

# Nightwatcher

## # 16. Xu Qi'an's Diary

\*Today is the Jia-Wu day of the Bing-Xu month of the Geng-Zi year... what the fuck is this, if this were me earlier, then I would have no clue. At least I inherited some of the original Xu Qi'an's memories.\*

\*From my calculations, it should be the year of the Rat, the 18th of October in the Gregorian calendar. Mm, I need to start writing a diary, in any case I'm not any regular do-gooder.\*

\*Uncle wasn't wrong, I need to change how I live.\*

\*This godforsaken peace of shit of a society, getting too high up isn't necessarily a good thing. In ancient times, important officials getting their homes raided might as well be commonplace. What type of person could then live a comfortable life? After some investigation, it'd be the middle class.\*

\*More wealthy than the common people, but also not high enough to be involved in political fighting at the top level. Taking a few setbacks in daily life wouldn't be a big deal, so all in all, the middle class is best.\*

\*Also: in the market I picked up a cash of silver.\*

\*19 October. The sky is overcast. I must have money, the only thing more reliable in this world other than silver is gold. Even if merchants have no standing, really I can only say you win some you lose some. In a few days I plan to resign, to no longer be a bailiff at the constabulary. A monthly salary of two taels of silver and a dan of rice, how could I go and sleep the oirans at the Jiaofangsi?\*

\*Also: in the constabulary I picked up a cash of silver.\*

\*21 October. The sky is clear. Today Constable Wang took me to the Goulan to play. My view of the Goulan has changed, it's a place where you can listen to music and watch plays, as well as enjoy desires of the physical kind. I'm still in Refining Body, and cannot lose my virginity. A thousand sorrows.\*

\*I looked for ages, and not one of them was more beautiful than my aunt. Auntie is one of those full-figured beautiful women, but also with the attractiveness that only a housewife can have. The women in the Goulan are far too frivolous, are far too base.\*

\*Looking at it this way, Auntie and Lingyue's appearance is at the top of the bunch.\*

\*Later, I picked up a cash of silver in the Goulan, just enough to pay off the food and entry fee... recently have I really waked into dog shit luck?\*[^1]

\*22 October. Goulan, listening to music.\*

\*23 October. Goulan, listening to music.\*

\*24 October. Goulan, listening to music. Constable Wang asked me why I was so happy? Because free-riding makes me happy.\*

\*25 October. Xu Qi'an oh Xu Qi'an, how far have you fallen? You can't go on like this, have you forgotten your goal? Let's set a goal first, earn 100 million.\*

\*26 October. Goulan, listening to music.\*

\*27 October. Goulan, listening to music. Today I didn't pick up any silver, I had to pay a cash of silver. Pah, stuffy, smoky place. I'm not going there again.\*

\*28 October. This world has gunpowder, has muskets. They also have soap bean[^2], and it works far better than expected. So making fragrant soap is a no-go. Damn these arcanists - right! Glass!\*

\*I can make glass, glass is a good thing. This type of thing these ancient era people have definitely never seen.\*

\*29 October. Oh, they do have glass. I need to think of a different path. Today at home I picked up a cash of silver, probably fallen from uncle's private savings.\*

\*30 October. Goulan, listening to music.\*

\*31 October. I discovered another money-making plan today, I can improve paper. The bureaucratic tradition of the Great Feng is strong, and as long as I can make better paper, I can make bucket loads of gold, eat the best food, and sleep the prettiest oiran.\*

\*Let me think, the process of making paper is...\* (The rest of the paragraph has been crossed out)

\*Alright, let's not worry about such a small thing like paper. I've got a better idea, making cement.\*

\*I know the composition of cement: calcium carbonate, silicon dioxide, aluminium oxide, iron (III) oxide... to be combined according to specific physics and chemistry principles. Oh, I picked up a cash of silver in the market today.\*

\*??? What's wrong with me? I swear I'm picking up money with far too high a frequency. This doesn't sit well with me.\*

\*2 November. The cement plan has failed. theory and practice are really two different things. Fucking hell...\*

\*3 November. Today I've managed to spend out the last of my savings. I wanted to borrow money from my uncle, but that poor cunt also doesn't have any. After Xu Xinnian found out, he first displayed is contempt, and then mocked me, and finally gave me five taels of silver... apart from having a sharp tongue and being very full of himself, this cousin of mine is really not a bad brother.\* If heaven births not I, Xu Xinnian, then the Great Feng forever will be in night that never ends... \*I thanked him as so - his ears were so red, as he left in a huff.\*

\*Oh Erlang, if we weren't sworn brothers, I would've made you the matriarch of the house.\*

\*5 November. Today with my colleagues in the constabulary, we went to the teahouse to moyu. When I first heard the storyteller tell his story, I suddenly thought, what if I copied down the other world's wuxia novels, four great classics, and web novels? I'd be making money laying down... I'm really so good with these things.\*

\*I've transmigrated for ten days now, and haven't done a single thing. Aaaaaa, I'm falling apart.\*

\*8 November. Rain. Perfectly reflecting my feelings. I clearly know a little about everything, but when I want to turn that knowledge into silver, to turn nothing into something, I find that I hardly know anything. I've really experienced the failures of exam-based education.\*

\*Talking to Uncle today, I heard him talk about goings on at court, and told him about what things I've heard at the constabulary. I've suddenly found out that this world is far worse than I'd thought: corrupt officials can prance around without worry, if an official is only slightly corrupt then they're seen as "good", an incorrupt official is as rare as a virgin in a Goulan...\*

\*9 November. Cloudy. Why hasn't Miss Caiwei from the Sitianjian come to find me yet? Does she not want to know these legendary secrets of alchemy? That girl's appearance is comparable to Lingyue, with a cute, delicate, egg-shaped face. Her eyes are big and beautiful, with my masterful pulling ability, I can't guarantee that I'd get her. I don't care if she's the Sitianjian Grandmaster's disciple, mostly in this cold and dreary world, I just want some love.\*

