

# Nightwatcher

## #Chapter 31: It's Not Free; It's Equivalent Exchange –

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# 31. It's Not Free; It's Equivalent Exchange

"The crux?"

Song Qing ruminated and analysed based on the experience of previous failures and the current success.

The previous steps hadn't changed, the real change was in the final step: the lightning strike!

How was the lightning different than the previous attempts?

Some faint currents ran in his mind as Song Qing's body shook, and he said excitedly, "I understand, I understand."

"Xu Ningyan, you indeed have extraordinary talent in alchemy."

"Although you hadn't seen our previous experiments, You had already deduced it, right? You knew the real reason for our failure already."

\*No, I only know that you have been thinking big...\* Xu Qi'an smiled and didn't say anything.

"What's the crux? What did you understand, brother Song?"

"Don't keep up the suspense, Senior Brother Song. Tell me quickly. This alchemy has almost become my obsession." The alchemists in white asked anxiously.

Song Qing coughed, looked around at his juniors, and said deeply, "It's the intensity of a lightning strike."

After speaking, he looked at Xu Qi'an, looking for his validation.

Xu Qi'an nodded with a smile and said, "I call it electric voltage."

The voltage required to electrolyze sodium metal should be controlled between 6-15 volts.

Electric voltage?

Song Qing was taken aback since it was a word he hadn't heard of before. He knew of electricity, but he had never heard of electric voltage.

Instinctively, he felt that it was an important piece of knowledge, as profound as the knowledge in the blue book.

A white-cloaked alchemist took a step forward and bowed to Xu Qi'an, "Brother, can you please explain what voltage is?"

"Please teach us." The other white-cloaked alchemists cupped their hands simultaneously and said in unison.

Chu Caiwei, who was standing aside, was very envious. She liked the feeling of being a master and teaching apprentices the most. It was a pity that she was only a Master of Feng Shui and wasn't qualified to teach apprentices.

\*Electric Voltage, also known as electric pressure, or (electric) potential difference, is the difference in electric potential between two points. In a static electric field, it corresponds to the work needed per unit of charge to move a test charge between the two points. Of course, You wouldn't understand this.\* Xu Qi'an coughed, and said seriously:

"Electricity is the same as flowing water, it will flow towards the lowest point."

He raised a teacup and poured water into it, "It's okay to pour this cup on anyone, but if it's a waterfall, people will be injured due to the impact of the water or could even lose their lives. So, I call this phenomenon electric pressure ,or voltage.

He used this simple example to explain voltage.

The Sitianjian's White cloaks frowned and fell into deep thought. They couldn't understand the words of Xu Qi'an well.

Although they were alchemists and could manipulate lightning, it didn't mean that they understood the nature of electricity.

Song Qing suddenly understood something, and raised a point, "So, the reason why thunder and lightning hit trees on rainy days is that the trees are at the low point. It should be the same for people. Additionally, we'll only feel paralyzed for some time if the current is weak, but if one were to be hit by lightning, then they would die."

"The truth is that the voltage of natural thunder is so strong that it exceeds the limit that ordinary people could bear, just like a waterfall. The weak current is like a cup of water, which can be withstood by the body."

The alchemists were suddenly enlightened due to the words of Song Qing, and felt excited to have obtained a profound truth. They looked at Xu Qi'an for validation.

\*Um, is this the principle? Isn't the reason for trees being struck by lightning the conductivity of rainwater? My middle school teacher hadn't made it clear... \* Xu Qi'an wasn't sure himself, so he said smilingly, "You can understand."

"Was this also written in the alchemy tome?" A young white cloak asked with a curious face.

"Yes, I'm the only one who has learned the contents of the alchemy book. The content of the notes I'd sent to Sitianjian was just a drop in the ocean." After a pause, Xu Qi'an said deeply.

"That ancient alchemy book not only recorded knowledge, but many rare alchemy techniques."

News of rare alchemy techniques made everyone breathe heavily.

Xu Qi'an smiled, and made a promise that made the white cloaks excited, "I've decided to share the tome of alchemy with Sitianjian."

Woah!

Nearly twenty alchemists became excited over his words.

"The blue book I gave to Sitianjian was a thank-you gift for saving me. The complete knowledge for refining fake silver and the knowledge of voltage isn't free.", Xu Qi'an said.

"Of course, The paid content also includes the follow-up alchemy secrets."

"Never forget that the principle of alchemy is equivalent exchange!"

Song Qing nodded, since he agreed with Xu Ningyan's reasoning, and asked questions on behalf of his juniors.

"How much silver do you want?"

