

Nightwatcher

#Chapter 21: Since Ancient Times, how Arrogant Have the Bullies Been –

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21. Since Ancient Times, how Arrogant Have the Bullies Been

The temperature at the Capital at the end of November should normally be sub-zero at its coldest. Xu Qi'an got up in the morning and saw the thin layer of ice in the water tank in the yard.

Great Feng ruled over the Central Plains of Jiuzhou^[^1] and claimed itself as orthodox in the world. The climate of the capital should be an average temperate continental climate.

In this climate zone, It would be difficult to endure the winter without heating.

"Naturally, frozen skeletons appear in the winters of this era." Xu Qi'an sighed.

He regretted that he wasn't learned enough in mathematics, physics, and chemistry to farm in this era of underdeveloped infrastructure and material shortage.

If he could, It would have been a great benefit to the people.

The sun in the sky was emitting warmth from high above, the beautiful girl holding her five-year-old sister strolled through the busy street with high spirits. Her limpid eyes looked left and right, and the corners of her exquisite mouth were curled in a smile.

Today, his little sister was wearing a light blue silk dress, and flower vines were in bloom in her cuffs and skirts. Her loose cuffs wafted, making her look like a fairy.

Xu Qi'an inevitably thought of the beauties wearing ancient costumes in his previous life and compared them silently. *Women in this era tended to dress conservatively, not as coquettish as the beauties in ancient costumes in his previous life.*

"I have an idea to make money. I could improve clothes to make women's clothes more attractive..." Xu Qi'an had an idea.

In a moment, many epoch-making women's clothes flashed in his mind: Hollow, Black Silk, Garters, Aprons...

Stop, Stop... I'll be dragged to Meridian Gate and beheaded if I think more about it.

The horse-drawn carriages, the peddlers carrying goods, the hurrying passers-by, and the rows of shops... made up a vivid picture of a market in ancient times.

Xu Lingyue's impression of her cousin had changed a lot due to their interactions over the previous month. She wasn't as estranged from her cousin as before.

Due to auntie's animosity with the original Xu Qi'an, only Little Pea among the siblings was liked by the original Xu Qi'an due to her being closer to Second Uncle Xu.

In the beginning, Xu Lingyue used to call him elder brother. After being left hanging many times, she began only to nod when meeting him.

The relationship had improved a lot compared to the earlier situation, but they were still a little estranged. The beautiful young girl in her flowery years took the little girl and walked to the side, separate from Xu Qi'an by a couple of steps.

Little Pea was attracted by the novelties in the street and tried to move ahead of her sister, but she was firmly held.

"Candied haws, Candied Haws..." Little Pea pointed to a shopkeeper in the street and shouted.

"Do you want to rot your teeth?" Her sister rebuked and dragged her forward.

Due to being involved in a disaster, the Xu family was short of money, which made their lives in the previous month difficult. Xu Lingyue didn't have any copper to buy candied haws for her sister.

Xu Qi'an walked behind them, observing his younger sisters, particularly the eldest sister, who was tall and showed the youthfulness and figure of a young girl.

Her back was like a new-born willow, Although it wasn't as plump as a mature woman, it had the youthful and lively charm unique to girls her age.

"Big Brother, Big brother..." Little Pea was anxious and pushed her butt out while dragging her feet to resist her sister's pull.

Xu Lingyue bit her lip, clearly anxious and annoyed.

"Big brother doesn't have any silver, but he'll get it soon..." Xu Qi'an motioned his younger sister to be still. While speaking, he felt a hard object under the sole of his foot. When he looked down, he saw a nugget of silver, glinting dully.

He leaned over and picked up the silver. Weighting it, it was like before one cash of silver.

He had picked up silver too frequently over the last month.

Xu Lingyue's eyes widened.

He stumbled into silver!

I have got money to listen to music in the Goulan today... Counting up, He hadn't listened to music for two days now, having not found any money.

Xu Qi'an was pleased and held the broken silver to beckon to the shopkeeper, "Give me three bunches of candied haws."

"Okay!" The dark-skinned shopkeeper removed three strings with a smile, "Six copper coins."

The shopkeeper couldn't find the change for the piece of silver. So, he took it to a nearby shop to get it exchanged for copper. He kept six of them and tied the remaining 94 coins belonging to Xu Qi'an with a string.

The monetary system of Feng: 1 tael of silver = 8 cash = 100 copper.[^3] Gold was a luxury and wasn't normally used as currency. Some poor people wouldn't touch a single ingot of gold in their lifetime.

Xu Qi'an took the copper coin and the candied haws, bit into one skewer, and handed over the remaining two to his two sisters.

Xu Lingyue accepted it gracefully and said softly, "Thank you, big brother."

Xu Qi'an nodded and looked at Little Pea, who was already chewing on her candied haws.

"Big brother big brother, Are your candied haws sweet?" Xu Lingyin asked vaguely with her bulging cheeks.

"You want to eat it." Xu Qi'an revealed the little girl's conspiracy.

"Ah! How did big brother know?" Xu Lingyin was taken aback. She didn't know that her big brother could read her thoughts. Her big brother was indeed awesome.

Xu Qi'an said, "If you eat too many candied haws, bugs will drill holes in your mouth."

"What kind of bug?", Little pea's small face looked scared.

Xu Qi'an thought for a while, and described, "It's a type of white and long slimy bug."

He had just finished speaking when his younger sister started drooling.

Haiya... Xu Qi'an stretched out and offered his candied haws with both hands.

Xu Qi'an led his two younger sisters across the road while observing the hustle and bustle of the capital, but his heart wasn't at peace.

