

Nightwatcher

26 The Virtuous

Li Mubai suddenly waved his hand, as the driver on the cart was picked up by a gust of wind, to land safely at the side of the road.

Scholar Li pulled on the horse's reins, and took control himself, calmly saying, "This horse is a Thousand-li riding horse, in one day he can run a thousand li."

A shocking scene happened, the ordinary brown horse pulling the cart, at this moment, suddenly gave an energetic neigh.

Underneath its skin, muscles started bulging, its body started growing, and in the blink of an eye, it grew to almost twice the size of a regular pack horse.

Li Mubai's cart was left in the dust.

Zhang Shen hmped, "You get down too."

He left the cart driver also at the side of the road, and took his place for himself, pulling at the reigns, stating solemnly, "This horse is big and strong, not only is it a Thousand-Li Steed, but it also has six legs."

A similar change happened, as this black horse underwent the same transformation as before, its body growing, muscles bulging. What was different though, was that its sides split open, and new bones grew, and then ligaments, and then flesh... and out of thin air, two more legs had formed.

The black horse galloped like flight with its six legs, kicking up a cloud of dust, quickly catching up to Li Mubai.

"Old Scoundrel, you have no shame! Where is there a six-legged horse?" Li Mubai was furious.

"I say, therefore there is."

"Hah, good, then my horse has eight legs!"

"Hmph, you shameless old bastard want to fight with me for a disciple, huh? This horse cart of mine is as light as paper, and can fly with the wind!"

A gust of wind rushed by, and Zhang Shen's carriage lightly floated up, just like paper, and floated away on the gales.

Li Mubai did not want to be outdone, shouting “My horse cart can ride on clouds!”

A cloud appeared from the ground, surrounding the cart wheels, pushing the horse and carriage up into the sky.

Xu Pingzhi looked at this scene, utterly speechless. Only after the carts had disappeared over the horizon, did he swallow uncomfortably, “The confucianists are really cool eh.”

Xu Xinnian looked to the sky, desire in his heart, muttering “This isn’t showing off, this is the Confucianist fifth rank: Virtuous!”

They also had another name, given as such by the Jianzheng after he had had much to drink: Confucianists using words to mess with laws!

...

Jail, in the Ministry of Law.

Xu Qi’an, shackled, sat cross-legged on a tattered straw mat, back against the icy cold cell wall.

Smelling the cold, damp air, which carried a slight smell of rot, it was almost as if he was back in that cell in the constabulary, in the tax silver case.

According to the cases that he had read previously, cases of abuse and rape within the constabularies of the capital were too numerous to count. These shitty things, pretty much never make it into the old Emperor’s ears, being suppressed by the officials within.

After all, the words *to report to the son of heaven* carried a weight as heavy as Mount Tai, and wasn’t it not from here that they originated?

But this was the period of official evaluation, do you not fear your political enemies using this as an avenue to attack... Xu Qi’an laughed, “Finish me off at greatest haste, then use the lives of my whole family to force Uncle to keep quiet about this shame, does this not solve the issue?”

“I was wrong. Even though the middle class lived a comfortable life, but if they ever raised the ire once of someone higher up, then not after a thousand calamities will they be satisfied.

“If I wanted to live a proper life, then I’d need power and influence.”

Crash... the iron door at the end of the corridor opened, and footsteps approached. Not much time later, a jailor accompanied by two sword-wearing armoured soldiers came to his cell.

“Time for your last meal.” the jailor sneered.

After opening the door, he did not go in, rather standing back, shouting “Bring him out.”

The two armoured soldiers lay their hands on sword-hilts, expressions cautious.

Even if he was wearing shackles on hands and feet, Xu Qi'an was nonetheless a martial artist at the peak of Refining Body, and if he were to fight like a cornered animal, then they all would be in danger.

“You better behave yourself, and co-operate with us here. I don't think you want us to cut the tendons in your hands and feet before carrying you out, no?”

Xu Qi'an was silent for a moment, before rising.

...

Minister Sun of the Ministry of Law was sitting in front of the case table, sorting out an assignment. Memos and dossiers were piled up in mountains.

Suddenly, he seemed to feel something, and looked over at the window.

Soon after, two black shadows appeared, coming closer and closer, their shapes slowly getting more distinct. It was two horse-drawn carts, one riding the wind, the other supported by clouds.

The two carts were side by side, as if fighting to be first to arrive, and landed simultaneously in the courtyard of the Ministry constabulary.

The second that those strong mighty horses landed, they collapsed to the ground, energy expended, as if their life force had been sucked dry. After twitching slightly, the last vestiges of life left them.

The assistants and guards in the constabulary quickly surrounded them.

The crimson-robed Minister Sun approached, brow furrowed. He had a square, straight face, and his expression brought him an aura of strictness.

“Brother Chunjing, Brother Jinyan, for what have you two come to my Ministry of Law?”

Minister Sun was still courteous. Even though the Imperial Academy and the Cloud Deer Academy had been fighting for a long time now, but the coming of the two great scholars was still sufficient to make him mind his actions.

Zhang Shen clasped his fists in greeting, saying solemnly, "Today, the Ministry of Law apprehended one of my students, called Xu Qi'an. May Minister Sun please release him."

We've apprehended a student of the Cloud Deer Academy?

These old things in the academy are most protective of their own... Minister Sun replied "The Ministry of Law oversees the rights of sanction and incarceration, we would not arrest anyone without good reason. Please may my good sirs elaborate."