\*Come look for me, I don't want to fight any more.\*

\*10 November. I still don't want to give up on the novel idea, so I told my sisters a summary of the Butterfly Lovers. The story was very simple, as after all I'd forgotten a lot of the details. When I finished, Lingyue's eyes were red, but Lingyin didn't cry. I smacked her, and then she cried. I think she can take it at this age.\*

\*11 November. Today I had wine with Clerk Li. When he was tipsy, he told me that the Zhenbei King's<sup>[^3]</sup> consort was the most beautiful woman in court. I asked him exactly how beautiful she is, but he couldn't respond, because Clerk Li had only heard it from Magistrate Zhu.\*

\*When I got off work in the evening, I secretly asked Uncle. Uncle's expression was very strange, as he tried his utmost to use the paltry vocabulary he possessed to describe this consort's beauty. I summarised it as follows: Fuck me; big breasts.\*

\*I think I'm starting to develop a tiny bit of interest and hope in this Consort...\*

\*12 November. Until today, I've achieved nothing. I've lost face for transmigrators, I've lost face for Mother China.\*

\*This marks the first month that I have spent here. They gave out the salary. I plan to work hard, business comes slowly...\*

\*13 November. Goulan, listening to music.\*

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[^1]: Lucky, because stepping on dog shit is not a common occurrence. But also stepping on dog shit is never a \*good\* thing. Now mostly used in the sense of undeserving good luck.

[^2]: *Gleditsia sinensis*

[^3]: 镇北王

# 17. To Regularly Argue with Auntie

"Thud!"

Xu Qi'an stood in the eaves of the small courtyard, throwing a prism-shaped hidden weapon casually without putting any effort to aim.

The weapon accurately hit the red centre of the stake 20 paces<sup>[^1]</sup> away.

This wasn't due to some special technique used by Xu Qi'an but because... He was lucky.

"My body surely has some problem...", Xu Qi'an whispered to himself.

He was too lucky. He had picked up 1-2 silver cash regularly over the past month, which was equivalent to half his monthly salary.

This amount of money was equal to the savings of an ordinary family of three after three months.

The strangest thing was, that every single time he always picked up one cash of silver. This wasn't something pure luck could describe.

You didn't need to ask Yuanfang<sup>[2]</sup> to know that this was strange.

"Father system? Come out, don't play hide and seek with me.", Xu Qi'an tentatively asked.

The system ignored him.

In the past month, He had made countless attempts to wake up the system.

Reality told him that no such system existed.

How could this strange luck be explained?

\*I don't think that an African Chief like me who hasn't won a lottery ticket of even five yuan since I was a child would evolve into a European Emperor one day. But the lifespan of this European Emperor was extremely short.\*<sup>[3]</sup>

One certain thing was that the original owner didn't have this kind of luck at all. If he had the same luck, Auntie would treat him as an ancestor instead of disliking him.

The whole family would stop struggling and depend on his money-picking abilities to live.

"This kind of gift from an unknown origin is very unsettling and unreliable..." Xu Qi'an sighed, "Well, one step at a time then."

Taking a break that day, Xu Qi'an jumped over the one zhang high wall and went to his second uncle's house for breakfast.

The small courtyard where Xu Qi'an lived was originally inhabited by an old housekeeper of the Xu family, and was separated from the mansion by a wall. Ever since the old housekeeper died, the small courtyard was left unused until Xu Qi'an fell out with his aunt and moved there angrily.

The original owner was quite stubborn, He cooked three meals himself normally. Occasionally, the second uncle would bring wine and vegetables over the wall to find his nephew for a drink.

Xu Qi'an didn't want to pay for the stubbornness of the original owner. He couldn't get out of bed in the morning to prepare breakfast if he wanted to make it by himself and it would be a waste of money to eat outside.

Isn't a much better use to listen to songs in the Goulan? Or, rather, mostly to be able to see the swaying buttocks of the satin-dressed ladies as they walked about.

...

Inner Hall.

Auntie, who was wearing a dark red dress with wide sleeves, saw Xu Qi'an come in, curled her lips, and drank porridge. Auntie wasn't the daughter of a big family. Her father was a \*Xiucan\*<sup>[4]</sup> and so she barely counted as coming from a scholarly family. But auntie was very sensible and reasonable. She couldn't drive her nephew out of the house just after accepting his kindness. She was quite lax with her "Don't bully the young" nephew who was quite happy about it.

Little Pea stood in front of a round stool. Her breakfast was on the round stool, three meat buns, two fried dough sticks, a stack of side dishes, and a bowl of porridge.

"Big brother..." She yelled vaguely.

"Why isn't Cijiu here?" Xu Qi'an asked.

Cijiu<sup>[5]</sup> "Saying goodbye to the old" was Xu Xinnian's courtesy name, and it acted as a supplement to his birth name "New Year".

"He's cooped up in his room writing poetry." Xu Pingzhi said.

Xu Qi'an sat down. Lü'e brought a bowl of porridge, six meat buns, a stack of pickled radish, and a bowl of tofu.

A martial artist in the Refining body realm had a much bigger appetite than an ordinary person.

\*This can only fill half my stomach...\* Xu Qi'an glanced at Little Pea gently, "Lingyin, Is it okay to give a meat bun to big brother?"

Everyone glanced at him. The youngest child didn't care about anything except for her food and she would fight with anybody that dared to take her food.

"No!", Little Pea opened her arms as was expected, like a hen guarding her children, and protected her food.

"Don't worry, Brother won't rip you off." Xu Qi'an picked up a meat bun and put it on her plate. Then, he pointed at the four meat buns and said,

"Don't we all have to share these four buns?"

Xu Lingyin nodded.

"Should we split the buns evenly?"

Xu Lingyin thought for some time and nodded.

"You have two steamed buns, and big brother has two steamed buns. Then, Big Brother will give you half a fritter. Did you make a profit?"

