

## Nightwatcher 151

### Chapter 151. Two Secret Letters

At dusk, Wei Yuan finally arrived back from the palace.

The wide and opulent carriage entered the constabulary, and Wei Yuan exited with the small stepping stool. Xu Qi'an came over close, and said quietly "Duke Wei..."

The azure cloak with whitening hair gave him a glance, replying whilst walking, "King Yu wrote a blood letter, accusing the Earl Pingyuan, the Chief Supervising Secretary of the Ministry of Revenues, and the Minister of War, accusing them of conspiracy in the murder of a royal."

Xu Qi'an had known of King Yu's actions from Huaqing, and nodding, "Has His Majesty sent this case to the three departments?"

"No!" Wei Yuan shook his head, "His Majesty's anger was no less than that of King Yu, and immediately wrote a royal command, asking the Jianzheng to enter the palace and stand face-to-face with the three of them. At that time there were also many of the court present."

"What was the result?" Xu Qi'an already knew the result, but he still needed to ask.

Wei Yuan sighed, "Conspiracy in the murder of a royal, three familial exterminations. The letter confirming the verdict will arrive tomorrow morning by the latest. The Liang clique is finished."

\*Three familial exterminations...\* Xu Qi'an's expression turned slightly.

"Three" referred to the execution of the clan of the mother, the clan of the father, and the clan of the spouse. It could be considered one of the most extreme punishments possible, being second only to nine familial exterminations.[^1]

"Aye, tomorrow it seems heads will roll." Xu Qi'an sighed with him, not knowing whether to clap his hands in happiness, or to pity those innocent kin who were caught up in this.

Even though the Earl Pingyuan's mouse had been destroyed, but compared to three familial exterminations, at the very least over a hundred more people would be executed. Anyone within three degrees of kin to Earl Pingyuan would be condemned.

The same applied for the other two.

"The Liang Clique?" Xu Qi'an asked in confusion.

Wei Yuan nodded, "When King Yu retreated from the battlefield of political power, the Liang Clique was the biggest benefactor of this. It is headed by the Minister of War Zhang Feng and the Ministry of Revenues Chief Supervising Secretary Sun Mingzhong. Earl Pingyuan joined the Liang Clique last year."

"Duke Wei, then- then my situation..." Xu Qi'an said quietly. The Liang Clique of court was far too removed from him, Xu Qi'an did not care too much.

He was more worried about his own small life.

“Don’t rush, His Majesty is still boiling over in anger. If you mention this at this time, it’ll probably have the opposite effect.”

\*That’s reasonable…\* Xu Qi’an nodded, and bade farewell to Wei Yuan. In the last remaining light of dusk, he headed back towards home.

...

Dusk, in a room somewhere.

A pale white hand held a brush, writing on the letter paper:

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\*My Respected Master,\*

\*The Sangpo Case has come to a close. The Minster of Rites once said that working with us is like trying to persuade a tiger for its skin. Heh, his eyes are sharp.\*

\*A year ago I accidentally witnessed Princess Pingyang and the monk Henghui’s fate. Henghui had died, yet had not settled, as resentment thickened his soul. I made him into a puppet and kept him by my side.\*

\*I told you about this, and you said that the opportunity had come. The year of Official Evaluation, would be the opening act of our great undertaking, that had been planned for five hundred years.\*

\*Please forgive my insolence, but I am not optimistic. The Sitianjian’s Jianzheng, the Sect leader of the Human sect, all belong to the few powerful characters upon this earth.\*

\*But when this matter started, for some reason the two tacitly did not act, choosing to watch from the sidelines... I want to praise you again, Master, your intellect is unparalleled.\*

\*Emperor Yuanjing’s attitude to this case is not particularly vigorous, otherwise he would not have assigned a Bronze Gong as the lead investigator, this was all within your expectations.\*

\*But that Bronze Gong is really powerful, his senses are sharp.\*

\*In the process of investigation, your descent was found out by him. He came three times to the Jiaofangsi to watch for Yao qi. May I be so presumptuous as to ask, was that deliberate?\*

\*Furthermore, the other Nightwatchers were also covertly investigating.\*

\*I had no alternative but to push Huiji under the cart. I know she’s your clan, please forgive me for taking action without orders.\*

\*Do not worry, the item has already been given to someone who ought to get it.\*

\*I apologise greatly, all the leads of the tax silver case have broken... several times I’ve interacted with Zhou Li, and he really is a hedonistic rich playboy with a minor amount of intellect, and not at all familiar with his father’s plans.\*

\*Hereto, I need to report four things to Master:\*

\*One: As the tax silver was being escorted, Deputy Minister Zhou had multiple opportunities to act. That would have been much safer, yet he chose to steal the 150,000 taels of silver in the capital.\*

\*This does make one puzzled; Deputy Minister Zhou is a clever man, yet he played a massive blunder, I feel there must be a reason behind this.\*

\*And just conveniently, on the way to exile Deputy Minister Zhou “accidentally perished”, thus there’s no one left to give me answers.\*

\*Two: from this information, in these twenty years the amount of silver Deputy Minister Zhou had embezzled would be over two million taels, yet when his house was raided, the court only found a few thousand.\*

\*Where did all this silver go?\*

\*Three: from my secret investigation of the Sitianjian, I found that the youngest disciple of the Jianzheng is called Chu Caiwei, a very beautiful and very interesting woman. Of course, she could never be comparable to Master’s beauty and stature.\*

\*What I want to say is, the Sitianjian’s arcanists call her “youngest sister”, or “sixth sister”. However the Jianzheng only has five disciples.\*

\*Four: The Warlocks killed Magistrate Zhao of Taikang County, the one who discovered that saltpetre mine.\*

\*Yes, the Warlock Church’s warlocks have their hands in this. Furthermore, they could have used more delicate, and more subtle ways of silencing him, yet they chose to kill him in his dreams.\*

\*It’s not hard to see that they are trying to mislead the court, to throw dirty water on the Zhenbei King, and chip away at the relationship between him and Emperor Yuanjing.\*

\*Finally, there’s a small matter that embarrasses me to talk about. I’m in love with a man, a man I shouldn’t love. I plead for Master’s sympathy, to make me a new body.\*

\*— Your forever loyal servant.\*

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\*Respected Sir,\*

\*The tax silver case plans have failed. I will take the responsibility. The death of Deputy Minister Zhou is fully due to his own stupidity. His son, thinking himself as clever, caused the whole plan to come crumbling down.\*

...

\*As you expected, the Wanyao Kingdom’s plans have succeeded. They have released the item sealed under Sangpo Lake.\*

\*In this letter I will describe in detail the intelligence I have received in the past year.\*

\*Around a year ago, the conflict between the nobles and the civil servants became white-hot. King Yu represented the nobles’ power, and under tacit agreement by Emperor Yuanjing, became the Minister of War. He was only a step away from entering the cabinet.\*

\*During this, his daughter Princess Pingyang fell in love with a monk of Qinglong Temple. The two of them decided to elope, and asked the Earl Pingyuan’s eldest son to help...\*

\*Because they coveted Princess Pingyang's beauty, the three rich boys planned to rape her, and then silence them both. However they met strong resistance, and Princess Pingyang committed suicide by swallowing her hairpin...\*

\*The spy that the Wanyao Kingdom had placed in the capital accidentally witnessed this. She used a corpse Gu to make Henghui into an undead puppet, and with this secret, put him in hiding.\*

\*A new round of official evaluation came to the capital, as the cliques and parties fought in the open and behind closed doors, getting more and more violent. I can't help but admit, Emperor Yuanjing is a frightening emperor, his emperor's heart is as strong as steel.\*

\*But he's not a good emperor. All he values is power and long life.\*

\*With this secret in hand, the Wanyao Kingdom spy secretly started searching for partners to work with in the capital. Finally, she set her sights on the Minister of Rites, and the power he belongs to.\*

\*Because conveniently at that time, a saltpetre mine was discovered in Great Yellow Mountain in Taikang County, this was exactly what the Wanyao Kingdom remnants wanted.\*

\*No one in this world can sneak into Sangpo Lake and blow up the Temple Eternally Suppressing Mountains and Rivers under the eyes of the Jianzheng and Human Sect Leader, but gunpowder would help them achieve their goal.\*

\*And the force behind the Minister of Rites has long wanted to solely rule court, and overcome all other cliques and parties. The Liang clique, as a stumbling stone in their path, naturally was on their list of people to clear out.\*

\*Both sides came together immediately, reached an agreement. The Minister of Rites would help the Wanyao Kingdom remnants to blow up the Temple Eternally Suppressing Mountains and Rivers, and release the item sealed within.\*

\*Before the Wanyao Kingdom pushed Henghui onto the stage, they lead the Nightwatchers to investigate the disappearance of Princess Pingyang.\*

\*To remove suspicion on himself, the Minister of Rites used his insider, the Jinwu Guard Baihu Zhou Chixiong, to smuggle gunpowder into the Imperial city, and to bury it under the temple. At the same time he killed nine civil servants of the High Court, the Ministry of Rites, and the Palace, to obscure the truth, and mislead the lead investigator of the three offices.\*

\*He even wanted to use the gunpowder to implicate the Qi clique's Minister of Industry. Shame then that he underestimated the Bronze Gong Xu Qi'an.\*

\*The Jinwu guard Baihu Zhou Chixiong deliberately killed lieutenant Liu Han, to raise the notice of the Nightwatchers and Prefecture constabularies. In the ensuing investigation, he used a qi-blocking magic item to deceive them, to draw their attention to Qinglong temple, so that they could find the case of Henghui's elopement, and thus follow the vine to the party conflict a year ago.\*

\*This piece was played incredibly well, your servant reckons it's not something a mere Baihu could have done. Without a doubt, it was that Yao Queen's daughter personally putting down the pieces.\*

\*The events generally unfolded as mentioned. Your servant only has two points which he has not figured out:\*

\*One: Your servant has spent blood and tears, yet he has not found out what kind of artefact is the thing sealed under Sangpo Lake. But one thing can be sure, it is intimately linked to the Buddhist Sect. The reason why the Wanyao Kingdom wanted to release it is unclear.\*

\*Two: The Jianzheng's attitude is impenetrable. If he were to talk about the reason why Emperor Yuanjing lifted the city curfew, your servant would still be able to say one or two things, but as to the Jianzheng's thoughts your servant cannot see thorough them at all.\*

\*Clearly he has done nothing, yet your servant feels that everything is still under his control, within his grasp.\*

\*— End.\*

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Xu Qi'an came home, ate dinner, and told Second Uncle about the progress in the Sangpo Case, as well as the true story behind the disappearance of Princess Pingyang.

Uncle Xu listened in a daze, forgetting even to eat, as he muttered, "These scholars are really evil after evil, even though this old man's chopped a few heads, but compared to them, I might as well be the most honest man.

"Ningyan, remember in the future to hold your mouth around a scholar, if you can move your sabre then don't hesitate, otherwise you'll never know when you'll fall into their trap."

Xu Qi'an nodded, umming and ahing, thinking \*have you forgotten you have a scholar for a son?\*

He finished eating, and played with Xu Lingyin for a while, talked with Xu Lingyue a while, before planning to return to his own little courtyard.

"Ahem," Auntie artificially cleared her throat, looking away, saying "I've arranged for your clothes to be made. Afterwards Lingyue will bring them to you. If they don't fit... well I don't care. If you want to wear them wear them."

"Huh? Did the sun rise in the west this morning?" Xu Qi'an stared outside in shock.

Auntie gritted her teeth, only squeezing one word out between her red lips: "GO!"

Xu Qi'an immediately left for his own place.

The moment he opened the door, he suddenly felt a lurch in his heart, not the palpitation that the Earth Book fragment's notification gave, but rather the type where his hair stood on end, and his back erupted in cold sweat.

As Xu Qi'an stiffly turned his head, seeing a red severed arm lying quietly on his bed.

His scalp tingled, adrenaline surged, as the cold sweat started dropping in beads.

Chapter 152. The Monkey and the Secret Keeper

The dark-red skinned hand lay silently on his bed, thick grey-blue veins protruding beneath its skin.

Xu Qi'an felt as if he had just finished watching \*A Wicked Ghost\*<sup>[^1]</sup> in his living room, before returning to his bedroom afraid and wanting to sleep, and opening the door only to find Chu Renmei<sup>[^2]</sup> standing by his bed, staring at him with sinister, empty eyes.

The fear in his heart exploded, and every fibre of his being was telling him: Run, Run, RUN!

Just then, he saw the index finger of the severed hand move slightly. \*Thud...\* as it tapped the bedsheets.

The next moment, the air became viscous, and Xu Qi'an felt as if he was an old cow that had fallen into mud; even though he had a powerful build, he could barely make a step.

