

# Nightwatcher

## #Chapter 41: A Small Official's Poetic Talent - Read Nightwatcher Chapter 41: A Small Official's Poetic Talent

### # 41. A Small Official's Poetic Talent

Are the Academy's three Great Scholars fighting? Is it because they had a breakthrough while discussing the dao, and speaking gentlemanly words evolved into fighting? The eldest princess was taken aback. She had studied at the Cloud Deer Academy for a while and knew of the Scholars.

The four Great Scholars in the Academy often sat together and discussed the dao, smiling when happy and swearing without care if they were worried.

But a big fight hadn't ever happened between them.

After all, Great Scholars had honourable identities, and they had to act as an example to their students. How could they fight so easily?

Zhao Shou frowned slightly and put down his teacup, and asked, "Why are they fighting?"

The old teacher shook his head and said helplessly, "I don't know what happened. Mr. Mubai was writing something when the other two scholars appeared suddenly. Then, all of them started fighting.

After pausing, the old teacher added with a sad face, "One of them said, 'Old ignorant man' and the other retorts with 'Shameless old thief'. It seems like they have some beef with each other."

Just then, the dean, who was as calm as a mountain, was taken aback and realized that something was fishy.

The eldest princess said, "I'll go with the dean."

Zhao Shou said in a deep voice, "Within ten feet around me, the Sage Courtyard is located."

The eldest princess suddenly felt as if she was in a daze, then she saw the sculpture of the sage holding a scroll, a burning candle, and grey smoke curling around the hall.

Outside the hall was full of commotion, and gusts of violent wind rushed into the great hall, blowing out the candles.

The dean, who was sitting opposite her had disappeared. So, the princess walked towards the entrance from where strong winds were blowing.

The strong wind caused her dress to fly backward, and the lapel to stick to her chest. Even a thick winter coat couldn't cover up her bulging figure.

In the distance, In mid-air, the three Great Scholars were floating.

From the three's bodies, vast amounts of righteous Qi rippled out. Their righteous and unyielding aura collided with each other, giving rise to a furious gale.

Zhang Shen snorted, "Li Mubai, You shameless bastard. You just tried to snatch my student back then. But you did such a despicable thing today. Has all the knowledge of the sage you read before entered a dog's stomach?"

The eldest princess's expression changed. She didn't know what great thing Master Li Mubai had done that Zhang Shen was provoked with such indignation.

Snatching students? Were the two competing for students?

Li Mubai loudly retorted, "As a teacher, What's wrong with me helping students to polish their articles and poems? It's you, an ignorant old man, being jealous of my talent."

Chen Tai, "You shut up, I can't stand it anymore."

Li Mubai gave him a slanted look, "Zhang and me have a reason to be angry at each other. It doesn't have anything to do with you, Chen Tai. You can go out and leave us."

At the time, Zhang Shen took out a volume of books from his arms, and said leisurely, "It seems that it's hard to determine a winner from a contest of Righteousness."

He tore off a page from a book and set it ablaze.

The moment the paper was completely burned, a green cloud emerged out of thin air and buzzed toward Li Mubai.

It was a green beetle with ferocious mouthparts densely packed like a swarm of locusts.

"I'd travelled throughout the world a few years ago, and I had some gains." Li Mubai didn't panic and also took out a book from which he tore up two pages, both of which ignited at the same time.

One of the pages burned completely and turned into a crimson lizard, somewhere between flesh-and-blood and an illusion.

The crimson lizard puffed its cheeks and spewed out a gust of 10 foot long flames that burned the green clouds in the sky to ashes.

At the same time, another page of paper burned, conjuring up a scantily clad young girl that looked like a siren, swimming through the air toward Zhang Shen.

As the young girl approached, Great Scholar Zhang's eyelids became heavier, and he felt drowsy.

The young girl raised the corner of her mouth slightly and approached Zhang Shen while sporting a charming smile.

At that moment, Chen Tai also burned a page in his hand, causing a bright golden core to manifest and burst out a golden light.

"Aiyou!"

Li Mubai suddenly was stabbed in the back, and was sent staggering by the golden light. Zhang Shen, also, was burned by the golden core, bringing him out of his sleepiness. He quickly roused his righteous qi, and shook the scantily clad young girl away.

The eldest princess watched the scene silently.

Sixth Rank Confucianists could learn the unique knowledge of other systems and record them in books for later use.

What Zhang Shen used just now was the ability of Shamans, and the young girl on Li Mubai's page should have had a Warlock's ability, but the rank of said warlock was uncertain.