"Vulgar!" Xu Qi'an said deeply, "How could Alchemy be measured by mere silver."

\*Free is the most Expensive\*, He added silently in his mind.

...

Changle County Office, Side Hall:

Xu Lingyue held her sleeping young sister in her arms, holding a handkerchief while crying.

The bailiffs in the office were heartbroken looking at her tear-stained face. They never expected that Xu Ningyan had such a pretty younger sister.

Even Constable Wang, who frequented the Jiaofangsi was amazed by her beauty.

The atmosphere in the side hall was a melancholy, and the bailiffs looked listless.

Constable Wang poured a cup of tea and placed it in front of Xu Lingyue. The little beauty had cried for a long time, and tears had continuously flowed from her eyes. Women were indeed made up of water.

"Miss Xu, don't worry, Lord Baihu will find a way to rescue Ningyan."

The other bailiffs comforted her and scolded Young Master Zhou.

\*Elder Brother has a good relationship with his colleagues...\* Xu Lingyue was a little surprised that the angry expression of the bailiffs wasn't fake.

As if he saw her surprise, Constable Wang smiled, "Ningyan is a person worthy of being respected."

Respected? Xu Lingyue was stunned and after sobbing for a while, said softly, "Constable Wang, Can you tell me about my elder brother?"

Constable Wang was silent for a while, and subconsciously lowered his voice, "Actually, how could people like us have clean hands?"

"If you didn't attack common people, then you'd already have a good conscience. As for those wealthy businessmen, isn't it normal to seek profit from them?"

"But your elder brother couldn't do it, whether it's a commoner or a wealthy business, he never extorted or blackmailed them. A while ago, considering the catastrophe of the Xu family, I decided to take him to make a fortune." Constable Wang was a bit embarrassed when talking about this matter.

"He agreed with the matter. Later, I gave him five cash of silver but he quietly returned it to the other party."

"If you say that he's well-behaved, well, I'm sure he knows the principle that there are no fish in clear water. But to say that he's not, he's very good at dealing with matters, and has a good relationship with everyone. He's very slippery. So if something happens to him, we're all upset."

e has a good relationship with everyone and is very slippery. So, his arrest made everyone sad."

Xu Lingyue listened attentively, and the image of her elder brother in her mind became taller, brighter, and stalwart.

She admired Xu Xinnian since her childhood, because everything aside from studying was vain, because her mother had instilled in her that her second brother was the only person suited to study in the Xu family, and he will be the pillar of the family in the future. This admiration reached its peak in the autumn of this year when Xu Xinnian passed the exam.

But, during the tax fraud case, when the entire family was imprisoned, and when they were desperate and helpless, the Elder brother opened up a way out for the entire family in that desperate situation. Her attention was drawn to her elder brother and she became curious about him.

Until today, She didn't know the reliability of her big brother even if he had rescued them from prison a month ago. The feeling back then was not as deep as this time.

At the moment when her elder brother rescued her little sister, Xu Lingyue felt that the image of her elder brother in her heart was equal to her second brother's.

At the moment, hearing Constable Wang's description, the image of a high-spirited, principled person with a bottom line emerged in her heart and exceeded the status of the second brother she'd always admired.

Then, the light in the entrance changed, and Xu Pingzhi and his son finally rushed back to Changle County Office. When they saw their sister (daughter) safe and sound, Father and son were relieved.

Xu Lingyue raised her head, with tears flowing down her face, and sadly said, "Father, you have to save big brother. If big brother doesn't come back, your daughter won't have the will to live."

# 32.

Xu Pingzhi was deeply touched; he hadn't taken the role of mediator in the family for twenty years for nothing! Even if the old wife did not like his nephew, the relationship between the children were still very close.

He took the his young child from her daughter's arms, and comforted, "Ningyan has already got out, all this is over."

Xu Lingyue didn't believe him.

No matter what Uncle Xu said, his daughter still only ever half-believed him, and she looked over at her second brother.

Xu Xinnian lightly replied "A small matter."

Xu Lingyue thus believed him.

A proud and arrogant man like her second brother wouldn't lie about such important matters.

County Magistrate Zhu followed this case with great interest, and hearing the news from a deputy, immediately rushed over.

"How did you deal with Master Zhou?" Magistrate Zhu was shocked and doubtful; unless Zhou himself gave up on the matter, but he thought that this couldn't be the case.

"I asked my teacher" Xu Xinnian said.

\*So it's like this...\* Magistrate Zhu felt as if he had just had a revelation, but then thought that this didn't sound right; all the important people in court came from the Imperial Academy, and everyone knew that the Imperial Academy and Yunlu Academy never saw eye to eye.