"Yeah." Xu Lingyin was pulled into Xu Qi'an's rhythm and felt that she made a lot of profit. So, she smiled happily.

Xu Lingyue, "..."

Xu Pingzhi glanced at his nephew: (?\_?)

Auntie scolded, "How did I give birth to a stupid girl like you? You piss off your old mother sometimes."

Little Pea felt very aggrieved. She earned half a fritter, Why was her mother scolding her?

At the same time, Xu Xinnian came in while muttering words with his eyes wandering off into space, He sat down to eat while thinking.

Auntie exhaled and ignored the stupid little girl in favour of the promising son.

"Nian'er, why as good as you are are you trying to write poetry. People have strengths and weaknesses just as inches are short. Don't care about the rumours outside."

"Cijiu, When can you break through and reach the eighth stage of cultivation?" Xu Qi'an asked suddenly.

Xu Xinnian's path is that of Confucian cultivation. Cloud Deer Academy was founded by a disciple of the Confucian Sage and had a history of 1,200 years.

As a holy place that graced the dreams of scholars all over the world, Cloud Deer Academy was transcendent not only because its founder was a disciple of the sage, but because it was the only academy for cultivating Confucianism.

The ninth level of Confucianism: Awakenening;

Awakenening could improve memory, reading speed, and enhanced learning ability, but didn't do much for combat.

"I don't have a clue for the time being. The teacher said that I should realize the method myself."

"You can refer to the Awakened Stage." Xu Qi'an said, "How is the Awakened Stage cultivated?"

Xu Xinnian recollected, "Awakened Stage is the stage when you can memorize the sage's classics Front to Back and utilize them for yourself."

\*Front to back... Utilize for yourself... The former requires a lot of time for memorization and the latter depends on understanding.\* Xu Qi'an nodded thoughtfully.

This is the same as the refining body realm of martial artists, Which depends on years of developing qi and tempering the body.

"To reach Self Cultivation, do you have to train your body?" Xu Qi'an asked.

Xu Xinnian considered it, and said, "A Confucian in the realm of self-cultivation is courageous and can convince people with their words and deeds along with inspiring fighting spirit. I tried to reverse the method of cultivation based on the abilities shown in the stage of self-cultivation."

"Were you successful?"

Xu Xinnian pretended to not have heard him, and turned to his mother, "An elder of the academy is going to Qingzhou. The journey is quite long. the students of the academy will see him off tomorrow and gift his poems."

Xu Xinnian expressed his distress, "I haven't written a farewell poem yet."

Xu Lingyue said in a low voice, "Second Brother doesn't have a talent for poetry."

Auntie glared at her and said with displeasure, "Your second brother is very talented in poetry. He just didn't focus on it before."

Xu Pingzhi scratched his head, "Just write a few sentences. I think the poem you wrote that day was very bold."

"Hurhur", Xu Qi'an laughed out loud.

The corner of Xu Xinnian's mouth twitched, and he changed the subject rigidly, "The elder is a famous scholar and is good at poetry. Everyone who's seeing him off is a



talented poet. In addition to admiring the elder, I have got the idea of making friends and networking."

"If I were to be appreciated by that elder, It'll be of great benefit."

\*Yes, finally he's thinking of making connections.\*

Xu Xinnian's heart was arrogant, and he always talked about "Gentlemen's friendship is as light as water" and "Friendship but not forming parties"

After experiencing the crisis, He finally realized the benefits of PY trading.[^6]

Xu Qi'an was very pleased as an elder brother.

He should be a big man if he inspired Erlang, who's not good at poetry, to work hard and make friends... Auntie was anxious, "How can this be a good thing?"

Xu Xinnian said helplessly, "Mum, prose is already formed from heaven's mysteries, and only written out by hand. The same is true of poetry."

After finishing speaking, he said emotionally, "If I had good relations with this senior in the literary world, I might have been able to save you from prison. At least there would have been some help."

Auntie suddenly frowned. She cared for her son's future more than anybody else.

Real great scholars have strong personalities, and silver gifts weren't feasible. You had to do what they liked and make them feel that you were worthy of befriending.

Xu Pingzhi frowned, "Your grandfather was just like you, He could only write prose and didn't have an ounce of poetry talent within him."

Auntie wasn't convinced, and her pretty willow eyebrows were raised, "What do you mean, Is it my father's fault?"

"Xinnian became a Juren because he followed my side of the family. Look at Lingyin, She followed you and hasn't even become literate yet."

Xu Xinnian and Xu Lingyue took after their mother and their looks made others jealous. Little Pea Xu Lingyin has taken after her father and was cute and simple.

Uncle Xu became speechless.

Xu Qi'an wasn't convinced, "Auntie, You've said it wrong. Do you mean that my Xu family's genes are stupid?"

Aunt didn't understand what genes were, she sneered, "If you were material for studying, you wouldn't learn martial arts."

If Xu Erlang wanted to take initiative to PY with his arrogance, the status of the elder in the college shouldn't be low. Erlang's contacts are mine and my contacts are still mine. So, I have to help him. Xu Qi'an's thoughts flickered, thinking of masterpieces that would work as farewell poems from his previous life.

Although he didn't plan to mix up with the Confucian scholars, Why couldn't he use the resources to exchange for benefits?

Soon, He had an idea and selected a poem.

Xu Qi'an furiously took a bite of the meat bun, "Poem writing, right? Today, Auntie will know that everyone in my Xu family is a talent."

What he had to ponder over was the matter of the poem being too good. You should know that poems written in textbooks are usually handed down as masterpieces.

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[^1]: A "pace" here is an established unit of measurement, being equal to 5 \*chi\* (feet).

[^2]: A character in \*Detective Bao Qingtian\*

[^3]: Slang words from plays of a certain Chinese video game (that I can't remember) - "African Chiefs" were players with extremely bad luck, whilst "European Emperors" were those with extremely good luck - and enough money to pay to win. Colonialism reference.