The five fingers on the severed hand twitched. Then, using its fingers as feet, it climbed up off the bed, and crawled towards Xu Qi'an.

The horror of this scene, was like that right out of a horror movie. Xu Qi'an couldn't move a muscle, his eyes rolling, looking with despair at the hand climbing over his feet, climbing up along his trousers, going up and up...

\*It wants to possess me, just like it possessed Henghui... why? Why did it pick me, I'm just a regular ordinary Bronze Gong...\* Xu Qi'an's thoughts flashed by in fright, as the severed hand climbed over his chest, still going up. And then, the thumb and index finger pried open Xu Qi'an's small mouth.

... Xu Qi'an could not fight back. His eyes became wide, his expression one of dread.

His mouth was stretched wide open, as the severed hand violently thrust itself into him, its fingers pulling its way deeper into his throat.

The corners of his mouth split, as blood dripped like rain. How could a man's mouth fit an entire hand? Not to mention a throat, but the severed hand seemed to exactly have that idea.

Very quickly, the severed hand entered his throat, as Xu Qi'an's esophagus slowly bulged up, clearly showing the shape of fingers within.

This process was very quick, because the severed hand didn't consider Xu Qi'an's tolerance in the slightest, like another creature, as it brusquely and quickly passed through Xu Qi'an's mouth and throat.

The moment it entered his body proper, Xu Qi'an cried out in pain, as his consciousness shattered into countless pieces. After a long, long haze, he finally saw a temple. There was no Buddha statue in the temple, and a young monk sat on the prayer mat within.

Xu Qi'an tried his best to look clearly at the young monk's appearance, but it was as if his face was covered with mist, and no matter how hard Xu Qi'an tried, he could not see clearly.

\*Why have I come here... am I dead? Am I going to the Land of Paradise in the west? ... But that's impossible, I'm not a Buddhist, all the Buddha would do would be to slam the door on my head, and then kick me out of Paradise...\* Xu Qi'an thought mockingly, before hearing the young monk's warm voice:

"This small monk wishes to borrow the benefactor's body, to nurture his severed arm, if the benefactor does not mind."

\*...He's that demon hand?\* Xu Qi'an felt bewildered, as he tested, "What if I do mind?"

The young monk sat silently, ignoring him.

... Xu Qi'an said sternly, "Who are you? Why were you sealed under Sangpo Lake?"

"This small monk's name is Shenshu[^3], but why was I under Sangpo? Where did I come from?"

At the start he was calm, but slowly, along with each question, he began to lose control of his feelings. The peaceful tranquility disappeared, as the entire space around them shook, as an indescribable, terrifying aura emanated from his body.

That aura was like the aura of Hell, making Xu Qi'an's hair stand on end, and his heart thump violently.

\*This familiar aura...\* At this moment, Xu Qi'an could confirm that the young monk was indeed the severed hand.

"This small monk lost control..." The young monk calmed himself, as that aura that made men tremble was restrained.

With a kindly voice, he said: "My soul is broken, thus I cannot remember much of the past. I only know my dharma name, yet I do not know from whence I came, nor what happened before."

As he spoke, a helpless despair could be heard on his voice, as if he wanted dearly to know, yet was powerless to do so.

\*A broken soul? Because you're only one severed arm? Mm, if the body is not whole, then the soul is not whole. This makes sense... Monk, you're in a bad spot...\* Xu Qi'an tested out again,

"Master, I may know something, but I do not know if it is of use to you."

The young monk's aura suddenly trembled, as from behind the mist, his eyes stared blazingly at Xu Qi'an.

"The formation that sealed you in, was built with the help of the Royal Family of Feng, the Sitianjian, as well as the western Buddhist House. You should thus be of the Buddhist sect, and may come from the Western Realms."

As he spoke, he naturally began thinking: \*The severed hand's master is a monk, and the three powers that sealed him were the Great Feng's Royal Family, the Buddhists of the Western Realms, and the Sitianjian... from the reactions of the Qinglong Temple monks, the Buddhists clearly are more worried about the sealed item... wait!\*

Xu Qi'an's eyes suddenly lit up, as he thought through a few details of the Sangpo Case: The third day the Temple Eternally Suppressing Mountains and Rivers was destroyed, Wei Yuan told him, that Emperor Yuanjing dropped the curfew.

On the second day, the old man Jianzheng pretended to be ill, and watched from the sidelines.

After getting confirmation from him that the severed hand had reappeared, Abbot Panshu of Qinglong temple immediately set out west.

From these details, he could deduce that the Buddhists were the main orchestrators of the seal under Sangpo. The young monk that was sealed there, almost definitely came from the Western Buddhist Sect.

\*No wonder, no wonder Emperor Yuanjing opened the curfew. No wonder the Jianzheng pretended to be ill... they were clearly taking a “not my problem” attitude.\*

Xu Qi'an in hindsight understood the Jianzheng and Emperor Yuanjing's attitudes. Immediately, he remembered another detail: Wei Yuan had emphasised, that he ignore the sealed item, and only worry about finding moles in court.

Wei Yuan most likely also knew about the severed hand's identity, at least he knew that it came from the Buddhist House.

\*No wonder the high levels of the Capital did not care much for it, and put all their effort into rooting out spies... every one of them are LYBs!\*

\*Thank goodness I'm quick-witted, investigating through a lieutenant's homicide case to Baihu Zhou using a qi-concealing magic item, to Qinglong Temple, peeling this layer by layer.\*

At this time, the young monk sighed, “This poor monk wants to ask the benefactor for a favour.”

“Master, I am just a Refining Qi martial artist.” Xu Qi'an wanted to decline tactfully. Wei Yuan had said, that the rank of the sealed item would at least be Second Rank, if not First Rank.

A small ant like him had no hope of inserting himself into a conflict of this level. Furthermore, Xu Qi'an had not forgotten the reason why Jinlian Daozhang built the Heaven and Earth Society: to cancel the Earth Sect's second rank Sect Leader.

\*Only barely easier than me becoming Emperor... and if because of you I get caught up in the gratitudes and grudges of the Buddhists, then I'd be better off usurping the throne...\* Xu Qi'an thought.

The young monk ignored him, continuing to speak, “Help this poor monk, find back his memories...”

“In this, this poor monk will help the benefactor.”

\*Help me?\* Xu Qi'an thought back to the sight of the four Gold Gongs covered in bandages, as he became tempted. If he had the sealed item along with him, it would be like having an extra ace up his sleeve.

In this world, where Imperial and Divine authority is absolute, he would better be able to protect himself. At least he wouldn't have to worry about his house being raided, his family killed, as anyone that dared touch a hair on his family members, he would smash their brains out.

Furthermore, when Zhou Chixiong is caught, he would almost certainly get promoted or a raise, thus his own influence would increase.

However, before he answered the monk, there were two things he needed clarifying.



“Master, do you need to constantly consume qi and blood?” Xu Qi’an tried his best to use neutral wording.

“As long as I am in your body, I will not need any outside blood to supplement. Of course, if you want to use my power, then I will need blood to nurture me, ideally from cultivators.”

\*Thus to say, normally if you’re in my body everything’s fine, but if you need to work, then I need to feed you...\* Xu Qi’an nodded, this equal exchange agreed with his principles.

“Why, did you pick me?” Xu Qi’an asked.

“Someone brought me here,” the young monk said, “Because we are the same kind of person.”

Xu Qi’an hastily asked, “What same kind of person? Master, please enlighten this junior.”

The young monk said, “My instinct feels this way, I can’t remember much more.”

\*You can’t remember...\* Xu Qi’an’s mouth twitched, “Who brought you here?”

The young monk conjured up an image. In the image, a figure in a black cloak and hood solemnly opened a brocade pouch, and placed the severed hand inside.

From their figure, from the round, full breasts, the plump buttocks, they were female.

On the brocade pouch was embroidered an animal, with a figure like a fox, full of liveliness, white tails fanning out like a peacock behind it.

\*A fox, tails fanning out... the Nine-Tailed Fox? Mm, from the confession of that fox in the Jiaofangsi, the Wanyao Kingdom remnants were conspirators in the Sangpo case... and the Wanyao Kingdom’s late Queen was a nine-tailed fox... hss, the Wanyao Kingdom’s people pushed the severed hand to me.\*

\*Why?\*

\*They’ve noticed me...\* Xu Qi’an started to deeply worry.

...

Xu Qi’an opened his eyes, and found himself lying on the ice cold floor, the dim moonlight shining through the window lighting the room in a dim glow.

He came to the bed, and lit the lamp. Bringing it to in front of the bronze mirror, he saw his own manly face in it, traces of blood left in the corners of his mouth. He gently wiped it off, and found no traces of injury.

The injuries that that unreasonable monkey Shenshu left had all vanished.

The water clock showed that the time was 9:15 PM.

Xu Qi’an sat by the mirror, letting his thoughts wander, weighing up what he should do next.

The most pressing issue is how would he deal with the severed hand, would he report this to Wei Yuan?

\*Wei Yuan prizes me greatly, but after all I'm not his son, there's a limit to how much he would go. And this matter relates to the sealed item under Sangpo lake...\*

\*If he can help me take out the severed hand, then that wouldn't be a problem, but if not, then would he protect me, or would he seal me back up with it in tow?\*

\*And I'm just a Refining Qi Bronze Gong, I can't not eat and drink for five hundred years and not die.\*

\*The Jianzheng must be able to help me take it out right? He's a first-rank arcanist after all, but the problem is, I'm not that close with him... Xu Qi'an oh Xu Qi'an, how you've fallen, you've gotten so engrossed in Fuxiang's warm tits that you can't pull yourself out. Have you forgotten that Chu Caiwei is waiting for your directions? The earlier you can become the Sitianjian's son in law, the earlier you'll become one of them.\*

\*The old man Jianzheng knows about my strange fortune, so I can't reveal all my secrets to him, because he's definitely scheming something in the dark...\*

Moreover, there was still one more far-away issue:

The Wanyao Kingdom spent so much effort in releasing the sealed item, it would hardly be to give him a dowry?

They must have some kind of goal, in pushing the severed hand his way, this, even his little toe could deduce. As for this goal, would it be good or bad for him?

\*The Monk Shenshu said, I can nurture his hand and that part of his soul... is this why the Wanyao kingdom brought him here?\*

\*Then one day in the future, would he not come back to take his hand? At that time, god knows if I will live or die.\*

Just then, he heard Shenshu's kindly voice inside his head:

"Keep the secret!"

... Xu Qi'an's face stiffened.

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## Chapter 153. The Interrogation of Hengyuan

The next day, as he squatted under the eaves to brush his teeth and wash his face, Xu Qi'an called out in his mind "Master Shenshu?"

There was no response.

"Master, You said last night that I was similar to you. I just want to ask, did you also pick up silver every day?"

Still, No response appeared.

\*He should usually be resting. After all, he's a sealed artefact... I'll try to call him again later. If he still won't respond, I can accept using my hot and tender body to warm his icy cool heart, Just a little...\* Xu Qi'an secretly sighed in relief.

After donning his cool uniform and tying up his long hair, Xu Qi'an hung up the long black gold sabre on his waist, after which he jumped over the zhang high fence, going to the main house to have breakfast.

As he put his hand over the handle of his sabre, he thought \*Did Jianzheng give me this sabre back then as a sort of favor?\*

\*...I'm too naive; why would a Master of the first rank need to exchange favors with me? However, the sabre perfectly matches my "One Blade From Heaven and Earth". I should be thankful to the Jianzheng for that.\*

\*Wait, What?\*

Xu Qi'an stopped and suddenly stalled.

\*The black gold long sabre was given to me by the Jianzheng, and "One Blade From Heaven and Earth" was sent over by the Sitianjian. The long sabre and "One Blade From Heaven and Earth" inexplicably work very well together. And, Jianzheng knows of my strange luck...\* Xu Qi'an slowly shivered in the cold morning wind.

That was the moment when Xu Qi'an felt the feeling of \*This World is filled with thousand-mile-deep schemes. I want to return to my sweet safe Earth.\*

\*Phew... one step at a time. I have to improve my power and status before I have any confidence to talk of the future.\*

After gathering up his rogue emotions, Xu Qi'an went to the front hall. The sky was getting bright, and his aunt and uncle sat at the dining table, having breakfast. Lyu'e was also sitting at the dining table, holding Little Pea on her lap.

"Big Brother!" Xu Lingyin enthusiastically greeted, while she discreetly moved the meat buns and deep-fried dough sticks into the secure grasp of her arms.

\*... This sibling relationship is really too plastic.\* Xu Qi'an also sat down, and after serving himself a bowl of porridge, He glanced at this beautiful madam.

"Auntie you're up early?"

