, and winter dates.

Her maidservant was squatting by her bed, holding her delicate and fragrant feet as she massaged the acupoints in her soles.

"Miss, You have been in a trance lately, as if you aren't very happy. Are you thinking of Master Xu?"

"What thoughts would I put into that rascal?" Fuxiang shook her head.

"Why else would you have me go outside to ask if Young Master Xu was there every night we sample tea."

Fuxiang frowned, and pointed to her fruit platter, "All the men in the world are of the same sort. They are like that sugarcane!"

"Sugarcane?"

"Sweet in the beginning. Sweet enough that it melts your heart and soul. As you eat it, You finally discover its true taste, as all that's left in your mouth is sawdust." Fuxiang curled her lips.

Her dignified and gentle aura fell off, causing her face to appear more lively.

The smilingly thought, *Even if it is sawdust, it was really sweet when it was sweet."

Fuxiang, silent at the beginning, became chatty after the maidservant prodded along. Pursing her lips, she asked,

"What do you think of my Darling Xu?"

The maidservant laughed cheekily and said, "He's very powerful. Every night he works you until you're tired all over, so much so that you struggle to walk straight."

Fuxiang blushed and lightly kicked the maidservant. She stared off with a flirtatious gaze, and said, "Don't you think that he's different from other men?"

Jogging her memory, the maidservant agreed, "He is much gentler than other men, and he doesn't arrogantly look down on us. But, when he stares at Miss's chest, you find that he isn't that pure compared to the men outside."

"All men are lustful." Fuxiang didn't care about it and pinched a grape, which she stuffed into her mouth. She continued,

"Recently, half a Qiyang poem, one rivalling that of *Delicate, tilting branches reflected on clear and shallow water; its subtle fragrance drifts with the rising moon at dusk*, has been circulating in the Jiaofangsi. It is said to have originated from the palace."

The maidservant nodded, "According to the guests in our tea parties, It was made by a prince or princess during a drinking game. But, I haven't heard of a prince having this level of poetic talent."

At the time, a tall maid arrived in the room. She was slightly panting, and her eyes were anxious. She said, "Miss, Master Xu had just arrived at the Jiaofangsi..."

After she said that, she paused for a moment to catch her breath.

Humming, Fuxiang calmly said, "Let him wait outside with food and drinks."

This man... Hmmph. I haven't seen you for ten days. You came over and called me honey when interested, and leave me in the cold when not interested!

He's just a man. I don't have to worry about him.

The maid shook her head, as she spoke out, "Young Master Xu was snatched away by Miss Mingyan, and he has already arrived at her courtyard."

"What?"

In a whoosh Fuxiang hurriedly stood up, causing layers of waves to flow on her chest. Squeezing her willow-like eyebrows, She gritted her teeth and said, "Dress up. We are going to the Azure Pond Courtyard."

...

In the elegantly furnished brocade hall, Xu Qi'an was admiring the figure of the dancing Oiran with a smile adorned his face.

She was wearing a light yellow veil dress. Her dress was neither conservative nor gaudy. She had clear eyes and a pointed chin. Alongside that, A vigor unmatched by any other woman in the Jiaofangsi was contained in her body, probably a result of practicing dance all year round.

Furthermore, though her figure wasn't spicy hot, it was excellently proportioned.

"I have been paying attention to Master Xu for a long time. It's a pity that Master Xu has always graced the Reflecting Plum Pavilion whenever he visited the Jiaofangsi." Mingyan's voice was soft, making her resentful words sound joking, even more so due to the smile in her mouth.

"Today, I was finally able to seize this opportunity."

Smiling, Xu Qi'an said, "I'm afraid of a beauty being abrupt.", However, his mind was fully focused on calculations. *This oiran is on the same level as Fuxiang. Fuxiang's rate is about thirty taels a night. She should have similar rates, and I haven't yet calculated the cost of drinks.*

I haven't brought much silver today. But, I do have a lot of gold. However, gold can't be used as currency.

The two chatted for a while when a maid hurried in, lowering her head, "Miss, Fuxiang is on the way, and I, we can't stop her."

Mingyan raised her eyebrows, and said with a smile, "It seems that Fuxiang has great affection for Young Master, and she regards him as her exclusively."

Xu Qi'an raised his brows. This sentence looked like a compliment, but it was Mingyan's method of sowing discord.

Being regarded as exclusive by a prostitute wasn't a glorious matter for the men of this era.

Heh, Bitches do have Bitch Qi... Xu Qi'an took a sip, he wasn't troubled at this. If anything, is it not a normal sight for a place like the Jiaofangsi to be overflowing with Bitch Qi?

How could someone without some skills survive in that sort of place?

If we were to discuss the place with the highest concentration of Bitch Qi, the emperor's harem was the well-deserved industry leader.

Just as he was thinking, Fuxiang arrived, accompanied by her maidservant. The famous oiran was sullen. Her beautiful eyes flashed with fierceness. Yet, her brows and eyes instantaneously turned gentle the moment she entered the room, and she said, her tone as pitiful as it could be:

"I had heard that my darling had come to Jiaofangsi. So, I wanted to join in on the fun and serve you alongside Miss Mingyan."

Her speaking skills were assuredly amazing. It sounded as if she hadn't come to Azure Pond Pavilion to inquire about a crime, but to serve together.

Not only had she declared her sovereignty, but She had also defeated Oiran Mingyan and also pleased Xu Qi'an. Who wouldn't want to be confessed by two famous oirans at the same time?

Mingyan wore a warm smile, "How could I allow sister the bother of running over? I was just whispering some secrets to Master Xu... I'm too embarrassed to say it now that sister is here."

Pretending not to hear anything, Fuxiang lifted her skirt and sat elegantly beside Xu Qi'an. She carefully poured wine for him, picked up vegetables for him, and also tidied up his messy hair.

"Is Darling busy with official duties lately?"

"Yeah." Seeing the famous oiran lean over, Xu Qi'an hugged her slender willow waist.

"Then you come to the Reflecting Plum Pavilion later. I'll rub your shoulders and massage your acupoints." Fuxiang softly said.

Mingyan gritted her teeth. How much she wished that she could drive that bitch out using a broom.
She's already gotten her chance, and became very famous, she should have been content with that.

It doesn't make any sense to tie a man to your side and not allow the other sisters in Jiaofangsi to not get a share of the pie.

The sound of hurried footsteps appeared again. It was still the maid who had come previously. Gazing at Xu Qi'an while holding a strange expression, she said in a low voice,

"Miss, All the famous oirans are here..."

"What?" Both Mingyan and Fuxiang exclaimed in surprise.

Xu Qi'an's ears twitched, and he heard laughter, like the singing of orioles and swallows. After a while, a group of beautifully dressed, high-quality beauties entered the room one by one.

Some of them appeared charming and ardent, Some were flirtatious and enthusiastic, Some were reserved like ladies, and some had a sickly complexion similar to sister Daiyu.[^3]

All these styles, all gathered in these Seven famous oirans.

In terms of figure or appearance, all of them could be considered top-notch beauties.

"Hello, Master Xu!" Standing in a row, the famous oirans bowed their bodies and said in their melodious voice.

Only five words could reflect Xu Qi'an's imagination at the moment, *The Young Models Association*.

Fuxiang and Mingyan were very furious about having to entertain the other famous oirans warmly with hypocrisy.

The brocade hall didn't have room for this many people, So Famous Oiran Mingyan invited everyone to the External Hall and arranged for her maids to serve delicious food and wine.

The nine oirans chatted and laughed amongst themselves at ease, as if they were actual sisters. But, they would look at Xu Qi'an from time to time, revealing that all this was simply a secret competition among them.

They were all greedy humans, and they were very greedy for Xu Qi'an's body. But, None of that greed appeared in their actions as they maintained the style and demeanor expected from a famous oiran.

However, Xu Qi'an could smell the traces of gunpowder, especially from Fuxiang. He could see her acting impatiently whenever he looked around.

What's the matter? Do you all want to compete for the Jiuyin Zhenjing?[^4]... Unfortunately, I don't have a phone, or I could have shown this off in my WeChat Moments. Xu Qi'an flirted while lampooning.

A famous oiran proposed that they play a Drinking Game.

Even after drinking for three rounds, Xu Qi'an's performance was still mediocre, and no popular poems came out, disappointing the famous oirans who had come because of him.

The Famous Oiran who had proposed to play the Drinking Game smiled and said, "Have you heard the half Qiyan poem, *Drunk, he knows not if the sky floats in the water; His dream laden boat sailing atop the Milky way.*"

The oirans became active all of a sudden. The beauties began to speak, "What a beautiful verse, isn't it?"

Fuxiang smiled and said, "It is said to have spread from the palace."

The talented Oiran nodded, "Do you know who wrote it?"

The oiran's eyes lit up, and they all looked at her, "And you know it, A'ya?"

Xu Qi'an lowered his head as he continued to drink.

The talented Famous Oiran shook her head, "I don't know. But, I do know something else, which isn't known to the Jiaofangsi..."

She paused deliberately and began drinking slowly.

"Speak quickly." The other famous oirans urged her.

Fuxiang's attention was also attracted. Her eyes also sparkled, as the corners of her mouth unconsciously gathered to form a smile.

Xu Qi'an had seen this kind of expression before. In his previous life, he had seen that sort of expression when his girlfriend and her friends discussed luxury bags. They had the same sort of attitude back then.

A'ya was very satisfied with the other's attitude and said while smiling, "This poem was made during a Drinking Game. The interesting thing is, the participants of the Drinking Game were all Princesses."

"Was it the Eldest Princess?" The famous Oirans guessed.

If anyone among the Imperial Children wrote the Qiyang poem, the talented Eldest Princess Huaiqing must have been the one to do so.

"I don't know about that." A'ya shook her head, and glanced at Xu Qi'an, expression laden with Bitch Qi, laughing:

"Although only half the poem was written, The level is comparable to Master Xu's Plum Praising Verse. But I feel that Master Xu's poems are unique. That half poem seems to be from a flash of inspiration, and the creator shouldn't be as talented as Master Xu."

"Yes, Has Master Xu written a new work lately? I have admired your talent for a long time." The flirtatious and affectionate famous oiran winked.

Xu Qi'an lightly laughed while sipping his wine, "I've run out of ideas recently, and haven't created any new works. After all, I can't write a new poem in a mere 3-4 days."

The girls were disappointed hearing what he said. But, They just realized that there was a mistake in his words.