He did not agree straight away; the Imperial Academy had beaten down the Cloud Deer academy for many years now, as the former was ordained by the crown and its officials. Thus, naturally the Cloud Deer Academy could not fight against the Imperial Academy, as if the crown doesn't employ your people, what are you going to do about it?

However this was not to say that the Cloud Deer Academy were powerless people who could be pushed around; the Cloud Deer academy controlled the Confucian cultivation path, and was the holy site of all students under heaven.

The teachers of the academy protecting their own students was natural, and with their name and recognition, if the person in question had not committed any serious crime, the Ministry of Law would rarely go against their request.

Before the two great scholars could reply, a few runners rushed into the courtyard in a panic, shouting "Minister Sir, there's a group of Sitianjian white-cloaks outside, coming into the ministry, we couldn't stop them..."

Minister Sun and all the officials there looked to the clamour, and saw a group of Sitianjian disciples, with their white cloaks a-flowing, forcing their way through the main door of the Ministry.

At their head was a man, a picture of a crucible embroidered on his chest, with thick eyebrows, a tall nose, and bags under his eyes that seemed as if they never went away.

The fourth disciple of the Sitianjian's grandmaster, Song Qing.

Their fierce arrival caused Minister Sun's brow to furrow tightly, as he shouted, "You lot dare to force your way into the Ministry of Law? You have already broken the law, why are you not leaving this instant?"

Song Qing stopped, making a greeting, saying lightly "Minister Sir, we have come to the Ministry of Law to ask for a person."

Hearing this, Minister Sun's heart skipped a beat, and a thought vaguely formed in his head. He replied solemnly "Who?"

"Xu Qi'an. He was arrested just today by the Ministry for no reason."

Xu Qi'an again, which holy person is he, that he could bring both the Cloud Deer Academy's great scholars, and the Sitianjian's white-cloaks at the same time?

In the Great Feng, nobody wanted to disrespect the Jianzheng. Even the self-proclaimed orthodox Confucianist Cloud Deer Academy, when mocked by the alcohol-loving Jiangzheng as using words to mess with laws, could only turn the other cheek, and not attempt to use their command of words to overcome him.

"What's going on? Who's Xu Qi'an? How have I never heard of this person?"

"You must be very ignorant, have you not heard of the tax silver case? The person who solved the case was exactly this Xu Qi'an."

"But he's just a martial artist, how could he form relationships with the Confucianists and the Sitianjian?"

"Strange, what did our Ministry arrest him for?"

The onlooking officials muttered amongst themselves.

Minister Sun waved his hand, summoning one of the officials, asking "Did the Ministry of Law arrest a person called Xu Qi'an today?"

That official replied in a low voice, before hurriedly running off. Very soon, he came back holding a stack of documents.

"Minister Sir, there was no Xu Qi'an in the arrest warrant record."

No record? Minister Sun's face darkened.

"Who carried out the arrest?"

"That, this official does know..." the official turned around, looking at the crowd, and saw a blue-robed person, "It was Huang Langzhong."

Several gazes moved onto him.

That azure-wearing young man, having just returned to the Ministry, having only had time to drink a cup of tea, and having not had time to report to the high minister, felt his blood run cold.

27. Bring him away

Minister Sun coldly glanced to the side.

Petty Minister Huang, feeling as if he was in an ice cellar, walked over in a panic with his head bowing down.

"Milord, the incident was sudden, and this small official didn't have the time to obtain the documents for arrest. The main reason is that the suspect is a martial artist and the nephew of the Imperial Guard Xu Pingzhi. He's very much able to abscond in fear of crime." Huang thought, *Even if Minister Sun's mouth is just six feet away, I could still fling the pot on someone else in 0.01 seconds.*^[^1]

"Young Master Zhou sent his subordinate to submit a lawsuit saying that a thief beat him on the street, and said that he would let blood splatter five steps...

"Due to it being an emergency, This small official decided to arrest the suspect first, so that he wouldn't abscond in fear of crime."

With the Sitianjian white cloaks and Cloud Deer Academy Great Scholars present, He didn't dare to lie and didn't have any need to lie.

Fighting in the street was a crime that resulted in the leader of both sides of the fight being paddled using big boards at least fifty times.

Except for not acquiring the documents for arrest, everything else was done according to the rules. In the Ministry of Law, there were many examples of getting the documents for arrest after the fact.

Sitianjian's white cloaks frowned.

Li Mubai and Zhang Shen looked at each other, after which the former took a step forward and said in a deep voice, "The sage said: *A gentleman should be honest and sincere.*"

"Bump-bump", "Bump-bump", "Bump-bump"

Petty Minister Huang felt his heart beating violently, and blood rushed into his face. He felt ashamed of himself for lying.

He hated his behaviour of lying, and his spirit violently protested his despicable behaviour.

His mouth moved out of his control, and he spoke uncontrollably, "Young Master Zhou wants to kill Xu Qi'an and have him die in the prison of the Ministry of Law to vent his hatred. I, I... want to sell Young Master Zhou a favour."

Comfortable. Petty Minister Huang sat down on the ground, with sweat dripping off his forehead.

There was an uproar, and more than a dozen officials of the Ministry of Law were looking at Huang, some with disdain, some with contempt, some gloating at him and some shaking their heads and sighing at him.

"Despicable and shameless, I'll write a report to impeach you tomorrow!" The Ministry of Law's Censor was roused to anger.

Fifth-rank... Minister Sun remained calm and glanced at Petty Minister Huang, who was pale and dull-eyed, and ordered the officials under him, "Pass on my word, Let the suspect go!"

...