Auntie, who had gotten up early, was clearly in a bad mood and didn't want to talk with her nephew very much. After stirring the rice porridge with the porcelain spoon held in her smooth white fingers, She said in a light tone:

"Lingyue isn't feeling well. I just went to check up on her."

"What's the matter?" Xu Qi'an frowned. He cared a lot about that beautiful and refined girl.

"It's a girl's personal matter..." Auntie murmured, her voice close to a whisper as if she didn't want to explain.

\*Ah, its that time of the month... but, A period shouldn't be a cause for Auntie to worry. So, it's menstrual pain?\*

Famous Detective Xu Qi'an quickly came up with a conclusion.

After finishing his breakfast, Xu Qi'an said, "I'm going to visit Lingyue."

Neither uncle nor Auntie had any objections to this. An advantage of being from a military family was this. There weren't that many cumbersome rules to follow as that would be common in a scholarly family.

For example, brothers and sisters had to maintain a fixed distance from each other when talking, and they had to salute each other with different honorifics when speaking, and there was a clear limit on the time they were allowed to spend together unless a group of siblings and clan siblings were having a banquet together.

And so on ...

In a scholarly family, considering Xu Lingyue's condition, the elders would have refused the visit.

"Big bwother, big bwother... I also want to see big sister." Jumping up from Lyu'e's lap, Xu Lingyin grabbed Xu Qi'an's clothes.

Bothered by her slow speed, Xu Qi'an put her under his arm, and soon arrived at the door of Xu Lingyue's room. He knocked on the room, saying,

"Sis, you there? Auntie said that you weren't feeling well."

Xu Lingyue's weakened voice came out of the door, "I, I'm fine..."

"Can you let your elder brother in?" Xu Qi'an said, lampooning, \*Do you want me to tidy up your bandages?\*

"Creak..." The maid opened the room, welcoming Xu Qi'an and Little Pea to the room.

Xu Qi'an was lying on the bed. She was lying on her side while clutching her stomach with both her hands. Her delicate brows looked creased, and her pretty lively face had turned pale.

\*This looks a little serious... is it really that painful...\* Xu Qi'an tried to comfort her, "You're having a period right. Have you taken any medicine?"

Stunned, Xu Lingyue's face reddened, as she shook her head, "Mom told me that it would be fine if I endured it for a while."

Her voice contained little bits of her aggrievedness.

After all, She was merely a little girl, lying on the bed enduring the pain, with only a single maid by her side.

Menstrual pain was hard to endure in this era. After all, It wasn't a disease and would heal naturally after a while. Most middle-class officials and the poor civilians didn't see the need to see a physician unless they were close to dying.

\*I seem to remember that Brown Sugar Ginger Tea can cure menstrual pain. Let it be. I'll ask Chu Caiwei about it later...\*

Xu Lingyin walked to the side of her sister, stretched out her fingers to straighten her sister's curled brows, and snuck a pitiful look at her brother.

"Is my sister about to die?"

Xu Lingyue "..."

"Your sister won't die." Xu Qi'an consoled her.

"What's wrong with sister, then?" Xu Lingyin asked, still fearful.

\*You won't understand if I say menstrual pain. And I think you don't have any clue about periods...\*

Thinking for some time, Xu Qi'an stroked Xu Lingyin's head and simply explained:

"Your sister is too sensible and doesn't make trouble at all. So, She's feeling uncomfortable. Her stomach will stop hurting after she starts making trouble."

A thing like menstrual pain could stop after marriage, or even not. So, Xu Qi'an's explanation could be thought of as precise and easy to understand, which were rare qualities in this world.

Even a stupid child like Xu Lingyin understood it, and nodded, her face serious, "I'll also make a lot of trouble. So, My stomach won't hurt even a little in the future."

"Elder... Elder Brother, What were you telling her?" Xu Lingyue didn't understand what Xu Qi'an said, but she sure felt that it was weird.

"Just rest well." Pinching the little girl's face, Xu Qi'an left, carrying Little Pea along with him.

On the way to the front hall, He saw Little Pea running to the garden, grabbing a handful of soil, and hiding it in her little fist.

\*What does she want to do?\* Xu Qi'an was taken aback.

Second Uncle and Auntie were still having breakfast in the front hall, when the former asked him, "Is Lingyue feeling better?"

"She's still hurting..." When Xu Qi'an was about to speak, He saw Xu Lingyin climb up a stool, lean on the edge of the table using her small body, and throw the soil into a large bowl of porridge right in front of her parents."

Then, Standing on the stool, She let off a sigh of relief, relieved that she would never get a stomach ache.

Frozen, Auntie, and Uncle turned their heads slowly until they reached the toddler, "What were you doing?"

"I'm making trouble, can't you see!" Xu Lingyin proudly said, "I'll definitely make a lot of trouble in the future, not like my sister, who only makes Dad and Mom worry."

After finishing her speech, She twisted her waist, waiting for her parent's praise.

The cockroach incident resurfaced in Auntie's mind. And then, remembering the old and current incidents, She picked up Little Pea by her neck, putting her on top of her thigh, and spanked her trouble-making ass.

Little Pea wasn't still convinced of her mistake, and cried, trying to defend herself, "Why are you hitting me, Mom?"

Auntie continued replying to her arguments with continued palms to her butt, "How are you so proud about throwing mud into porridge?"

"Elder Brother taught me that. Elder Brother said that my stomach won't hurt as long as I kept making trouble... Ouch, Ouch..."

Furious, Aunite's brows joined each other, forming a straight line, "What did you teach her now, Xu Ningyan?"

"Today's weather looks very nice. I'll be leaving for the office right away, Second Uncle." Xu Qi'an escaped the premises, His mind filled with panic.

...

The Dungeon, Nightwatcher Office.

A temporary prisoner, Hengyuan was lucky, lucky in that he wasn't seriously tortured. He was only hit twice by the jailer when he first arrived. The reason was that even Master Tie wasn't as clean as him.

\*This damn baldie couldn't be squeezed for a hint of oil or water.\*

"Bang!..." The door of the cell was opened, and the jailer yelled at the burly Lu Zhisheng look-alike wearing shackles, "A Sir has come to interrogate you. Come out."

Opening his eyes, Hengyuan followed the jailer to the interrogation room.

A masculine and handsome bronze gong, holding a golden sabre in his hand, was in the dimly lighted interrogation room, gazing at him with a sharp gaze.

Hengyuan knew the Bronze Gong. He had seen the specific Bronze Gong when warm-hearted Mr. Three had helped him avoid arrest. At that time, the Bronze Gong had been standing in the eaves of a room, pressing his knife with one hand. His temperament revealed his extraordinariness.

"Master, please sit down. I have a few questions I wish to ask you about." Xu Qi'an said, examining the monk with a square face and rough features.

He had the temperament of a reckless man at first glance. But, looking deeper, you could discover that his eyes were bright and calm, and his aura was similarly deep and restrained.

After clasping his hands together, Hengyuan saluted and then sat down.

"Name?" Xu Qi'an lowered his head to sip some tea.

"Monks do not use names. Sir may call me Hengyuan."

"Age."

"Thirty."

Surprised, Xu Qi'an raised his head to glance at him. He remembered a joke:

\*"How do you look so young, Uncle?"\*

\*"Staying up late."\*

\*"Then, this year, you would be..."\*

\*"Twenty Years."\*

\*Just looking at him, Hengyuan seemed to be in his forties, close to fifty. Is he pulling multiple all-nighters?\* Xu Qi'an lampooned.

"You're from?"

"This monk is from Qinglong Temple."

"Your cultivation?"

"Rank Eight: Warrior Monk"

Xu Qi'an frowned, and tapped his fingers on the table, "Don't try to mess with me."

\*As if an Eight Rank Warrior Monk could break into Count Pingyuan's mansion at night for a murder, easily injure two Practicing Qi Martial Artists, and walk out without any injuries?\*

Hengyuan said, his tone serious, "This monk is indeed an Eighth Rank Warrior Monk."

\*Eighth Rank Warrior Monk... I remember something strange about the Buddhist System. The level after Ninth Rank Sramanera is Seventh Rank Dharmacarya, skipping over Rank Eight Warrior Monk.\*

\*Does Buddhism actually include two systems? Since they have two systems, Why were they merged together? Additionally, What's the progression path for Warrior Monks?\*

After Xu Qi'an asked about these doubts, Hengyuan shook his head, "There's no information in Qinglong Temple. This knowledge is unique to the West."

\*Unique to the West! Then there are probably no relevant records in the Official archives... This is all insignificant...\* Xu Qi'an said:

"Henghui has already passed away, and the bones of Princess Pingyang have also been found. His Majesty issued a decree yesterday:

"\*Count Pingyuan, Minister of War Zhang Feng, and Minister of Revenue Sun Zhongming were responsible for the death of a royal. Three familial exterminations shall be their punishment.\*

"You can rest easy."

"Amitufo." Hengyuan closed his eyes to chant the Buddha's name.

"You were accidentally involved in the case, and the Nightwatchers won't hold you accountable for that. But, can you explain this thing to me?"

Xu Qi'an took out a small jade mirror from his bosom, patted it to remove the dust collecting on it, and threw it on the table.

This small jade mirror had been found in the bottom of the well. It was Fragment Six of the Earth Book that belonged to Hengyuan.

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Chapter 154. Three's Persona Crumbling?

Hengyuan's gaze fell on the small jade mirror, the one that he dropped in the courtyard well. It had slipped from his robes in his altercation with Henghui.

Afterwards he had heard Henghui's story, saw him pass away in meditation, and in his mournful state did not care much for the Earth Book fragment.

After that the Nightwatchers came, and he knew that he would enter their jail. To prevent the mirror from being taken away by the Nightwatchers, leaving it in the well was the best choice.

Hengyuan's plan was that if he could escape, to return and retrieve his Earth Book fragment. Alternatively, Jinlian would retrieve it for him.

He didn't think that in the end it would still fall into the Nightwatchers' hands.

Xu Qi'an stared at Hengyuan, waiting for his reply.

The jade mirror was handed to him this morning by Wei Yuan. He didn't give any other orders, but Xu Qi'an knew Wei Yuan's intention was to through him give the mirror back to Six.

Seeing the big baldie be silent for a long time, Xu Qi'an sipped his tea, saying leisurely, "This mirror was found in the well bottom. If it's not yours, then it's Henghui's. And its true name, is the Earth Book."

Hengyuan suddenly raised his head, looking closely at him. Xu Qi'an laughed, saying with a voice full of confidence, "Many people in the world do not know of it, but that does not include the Nightwatchers."

Hengyuan lowered his head again, saying in a low voice, "It does belong to this poor monk."

Xu Qi'an said, "As far as I know, this is a magic item of the Daoist Earth Sect, how would it have appeared in the hands of a monk?"

Hengyuan replied, "Due to unforeseen opportunity, I received this magic item. Please may Sir return it to me."

Xu Qi'an shook his head, taking back the jade mirror, playing with it in his hands, smiling, "Master, this official reckons that it's not as simple as that, right? A magical artefact of the Daoist Earth Sect, how could 'unforeseen opportunity' explain away that?

"If you sincerely say some useful information, this official will let you leave. Otherwise, you might as well spend the rest of your life in the Nightwatchers' cells."

Hengyuan fell silent for a minute, before standing to leave.

Xu Qi'an frowned, "Where are you going?"

"This poor monk is returning to his cell."

\*... Six's moral character isn't bad, he won't betray the Heaven and Earth Society. Of course, it may also be that he hasn't gone through torture yet, but I don't want something like that.\* Xu Qi'an said solemnly, "It's only a magic item, does the Master need to be like this? There are things in the world more valuable no?"

Hengyuan did not turn back, saying "Please may you shackle this poor monk again."

Xu Qi'an looked to the clerk taking notes, "You go out for now."

The clerk gathered up his paper, pen, and ink, and left the interrogation room.

Xu Qi'an cleared his throat, his voice becoming kindlier, "Master, please sit."

He rose, pulling on Hengyuan's arm, and making a respectful posture.



Hengyuan blankly returned to the tableside, looking at this Bronze Gong, whose attitude had just done a 180-degree turn, not knowing what he was scheming.

“Sir, I know nothing, the Earth Book was indeed received in an unforeseen opportunity.” Hengyuan said helplessly.

\*You don’t need to speak so rigidly! A monk cannot lie, soon you’ll feel awkward for that!\* Xu Qi’an said with half a smile, “You are the Heaven and Earth Society’s number Six right.”

Σ(°△°|||)

Hengyuan’s eyes went wide, looking back with a shocked and stupefied expression. That tranquil aura on his face vanished without a trace, being filled with enmity and caution.

As if upon Xu Qi’an revealing anything that would be detrimental to the Heaven and Earth Society, he would strike this Bronze Gong down with one hand, to take a life for a life.