In 3-4 days? Wasn't Young Master Xu's latest work "Plum Song" presented to Fuxiang, and the one before "Who in the world doesn't know of you?" presented to Ziyang Jushi?

They obviously hadn't heard of the encouraging learning poem.

The two poems had been around for quite some time and had been widely sung, but their popularity had dropped. Why would he say something about a lapse of 3-4 days... That means... He wrote a new work three or four days ago.

A'ya remembered the time the half Qiyang had come out from the palace. That was the day before yesterday. Some time should have passed before the poem got to the Jiaofangsi. After the calculation, The times matched.

Her beautiful eyes became wide open, and she tightened an embroidered handkerchief with her slender fingers. Similarly, Her delicate body trembled slightly with excitement, and she stared straight at Xu Qi'an, as her voice trembled,

"Young Master Xu... Your newest work wouldn't be..."

Fuxiang was the one to react the quickest. She suddenly turned her head so her watery eyes could reflect Xu Qi'an's appearance.

She felt a kind of excitement and tension, one that had yet to erupt. The feeling was similar to the joy and anticipation of suddenly discovering something you like being by your side.

The chatter and laughter abruptly stopped, and the hall fell silent. The famous oirans, still bright, realized something and turned their heads one after another, casting complicated gazes toward Xu Qi'an.

Their gazes were a mixture of anticipation, surprise, and shock.

Chapter 144. A Female Yaoguai

Xu Qi'an took a sip of wine, before putting down the cup, looking around at all the beautiful women. With a carefree and relaxed tone, he said "That day, I had accompanied Princess Huaqing to the banquet. I had a sudden inspiration and thus composed this half a Qiyao poem."

His tone was calm and casual, as if it were merely a trivial matter, but the oirans' hearts thumped in their chests.

It is him... A'ya, who had guessed the truth, had a sudden feeling of inevitability, as if any other author would've seemed wrong.

The Great Feng's poetic talent was still as appalling as before, and if Huaqing, who had never written a great work before, had suddenly composed one it would be far out of the ordinary.

Only that when they heard the news, no one could link it up to Xu Qi'an. Only when they heard his words, and thought of his status as a Nightwatcher, as well as his extraordinary poetic talent, did they make the guess. A bold guess, but it hit the mark.

Currently in the Jiaofangsi no one knew who had written this poem, and there were countless outside curious as to the answer. Just this little bit of knowledge would make for the liveliest conversation.

"My Dear..." Fuxiang stared at him, full of emotion, her gaze overflowing with charm. To a lover of poetry like Fuxiang, this was more attractive than any a sweet word.

As for other oirans, whilst they silently exclaimed at his poetic talent, another detail made their hearts beat even faster, something that was more important than the poem itself:

He could enter the Imperial palace, and even attend a banquet with the princes and princesses.

This meant that Xu Qi'an was a trusted aide of one of the princes or princesses, otherwise he would not have gone to the banquet in the first place. He was worth much more than merely some poetry now.

And his appearance was still rather handsome, and he was a Nightwatcher, with state authority in his hand... of course, the oirans had seen their fair share of important officials and renowned nobles, and so the authority of a Nightwatcher was not much in comparison. But if the Nightwatcher had talent that could look down upon a forest of scholars? If the Nightwatcher was valued by a royal prince or princess?

All these halos added together, made serving him more attractive than any old, fat, high and mighty official.

We can't let Fuxiang take advantage of this too, we must win him over! Fuxiang is the most prominent oiran in the Jiaofangsi, if she got another poem, then us sisters will never have an opportunity for fame again...

As they thought this, the oirans' smiles became ever more earnest, each of them being coy with their words, their adoring gazes surrounding Xu Qi'an.

Suddenly the aura in the room became fiery hot.

After the drinking games were finished, under the influence of alcohol, the oirans boldly started playing finger games, each with their sleeves up, showing their shining pale lower arms, their delicate hands.

Most importantly Xu Qi'an didn't mind, which gave them the courage.

...

The sky slowly darkened, and more guests came to the Jiaofangsi, who quickly noticed a strange thing.

Today nearly all the oirans were closed to customers, and were not playing drinking games.

Some people in irritation went to find the brothel keeper, and the brothel keeper thought to herself *Are you trying to bloody revolt? How're you going to earn silver if you don't take guest?*

Then she sent someone to ask after them, and only then did she find out that the oirans had all gone to the Azure Pond Courtyard, eight in total — that is to say, that in the Azure Pond Courtyard today were nine oirans in total.

"What's the matter with this?"

"From the sounds of it... they seem to be very happy, are they serving an important person?"

"How could they? During the official evaluation, who would dare indulge like this? Who would be dumb enough to present the dagger to their enemies?"

"Perhaps they're just playing around together."

"Why are you guessing, we can just go and ask."

A guest knocked on the door to the courtyard. The gatekeeper, opening the door, was scared out of his skin by the sight beyond.

Around the door of the Azure Pond Courtyard, were stood over a dozen guests.

"What are the madams doing in there?" A young man with opulent robes tried to peek into the yard, asking sternly.

"Receiving a guest." The gatekeeper said.

The guests outside all fell silent. After a few seconds, someone asked with a strange expression, "Which... which gentleman is inside... if it's inconvenient to say, then forget I asked."

The gatekeeper thought for a moment. He knew that the guest inside was a Master Xu, and not some important figure as the people outside had presumed. He felt that there was no need to hide anything, thus truthfully said,

"It's not as the Sirs think, the guest inside is Master Xu."

Master Xu?

The crowd exchanged looks. Searching around in their heads for a moment, the guests failed to find any "Master Xu".

There's a noble or official named Xu in this court?

The young man who knocked on the door asked with a frown, "Which Master Xu?"

"Xu Qi'an, the Master Xu who wrote the poem for Fuxiang." The gatekeeper said. He had been rewarded three cash of silver by Master Xu, and was in high spirits, so he was happy to praise his name.

Him?

Rays of light shone from the eyes of the few scholars that were present.

"Let's wait here, perhaps we could get another legendary poetic work."

As this was said, the people who were originally angry, or jealous, also calmed their emotions. Everyone present had status. Even if they were just a merchant, they also had a wishing to mingle with high culture.

"To be served by nine oirans, what bearing must he have! Not even any of the previous Zhuangyuans had such a treatment."

"A Zhuangyuan wouldn't dare to be so extravagantly indulgent."

...

Ding! Ding! Ding!

With a clear and crisp sound, several headless arrows landed in the vase three *zhang* away with expert precision.

Xu Qi'an, blindfolded and facing the other way, took off the blindfold, and with a large laugh pulled the two oirans A'ya and Mingyan closer, crazily slobbering over their faces.

After he was done, Xu Qi'an slapped the two on the buttocks, "You lost the bet, you pay the price, drink, drink!"

The two oirans turned their waists, showing a feigned kittenish anger, at the same time dutifully drinking their wine.

“Ah let’s not play more, it’s so boring being unbeatable.” Xu Qi’an pushed aside the two oirans, “Wait here young misses, I’m gonna go out a moment, when I get back we can battle another three hundred rounds.”

He rubbed his stomach, indicating that he needed to go to the toilet.

The oirans behind him all called, “Master official, return quickly!”

Leaving the room, and closing the door, the fiercely cold winter wind came rushing in. Xu Qi’an’s pompous expression faded, as he lightly let out a long breath.

He looked around, and seeing that no one had noticed him, he lightly leapt onto the courtyard wall, tearing out a sheet of qi-watching technique, lighting it with his qi.

Whoosh~~

He raised his head to the sky, as two bursts of bright light shout from his eyes, cutting the night, before fading, the bright clear light swimming around in his pupils.

Xu Qi’an had another reason for coming to the Jiaofangsi, that was to use qi-watching at close range, and find that Yao aura.

Henghui had appeared, and committed massacre twice in the inner city. If someone were to say that there were no Yaoguai lurking in the city, he would not believe them.

Henghui is clearly a blade for the Yao, they’re using him to achieve some sort of goal. The Yao race went to so much trouble to free that sealed item, they would never just let Henghui do as he wished... if it were me, I would always keep eyes on Henghui... last time I saw Yao qi at the Jiaofangsi, if it was just a one-off, then whatever, but if it isn’t, then the Jiaofangsi is very likely to be one of the places where they are lurking.

The clear qi swirled around in his eyes, as he leisurely scanned over every single corner, seeing all colours of qi, but nothing out of the ordinary.

Finally, he laid his gaze on the Azure Pond Courtyard right in front of him, into the room where the oirans were.

A wisp of emerald-green Yao qi, rose in spirals like smoke.

Fuck... Xu Qi’an nearly couldn’t resist swearing out loud. His blood ran cold, as his back erupted in cold sweat.

The Yao is in the room?

It was just drinking wine with me?

He had a chilling feeling of being in a horror story, where the main character finds a place to stay the night deep in the wilderness, where he is given a warm welcome, only to wake up the next morning to find that he is in a graveyard.

“Which one is the Yaoguai... one of the oirans, or one of the maids? It can’t be Fuxiang right, I’ve slept with her so many times, she can’t be a Yao... plus that day when I was looking for Yao aura, I’d already looked at her.”

Xu Qi'an silently jumped down from the wall, tiptoeing towards the tea room. The door was not closed tightly, and he peeked in through the gap.

He saw the woman that was giving off the Yao qi: it was not one of the oirans, but rather one of oiran Mingyan's maidservants.

It's her... Xu Qi'an instantly began to think, why was it when last time he brought Song Tingfeng and the others on an outing together, did he not see the Yao aura?

That night did she use some method to hide her qi... what motive does she have for hiding next to Mingyan... mn, Mingyan may not be innocent, perhaps she's in cahoots with the Yao... thinking about this, as soon as I entered the Jiaofangsi she sent people to ask after me, might not be for any simple reasons.

Xu Qi'an immediately made up his mind. Again he vaulted over the wall, leaving the Courtyard and making his way straight to where Song Tingfeng was.

Earlier when he was qi-watching, he mentally noted Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao's whereabouts.

As he leapt onto the surrounding wall, he ignored the maids' shocked questions, bursting into the room, before hearing through the bedroom door Old Song busy in exchanging essence through dual cultivation.

The sounds from the room suddenly stopped, followed by Song Tingfeng's cautious voice, "Who is it?"

"It's me," Xu Qi'an banged on the door, "Come out, it's serious."