As for the page used by Chen Tai, She was sure that it was the Golden Core in Taoism.

The three Great Scholars were fighting like raging fires meeting in mid-air, and the students watched from below with great interest. Although they were a bit shocked and worried by the fight between the three elders, It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to see Great Scholars fighting.

Upon observing that Li Mubai couldn't be taken down for a long time, Zhang Shen had an idea," Li Mubai, your trousers fell off."

Li Mubai's crotch felt cold, and he was shocked to find that his trousers had slipped down to his ankles.

"Damn it!" Li Mubai exploded, and he shouted, "Everyone's trousers have fallen off."

Underneath, countless people bent down to lift their trousers with horror.

A milky white jade pendant on the princess's waist started to emit light.

A majestic voice sounded in the ears everyone, "It's forbidden to fight each other in this place."

"Floating is forbidden here, get your arses down here!"

As soon as the words were spoken, the Righteous Qi of the three Great Scholars dissipated automatically. Newton began to rectify his embarrassment and pulled them down from midair.

Zhao Shou, dressed in sackcloth and with loose grey hair, walked up to the three of them with a sullen face. He then began carefully examining them with keen eyes, "What's going on?"

Zhang Shen and Li Mubai exchanged glances silently and reached a tacit understanding in an instant. The former snorted coldly, "It's nothing, It's just that we had a disagreement in our research and we couldn't persuade each other."

The latter continued, "So, We changed the method of persuasion."

Persuading people with reasoning was indeed in line with traditional Confucian values.

"Dean, I want to report them for deceiving you." The Great Scholar Chen Tai stabbed the two of them in the back to complete a Double Kill.

Zhang Shen and Li Mubai turned their heads together and stared at each other with anger.

Chen Tai looked in the direction of the low wall, "The dean knows of the poem 'Sending off Yang Gong to Qingzhou in Mianyang', right?"

Zhao Shou looked at the low wall and stared at it for a moment before finding the small words, and he understood the crux of the matter immediately.

He knew that Zhang Jinyan and Li Chunjing were envious of Ziyang Jushi these days.

The poem on the low wall was indeed great, Not to mention the poem becoming famous after spreading, It also had a great chance of being passed to future generations. It's justified for them to quarrel for the sake of reputation, fame, etc. Dean Zhao's cheeks twitched thinking of the reason for the two to conceal the reason from him.

He was about to speak when he saw the princess coming gracefully with her long skirt dragging on the floor with the corner of his eye.

He immediately swallowed the words in his throat.

The eldest princess's clear eyes rolled and she smiled reservedly, "Which poem caused the two Great Scholars to conflict."

Zhang Shen and Li Mubai hurriedly saluted the princess, "It's just a poem to encourage learning."

The eldest princess turned her eyes to the low wall immediately, and her pupils started to bloom with surprise, "Good Poem!"

After a pause, her lips parted slightly, "Who made this poem?"

Zhang Shen bit the bullet, "It's my student. Um... "Sending YangGong to Qingzhou" was also written by him."

"That bailiff from the Changle County office?" A strange look flashed in the eyes of the princess.

"His name is Xu Qi'an." Li Mubai replied, continuing, "He is also my disciple."

The eldest princess felt a little familiar with the name. It seemed that someone had mentioned the name to her before, but she didn't commit it to her memory and she couldn't recall the incident.

It's too wasteful for such a talent to become a bailiff in the Changle County Office. Even if he only knew poetry, it would be easy to become the chief of staff in her mansion, the princess thought in her heart.

The students of the academy stood in the distance, admiring the beautiful face of the eldest princess. She was as beautiful as a solitary snow lotus, with a noble aura that made people neglect the rest of the world.

"Where is he?" The eldest princess's clear eyes swept across the crowd, looking for the subject of the discussion.

"He went to tour the Mountain." Chen Tai said.

The students who heard their conversation were shocked for a moment since they finally knew the identity of the writer of the exhortation poem.

# 42. The Lesser Sage and His Wife

The cold and bleak mountain wind swept through the forest, making a mournful whistle going through the dry tree branches,

On the limestone paved path, Xu Qi'an tilted his head, looking at Xu Xinnian, with his hair and long sleeves dancing in the wind. This younger cousin of his, with a face that would make others jealous, was like an immortal that had landed in the mortal realm.