Amidst the clattering of shackles, Xu Qi'an was brought to the torture room. Young Master Zhou changed into an indigo robe, which was thick but not bad-looking.

He sat there loose and carefree, with a foot on the chair. The ear that was crushed by Xu Qi'an was wrapped in white muslin.

The thin old man in a blue coat with golden patterns in his collar and cuffs stood beside him, staring at Xu Qi'an sharply, without hiding his murderous intent.

In addition, two guards were beside a pile of torture instruments, gloating at Xu Qi'an.

The Young Master in brocade clothes waved his hand, and a jailor took a piece of paper from his arms and threw it in front of Xu Qi'an.

"You have two choices." young master Zhou said disdainfully, "Plead guilty and be put in prison; or try all the torture instruments here, then plead guilty, and be put in prison."

Xu Qi'an glanced at it, and its content was roughly this: *Xu Qi'an, the fast bailiff of the Changle county office had an argument with Zhou Li on the street, which led to him being murderous and then resorting to martial force, which led to Zhou Li being seriously injured. Later, Bailiffs arrived quickly and fast bailiff Xu Qi'an was arrested...*

Violence in the middle of the street, The second party was the son of the Deputy of the Ministry of Households. If I put my signature on the paper, The lightest punishment for me would be being exiled. If the one surnamed Zhou tries, I could be executed in the vegetable market... He didn't leave me a way out.

Xu Qi'an withdrew his gaze and looked at the Young Master in Embroidered Clothes, "Will I be harmed if I sign this paper?"

The corner of Young Master Zhou's mouth raised as if he was toying with insects, and he said mockingly, "No, the choice I give you is: Be imprisoned first and then be punished or Be punished first and then imprisoned."

The jailers burst into laughter.

Xu Qi'an's face became gloomy.

The more he was like this, the happier Young Master Zhou became. He liked the expression people made when they had hatred against him but were helpless to put it into action.

"Tsk, tsk, Scary, Really scary." Zhou Li said with a smile "Uncle Chen, are the shackles firm? In case the thief suddenly tries to attack, What should be done?"

The thin old man smiled and said, "Don't worry, Young Master. He's just an ant, and this slave can kill such ants with a single slap."

"I'm relieved." Zhou Li got up, walked to the pile of torture instruments, and started talking, "There are twenty-four types of torture instruments here, Each of them can make people feel extreme pain without danger to their lives. They are important devices used to extract confessions through torture."

"I won't kill you. Wouldn't killing you be too convenient?"

"I heard that in the jail of the Nightwatchers, there are 108 different types of torture instruments. Those imprisoned there never come out alive."

"It's a pity that you aren't blessed enough to enjoy them. tsk, tsk, What a pity."

Xu Qi'an inevitably looked at the instruments of torture. There were chairs covered with iron nails, rusty steel needles, and dark red saws that were stained with blood all year long... There were so many types of torture instruments, all showing their cruelty and bloodiness.

Xu Qi'an's throat rolled, and his face turned pale.

According to the time, Miss Caiwei from Sitianjian should have received the notification from Constable Wang... Why hasn't she arrived yet... Is she unwilling to save me?

No, the contents of the book I'd written are really attractive to any alchemist, any of them would be experiencing discomfort like scratching their heart, waiting to read the rest.

If you don't come to save me now, Even if I survive the torture, I'll be disabled if the entire set of torture instruments is used on me... Xu Qi'an's forehead was covered in sweat.

He was a normal human being; he also could get scared.

Young Master Zhou was observing his face when talking, and he was very satisfied at this sight.

This game, similar to a cat playing with its prey, made him immerse himself into it, enjoying it very much. He continued, "I heard that you were raised by your second uncle Xu Pingzhi since you were young. You should have a good relationship with him."

"Well, I suspect this matter was planned by you and your second uncle together."

He investigated me... Xu Qi'an's forehead veins bulged.

"This... Young Master Zhou, it's not written in the confession." A jailer said.

"Idiot, just write a new version." Another jailer cursed.

"What are you waiting for? Just write it here in front of him." Young Master Zhou laughed wildly.

While laughter was erupting in the torture room, Suddenly, the door of the prison was opened and a jailer led an azure-robed official in.

The azure-robed official glanced around and saw that Xu Qi'an was unscathed without any blood, and was relieved.

"Bring him away."

Finally, finally, someone came... Xu Qi'an was relieved.

Several jailers in the torture room subconsciously looked at Young Master Zhou.

"Milord, We are interrogating a prisoner." Young Master Zhou looked away from the azure robe, that symbolized fifth-ranked officials, and stared at the official's face with a displeased expression.

With a strange smile, the azure-robed official said, "This is the Ministry of Law, not the Ministry of Households. Young Master Zhou could go back to the Ministry of Households to interrogate people — if the Ministry of Households also has authority over prisons."

After he finished, he shouted, "Bastards, Didn't you listen to me? Bring him away."

[^1]: Fling the pot (chinese idiom): push blame to someone else. Similarly, carrying the pot: taking the blame.

28. Kill Me Then

“Not so quickly!” Master Zhou shouted at the jailors to stop, staring angrily at the blue-robed official, “This man assaulted me in the street, and wanted to kill me! I’m the victim.”

He half-closed his eyes, and with a tone of voice as if saying something significant, “This Sir, do not interfere in other people’s affairs”

Opposite him was a fifth rank official, nowhere near sufficient to be compared to his father, like mud to clouds. But after all he was an official of the Ministry of Law, and had no relation to the Ministry of Revenue.

Master Zhou also couldn’t be too stubborn; all he wanted to imply, was that to disrespect an assistant high minister’s son was a very unwise decision.