Song Tingfeng cursed, before he heard the rustling of clothes. A moment later, he came out scruffily clothed.

"Old Song, go immediately to the constabulary, and notify the Gold Gong on duty to come personally to the Jiaofangsi. Tell him that there is a Yaoguai in the Azure Pond Courtyard." Xu Qi'an made a long story short,

"Remember, you must get a Gold Gong over. I don't really understand qi-watching, and can't tell their power. There are also nine oirans in the courtyard, they're all like sheep and are powerless to protect themselves. Oh right, if the one on duty is surnamed Zhu, then go instead to the Sitianjian and find Song Qing."

He didn't say any more; he believed that as long as Song Tingfeng reported the situation as it was told, with the experience of a Gold Gong he would know what to do.

Song Tingfeng's expression became more and more serious, the earlier feeling of annoyance completely evaporating. He returned and grabbed his sabre, his bronze gong, simultaneously tying on his gong, and rushing out of the yard.

Xu Qi'an quickly returned to the Azure Pond Courtyard, a frivolous smile forming on his face, as with an expression like he was high on life pushed open the door, laughing,

"I've come back, my beauties!"

Out of the corner of his eye he glanced at the female Yao, who was head lowered, pouring her Madam more wine, before moving his gaze.

Without knowing her ability, he did not dare make a move himself. To allow her to escape would not be the end of the world, but he did not want to see innocent oirans get hurt.

Later he ate what he should eat, drank what he should drank, and touched where he should touch.

Xu Qi'an and the oirans played drinking games after drinking games, throwing dice and pitching pots, full of happiness.

Whose buttocks were the roundest, whose breasts were the softest, whose waist was the thinnest, who was made of water... he became intimately familiar.

But Xu Qi'an was not happy, rather he was somewhat anxious. Waiting and waiting, an hour had passed, and Song Tingfeng had not yet returned.

Just now, the female Yao raised her head, glancing at Xu Qi'an, saying softly, "The night is dark, Madams should probably not return too late. Will Master Xu be staying tonight with our Miss?"

Chapter 145. Yang Qianhuan

The lively atmosphere ceased to be in an instant, and the famous oirans all began to restrain their smiles. Just a moment before, They were all loving sisters, and after they acted as if they were female soldiers about to enter the battlefield. Even then, they still looked flirtatious and charming.

"Elder Sisters, Since Mr. Xu has come to my Azure Pond Courtyard today, I also hope that he rests here. I believe that sisters will also help me."

Would the Famous Oirans help her? No way in hell!

No sort of sisterhood existed in the Jiaofangsi. Even if it did exist, it would be purely plastic. Having been promoted from an ordinary prostitute to a famous oiran, all of the famous oirans had gone through a lot. Their status was earned through a lot of sweat and hard work, along with their wisdom in handling relationships, and their fighting spirit. Similarly, This spirit didn't allow them to admit defeat that easily.

Although the place was an opportunity for Xu Qi'an, it was too dangerous for the oirans to remain there. Even a small release of qi could cause their death.

And it is known that martial artists were straightforward battle maniacs, without any sort of fancy spells or techniques.

Well, Actually, I quite enjoy this competition for the Jiuyin Zhenjing. I believe that the girls with a lot of spare tires felt the same way in my previous life. Xu Qi'an coughed and gazed at the oirans.

"Miss Mingyan's kindness is hard to turn down. So, I'll rest here tonight. Ladies, You should go back. I'll visit you later, and I'll keep my promises."

A man's words at the wine table were like their words in bed. As in, They couldn't be believed.

But the words had already been spoken. What else could they do? This sort of thing couldn't be forced.

Only Fuxiang looked as if she had some grievances, and she looked at Xu Qi'an, bearing a sad face, "Darling!"

Although Xu Qi'an's head was stubborn, his heart was still soft. He had wanted to bow his head to take a sip and ignore her. But, looking at her aggrieved look, He said in a gloomy tone, "Go back. I'll come to you tomorrow."

After taking another look at him, Fuxiang covered her face and wept, walking out.

The other famous oirans made themselves scarce one after another.

Oiran Mingyan looked excited, stood up gracefully, and shyly said, "It's late. Come along with me, Young Master Xu."

In Miss Mingyan's boudoir, a smokeless metal charcoal burner was heating the room, and sandalwood incense could be seen curling up. Compared with the elegant atmosphere of Fuxiang's room, this room was better described as ... magnificent.

The yaoguai maid saluted Xu Qi'an, and obediently said, "This servant will be serving you in the bath, young master."

You wish. I don't dare to let you serve me. Xu Qi'an shook his head, and glanced at oiran Mingyan, "When I visited the Reflecting Plum Pavilion, Fuxiang served me in the bath."

Taking a bath together? The famous oiran, Mingyan, hadn't ever experienced this sort of thing. So, she was shy and embarrassed.

After gritting her silver teeth, She softly said, "He'er, I'll be serving young master Xu."

After getting off the couple bath, Xu Qi'an put on his robe and white silk trousers, while his mind was cursing up a storm, *Song Tingfeng you motherfucker, Why the hell haven't you arrived yet?*

"What are you waiting for, Master Xu?" Mingyan was curled up under the blanket, a bit unhappy.

She was a woman, and it was inconvenient for her to say some words, otherwise, she would be thought of as a dissolute woman. But, she had never seen a man enter her room, wipe their knife for a quarter of an hour and drink tea for another quarter.

The quilt had already been warmed, and she would fall asleep if he didn't come.

"The night is still long. Don't be in a hurry. I'm thinking of something." Xu Qi'an postured and spewed some bull.

His peripheral vision was focused on the Yao maid. *I won't move until the enemy does. Perchance, If the enemy moves, I'll gift her a Slash.*

While he thought over this, Xu Qi'an suddenly felt dizzy, as if he hadn't slept for three days, and his eyes felt heavy, as if they weighed thousands of catties.

I've been poisoned, He shuddered, and looked over at famous oiran Mingyan, only to discover that she had already fallen asleep and was currently motionless.

"What are you waiting for, Master Xu?" A chuckle sounded. The maid, who seemed downcast before, seemed to be a different person.

Her eyes were coquettish and licentious. She was staring right at him, her posture being quite aggressive.

"Who are you? Why did you poison me? I don't have any grudge against you. Poisoning and attacking others is a serious crime, a crime that leads to confiscation of family property." Xu Qi'an pretended to panic and said some words to test her.

"Of course, I was waiting for Master Xu." The maid giggled, Making her already charming face appear to be even more bewitching.

"Me?" Xu Qi'an asked, his head filled with doubt.

He tried to run his qi, but the qi in his dantian felt as thick as honey, and he couldn't move it at all. His limbs started to get heavy.

Damn, That bastard Song Tingfeng harmed me!

Due to his trust in the Nightwatchers, he chose to stay in the Jiaofangsi, waiting for an opportunity to capture the Yao woman. But, it seemed that Song Tingfeng had encountered some trouble. Otherwise, several round trips to and from the Nightwatcher Office and the Jiaofangsi could have been made during this time.

There was no reason for him to take this long.

"The night is still long, but Miss is already asleep. Let this servant take care of Young Master Xu in her stead." The maid walked slowly, taking off a piece of clothing every time she took a step.

She wants to fuck me! Xu Qi'an was shocked at the situation.

This wasn't some romantic affair. Having been a Nightwatcher for this long, He had accumulated a lot of experience and wisdom. He knew that Yao women were proficient at harvesting yang to replenish yin, and they were even more proficient at squeezing men into medicinal dregs.

The fate of those medicinal dregs were also quite simple, an untimely death.

What had she poisoned? The Sandalwood? The liquor? I don't know much about poison, this also isn't the main point... The real thing is that she had already arranged a method to deal with me. I arrived at Jiaofangsi today based on a whim, and she doesn't have any reason to know about my whims.

When the Yao girl approached a distance of three feet from Xu Qi'an, an intense light suddenly shot off from his eyes, calming down all his emotions.

Clang!!

The black gold long sabre came out of its sheath, causing a thin line of sabre qi to light up the room, fizzling out afterward.

Not looking at the result, Xu Qi'an broke out with all his remaining strength. Running wildly, he slammed into the window.

He wanted to make some noise, so an outsider would notice, and also to make the Yao girl wary of him.

Xu Qi'an fell on the ground, as he had tripped over something.

That something was a thick and long grey tail. It was fluffy and looked like a fox's tail.

Looking back, Xu Qi'an saw that the maid had disappeared, leaving a paper figurine, which was cut into two pieces.

He felt a wet tongue licking his face. Xu Qi'an turned his head slowly, only to discover that the maid had appeared behind him without him knowing.

Her pupils had turned amber, and she looked at him as she was looking at prey. She licked his face deftly with her tongue.

"Such rich vitality. I couldn't restrain myself after smelling your aura."

She was telling the truth, because Xu Qi'an saw the change in her appearance.

This is the first time I've loathed a woman... Xu Qi'an's body was stiff, and a sense of danger made him greatly anxious.

Half the power that had erupted before had come from his strength, while the other half came from the pill of great strength he had hid under his tongue.

He had wanted to stab the Yao girl, but he had greatly underestimated the opponent.

How should I proceed now? I'll certainly be killed if I yell.

Should I start rolling as hard as I can? After all an immortal would find it hard to do a rolling person... or should I lay a fragrant gold nugget to disgust her?...

Smiling, the Yao girl stretched out her fingers to scratch Xu Qi'an's silk pants. Just then, her expression suddenly changed, and she looked at a place, and shouted, "Who is it?"

"You don't need to know my identity, for anyone who knows the name of this one is already dead."

A black shadow appeared in the room, with its back pointed to the two of them, dressed in robes as white as snow.

The Yao girl let out a roar and gave off a fierce look at the man in white. She then threw herself towards the window decisively to escape.

Boom!

She hit an invisible air wall and bounced back.

"How sad." The man in white shook his head, sighed, and said, his words filled with pity.

Afterward, he snapped his fingers, and magical formations erupted from under his feet, moving to cover the Yao girl.

An illusory chain stretched out from the formation, which then wrapped around the Yao girl's wrists and ankles, and restrained her in place. No matter how much she struggled, she couldn't break free of the chain.

"Keep her alive." Xu Qi'an was afraid that this overbearing expert would kill the Yao girl.

The white-robed man stood with his hands behind his back, and said, "You are Xu Qi'an, right?"

"That's right." Xu Qi'an said, "And this senior would be..."