Even if Xu Xinnian's teacher was a great scholar, the Ministry of Law's Minister Sun wouldn't so easily let a person go, he would at least fight with them a bit, pull down the face of the Yunlu Academy's scholars a bit more. He would never so easily capitulate.

"And Mr Mubai." Xu Xinnian continued, and then added "And the Sitianjian's white-cloaks."

"What!?" Magistrate Zhu did a double take, as his expression became cautious, his posture became upright, "A tiger father cannot have a dog son!"

"My Congratulations, Mr Xu, your dear son's intelligence is extraordinary, not only did he manage to get the attention of the great scholars of Yunlu Academy, but he also has relations with the Sitianjian's white-cloaks, his future is boundless. To have a son like that, you make old Zhu green with envy."

\*Xinnian knows the Sitianjian's white-cloaks?\* Xu Lingyue immediately looked towards Xu Xinnian, a strong feeling of safety welling up in her heart.

She could rely on her father, and also her brothers too.

Xu Xinnian shook his head, "I did not ask Mr Mubai to come, that was my brother's own personal connection. I also don't know any white cloaks from the Sitianjian, again big brother found them himself."

\*Since when did Xu Ningyan know the great scholar Li Mubai from Yunlu academy? Maybe it was through Xu Xinnian that he did. But how did the Sitianjian's white cloaks get to know a mere petty official?\*

County Magistrate Zhu was stunned, the word "impossible" the only thing remaining in his mind.

Xu Ningyan had been under his employment for several years at this point, and he was always quiet and unnoticeable. Though his relations with his colleagues wasn't bad, but they weren't good friends either.

He had no real skills, and only knew how to hit.

But in this span of time he suddenly became clever and slippery, became good brothers with Constable Wang, and have suddenly become the best of friends with his colleagues.

But no matter what, it wouldn't amount to getting the attention of the great scholars, getting the friendship of the Sitianjian white-cloaks.

\*If this is the case, then Xu Ningyan's status cannot be compared equally to any common person. Even I would have to be a bit more polite in the future... At tomorrow's head count, I'll try and start some conversation, and see what really is going on.\*  
Magistrate Zhu thought.

Xu Lingyue opened her Carlsan-blue eyes wide, somewhat not daring to believe.

But being as clever as she was, she immediately connected the dots - \*it was that poem? the poem that big brother wrote for second brother, that received the praise of the great scholars, thus causing them to want to come and mediate.\*

\*But, how could big brother know the deities in the Sitianjian... big brother he- he's really getting more and more mysterious.\*

...

Xu Qi'an walked with Song Qing through the corridor, the air-holes on the right-hand wall letting thin rays of sunlight stream through, bringing light to the interior.

The Stargazing Tower did not have any windows, and Xu Qi'an thought it was a shame that they could not see the city sprawled out below them.

Not much time later, they reached a secret room. Song Qing took out a key, and unlocked the door, lighting the candle inside.

Inside the secret room there were all sorts of toys and contraptions. Some were weapons, like crossbows and such, others were completely unrecognisable.

Xu Qi'an looked round at these things one by one, like he was browsing a clothing store, and suddenly saw something which gave him a fright.

“What’s this?”

It was a huge glass bottle, which was filled with clear water. In the water, floated a strange creature. It’s form was like a cat, but its body was covered in winding patterns, its stomach even had tree burls.

What was more strange, it was alive, that that tree knot like thing sticking out was like a heart, slightly rising and falling.

“This is a grand experiment,” Song Qing said solemnly, “Its original body was that of a cat, but I tried to combine it with a tree, giving it the ability to regrow lost limbs. In reality, I’ve almost succeeded - even if you chopped off its head, it would still regrow within three days. Its only weak spot was its heart.

“But I also failed, because it turned entirely into tree; it cannot move, cannot think, and can only be kept alive floating in water.”

\*...what sort of demon are you?\* Xu Qi'an’s gaze turned.

“What do you think of my idea?” Song Qing asked with a probing tone. Seeing that Xu Qi’an’s expression was off, he furrowed his brow, somewhat disappointed, “You also think there’s a problem?”

Xu Qi’an made sure that his expression did not change, shaking his head “I just think that your approach was wrong, because I also have thought about this form of alchemy, though I have given it the name cross-breeding, or hybridisation.”

\*Hybridisation...\* Song Qing chewed on this word, his eyes getting brighter and brighter.

“We can start small, cross breeding things of the same type, such as two different breeds of cat, letting them give birth to a new breed.” Xu Qi’an said.