In Officialdom, making unnecessary enemies was something particularly avoided.

But he did not expect this official to show absolutely no sign of fear or hesitation. Rather, he sneered, “Master Zhou, these words are better heard by Minister Sun.”

Young master Zhou furrowed his brow, and looked at his old attendant, as this Uncle Chen said quietly “Minister Sun knows the master well...”

What was left unsaid, was that if all goes well, he would not ask too many questions. If the opposite happened, then there would be a problem.

Master Zhou, unwilling for this nearly cooked duck to just up and fly away in front of his eyes, closely followed. As long as there were no big problems, he would immediately capture Xu Qi'an again, and immediately torture him to death.

Walking out of the prison in the Ministry, and seeing the bright sun shining down, Xu Qi'an squinted, slowly getting used to the abrupt change in light.

He followed that blue-robed official into the great courtyard of the Ministry. In the yard, were many people. There were officials, wearing all sorts of colours; over a dozen white-wearing young people; two horse-drawn carts and their dead horses; and two thin and graceful old scholars, in Confucian dress.

Master Zhou, also seeing this sight, was lost for a moment, not sure what had been going on.

He heard the clanging of shackles stop, as that bastard Xu Qi'an stopped, turned his head, and enunciated one word at a time:

"You should be glad you did not use torture; let me introduce myself again: I am a new disciple of the Sitianjian."

The old man's face turned.

Master Zhou in an instant lost composure.

This can't be. He can't be a disciple of the Sitianjian.

But he saw the courtyard full of white-cloaks, and so Master Zhou and Uncle Chen remained silent.

Xu Qi'an paid them no mind, as he stepped forward, looking over the white-cloaks, being surprised to find Caiwei absent.

Where was that beautiful girl with the oval egg-shaped face and that pair of As?

Constable Wang had indeed delivered the blue cover book, but Caiwei isn't here... did the Sitianjian's disciples look at the book's contents, and so decided to come and save me?

Or Caiwei had important business that she couldn't spare time from, and so asked her fellow disciples to come?

Xu Qi'an breathed a deep breath, and in the clanging of chains, said "Xu Qi'an greets his fellow brothers."

Brothers? Song Qing did a double-take, looking carefully at Xu Qi'an, "You wrote the book?"

His expression doesn't look kind... Xu Qi'an nodded, "This isn't a place to talk. After we leave the Ministry of Law, whatever my Brothers want to ask, Ningyan will answer all that he knows, and in as much detail as he can."

Seeing Xu Qi'an talking to the white-cloaks, Master Zhou's expression was wooden. He stiffly moved away his gaze, still with a last vestige of denial in his heart, quickly walked towards Minister Sun.

"Mr Sun, the people from the Sitianjian..."

Minister Sun gave him a look, "They came to ask for him."

Master Zhou's body swayed.

The thin old man's breaths suddenly became sharp.

He really is a disciple of the Sitianjian!? This can't be the case, and if he really was a disciple of the Jianzheng, then the tax silver case would simply have never engulfed the Xu family.

The tax silver case!

The old man thought of one possibility, that he was taken in as a disciple after the tax silver case.

Indeed, he did pry open the secrets behind the case, refine the fake silver. Seeing a prodigy in alchemy like him without a teacher, the Jianzheng naturally would have taken interest. Him making an exception to take him as a disciple was not impossible, and was even rather probable.

Furthermore, if he wasn't the Jianzheng's disciple, why would there be this group of white-cloaks gathered here.

At this time, the old man noticed the two silent great scholars, and their strange, dead horses. He looked at them closely, and suddenly shuddered, recognising them as two great scholars from the Cloud Deer Academy.

He gulped, "Minister Sir, these two great scholars...."

"They also came for him." Sun replied, expressionless.

Master Zhou's face stiffened even more, turning his head slowly to look at old Uncle Chen.

...

"So you are Xu Qi'an?"

Xu Qi'an turned to look, and saw that the asker was an old man, wearing a grey robes, with a beard like a mountain goat. In his mind, he asked *grandpa, who are you?*

"I am Cijiu's teacher." The other blue-robed old man said, his smile warm as he looked Xu Qi'an up and down, "*On this road, surely will there be friends dear and true; Throughout the land is there anyone who knows not you;*" was written by you?"

"This junior wrote randomly, and caused laughter for my elders," he replied, "my courtesy name is Ningyan."

Introducing one's own courtesy name to strangers was one of the most basic pleasantries, since calling someone directly by their birth name was a taboo. If you do

not introduce your courtesy name, you imply that you do not want to interact with that person.

The blue robed old man's smile grew wider.

"We should probably be leaving the ministry now." Song Qing could not resist hurrying them.

Immediately, a jailor came forward, and undid Xu Qi'an's shackles.

"Sure!" Xu Qi'an nodded.

The faces of the Sitianjian disciples broke into smile, as their goal was accomplished, their person freed, and they were unimaginably excited for the coming discussions.

Neither Li Mubai nor Zhang Shen wanted to stay any longer, because what faced them was a fierce and intense battle between each other.

"Whew!" Seeing Xu Qi'an leaving with the group, Master Zhou let out a huge sigh of relief, a feeling of fear and apprehension welling up in his heart, that he did not want to admit to.

"Wait!" Xu Qi'an suddenly stopped.

The Sitianjian disciples and the two great scholars all looked at him.

"I still have a thing to do," Xu Qi'an clasped his fists together, before turning and walking towards Master Zhou. Passing the jailor, he snatched the wooden plank shackles from him.