"Sitianjian's Yang Qianhuan. You should have heard of me." The white-robed man said.

I'm sorry. I've never heard of this man. Xu Qi'an quickly said, "So it is you, Senior Yang. I've admired you for a long time."

"Ehh!" The white-robed man cheered up, "Did junior sister Caiwei tell you about me, or that mad scientist Song Qing?"

"All of them, all of them..." Xu Qi'an made an educated guess that this senior was a certain disciple of the Jianzheng.

"Were you notified by my colleagues, Senior?"

"Those bronze gongs?" The white-robed man nodded, "Exactly, They notified the Sitianjian two incense sticks' time ago, saying that a Yao was discovered here. I was outside the courtyard the entire time."

What the fuck? Why didn't you act earlier? Xu Qi'an opened his mouth in puzzlement.

As if he had looked through his thoughts, the white-robed man hummed and said, "A real hero always makes an entrance at the end, Isn't that right?"

I think something's wrong with your head. Xu Qi'an nodded, forcing a smile on his lips.

Yang Qianhuan also nodded in satisfaction, and then said, his voice deep, "Ask whatever you want to ask."

Xu Qi'an let off a breath, stood up tremblingly, and stared at the demon girl captured in the formation, "Are you a remnant of the Wanyao Kingdom, or a member of the northern Yao?"

The Yao girl sneered but said nothing.

The illusory chains were suddenly tightened, and electric arcs then swam along the body of the Yao girl. She screamed in pain, as her tender body convulsed.

"Heh. I created this interrogation formation by myself. It can squeeze the body and the soul. I believe very few men or monsters could bear this pain." The white-robed man stood at a distance while putting his hands behind his back, and said calmly.

The Yao girl's amber pupils were filled with abject terror.

"Wan, Wan... Wan Yao Kingdom. I'm a vixen from the Wanyao Kingdom." She said.

"You were a perpetrator of the Sangpo case, right?"

"Yes."

"Is Henghui one of your accomplices?"

"Yes."

"What's your purpose?"

"Blowing up the Sangpo and releasing whatever that's inside."

"What was inside Sangpo?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

Xu Qi'an glanced at the white-robed man and saw he didn't say anything. So, he believed the Yao girl, and continued to question,

"I still have three questions."

"The first question: Since you have already released the sealed item, Why did you instigate Henghui to make trouble, to kill Count Pingyuan, and to attack the Minister of War's mansion at night?

"Second question: Who are you working with?

"Third question: Why were you targeting me?"

The Yao girl hesitated for a moment before answering, "I don't know of the first two. I am only lurking within the capital and obeying orders. I don't know anything else.

"As for your matter. I had received an order long ago saying that I had to find a way to take Xu Qi'an's life as soon as he entered the Jiaofangsi."

The white-robed man didn't speak. Xu Qi'an frowned, *So, the Yao hidden in Jiaofangsi is the Yao girl who was ordered to kill me. Was that because I was very close to the truth of the case? So, they planned to erase the threat from the root by removing me, didn't they?*

*At least I had some gains. Henghui will indeed be the breakthrough for the case.**

"The last question: Is Miss Mingyan an accomplice?"

The Yao girl sneered and said, "I do want to say yes..." An electric arc once again swam through her body, causing her face to change colour once again, after which she shook her head, "She doesn't know anything."

"Senior, I'm done asking questions." Xu Qi'an said.

Could this Yao girl be left to me as a merit? He was about to articulate the question when he heard the white-robed man say, "All right. This Yao girl is my merit. So, I'll be taking her away."

What? Weren't you an expert? This isn't how I'd expect you to respond. Xu Qi'an replied dully, "Well. Also, are any other monsters hiding here?"

"When this venerable arrives, even mountains of swords and seas of fire will become a paradise." After posturing, Yang Qianhuan said, "The Jiaofangsi is very safe."

Although he felt that the guy had some problems in his head, his strength didn't have any problems. Xu Qi'an nodded, reassured.

"You, Lower your head for a few breaths." Suddenly, Yang Qianhuan said.

Xu Qi'an did as he said, dazed. After two breaths, he raised his head, only to discover that the white-robed man had disappeared.

After checking that famous oiran Mingyan's breathing and heartbeat didn't have any problems, Xu Qi'an left the Azure Pond Courtyard carrying a question in his head, *Why did he want me to lower my head for two breaths?*

Xu Qi'an dragged his exhausted body into Reflecting Plum Courtyard and was led to the master bedroom, where he saw Fuxiang, whose face was peach red due to crying.

The miss was lying on the edge of the bed and had turned her body sideways, and her head was also facing outside.

After looking at her, Xu Qi'an didn't bother to explain anything and lifted the quilt to sleep.

He didn't want to stay at the Azure Pond Courtyard anymore, and he couldn't go back home in the middle of the night. So, He could only rest in the Reflecting Plum Courtyard.

Chapter 146. Eat you, Brother

The morning of the next day, Xu Qi'an awoke in high spirits. The person beside him had already gone, and all that was left in the brocade duvet was the remnants of a woman's perfume.

He propped himself up, his limbs feeling weak and sore, as if he had just ran a kilometre sprint the day before.

I've overslept again... however, I have a good excuse in being late, I came to the Jiaofangsi to investigate.

Xu Qi'an sat up cross-legged and started deep breathing, slowly relieving the fatigue in his cells, returning his body as quickly as possible to its best possible state.

He breathed through two microcosmic orbits, as some life came back to his aching muscles.

Creak~

The bedroom door was pushed open, and Fuxiang with her dress pulling behind her, came in with her maidservant. Her jet-black hair was tied tightly up, adorned with ornate jewellery. Her pale beautiful face was somewhat sallow.

Her eyes were still somewhat red and swollen, her eyelids plump from crying.

"Master Xu is awake." She smiled lightly, wearing a distant and formal smile, "I've asked the kitchen to make you some duck broth."

"Put it over there," Xu Qi'an took toiletries from the maid, and quickly brushed his teeth and washed his face. Coming back to the table, he picked up the bowl, and whilst eating thought:

The Yao woman yesterday was from the Wanyao kingdom remnants, implying that this has nothing to do with the northern Yao... the suspicion on the Zhenbei King is very light... is the target of the Wanyao kingdom the sealed item, or something else?

The reason Xu Qi'an would think this way, is that if the target was indeed the sealed item, then the Yao kingdom's people would cash in and flee, rather than stay in the capital and cause more trouble.

...There's another possibility, that not only are the Yao after the sealed item, but there's a much greater plot, and the sealed item is just a means to an end.

The different leads of the Sangpo case had pretty much been uncovered.

The main conspirators: One, traitors in the court; two, the remnants of the Wanyao kingdom.

The target: Unknown.

The sealed item: A powerful person's severed hand.

Factors, people, and powers involved: The Wanyao Kingdom, The Earl Pingyuan, the Minister of War, the Sitianjian, the Crown, Princess Pingyang, the Monk Henghui, Baihu Zhou Chixiong of the Jinwu guard...

Points of interest: The handless powerful person, the monk Henghui, Princess Pingyang.

If I can find out the identity of the severed hand, then I can deduce what the true objective of the Wanyao kingdom is... then, if I can capture one of Henghui or Princess Pingyang, then I can work back to find the true events... Xu Qi'an drank his broth, and sighed in satisfaction.

Only then did he have time to tease Fuxiang: "Are you angry?"

Fuxiang's smile was sweet, "Master Xu should not make fun of your servant, your servant is just a prostitute girl, what right do I have to be angry with the Master?"

Alright, "Dear" has now become "Master Xu" has it... Xu Qi'an nodded, stretching in a carefree manner, "Prepare some hot water, I want a bath."

Fuxiang nodded, smiling, and arranged a maid to bathe him. She herself led her personal maidservant out, to walk.

Xu Qi'an had a comfortable hot bath. He tidily dressed, tied on his bronze gong, strapped on his sabre, and then thought for a moment, asking "Could you prepare some ink and a brush for me."

The small maid softly answered "Yes sir."

...

"Madam, are you not being too cold to Master Xu?" In the alleys of the Jiaofangsi, the maid asked.

Fuxiang's gaze remained facing forward, as she shook her head slightly, her tone somewhat mournful, "You don't understand. I once pleaded with him, if he could buy my freedom, yet he refused."

The maid fell silent, and then tried to explain for Xu Qi'an, "Master Xu probably has no silver. Madam's contract at the low end would be three to four thousand taels of silver, and it might even have doubled."

Fuxiang drew back her gaze, looking at the floor, "I've saved quite a lot of silver over these years, it is possible..."

She laughed bitterly, her expression melancholy, "In his heart, I'm no different to you. Before I didn't want to believe it, I tried to deceive others and deceive myself, but the events of last night made me see myself properly."

It was nought but wishful thinking; as flower petals fall into a stream with desire, yet the stream has no feelings for the flower.

As she walked, unconsciously she came to the Azure Pond Courtyard, and a clamorous series of sounds caught her attention.

Two men in Nightwatcher uniforms with Bronze Gongs, walked out with Mingyan in shackles. The old brothel keeper blindly followed their footsteps, her expression panicked, vigorously protesting:

“Officers, officers, this must be a mistake, it must be a mistake!”

The oiran Minyan’s face was full of terror, “Mother, I was wronged, I was wronged!...”

She knew these two silver gongs, they were the two that usually accompanied Xu Qi’an in drinking games at the Reflecting Plum Pavilion. She remembered one was surnamed Song, the other ... that one was too silent, she couldn’t remember.

What’s happened? Yesterday Mingyan was perfectly fine. Right, why did Master Xu suddenly come back to my Reflecting Plum Pavilion... did Mingyan offend the master? And so she was set up?

She immediately discounted this thought; even though her heart was ashen towards this man, she still believed Xu Qi’an was not that type of person.

Fuxiang frowned, and met the Nightwatchers, giving a full bow, “My sirs, what crime has Madam Mingyan committed?”

Song Tingfeng stopped, and replied with squinted smile, “Madam Mingyan secretly conspired with the Yaoguai, and provided shelter. Last night through Sir Xu’s covert investigation, he found the female Yao that was hiding as her personal maidservant.

“The Yao woman has already been executed, we are now bringing her in for questioning.”

The brothel keeper beat her chest and stamped her feet, “This is a false arrest! Mingyan is merely a weak woman, how could she have conspired with the Yaoguai? Do you know how much blood and sweat and silver went into raising and training her? I’m going to report this to the Ministry of Rites, the Ministry will defend us!”