Xu Qi’an lowered his voice even more, using a tone as if he was making a backroom criminal deal: “My name is Xu Qi’an. I am a mole placed in the Nightwatchers by the Cloud Deer Academy.

“The constabulary did not find the Earth Book fragment, I pulled it up out of the well, I brought people to find you. All of this was under orders by Three, he is my superior.”

\*Three!?!\* Henghui fell into a deep shock. He did not immediately deny the Bronze Gong’s words, because just now, he had remembered something.

\*Three is a student of the Cloud Deer Academy, he’d revealed multiple times that he has eyes in the various constabularies and offices of Court... as the orthodox Confucian school that once controlled the court, this kind of behaviour is to be expected...\*

\*After the Sangpo case happened, Three had mentioned a few details of the case in the Heaven and Earth Society... there is indeed a mole from the Cloud Deer Academy inside the Nightwatchers...\*

\*But how did Three know where I was? Right, Jinlian Daozhang knows all of our identities. At that time Henghui and I were together, and Jinlian Daozhang definitely wanted to avoid conflict between himself and Henghui, thus he could only ask someone else for help. And the Nightwatchers were responsible for the Sangpo Case, so Three, who had spies inside the Nightwatchers, was the best choice...\*

\*I owe Three another life. Three is worthy of being a scholar, he has a heart of heroism and justice, and is a worthy friend. This karma may be hard to return...\* Hengyuan drew a deep breath, as his gaze towards Xu Qi’an no longer had any enmity and caution, as he asked kindly “What did Three say?”

“He said the Spring Examinations are near, and cannot leave the Cloud Deer Academy. If in the future you get into any trouble, he likely will not be able to help. Thus, he asked this official to keep in contact with the Master, if the Master needs any help in the future, you may ask after me.”

In his mind Xu Qi’an added: \*If I have anything, I can also find you, without revealing the identity of Three, at least in the short term.\*

At the moment he did not want to reveal his identity.

Firstly, the pretentious style that he had set up earlier was rather too grandiose, and now the Heaven and Earth Society all thought that he was a top student of the Cloud Deer Academy, a highly gifted, erudite scholar.

If they found out he was a mere Bronze Gong, everything would come crashing down.

Secondly, whenever one keeps a hand, keeps something hidden, it is equivalent to giving oneself a huge amount of territory to maneuver.

\*After all to Number Six Hengyuan, whether I'm a Nightwatcher or a Cloud Deer Academy student, doesn't make much of a difference.\*

Hengyuan nodded, taking over the Earth Book fragment that the handsome Bronze Gong handed to him, "In the future if there's anything this poor monk can help with, Sir only needs to speak."

Xu Qi'an smiled and waved his hand, "Master, I'll escort you out."

After escorting away Hengyuan, Xu Qi'an came back to Spring Breeze Hall. The prefecture office's Lyu Qing and her bailiffs have stopped coming to the constabulary, because they knew that Xu Qi'an likely would be able to be pardoned for his contribution in the Princess Pingyang case.

Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao were meditating in the side hall. Li Yuchun was tidying, arranging everything nice and neatly.

"Boss, let me help you..."

"No, no don't touch a thing!" Li Yuchun hurriedly shouted, "I'll do it myself, I'm good."

Xu Qi'an gladly idled, sitting by the tableside, saying "After the case is over, let's all go to the Jiaofangsi for a drink. On me."

"The Jiaofangsi..." Li Yuchun hesitated.

"Boss, you can't have never gone to the Jiaofangsi?" Xu Qi'an immediately picked up this point, his tone and expression mysterious.

In this era, no man with status or wealth would not have gone to the Jiaofangsi at least once.... the rarity of this, would be like in Xu Qi'an's past life, when a female PhD was still a virgin, to not have any thirty year old male PhDs come and use hand gestures to show off.

"A place full of smoke and miasma, why would I have gone?" Li Yuchun shook his head, "Those three will be beheaded today, do you want to go watch?"

Xu Qi'an hurriedly shook his head, "No, I can't stand those scenes."

Li Yuchun gave him a confused gaze.

Events like beheadings were far too ordinary in the Great Feng. Not considering the Official evaluation there was often a bunch of officials who were brought to the vegetable market to be beheaded, or those death row prisoners after autumn. As for the commoners they would be uncomfortable at first, accustomed at second, and sat eating their lunch and watching the fun at third.

There was absolutely no psychological pressure.

“I’m not going anyway.” Xu Qi’an said.

The impact of several hundred people watching someone be beheaded would be too big for Xu Qi’an, he wouldn’t be able to sleep. And he had spent several years as a detective, and had seen many bloody homicide cases. Given any other person, that would probably leave permanent trauma.

...

Noon, the Vegetable Market.

On the execution platform, were knelt over a hundred people. At their head were the Minister of War Zhang Feng, and his son Zhang Yi.

They wore white prisoners’ gowns, and black blindfolds around their eyes. Surrounding them were gathered over a thousand commoners.

Not that all of them liked watching such a brutal and bloody scene, even if in their eyes all those being beheaded were serious criminals. Most importantly, the Court placed great emphasis on the “audience”, using both carrot and stick strategies. Some people couldn’t not come; they were forced over to watch.

The reason was very simple: to brandish the authority of Court, to subdue the common people.

“Begin!” The lead official eyed the position of the sun, and gave the command.

With death drawing near, the blindfolded family members started ranting and cursing, cursing the Minister of War Zhang Feng for condemning himself and others, swearing to not let him go even if they became ghosts.

The executioner raised his blade high, as head after head rolled, blood spurted in all direction in ridiculous proportions, as the heavy stench of blood was smelled by even the furthest audience members.

Afterwards two more batches of death row prisoners were executed, being the families of Earl Pingyuan and Sun Zhongming.

Hengyuan, standing outside the crowd, silently turned to leave. He had two reasons to come and watch the execution:

Firstly, to resolve this karma for his brother Henghui, to see those personal enemies be beheaded. Secondly, to calm his own obsession, and avoid forming a heart-demon in the future.

Henghui was a junior brother that he had raised from young, he was like a brother and a son. To return the favour, this matter was settled.

...

“Master Shenshu... are you awake?”

In the side hall, whilst practicing breathing, he tried to wake up Shenshu, but Xu Qi’an still did not receive any reply from this high-ranked monk.

\*He seems to be able to sense my thoughts, is this the Buddhist heart-reading art? But heart-reading should not be able to read memories... no matter what, for most of the time he's in deep sleep, this is good.\*

As Xu Qi'an was thinking, he suddenly felt a lurch in his heart. Opening his eyes, he saw that his two colleagues' eyes were still closed. Thus he took out the small jade mirror, and started reading.

【SIX: Everyone: I'm save. Thanks for your thoughts.】

【FIVE: Is SIX the real SIX? Is there a Nightwatcher pretending to be him?】

Five immediately threw out her suspicion. At first glance it seemed to be cautious and careful, but in reality it was rather foolish.

【FOUR: Heh, if he's fake, Jinlian Daozhang would have warned us ages ago. FIVE, what you need to consider is, has SIX been compromised by the Nightwatchers?】

\*I'd expect nothing less from a scholar and a once great official, his thoughts are sharp...\* Xu Qi'an tutted in admiration.

【FIVE: Then SIX, have you been compromised?】

【SIX: This poor monk is very well, this poor monk wants to thank THREE and Jinlian Daozhang's kindness.】

【NINE: No need to thank me, your junior brother never had the heart to kill you.】

【FOUR: What's the progress with the Sangpo Case?】

Seeing this, Xu Qi'an waited for a moment, and not seeing One respond, entered

【THREE: The Sangpo Case is over, but it's also not over.】

【FOUR: As expected.】

【FIVE: What do you mean, what do you mean "as expected"? How has the Sangpo case just ended, and how do you say it's also not ended?】

【FOUR: Heh, it's best to let THREE explain. I reckon that he can explain better than I can.】

Xu Qi'an hesitated a while, and decided to take Four's burden, writing: 【THREE: It's very simple, the real goal of the Sangpo Case is to bring forward the Case of the disappearance of Princess Pingyang. The best example of this is Henghui taking the sealed item and causing chaos in the inner city by exterminating the Earl Pingyuan's family.

【This noon, the three officials that were involved in this case had three familial relations be executed at the vegetable market. Since the Princess Pingyang case came to a close, the perpetrator behind the scenes had achieved their goal. They

most likely will take the sealed item out of the capital, and this storm will have passed.

【But the Sangpo Case itself hasn't ended.】

\*So that's how it is.\* Five had a great realisation, and then coldly stabbed three in the back: 【FIVE: THREE you great liar, that person that picks up silver every day clearly is you.】

Chapter 156. A Goddess of War

Seventh floor, Tower of Noble Spirit.

The tea room was empty, save for Wei Yuan. Xu Qi'an, with his back straight and with steady stems walked in, clasping his fists:

“Duke Wei.”

Wei Yuan had just poured a cup of tea, and put it facing him. He raised his head, indicating, “Sit.”

Xu Qi'an sat down reservedly, taking a token sip of tea, before fixing his gaze on Wei Yuan. He had a feeling, that the reason Wei Yuan wanted him, was because of the Case of Princess Pingyang.

“The Princess Pingyang case has ended, the Sangpo Case must continue. His Majesty has shut down my suggestion.” Wei Yuan drank his tea, his voice neither quick nor slow, recounting the events in the Imperial Study to Xu Qi'an as if he was just idly chatting.

Xu Qi'an said with a dark face, “Minister Sun of the Ministry of Law had past relations with Assistant Minister Zhou Xianping from the Ministry of Revenues, he hated me from the start...”

Wei Yuan waved his hand wide, interrupting him unhappily, “These are all small matters!”

He continued with a frustrated tone of voice, “His Majesty doesn't like you, this is a big matter!”

Xu Qi'an's face became even darker.

\*Funny that, I don't like him either.\* When he first saw the daoist-robe wearing Emperor Yuanjing at the ancestor ceremony, a light contempt had started flickering in his heart.

At that time, he thought it was because the Emperor represented feudalist imperial authority, but after the events with the spirit dragon, after coming in close contact, he discovered that his hate for Emperor Yuanjing was very pure; there was no other reason, he just innately hated the man.

\*Perhaps my horoscope is conflicting with his... I'm a monkey, is he a ram?\* Xu Qi'an made a bitter laugh,

“Your servant does not know how he has gained His Majesty's contempt.”

“Perhaps you just don't have any affinity.” Wei Yuan rubbed his temples, “You just wait, there's no more reason to investigate. At this time, all remaining threads have already been covered, you won't be able to find anything more. When the time limit is

up, and His Majesty must chop you, then I'll arrange a death row prisoner to double for you.

Heh, don't worry, no one will worry too much about a little Bronze Gong like you."

\*And then I'll naturally become your covert... agent.\* Xu Qi'an asked: "What if we can catch Zhou Chixiong?"

Wei Yuan laughed, "Then all is resolved."

He shook his head and laughed again.

Leaving the Tower of Noble Spirit, Xu Qi'an returned to Spring Breeze Hall, and told the matter to Song Tingfeng, Zhu Guangxiao, and Li Yuchun.

Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao's expressions both suddenly became stiff. The former struck the table emphatically, swearing, before walking in anxious circles around the hall, a deep bitterness being engrained deeper and deeper onto his face, as his frown got tighter.

Li Yuchun hesitated, before saying, "The case of Princess Pingyang has wasted too much time. You'll be hard pressed to investigate the Sangpo case further. The Sitianjian's qi-watching technique cannot be used to accuse a fourth rank or higher official, unless you can ask the Jianzheng."

\*Ask the Jianzheng? Not counting whether or not he wants to help, even if he did, would Emperor Yuanjing believe him?\* Xu Qi'an's hearts said, \*No way I'm going to find that raggedy old man.\*

...

Stargazing Tower.

"Sister Caiwei, I wish to see the Jianzheng, do you have any way of taking me to the Bagua platform?" Xu Qi'an, carrying numerous bags of snacks and food, wore a smile like the most ultimate of simps in his previous life.

Chu Caiwei without any hint of politeness ate the food Xu Qi'an offered, saying "Can't do. Teacher is in seclusion, and has already closed the passage to the Bagua platform, no one can go up."

Bearing striking resemblance to a goddess expending her spare tyre.

"There's no way?"

"Nope."

"When will our Teacher come out of seclusion?"

Chu Caiwei gave him a look, \*Since when is he "our teacher"?\*

She said: "At longest many months, at shortest maybe half a month. He's probably on the Bagua platform reading star signs."

... Xu Qi'an felt a mouthful of old blood: this was karma! Freeloading all day, only for the day to come where he will be the one freeloaded off!

\*No, I can't lose out like this...\* He put all two taels of silver worth of food onto the table, saying "My little sis is having menstrual pains, it's difficult to bear for her, is there any way to help?"