"What- what are you doing?" Master Zhou quickly retreated, startled. "Xu Qi'an, my father is Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Revenue, you dare to touch me? You dare to touch me in the Ministry of Law? Mr Sun, Minister Sun, arrest this person this once... Uncle Chen, save me—"

Crack!

Xu Qi'an swung the wooden shackles, and brought them down heavily on Zhou Li's head. Shards of wood flew.

Master Zhou's eyes rolled up, and he toppled over backwards, crimson red blood trickling down from beneath his hair.

Emotionless, Xu Qi'an looked at old Uncle Chen, "Kill me then."

The whole courtyard was silent!

“Kill me then. In front of my brothers, in front of the Sirs of the Ministry of Law, in front of the two great scholars, slap me to death like the ant I am.”

The anger that had rushed to his face like a surging tide faded as quickly as it came. The thin old man stood there, stiff, not daring to make a single move.

...

I really danced around the gates of hell... it really is that only guanerdai can deal with guanerdai, the just hand of the law really only applies to conflicts between small people... Xu Qi'an basked in the early winter sun, feeling as if he had just earned a new life.

Just leaving the Ministry, he saw at the end of the street two horses galloping over at great haste: Xu Erlang and Uncle Xu.

Father and son both saw Xu Qi'an, surrounded by Sitianjian white-cloaks, and their expressions showed noticeable relief.

Why would the people from the Sitianjian be here... Uncle Xu wondered in confusion. He himself was a master at the peak of Refining Qi, he had gone through the Campaign of Mountains and Seas, and so did not, like the common people did, treat the Sitianjian's Arcanists like gods.

Xu Xinnian pulled on his reins, and immaculately examined his elder cousin, before subtly letting out a breath, and making a deep bow, “Thank you, teacher. Than you, Mr Mubai.”

Xu Qi'an merely clasped his hands together towards the Sitianjian's people, and then copied his younger cousin, and bowed to the two great scholars.

Li Mubai remarked with a sigh, “Such a great poetic talent, how could he just be a bailiff? Ningyan, do you have any interest in coming to the Cloud Deer Academy, and cultivating the Confucian path?”

We've not known each other more than 30 minutes, and you're already calling me Ningyan... Zhang Shen added, “Just perfect, you can become this old man's student.”

Xu Qi'an: “???”

29. Cijiu, Hasn't Your Elder Brother Treated You Well?

He glanced at his cousin, who was still maintaining a poker face.

"Ningyan is thankful to the two seniors for appreciating me, but I'm practicing Martial Arts. Although I've studied the classics a little in my childhood, I don't have much

knowledge about them now." Xu Qi'an didn't dare comply without figuring out the context.

"It's okay, study and research are done over one's entire life. It's never too late." Li Mubai stroked his goatee with a smile.

He really appreciates me this much... Xu Qi'an was astonished.

He thought for a while before he had an idea. He looked at his cousin again, and said smilingly, "That's right, There's no limit to knowledge, I also have a talent for studying. With the help of two seniors, I'll surely surpass Cijiu even if I am a latecomer."

When Xu Cijiu heard that, He let out a 'huh' and said proudly, "My teacher and Mr. Mubai are interested in your poems, like 'A Send-off for Yang Gong to Qingzhou, in Mianyang Pavilion'".

Immediately after, Erlang's face stiffened and he lowered his head slightly, without daring to look at his teacher and Li Mubai.

A Send-off for Yang Gong to Qingzhou, in Mianyang Pavilion... So it's like this... Xu Qi'an's plan targeted Xu Erlang's arrogance and poisonous tongue. So he knew it was true when he heard his words.

After pondering over the matter, He understood the intentions of the two great scholars.

This was indeed a shortcut to getting into the history books. You could refer to Wang Lun and know that he just fawned over Li Bai, and he easily became famous through the ages, and his name has been passed on to this day.

It could be concluded that fawning was a technical job.

Ancient Fawners: fawning on friends and going down in history.

Modern Fawners/Simps: Fawning/Simping on a woman and returning empty.

The trend of worshipping the past and belittling the present was deserved.

The path to officialdom from Cloud Deer Academy was extremely difficult. It's hard to go down in history without being a high-ranking official. In this situation, The role of Xu Qi'an poems became more prominent.

The old fellows are quite bad... Xu Qi'an's mouth twitched, a little dissatisfied that he wasn't accosted due to his handsomeness and character.

But due to his poems.

The two Great Scholars had rough and thick skin, and their smiles remained unchanged.

Xu Qi'an pondered for some time, "My thanks for the two teachers' appreciation. Ningyan is dedicated to learning, and to refuse would be impolite. I recently had an inspiration and wrote a few good poems. After this matter is over, I'll go to Cloud Deer Academy to visit the two teachers."

Two teachers... Xu Cijiu's cousin is much more thoughtful than him... Li Mubai heaved a sigh of relief, and a smile appeared on his face.

If he tried to rob a disciple from Zhang Shen, The other party had a relationship with Xu Cijiu, So he didn't have many chances of getting him as a disciple.

What Xu Qi'an said was beautiful.

"Since the case is like this, The two of us will wait for you in Yunlu Academy." After Zhang Shen finished speaking, he took a deep look at Xu Cijiu.

"Cijiu, Self Cultivation involves cultivating one's character. You've been Awakened for a year, but you haven't been able to break through to Self Cultivation... mm, go home and copy the sage's quotations 300 times, and give it to me in ten days."

It was like Xu Cijiu was struck by thunder.