I found silver again.

How is this possible?

As a graduate of a police school, he was very sensitive to such details.

"Is this inexplicable luck related to my crossing?"

Xu Qi'an clearly remembers that he hadn't touched an antique or been guided by an old Taoist before crossing.

"This is my cheat? What's the matter of giving me a single cash of silver daily? It's exactly the rate of the Goulan. Does Heaven want me to listen to music at the Goulan every day?"

"It's better to think about breaking through to Refining Qi. It's good to pick up money regularly even if there's a problem within my body."

"I'll break through first, and then check for any changes due to it. Moreover, I don't know about the pinnacle powers in this world. I may be able to figure out the reason for this luck in the future if I am sufficiently strong."

Xu Qi'an was very wary of his luck. He would rather be accepting of a system since it would be within his scope of understanding.

...

There was a brothel in the street called "Guiyue Building", a third-class brothel.

Thanks to the instruction of Constable Wang and the others, Xu Qi'an learned a lot of knowledge about brothels, which enriched his cultural heritage.

The suffix of a brothel could be used to determine its qualifications. The suffixes of first-class and second-class brothels were mainly "Courtyard", "Pavilion" or "Hall".

Third-class and fourth-class brothels mainly used "Company", "Building" or "Shop" as their suffix.

Before noon, the brothel workers opened their doors for business ahead of time. A few pretty women in red and green leaned against the railing of the second floor and smiled at the passers-by.

Upon seeing a man they liked (Robed in Silk or Satin), They waved a coloured handkerchief and said softly, "Master, Come up for a drink."

Even for a third-class brothel, You'd have to pay two cash silver as the wine fee (entry fee)... If you wanted to sleep with a girl, Depending on the quality of the girl, about 5-6 cash could be enough, and the expensive ones would have nearly double rates... Xu Qi'an calculated and confirmed that he couldn't afford the price.

There's no point, and all his belongings only summed to a few taels of silver... He looked at the sparrows and warblers lazily sitting on top of the railing of the second floor, and recited with emotion,

“*That time when I was young, my blue cloak billowing,

Riding a horse over the small bridge's side,

A building of young women beckoning at my sight!*”

That was the dream of men.

"Big brother, poems are to be recited in proper locations.", Xu Lingyue lightly said.

She thought for some time and sighed. *Perhaps Father was right, Elder brother is suited for reading.*

"Brother, the ladies upstairs are quite beautiful.", Little Pea crisply said.

"People need to dress decently for their business." Xu Qi'an replied.

"What kind of business?"

"Selling Abalone."[^2]

"Abalone?" Little Pea's eyes shined, and she became unwilling to leave the brothel.

"Big brother!" Xu Lingyue stomped and shouted, ashamed, and blamed Xu Qi'an for discussing such a topic with their younger sister.

Xu Qi'an turned his head and glanced at the girl. *Why are you angry, Do you even know the meme?*

After leaving the brothel, They passed by a fish meatball shop, whose fragrance made Little Pea stop in her tracks.

Xu Lingyue glanced over and swallowed silently. After being released from prison, the Xu family was struggling, and sometimes it took 3 days to eat a meat dish.

As she was still growing, she had great need for food, especially meat.

"Wait, brother will buy it for you."

The shop was small and many people were waiting in line to buy the meatballs. Xu Qi'an asked his sisters to stay on the roadside and squeezed in by himself.

"Big brother is very nice." Little Pea crisply said while drooling. And looked at her sister.

Xu Lingyue held her sister's small hand and looked at Xu Qi'an's back, her mouth curling up unconsciously.

Soon, Xu Qi'an bought 3 fish meatballs and packed them in butter paper bags. When he returned, He saw four or five rough looking men, dressed like bodyguards surrounding Xu Lingyue and teasing her without touching her.

The sixteen-year-old girl was like a trapped deer and was trying to rush out of the encirclement while protecting herself. But was forced back by them.

She was crying, and her face was fearful.

The bodyguards laughed at her predicament.

At the edge of the encirclement, a young man in gold robes was riding on the back of a horse and watching the scene as a spectator at a theatre would.

Xu Lingyin saw her sister being bullied and ran towards the young master with her short legs. She then put her hands behind her and cried out "Waaah" loudly to launch a sonic attack.

"What racket." The young master subconsciously raised his whip but suddenly stopped. His eyes flashed with cruelty and he pulled his horse's rein so that it would trample on Xu Lingyin with its hooves.

Xu Lingyue let out a loud scream.

[^1]: Jiuzhou, lit. "Nine Provinces", is the name of the continent, and an ancient name for the region where China is.

[^2]: Abalone is a type of fish.

[^3]: This is what the author wrote. Of course he does mean that 1 tael is 8 cash, and 1 cash is 100 copper, making 800 copper a tael of silver.

22. Teaching the Young Lord a Principle

In Xu Qi'an's heart welled up a gust of angry hellfire. In the moment that the horse's hooves raised, he pulled out that string of copper cash, and threw it with all his might. At the same time, the flagstones under his feet broke with a crack, as he shot forth like lightning.

Seventy-two copper coins howled through the air, splashing towards that brocade-wearing pampered young lord.

He had no reaction to the oncoming slaughter, that mildly interested, sadistic expression of deliberately stepping on an ant still on his face. Rather, one of his bodyguards reacted first, as his expression changed, and leapt towards his master, pushing him off the horse. The two of them rolled on the ground, dishevelled.

pat pat pat... A portion of the copper coins missed, but the other sank deep into the horse, the ensuing spatter of blood covering Xu Lingyin.

Bang!