Hearing this, Chu Caiwei rushed away, her hips swaying, before returning a few minutes later with a porcelain bottle. "When in pain eat one of these, it'll be gone in a flash."

Though this Miss was somewhat of a glutton, she was nonetheless very generous. No matter if the medicine was expensive or not, she always was happy to give to people.

....

Yunzhou.

Within a vast and boundless mountain range, a decently sized fortified village was built with its back to a mountain, chains of torch-fires lighting the pitch-black night.

The stronghold was easy to defend and hard to attack, being on favourable terrain. When the fortification was first built, the government had sent soldiers to try root them out, but after failing several times, they could only turn a blind eye.

Banditry in Yunzhou was a serious matter, with mountain bandits, highwaymen, robbers and the like too numerous to count. The common people had long suffered, and the provincial government had been struggling for decades.

After so many decades, slowly people grew used to it; a chaotic region still had a chaotic region's way of life.

It was just after dusk, and the mountain gales were already howling fiercely. Soon, thunderclaps echoed, and a downpour began.

On the guard tower, the bandit on lookout resisted the icy cold wind and rain cutting into him, looking towards the inside of the stronghold with admiration.

Today, the stronghold had another windfall. They had captured a merchant caravan, and brought back silk, tea, porcelain, all manner of valuable goods.

This was all because of the new sixth boss that had come to the stronghold. His martial prowess outshone them all, and knew how to use combined assaults, and was proficient in training soldiers.

It's said that he came from the military, and used to be stationed in the Great Feng Capital. Later, because he couldn't bear the corruption and rot of court, he simply took to the mountains, and became an outlaw.

Currently, a great feast was being held in the stronghold.

A great fire roared in the hall, as the six heads and several of their ringleaders were all eating and drinking with abandon, chatting vulgar topics, raising great goblets high.

Thinly clothed women stood by, attending to their needs, forcing smiles on their faces. They were all captive women, some were common women, but some were the prized daughters of rich households.

The prettier ones were picked out especially to serve the bosses and the ringleaders, whilst the rest were shared amongst the grunts in the stronghold.

Zhou Chixiong sat by the table, his back habitually straight as a ruler, his manner clashing inharmoniously with the lustful outlaws. Beside him was a graceful woman attending to him, but Zhou Chixiong didn't even bother looking over.

These base, common bodies, he had no interest in even touching them.

Zhou Chixiong had brought his family to Yunzhou. His wife and son were not in the mountain stronghold, rather being housed in the largest city in Yunzhou, Baidi<sup>[^1]</sup> city.

Baidi City was one of the few havens in Yunzhou, that did not need to worry about bandits and outlaws.

The top boss was a man with a huge matt of hair for a beard. He looked coarse and rough, but he was a careful and scrupulous martial artist at the peak of Refining Spirit.

“Brother Zhou, is this woman not to your tastes?”

Without waiting for Zhou Chixiong to reply, the top boss laughed uproariously, “I heard that there is a woman in this merchant caravan that has a face like a flower, who’s currently locked in the shed?”

“Yes boss, that chick is a beaut!”

“Bossman, compared to the other women in the fort, she’s... she’s like white sugar in a mud pile.”

As that woman’s country-destroying beauty flashed up in his mind, Zhou Chixiong also became excited. She was captured by him, he knew best what she looked like. If he wasn’t a newcomer, then this woman would already be in his bedroom.

The head boss hesitated for a moment, before smiling generously, “Go bring that girl over, tonight she will be the sixth boss’s to do with as he likes. After all he was the one who did the capturin’, he should be the one to open the feast!”

The other bosses had no issue; it didn’t matter who starts them off, everybody will have a try eventually.

After a while, a woman was brought over. She wore a pearly white layered dress, her skin was white as snow, her eyes were bright and beautiful, and her features were flawless.

She was somewhat scared, like a cowering doe in a forest.

The whole room fell silent, as everyone looked in a trance at her beauty, daydreaming.

“Gurgle.” As the sound of gulping echoed.

The woman seemed to know her own fate, and biting her lip, said shyly, “Wh- which master is your servant attending to?”

Zhou Chixiong swallowed, feeling that her beauty was practically edible. He walked over with large steps, and dragged her to the table.

Zhou Chixiong pulled the beautiful woman into his bosom, and as if he was starving touched her, licked her, bit her. The bandits watching this were filled with jealousy, wanting nothing more than to take his place.

“Are you Zhou Chixiong.” The soft voice of the girl sounded from by his ear.

\*She knows my name...\* Zhou Chixiong’s blood ran cold, as all desire evaporated. At the same time, he discovered that the beauty in his lap was slowly whitening, slowly losing all life.



A moment later, she had turned into a human-sized paper cutout.

“Teeheehee...”

A sharp female laughter echoed around the room, sending people’s hairs standing on end.

Clang! The window burst open under the wind, extinguishing the fire in the room.

In the darkness, the sound of blades being drawn resonated all around, as the head boss’s voice sounded out: “What cretins are engaging in this nonsense?”

The sharp female laughter suddenly stopped. A few seconds later though, everyone in the fortress heard a mournful cry. That cry echoed through the mountains, through the night sky.

“It’s a succubus.” Zhou Chixiong said deeply, as an ominous feeling welled up inside him.

A succubus, a demon of romance, has almost no fighting capability, but is skilled in charming and seducing, and then sucking dry the victim’s spirit.

Although martial artists were not skilled in dealing with ghosts and demons, when they roused their qi they could make their body immune to all manners of evil. What Zhou Chixiong was really worried about was the master of the succubus.

Zhou Chixiong had a feeling that they were coming for him.

Just then, the sound of drums sounded throughout the mountain, as from outside came the shouts of bandits: “Attack, attack!”

The bosses and ringleaders of the stronghold all picked up their weapons, and rushed out of the hall, trying to look through the rainstorm. The night, the rain, and the forest blocked their sight.

From the air came sharp whistling sounds, the sounds of numerous arrows.

Bandits fell to the ground, as cries came from all around.

The head boss smacked aside an arrow, and let out a breath. To attack from below, the arrows’ strength was never going to be too high. As long as their luck was not bad enough to be shot in a weak point, they would still be able to fight even with an arrow or two in them.

“Prepare the rocks and oil...”

The mountain fortress had the high ground, and these two things were its defensive trump cards. When the fortress was first built, it was these two things that fended off the government siege, that saw the stronghold through its hardest days.

As soon as the head boss’s words fell, a silver flash arced through the night — not the flash of lightning, but the qi given off by a long spear.

Roar!

As lighting appeared at the perfect time, letting the bandits below see that on the spear was stood a figure.

She wore scaled plate armour, a brilliant red cape streaming behind her. She wore no helmet, and her long hair was tied into a ponytail that reached to her waist. She was valiant and formidable, like a goddess of war, standing coldly above.

As the goddess of war cast her spell, summoning the lightning. Boom! as the lightning crashed down, she clutched it between her fingers, and flung with all her might.

Two archery towers of the stronghold fell with a crash.

\*Daoist lightning magic?\*

Zhou Chixiong was stunned stiff, as if his whole body was put in a freezer.

---

Chapter 157. The Water Recedes, Revealing the Stones

The bandit suppression began in a flash, and ended in a flash, as merely two hours had passed until the stronghold had been breached.

The lead boss knelt on the ground, his body covered in blood, as he looked at the battalion. They were wearing bright armour, but they didn't show any sigils of the provincial government or the army.

The contingent was small, consisting of around four hundred people. But the leader was shocked to find that the none of the members of the battalion were weak. At the lowest, they were Refining Vitality.

Counting, he saw that the number of Refining Qi martial artists reached the fifties, and also found more than ten Refining Spirit martial artists. There were also four Bronze Skin and Iron Bone realm martial artists.

And that War Goddess at their head, her cultivation was certainly even more terrifying.

Such an army was more than enough to deal with a small bandit's warren. It was strong enough even to butt heads with Baidi City, the largest city in Yunzhou.

\*Not gathered under a flag, Very strong, Led by a woman...\* The chieftain's heart sank, as a urban legend of Yunzhou came to his mind.

"You, You are... the Flying Swallow Heroine?"

"What flying swallow heroine, sounds awful."

The War Goddess, who was wielding a silver spear, frowned. She was extremely beautiful. Her face was marked with graceful features, small red cherry lips, and she had a high nose that highlighted her features. It's just that... Her spirit was so vigorous, that it led to others ignoring her obvious beauty.

A transparent ghost was obediently standing beside her. Although the ghost was an extremely charming one, It's charm was eclipsed by her personality.

"Did I do the job well, master?", The ghost said in lovable voice.

"You passed on the message in time." The War Goddess nodded and praised her work.

"Can you give me a man?" The ghost said, acting cute, "I've been hungry for many days."

\*I'll deliver Emperor Yuanjing to you. Go and suck up his vitality...\* The War Goddess mentally cursed, while she nodded in reality, "You can choose a few bandits."

The chieftain became sure that the War Goddess in front of him was the legendary Flying Swallow Heroine.

A few years ago, a chivalrous and brave female knight suddenly emerged in the Jianghu. Wherever she went, she supported and upheld justice.

In those few years, She had managed to rise to fame in the Jianghu and her name was spread to thousands of households. Due to her zeal for justice, She was titled the Flying Swallow Heroine.

At the beginning of the year, the heroine had come to Yunzhou. Seeing the rampant banditry and the civilians living in dire straits, She immediately went ahead and recruited soldiers, established a small troop and started to zealously suppress bandits.

Her actions were well supported by the Governor of Yunzhou.

"I ask, you answer, and I'll make your death a quick one." The War Goddess pointed the tip of her silver spear at him, and said coldly, "Otherwise, You shall become a ghost, never to be reborn again."

The bandit leader was put in a tough spot, as he tried to bargain, "No way!"

Swish.. The silver spear pierced his temple, causing some red and white things to flow out.

After putting away her spear, the War Goddess murmured, "Just making things difficult."

"!!!" Zhou Chixiong was so frightened by the scene in front of him that his legs became weak. He thought, \*Why did she do that? Couldn't she have seen him trying to bargain? She should have given him at least one chance."

\*How is she this reckless!\*

The martial artists of the troop seemed to have long since got used to the idiosyncrasies of the War Goddess, and they continued watching the fun, smiles occupying their faces.

At the time, Zhou Chixiong felt as if the War Goddess would kill him without remorse in the same moment. So, he immediately prostrated himself, "Heroine, please spare me. I'll say anything you want me to say. I'll say anything."

"I won't kill you." The War Goddess stood proud. Her close-fitting armor highlighted her graceful and exquisite curves, Her beauty was accentuated her aura, both imposing and murderous.

"I'm going to send you to meet a person."

...

Xu Qi'an finished his qi circulation exercises, a dark cloud in his heart preventing him from sleeping. His ears picked up the gentle drip of the water clock, before a familiar lurch came from his heart.

He quickly sat up, and hurriedly pulled out the small jade mirror from under his pillow. As expected, he saw what he wanted to see:

((TWO: THREE, Zhou Chixiong has been caught. Tomorrow I'll send someone to take him to the capital.))

\*Zhou Chixiong's been caught? This efficiency is a little too scary... Number Two might as well be my white moon[^1], I love it, love it!\* Xu Qi'an's emotions could hardly be described as just "pleased beyond relief", being almost joyful to the point of tears.

Becoming Wei Yuan's undercover agent was the worst option. Xu Qi'an in reality never wanted to take this path. Currently he was just Refining Qi, he still didn't have much experience under his belt yet. No matter the resources or environment, staying in the capital, with the Nightwatchers, would be far better than whatever ends of the earth he would go.

If one's life was calm and peaceful, who would want to wander around miserably?

He never felt much belonging to this world anyway, and if he parted ways with Uncle and Auntie, with his brothers and sisters, lonely might not be enough to describe his emotions.

((THREE: Can you get there within six days?))

Yunzhou was far from the capital. Even though the empire had well-developed roads and rest stations, six days was still rather much of an ask.

((TWO: If riding a firefeather beast, then six days would be just enough. But you must pay me three hundred taels of silver. I can't make my brothers run errands for you for nothing, you also have to pay their travel expenses.))

((THREE: This is only natural.))

Xu Qi'an finished messaging, and fell into thought. Zhou Chixiong could under no circumstances be delivered to the capital, the waters in the capital are too deep. As soon as Zhou Chixiong entered the city, he would be found out, as after all he was wanted by the court, and most wanted at that.

\*I have two choices, I could notify Wei Yuan beforehand, or find another way to ferry Zhou Chixiong to the capital...\* after thinking, Xu Qi'an chose the latter option.

Because he had a better idea.