[^4]: Someone who passed the imperial examination at county level.

[^5]: 辞旧

[^6]: PY交易, 屁眼交易, "arsehole trading" more Chinese internet slang.

## # 18. Going Shopping with the Sisters

The core essence of poetry is in the relationship between the tones.

As long as this doesn't change, even if he was in another world, the poems he learnt during his nine years of compulsory education still had much room to show their potential.

Xu Xinnian gave him a glance, and raised his head, "\*In the sky there is a bird, on the ground a bug, the bird swoops down, and the bug returns to the cycle of life.\*"

“Pff...” Xu Lingyue covered her mouth, hiding her laughter, but nonetheless was sternly stared at by Xu Qi’an. Her round face went red, as she quickly looked down.

\*Too sharp a tongue, I really want to hit him.\* The corner of Xu Qi’an’s mouth twitched. This was a poem the original Xu Qi’an wrote at the age of ten. At that time the person responsible for teaching the three children of the Xu family to read (Xu Lingyin was no more than a little tadpole), was Auntie’s father, that Xiucan grandfather.

One time, the Xiucan grandfather tested them on their poetry, and that was how this poem of uncanny merit came about.

Auntie mocked, “Ningyan, it’s not that Auntie looks down on you, but the old Xu family only came out with one scholar son. You and your uncle’s characters look like crawling bugs.

“If you can’t even write well, how can you write poetry?” Auntie pouted, and even when rolling her eyes having utmost grace.

Uncle felt awkward, as he cleared his throat, “Ningyan, these scholarly issues, let’s just not get involved. Today is your rest day, shall we have a spar in the yard?”

Hidden within those words, was something saying \*you young brat, don’t make a ruckus, you don’t know how these scholars work. You lose face and even your old uncle gets a scolding from his own wife.\*

“\*Yellow Clouds covering a thousand li, and the sun setting dim;\*” Xu Qi’an spoke calmly.

Auntie rolled her eyes again, and focused on her porridge.

Uncle wiped some grease from the corner of his youngest daughter’s mouth.

Xu Xinnian however frowned. He couldn’t get much from this one sentence, but the fact that Xu Qi’an could compose such a perfect seven-syllable line, was already very unexpected.

“\*In whirling snow, the north wind drives south wild geese;\*”

Xu Xinnian paused for a moment, as in his mind, a landscape drawing started to form.

Xu Lingyue raised her head, energetic eyes looking at her elder cousin with disbelief.

Xu Qi’an lowered his head, drinking porridge, not speaking any further.

“What comes after? What comes after?” Xu Xinnian anxiously asked. This felt like sitting in the tea hall, listening to the old storyteller telling his stories, and just as he was getting

to the most intense, most spectacular bits, to suddenly stop them in their tracks: “If thou wished to know what comes next, please, come and listen next time.”

It could make a person angry enough to want to hit a man.

“I don’t know how to write poetry,” Xu Qi’an lightly and absent-mindedly sent Auntie a look. He only thought that Auntie today looked extraordinarily beautiful, and had no intention of wanting her to apologise.

Auntie’s Carlsan-big eyes opened wide, as she turned her head to ask her son, “Is this poem really good?”

Xu Lingyue said softly, “Very vivid!”

Whilst her reading was limited, she could hear that those two opening lines were some of the best seven syllable rhymes she’d heard.

Seeing that both her son and daughter had this attitude, Xu Pingzhi was stunned, staring at Xu Qi’an unblinking, his eyes showing shock, as well as expectation.

“\*On the road ahead, surely will be friends dear and true; Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you?\*[^1]” Xu Qi’an chewed his \*youtiao\*[^2], and casually threw out the last two lines.

\*Pa’ta\*... The chopsticks in Xu Xinnian’s hands fell onto the table.

“On the road ahead, surely will be friends dear and true; Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you...” he muttered to himself, sunk deep within the imagery created by this poem, unable to get himself out.

Xu Lingyue’s delicate body shook, as she felt goosebumps rise up her arm.

Xu Pingzhi smiled, “Fuck, why does listening to it give me the shivers?”

Auntie didn’t want to back down, though she agreed with her husband’s words.

When Xu Qi’an was still studying, this type of stunned feeling was common whenever he read any of the most famous works of poetry in his books.

\*Yellow clouds covering a thousand li, and the sun setting dim;\*

\*In whirling snow, the north wind drives south wild geese;\*

\*On the road ahead, surely will be friends dear and true;\*

\*Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you?\*

Xu Xinnian unconsciously stood up, his face turning a little red with excitement, making his already handsome and graceful appearance seeming ever more... tender.

Such a work of art!

Even though he was not good in the arts of poetry, as a scholar who has read the old anthologies through and through, he knew a good poem when he heard one, and like any scholar, naturally welled up with excitement, emotion, with hot blood coursing through his veins.

“When... did you learn to compose poetry?” Xu Xinnian stared at Xu Qi’an intently, his expression bright, stunned, and confused.

“When did I say I don’t know how to write poetry?” Xu Qi’an laughed, “Could a poem I wrote when I was just literate compare to now? I’ve always somewhat of a talent for poetry, but I could never express it, is all.”

“So Ningyan is the Xu family’s academic prodigy after all,” Xu Pingzhi was over the moon, smiling widely, “If I had known, I would have had you reading books, and Cijiu practicing martial arts.”

Auntie still didn’t want to admit defeat, as she opened her mouth, but could not come up with an appropriate response.

\*No... if that were the case, then I wouldn’t be a good scholar, and Xinnian not a good martial artist...\* Xu Qi’an knew deeply that pre-transmigration that Xu Qi’an was a dullard; reading would be simply just wasting time, and it would be better for him to have dropped out of school to do manual labour.

Xu Xinnian also wasn’t the fighter type - to want a tender-skinned, thin, delicate young man to eat hardship, and harden his body?