At this time, Xu Qi'an had arrived, body leaning forward, striking the horse flying with his elbow.

The tall warhorse was flung a few metres away, leaving a trail of brilliant red on the flagstones.

The commoners around the commotion scattered, hiding far away and watching the scene.

Xu Qi'an immediately picked up Little Pea in a large embrace, holding her tightly, simultaneously paying attention to her expression, and also comforting her "Don't be scared, your big brother is here."

Little Pea's mouth twitched, and coming out of her stunned trace, finally began to cry.

The guards surrounding Xu Lingyue didn't bother with her any more, and ran towards their young lord.

Xu Qi'an took this opportunity to give his baby sister to a white-faced Xu Lingyue, saying in a low voice "Take her to the Changle County Constabulary, knock on the door,

and say it was me who sent you. Afterwards ask constable Wang to send people to the royal guards, asking for Uncle. It's on Huanglin street, quick!"

Xu Lingyue looked deeply at her older brother, and ran, carrying Little Pea in her arms.

"You dare to kill my horse," the brocade-wearing pampered young lord laughed maniacally, pushing through his guards. He waved his hand, signalling them to surround Xu Qi'an.

I want to kill you too...

That horse was a "Snow-hooved Black Dragon" Warhorse, something that even a fortune would be hard to buy. In the army, only brigadier generals or above could ride this breed of horse.

Uncle Xu grew up in the army, and Xu Qi'an naturally was influenced by him, and immediately recognised the cost of that horse. In modern times, it would be equivalent to a Lamborghini.

The ones who could drive Lamborghinis were definitely the descendants of the top of the top, and the *guanerdai* and *fuerdai*^[^1] were not worth money, and had no titles.

Apart from the warhorse, those beautiful azure robes with purple cloud patterns, that dragon-patterned white jade belt, those pouches clanging with precious metals, that jade amulet... these details all showed this pampered young man's status.

The son of a top official.

"My name is Xu Qi'an, the son of Xu Pingzhi, captain in the city guard. They were my two younger sisters, may I ask where they offended milord." Xu Qi'an clasped his hands together, controlling his temper, asking politely.

"To save my younger sister, I accidentally killed milord's beloved horse. I will definitely compensate milord for this."

Even Xu Qi'an's little toe knew very clearly what was the origin of this conflict. It was most definitely that this young lord saw Xu Lingyue's looks, and wanted to play around with her, and even perhaps kidnap her.

Having worked at the constabulary for a month, Xu Qi'an had heard of the actions of these young men: domineering and outrageous, and no one could stop them.

They were not above kidnapping commoner women, and being careless with commoners' lives was a common occurrence.

And setting such matters was also very easy, one could use force to intimidate, and riches to persuade. And for those that didn't bow down? Well, maybe your whole family didn't deserve to live.

The higher-up the rankings the family elders are, the more their children are like this. Would the court really expel a top official for the deaths of a few commoners?

In the eyes of the Constabulary, bullying commoners was hardly considered an issue.

The only people who could defeat a *guanerdai*, was another *guanerdai*.

And Xu Qi'an barely counted as a guanerdai; Xu Pingzhi was a seventh-rank green robe, and at the very least had an official rank, and was not a mere commoner.

Guanerdai could bully the common people with abandon, but to others who took the crown's salary? They would have some reservations.

Because the water in the capital was deep!

Having listened to Xu Qi'an's words, he first was confused, asking "Xu Pingzhi? The one who lost the tax silver?"

"Yes!" Xu Qi'an let out a breath.

The young lord's face darkened, as he replied with malice, "Break his arms, we'll just leave a message."

What mental disorder do you have... Xu Qi'an nearly couldn't control his words.

The guards were all well-trained, strong men. They all drew daggers from their robes.

In the capital, if one didn't have an official role, one was not allowed to carry swords. To carry a sword and not have an official's robe, carried a sentence of 18 strokes of the cane, and a fine of a hundred taels of silver.

To be a group of sword carrying people, one would simply be executed.

Daggers however were not counted as swords, and so this group of people were just about legal, having found a loophole in the law.

Five of them were not only strong and well built, but also learnt group fighting techniques, and could work together perfectly.

Two guards rushed forward together, striking their daggers towards Xu Qi'an. The latter raised his hands, and grabbed the two guards' wrists, and was just about to respond,

when the two men separated left and right, revealing that guard which had saved the young lord jumping into the sky, bringing his knee down in a ferocious attack.

Xu Qi'an could not but respond, crossing his arms in front of his chest.

Thud!

The guard's kneecap crashed into his arms, and he felt a fiery pain.

The other two guards sandwiched him from both sides. One dagger missed, the other one drawing a red glistening line across Xu Qi'an's waist.

"Break his wrists and ankles, make him useless!" The brocade wearing young man shouted.

Xu Qi'an glanced at him, not saying anything, analysing the situation within his mind.

They're all refining body, but not at its peak, in a one-on-one fight I could take any of them on easy, but they know how to fight together...

The daggers again whistled towards him. Xu Qi'an used the fighting techniques learnt in his past life, and pretended to get weaker and weaker.

At the peak of Refining Body, a martial artist's energy is limitless, and wouldn't run out any time soon, but Xu Qi'an couldn't let them figure out how much energy he had left.

Seeing his guards unable to bring down Xu Qi'an in a short time, the brocade-wearing young lord furrowed his brow. Standing far away, he mocked, "Oy, the one called Xu, kneel and kowtow to me, call me 'grandad', and this lord will spare your life."

Xu Qi'an replied loudly "Grandad, Grandma is really good in bed!"