"This old man can walk 30 zhang in a single step." Zhang Shen turned around, took a step forward, and disappeared immediately.

Li Mubai deliberately showed off his skills by drawing a circle around his body with his toes, glancing at Xu Qi'an, and said with a deep voice, "Within three inches of this old man, It's not this place, It's the city gate."

After saying that, his figure suddenly disappeared.

Xu Qi'an's eyes widened!

"Cijiu, what realm are these two Great Scholars in?"

As Xu Xinnian was still in despair due to having to write the sage's quotation 300 times, Xu Ershu said, "According to Nian'er, It's the fifth level of Confucianism, Virtuous."

He enthusiastically shared the scene he saw outside the city with his nephew.

As long as I brag big enough, there isn't anything impossible in the world? Xu Qi'an was shocked again.

Xu Xinnian let out a turbid breath, looking regretfully at Xu Qi'an, whose trick harmed him, and said in a bad mood, "Virtuous can manipulate people's behaviours and use words to manipulate others."

"The core ability of this realm is to have a preliminary grasp of the true meaning of the ability to make laws follow words, and tamper with the laws of some objects to a certain extent. Therefore, It's also called One Word Disrupting the Law."

"Of course, the methods of the two Great Scholars couldn't be achieved by ordinary Virtuous."

The two martial artists were fascinated by what they heard, and Second Uncle Xu remarked regretfully, "Every system has its brand of magic but we martial artists can only be brave and fierce."

So they're called vulgar... The proud Confucian Scholar Xu Xinnian considered that the two vulgar people were both higher than him in seniority and had a good reason to be vulgar, so he didn't say this.

Then, He found his cousin looking at him with burning eyes.

"Erlang..."

"Ugh?"

"Big Brother has treated you well."

"Big Brother, please ask your conscience before saying this."

"Brother, I've something to ask."

"...Speak."

"In the future, When Erlang arrives at the realm of virtue, I need a promise from you."

"...Say it."

"Erlang should say: where's big brother's little bird? Oh, his big eagle is wrapped around his waist."

"You're depraved!" Xu Erlang walked away with a flick of his sleeves.

Xu Pingzhi fell into deep thought after hearing his nephew's words.

...

Xu Qi'an left for the Sitianjian while Xu Pingzhi and his son went to the Changle County Office, since Xu Ershu had asked his sister to stay in the side hall of the Changle County Office before leaving.

It was his first time to come to Stargazing Tower, the tallest building in the capital. Xu Qi'an clicked his tongue and looked at it with great interest.

"Have you ever come to the Stargazing Tower before?" Song Qing asked.

"It's my first time here."

"But you don't seem surprised to see the tower." Song Qing saw the word 'ordinary' in Xu Qi'an's eyes.

But anyone who had seen the tower for the first time had always felt that it was a majestic miracle.

Its foundation was twice the height of a normal house, its pillars were several times thicker than the Panlong Pillars in the Imperial Palace, and its bricks were taller than a person.

The manpower, material and financial resources invested into it was a third of the annual tax revenue of the Great Feng.

What the Sitianjian was most proud of was that the height of the Observatory Tower was unparalleled in the world, and it was difficult for anyone in the world to build a building taller than it.

The alchemists in Sitianjian and the Ministry of Industry jointly designed and built the tower, and it took 12 years to make this unique wonder.

It's because I'm used to seeing high-rise buildings... Xu Qi'an smiled and said "My second uncle often said that I had a calm attitude since I was young, and I couldn't change my face even if a mountain collapsed in front of me. That may be my talent."

Song Qing's eyes lit up, and he said with excitement, "Only people with such calmness are worthy of scheming with me."

Xu Qi'an looked at the other person's dark circles and felt that he might have said something wrong.

On the second floor of the Stargazing Tower, he saw Chu Caiwei, who he had met once before. She was wearing a goose-yellow skirt and was sitting at a table with a variety of food arranged on it.

Steamed lamb, steamed bear's paw, steamed deer tail, roasted duck, roasted chicken, roasted goose... Xu Qi'an's mind drifted to this meme.[^1]

"Why are you in trouble again?" Chu Caiwei glanced at the little policeman who she had met once and said hello vaguely with her puffed-up cheeks.

"You weren't in the Observation Tower earlier?" Song Qing had already told him about the events beforehand.

"I went to the Eldest Princess's Palace to get some snacks."

Xu Qi'an happened to be quite hungry, so he sat down at the table comfortably, and reached for the chicken legs.

Bang...

Chu Caiwei slapped his pig foot away with her small hands, her big almond eyes were full of vigilance. "Haven't you eaten?"

"Yeah"

"Brother Song, take him back and send him here after he has eaten."

... I seem to have seen Xu Lingyin's evolved form! Xu Qi'an's mouthful of compliments stuck in his mouth; he did not know whether to say them or not.

"Why did you fight with the one surnamed Zhou?" Chu Caiwei suddenly asked while eating.

"I took my sister shopping, and the one surnamed Zhou fell in love with her beauty."

"Is your sister pretty?"

"Not comparable to you."

"Then she must be like an immortal, not like any mortal beauty."

Xu Qi'an looked up at her, her beautiful oval face glowed with a healthy and warm colour in the sunlight shining through the air holes in the wall.

Her eyes were big and round, clear like the stars. Xu Qi'an had rarely seen such anime-like eyes.

Her appearance would be a match made in heaven in my previous life...

"The tax case is over, Do you know who lost your second uncle's tax money?" Chu Caiwei sucked her finger.

Xu Qi'an shook his head, "I'm just a small bailiff."