“However, this poem was written by Ningyan. Cijiu, listening is one thing, but you can’t take it for your own; that’s not how a scholar acts.” Uncle said.

“Heh,” Xu Xinnian laughed, not deigning to reply to his father. Who was he to speak? Turning his head to Xu Qi’an, he said “Let me borrow this poem, I’ll make sure to say the author was you.”

\*Fuck off if it’s me...\* Xu Qi’an nodded gently, “Go on then, take it to pretend... to show off in front of others.”

To show off in front of the masses, is a scholar’s calling.

He had always intended to give this poem to Xu Xinnian, to build up his connections. Whoever is put down as the author, he didn’t mind as much.

It was not as if he wanted to get into scholarly circles, so poetry to him had no particular use, which is also the reason why in the past month he had never used poetry to show off.

His environment didn't allow for it.

All day he would be hanging out with a bunch of sword-waving baton-swinging bailiffs. It would be more use to teach them how to sing \*The Lasso Pole\* then to recite poetry at them.

"What's the poem's name?" Xinnian asked.

\*... I forgot.\* Xu Qi'an's face stiffened, "I made this poem on a whim, it has no name. You think of one."

...

After finishing breakfast, Xu Xinnian brought from the back yard his father's beloved horse, and left hurriedly. Uncle and nephew were sparring in the yard.

"Not bad, you've improved. If you want to improve even more, you'd have to enter the Refining Qi stage, but qi requires heaven and earth to intersect within you to be formed." Uncle Xu took a towel from a servant, and wiped his brow, "Apart from bathing in medicine, you also need a Refining Spirit martial artist to help you open heaven's door. Otherwise, you'll never be able to enter Refining Qi."

Refining Spirit was a martial artists' seventh rank cultivation.

"What are you trying to say, uncle?" Xu Qi'an wiped sweat off his face.

"In the Campaign of Mountains and Seas, I was on a hair's breadth from death, and only then did I get enough merit, for a higher up in the army to help me open heaven's door, and enter Refining Qi." Uncle Xu sighed, "The second year after coming home, I had Xinnian."

"Today, the world is peaceful, and so you won't even be able to gain any merit, so how could you Refine Qi? If you don't Refine Qi, does that mean you'll never make a family?"

"Ningyan, your uncle is getting old, and my only wish is to see you marry, and have children. Only this way can I live up to your dead father."

"Well, I'll take it one step at a time," Xu Qi'an replied noncommittally.

Apart from gaining merit, there were other ways to advance in cultivation, and that was by throwing money at the problem.

Both medicine and high-rank cultivators, can all be solved with money.

Many lawbreakers were martial artists, and so the crown kept stern control over the number of martial artists, establishing that Refining Spirit cultivators could not privately open heaven's door for anyone, and if they wanted to do it for their own children, they had to report to the government.

However, as of present the bureaucracy in the Great Feng was falling apart, corrupt officials doing as they wished, and the authority of the crown was weakening day by day. Even if they didn't want to break the law out in public, there were still many Refining Spirit cultivators on the black market, willing to make a trade.

If Xu Qi'an tried his hardest to make money, he could save up enough silver to make up for the lack of merit.

However, he'll forever be in Refining Body, what use would that stick of his be then?

Auntie came over with the two girls, standing under the eaves, shouting, "Husband dear, the weather is nice, you should take Lingyin and Lingyue to the market."

Uncle Xu frowned, "I have business."

"Isn't today your rest day?"

"I've already arranged with my coworkers to go out together, we'll be leaving in a bit. How about, let Ningyan take them out to play."

The two young daughters were usually kept at home, and couldn't just go out and wander about as they pleased.

Xu Qi'an looked over, just in time to meet his barely sixteen year old sister's sparkling eyes. This outstandingly graceful young girl pursed her lips, feeling some embarrassment, lowering her head.

"Sure, I just so happen to be free." Xu Qi'an nodded.

\*Thinking back now, in the last life I took my sixteen year old sister out shopping. I was still in the golden years of eighteen then. Of course, that little sister could not compare with Xu Lingyue.\*

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[M]: 高适《别董大》「千里黄云白日曛，北风吹雁雪纷纷。莫愁前路无知己，天下谁人不识君？」

[^2]: Chinese battered dough strips, similar to American Indian fry bread, but more airy, a popular breakfast food (and food in general)

## # 19. Farewell Poem

Outskirts of the Capital, Mianyang[^1] Pavilion!

A few luxurious carriages were parked beside the pavilion. The outskirts were cold and windy and the cascading hills were light brown in colour.

The sun hung in the sky, giving off the weak warmth of the early winter.

Residential Scholar Ziyang[^2] of Yunlu Academy[^3] was going to become an official.

This was a joyous event for Yunlu Academy, whose presence in officialdom was declining.

The Scholars from the academy sang festively, and the students felt that the early status of the academy was about to resurge.

In the pavilion, three old men sat together while drinking tea. One of them was wearing a purple robe and had silvery white hair. He was the protagonist of the event.

Yang Gong[^4], courtesy name Ziqian, title Ziyang Jushi, was the \*zhuangyuan\*, top scorer in the imperial examinations of the 14th year of Yuanjing. In the year after, he left his official post and returned to Yunlu Academy to study. After 22 years, He had students all over the world and had become a famous scholar.

He should have had a bright future; even becoming the Prime Minister was not out of the question, however he left the officialdom quietly at his prime. There were several theories regarding his resignation from officialdom. Some major theories were that he had offended the Emperor and had to leave his job. Some others said he had offended the First Secretary, and eventually left after being unable to handle the retribution.

Whatever the reason might be, he went out of the mountain after 22 years to go to Qingzhou as the chief envoy, the head office of the frontier region.

Whatever that reason might be, 22 years later he again came down from the mountain, reading to go to Qingzhou, as its Governor.

A true case of a great official, being sent far away into the country.