Zhu Guangxiao said solemnly, “I now suspect that you are also in cahoots.”

The brothel keeper suddenly fell silent, her will to stay alive taking over and making her back away.

Song Tingfeng squinted, before nodding towards Fuxiang, and leaving.

Fuxiang stared in a daze at their backs, and started thinking... *Mingyan conspiring with Yao? Master Xu covertly investigating?*

Last night he decided to stay at the Azure Pond Courtyard, not because he was enamoured with new people, but because he had official duties, yet I was just a pouting troublemaker.

I saw him come back last night exhausted, I had thought that he and Mingyan... I’ve wronged him, and this morning I gave him such an attitude... but why didn’t he explain? Right, he couldn’t explain, because this is official business of the constabulary, case details must be kept secret.

And yet even like this, though he knew he was being misunderstood, wronged, he didn’t show a sliver of annoyance, silently taking it all...

Fuxiang suddenly picked up her skirt hems, and sprinted towards the Reflecting Plum Pavilion.

“Madam, where are you going, slow down...” the maidservant was startled.

As she flew back to the Reflecting Plum Pavilion, and rushed into the bedroom, Fuxiang shouted out “My Dear...”

The room was empty, he had already gone. At this moment, she felt as if she had lost something precious, as if she had lost a part of her heart.

“Madam, madam...” the maidservant caught up, and saw her Madam standing emptily by the doorway.

“I’m tired, support me.” Fuxiang said softly.

The maid supported her onto the bed, and glanced at her, sighing inside. She did not dare to disturb her, and so turned to tidy the room.

She saw the pen, paper, and ink stone on the table by the screen divider, and let out a soft “eh?”. Walking over, she said:

“Madam, there’s a poem here, perhaps Master Xu left it.”

Fuxiang immediately came to life, rushing barefoot to the tableside, snatching it from the maid as if she was snatching a precious jewel, and read:

*A fair girl draws the blind aside.

And sadly sits with drooping head;

I see her burning tear-drops glide

But know not why those tears are shed.*^[^1]

“My dear, my dear...” She first laughed, and as she laughed and laughed, teardrops began to fall like rain. She sagged towards the floor, clutching the paper to her heart, both crying and laughing, like raindrops on pear blossoms.

“I’m going to find him.” Fuxiang wiped her tears, rising, and jogged towards the door.

The maid was greatly shocked, as she clung onto her Madam’s waist, “No no no, you’re an oiran, the most famous oiran in the Jiaofangsi, if this were to get out, how will you continue on? All that fame that you’ve gained would all be gone.

“There’s never been another oiran without style like this.”

Fuxiang angrily shouted “Let go of me!”

“Absolutely not!”

...

Xu Qi’an bought six large meat buns at a street stall, and leisurely rode towards the constabulary.

The oirans of the Jiaofangsi are all pretty good looking... each have their allure, there’s nothing beautiful that can be imagined... mn, when the Sangpo case is finished, I’ll go and exchange experiences one by one with them, and then publish a “Guide to the Oirans of the Great Feng”.

The only issue is that I don't have that much money. Every day I can only pick up three cash of silver, and with the price of the Oirans it takes at least thirty taels to sleep one for a night.

Thank you, nine years of mandatory education[^2]... those poems weren't for nothing. Heh, I'm really a disgrace to transmigrators, they use literary talent to get high official jobs, and I freeload prostitutes...

I'm nearly twenty now. At least Auntie isn't my mum, she won't bother with my marriage, I can decide for myself. Caiwei is a disciple of the Sitianjian, it's too hard behind the scenes, almost like trying to marry a lesser princess, I won't be able to go out and play much more...

But let's not be hasty. A few more years of sleeping around, after all the Jiaofangsi has twenty-four oirans! Haha, I'm thinking out of my arse anyway, as if the disciples of the Jianzheng even deign to look at me as a suitable partner.

Freeloader Xu mocked himself in his mind, his thoughts going all over the place, finally returning to the ase.

He was the one who had encouraged Song Tingfeng to arrest her. Even though he confirmed last night that she was innocent, he still had questions to ask, such as when did that maid enter the Jiaofangsi, who was she close with, what was her daily habits, etc.

...

In a quiet courtyard, the willow trees trailed down branches like hair, all devoid of leaves and looking rather desolate.

Thumping and clattering came from within the house, as well as the pained grunts of a man... a moment later, all activity stilled.

"Creak~"

The door opened, and a black-robed Henghui walked out, coming directly to the well in the courtyard.

He stared into the deep well for a moment, before waving his hand. The well opening suddenly alit with a golden sauwastika[^3], before breaking .

After the seal was removed, Henghui jumped in.

In the dim well bottom, the mud gave off the light stench of stagnant water. A middle-aged monk sat with his back against the well wall, cross-legged in meditation.

He looked dreary and desolate, his lips were dry and cracked, as if he had been badly hurt.

The middle-aged monk had a tall and sturdy build, with a light grey beard shadow, his face displaying a great bitterness.

If Xu Qi'an was here, he would immediately recognise this monk: someone that Xu Qi'an had been searching in worry for a long time; Hengyuan.

"Brother..." Henghui's voice was hoarse.

Hengyuan ignored him; sitting silently.

"I've been gravely hurt, the severed hand is biting back."

Hengyuan opened his eyes, and said with concern, “Henghui, look back and the shore is at hand.”[4]

Henghui shook his head, “Brother. At the age of six I came to Qinglong temple. I’ve followed by your side, you taught me how to meditate, taught me the sacred texts, looked after me for food, bed, and clothing. You treated me like a blood brother, now I plead with you for one thing.”

Hengyuan sighed, and nodded.

Henghui raised his head, showing a pair of eyes with no white. He laughed fiercely, “I need to eat you, brother.”

Chapter 147. A Message from Jinlian

Under the black cloak, those hands stretched out on their own, qi swirling in their palms... whoosh! Hengyuan helplessly flew up, flying towards the whirlpool of death.

In pain his eyes opened wide, his skin quickly drying, his blood flowing away, as his body began to visibly wither away.

That familiar face reflected in his eyes, slowly withering away, slowly inching towards death... Henghui, watching all of this, suddenly showed some expression on his ruthless face, his inky black eyes no longer as cold and unyielding.

Bang! Hengyuan was thrown aside, colliding heavily with the well wall.

Henghui’s left hand was clamped over his right, as he grunted through gritted teeth, “You will not kill him, you will not kill my Brother...”

His face suddenly became cold and unfeeling, and his voice became enticing, “Hengyuan is a warrior monk, his qi is flourishing, he would be perfect to heal your injury... do you not want revenge, do you not want revenge?”

Immediately after, that cold expression disappeared, and pained struggle took its place, “No, you can’t kill him! He’s my sect-brother!”

“You can kill anyone in the world, why not him?”

“You can kill anyone, just not him! He’s my Brother, he’s the one I revere the most.”

“How about Pingyang?”

“Pingyang...”

His expression became cold, then pained, then cold again, as if two personalities were fighting over his body. As they struggled, the veins on that thick right arm began to glow in red light, becoming stronger and weaker, as if it were breathing.

Henghui’s main personality seemed to have been suppressed, as the coldness slowly took the upper hand.

“Henghui...” Hengyuan’s voice was tired, “Do you remember that chant that your brother taught you before?”

The Chant of calming minds... Henghui resisted the right arm that had gotten out of his control, and sat down slowly, his back to the well wall. He put his hands together, and started to mutter.

A long time later, he slowly calmed those evil desires, and the right arm stopped its agitation.

Henghui opened his eyes, those eyes that still had no sign of white. In the darkness of the well bottom he stared at Hengyuan, his voice hoarse:

“Brother, didn’t you want to know what I encountered a year ago? Well, I’ll tell you.”

...

“What’s the maid’s name?”

In the interrogation room, Xu Qi’an drank tea, looking at the oiran sitting anxiously opposite him.

“He’er...” Mingyan answered promptly.

She constantly stole glances at Xu Qi’an, as well as the tightly shut door behind them. As an oiran of the Jiaofangsi, she had received her fair share of important guests, and knew what the Nightwatchers Constabulary was like.

Any officials who were put here, would lose a layer of skin if they did not outright die, and a weak woman like her, may be facing a fate worse than death.

“When did she start serving you.” Xu Qi’an’s expression was serious.

“For- for three or four years.” She looked at Xu Qi’an in fear, “Around three and a half years, as for the exact time your servant can’t remember.”

This young man sat there expressionless, an imposing aura naturally forming around him. She hardly dared to take breath, as a towering mountain of stress weighed on her heart.

How did he change so much? Last night he seemed fully like a hedonistic boy born with a silver spoon.

Three and a half years... afterwards I’ll send someone to look that up, to see which women entered the Jiaofangsi at that ime. Xu Qi’an nodded,

“Normally, who did she meet, or were close confidants with?”

Mingyan thought for a long time, simultaneously trying to remember, and giving out a long list of names.

After asking a few more questions, Xu Qi’an looked at the clerk who was making notes, who nodded back.

“Thank you, Miss Mingyan, for your cooperation. You may leave.”

“Eh?” Fortune came like a tornado, and she was momentarily in disbelief.

“I’ll take you back to the Jiaofangsi.” Xu Qi’an rose, and made a “please” gesture.

Oiran Mingyan anxiously followed him out of the room, and all the way to the constabulary door. When she saw the horse-drawn carriage parked there, she finally felt a great weight lift, and knew that she would really be sent back to the Jiaofangsi, and not to be kept in the constabulary to be...

She immediately recovered some of her past personality, giving a full bow, "Thank you, Master Xu."

Xu Qi'an stretched out a hand, and pinched those round, plump buttocks, "Don't thank me with words, thank me with actions."

This man can change face faster than a woman can... Mingyan was somewhat embarrassed, and glanced at the carriage.

Xu Qi'an's eyebrow raised, looking at the carriage and falling into thought.

...

The horse drawn carriage stopped outside the alleys of the Jiaofangsi. The oiran stepped out, and said softly, "If Sir Xu has time, please come to my Azure Pond Courtyard for tea."

With pleasantries exchanged, she quickly turned and left, her steps very quick, her dress flapping.

She was somewhat scared of Xu Qi'an, naturally not because of his 24-carat gold hardness; nothing happened on the carriage.

She was always apprehensive of those with hard to predict tempers.