Chu Caiwei raised her eyes to look, and then lowered her head to take a bite of the fried roast duck with crispy skin. "The one who changed the tax money is *Qianhu*^[^2] Lu Yuzhi of the Imperial Guard, and Zheng Xin, the hall master in the Ministry of Households."

"So?" Xu Qi'an raised his eyebrows.

"I heard that Zhou Xianping, the Deputy Minister of the Household, is their backer."

"!!!"

Fuck... Xu Qi'an couldn't help but want to swear.

It seemed that a current passed his mind, and he understood many things in an instant.

So, after hearing my name, the one surnamed Zhou was determined to put me to death, because I cracked the silver tax case and ruined his father's business.

He wanted to take revenge.

No, maybe what happened today was something he had planned for a long time... Minister Zhou's mansion was in the inner city and quite far away, How did the one surnamed Zhou happen to wander near the Xu Mansion.

Unless he was wandering around the Xu mansion on purpose... The one surnamed Zhou investigated me, How couldn't he know Lingyue's appearance... Molesting a respectable woman was acting, the real purpose was to force me to make a mistake and use that excuse to kill me.

A cold snake seemed to crawl behind Xu Qi'an, and a chill rose in his heart.

[^1]: ... don't ask which meme it is

[^2]: Rank, originating in the military, lit. "thousand households"

30. Chemistry Class

The one surnamed Zhou was just an addle-brained child born with a silver spoon, how could he pretend this well?

Perhaps he wasn't pretending, being born with a silver spoon doesn't mean that they can't think, he used his privilege expertly, to raise an altercation... and removing me from the picture.

Furthermore, the side effects of doing this are very small. Even if the official evaluation is coming, how could the death of a low-level civil servant and a bailiff shake the position of a third-rank deputy minister of revenues?

But clearly Zhou would have never thought, that not only had I formed a relationship with the disciples of the Sitianjian, but had also managed to get two great scholars of the Yunlu academy to personally come out. Thinking about this, Xu Qi'an had a feeling like he was walking a tightrope.

From the day I solved that case, I had already raised the ire of the Deputy Minister of Revenues, and was pulled into this case against my will.

A good lot that does for my wishes to avoid politics and power, and live a rich businessman's life with a group of mistresses, for my wishes to live a simple, unflattering, and bland existence.

If it weren't for the case that Erlang just happened to need a poem to send off his elder, if it weren't for the fact that a few days ago I suddenly decided to write down some of my chemistry knowledge... my body could already be cold.

I wouldn't even know the true reason for my death, and would only have thought that I'd just angered a silver-spoon guanerdai.

Coincidence after coincidence, carrying me safely through this crisis... it's luck! Xu Qi'an sucked in a cold breath, and suddenly had a thought, "Miss Caiwei, you know how to see Qi?"

"Mm." Chu Caiwei swallowed down her mouthful of food, "The eighth rank of the Arcanists is called Qi-watcher. Qi watching is one of us Arcanists' most basic of skills. All the many different magicks that come later, all build on the foundation of watching qi."

As she started talking about her own cultivation path, she seemed to get into it, get excited, as she jabbered on, "However, do you know why ninth rank Arcanists aren't Qi-watchers, rather Physicians?"

Xu Qi'an shook his head, making an earnest expression, asking "It can't be that you Arcanists have a heart for saving lives and curing wounds?"

Chu Caiwei straightened her waist, making a very sincere and serious posture, as if she very much enjoyed being in the role of teacher, replying: "All things under heaven have qi. Humanity has the greatest; all the eight distresses, the seven emotions and six

desires^[^1], all have qi. When Physicians save lives and cure illnesses, they cannot avoid being involved with birth, age, illness, death, and through enough time, a pair of clear pupils will emerge, that can see through all qi.”

I just love the type of girl who says what she knows and says all she knows... Xu Qi'an asked, “Then can you see my qi?”

Chu Caiwei delicately wiped her small mouth with a handkerchief, and inspected Xu Qi'an with great intensity, a clear energy dancing around within her dark eyes, slowly accumulating at her pupils.

In that gaze, swirling with dancing light, Xu Qi'an felt his consciousness had been touched, like a thorn in his back, a deeply uncomfortable experience.

Soon after, the bright aura in Chu Caiwei's eyes faded, and she said with a calm face, “Your qi is light red, with some black interspersed.”

“What does that mean?”

“Red, represents the fact that you eat off an officials' salary, but the colour is light, meaning that you are a low-level civil servant. Black is a sign of misfortune, I suppose that you can very much relate to this.”

Xu Qi'an frowned, testing, “There are no other colours? Like, for example, any colour that symbolises that I am a son of heaven's destiny?”

“Saying those words to me is all well and good, but if this were heard by someone with intention, then that would be a crime of utmost disrespect. Apart from the emperor, no one dares call themselves a son of heaven's destiny.” Chu Caiwei was shocked; the great disrespect was all well and good, but where did this person have the backing to think that they are the son of heaven's fate?

Dragon, dragon, wipe your eyes properly, look closer again!^[^2]

She couldn't see anything... maybe her rank is not high enough, maybe my luck of a European Emperor has nothing to do with qi... Xu Qi'an's expression was calm and unfazed, but within his mind was turbulent.

Smack!

Chu Caiwei again smacked the food out of Xu Qi'an's hand, puffing out her cheeks, expressing her displeasure: “Can't you wait until I'm full? After I'm full you can eat.”

Xu Qi'an eyed the half empty plate of extravagant food, that was full just a moment ago, and silently guessed that her stomach must be like a several-months pregnant woman.