The other two weren't insignificant characters themselves; their reputation wouldn't lose to Scholar Ziyang either in the academy or the outside world.



The man wearing the grey robe and with a goatee was named Li Mubai<sup>[^5]</sup>. He was once the best Go player in the world. He once had three matches with Duke Wei Yuan of the Nightwatchers five years ago, losing spectacularly, and smashing the Go board that day, never played the game again.

The blue-robed man was called Zhang Shen<sup>[^6]</sup>, he was a master in the art of war. The \*Six Notes on the Art of War\* written in his early years was still a compulsory read for military officials and generals today.

He was also the only military strategist that could ever compete with Wei Yuan.

Outside the pavilion, The students who were seeing the scholar were standing in a crowd. These students were all students with potential from Yunlu Academy. Xu Xinnian was also in the crowd of students.

"Scholar Ziyang is finally out of the mountain. If we are appreciated by him, We would be successful in officialdom in the future.", A familiar classmate whispered, "Ciju, You have written a poem, right?"

\*My brother prepared it for me... But it's half of a qiyán lǜshī<sup>[^7]</sup>...\* Xu Xinnian looked into the pavilion and whispered, "I've prepared half a poem. Yongshu, You're too utilitarian."

Qilǚ poems had a strict metric and required a uniform number of characters in the poem. They consisted of eight sentences with seven characters each, and every two sentences form a verse for a total of four verses.

Xu Qi'an only gave him only the first two verses of the Qilǚ. When Xu Xinnian asked for the remaining verses after dinner, he hesitated and shifted the subject, and didn't give them.

"This isn't being utilitarian. The sea of learning is the same as officialdom, Working hard to make a boat isn't as good as joining a camp for warmth.<sup>[^8]</sup>", The friend said, knowing that Xu Xinnian wasn't good at poetry.

"Yongshu is correct. The officialdom is too corrupt now. You have to cooperate with corrupt officials to help the common people in this environment. They've been suffering under natural disasters for years and changing their situation can only be done if you are active." Another student participated in their conversation.

The student named Yongshu nodded and looked at Xu Xinnian, "You always say that poetry is a small way, but no one will remember you based on your prose after decades. But good poetry can be spread throughout the world."

\*Poetry is a small way. It can not be used to govern the country nor to benefit the people. It's a mere art...\* Xu Erlang wanted to say these words but swallowed them

back, and gave off a hum once he realized that he was about to use the same art to please a senior.

Yongshu looked at him in surprise, since he didn't even object.

The famous Go player Li Mubai sighed, "Brother Yang, If you were even half as smooth as them back in the day, you wouldn't waste more than 20 years."

Ziyang Jushi smiled upon hearing these words.

"That's not right", Master of War Zhang Shen laughed and drank tea, "Brother Yang is ambitious, and is paving way for the realm of 'Mandate Seeker'"

Upon hearing this, Ziyang Jushi sighed "After all, I was pushed out of the officialdom."

"That wasn't your problem. The people from the Imperial Academy won't sit idling by as our White Deer Academy turns over."

"Hmph, those bastards who only know how to flatter superiors and deceive others while playing tricks have harmed the world to this state in less than 200 years."

This matter involved a very interesting historical anecdote.

Confucianism originated from the Sage. The White Deer Academy, being an academy founded by the disciple of the sage, naturally promoted itself as the orthodox school of Confucianism. This fact was true.

But 200 years ago, due to the struggle for the throne, the contemporary emperor rejected the Academy.

Around that time, a traitor left White Deer Academy and took the opportunity to please the emperor by setting himself up with the concept of "Following Heaven's Nature and Eliminating Human Desires". With the emperor's support, he established the Imperial Academy and became a master of a generation.

After that incident, Imperial Academy replaced White Deer Academy to become the main school that produced court officials.

This struggle for the orthodoxy of Confucianism has continued for 200 years.

Ziyang Jushi said deeply, "I'm going to open up the frontier region as the foundation of the official careers of our students. But, if we want to rejuvenate the academy to its past stature, I'm not enough. I need to work together with a lot of excellent young people."

Li Mubai and Zhang Shen smiled at each other. Then, The latter turned his head and looked at the students outside the pavilion "Is anyone willing to compose a poem and give it to Ziyang Jushi?"

"Poetry contests should have a prize, otherwise the contest would be boring." Ziyang Jushi took off a purple jade pendant from his waist, "The best poet can get this jade pendant."

The purple light in the jade pendant was flowing. It looked quite extraordinary.

The eyes of the students outside the pavilion lit up; the jade pendant carried around by a Great Scholar would have magical effects, due to being nurtured by their Literary Qi. If they could acquire one, It would certainly be of great benefit to them.

At the same time, Ziyang Jushi used the purple jade as the prize, which had a deeper meaning.

The items regularly carried by an elder were usually only given as a gift to their juniors and students. So, Taking the pendant meant that you were related to him ... or were his student.

"This student is willing to write a poem to see off Ziyang Jushi." A tall and straight student wearing a green Confucian robe and a jade pendant around his waist stepped out and arched his hands towards the three Confucian Great Scholars in the pavilion.

Li Mubai said smilingly, "This is my student Zhu Tuizhi. He's quite talented in poetry."

Ziyang Jushi smiled and nodded.

After the student named Zhu Tuizhi chanted his farewell poem, the smile on the face of Ziyang Jushi deepened, seemingly very satisfied.

"Not bad, Not bad", War Master Zhang Shen praised him and didn't comment much. The other two great scholars were more talented in poetry than he.

But a good beginning didn't necessarily lead to a good ending. The next part of the poem could probably be described to be like a dog's tail.

The latter part of the poem wasn't satisfactory, and barely qualified.

Li Mubai sighed, "Since the Imperial Academy re-compiled the saint's classics and advocated the theory of following the heavens and eliminating human desires, the students of the world have stuck to the classics and buried their heads in their contents. Over time, they would fall into the situation of 'Shackled Thinking and Cumbersome Writing' and lose their spirituality."