Xu Qi'an rode back to the constabulary, and gathered the core members of his team for a meeting.

Very quickly, the three Silver Gongs, Lyu Qing, as well as Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao were summoned to the side hall by Xu Qi'an.

"I gather everyone knows what happened last night in the Jiaofangsi." Xu Qi'an said.

Everyone nodded their heads; they had all been told by Song Tingfeng. They also knew that in the end it was the Sitianjian's disciples that acted and saved the day.

As to why Song Tingfeng did not report back to the constabulary, they all tacitly did not ask, because yesterday night, unfortunately, it was Gold Gong Zhu who was on duty.

Lyu Qing stared at Xu Qi'an for a long time, to where his hair stood on end, and he asked with a frown, "Constable Lyu, what's the matter?"

Lyu Qing pursed her small red lips, "How did Sir know that there were Yao hiding in the Jiaofangsi?"

The other men gave understanding smiles, and only Li Yuchun maintained a stiff face, being out of tune with the others due to his insufficient lustfulness.

Xu Qi'an replied with a straight face, "When I was patrolling one night, I looked at the Jiaofangsi with qi-watching magic, and discovered Yao qi."

"Why did I not hear you report this?" Li Yuchun asked blankly.

"At that time, I didn't know what green light stood for, after that because I gave that asshole Zhu a blade, and was put in jail for it, and then after..." Xu Qi'an shrugged.

After that you became my subordinate, even though we called each other by what we did, I didn't need to report to you any more.

"Alright, there's things I need you all to do." Xu Qi'an took out a list of names from his robes and smacked them down on the table.

"Boss, you lead people to investigate the names on the list. They were close with the Yao woman. Furthermore, investigate for people who joined the Jiaofangsi four years ago, or any woman who suddenly got famous.

"Constable Lyu, you take a team to search house by house for Henghui, remember to take utmost care."

After he had spoken, Xu Qi'an sat down again and drank some water, planning to go report the matter at the Jiaofangsi to Wei Yuan.

That twinge in his heart came out of nowhere. He immediately left the side hall, and entered the latrine, whereupon he took out the Earth Book fragment. The Earth Book Group Chat, which had not had activity for a long time, finally came to life again.

【FIVE: I've come to pay back my debt to THREE, mm, we've finished exploring the Abyss. I've discovered a secret as big as the heavens themselves!】

Given that she had deliberately mentioned him, Xu Qi'an could not remain silent, and replied 【THREE: What secret?】

【FIVE: How about you guys, have you decided to owe me one?】

【TWO: Let's hear it then.】

【FOUR: Heh, no problem.】

【FIVE: Is ONE not here?】

【ONE: Ok.】

After everyone had expressed themselves, number Five messaged: 【FIVE: The seven shaman tribes have worked as one, and overcome many difficulties, and after a life-and-death exploration, finally reached the abys...】

【THREE: Just get to the point.】

【FIVE: ... we found the Confucian Sage's statue in the abyss, he's watching into the abyss.】

The Confucian Sage? Everyone in the Heaven and Earth Society were shocked, and then could not help but think of Three. As a distinguished student of the Cloud Deer Academy, he may know something about this.

But he probably won't say... furthermore, they still hadn't returned any favours... the amount they owed was just getting more and more...

【FIVE: THREE, you're a student in the Cloud Deer Academy, you should know something about this, right?】

Everyone in the Heaven and Earth Society were very happy, Five asked well.

How would I know, I'm also shocked... Xu Qi'an did not respond directly, adding
【Apart from the Sage's statue, what else was there? Furthermore, could you describe in detail what the sage's statue looks like.】

This was all useless talk without any substance, with the only goal to get more information.

【FIVE: Apart from the Gu god and various insects, the only thing in the abyss is the sage's statute. Oh, I've just remembered, the sage's statue was cracked at the forehead, the elders in the tribe seem to be really worried.】

The sage's statue's head is cracked... the Shaman clans' elders are really worried...
Number Two suddenly had a thought, 【Say, might the Sage's statue not be suppressing the Gu God? Otherwise, why would the sage's statue appear in the Abyss?】

【FOUR: We cannot discount this possibility, using statues, bronze models, and other bronze items as vectors for sealing formations is very commonly seen. The best example of this is in ancient times, when the human emperor cast nine cauldrons, to suppress the mountains and rivers of the Nine Provinces, gathering the fortunes of Humanity.】

【ONE: That Sage statue's forehead is starting to split, doesn't this imply that the seal is no longer as stable? Thus the Gu God is beginning to re-awaken.】

【FOUR: This is a possibility.】

This topic quickly passed, as after all both the rank of the Gu God and the distance to the Southern Marches were all too far removed from everyone.

Xu Qi'an sent another message 【ONE, recently you haven't even asked me about the Sangpo case's status, have you got any leads from those ancient books?】

【ONE: None.】

After this, One silently went back under the water.

ONE's reply isn't usual, earlier they were clearly very interested in the Sangpo case... but after so many days, he (or she) hasn't even asked me once... Xu Qi'an continued to message, 【TWO, do you have any leads on where Zhou Chixiong is?】

【TWO: Nope, I'll continue to keep an ear out.】

People mountain people sea, of course it was not so easy to find him. Xu Qi'an was both disappointed, but also felt that this was expected.

After talking for a few more minutes, number Four and the others expressed their worry towards Six's whereabouts, calling for Number Nine the Daoist Jinlian, yet he did not respond.

... The weather's so good today, perhaps Jinlian Daozhang is up on some roof sunbathing.

Xu Qi'an lampooned, before suddenly seeing Jinlian stick his head out of the water,

【NINE: Three, come out and see me.】

"Hm?" Xu Qi'an stared blankly, before understanding him. He quickly put back his jade mirror, left the latrine, and quickly walked towards the constabulary door.

He looked around at the door, and saw on the street stood a ginger cat, its tail perked up high, quietly watching the Nightwatchers Constabulary main door.

Xu Qi'an naturally walked over, over to beside the cat, yet he did not look down at it, rather looking in all four directions.

The ginger cat said solemnly, "I've found Six."

Chapter 148. Story (I)

"You found him?" Xu Qi'an could not resist exclaiming, turning his head in excitement to look directly at the ginger cat.

The ginger cat looked cautiously towards the Nightwatchers Constabulary, and said "Not long ago, I sensed Six's Earth Book fragment... but when I was coming over to find you, the connection between the fragments broke again."

"Then Six..." Xu Qi'an's expression turned.

The ginger cat shook his head, "I don't know details, but what I guessed before was correct; he's been sealed up, and just then because of some reason, the seal was broken."

The ginger cat paused, and did not continue.

Why would the seal be broken? There were two main possibilities: Six was moved, or Six was no more.

"Quickly, go find Wei Yuan." the ginger cat rushed him.

A cat's face did not have expression, and so it was hard to see, but from his tone of voice Xu Qi'an could tell the anxiety concealed within.

Even if Daozhang is a LYB, he still cares a lot about the Heaven and Earth Society members... this is good for me, if in the future I come into trouble I can ask him for help... Xu Qi'an nodded, "I'll go immediately."

He quickly ran back into the constabulary.

When his figure had disappeared, the ginger cat snorted lightly, thinking:

What on earth is Luo Yuheng thinking? From then until now she still hasn't done anything. With her cultivation and age, her fate shouldn't have arrived yet, so there's no reason not to act.

On one hand she wants to be the National Teacher, on the other hand not wanting to dual-cultivate with the Emperor, I don't know what on earth she's thinking. Ai, let's save Six first, if he hasn't died yet.

As he thought, Jinlian Daozhang heard a cat's cry. Turning his head, he saw a large grey cat walk over, walking circles around him, sniffing here and there.

Jinlian Daozhang stopped caring about him, continuing to think his thoughts. Suddenly, the big grey cat came to behind him, and then mounted on top...

Hm? Jinlian Daozhang was startled at first, before suddenly realising what was going on. A huge anger welled up, as he turned to give the grey cat a beating.

...

Xu Qi'an sprinted inside the Tower of Noble Spirit, not wasting time waiting for the clerk to send a message. As he ran he showed his golden token, and shouted to the guards, "Incredibly urgent! Away!"

Coming to the seventh floor, he saw Wei Yuan standing by the balcony, and as he entered Wei Yuan immediately asked "What is it."

"Duke Wei, I may have knowledge of Henghui." Xu Qi'an immediately got to the point.

"How did you find him?"

"Not long ago Jinlian Daozhang of the Heaven and Earth Society used the connection between Earth Book fragments to track down where Number Six is." Xu Qi'an said, "Number Six is Henghui's sect brother, a monk of Qinglong temple, with the dharma name Hengyuan. When searching for his sect brother's tracks, he suddenly disappeared. I suspect that he was sealed up by Henghui or the Yao."

Thus implying, where Six was, Henghui or the Yao race were also likely to be. No matter which case was true, this would still be a highly important matter.

Wei Yuan nodded, and came back to the tea room, picking up a pen and quickly writing a letter, before stamping a jade seal on it, "Take this order and go see Yang Yan, make him gather all the Gold Gongs, to gather in fifteen minutes before the constabulary door. As for everything else, that's not your issue."

"Jinlian Daozhang is right outside the entrance, we need him to lead the way..." Xu Qi'an said in a low voice.

"I know." Wei Yuan said.

"I have another problem," Xu Qi'an hesitated, "Henghui is in the inner city. If a battle were to start, then it would be hard for some common people to get injured."

To conduct a large-scale investigation of the area's residents would be immediately found out. The formations of the Sitianjian were mysterious, but if they could not be put down beforehand, then they might as well not exist.

"This is unavoidable," Wei Yuan stared at him, saying, "I've also been intending to talk to you about this. I also loathe those who are callous with human lives, but sometimes we need to know when to let go."

"Henghui is related to the Sangpo case, related to the sealed item, related to the scheming of the Yao race. If we have an opportunity, then we should catch him at all costs, or kill him."

"Never win small and lose big, because of a sudden welling of morality. That will only cause worse issues later down the line."

"I've read the dossier on the murder of Earl Pingyuan's family, that sealed item likes to consume blood and qi to strengthen itself. Henghui hasn't killed again yet, but that does not mean he will always be laying low. With the sealed item's strength, if it were to wantonly consume human blood, then it would cause even greater harm and destruction."