“Giving birth to a different breed? What breed would it give birth to?” Song Qing asked eagerly.

“I don’t know, maybe it could make something new, something better, maybe it could have the opposite effect.” Xu Qi’an said, “But this is the attractiveness of alchemy, don’t you say?”

“You just said alchemy, you just said alchemy!” Song Qing immediately became incredibly excited.

“What?” Xu Qi’an’s heart sank, wondering if he had just said something wrong.

“I’ve always thought that alchemy was not limited to non-living things, rather I think that living creatures are also within the boundaries of alchemy. Thus I tried to change this cat, but teacher disagreed, saying that living things were not within the realm of alchemy. Because of this, he shut me away for ages.”

\*Mr Jianzheng did brilliantly...\* Xu Qi’an’s forced his face to not change, saying “Within or without, we must leave time to prove it.”

Thinking, he continued, “If you want to oppose Mr Jianzheng, and you don’t want to be shut away, then I have a suggestion.”

“Please say,” Song Qing had already saw Xu Qi’an as someone on the same path.

“You can start off by using plants.” Xu Qi’an said, “Plants are living things, but their nature is much more simple. In that alchemical tome, I saw a method that had the same effects as your thoughts...”

He did not continue.

“Oh, but you’ve got to say it.” Song Qing felt that heart-itching desperation, his eyes behind those swollen bags staring wide.

“Brother Song has a really fascinating collection of toys here,” Xu Qi’an reminded, “Alchemy is about equivalent exchange...”

“I get it, I can give you three presents. With your current Refining Body stage, I think these items suit you best.” Song Qing immediately understood what Xu Qi’an wanted. He did not mind the principle of making a trade of equal value.

He even rather appreciated it.

“This crossbow was made by me randomly one day, it’s stronger than regular ironware, its springiness is also very strong, but because making it is difficult, we cant mass-produce it. The bowstring is made from a combination of silk of the six-eyed poisonous

spider, from the Southern Marches; and silk from the rainbow silkworm. In an ambush, its penetrating power is such that it can even pierce a Refining Qi martial artist's body, though not one at the peak of that stage.

"Its most valuable part though, is that this crossbow has a magic formation inscribed into it. The formation will increase the strength of its bolts, threatening even skilled masters at Refining Spirit. But this can only be used thrice, and after the formation will dissipate."

Xu Qi'an piqued up interest, "This is a magic item?"

# 33. \*I stand in the strong wind\*

He had heard of Magical Tools, His second uncle had even said that cannons were essential for Great Feng's victory in the "Mountain and Sea Campaign".

Half of the power of the cannons was from gunpowder, while the other half could be attributed to the effect of formations.

Magical Tools were the unique weapons of the Great Feng, and also the source of confidence for Feng to claim itself as the orthodox power in the world.

At this moment, Xu Qi'an realized that Magical Tools and the Sitanjian were inextricably linked.

Song Qing hesitated for a moment, and answered Xu Qi'an's question to exchange knowledge, "It's not a secret. Don't you know what a fourth-rank Arcanist is called?"

\*I don't even know the name of the sixth rank of my Martial System...\* Xu Qi'an shook his head.

"Master of Formations!", Song Qing said, "The objects refined by Masters of Alchemy are all ordinary objects. The Master of Formation engraves formations in the ordinary thing, which elevates it to a Magical Tool."

Based on his understanding of the Arcanist System and the information disclosed by Chu Caiwei not long ago, Xu Qi'an deduced a lot at once.

\*The ninth rank Physician is laying the foundation for the eighth rank Qi Watcher, and the seventh rank Master of Feng Shui is also laying the foundation for a later rank. But Master of Feng Shui doesn't have any connection to its next level, the sixth rank Master of Alchemy... but it seems that Masters of Alchemy and Masters of Formations complement each other well.\*

\*Masters of Alchemy forge powerful weapons and Masters of Formations process them into Magical Tools... There's something in the Arcanist System.\*

\*No wonder Mr Jianzheng had such a lofty status in Great Feng.\*

\*I must hold Chu Caiwei firmly in my hands. I don't have any special purpose for it. I just want to gain sincere love in this cold society.\*

Xu Qi'an made up his mind.

"The second item is the Heart Protection Mirror. It's also a Magical Tool. Its material is very ordinary, but its formation in it is very valuable. It can resist the full strength of a master surpassing Refining Spirit, A Copper Skin and Iron Bone realm martial artist once.