He pointed towards a waterfall far away, and said "This is the place where one of the Academy's elders thinks about the Dao. Beside the waterfall is a stone stele, recording that elder's life."

The water levels were low in winter, and that waterfall was thin and frail looking, falling down into the pool below with hardly a hint of energy. The pool was clear, so clear that one could see the bottom.

Beside the pool stood the stele, and a bronze statue of a cross-legged person. On the stele recorded the life of a scholar named Qian Zhong. This person lived six hundred years ago, and lived during the rise of the Feng dynasty.

That time, the emperor of the previous dynasty was addle-brained and weak, his officials had rotted to the core, and the rich ate and abused the poor. All across the central plains the smoke of rebellion rose, as warlords split the land.

That dynasty then, the dynasty of Zhou, waged a war of several decades against these warlords and rebelling armies, and the lives of the common people who lived at the bottom of society were arduous and difficult.

Qian Zhong, of the Confucian second rank Great Scholar, travelled the country for three years, and saw with his own eyes the suffering of the common people. With a heart full of rage and sadness he brought their anger to the capital, and used his own flesh and blood to strip the Zhou of what little fortune they had left.

Then, the Feng rose, and calmed the country, and peace came to the land.

"Is a Great Scholar rank this powerful?" Xu Qi'an's face looked doubtful, "Why have I not seen any 'Niubi'<sup>[^1]</sup> from those three great scholars?"

Xu Xinnian did not know what "Niubi" quite meant, but undoubtedly it was vulgar language. Considering the fact that his big brother had just wrote a poem and brought their family safety, he resisted mocking him, and answered:

"Who told you that the teachers were second rank Great Scholars? They are fourth rank Junzi<sup>[^2]</sup>."

Xu Qi'an was in disbelief, "Then how do they have face to call themselves great scholars?"

Xu Xinnian crouched down by the pool, rinsing his hands, and explained “‘Great Scholar’ has two meanings. One refers to those scholars who have studied deeply, and have recognition in their field. The other refers to the Confucian second rank. Our ‘great scholars’ of the academy belong to the first kind.”

\*To take the common people’s anger, and scatter a country’s fortune, even during the dying breaths of a dynasty, was not a thing an ordinary person could do. How powerful were the second ranks of the Confucianists? How about first rank?\*

Xu Qi’an became deep in thought, and after a long time, said with a respectful tone, “Does the Cloud Deer Academy have second rank Great Scholars?”

Xu Xinnian shook his head, sighing in pity, “Two hundred years ago, the most that ever emerged was third rank. The third rank of the Confucianists is called Mandate Seeker. I also only just heard it from my teacher that day, when seeing off Ziyang Jushi. Our academy’s dean is a third rank Mandate Seeker.”

Xu Qi’an’s tone of voice suddenly became more relaxed, as he casually remarked, “Not bad.”

Those three old teachers’ personalities, seemed to be somewhat shallow and not righteous, and lacked a sense of steadiness and grandeur. Xu Qi’an told his thoughts to Xu Xinnian.

The latter hesitated for a moment, “They weren’t like this earlier. After Junzi, comes Mandate Seeker... perhaps this has something to do with it.

“Mm, Ziyang Jushi was also like this before, but recently he suddenly changed personalities, as if he was replaced with a different person. I heard my teacher say, that Ziyang Jushi is merely half a step away from Mandate Seeker.”

The two brothers wandered the Academy with no goal in mind, Xu Xinnian took him to look over some famous historic sights. As an Academy with a history over 1200 years long, if not for the fact that they normally did not allow outsiders, owing to that disturbing the students’ study, Qingyun mountain would certainly become a tourism hotspot.

“Brother...” as they walked and walked, Xu Xinnian suddenly called out to him with a low tone of voice.

Xu Qi’an stopped his tracks.

Xu Xinnian looked at him, and then turned his head, pretending to look at the scenery surrounding them, “I thought for a long time yesterday. If it were not for you, then dad would already be beheaded, the women would already be sent to the Jiaofangsi.

“If not for you, then the Xu family would still be languishing within the feeling of life after disaster, only to one day be extinguished.”

Afterwards, he walked ahead with quick steps, wading a dozen or more metres out, and silently said: \*Thank you.\*

...

Hall of the Lesser Sage.

Xu Qi'an followed his cousin up the stairs, passing the incense holder and entering the building. Red painted pillars seven metres tall rose to the ceiling, holding up a vaulted roof. The 'Lesser Sage' worshipped in the hall was the founder of the Cloud Deer Academy.