Having failed to anger Xu Qi'an, and instead being made fun of himself, the young lord shouted "Kill him."

Thud!

The strongest guard struck at Xu Qi'an. The latter pretended that he couldn't defend against this, staggering backwards.

The other four guards saw an opportunity, and came at him from all sides.

At this time, the flagstones under Xu Qi'an's feet split, as the muscles in his legs made his trousers bulge. Like an arrow, he shot forward, crashing into the guard on his left, causing the latter to spit out a glob of blood, and fall back, ribs broken.

The guards didn't expect that he would have that much hidden energy left, and being caught unawares, allowed Xu Qi'an to escape from the encirclement.

Xu Qi'an didn't escape, rather sprinting towards the young lord, and under his shocked and fearful expression, grabbed his neck, and savagely struck him in the stomach.

The brocade wearing young lord's body bent like a shrimp, vomiting.

Without any change in expression, Xu Qi'an gave him a few more punches, and hit him until the young man was clutching his stomach, kneeling on the floor.

The hellfire in his heart slowly settled, and he did not continue his attack, turning his head towards the advancing guards, shouting "Stay where you are, or I'll kill him."

The guards were afraid of causing such collateral damage, and did as he said.

"Good, very good..." the brocade wearing young man raised his head, face full of venomous fury, "Do you know who I am?"

Thud!

Xu Qi'an stomped his face into the vomit, silently using more power, causing the young lord to let out a heart-wrenching cry of pain.

"Then I'll teach milord a principle," Xu Qi'an said, face dark, "common men also have anger, and if you bring one to anger, five paces will blood spatter."

The two sides faced off for a while, before a group of black cloaked, sword wearing bailiffs, with some assistant runners rushed over.

At their head was constable Wang.

Hearing that young Xu was taking a beating, Constable Wang was initially very angry, but seeing the young man's brocade dress, his face stiffened, as his gaze flickered, and he resumed his angry expression.

"Who dares in broad daylight to fight on the streets in Changle County?"

Seeing that his colleagues had already drawn their blades, and had surrounded the bodyguards, Xu Qi'an let go of the young lord.

The latter pointed at him, shouting angrily, "Arrest him, arrest him! This young lord will kill him by a thousand cuts!"

Constable Wang pretended not to hear, scolding, "Bastard things, arrest them all."

No matter what the pampered young man said, Wang maintained a base attitude of *I have no culture to behold, with a “fuck you” I’ll travel the world*.

Most likely seeing that these bailiffs had no brains, the young lord stopped his racket, and was escorted to the Constabulary under watch.

Constable Wang stayed back from the group a few steps, going to Xu Qi'an's side, asking, “Brother, you’ve got yourself into big trouble, that bastard’s background isn’t simple. Have you thought of how to get out of this?”

Old Wang’s eyesight was like an eagle.

I, Liu Jianming, had no choice... Xu Qi’an replied quietly “Have you notified my uncle?”

Not long after, they reached the constabulary.

[^1]: 官二代、富二代 the children of officials and rich families.

23. An Arrest by the Ministry of Law

As Xu Qi'an rushed into the county office, He soon heard a weeping sound "Big Brother!"

Xu Lingyue, wearing a light blue robe, looked slender and elegant. Her elegant and fair face was tear-stained and her eye sockets were red and swollen, just like a cute little flower.

He couldn't see Xu Lingyin, She was probably in the side hall, and not permitted to come.

Xu Qi'an nodded slightly and gave her a calm look.

County Magistrate Zhu, having already received the news, sat in front of the table and saw the group of people brought in by the Office Servants. He looked at the angry young master in brocade clothes.

Old Zhu was startled and hurriedly got up to greet him.

"Isn't this Young Master Zhou, How is Assistant Minister Zhou?"

The young brocade wearing master waved his sleeve violently, batting Magistrate Zhu aside, before pointing at Xu Qi'an and viciously saying, "This man committed crimes on the street and attempted to kill me. Take him away quickly."

"Serious Matter, serious matter," County Magistrate Zhu turned his head with a smile on his face, and shouted angrily, "Hurry up, Xu Qi'an. Get your arse over here!"

Xu Qi'an bit the bullet and went forward.

"Disgraceful, You dared to hit the son of Mr. Zhou, the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Revenues. Don't you have a brain?" County Magistrate Zhu got up and kicked Xu Qi'an, turned his head, and smiled with a fawning face.

"Young Master Zhou, these are surging waters hitting the dragon king's temple. We're all on the same side, a lord like you doesn't care for lowly people, don't bother arguing with such an insignificant thing."

Outside the crowd, Xu Lingyue looked at her cousin taking hardship for her. Tears rolled down her face, and her tall nose, which was more straight and delicate than ordinary women, turned red from crying.

Son of the Deputy Minister of Household... Xu Qi'an's heart dropped.

In the officialdom of Great Feng, the power of an official depends not on his rank, but on his background.

Even if there were many first and second-rank officials, Only a few people truly stood at the top of the totem pole. The Six Ministers and Deputy Ministers were among them.

It was a serious matter to have beaten the son of the Deputy Minister of the Household.

"This young master will leave you some time. If you don't arrest this person, I'll do it myself." Young Master Zhou waved his hand and ordered his subordinates, "Arrest this bastard."

He didn't believe that this bastard dared to resist arrest and commit murder in the County Office.

County Magistrate Zhu shouted, "Whoever dares to commit violence in the county office will be put to death."

Three squads of office servants rushed out, drew out their knives, and put them on the neck of the subordinates who were about to strike. Deputies were on guard outside holding truncheons.