Wei Yuan is warning me not to make the same mistake as last time... about attacking Silver Gong Zhu, he never said anything on the surface, but he didn't necessarily approve of my actions... he's a schemer, and I'm a policeman, even if I'm fond of placating the big sisters in the Jiaofangsi... mn, this isn't depravity, this is giving them business.

As his thoughts whirled, he clasped his hands together, "Yes sir."

Xu Qi'an took the order letter, and left.

He immediately went to find Yang Yan, and saw this stiff faced Gold Gong in front of his Divine Spear Hall. Meeting his questioning gaze, he handed over Wei Yuan's letter.

Yang Yan finished reading it, and his stiff carved face showed some amount of graveness, "What's happened? Why is father summoning all of the Gold Gongs?"

"We've found a place that may be where Henghui is hiding." Xu Qi'an replied.

Yang Yan's gaze suddenly became sharp. He rose, reached out, and the silver spear on the wooden stand flew to his hand with a whoosh.

"Gold Gong Yang..." Xu Qi'an called, asking curiously, "If there are no Gold Gongs guarding the constabulary, won't Duke Wei's safety be at risk?"

"I don't know." Yang Yan shook his head.

You don't know? Xu Qi'an looked at him blankly, before hearing him explain: "Nobody knows how many people are protecting Father, or how powerful they are."

Guard details are secret? So you never know what is true and what is not... Wei Yuan really is a crafty old schemer.

Very quickly, all the Gold Gongs present were gathered, and assembled in the front hall of the constabulary.

At the same time, thirty Silver Gongs were summoned, with no bronze gongs. If an altercation were to happen, then sending bronze gongs would be sending cannon fodder.

Xu Qi'an ran outside the Nightwatchers Constabulary, looking left and right, and beside a wonton stall some ways away, he saw the ginger cat.

"Jinlian Daozhang, come, come..." Xu Qi'an waved his hand.

The ginger cat did not pay one bit of attention to him, its attention focused entirely on the great pot, smelling the fragrance floating out from within.

What's up with Jinlian Daozhang, is he hungry? Xu Qi'an stared blankly, before hearing a familiar voice come from behind him, "I'm here."

Turning his head, he saw a big grey cat standing behind him, looking back at him.

"Why did you change cats?" Xu Qi'an asked.

"That was a female cat..." the big grey cat explained tersely, as if he didn't want to talk about it further, and changed the topic: "What's Wei Yuan's attitude on me being with your people?"

"Duke Wei is willing to work with you."

The grey cat nodded, and lightly hopped onto Xu Qi'an's shoulder, laughing lightly in his ear, "Duke Wei... your reverence towards Azure Cloak Wei is far deeper than towards Emperor Yuanjing."

"So far, I haven't seen any flaws in his character that would cause me to dislike him."

Xu Qi'an walked and talked quietly, "Six is temporarily living in the Welfare home in the eastern city, that place is tattered beyond toleration. The court keeps delaying on its funding, and the children and elderly there can hardly eat any more. When I told Duke Wei of Six's circumstances, not only did he did not move to take Six, but rather arranged the owed funding to be payed. Yet the welfare home is not in the jurisdiction of the Nightwatchers."

"Heh, so you did reveal information from our Heaven and Earth Society to Wei Yuan." Jinlian Daozhang had a half-laughing tone.

This... Xu Qi'an's expression stiffened, feeling the shame of being called out for being a mole by the boss in broad daylight, but he quickly recovered, shrugging,

"I gain Duke Wei's trust to gain for information, to better our Heaven and Earth Society's intelligence systems. To reveal a little is still beneficial... why has Daozhang stopped talking?"

"You are too shameless, I don't want to speak." The grey cat sneered, "you're quite suited to an official career."

“But Wei Yuan said I’m not suited to officialdom.”

“Even though you’re shameless, you still have a bottom line, and so will easily end up with the short end of the stick.” Jinlian Daozhang commented.

“I’ve suddenly thought of something. When the National Teacher saw me, she also detected something special about me. She asked me for my birthdate and horoscope, yet she couldn’t conclude anything specific.” Xu Qi’an said helplessly.

The cat thought for a moment, asking “What do you think?”

Xu Qi’an thought for a moment: “Something special... look over there — [Look at this chapter’s comments]”^[^1]

Jinlian: “...”

...

Xu Qi’an rode on his mare, clip-clopping at the front. Behind him followed a group of gold and silver gongs.

The big grey cat sat on his shoulder, giving directions.

After walking for two sticks’ incense time, it suddenly said: “Stop, ahead is... it’s that courtyard, the Earth Book fragment’s aura is coming from that courtyard.”

Xu Qi’an pulled on the reins, as the gold and silver gongs behind him made the same action, the large contingent stopping at once.

He made a gesture behind him, and pointed towards the small courtyard house in front.

The ten Gold Gongs exchanged glances, and in synchrony disappeared from their horses’ backs, their figures appearing all around the small house, blocking all avenues of escape.

The Silver Gongs made a larger circle around them.

Xu Qi’an waited quietly for a while, and after not seeing the Gold Gongs move, looked back towards the courtyard with a frown.

What’s wrong? Has he escaped?

He jumped on the roof of the neighbouring house, managing to see into the courtyard from this angle.

The courtyard wasn’t big, two willow trees were growing within it. In the courtyard were sat two monks.

One had his hands together in prayer, chanting quietly.

The other was clad in black, head lowered, making not a sound.

It was the two sect-brothers Henghui and Hengyuan.

What happened?

Xu Qi’an looked at the grey cat on his shoulder, seeing that it also had confusion in its eyes.

“Let’s go over and see”, the cat with its little head, had great confusion, and urged Xu Qi’an on.

At this time, he saw Yang Yan with his spear advancing closer.

“You’ve come a step too late, he has already gone to Sukhavati, the land of paradise.” Hengyuan’s voice was empty, without joy or anguish, yet an indescribable grief was contained within.

He’s dead? This result caught Xu Qi’an off guard. Instinctively he suspected some kind of trap, that this was an illusion, to buy time.

Yang Yan flipped down Henghui’s hood with his spear. Below was a grey face, eyes closed, without any sign of life.

Yang Yan nodded lightly towards the other Gold Gongs, confirming that Henghui was already dead.

“Between my death and his own, he chose the latter, and had his life consumed by the demon hand.” Hengyuan deeply intoned a Buddhist chant.

“Yang Yan, look at his right arm.” Jiang Lyuzhong said solemnly.

Yang Yan shook his spear, as his qi tore apart the black cloak. Empty space appeared where Henghui’s right arm was meant to be; that demon arm was nowhere to be found.

It’s gone... Xu Qi’an’s pupils contracted, as he cautiously looked left and right, feeling that the area was no longer safe, and hid an untold number of dangers.

The Silver Gongs who witnessed this all did the same, as they all drew their blades, cautiously looking at the passers-by around.

“It’s already gone...” Hengyuan said deeply, “I remained here to wait for you all.”

Six is convinced that we would come? Right, Jinlian Daozhang could sense his Earth Book fragment, so he waited... Xu Qi’an had a realisation.

“Monk, what do you want to say?” Nangong Qianrou put his hand on his sabre, not letting down his guard.

“He did not give up his revenge, but rather handed responsibility to me.” Hengyuan said quietly, “I want to tell everyone a story, a story that happened a year ago.”

Chapter 149. Story (II)

A story that happened a year ago... Xu Qi’an’s mood transformed from one of disappointment to that of excitement. Without a doubt, this story that Hengyuan wanted to say would be the story of Henghui and Princess Pingyang.

Whatever that had happened to them was the key to unravelling the Sangpo case. So far, the Yao had yet to show up in the capital, only Henghui using the sealed item was making waves here. This would make anyone think, what did the Wanyao Kingdom want exactly?

Sabotage? Yet there had been just a single case of a family extermination, that of Count Pingyuan's House. It had a great impact but didn't cause much damage. Henghui could have gone on a killing spree and bathed the capital in blood yet he hadn't done that.

The sealed Item? If their motive had been the sealed item, Henghui would have left the capital long ago.

The case of Henghui and Princess Pingyang, had already upstaged the Sangpo case... I have a feeling that the ones behind the scenes deliberately exposed Henghui...

Yang Yan aimed his spear, emitting a burst of qi that shredded the sleeves of monk Hengyuan. His arms may have been muscular, but they weren't in any way demonic.

"Henghui is indeed dead. He had died a year ago. All that remained was merely a living corpse, a zombie. Now, he has been liberated. This is no conspiracy." Looking at his junior brother's body, dark clouds gathered in Hengyuan's eyes.

After a short while, the dark clouds in Hengyuan's eyes subsided, giving rise to a torrential rain carrying the past.

...

Henghui had been sent to the Qinglong Temple by his parents when he was six. He was a spirited child back then, and was immediately spotted by Abbot Monk Panshu and accepted as his apprentice.

Henghui was fully enlightened under the care of his senior brother, monk Hengyuan. The burly senior brother, with a bitter past and deep hatred, was the one who taught him to read and write, who taught him to meditate and chant the scriptures and also taught him the principles of life.

He respected and loved this senior brother as a father.

In a blink of an eye, many years passed, the clever and spirited little monk had grown into a handsome monk, with a similarly handsome countenance. He initially believed that he would spend his fleeting life under the light of the Buddha, just like his master and senior brother.

Until one day, when he met a girl...

That day was a sunny spring day. He was washing clothes in a stream when he saw a handkerchief falling floating down it. When he picked it up subconsciously, a clear voice, gentle like a bird, reached his ears.

"Master, that's my handkerchief. Can you return it to me?"

Henghui raised his head and saw a slender elegant woman standing on the bluestone pavement upstream. She was wearing a long lotus-pink dress. her long hair was combed, like the hair of an unmarried young woman. Although her face looked plain, it glowed under the sunlight, revealing a beauty anyone would love.

"Miss... Are you a pilgrim in the temple?"

"Why, Are you not going to return my handkerchief if I'm not a pilgrim?" She pinched her waist and acted flirtatiously.

"No, no. I just felt that miss was unfamiliar." After explaining, he offered the handkerchief to her with both hands.

"Hmmpf. You only know to bow your head and chant scriptures every day, and don't put us, pilgrims, in your eyes at all."

"How would you know, Miss?"

"Because I've been following you for a long time."

On a bright spring, near a gurgling stream, thus their first meeting went.

Continuing, the acquaintance and friendship of the two was something to be expected.

Whenever Henghui meditated, the young girl would be by his side, either reading forbidden story books or simply fanning her fan gently as she stared at Henghui's focused face in a daze.