In the thin flame of many candles, that Lesser Sage wore a azure-blue Confucian robe, wore a tall Confucian headdress, with one hand behind his back, and one hand on his front waist, his eyes looking far into the distance.

Beside the lesser sage, was a lively and beautiful white doe, cloud patterns just visible within its white fur.

Xu Xinnian pointed to the white doe, saying “It is the origin of our Cloud Deer Academy's name.”

Xu Qi'an said “Scholars are refined people; a white deer would make a good steed.”

Xu Xinnian gave his older cousin a look, and corrected “Not his steed, his wife.”

“!!!” Xu Qi'an looked the lesser sage up and down again, muttering “Not exactly wrong.”

\*After all, he's riding either way...\* but this he did not dare say.

Xu Xinnian seemed to know what his brother was thinking, and said “Recorded in the Academy's \*Annals of the Cloud Deer\*, this white deer is a yaoguai monster, who sat by the Sage and listened to him speak. Afterwards, it transformed into a person, and stayed by the Lesser Sage's side. A human and a monster growing up side by side, naturally they developed a deep affection, and became husband and wife.

“In those times, romance between man and monster was a deep taboo... still today. But after the Sage found out, he did not beat and forcefully separate the two, but rather praised their marriage. The sage said: ‘True love has no barriers’. We can see that as long as there is love, then even man and monster can stay together and support one another.”



From ancient times there have been nicknames for human-yaoguai couples, like “Ghost Rider”, “The Outlaw Hero”, “Union of Heaven and Man”. Then, what would the nickname of the lesser sage be?

\*To Make a Deer a Horse... A Horse Son’s Horse?\* Xu Qi’an bowed and cupped his hands towards the statue of the Lesser Saint.

When Xu Xinnian was paying his respects as a disciple towards the Lesser Saint, Xu Qi’an’s eyes wandered around the hall, and discovered that on the left and right sides, stood a stone stele each.

One was blank, the other one had characters carved on it.

He walked to the stele, and read “To uphold justice and be faithful to morality and the monarch until death, to leave a mark for generations to come — Chen Hui.”

The characters were tidy, not flowy, not cursive, not exaggerated, giving off an aura of a Junzi’s reserved and righteous nature, their vast spirit.

“This is what the Imperial Academy’s Lesser Sage wrote.” Xu Xinnian walked over, standing side by side his older cousin.

“The Lesser Sage of the Imperial Academy... actually, I’ve always not really known much about the bad blood between the Imperial Academy and the Cloud Deer Academy.” Xu Qi’an was full of interest, the word “Eating Melon[^3]” written in his eyes.

Xu Xinnian looked left and right, seeing that no one was there, before he spoke, in a lone tone “This matter started two hundred years ago, during that struggle for national destiny.”

“Struggle for national destiny?” even if Xu Qi’an was an amateur at best in the field of history, this concept he did know about.

The Crown Prince, the National Destiny!

To fight for the national destiny is to fight for the place of Crown Prince.

“That time the Renzong emperor was on the throne, and the title of Crown Prince had been empty for over a decade. Two princes were the foremost contenders at that time. One was the eldest child of the Emperor and Empress Consort, and another was a noble descended from the Emperor and one of his concubines, but further in line to the throne. That concubine’s son was very beautiful and graceful, and Renzong loved him deeply.

“Renzong wanted to make this son the Crown Prince, but he was opposed by his entire court. Renzong gave out the order many times, but each time it was opposed in his

cabinet and sent back to him. At that time, all the officials in court were the Cloud Deer Academy's disciples."

"The elder before the younger, the direct son before the concubines', was the rule since ancient times, even an emperor could not break it. Brother, what you said was right, ritual is our scholars' most well used dragon-slaying technique.[^4]

"In this succession crisis, neither side would let up, and both fought for a whole six years. In this time, the Senior Grand Secretary was swapped four times, the officials of court left in droves. In the capital and beyond, the number of officials who were affected reached over 200."

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[^1]: 牛逼, Common Chinese slang, used to express something is awesome or epic. Literally means cow vagina (for some reason). Often simplified to 牛 (Niu) which is more "family friendly".

[^2]: 君子, the Confucian gentleman

[^3]: Chinese slang, which in the most general sense is describing spectators into some drama.

[^4]: Probably good to mention that Chinese Emperors are always metaphorically referred to as Dragons.