"The one surnamed Zhu, you dare to touch my people?" Young Master Zhou pointed at county magistrate Zhu's nose and cursed.

"Young Master Zhou, do not misunderstand me. I'm an official of the court, and am just acting according to the rules." County Magistrate still had a fawning smile, wiping away some of the spittle on his face.

"I have a lawsuit here, suing you, Young Master for reckless riding, aiming to cause harm, bullying a respectable woman. The accuser is Xu Lingyue."

This was the method that County Magistrate Zhu had prepared long ago. If the other party was just an ordinary Official, County Magistrate Zhu would have found a way to convert a large problem into a small one.

He didn't expect the victim to have been the son of the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Households.

Young Master Zhou let out a breath, "Who did I hurt while riding a horse? Bullying a respectable woman, bah, the one surnamed Zhu, Go to the street and ask if I lay a finger on this woman."

"Then maybe this woman identified the wrong person." County Magistrate Zhu put the lawsuit back into his sleeve with a smile.

Shit, Magistrate Zhu can't get him, I need to find a way to save myself, if it really comes to it, I'll run away, but this will bring in Uncle and the whole family. Xu Qi'an was a bit anxious. In this era, Only children of officials could deal with the children of officials. He couldn't match the other party in the background.

Not just him, but even the second uncle, A Baihu from the Imperial Guard. Is that anything in front of the Deputy Minister of the Household?

Nothing.

As for regretting the matter, no, He didn't. Should he allow himself to be slaughtered when a knife was resting on his neck?

While thinking, he saw one of Young Master Zhou's subordinates leave the county office. But county Magistrate Zhu didn't stop him.

Xu Qi'an, chilled, walked up to Constable Wang, and said in a low voice, "Boss, your younger brother is doomed today. So, I want you to do something for me."

Constable Wang stayed silent for a while, and said in a low voice, "Say it."

In the past month, the relationship between him and Xu Qi'an had improved by leaps and bounds. They went to the Goulan to play together and drank flowery wine together, forging a deep friendship.

"First, Lend me a tael of silver."

Constable Wang felt his chest and took out a handful of broken silver, less than a tael.

Xu Qi'an took the broken silver and put it in his pocket, then said, "Boss, you ride to my house quickly and get a book, a blue book, from the cabinet next to my bed. Remember, don't take anything else."

The diary has a light yellow cover.

"After you take the book, Immediately go to the Sitianjian, find a girl called Caiwei, and send a message to her: Xu Qi'an is in trouble. Send help quickly."

Sitianjian!? Constable Wang became hesitant, "How can someone like me go to that place?"

Letting him into the Sitianjian was equivalent to letting an ordinary person into the palace. In that, he didn't have the guts to get close.

Xu Qi'an knew that it would be like this, and whispered, "If something happens to me, No one will return the money to you."

Constable Wang's eyes widened.

"Help me finish this matter. My salary for the next month will belong to you, boss."

"Xu Qi'an, you wonderful person." Constable Wang rushed out of the county office while cursing.

...

Upon receiving the notice, Xu Pingzhi borrowed a horse from his colleagues and hurried to Changle County Office.

Stepping over the threshold and entering the court, the first thing he saw was his crying and trembling daughter, followed by the office servants and subordinates who were facing each other.

Xu Pingzhi withdrew his gaze and came to his daughter to ask seriously, "What's going on?"

Xu Lingyue, upon seeing her father, cried even more fiercely and told the entire story to her father while sobbing.

Upon hearing of the part where Young Master Zhou raised his horse's hoof to trample on the child, The corners of his eyes twitched and his face became gloomy.

"Lingyin would have already been gone if it weren't for big brother, wahhhh..."

Xu Pingzhi looked at the figure of his nephew Ningyan, closed his eyes, and calmed down for a few seconds before saying in a low voice, "Go to the side hall and watch Lingyin. And don't come out."

After watching his small daughter disappear into the distance. Xu Pingzhi stepped forward silently, and stared at the young master in embroidered clothes, "Young Master Zhou, can this be sorted?"

The young master met his eyes and felt real killing intent, and remembered what Xu Qi'an had said on the street.

He couldn't say anything no matter how hard he tried to squeeze out the words in his throat.

"Baihu Xu, such a powerful official. What, if the young master doesn't give up, you want to spatter blood five paces?"

An old man wearing a blue gown with golden marks on the cuffs and neckline along with a jade pendant on his waist came in front of the county office.

His hair is white and thick, his face thin, and his eyes were as sharp as needles.

He was still at the door when he first spoke, but he had already arrived at the court when he had finished his words.

"Uncle Chen." Young Master Zhou was overjoyed.

"How did the young master get this hurt? Which animal moved its hands on you? This old servant has watched the young master grow up, and my heart aches even for a little injury."

When the old man saw Young Master Zhou's earlobes covered in scabs, he felt distressed and angry.

"I've always told the master several times that you should be assigned a Refining Qi martial artist, but he has always refused on grounds of you liking to cause trouble."

"So what if you cause trouble? It's always better for others to suffer than you, young master."

Xu Pingzhi felt that he was locked on to by a wave of energy, and felt as if he had fallen into an ice cellar; as if a snake crawled in his back, He had a feeling of hovering between life and death.

He had felt similarly when fighting on the battlefield, which made him unable to move.

The old man was a master of the Refining Spirit.

County Magistrate Zhu coughed, "May I ask Sir your...?"

"I don't dare!" The old man interrupted indifferently, "I'm just an old slave in the Zhou family, and I can't bear Master Zhu's 'sir'."