She would occasionally tickle him with dog tail grass, making him unable to concentrate on meditation. This annoyed the young master a lot. So, He would angrily say, "If you continue like this. This monk will leave once and for all."

Just after that, She would stick out the tip of her tongue, and apologise half-heartedly.

Now and then, they went on a trip to the mountains together. The scenery of White Phoenix Mountain was beautiful. In spring, the mountain and fields were filled with flowers. When she smiled in these flowery bushes, the source of the beauty was undetermined, unknown if it was the beauty of man or the beauty of nature.

Gradually, rumours about their relationship began to spread among the monks of Qinglong Temple. It was said that he wasn't pure, that he had broken the precept of lust, and that he was a lewd monk.

So, Master Panshu asked him three questions in front of the sculpture of the Buddha, Whether he was still devout to the Buddha; Whether he was interested in that woman; and whether he wanted to return to the mortal world.

He said, firmly that he was still devout to the Buddha; that he didn't have any intentions on the woman; and that he wasn't interested in the mortal world.

For this matter, the abbot only requested one thing of him: He was not to exchange a single word with that woman again.

As to the reason why he was the one prohibited from speaking to her instead of her being forbidden from entering the temple, Henghui later found that the abbot had actually wished to do so. But, he couldn't do it.

She was Princess Pingyang, the daughter of King Yu.

From that day on, Henghui no longer paid any attention to her. He would close his eyes and meditate whenever she neared, indifferent to her teasing and pranks.

Every day, She would arrive filled with hope and expectation, and every day, she would leave with greater disappointment and loneliness.

"Monk, Is this flower beautiful? I think it matches me very well."

"..."

"Monk, do you want to listen to my Qin? I specially brought it from home today."

"..."

"Monk, I'm feeling uneasy. Don't you care about me?"

"..."

"Monk, Do you have to insist on this solitude?"

"..."

Then, She finally stopped coming. She didn't set foot in Qinglong Temple for a month and completely withdrew from his life. It was as if she had never existed.

I can continue to accompany the Buddha, and no one will disturb me anymore... He was relieved, feeling as if his sincerity had touched the Buddha.

But, She came again one day. She looked devastated, and her face was thin, looking equally haggard.

"Monk, I'm about to get married."

For some reason, his prayer beads fell to the ground.

At the time, King Yu was at a critical point in his career. He was then serving as the Minister of War and was expected to enter the Cabinet with the support of the Aristocratic Bloc.

It wasn't an uncommon matter for people from an Aristocratic Clan to become the Prime Minister in this dynasty. There had been five such examples in the 600-year history of the country.

The weakening Aristocratic Bloc believed that the rise of King Yu would reverse their fortunes. So, their hope continued pushing him forward on this path.

King Yu, on the cusp of this storm, arranged a marriage for Princess Pingyang. It wasn't merely to find a good home for his daughter, It was also to gain more support for himself through marriage.

"Monk, Are you willing to elope with me?"

"...I am."

Henghui agreed. He finally realized his true intentions and chose to face the truth.

They then began to plan for their elopement. Princess Pingyang was always accompanied by guards when she went out of her home. If she disappeared for more than half an hour, the guards would search the mountains, and a message would be sent to King Yu's mansion.

Therefore, they required a Magical Item capable of shielding their aura if they wanted to elope successfully, as they required it to hide from the hunt by the Arcanists from the Sitianjian.

In the end, they also required a channel for new identification documents and their exit from the capital.

For this matter, Princess Pingyang asked for the help of a trustworthy friend, hoping that he would help them.

...

"Count Pingyuan's son... that friend is Count Pingyuan's son?" Xu Qi'an said, interrupting Hengyuan's narration.

Everything suddenly became clear. Count Pingyuan controlled a Brokerage Organization, which was surely proficient in forging identities and smuggling people to and from the capital. It was also reasonable for Princess Pingyang to know of Count Pingyuan's capabilities, even if she didn't know of the exact nature of his business.

King Yu had said that Count Pingyuan had been consorting with the Official Bloc, and was drifting from the Aristocratic Bloc. So, Count Pingyuan definitely had the motive to assassinate Princess Pingyang.

This later led to the extermination at Count Pingyuan's mansion... Still, I wonder about the role of the Minister of War in the incident... Xu Qi'an looked at Six, and then continued in his head, *You thought they were abducted because you knew they had been in contact with a Brokerage Organization, didn't you?*

However, he didn't dare speak in front of the watchful eyes of everyone present.

After hearing Xu Qi'an's analysis, several Gold Gongs looked at Hengyuan with a questioning tone.

"Yes." Hengyuan lightly nodded, "Poor Princess Pingyang was pure minded and didn't recognize the complex situation of the imperial court, let alone recognize the viciousness hidden in the human heart. A girl with no worldly experience and a monk who only knew to recite scriptures and praise the Buddha. This tragedy was doomed from the moment they decided to elope together."

"At that time, Count Pingyuan had long since decided to break ties with the Aristocratic Bloc. After he learned of this matter from his son, He immediately discussed it along with Zhang Feng, the Deputy Minister of War, and Sun Mingzhong, the Minister of Revenue, and made a plan to send Princess Pingyang away from the capital, thereby destroying King Yu's plan to gain status."

"Where's Princess Pingyang now, then?" Jiang Lyuzhong asked, his voice deep.

Seeming to have not heard him, Hengyuan continued, "People's hearts are as poisonous as snakes and scorpions. After sending the couple off from the capital, Count Pingyuan's son, along with the children of Minister Sun Mingzhong and Minister Zhang Feng, tried to assault Princess Pingyang in the way."

"Both of them tried to resist. They resisted desperately. In the end, one was killed and the other committed suicide by swallowing her hairpin. To cover up their crime, the group buried the bodies of Princess Pingyang and Monk Henghui in the barren hills, together with the magical artefact that could shield their aura."

The outside world only knew that Princess Pingyang had disappeared without rhyme or reason. Even if they tracked her to Qinglong Temple, It would only be thought that the two had eloped. Who would have thought that they had died a year ago?

Princess Pingyang is dead... The Gold Gongs silently looked at each other. Their faces grew scarily serious.

Princess Pingyang was the daughter of King Yu and the niece of Emperor Yuanjing. The murder of a princess was a serious crime, one that leads to three familial exterminations.

Nangong Qianrou clutched his sabre handle, squinting, "How did Henghui appear here a year later if he's already dead?"

That was also the doubt occupying everyone's head.

A person couldn't be resurrected like a lamp being reignited after being extinguished.

"He is dead," Hengyuan said something no one understood.

"He had died a year ago. However, his body was reanimated by someone using a secret technique to seal his primordial spirit within his body. This turned him into a zombie. All that supported him in the year was vengeance, revenge for Princess Pingyang."

"If you don't believe me, you could take his body to the Nightwatcher Office to be examined by a coroner."

"Who reanimated his body?" A Gold Gong asked.

Hengyuan shook his head.

The Gold Gong looked around at Yang Yan and the others, before he asked, "Where's the body of Princess Pingyang? Take us there."

After pausing for a while, he ordered the surrounding Silver Gongs, "Send Henghui's body back to the office."

Several Gold Gongs escorted Hengyuan away from the small courtyard and gave him a horse. Afterward, the group grandly left the city.

Xu Qi'an rode along, his heart still heavy. After being speechless for a while, He whispered, "Is that Hengyuan? Is it possible that he's possessed or manipulated?"

The grey cat lying on his shoulder lazily replied, "It is Hengyuan. Although I can't do much. I still have my own methods to recognize people."

"Is Henghui really dead?" Xu Qi'an still couldn't believe it.

"His life or death isn't really relevant to the case." The grey cat whispered, "He is merely a puppet. As the Demonic Hand has gone, his life and death were no longer important to the one behind the scenes. You should be happy for the case to be solved than be sad that the case was easier to solve than you thought."

"I can't be happy, actually. Princess Pingyang and Henghui were quite pitiful." Xu Qi'an's lips twitched, revealing a smile that wasn't completely a smile occupying his face.

Sighing, He changed the subject, "There's still something wrong with Henghui's case. It seems as if the one behind the scenes deliberately pushed it to the fore."

...

At the border of Taikang and Changle County, on a certain barren hill, Hengyuan looked around as he trekked, as if he was searching for something.

The search was inefficient and slow. He had told the Gold Gongs that Henghui had only told him the general location. He had been told that Princess Pingyang was buried in the shadow of an old locust tree, one whose trunk was as wide as three people.

The Gold and Silver Gongs formed an encirclement around Hengyuan, guarding him at the centre, and preventing his escape.

After half an hour, they finally found the old locust tree. The three silver gongs cut down the bushes and weeds near the locust tree and then used their sabres as shovels to dig up the ground. After they dug around for a while, the black soil revealed some bones.

"Sir, I found the body." A Silver Gong excitedly shouted.

"Dig it out!" Nangong Qianrou said, his voice heavy.

Princess Pingyang's bones were finally exposed to everyone's eyes. She had finally reappeared after a year.

The flesh and blood had already rotted away, leaving just white bones with tattered cloth attached to them, which should have been the clothes she was wearing before her death. Additionally, a gold hairpin of a dull colour was found between the throat and the chest of the corpse.

As Hengyuan had said, she had committed suicide by swallowing a hairpin.

"Amitufo!" Hengyuan couldn't bear to look anymore and closed his eyes to recite the Buddha's name.

"There's no way to prove this corpse belongs to Princess Pingyang without any other details." Jiang Lyuzhong frowned.

"It's normal." While the Gold Gongs pondered, Xu Qi'an walked under the locust tree and said, "Princess Pingyang had eloped with her lover. So, she should have disguised herself, and didn't bring along valuables with her that would draw attention from others.

"Let's put the body in a coffin first, bring it to the office. We'll then send someone to King Yu's mansion. Maybe King Yu will recognise the gold hairpin."

After the bones were transferred to a coffin, everyone walked outside the hills. Jiang Lyuzhong patted Xu Qi'an on the shoulder, "Good Job!"

Yang Yan, who didn't like talking, also nodded slightly, and said, "You are the one with the most merit for this case. Even if the Sangpo case isn't solved at the end, His Majesty will likely absolve you of the crime for this merit."

Xu Qi'an was about to speak when he felt as if a knife was cutting into his back.

He didn't need to turn his head to know that the knife-like gaze had come from Gold Gong Zhu.