\*Is the Copper Skin and Iron Bone realm the sixth rank of the Martial Artist system?\*

Xu Qi'an finally knew what the Sixth rank of his system was called.

"Finally, this is Bone Erosion Burning Heart. If you smear it into an arrow, It can kill a master in the realm of Refining Spirit. It's ineffective on an Iron Bone realm expert since an arrow can't penetrate their skin at all.

Xu Qi'an nodded, "I like all three of these items."

After a pause, He continued, "That kind of alchemy is called grafting!"

Relying on his memories, Xu Qi'an told Song Qing about grafting in a not-too-detailed manner. He didn't elaborate on the process, but he explained the benefits of the method quite well. He explained that a plant's resistance to cold, droughts, diseases and pests could be improved through grafting. And that the taste of fruits could be improved.

The process was similar to the experiments trying to get rich written in his diary. He had rich theoretical knowledge but his practical ability was subpar at best.

But it didn't matter. He was not the one doing the experiments anyway.

If Song Qing failed, it would be due to his weakness. If he succeeded, The credit would go to Xu Qi'an.

After listening to him, Song Qing jumped off and writhed in excitement, wishing that spring would come soon so he could perform this great alchemy.

"Divine Book, what a Divine Book! I didn't know there was such an ancient alchemy book in the world." Song Qing shouted with excitement.

...

"Thump thump thump..."

Xu Qi'an walked briskly on the steps of the Star Observation Tower, while carrying three Magical Tools, which couldn't be measured by money.

“I could use one of these artefacts to exchange for opening the Heaven's Gate on the black market... But all these items are very useful. I'm not willing to give any of them up... Sure enough, getting things for free is the eternal source of happiness for human beings. ... Tomorrow, to the Goulan.”

He didn't ask Sitianjian for a single copper coin, but if the items he got were exchanged for silver, His aunt would give in and bow her head and never dare to mock him again.

\*I can exchange all of them for bank notes, and then slap my aunt's face fiercely...\*  
Thinking of this, Xu Qi'an became even happier.

“\*I stand in the strong wind\*

\*And wanna\*

\*Completely get rid of mental anguish.\*

\*Watching the clouds float across the blue sky.\*

\*The sword in my hand is looking for\*

\*The hero of the Celestial Empire...\*\*”

Seeing that the road was clear, he began singing this song from his previous life with passion.

In a turn, he encountered a group of strangers, and they both looked at each other.

\*... It's So Awkward!\* Xu Qi'an's singing stopped abruptly, and he stepped aside expressionlessly.

There were three people in the group. The one in the middle was wearing a dark azure robe, had frosty temples, elegant temperament, handsome facial features, and eyes like a deep black pool where wind and frost eroded by the years had accumulated. He was the kind of charming uncle who could make young women fascinated.

On his left, there was a taciturn young man, looking forward meticulously.

On his right, there was a young man with a frivolous smile on his face and devilish eyes exuding a femininity that made Xu Qi'an feel uncomfortable.

However, In terms of appearance, the feminine young man was a rare handsome man comparable to his second brother, out of all the ones he'd seen.

When the three of them passed Xu Qi'an, the feminine young man slanted his eyes and squinted at him.

At that moment, Xu Qi'an felt that something terrible was watching him, and he couldn't help but hold his breath while his heartbeat intensified.

The three of them continued to move up the steps, and Xu Qi'an was relieved when he saw them disappear after passing the turn.

\*That guy seemed very disdainful and hostile, Were the lyrics too wild?\*

\*Well, there are some things to pay attention to in the future. I shouldn't talk nonsense, especially in public.\*

Nonsense like:

\*I want the sky to not cover my eyes!\*

\*I want this land to not bury my heart!\*

\*I want all sentient beings to be able to understand my intentions!\*

\*I want all those Buddhas to disappear from my life!!\*

Also like:

\*Supported by comrades ready to die,\*

\*Dare I aim to be the new Sun in the sky?\*

...

On the seventh floor, Song Qing, who had just received a report from his junior brother, was waiting for three people being led by the indigo-robed person at the stairs.

Chu Caiwei gnawed at a piece of sugar cane and stood casually by the wall.

The three came to the seventh floor, and Song Qing bowed to the leader, "Duke Wei."

The middle-aged man with slightly frosted temples nodded slightly.

"Duke Wei, the Teacher drank too much and is taking a nap. Please wait for a bit."

The taciturn young man remained expressionless while the feminine young man frowned.

The elegant middle-aged man didn't care much, and entered the tea room with Song Qing, casually saying, "When I went upstairs, I ran into an interesting young man. It seems that he isn't a disciple of Sitianjian."