"You are too polite," a seventh rank official facing the prime minister's door guard, this wisdom was known best by every experienced member of officialdom. Magistrate Zhu smiled,

"Looking at the matter, it's all misunderstandings after misunderstandings. The Official assessment is coming soon, and everyone values peace. What do you think, senior?"

The old man sneered and said, "A few insignificant people can't affect the master's official assessment. The Zhou family has always convinced people with virtue, and everything will be done according to the rules and regulations of the court."

Everyone didn't understand what he said at first, until a moment later when the loud sound of footsteps came from outside the office.

A group of armoured soldiers poured in, led by an official wearing a green robe embroidered with white pheasants. He looked around and said loudly.

"The Ministry of Law is arresting criminals, idlers must move away. If they interfere, they will be charged with the same crime as the arrested.

After a pause, the green-robed fifth-rank official smiled at Young Master Zhou, "Young Master, I ask you, Where is the criminal?"

Young Master Zhou pointed at Xu Qi'an, "Lock this bastard up for me."

The green-robed fifth-rank official waved his hand, "Apprehend him."

The soldiers rushed up, took out shackles, and locked Xu Qi'an.

"My lord, why is my nephew guilty?" Xu Pingzhi became nervous.

"I can decide whether he committed the crime by myself." The green-robed fifth-rank official said indifferently, "As a minister of the Ministry of Law, I always aspire to enforce the law impartially and meticulously."

Xu Pingzhi still wanted to speak but was held back by County Magistrate Zhu.

"Take him away!"

24. The Blue Cover Book

The men of the Ministry of Law quickly left, taking away the now "criminal" Xu Qi'an. Only then did the white-haired old man take back in his qi aura, and not taking one glance at Xu Pingzhi, went and held young master Zhou's arm, "Young master, this old servant will take you back to the estate to get treatment."

Young Master Zhou, clinging onto the old man, walked out, complaining, "I want to see that lowlife dead!"

"Yes yes yes, this old servant will ensure all is arranged appropriately." the old man smiled, face filled with kindness.

"No, I'll go myself."

"As young master wants."

The two of them left the constabulary with their bodyguards, their figures disappearing into the distance. Xu Pingzhi suddenly started breathing heavily, like a person who had nearly drowned to death.

His whole body was covered in sweat.

"I want to bring this to the crown!" Xu Pingzhi spat out one word at a time.

"You won't be able to see His Majesty. The palace is a forbidden area, how could a Baihu of the royal guard enter? You also don't have any right to bring any accusations," Magistrate Zhu sighed, "Forget it."

"No, no, I won't let it be..." Xu Pingzhi switched back and forth from ferocity and despair.

Magistrate Zhu thought for a moment, "The only thing you can do is to find Cijiu. He is a juren of the Cloud Deer Academy, perhaps he has a way."

Even though the Cloud Deer Academy had been suppressed for a long time by the court, with hardly any room to survive, but the people living there weren't just some helpless intellectuals.

No, they were disciples of the sage.

Not only were they adept at using reason to persuade, but they were even more adept at using reason to persuade.

Which is why when Xu Xinnian was able to escape exile then, and only have his achievements be cancelled, and his name put on the blacklist.

...

Stargazing Tower!

Constable Wang rode up to the city's tallest structure. Around it were no signs of foot soldier guards, but upon closer inspection, there was not a hint of any common person around the tower.

The Sitianjian was a place of colourful and strange mysteries. The grandmaster, called the *Jianzheng*^[^1], studied the arrangements of constellations, and set the calendar. He was a person who could talk with the immortals in heaven.

The inventions of the Sitianjian's alchemists have spread widely through the ranks of common people, making their lives more prosperous. Compared to all other cultivation paths, the Sitianjian's Arcanists were most like the immortal *xian* in people's minds.

And a place where immortals live, no ordinary people dared to come.

Constable Wang had several times thought to pull on the reins, and return to the constabulary, but resisted the urge.

He resisted the huge emotional pressure on himself, and stopped in front of Stargazing Tower, tying his horse's reins onto the railings of its stone steps with shaking hands.

Preparing himself, he started climbing.

The foundations of Stargazing Tower were a full six metres tall, taller than an average house's roof.

With a nervous mood, Constable Wang entered the first floor of the tower. The inside was lit incredibly well. with sunlight shining in from many holes in the wall, dust particles floating in its rays.

He saw the rows upon rows of medicine cupboards, saw a group of young white-cloaked people sitting in a circle, excitedly debating something.

He saw that some were intently reading books, others were asleep at their desks, and yet more others making medicine.

It was common knowledge amongst the people that the immortals of the Sitianjian were all heavenly doctors, who could save people from death and heal injuries, all without taking a penny... Constable Wang finally believed it now.

“Who are you?”

A white-cloaked person noticed Wang, and came over, looking him up and down.

Even though there were no guards around the Sitianjian, rarely if ever did commoners dare to brazenly come up its steps, and get close to the tower. Only some, who had fallen down with great illness, and knew that their future was dim, would test their luck here.

Constable Wang cautiously swallowed, and said haltingly, “I, I... am a constable of the Changle County Constabulary.”

So?

The white-cloaked person looked at him, not replying.

His eyes were flickering with radiant vigour, with a piercing gaze that seemed to stare into a person’s soul. Constable Wang felt a great pressure, and very nearly gave up on old Xu Qi’an and escaped from the place.

“I- I came to find Miss Caiwei.” Wang replied.

“Sister Caiwei?” the white-cloaked man inspected Constable Wang again, seeing his empty hands, muttering in his heart *you didn’t even bring anything to eat, and yet you want to find Sister Caiwei?*

“For what?”