#### # 43. The Inscription

"Around that time, a scholar from Cloud Deer Academy took over as the Senior Grand Secretary. He didn't have the same thoughts as his predecessors and resolutely devoted himself to Renzong. He also completed Renzong's business despite it being against ritual. Finally, the struggle for national destiny ended.

"Due to this incident, Renzong was disgusted with Cloud Deer Academy. He had realized that Cloud Deer Academy wasn't conducive to Imperial Rule. Around this time, Cheng Hui proposed to establish an Imperial Academy for the court to train talents by itself.

"Thereafter, The decline of Confucianism began."

That was the origin of the dispute between Cloud Deer Academy and Imperial Academy over Confucian Orthodoxy.

\*The Imperial Academy was a state-run university while Cloud Deer Academy was a private institution. How could a private institution surpass a state-run one...\* Xu Qi'an suddenly realized.

After Xu Xinnian finished speaking, he suddenly tried to examine, "What do you think, big brother... Well, I mean the matter of fighting over the national destiny, since it's a matter separate from academics."

\*Do you believe that a commoner like Big brother can't answer the question if it involved academic matters?\* Xu Qi'an lampooned, and smilingly said, "On the surface, It looks like a struggle for national destiny, but it's a power struggle."

"Scholars who want to display their ambitions must hold great power, and the amount of power in a country is fixed. When you hold more power, someone will lose theirs. The highest state of power is to take the emperor's power and become an uncrowned emperor."

Xu Xinnian was originally trying to examine his big brother, but upon hearing his thoughts, his face changed colour drastically.

Xu Qi'an squinted at him, "What, did I say something wrong?"

\*You're right. But you can't just say these kinds of things anywhere...\* Xu Xinnian took a deep breath, "Go on."

Xu Qi'an nodded, "No matter how powerful Confucianism's Dragon Slaughtering Technique is, It can't compare to the imperial power. \*Whether you learn literature, art, or martial, all belongs to the Emperor in the end.\* The sentence explains everything. Since ancient times, ministers, whether virtuous or tyrannical, as long as they had power, wouldn't have a good end."

The control over the government would only last a while, and eventually all unsettled things will be settled, because a courtier will always be a courtier. In the history of Xu Qi'an's previous life, many people could be titled uncrowned emperors. But whom among them got a good end?

Cao Cao was a different matter, the chaos after the collapse of the empire was a different situation altogether.

Xu Xinnian asked urgently, "Is there any solution to this eventuality?"

The academy wouldn't teach of the matters his elder brother just told him.

"There is no solution!" Xu Qi'an shook his head and sighed, "The court is like a battlefield, Party disputes could bring you a little enjoyment now, but will bring the whole family crashing down."

His words were strange, but there seemed to be millennia of literature and history brewing in his eyes. Xu Xinnian was astonished while looking at him.

"But your big brother has another idea as well." Xu Qi'an changed the subject.

"Please tell me, brother."

"Great Scholar Qian's deeds are an example. When you could affect the fortune of a country, You'll change from a scholar attached to the imperial power to a strong person equal to it."

Xu Xinnian's eyes lit up. But as soon as a joyful look appeared on his face, Xu Qi'an said with leisure, "Erlang is very intelligent. This child has some potential."

"..." Xu Erlang replied, \*wasn't I supposed to be teaching you...\*

Xu Qi'an didn't continue speaking, thinking of a question in his heart. Although Cloud Deer Academy didn't have much future in officialdom, It was still a holy land that controlled the Confucian System.

The only thing that was cut short was its path to officialdom.

Although Xu Xinnian didn't say whether the academy's official career or the entirety of Confucianism had weakened, Xu Qi'an felt that it was the latter that had weakened.

Because of what Xu Erlang had said in the waterfall, for 300 years, the highest grade achieved by a Confucian has only been the third rank.

Was it because Confucianists needed to become officials after the third grade? Or it involved sensitive matters like the luck of Confucianism.

"What's this tablet about? Why is it standing there?" He asked.

Xu Xinnian stared at the characters in the stele with complicated eyes, and sighed, "It's the follow-up or part of the follow-up of the dispute over Confucian Orthodoxy."

"That Lesser Sage Cheng was very talented. After he established the Imperial Academy, he knew that if he wanted to surpass the Cloud Deer Academy, he needed to have his system of education. Otherwise, the students of the Imperial Academy would still be spiritually affiliated to Cloud Deer Academy."

"So he devoted his time to studying the Sage's classics and rewrote them incorporating his own beliefs. After 13 years, he finally created an education system where there would be intergenerational progress.