Just as Chu Caiwei was about to speak, Song Qing signalled her to stop with his eyes and said smilingly, "He's just an insignificant little person. But he's quite interesting."

The Nightwatchers had a reputation for their viciousness, and were like tigers and wolves in the eyes of both civil and military officials. They didn't act with reason.

Song Qing wondered if Qi'an had inadvertently offended this powerful eunuch.

"Interesting?", The elegant middle-aged man smiled gently, "How so?"

Song Qing hesitated for a moment, then commented, "He's a genius, a genius in alchemy. If he hadn't taken the wrong cultivation path and entered Sitianjian, his name would have been recorded in the History books."

He neither said anything against his will, but at the same time revealed the hint that Sitianjian valued Xu Qi'an.

The feminine young man sneered.

The elegant middle-aged man smiled and nodded slightly.

...

Xu Mansion, Inner Courtyard

Auntie had a few maids cut clothes, draw thread, stuff cotton, and prepare winter clothes for the family.

The weather was getting colder, and auntie planned to buy winter clothes for her children and husband.

Lü'e finished the last stitch, her delicate silver teeth biting the thread. Looking at the delicately embroidered lotus flowers with satisfaction, thinking that Miss Lingyin would look good wearing them.

"Madam, I went to see Dalang yesterday and found that he didn't have winter clothes, and was wearing autumn clothes," Lü'e said softly.

Aunt glanced at the maid next to her, and said coldly, "What did you want to say?"

Lü'e lowered her head and whispered, "Maybe we should buy some clothes for Dalang."

"Don't even think about it!" Auntie snorted, "That little bastard makes me annoyed at every opportunity. Me, making clothes for him? No way I would do that."

The maids worked in silence, pretending they didn't hear her.

"He comes to eat at home every day, and doesn't even subsidize the family."

"Isn't Dalang's salary given to the mansion?" Lü'e muttered.

"And his appetite itself is too much" Auntie rolled her eyes vigorously, trying to show the whites in her eyes.

She thought that she could improve her relationship with her unlucky nephew, now that he had saved their entire family. But the rascal took every opportunity to poke her and make things difficult for her.

\*Wolves travel thousands of miles to eat meat, Dogs travel thousands of miles to eat shit.\* The old saying was true.

The butler hurried over, stopped outside the courtyard, and shouted, "Madam, Master is back."

# 34. Xu Lingyue: This Life I Must Properly Take Care of Big Brother

Auntie was right in the middle of crazily dissing her nephew, when she heard the family butler shouting, and raised her voice to reply "If they're back they're back, do you need me to go and receive them?"

The butler stomped his foot in agitation, "Madam, young Miss Lingyin has traces of blood on her body, Miss Lingyue seems to have just cried, both the Master and Erlang's faces do not look good, and, Dalang hasn't come back, something must've happened to him."

A "ping pong" sound echoed in the room, as if something was knocked over. After, came the voice of the maidservants, who tentatively asked "Madam..."

"Go away!" Auntie lifted her skirt, and ran out of the room, running towards the front hall with a worried face.

Auntie rushed into the room with great vigour, her eyes filled with tears, and seeing her husband with a serious face, holding their tiny daughter, the latter unconscious, she nearly cried out.

"Don't worry, she's just asleep." Xu Pingzhi said first, stabilising her emotions, and handing over their young daughter, "Take her to her room first."

Auntie tightly held the little girl, and then looked her elder daughter up and down. Seeing that she was unhurt, she let out a sigh of relief, but didn't leave, rather asking with a sob "What happened? You just went out to the market, how could you end up in this state."

Xu Lingyue immediately started crying.

Xu Pingzhi let out a long breath, and recounted through what had happened to his wife.

Hearing that Xu Lingyue was harassed by that evil young man, her willow-like eyebrows narrowed together, hardly suppressing her anger. Hearing that Xu Lingyin was nearly trampled under his horse, her face was deathly white, and she tightly held the little girl, scared.

When she heard that it was Xu Qi'an who saved the two daughters, and was hurt because of it, she was stunned.

Hearing that her nephew was taken to the Ministry of Law, she tightly grabbed her husband's hand, despair written on her face, "Ningyan he... he..."

"It's alright, he's already out. For now, it's all over." Xu Pingzhi gripped his wife's hand, comforting her. "Look, if it weren't for Ningyan, then Lingyue and Lingyin would have both been in danger. Even if his attitude is stubborn, but he's never bad to the family. Could any ordinary person protect our two little girls?"