Constable Wang retried a blue-cover book from his robes, “A friend of mine wanted me to give this book to Miss Caiwei, and also leave a message: Xu Qi’an is in trouble, send help quickly.”

The white cloaked man took the book, and idly flicked through it. The lettering within the book was twisted and sharp like a chicken’s foot, far from any prized calligraphic work.

He lost all interest, holding the book, “Sister Caiwei is not here, she went out. You could wait here, or come back later, or you can give the book to me, I’ll give it to her for you.”

“Then I thank you greatly for the trouble.” Constable Wang took the opportunity to flee.

“Brother, what’s up?”

Another white-cloaked person to the side watched Constable Wang hurriedly make his exit, and asked.

“A constable, said he was asking for Sister Caiwei, probably for something urgent... take this book to the seventh floor, to Brother Song, ask him for his opinion.”

...

Song Qing^[^2] was a sixth rank Master of Alchemy, and leader of all the alchemists within the Sitianjian. He was the Grandmaster's fourth disciple, as in the Sitianjian, all its disciples could call themselves the Jianzheng's disciples.

But in reality, the Jianzheng had only ever taught six disciples directly, who were called “the six children of the Sitianjian.”

As to the other disciples, they all received their tutelage through another. Mm, Caiwei was the youngest of all the disciples, and hadn't even taken any disciples of her own, having not yet the privilege to.

Song Qing had just recently returned to the capital, and having heard about the goings on of the tax silver case, and under the encouragement and persuasion of his peers, took on the task of refining the fake silver.

Happily living the blessing of a 996 life, the white-cloaked Masters of Alchemy were overjoyed that he agreed.

“We've failed again, Brother Song, are you also unable to do it?”

“Rubbish, how could Brother Song fail? It's nothing but another alchemical invention, and inventions require many rounds of failure and refinement to achieve the desired result.”

“If Brother Song can fully comprehend the secrets within this art, then our Sitianjian will have another line of business.”

Song Qing, having again and again worked overnight, waved them away, “All of you stop talking, I need some quiet.”

Though he had not slept, his eyes still shone with vigour, even with a hint of excitement. As someone who had a craze for alchemy, he took on all the challenges he could in the field.

It's not the composition of salt that's the issue... over many experiments and conclusions, I can roughly conclude that the temperature of the fire must be controlled to melt the salt, but not allow it to boil... the crucial component is in the lightning...

Song Qing muttered to himself silently.

He had already realised the crux of the issue, but because he had no knowledge of voltage, he could only try again and again, controlling the strength of his lightning magic.

“The person who invented the method of turning simple salt into fake silver, must be a prodigy of prodigies!” he exclaimed. If he could interact and make friends with this person, then his plans for biological alchemy could have a breakthrough.

At this time, a white-cloak came up the stairs to the seventh floor — where the Masters of Alchemy stayed.

White robes were the Sitianjian’s uniform, and though upon first glance they were not much different, the difference was in what was on the chest — the Masters of Alchemy had a crucible embroidered onto their robes.

The disciple who had just come up had a picture of medicinal herbs sewn at his chest, representing that he was the ninth rank of the Arcanists: a Doctor.

Also called a Physician.

“Brother, earlier a constable came round, asking after Sister Caiwei. He also told us to send a message: Xu Qi’an is in trouble, send help quickly.” The Physician continued, “I figured it could be something of great urgency, a friend of Sister Caiwei who is calling for her help, so I decided to come up to tell you.”

Xu Qi’an... Song Qing thought this name was somewhat familiar, but couldn’t put a face to it.

“Did that person say anything else?”

The Physician handed over the blue cover bound book, “He only left this book.”

“These characters have to be some of the ugliest I’ve ever seen...” Song Qing took it, and started reading, immediately feeling pain from reading those distorted chicken-scratch letters.

The first page only had one line, and he read carefully:

To obtain something, something of equal value must be lost. That is Alchemy's first law of equivalent exchange. — Edward Elric

[^1]: 监正

[^2]: 宋卿

25. Reinforcements

"Equivalent Exchange" hit Song Qing's mind like a flash of lightning, and his soul felt an impact. This impact was like the impact scholars felt when hearing a masterpiece poem, that had been passed down the ages.

Equivalent Exchange is the invariable principle of alchemy!

"Yes, It should be like this." Song Qing whispered to himself.

Whenever he successfully refined something, corresponding raw materials would disappear or be transformed into other things. This phenomenon had always existed, but few people noticed it. Of those that noticed this phenomenon, they didn't think much of it.

When the teacher taught us alchemy back then, He once said that the essence of alchemy was not Creation but Conversion.

"Equivalent Exchange, so that's what it means..." The alchemy fanatic began to tremble with excitement.

After calming down his excitement, Song Qing began to think about the meaning of the words "Edward Elric".

Was it a name?

How could such a strange name exist?

Was it a secret signal or some term in a field of alchemy?

He couldn't figure it out, and felt a bit irritated.

Song Qing took a deep breath, calmed down, and hurriedly turned the pages, reading the distorted and ugly writing professionally and patiently.

The opening sentence was: Step into the world of Alchemy!

Was it teaching people to step into the world of Alchemy?

How arrogant! Song Qing thought.

Alchemy had always been taught by words and examples, with occasional discussions and mutual exchanges. Those with talent could get started in a year or so while those without any couldn't achieve anything even in 30-50 years. The Sitanjian still didn't have a set of serious textbooks.

However, Song Qing was still looking forward to the book based on the sentence in the preface.