((THREE: TWO, could you send Zhou Chixiong to the Cloud Deer Academy, there'll be people there to pick him up.))

Zhou Chixiong's matter involved the most senior court officials. He needed to prevent them from fleeing too early. The Nightwatchers Constabulary was full of martials, who were too simple, not flamboyant enough.

The Cloud Deer Academy's great scholars had the ability to move instantaneously, and so were the best option for escorting a prisoner. They would only need to say: \*Three feet of me doth be the capital city.\*

And they would be there.

Most likely they wouldn't be able to enter the Imperial Palace, otherwise it would be far too easy for the great scholars to chop off Emperor Yuanjing's head.

\*Tomorrow I'll go to the Cloud Deer Academy, and visit my three teachers...\* Xu Qi'an made up his mind.

As to Three's request, no one was suspicious at all. After all, Three was a student of the Cloud Deer Academy, so it would only be natural.

...

Days passed by. During this time, Xu Qi'an rushed all around the place, and met with Princess Huaqing and Biaobiao, hoping the two could plead his case.

Biaobiao, only knowing how to make mischief for her sister and never scheming for herself, picked up her Princess title again and immediately agreed.

Princess Huaqing was more neutral and sensible, saying honestly: "Father seems not to like you. We can help you avoid the death penalty, but a living penalty would be hard to escape."

A living penalty naturally would be to be exiled.

Xu Qi'an noticed one detail though, Princess Huaqing gave off an unreasonable indifference to the Sangpo Case, as well as a strange calmness to Xu Qi'an's fate, as if she didn't even put it on her mind.

A day before the deadline, Wei Yuan sent someone to summon him, and Xu Qi'an saw the great azure cloak in the Tower of Noble Spirit.

"I've just received word from the palace, His Majesty tomorrow will hold morning court, and bringing up the Sangpo case will be inevitable. I will try my best to keep you at the constabulary, and not in the prefecture office or the Ministry of Law." Wei Yuan said.

He was just about to say something to reassure the small Bronze Gong, when he heard him say calmly,

"Duke Wei, I've already caught Zhou Chixiong."

Wei Yuan's expression froze, looking back wordlessly.

...

At 4 AM the next day, Xu Qi'an drove a carriage into the imperial city, stopping outside the palace. Accompanying him were Song Qing and Chu Caiwei of the Sitianjian, the Cloud Deer Academy's great scholar Zhang Shen, and the Gold Gongs Jiang Lyuzhong and Yang Yan.

In the carriage was the unconscious Jinwu Guard Baihu Zhou Chixiong. He was tied up, and a sack was placed over his head.

When he arrived, Xu Qi'an let out a sigh of relief, clasping his fists and saluting to the others, "Thank you, everyone, the Sangpo Case ends today."

He wanted to put a full stop on the Sangpo Case, to put a full stop on his altercation with the Silver Gong.

The Throne Room.

After the usual speeches and proclamations, Emperor Yuanjing said "Has the Sangpo Case progressed?"

Beneath him in court, the many great civil servants simultaneously looked towards Wei Yuan, their expressions all different, yet schadenfreude prevailing the most.

The Minister of Rites stepped forth, announcing loudly “Your Majesty, I wish Wei Yuan would return me some justice.”

Wei Yuan looked at the Minister of Rites, and turned his gaze on Emperor Yuanjing, bowing, “Your Majesty, the water recedes, revealing the stones, the Sangpo Case is complete.” The sound of discussion suddenly flared up.

Emperor Yuanjing was dazed for a moment, before squinting and leaning forward slightly, “Who is the main perpetrator?”

Emperor Yuanjing said, “There’s no point in your servant speaking, Your Majesty can directly summon for the Jinwu Guard Baihu Zhou Chixiong.”

The Minister of Rites’ eyebrow rose, as he laughed coldly, “Zhou Chixiong has long since fled the capital, how would he be summoned?”

Wei Yuan looked at him with a half smile: “Zhou Chixiong is just outside the palace complex, please may Your Majesty summon him.”

In that instant, the court fell into silence.

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## Chapter 158. Gifting Poems

After a short pause, the various court attendants could not resist but to discuss amongst themselves. The Sangpo case having been investigated for so long by now, everyone knew the dips and peaks of the story by now.

The escaped Jinwu guard Baihu Zhou was precisely the ringleader in conspiring with the Yao to smuggle gunpowder into the imperial city.

As to whether in reality he was or not, everyone had their own opinions, but there was rarely a slow head in the elders of the royal court. Thus, Wei Yuan’s words were like a boulder being chucked into a temple, raising a storm.

Although this sterile old eunuch drew the ire of many, no one could deny that Wei Yuan was a respected opponent. His words were very valuable, and had little fluff.

\*Someone’s over...\* was the thought that went through all of the bigwigs present.

The Minister of Rites suddenly changed colour, as his white beard shook slightly. His gaze suddenly stiffened, as he gazed directly at Wei Yuan.

This old man’s qigong practices were commendable, he rarely if ever lost control like this.

Emperor Yuanjing said deeply: “Send him in!”

...

Xu Qi'an sat at the driver's seat. Opening the curtain, he glanced at Zhou Chixiong, who was still unconscious. To prevent the man from killing himself, Xu Qi'an had acquired large amounts of incapacitating medication.

The reasons why he chose to go to the Cloud Deer Academy to pick him up himself, and not to stuff him in his earth book fragment, were twofold:

One, this person is a Refining Spirit rank, much higher than him, thus he didn't want to take risks. Two, the existence of the Earth Book fragment was a secret, and he couldn't just show everyone in the open. He could hardly just walk into the imperial throne room, and pull out the Earth Book fragment in front of the Emperor and his servants.

Of course, if there was no other way, he would have used the Earth Book. However he had enough relationships to get things done otherwise, thus he could avoid resorting to such an option.

"Brother Song, what order is Brother Yang Qianhuan in Sir Jianzheng's disciples?" As he waited for a message from within the court, Xu Qi'an chitchatted with Song Qing.

The black bags around Brother Song's eyes were a sight to behold. In Xu Qi'an's previous life, he would definitely be labelled as a lover of "multi-person activities", however Song Qing was a tech nerd who didn't go near women.

In his eyes were only man-beast hybrids, not women.

"He's mine and Caiwei's senior brother, the third disciple of our teacher." Song Qing drew closer to him, and muttered, "There's something wrong with that senior brother's head."

\*Is there a disciple of the Jianzheng who doesn't have something wrong with them?\* Xu Qi'an was still sceptical, as he put his hands behind his back, and imitated Yang Qianhuan's posture.

"Yes yes!" Song Qing nodded his head over and over, "He loves to stand with his back to people, and not speak properly. The other brothers all find him annoying, only he finds it shameless, rather finding it extremely satisfying."

"Why is this?" Xu Qi'an thought back to that night at the Jiaofangsi, back to his brief interaction with Yang Qianhuan.

"He says he needs to have his back to all others, to present a master's aura." Song Qing replied.

\*Is he trying to cosplay the Wushi Emperor[^1]...\* Xu Qi'an forced a mouthful of lampooning back down his throat, feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

\*This is not eighth grader syndrome, eighth grader syndrome would only make one somewhat fanciful, this is a problem with his fundamental personality. He is a king of posturers, because he deliberately postures like a pretentious prick, and not just because there's a problem with his world view.\*

Xu Qi'an thought for a while, before saying: "Brother Song, could you pass on a message for me."

"Go ahead."

Xu Qi'an said in a low voice: “\*Picking the stars with the moon in hand, there are none like me upon this land.\*”<sup>[^2]</sup>

The arrogance!

The ears of the two Gold Gongs Yang Yan and Jiang Lyuzhong twitched as they heard it, instinctively turning their heads over to look.

To a martial artist, hearing these words would be like a vagabond seeing another vagabond showing off left and right, it would instantly ignite their aggressive and competitive tendencies.

The same principle applied last time at the Stargazing Tower, when Xu Qi'an's singing of “\*A sword in hand, ask who is the hero under heaven?\*” was snorted at by Nangong Qianrou.

\*Such arrogant words, brother Yang is bound to love them, but saying them everywhere... he'll probably be beaten up... no that's good for him, I'm fed up of that attitude of his...\* Song Qing nodded happily, “I will ensure it is done.”

As they chatted, a eunuch came out with a contingent of armoured soldiers. He looked around at the palace city entrance, before saying loudly,

“Where are the Nightwatchers!”

Jiang Lyuzhong saluted, “Here!”

The group took out their plaques and golden tokens to identify themselves. The eunuch nodded, “Follow us to the palace, His Majesty has summons.”

Yang Yan immediately drew the carriage curtains, and put Zhou Chixiong over his shoulder.

“Who is this?” On the way to the palace, the eunuch asked curiously.

“A wanted criminal, Zhou Chixiong.” Xu Qi'an replied.

“Why is there still a bag over his head? Let us see.” The eunuch seemed to take much interest, and came over.

Jiang Lyuzhong blocked him, shaking his head, “Before His Majesty sees him, no one can come into contact with the criminal.”

The eunuch frowned, looking around at everyone's faces, saying solemnly, “Before seeing His Majesty, one must verify his identity. How shall one know that this one is not someone holding unsavoury intentions, pretending to be Zhou Chixiong to get into the palace and assassinate His Majesty.

“Naturally, we are not saying that you are accomplices, but a wise man's thoughts eventually will have fault, and we cannot rule out that we have been deceived.”

Jiang Lyuzhong shook his head again.

“What intentions do you have?” The eunuch stopped, squinting, examining them, “One now suspects this person's identity, and requires proof.”

That contingent of armoured soldiers also stopped, staring sternly at Jiang Lyuzhong and the others.



These words were reasonable and well-based, without any flaw, but to say such a thing now touched a sensitive spot.

Xu Qi'an knew numerous methods of making a person silently die, and was confident that the two Gold Gongs knew even more than him. And as martial artists, they most likely couldn't stop it. Martial artists were best only at outputting a lot of strength very quickly.

And if Zhou Chixiong died, died silently whilst unconscious, who has to bear the burden? Clearly it wouldn't be this eunuch.

Because inspecting the identity of criminals was an ordinary procedure.

\*This eunuch belongs to a faction... most likely it's the same clique as the Minister of Rites... as expected. If I came in all on my own, without the two Gold Gongs, the great scholar Zhang Shen, and brothers and sisters from the Sitianjian... I might have failed at the last step.\*

Thinking this, Xu Qi'an said smilingly, "Milord, when we go see His Majesty, I will say milord has attempted to murder Zhou Chixiong to silence him."

"Preposterous!" The eunuch flew into a rage, "You dare to slander us! Come, arrest him!"

"Milord..." Xu Qi'an said loudly, "Have you really decided to have an altercation here? His Majesty is not an idiot, nor are the great servants of court, have you considered the consequences?"

This eunuch laughed coldly, "Fledgling brat, have you considered the consequences?"

Xu Qi'an put a hand on his sabre, and walked over, whispering in the eunuch's ear: "Don't try to play lives with me, it's not worth it. Milord is helping someone else here, all you need to do is to try your best. After all you're not a core member of the Wang clique, make the best decision."

This early thirties eunuch's expression changed for a good minute, before he said sharply, "We will not lower ourselves to your level."

...

Coming to the throne room palace, the eunuch went to report. Soon after, Emperor Yuanjing summoned Xu Qi'an and the others into the palace.

After stepping over the ridiculously high threshold, that stretched past the knees, Xu Qi'an entered this main hall of the palace complex, and saw again the group of people that stood at the height of political power.

Especially that one, the middle aged man wearing the Daoist robe, sat on the dragon throne.

The many dukes and officials of court turned their bodies, looking at the great door of the throne room, look at Xu Qi'an's group.

\*Still a bit nervous... the core of the political power battlegrounds of the Great Feng...\* Xu Qi'an exhaled a long breath, pressing down the unease in his heart.

Wei Yuan's kindly gaze fell on Xu Qi'an's face, as he lightly nodded.

Xu Qi'an was even less afraid now, taking Baihu Zhou from Gold Gong Jiang. Taking off the hemp sack, he pulled on the nape of his neck, making the unconscious Zhou Chixiong raise his head.

"Your Majesty, this is the criminal wanted by court, the former Jinwu Guard Baihu Zhou Chixiong."

The hubbub of conversation exploded.

The face of the Minister of Rites slowly lost all colour.

Xu Qi'an pressed his finger into a few of Zhou Chixiong's major pressure points. "Ughh..." in a pained groan, Baihu Zhou slowly opened his eyes.

And promptly fell into a daze.

In front of him was the towering Emperor Yuanjing, to his sides were the dukes and officials of court, above him was the ornate throne room sign, and below him was the mirror-like sheen of the crystal floor.

\*Maybe I opened my eyes wrong...\* Baihu Zhou closed his eyes again.