"You never see eye to eye with him, and always thought that him practicing martial arts cost too much money. You think that since you raised him up, what's a few scoldings worth, thinking that he never speaks with respect, and is always fighting with you."

"But have you ever thought, that after living off someone else for twenty years, is really that easy? That he isn't sensitive at heart?"

"A woman's eyes are always shallow, they like to hear nice words, but don't see actions. When Lingyue was being bullied, he rushed in and risked his life. It's only fortunate that this time it was only a scare. If Ningyan really never came back, will you really not be heartbroken?"

Hearing this, Xu Lingyue's tears started dropping to the ground like a waterfall, crying silently. She thought that in this life, she must properly take care of her big brother.

"I..." Auntie sniffed, looking down.

Xu Xinnian looked at his always strong-willed mother. Today her eyes were full of lingering fear and regret, and he suddenly realised something.



She had always said “gold-eating monster” this and “Unlucky thing” that to call his older cousin, but in reality his mother really did have Xu Qi’an in her heart.

After all, she had raised him for nearly twenty years, and naturally some bond must’ve formed.

Xu Pingzhi gave his son a look, and with a humph, said “If instead you were the son accompanying them, perhaps you would’ve been kidnapped and molested along with the others.”

Xu Xinnian: “???”

...

After giving her younger daughter to a maid, and after comforting her older one, Auntie returned with a heavy heart.

She glanced at the maidservants, all busy making winter clothes, and suddenly said “Lü’e, make one less set for the Husband and Erlang. When Dalang comes home, get his measurements.”

Lü’e raised her head in disbelief, asking “Madam has changed her mind?”

Auntie snorted, “Am I such a shallow aunt in your eyes?”

\*...Yes...\* the whole room of maids thought at the same time.

...

Xu Qi’an left the Stargazing Tower, and hired a horse-drawn cab, finally returning home after two hours.

Having a hot bath, he saw that the injuries on his waist have nearly healed.

He spread on some healing salve, and returned to his room, grinding ink, and writing a few hundred characters of chemistry knowledge. Then, according to habit, he began to write his diary again.

\*16th November. This day is one to remember, because I have finally decided to give up the goal of living an ordinary, uninteresting life as a rich businessman with several servants. I need power, I need influence. For this, I had these thoughts:\*

\*First, change my cultivation path, and study Confucianism. As long as I can brown nose the two great scholars enough, they will definitely support me all they can. It would be much better than flailing around with the martial path.\*

\*Aye, others transmigrating all use poetry to show off, but I am using poetry do trade. Perhaps this is the difference between a European Emperor and the masses.\*

\*Two, try harder, and get Miss Caiwei from the Sitianjian into bed. If I have the support of the Sitianjian Jianzheng, then even if I don't try afterwards, I can still live a comfortable life.\*

\*Three, sell one of the magic items the Sitianjian gave me, and exchange it for an opportunity to open heaven's gate.\*

\*The problem with the first idea is that it would remind me of the trauma of literature class in third grade, and I'm not necessarily an intellectual. I'm nearly twenty, changing cultivation paths now may be too late.\*

\*The problem with the second idea is that I may have to say goodbye to a life of three wives and four mistresses, say goodbye to listening to music at the Goulan, the sacrifice here is quite large.\*

\*The problem with the third idea is that even at Refining Qi, I wouldn't be able to fight against the Deputy Minister of Revenues. Furthermore, without someone at my back, it'd be difficult for me to step further with any speed on the martial path. Uncle has been at the peak of Refining Qi for over ten years, being the best example of this.\*

\*Currently it's best to cling onto the legs of the Yunlu Academy and the Sitianjian, and then plan for the future. I have a feeling that the ripples of the Tax Silver case have yet to dissipate.\*

...

The Xu manor, the front hall.

It was dusk, and Xu Qi'an vaulted the wall, to neighbouring Uncle Xu's courtyard to have dinner. Afterwards, he stood in the front yard, watching Xu Lingyin make shaky martial stances, little fists punching left and right, huffing and puffing and providing accompaniment to herself.

She was wearing a lotus-pink little dress, wrapped like a \*zongzi\*<sup>[^1]</sup>, her hair held by a hairpin specifically for young children.

"What are you doing," Xu Qi'an lightly kicked her buttocks.

Little Pea fell on the ground with a smack.

"I'm practicing martial arts." Xu Lingyin picked herself back up, putting her hands on her waist, showing her round little stomach, very much annoyed at her big brother's ambush. Her little brows furrowed, she said "Big brother are you trying to provoke me?"

Perhaps what had happened earlier that morning left a shadow within her little heart, causing this five year old child to think that she should start practicing martial arts.