“Section 1: Property and Changes in Matter. Many invisible atoms in nature constitute matter. They undergo countless interactions, which cause changes to occur in front of the visible eye.

"I classify the changes as Physical Changes and Chemical Changes."

Song Qing looked at it, lost in his thoughts.

What is a chemical?

What is an atom?

What did I just look at?

Why do I know every word but can't understand them when they are combined?

There are commentaries for the classics of sages, but you haven't got a speck of commentary!

However, Song Qing did not come away empty handed. He keenly noticed that this book was unparalleled in the world.

It expounded on the true nature of the world and pointed out the most essential structure of all things.

Song Qing's body trembled, and he had the urge to tear up the book. These mysteries were things that only gods could know, and mortals shouldn't pry into them. But another force was supporting him, it was the most primitive thirst for knowledge in humans.

Silence reigned in the Alchemy Room.

The white-robed people looked at each other with dismay. They didn't dare to disturb their senior brother Song Qing, but they were deeply worried due to the strange expression he was showing.

"Brother is thinking of strange experiments again."

"Yeah, Last year, He tried to refine a cat's body into a tree, so that its head would grow back even if it was cut off, But he was grounded by the Jianzheng for a month."

Song Qing was immersed in his world, both fearful and excited when reading it. His eyes lit up suddenly because he saw the detailed explanation for the process of refining the fake silver in the tax fraud case.

Step 1: The first step is to filter brine to obtain pure Sodium Chloride (Refined Salt).

Step 2: Evaporate the brine until it dries to precipitate crystals and melt the crystals at 800 degrees Celsius.

Step 3: Pay attention! This step is the key to refining tax silver. Success and failure depends on this step.

Song Qing's eyes flashed with light, as finally, finally, they were about to solve the problem that had troubled him and his juniors for a long time.

This book is divine.

Song Qing realized that he had reached the end of the page and put a little drool on his fingers as if he couldn't wait to turn to the next page.

Blank!

Song Qing,"???"

Nothing?

There isn't any content remaining?

What is the third step? Why wasn't it recorded and who wrote the book? Writers that leave books incomplete should be made into mincemeat.

Song Qing spat out a mouthful of blood.

Song Qing opened his mouth, as if he had overlooked something, and said deeply, "Who sent this book?"

"I didn't notice."

"I didn't listen."

"I forgot."

All the juniors told the truth.

Song Qing went downstairs immediately and found the disciple who received constable Wang to ask about the process in detail.

Song Qing came to conclude after analysis that this was an exchange.

"Brother, What's happened?" The juniors in white chased him downwards.

"What's wrong with this book?"

Song Qing's face was incomparably serious, and he glanced at everyone's faces, "Junior brothers, listen to me. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our Sitanjian to rise rapidly. There may be an unprecedented change in alchemy due to this."

...

Mianyang Pavilion:

Two carriages drove slowly on the official road, and the two Great Scholars who had just argued were sitting in them respectively.

Xu Xinnian and a group of classmates rode horses and followed behind the carriages.

"I shouldn't have told the truth just now." Xu Xinnian felt a bit regretful.

The two great Scholars were quarrelling and belittling each other and about to fight each other. Xu Xinnian could say bluntly "In fact, Teacher and Mr. Mubai are just trying to get a poem handed down for generations."

The scene looked embarrassing.

Although the two scholars were prevented from fighting, Xu Xinnian also realized that it was wrong for him to tell the truth.

"Mother is right. I've never been able to speak well. I have to change myself." Xu Xinnian was doing the *n*th self-evaluation in his life.

He stretched his hand into his robes, and touched the warm jade pendant. Xu Xinnian looked away happily, but as he was feeling happy for himself, a galloping figure appeared in his sight.

After a while, the outline of the figure came into view. It was his father, Xu Pingzhi.

Xu Xinnian was stunned for a while, and with a tap on his horse's sides, he passed the carriages to meet his father.

"Father, Why are you here?" After finishing speaking, Xu Xinnian's heart sank. His father's expression made him realize that the matter at hand was bad, even if he didn't know anything about it.

Xu Pingzhi told Xu Xinnian about the matter as quickly as possible.

Assistant Minister Zhou's son molested his younger sister in the street and nearly killed the other sister by riding his horse. Brother and Lingyin were taken to the Ministry of Law.

"Nian'er, your elder brother's life depends on you."

"Father, don't worry." Many thoughts flashed through Xu Xinnian's head, and soon he came up with an idea. He turned his horse's head, forced his carriage to a stop, and said loudly, "Teacher, Mr. Mubai, Cijiu has something to request before he leaves."

The curtain was lifted and Zhang Shen and Li Mubai poked their heads out, "What's the matter?"

"My brother is in trouble. I ask the teacher and Mr. Mubai to help." Xu Xinnian repeated what his father told him.

Zhang Shen stared at him, and said in a deep voice, "Is he the genius who wrote 'On the road ahead, surely will be friends dear and true; Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you'?"

His voice was serious as if the matter was important.

"Exactly!" Xu Xinnian nodded.

Just as Zhang Shen was about to speak, Li Mubai in the carriage next to him cut off his words. "Cijiu, Leave your elder brother's affairs to me, You and your teacher could go back to the academy first."

"Hmph!" Zhang Shen snorted coldly, "Why should you, an outsider, poke your nose into this matter? I'll take care of my student's affairs."

Xu Pingzhi was overjoyed, He didn't expect his son's reputation to be so great.

"Teacher, Mr. Mubai, My brother has been taken to the Ministry of Law. Please go quickly lest things change." Xu Xinnian urged.

Don't bicker at this time.