As he spoke those last few words, suddenly a pang ached in his heart.

That was the reason why Confucianism began to weaken in modern times. 200 years ago, the Confucianists said: "Buddhism isn't bad. Taoism isn't that bad. Aye, Arcanists are also not bad too. Shamans and Warlocks who pioneered another path are worthy of praise... As to the vulgar martial artists, please, leave; this is a gathering of cultured peoples. Oh, and take the yaoguai and the other races out with you too if you please. Now, as to my fine gentlemen sitting here before me, you're all trash!"

Confucianism was as such back then.

Now, You say?

Major Cultivation systems: What is it, Little brother?

Confucianism, trembling: mmp.[^9]

Ziyang Jushi sighed, "Don't mention these matters. Who else would like to compose a poem?"

No one had the courage for a while.

Zhu Tuizhi stared at the purple pendant with hot eyes and felt as if it was already his.

"Sir, I have a poem." Xu Xinnian walked out of the crowd and went to the pavilion.

He had been silent until now with purpose. He's very low-key and humble and didn't want to recite a good poem too early in that his classmates wouldn't be embarrassed. This didn't have anything to do with his earlier arguments with Zhu Tuizhi.

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[^1]: "Soft Sheep"

[^2]: 紫阳居士

[^3]: Inconsistently "White Deer Academy", or "Cloud Deer Academy", the latter is used more often.

[^4]: 杨恭 · 字子谦

[^5]: 李慕白

[^6]: 张慎

[^7]: The eight-line seven syllable poem structure

[^8]: Chinese saying, 苦做舟, 钻营为浆

[^9]: mmp, 妈卖屁, a Chinese curse, which, to put it bluntly, means “Your mum’s a whore.”

# 20. Half a Qilü Stuns the Great Scholars

“Xu Cijiu, my student. Knowledgeable on the arts of warfare, and is one of great promise and talent.” Master war strategist Zhang Shen introduced him. \*He can’t write poetry.\*

That last sentence though, he said in his mind.

Master Zhang was confused; clearly he doesn’t know how to write poetry, why would he come out?

Thinking that the purple jade amulet was guaranteed to be his, Zhu Tuizhi initially was cautious when he heard someone else step up. However, when he saw Xu Xinnian, his worry disappeared. He merely gave him a look.

Having lived in the same dorms for many years, whilst one cannot say they know each other through and through, knowing weaknesses and strengths was nonetheless a guarantee.

Xu Xinnian was outstanding in debate and strategy, and also skilled at the art of warfare. Poetry, however, was more like a great hall that he could never reach.

\*That pendant is still mine.\*

The students’ gazes fell upon Xu Xinnian. He basked in the attention that everyone was giving him, with an expression like all was beneath him, looking at the warm sun hanging in the sky.

“\*Yellow clouds covering a thousand li, the sun setting dim;\*”

The Go master Li Mubai nodded, stroking his beard. This sentence was a simple introduction of the scenery, the initial brush strokes painting a scene on the paper.

“\*In whirling snow, the north wind drives the wild geese;\*”

It was currently just entering winter. The snows hadn’t come, but they were not far away, so this line was not unseemly.

Dusk rays scatter the sky, snows swirling around, with the north wind howling, scattering the formation of the wild geese flying. The feeling of a landscape finally flourished.

These two lines painted wonderfully the background, a perfect match for this farewell ceremony.

Zhang Shen was stunned, scrutinising Xu Xinnian carefully. With his student's talents for poetry, these two lines must've taken him hours upon hours of blood and tears to get down. If this standard could be kept, perhaps it would beat out Zhu Tuizhi.

Of the three virtuous and respectful great scholars, Ziyang Jushi had the highest talent for poetry. He chewed on those words now, feeling suddenly a pang of sadness.

A thousand li, dusk, north wind, lone geese, snow swirling around... it painted a bleak and lonely picture.

He was not sent out on a mission, but was rather thrown into the provinces, far from where he was worthy to be.

However, though bleak the scene, it still had some charm that only a quiet, snow-covered land may have.

This governorship, though seeming like he was being put to good use by the court, being given authority, but will the forces from the Imperial Academy really watch him stroll through the azure clouds?

Will they really allow him to plant roots in officialdom for the White Deer Academy?

Going to Qingzhou, his future was uncertain, and the path ahead was hazy.

Suddenly, Xu Xinnian spread his arms out wide, his handsome face being lit up in the sunlight, seeming perfect and delicate like the finest jade.

He shook his arms, looking directly at Ziyang Jushi, and with vigour intoned the last two lines:

“\*On the road ahead, surely will be friends dear and true;\*

“\*Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you?\*

Within and without the pavilion, all fell silent.

In an instant, all present felt goosebumps.

Zhu Tuizhi turned around stiffly, looking at the proudly standing Xu Xinnian with a dumbstruck expression.

“On the road ahead, surely will be friends dear and true; Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you.” Li Mubai excitedly punched his fist in the air, “Marvellous!”

The first two lines painted a desolate scene, the latter two turned that emotion on its head, like the fog on the path ahead suddenly being cleared by a gust of wind, giving the traveller courage.

Zhang Shen looked at Xu Xinnian deeply, falling silent.

Ziyang Jushi, with his love for poetry, was deeply engrossed within the picture that this Qilü poem painted, heart shaken.

“What a good poem...” he muttered.

“Why is there only half?” Master of War Zhang Shen saw that his own student did not continue, and couldn’t resist asking.

The corner of Xu Xinnian’s mouth twitched, “This poem only has half the verses.”

Only half!?

All the scholars present stared wide at him, finding it difficult to believe this fact. Who writes only half a poem? Is he still human?

“No matter, half a poem is still enough to stun the heavens.” Ziyang Jushi calmed his emotions, smiling deeply, “Xu Cijiu, this poem, what’s its title?”

“It has none!”