“Yeah, I am.” Xu Qi’an replied.

“Daddy said, men fight for a breath, martial artists do too. This is called di.... di...”

“Dignity?”

“Mm!” Xu Lingyin fervently nodded her head, and then stared at her big brother angrily, “I want to fight you.”

Her two little legs flew, as she rushed towards Xu Qi’an, shouting and waving her fists.

Xu Qi’an put a single hand on her forehead. Little Pea felt desperation, and simultaneously shouted and flailing her fists, trying to hit her brother.

But no matter how she tried, she couldn’t reach.

Her face was twisted into a little spiral with desperation.

Xu Qi’an felt annoyed by her, and so discussed, “I’ll give you a chicken leg, and you admit defeat.”

“Yeah!” As expected, Xu Lingyin stopped flailing her fists, face full of delight.

“Where’s your dignity gone?”

“Big brother, what’s a ‘dignity’?”

“... you have promise.”

Holding Little Pea’s hand, they entered the dining room. Not long after dinner started, and it was incredibly bountiful, as if they were celebrating a festival.

The maidservants seemingly deliberately, seemingly coincidentally, put the best dishes in front of Xu Qi’an. He couldn’t resist a look towards Auntie, who was wearing a dark flower-patterned dress, with a refined face, and a pair of watery beautiful eyes, that perfectly accompanied her thick eyelashes. She had on her a type of beauty that only a middle-aged woman could have, like a begonia in full flourish.

She had the same cold attitude, as if what Xu Qi’an did today was a small matter barely worth talking about.

But if it were not for her indicating her wishes, the servants would not treat Xu Qi’an so specially.

Xu Lingyue ate small chopstick-full after small chopstick-full, before finally working up the courage, saying “Brother, mum is making winter clothes for everyone. After dinner let me get your measurements, I- I want to make you a set myself.”

\*Brother... fuck me...\* Xu Qi’an felt even his bones soften. His younger sister was wearing rather beautiful and eye-catching clothes: all over her dress were sewn flashing bright lotus flowers, a goose-yellow \*pibo\*<sup>[^2]</sup> embroidered with cloud patterns. She was not older than sixteen or seventeen, but with this beautiful dress, along with her delicate and refined features, she gave off an otherworldly beauty.

“Is... is that okay?” Xu Lingyue’s skin was thin, and seeing him not replying, she immediately turned red, and lowered her head.

\*If instead it were the womaniser Jia Baoyu, what would he say...\* Xu Qi’an regretted the fact that he did not really read \*Dream of the Red Chamber\* in his previous life, and nodded, “Thank you.”

Xu Lingyue smiled at him warmly, and exchanged looks with Auntie beside her.

Xu Qi’an took back his gaze, saying “Uncle, Erlang, after dinner I have something to talk with you two, let’s go to the study.”

...

The study!

Lü’e brought in three cups of hot tea, before leaving.

Xu Qi’an picked up the teacup and took a sip, rinsing his throat, and again sighed at the food without MSG. He always felt it was missing something.

“What do you two think of what happened today afternoon?” Xu Qi’an immediately got to the point, asking for his uncle and cousin’s opinions.

\*Has the situation not already passed...\* Uncle Xu was confused.

Xu Xinnian frowned, “Are you saying, that that Master Zhou may seek revenge?”

A Deputy Minister of Revenue, falling head over heel by the actions of a small civil servant, would definitely not give up so easily.

Uncle Xu waved his hand, “No, nonsense, at any other time sure, but today the two great scholars of the Cloud Deer Academy, and the Sitianjian’s white-cloaks all showed up. By my reckoning, that one surnamed Zhou wouldn’t dare to stir up the flames,”

His logic was sound and reasonable.

The constabularies had seen bullying of commoners so often it was barely a thing, but if an incident happened to involve civil servants or influential powers, then they would be more cautious.

One half was because from little they were told again and again, that no matter how unethical the constabulary they got themselves into, they must always remember that the water in the capital was deep. Another part came from the warnings of their seniors and predecessors.

Xu Xinnian shook his head, "Dad, if big brother is saying this, then he must have a reason."

He looked towards Xu Qi'an.

The latter said solemnly, "I heard a rumour today at the Sitianjian, the one behind the tax silver case, was Deputy Minister Zhou."

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[^1]: Zongzi is a type of food, consisting of steamed rice and filling, wrapped in bamboo leaves, often in a tetrahedral shape. It is traditionally eaten on the dragonboat festival.

[^2]: Type of shawl that accompanied female Hanfu