"Obey natural principles to destroy Human desires?" Xu Qi'an's heart moved.

Xu Erlang nodded, and after the conversation just before, he was willing to explain academic matters to his elder brother.

“Lesser Sage Cheng believed that everything in the world follows a certain law. This law could be called “\*Li”<sup>[^1]</sup>. Li, or reason, is the world's most essential and correct thing.

"Myriad Matter relies on reason to flourish. But people will lose their beliefs and reason in the turmoil in the world."

"So, it is necessary to preserve Natural Reason and destroy human desires?" Xu Qi'an asked.

Preserving Natural Reason and destroying human desires was the outline of the Imperial academy's philosophy. Xu Qi'an was waiting for Xu Xinnian's detailed explanation of it.

Xu Xinnian continued, “Lesser Sage Cheng set up a set of rules and regulations. If scholars follow these rules, they will not make mistakes and be close to the laws of heaven and earth.

"This set of rules elevates loyalty, filial piety, and moral integrity to the height of heavenly Reason."

Xu Xinnian sneered, "If the king wants his minister to die, the minister should die. If the father wants his son to die, the son has to die. Sacrifice one's life for moral integrity. For the sake of ensuring one's morals, one should die."

Xu Qi'an listened silently, and suddenly asked, "What do you think, Cijiu? Is this right or wrong?"

Xu Xinnian was stunned, He blankly stared at his cousin, and tried to open his mouth, but a mysterious force blocked his throat, making him unable to speak.

Xu Qi'an understood. This type of ability was called "Ideological Imprisonment".

"Therefore, this tablet was put here?" Xu Qi'an turned his gaze to the inscribed text.

"Hm." Xu Erlang nodded. “The dispute between Cloud Deer Academy and the Imperial Academy is an academic and philosophical dispute. But this tablet has remained in Cloud Deer Academy for 200 years and has never fallen. Cloud Deer Academy has no hope of defeating the Imperial Academy until the tablet falls.

"The dean stayed in the academy for more than a decade and tried to refute the inscription using his vast experience by creating a mature and correct concept, but he failed in the endeavour."

"Because the idea represents truth, It represents correct ideas." Xu Qi'an said.

"Yeah." Xu Xinnian sighed, "Not only the dean, all the Great Scholars and teachers of the academy have competed with the inscription. But no one has ever succeeded. How could an ordinary person refute a lesser-sage's thoughts."

"That blank tablet over there..." Xu Qi'an had a guess.

"The dean placed it here, but he hadn't been able to pen a word there over a decade." Xu Xinnian pointed to the table next to the blank stone tablet and said

"Later, Some students and Scholars tried to write words there to compete with Lesser Sage Cheng's inscription, but they were all wiped out the next day. However, the brush and inkstone on the table remained still. Perhaps the dean holds some sliver of expectation in them.

"Due to this, whenever the students have a whim or they feel that they have a good idea, They go there to write. It's a pity that the person expected by the dean has never appeared."

"I thought that I could do it, and I also inscribed in the stone tablet..." At that point, Xu Xinnian didn't continue, obviously because he didn't want to reveal his frivolous behaviour in his youth to his cousin, to avoid dying socially again.

\*To uphold justice and be faithful to morality and the monarch until death, to leave a mark for generations to come...\* Xu Qi'an faced the inscription, became silent for a while, and said deeply,

"Cijiu, Your elder brother wants to know if the monarch is more important or the people are more important."

Xu Xinnian didn't hesitate to answer, "Naturally the people."

Xu Qi'an asked again, "Then why are you studying?"

Xu Xinnian subconsciously said, "To be loyal to the emperor and to serve the country..."

He stared blankly after speaking due to shock.

Xu Qi'an didn't care at all, and continued, "Is being famous in history a pursuit a scholar should strive towards?"

Xu Xinnian didn't answer, and his silence spoke a thousand words.

The actions of the two Great Scholars in Cloud Deer Academy for being involved with a poem explained also explained the situation.

Xu Qi'an sighed quietly.

\*If the king wants the minister to die, the minister has to die. Why?\*

\*If a father wants his son to die, the son has to die. Why?\*

\*Can't this shitty society have a little more human rights?\* Xu Qi'an smiled and said, "I'm not a scholar, but I also want to write something. Cijiu, grind the inkstone for me."

Xu Xinnian frowned.

Xu Qi'an said, "Anyway, the brush and ink are placed here. it's surely so that people will write here. If your elder brother writes badly, it will be erased tomorrow."