“Oh, right, what’s the situation like with the Deputy Minister of Revenues?” Xu Qi'an adjusted his posture, not looking at the food.

“The Ministry of Revenue a few days ago sought to impeach Deputy Minister Zhou, but the motion was vetoed by His Majesty.” Chu Caiwei replied, and after a pause, added on “Those two, afraid of consequences, killed themselves.”

So there’s no proof? In this day and age, if the emperor really wanted to kill someone, they wouldn’t need proof, everyone would find proof themselves... maybe it involves party politics... or the emperor has some other plan... mm, I don’t understand the goings-on at court, since of course I’ve never interacted with it, I should find an old veteran of officialdom to ask as a start...

Thus Xu Qi'an began to ponder and scheme, but Chu Caiwei had no interest for happenings at court, so she furrowed her brow, and made an obviously displeased expression.

I might have damaged her self respect as a teacher... Xu Qi'an tactfully did not continue to ask.

...

“How much silver is this?” Xu Qi’an was eating with great joy.

Chu Caiwei, having had her fill of food and wine, was calculating on her fingers for an age, and then... there was no and then.

“Mm?” Xu Qi'an raised his head.

“I gave the restaurant four taels of silver, and they gave me back one tael, three cash silver and sixty copper coins in change,” Chu Caiwei said frustratedly, “How much did I spend?”

A Chu Caiwei with a furrowed brow was very cute, making Xu Qi'an think back to how her seven year old little sister would do maths problems.

“...” Xu Qi'an hesitated, “I don’t know either.”

One tael of silver was equal to eight cash, and one cash of silver equalled a hundred copper coins. Since this was not a 10:1 ratio, the difficulty in calculations was increased greatly.

Looking at her, she probably only knew how to read, but had never learned arithmetic.

Thus Xu Qi'an was not going to become this hero.

Hearing this, the corners of Chu Caiwei's eyes lifted, and she felt as if Xu Qi'an was the same as her.

"Then how could you calculate so well when solving the case?"

"I thought for a very long time."

"Oh." Chu Caiwei looked at him, "You don't seem to be very happy eating?"

"No, the flavour is average, is all."

"What are you saying, this is from Zuixinju, one of the best restaurants in the city south."

"I've eaten better."

Chu Caiwei's eyes lit up.

Xu Qi'an continued, "When you have time, you can come to my house, I'll make delicious food for you."

...

The Lab.

A group of white-cloaks surrounded some lab equipment, watching Song Qing doing his work.

A porcelain cup, thin as an eggshell, roasted on top of a fire, steam rising in swirls. The water in the cup fully evaporated, and left glittering crystals.

Song Qing clicked his fingers, as a bright tongue of flame enveloped the crystals, slowly melting them.

"If I had this technique in my previous life, I could click my fingers to light a smoke, that would pull all the chicks." Xu Qi'an envied the many colourful abilities of the Arcanists.

The sodium chloride crystals melted, and Song Qing's expression became concentrated. In an untold number of past experiments, he had failed at the next step:

Lightning!

Song Qing unconsciously looked up at Xu Qi'an, beside him.

All of the white cloaks, including Chu Caiwei, turned their gazes in unison onto the eldest child of the Xu family.

Xu Qi'an nodded, expressionless.

He didn't even give any directions... that means that my earlier steps were all correct... Song Qing prepared himself, before clicking his fingers.

Dimly lit bolts of lightning suddenly cut across the air, gathering within the porcelain bowl.

"Hold your breath."

Suddenly, everyone watching heard Xu Qi'an's words, and without hesitation, immediately held their breaths.

In reality, even if they had directly inhaled the toxic gas, this group of people won't have issue... purely from a force of habit, Xu Qi'an had ordered them to hold their breaths.

The next moment, a sight that stunned the Sitianjian white-cloaks befell their eyes.

Within the porcelain cup formed several uneven lumps of silvery material, identical to silver. Surrounding the lumps was some remaining unreacted salt.

"I've- I've done it..."

"Brother Song, how did you do it?"

The white cloaks were shocked. Earlier, no matter what they did, they never had any luck, but this time somehow they managed to do it on the first time.

As expected, the fact that that day Miss Caiwei managed to refine the fake silver first time, was not that she had walked on dog shit luck... no, it was just because she had dog shit luck, because I was right there beside her, and this related to me... Xu Qi'an watched silently, having proved the hypothesis in his mind.

Song Qing looked at the fake silver, and up at his excited fellow disciples, his face somewhat blank and confused.

I didn't do anything differently... it was just like this earlier... thinking this, he unconsciously glanced at Xu Qi'an, and found that this small bailiff had no hint of surprise. His eyes were dark, as if he had long predicted that this would happen.

Song Qing had a thought, "Xu Ningyan, you know what's the reason?"

Chu Caiwei, who had just been deep in thought, immediately looked towards Xu Qi'an.

The latter stood with his hands behind his back, and laughed “This question shouldn’t be directed at me. An experienced Master of Alchemy, should know how to independently ponder this question.

“I think, you should be able to realise the crux of the issue yourself.”

[^1]: An important part of Buddhist and Traditional Chinese philosophy and medicine. The eight *dukkha* (distresses) are birth, age, sickness, death, parting with what we love, meeting with what we hate, unattained aims, and all ills of the five *skandhas*. The seven emotions are joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and desire. The six desires are (often sexual) desire arising from the qualities of the six senses.

[^2]: I don’t know either ... *unless*, considering the many things this book “borrows” from Lord of the Mysteries...