Smack! Xu Qi'an immediately smacked him, laughing coldly, "Ey, traitor, you've come back in glory."

Zhou Chixiong, numb all over, was struck to the ground. He didn't get back up, rather prostrated himself, crying shakily: "Your servant's sin deserves a thousand deaths! Your servant's sin deserves a thousand deaths!"

After the stronghold in Yunzhou was taken, Zhou Chixiong was knocked unconscious, and was delivered back to the capital on a firefeather beast. He was unconscious all the way. He was only ever fed some water, and not any food.

With great trouble he reached the capital, and Xu Qi'an thought that his situation was still decent, so the former gave him incapacitating medicine to keep him knocked out.

Emperor Yuanjing's face was stern, as he gazed down from above: "Zhou Chixiong, who ordered you to conspire with the Yao to smuggle gunpowder?"

Zhou Chixiong was still prostrate on the floor, saying with all his breath: "Your servant should die..."

Emperor Yuanjing turned his gaze from this ant, looking towards Zhang Shen beside Xu Qi'an, saying kindly "Mister Zhang, sorry to bother you."

Zhang Shen grunted coldly, not directly responding to the emperor, as he stepped forwards, his hands behind his back, heavenly laws on his tongue: "A gentleman must be truthful, an ordinary man must also."

An invisible zephyr swept through the throne room, as in an instant, everyone's minds were filled with the word "truthfulness".

"Who ordered you to conspire with the Yao to smuggle gunpowder?"

"It's... it's the Minister of Rites Li Yulang." Zhou Chixiong began to sob.

In an instant, the throne room exploded. All the great officials lost their abilities to control their emotions, and an uproar rose.

A supervising secretary stepped out, "Your Majesty, this is preposterous, Zhou Chixiong is slandering..."

Song Qing interrupted icily, "Baihu Zhou is not lying."

Chu Caiwei concurred, "He's not lying."

The qi-watching technique could not be used on officials greater than fourth rank, but it could be used on Zhou Chixiong.

The Minister of Rites' face was ashen grey.

There was no point in arguing any more; as soon as Zhou Chixiong had been caught, he had lost, unless he knew of this matter beforehand, and can kill him halfway.

"Li Yulang, what have you to say?" Emperor Yuanjing said.

The Minister of Rites took a deep breath, stowing away the defeat on his face, "Your servant is being wronged."

As if they were the last struggles in his death throes, there were no excuses nor arguments, only those few pitiful words.

Wei Yuan immediately said, "Your Majesty, please lend that man to this servant for interrogation, to find his accomplices."

The Minister of Law also stepped forwards, butting heads with Wei Yuan, "Your Majesty, please give this case to the Ministry of Law."

Emperor Yuanjing did not reply, looking silently at the room full of red and purple cloaks. The room slowly quietened, as people instinctively stopped their discussions, lowering their heads.

After a long time, Emperor Yuanjing said loudly, "This case will be handed to the Ministry of Law."

...

After the court had adjourned, Minister Sun was escorted out, his official robes and cap long being confiscated.

"Wait!"

The ashen-hearted Minister of Rites turned to look, and the people from the Ministry of Law did similarly. They saw that small Bronze Gong from the Nightwatchers Constabulary catch up to them,

The Ministry of Law people immediately went to block his way.

Xu Qi'an did not argue, stopping in his steps, looking at the Minister of Law and the Minister of Rites. He said lightly, "A few days ago, I heard about what happened in court. If your Wang clique could quiet everything earlier, then today may never have happened."

This scene was seen by many officials. They involuntarily stopped, looking over.

Further away, Wei Yuan stopped by his carriage, gazing over.

Yang Yan whispered: "Father, do I call him over?"

Wei Yuan shook his head, “The anguish in his heart is hard to suppress. If he does not vent it now, what time does he have. You watch, make sure things do not escalate.”

He smiled warmly, “I also want to see what he says.”

The The Minister of Law Minister Sun squinted, saying contemptuously, “Young brat, prattling on so self-importantly here.”

Xu Qi’an was not the least bit angered, replying “Do the two ministers know that I have some little poetic talent? I do not dare to prattle self-importantly, I only wanted to gift Minister Sun and Minister Li a poem.

“This poem is called: \*The Case of Sangpo Lake, Given to Minister Sun\*”

Gifting a poem!?

The surrounding civil servants first were dazed, then became excited, not caring about this matter being blown out of bounds, or about Minister Sun’s dignity, they all rushed over.

“Come on, let us listen in.” Wei Yuan’s eyes lit up slightly, as he strode over with great steps.

Minister Sun’s face turned, as he remembered Xu Qi’an’s fame, remembered his poetry. A torrent of unease welled up inside him.

Xu Qi’an loudly proclaimed:

“\*All men raise their children and hope them clever,

While my cleverness has strayed me all my life,

Now I only wish my son be dull and clumsy,

And reach the high ranks with no misery and strife.\*”<sup>[3]</sup>

Chapter 159. The Straight-as-Iron Li Yuchun

\*Now I only wish my son be dull and clumsy, and reach the high ranks with no misery and strife... hss, what a poisonous tongue!\*

The meaning hidden within this poem was, that the author was lamenting that he was too clever, and thus delayed for his whole life. If he were to be an idiot, then he would be able to become a duke without any worry nor strife.

This was satirising the entire court of civil and martial officials, all the princes and dukes of the land, mocking them for being addle-brained idiots.

The surrounding officials all exchanged looks, their expressions hardly just describable as “strange”. They had come to see Minister Sun being mocked, yet they were just coldly stabbed in the back.

A little uncomfortable hardly describes it!

\*The Sangpo Case, given to Minister Sun... he’s calling me an idiot, mocking me for shooting myself in the foot... he wants to pin my name to the post of disgrace...\* the name of the poem echoed in Minister Sun’s mind, as anger welled in his heart.

The most majestic pursuit of a learned man was to leave a glorious name in the annals of history, this attracted them more than teaching or anything else. Similarly, however much they wished to leave a glorious name, was however much they feared having their name dragged through the pigsty.

How could this be tolerated?

This could not be tolerated.

“Come, arrest this brat, take him!” Minister Sun was shaking with fury, his whole face red and swollen.

Because he had taken matters into his own hands, and tried to finish off the Nightwatchers lead investigator Xu Qi’an, the Sangpo case had an ending like it did. Already he was feeling frustration enough to flip tables, and just then the thing he could suffer the least was to be kicked whilst he was down.

The Ministry of Law’s people came up in unison, to arrest Xu Qi’an outside of the imperial city gates.

“Sir Sun, please do not be angry.” Wei Yuan’s calm and kindly voice stopped the Ministry of Law’s people.

This great azure cloak walked over unhurriedly, stepping between the Ministry of Law and Xu Qi’an.

“Wei Yuan, this person is slandering this official, insulting a ministry’s high minister, by the law he shall be exiled!” The Minister of Law resisted his anger, and enunciated word by word:

“Today. Even. You. Will. Not. Protect. Him.”

“To slander a minister is indeed a great offence.” Wei Yuan looked sternly at Xu Qi’an, and just when everyone thought he was about to scold the foul mouthed little Bronze Gong, he turned back to the minister with deadly earnest, “To be honest, it is not slander.”

“You...” Minister Sun swayed, pointing a trembling finger at Wei Yuan.

Wei Yuan smiled, turned and left. Xu Qi’an happily followed dad away, escaping the Ministry of Law’s henchmen.

After waling a few steps, he stopped again, turning his head and calling: “Congratulations, Minister Sun, your name will be spoken of through the ages, and will be famous amongst scholars worldwide.”

Minister Sun froze. A few seconds later, forgetting how to breathe, he fainted right on the spot.

“Minister Sir, Minister Sir...” the Ministry of Law’s people fell into a panic.

...

Returning back to the constabulary, Xu Qi'an followed Wei Yuan into the Tower of Noble Spirit, and diligently poured Wei Yuan and the two Gold Gongs tea.

"Duke Wei, there's a few things I still don't understand." Xu Qi'an asked.

Wei Yuan was a man of strategy as well as wisdom. Some questions were better asked than figured out oneself, just like when at school, asking the teacher a question was usually both convenient and quicker.

"Why did His Majesty order the Ministry of Law to take this case?" Wei Yuan picked up the teacup, smiling lightly.

"Under heaven there is a stone of talent, Wei Yuan alone takes eight tenths of it, the Cloud Deer Academy and I share one." Xu Qi'an flattered him.

Pff... Jiang Lyuzhong spat out his tea.

The corner of Yang Yan's mouth twitched.

Wei Yuan's light smile quickly broadened, clearly very appreciative of Xu Qi'an's flattery.

A Scholar was like so, if you praise him: "fucking based, 666[^1] absolute chad" he wouldn't bother with you.

But that didn't mean scholars did not like to be flattered, but one needed to use a different method. Xu Qi'an's flattery was thus very precise, and used a method that scholars liked, making Wei Yuan feel comfortable with taking it.

Wei Yuan was a very proud scholar.

"The Minister of Rites is a member of the Wang clique, if given to the Nightwatchers to hear, then it'll involve a large number of Wang clique members." Wei Yuan said.

\*And when that happens, the balance of power in court will be gone... Emperor Yuanjing does not want to see one or two parties dominating, since it would hamper his control over court, especially as he's constantly in cultivation... even if the Wang clique conspired with the Yao, blowing up Sangpo lake, blowing up his ancestors' statues, that would hardly matter compared to his power...\* from Wei Yuan's words, Xu Qi'an deduced and extracted the core reason behind it.

His impression of Emperor Yuanjing thus fell again by a few more points.

Emperor Yuanjing may be a very skilled emperor, but he was not a good emperor. Armchair historian Xu Qi'an had separated emperors into three categories: bright rulers, ordinary rulers, and dark rulers.

Bright rulers were good emperors that could bring a golden age to the common people.

Ordinary rulers did not have many achievements, nor many transgressions. Most of the emperors in history belonged to this category. In reality to the common people an ordinary ruler that did not bother them might as well be a bright one.

Dark rulers listened to lowly men and kept far from virtue, and often made the court into a mess, and the country into a mess.

The reason why he did not include a category for tyrant, was because tyrant rulers could come from all three.

In Xu Qi'an's eyes, Emperor Yuanjing was a dark ruler, because as emperor, he only had care for his own power and status. The chaotic situation in court with party politics was in reality created by him.

He cultivated Dao, and did not care for politics, thus needed a chaotic and discordant court to keep his grip on power. Otherwise, he would easily be figureheaded.

"Another matter, I can't figure out why the Minister of Rites did not silence Zhou Chixiong." Xu Qi'an said.

Originally he had presumed that the Nightwatchers would definitely be allowed to interrogate the Minister of Rites, and so he would've asked then. Little did he expect Emperor Yuanjing to have that skilled control.

Wei Yuan shook his head, "These small matters do not need to be worried about. This phase of the Sangpo Case has come to an end. The fact that His Majesty did not mention you, meant that this matter has been overcome."

Xu Qi'an laughed with heartfelt emotion, immediately saying "I want to invite my colleagues in the case to the Jiaofangsi for drinks, but I've no silver, please may Duke Wei allocate some budget."

Just like how when a company finished a large project, everyone going to a restaurant. The costs were naturally paid by the company.

Wei Yuan gave him a look, "Piss off."

After Xu Qi'an had pissed off, Wei Yuan fell into thought for a while, before saying: "Yang Yan, you allocate him two hundred taels of silver, make it a reward from the constabulary."

He then looked over at Jiang Lyuzhong too, "You two can go along as well."

Jiang Lyuzhong shook his head vigorously, "Duke Wei, I don't go to places like the Jiaofangsi."

Yang Yan also shook his head.

Wei Yuan did not press the issue, leisurely sipping tea, "With him present, I reckon many oirans will want to accompany him."

...

Night fell, as the lanterns in the Jiaofangsi shone brightly, the sound of string and woodwind instruments resonated all around.

In the Reflecting Plum Pavilion, Fuxiang played the qin, Mingyan danced, and Xiaoya led the drinking games. It was a lively sight.

Beside Yang Yan and Jiang Lyuzhong was a lovable and charming orian, serving them wine. Xu Qi'an raised his cup, laughing, "Everyone, don't be so uptight, let's eat, let's drink!"

At the start the Bronze Gongs and Silver Gongs were still a bit uncomfortable, as after all there were two Gold Gongs present, giving them some amount of stress.

But Jiang Lyuzhong was a veteran of these places, and knew how to make the atmosphere lively. He constantly raised his cup and toasted, and even chatted some vulgar words, seeming a completely new person compared to when he was on duty.

Slowly, the Silver Gongs and Bronze Gongs all relaxed.