After Xu Xinnian finished listening, he went to grind ink. In a moment, he stood in front of the stele with a pen in his hand and asked, "What do you want to write, brother?"

"I want to write it by myself this time." Xu Qi'an grabbed the pen and stared at the blank stone tablet.

Suddenly, the face of the stall owner at the breakfast stall in the morning appeared in his mind. He was in so much distress, but he didn't dare to ask for money. He was as pitiful as a stray dog.

The issue of subordinate officials in the Great Feng had been a problem for a long time, and the palace was full of beasts who were only loyal to the emperor, but have never lowered their merciful eyes to the common people at the bottom.

He thought of Zhou Li's arrogant and domineering posture when he rode his horse in the street. He thought of the records of rampant behaviour in the capital's government office.

The existence of extraordinary force served to highlight the shortcomings of a feudal dynasty quite vividly. It also made the common people at the lower strata have no courage to resist tyranny.

He had heard of a few grand peasant uprisings in his previous life. But, in this world, peasant uprisings were quickly extinguished without even having a chance to take shape.

Xu Qi'an took a deep breath, exhaled heavily, and picked a brush to write:

\*"To ordain conscience for Heaven and Earth,

To secure life and fortune for the people,

To continue lost teachings for past sages,

To establish peace for all future generations!"\*

After he finished writing, Xu Qi'an felt refreshed, and breathing out the depressive energy within his chest. Then he threw away his pen and said loudly, "Cijiu, This is what a scholar should do."

Boom!

Xu Cijiu felt as if a thunderbolt had struck his mind, splitting his spirit filled with primal chaos and releasing the shackles in his soul.

He stared blankly at his cousin. As if he was seeing an illusion, Xu Erlang seemed to see the dense purple air above his cousin's head appear and disappear in a flash.

\*Ka- ka\*!

The stone tablet on the side suddenly made a cracking sound, and a huge crack appeared from its top to its bottom.

The two brothers were taken aback. Before they could react, the entire Sub Sage Temple trembled, the dome rustled and the candlesticks fell over.

A puff of fresh qi burst from the Lesser Sage's sculpture to pierce the white clouds on the mountaintop, its form being able to be seen dozens of li away.

Xu Qi'an was stunned, and his expression was extremely ugly, "What's going on? Um... It seems like we're in a lot of trouble."

"What trouble, where trouble?" Xu Xinnian became agitated and said loudly, "What does it have to do with us? We've never been to the Lesser Sage Temple."

After finishing speaking, he rushed out of the door with his head in his arms and fled the premises.

"Scholar, You wait for me." Xu Qi'an ran after him thinking that scholars have strong adaptability in critical moments.

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Author's note:

The Neo-Confucianism in the book is an academic school I have made up based on "Cheng-Zhu" Neo-Confucianism. It's quite different than Neo-Confucianism in reality so don't take it seriously.



The theory is based on realistic materials and I just added little modifications myself. After all, if I could write about an entire academic school... Well, I'm a lazy person, why would I write web novels?

The reason for the explanation is that "Cheng-Zhu Confucianism" has polarized opinions, which lends itself to arguments. So, I made this statement.

[^1]: 理, fundamentally means reason, or principle, or science. An emphasis in Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism.

#### # 44. The Escape

The two brothers ran out of the Lesser Sage Hall, not daring to run on the big paths, rather taking the small winding alleys at the sides of the Academy, running into the mountain forest. Only after a long time, did they finally stop.

Xu Qi'an's breaths were steady, whilst Xu Xinnian leant against a pine tree, gasping for air. Due to the intense exercise, his white face bore a flush of red that could move a person's heart.

"What do we do now?" Xu Qi'an decided to ask his "doing things with reason" younger brother, "Did I just help solve one of the Academy's oldest and hardest problems?"

He didn't expect that that phrase would cause such a monumental sign, and was not sure what would happen after, so he listened to his heart and escaped alongside Xu Xinnian.

Xu Xinnian was still breathing heavily, and simultaneously tried to calm his beating heart, and laughed in a proud tone, "At most a problem two hundred years old."

Xu Qi'an handed over his waterskin.

Xu Xinnian took it, taking a swig, before continuing "If I had just enrolled in the Academy, I may have suggested that you stayed where you were, and waited to enjoy the teacher's praises and admiration.

"However as to the present me, I just wanted to take you and escape." He threw back the waterskin, and waited, seeing that his face was calm, with no sign of confusion.