Xu Xinnian maintained his proud expression, but in reality did not know how to explain. Only by maintaining his haughty demeanour, can he prevent people from asking further.

“No need to rush,” Ziyang Jushi’s smile seemed to widen even more, “This poem was written for me, right?”

Xu Xinnian nodded.

“Why not, let this old man help you make a title?”

Go master Li Mubai and war master Zhang Shen suddenly realised his intentions, and felt as sour as if a lemon had been squeezed inside them.

“Then let’s call it \*A Send-off for Yang Gong to Qingzhou, in Mianyang Pavilion\*, how about that?” For a great and mighty scholar, his eyes showed childish excitement.

“Of course!” Xu Xinnian unconsciously replied haughtily, and thinking that this attitude might be showing disrespect, quickly added, “All according to you, Sir.”

“Shameless old bastard!”

“Humph!”

The two other great scholars felt even more sour.

“This is what’s called good fortune,” Ziyang Jushi laughed, swaggeringly clasping his hands together, and bowing towards the other two scholars.

The poetic talent of the Great Feng had fallen so, that if this work were to spread out, it would cause uproar in scholarly circles, and would be recited by students all across the world.

Ziyang Jushi’s name would also spread with it, and most importantly, by doing this he had forever bound his name to this poem.

If this poem became something that would be passed down through generations, then Ziyang Jushi’s name would be spread for thousands of years to come.

And for a work of this quality, that was highly likely.

In the other two great scholars’ eyes, what was most embarrassing, was that Xu Xinnian in the position of a student gifted this to his teacher, and so the name of the poem should not contain one’s birth name, and must rather use the “courtesy name” or “title name” instead. Only good friends of the same generation had any right to write one’s birth name into a poem.

So one can see how much this old bastard was willing to lose face, if it meant his name spreading wide and far.

Being a teacher, Zhang Shen realised that this poem might not have been his student’s own creation, but he did not speak up. If his student could earn the good graces of Ziyang Jushi, it would be his own good fortune. As a teacher, Zhang Shen was nonetheless happy for him,

In the raucous discussion of the crowd, Xu Xinnian coughed, and told truthfully, “Teacher, two Sirs, this poem was not originally my work, there was someone else.”

The conversations immediately fell silent.



The three great scholars' reactions were all different. Zhang Shen's suspicion was confirmed, and he showed an "of course this was the case" look.

Li Mubai was shocked, not expecting this turn.

Ziyang Jushi's reaction was the largest, as he stepped forward a few steps, anxiously asking, "Who? Is it someone else in our academy? Are they here right now?"

His gaze danced past Xu Xinnian, searching the crowd.

"It was my brother!" Xu Xinnian raised his chin, replying haughtily.

The silent students began to chatter again:

"Xu Cijiu's older brother?"

"Where did he study? Why have I not heard of his person?"

"Um... if I remember correctly, Xu Cijiu was the eldest son?"

"Cijiu, what's your brother's respected name, who did he study under... aiya, c'mon, say it, how do we not know this incredible poetic talent?"

The students were impatient and eager.

The three great scholars looked at Xu Xinnian.

\*Shit, I was influenced by my simple uncle, I shouldn't have told them about my stupid older brother...\* Looking at the expectant faces of the other students, Xu Xinnian suddenly realised that he made a mistake.

Everything in the world was lowly, only the intellectuals were not, and so one could see how proud the intellectuals were, Xu Xinnian included.

Scholars of the Cloud Deer Academy was even more proud.

If Xu Qi'an was an intellectual as well, then they would praise him, even look up to him, but to let everyone know he was but a bailiff at the constabulary, would cause the opposite effect.

If lowly constabulary runner could write a world-shaking Qilü, what face do we scholars have?

Xu Xinnian internally prepared to face the onslaught, "My brother... spends much of his time at home studiously reading the classics. He is not a student in our Cloud Deer

Academy, and neither at the Imperial Academy. He- his personality is very quiet and introverted, and he doesn't like fame or merit, and only to study."

\*Such integrity, he could be a model for all of us. He should be looked up to...\* the students were stunned by the description, and they all thought the same thing.

There was no debate on the best poem, the purple jade amulet went to Xu Xinnian. Ziyang Jushi bade farewell to everyone, face ruddy and bright, feeling a well of emotion. Stepping into the carriage, he left behind one parting remark:

"Such a great talent must not be left in the dust. Chunjing, Jinyan, what do you think?"

One cannot be sure if the two other great scholars didn't understand, or were pretending to be understand, but nonetheless they silently watched as Ziyang Jushi departed. Waiting until the carriage has gone far, Li Mubai suddenly dragged Xu Xinnian's hand, pulling him aside, asking "Cijiu, this old man suddenly has heart to take a student. I have nothing going on today, why don't you take me to see your brother?"

Zhang Shen was shocked, as he immediately added "Cijiu, if your older brother was to also take this old man as his teacher, it would certainly be praised far and wide."

Whether or not he wrote any poems was not important, mostly they didn't want to leave such a prodigy forgotten.

But if he were to suddenly have a stroke of inspiration, and write a legendary poem, like \*My Teacher Zhang Shen\* or the like, that would also be great.

Li Mubai said unhappily "The art of warfare is not a main focus. Us scholars' first focus should be on philosophy and the classics, and then debate, and then self cultivation and one's house."

"Heh, and is Go the main focus then? And an unbeatable player at that... only to lose spectacularly against Wei Yuan." Zhang Shen snorted.

"Old bastard, shut your mouth, don't speak of Wei Yuan in front of me. This old man has always appreciated talent, this student is mine."

"Old thing, what is this 'appreciating talent' now? You're merely after his poetic ability."

"Shameless old bastard, I'll smite you down with righteous spirit!"

Xu Xinnian's hair stood on end.

The students far away were all shocked and stunned. They didn't know what happened, but the two great scholars were red faced and arguing with each other, even making as if to fight.