Present were only two people who were still prim and proper, and looking completely unlike having just come to freeload. They were Yang Yan and Li Yuchun.

“You two, you’re worthy of being superior and subordinate, you’re like two peas in a pod,” Jiang Lyuzhong teased them, laughing.

“Not quite, Gold Gong Jiang,” Xu Qi’an had already drank a lot of liquor, and was rather woozy, boldly making fun of his two superiors:

“Gold Gong Yang does not like women, Boss is just too prudish, there’s still a difference.”

Just like that, the whole room burst into laughter, as the atmosphere became even more relaxed, full of lively aura.

They drank all the way until 10:30, when the banquet finally ended. Jiang Lyuzhong left with that well-rounded oiran, whilst Yang Yan returned back to the constabulary.

Li Yuchun also wanted to go back, but he was pulled back by Xu Qi’an, as well as Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao, and had a charming young woman pushed into his arms, and shut into a room together.

As the “official host”, Xu Qi’an arranged everyone properly before entering Fuxiang’s bedroom.

“Why have so many come today?” Fuxiang, having just finished bathing, sat cross-legged by the table, drying her glistening black silken hair.

“To get all the misses in the courtyard nice and orderly, of course,” Xu Qi’an took off his jacket and sabre, and turned to leave:

“I’ll come back in a minute.”

He quietened his footsteps, and crept towards Li Yuchun’s room, rubbing his hands. In the corner he saw two people also furtively sneaking around, none other than Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao.

Xu Qi’an used his gaze to communicate: “Are you two also here to listen to the corner of the wall.”

The two of them nodded, using their expression to reply “Boss is refining qi, be careful, control your breathing...”

Finally, they slowly crept under Li Yuchun’s window, and discovered no sounds of creaking beds, but rather conversation:

“Master, your servant has already finished bathing, you can go bathe now.”

“Mn.” Li Yuchun replied rather deeply.



A long time later, he finished bathing, as the woman's voice came again: "Master, the bed is warmed, what are you doing strolling around?"

"The furniture is disorganised, everything is too messy, it's a mess, a whole mess. Staying in this room is like sitting on a pincushion." Li Yuchun replied painfully.

"Huh?" The woman was stunned for a moment, "It's already very clean, your servant tidies the room every day."

"No..." Li Yuchun said earnestly, "The teacups on the table should surround the teapot, keeping a specific distance... the plant pots by the window need to be moved left two inches... the chairs are placed too haphazardly, they should surround the tea table in the same way the tea cups surround the pot... the picture on this wall, why is it not in the centre... the screen is askew, I just aligned it properly... mn, your silk shoes are also not placed tidily..."

"... this, how could this be fully tidy, who could do such a thing?" The woman said softly, "Master, your servant has been waiting for so long."

Li Yuchun was not very happy hearing that, and replied deeply, "Who says this cannot be done, you watch, and learn. This official will teach you how to tidy a room properly."

The woman: "???"

Under the window, Xu Qi'an and the others were speechless.

After creeping away, Xu Qi'an lamented: "Has boss not married?"

"He's married."

"Why does he feel like a newbie?" Xu Qi'an said.

"This can't be his first time at the Jiaofangsi, can it?" Song Tingfeng was in disbelief. Even though he had been Li Yuchun's subordinate for many years, he still didn't know much about the man's private life.

Xu Qi'an thought for a moment, saying "When we get back to our rooms, we can make a bit more of a ruckus."

"Good idea" Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao thought this was a good plan.

Thus, the sound of shaking beds inside the Reflecting Plum Pavilion was extra vigorous that night.

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## Chapter 160. Buying a House

8:45 AM, Xu Qi'an climbed astride his beloved mare, that never got into traffic jams, and headed towards the Sitianjian. Under the enthusiastic welcome by the white-cloaked arcanists, he found Chu Caiwei listening to Song Qing's lecture.

“Miss Caiwei, I want to buy a city in the inner city. I know the Sitianjian knows how to inspect feng-shui, so I’d like to ask you for help.” Xu Qi’an stated his intentions.

Chu Caiwei moved her gaze from the various vials and beakers on the table, raising her face. A girl of just eighteen, her face was still round and tender.

A face both beautiful and delicate, with round eyes flashing brightly, the whites clear and pure, like that of an infant.

As everyone knows, the eyes of an infant are the clearest, purest, brightest, this is because the whites are most pure.

Unlike an adult, as one ages, the whites of one’s eyes will become cloudy, filling with blood vessels.

Chu Caiwei’s eyes were like that of an infants, big and large and extremely beautiful.[^1]

“I need to learn alchemy, I’m not going.” Chu Caiwei puffed her cheeks, and turned her face aside.

\*Is it that time of the month for her? She seems to be grumpy...\* Xu Qi’an thought, before hearing Song Qing say, “I’ll call a junior brother to go with you.”

\*What do I want a junior brother for? Hell no! Only if the junior sister accompanies me will things be fun, who wants to go window shopping with an old man.\* Xu Qi’an shook his head, gracefully declining Song Qing’s offer, saying:

“Miss Caiwei, may I ask why you’re so... shitting up a wall today?”[^2]

Chu Caiwei replied earnestly: “I’ve been stuck at seventh rank Master of Feng-Shui for over a year. I should have been a Master of Alchemy by now, but alchemy is just too hard, it’s both exhausting and boring...”

\*Yup, I get you, STEM is a woman’s nightmare.\*

Chu Caiwei continued, “Furthermore, to become a sixth rank Master of Alchemy, I need to independently complete a completely new method of alchemy, and then spread it far and wide. Only when I get the common people’s positive feedback can I then advance.”

The last sentence, Xu Qi’an did not understand: “The common people’s positive feedback?”

“Do you know who discovered gunpowder?”

“How would I know?”

“Gunpowder was discovered three hundred years ago by a Master of Feng-Shui of the Sitianjian. He spread gunpowder widely, and received the common people’s approval, thus advancing to Master of Alchemy. Of course, you needn’t necessarily invent something so mind-boggling; senior brother Song Qing invented ceramic glaze and advanced that way.” Chu Caiwei said, “the crucial part is the reaction of the common people.”

\*So the son of a bitch who had ruined my chance at fortune was you Song Qing...\* Xu Qi'an secretly seethed, then asking in confusion: "Why do you need to get the approval of the common people?"

Chu Caiwei immediately looked towards Song Qing, as the latter hesitated, saying "This is the Sitianjian's secret. There's no harm in telling you, but don't go around telling anyone else."

Seeing Xu Qi'an nod, Song Qing said, "Have you ever felt that the Sitianjian was different from other cultivation pathways?"

"Serving the country and people, making selfless contributions, extremely noble." Xu Qi'an said seriously.

\*Xu Qi'an is worthy of being a friend of the Sitianjian...\* Song Qing nodded in approval, his voice becoming excited, "Yes, you have a very original and accurate gaze, I admire you."

"In all the great systems, rank nine is the foundation. In reality the differences in the ninth rank represents the core of each system. The martial artists' Refining Vitality, the Confucianists' Awakened, the Buddhists' Sramanera."

\*The martial artists have Refining Vitality, its core is the body, the body is the foundation of martial arts... the Confucianists have Awakened, as in becoming literate, uh, does this imply, that if you don't have a brain don't read books? The Buddhists have Sramanera, acolyte. The young acolytes must hold their vows, to keep vows is the foundation upon which the monks learn Buddhist scripture... then what about the ninth rank of the arcanists, Physician? There doesn't seem to be much a Physician has to do with Arcanists?\*

Xu Qi'an fell into silence. Song Qing, seeing that he had not yet had the realisation, prodded him: "The essence of a ninth rank Physician is not in the pharmacy, but in the people. The path of the Arcanist is the path of man, thus the sixth rank Masters of Alchemy must receive the approval of the common people, thus the Sitianjian must be attached to the royal court."

\*The path of the Arcanist is the path of man? That shouldn't be the "humanitarianism"<sup>[^3]</sup> that I know about... no wonder these white-cloaks are so proud and uppity yet they work "to serve the people"<sup>[^4]</sup>; no wonder the Jianzheng is the protector of the capital, they have to support the crown... It reminds me of the Confucianists who also have to support the crown. The Confucianists until today have not had a second rank, going off Xinnian's words, they may have had their path broken. Is this not quite similar to the seventh rank Masters of Feng Shui — if they don't receive the approval of the common people, they will never gain rank?\*

\*If there is the way of man, then there are bound to be other ways, "Dao"s existing. Apart from the surface level system differences, there are different Daos hidden behind them?\*

"Do you have any ideas for a new alchemical invention?" Xu Qi'an asked.

Song Qing glanced at his junior sister, and said helplessly, "Notwithstanding that she's not the sharpest sword, she also doesn't like studying. I'm afraid it's difficult."

The few other white-cloaked arcanists all shook their heads, displaying pessimistic outlooks towards Chu Caiwei's advancement.

"With sister Caiwei... we'll just have to wait for an opportunity."

“Aye, Master Jianzheng doesn’t even care much, maybe he thinks a girl like junior sister doesn’t need to be too high a rank.”

“We can’t do anything either.”

The white-cloaked arcanists all said pitifully, sighs going all around.

Chu Caiwei pursed her lip, like a hopeless student with all Fs facing the frustrated and disappointed sighs of her superiors.

\*This world still doesn’t have chicken bouillon, I wonder if making chicken bouillon would count as a new form of alchemy.\* Xu Qi’an thought for a moment, “I might have an idea for this.”

Whoosh! In the laboratory, every single white cloak looked over, all of their eyes flashing gold.

“Really, you really have a way?” Song Qing’s eyes became wide, both with the surging pleasure of learning new alchemy, and the gratification of a father sorting out a load on their heart.

“I still need to think about it, I’ll come back with an answer in a few days.” After Xu Qi’an had finished, he looked at Chu Caiwei, “Miss Caiwei, do you have time today?”

“Yes yes...” All of the white cloaks in the room spoke in unison.

Song Qing pushed Chu Caiwei upright, saying with heartfelt emotion, “Xu Qi’an is a prized person of our Sitianjian, hundreds of times more important than just some alchemy, you go and accompany him round the inner city today.”

Just like that, Chu Caiwei was pushed by her brothers into the wolf’s den.

Xu Qi’an led Chu Caiwei to the estate agents, and an old manager came up eagerly to greet them, “Are the sir and madam buying or renting?”

\*An old man... in my past life there’d be a round bottomed round breasted female attendant that would come to greet me...\* Xu Qi’an lampooned, his face holding a light smile, “Buying.”

The old man’s smile became even wider; the commission from renting and buying were leagues apart.

“What sort of model?”

“A three-layered courtyard.”

The smile on the old man’s face could no longer merely be described by “enthusiastic”, rather it was like he had just seen his own father after being decades apart, happy nearly to the point of tears.

It was not unreasonable for him to be so excited; in the inner city, based on what district one was going for, a three-layer courtyard house was worth anywhere from 5000 to 10,000 taels of silver.

A three or more tiered courtyard house was not a residence any ordinary person could buy. The estate agents hadn’t even sold a house of that calibre that year, but if they did then they could eat for a year on that one commission alone.

“Are there any houses that take your fancy Sir?” The old manager asked humbly.

“Give me a list of all the houses between five and seven thousand taels.” Xu Qi’an sat down boldly, picking up the tea, and drank a sip of what was probably the best green tea the agents had to offer.

The flavour was average, no where near what Wei Yuan had.

Very quickly, the documents were assembled. Xu Qi’an looked them over, and thought carefully for a moment, before pushing away three from the file, leaving only one left.

“Why do you only want this one house?” Chu Caiwei grabbed out a honey sweet from her deerskin bag, like a magician conjuring a coin.

“Because the house is closest to the Jiaofangsi.” Xu Qi’an raised his eyebrow, and laughed.

On the paper was written the location and the size, more detailed information must be retrieved separately. Xu Qi’an glanced over at it, and discovered that this one had a decent location, was very large, but also much cheaper than any of the other houses. The agents’ code for it was: Yi-23.

“Why is this house much cheaper than the others?” Xu Qi’an asked calmly.

Yi-23’s price was 5500 taels of silver. Other houses of a similar size usually had an asking price of close to 7000 or more.

“Naturally there’s a reason for its price...” the old manager looked left and right, before saying in a low voice:

“That house is cursed, no one can live there, Sir would be better off picking another one.”

Xu Qi’an and Chu Caiwei exchanged glances, \*cursed? Then as a Nightwatcher I ought to go look, and see why it is cursed.\*

But Xu Qi’an was not rash, as he asked cautiously: “Why so. Tell me in detail.”

Although the capital was the territory of the Nightwatchers, it indeed hid an unknown number of high rank experts, and there did indeed exist some cults and evil places around. Since he was little Xu Qi’an had heard of strange tales around the capital city.