He was both somewhat disappointed, and appreciative.

He appreciated the fact that his older cousin had a brain, and was different from his father's vulgarity. This made Xu Xinnian, who always looked very highly of himself, sincerely gratified.

He was disappointed that he could not show off in front of his brother, and make an appearance of the clever man's superiority.

Even if his cousin had several times written down poems that would make any scholar sigh, even if his cousin had wrote those words on that stele, that had the power to split mountains... Xu Xinnian still thought that his own intelligence was still a tad higher.

If he had not this attitude, then he would never have been able to write “\*If heaven births not I, Xu Xinnian; then the Great Feng forever, will be in night that never ends.\*”

The two brothers quickly made their way through the forest, and secretly made their way towards the stables.

The best choice now would be to leave without saying goodbye.

If Xu Qi'an had remained where he was, then what faced him was most likely the appreciation and praise of the Cloud Deer Academy. He may even be made a great scholar... even if that was not likely.

That would be the good side.

The bad side would be clear; the conflict between the Cloud Deer Academy and the Imperial Academy was one over the very Confucian orthodoxy itself. At the same time that Xu Qi'an received the praises of the Cloud Deer Academy, he would raise the ire of the Imperial scholars.

And all the officials and nobles at court, were all from the Imperial Academy.

A single tax silver case had already left them with no end of trouble, yet this would be more dangerous and difficult than a hundred tax silver cases combined.

\*Cijiu's and my thoughts may have taken different paths, but we've reached the same conclusion... \* Xu Qi'an laughed, “Cijiu, you really are a sly dog.”

\*Very good, Erlang isn't a rotten old scholar. Perhaps because he studies military strategy?\*

“Base.” Xu Xinnian immediately retorted, continuing “As long as we leave, I'm sure that afterwards the Academy won't brazenly announce anything, and keep the secret for us.”

He did not say any more, as he fell into deep thought, and focused on getting to their destination, seeming silent and solemn.

...

A courtyard outside the Lesser Sage's Hall.

Zhao Shou, wearing his hemp clothes and with his salt-and-pepper white hair, suddenly made a move that one would not expect: he suddenly turned, and looked towards the back of the Academy.

After a few seconds, the three great scholars did the same, with a serious face.

The Eldest Princess was confused, and unconsciously followed their gazes. A fresh breeze wafted across the clear sky, and nothing was to be seen.

But in the next second, a plume of azure qi, visible to the naked eye, rose up into the sky, piercing through the clouds. The thick white clouds that swirled around Qingyun mountain slowly dissipated in front of everyone's eyes.

Zhao Shou disappeared first, the three great scholars following shortly after, displaying the might of their Laws follow Commandments, making three feet beside them the back of the Academy.

The eldest princess's willow like brows slightly furrowed, as she picked up her skirt, and quickly but still gracefully chased after them.

Her stature was tall and lithe, with delicate curves, and the aura she had when walking could not be described, and could only be experienced.

...

Lesser Sage Hall. The candles were tipped over, their wax trickling onto the floor.

In the empty great hall, azure qi drifted around like the spring wind, surrounding Zhao Shou's shadow. He quickly looked over every little corner of the great hall, and finally his eyes fell upon Lesser Sage Cheng's stone stele, with a crack down its middle.

\*This...\* The dean's eyes like ancient wells suddenly showed a rush of shock and disbelief, as he quickly found the reason to the azure qi rushing towards the sky.

The stone stele suppressing the hall had split, the Cloud Deer Academy's righteous qi had broken free from its bonds, and overflowed out into the air, causing that sight.

The question was, why would Lesser Sage Cheng's stele split out of nowhere?

Quickly, Zhao Shou realised, as his eyes were drawn to the stone stele that he had placed in the hall himself. He looked at what was written on it, and felt as if the whole world had lost its colour, and was slowly disappearing, with only that column of ugly characters remaining burned into his vision.

Burned into his heart.

Becoming this world's only thing.

The azure qi spread outwards, making one feel as if they were in a spring breeze. The three great scholar's shadows materialised, as they instinctively scanned the entire hall.

Seeing the broken tablet of Lesser Sage Cheng, their pupils unconsciously shrank.

\*It was sitting there so well, why would the tablet split... no, this is a good thing, this means that the chains binding down the Cloud Deer Academy's fortune had been shaken... \* Li Mubai thought, before he suddenly realised that the dean's attitude was not quite right.

He had that feeling of being stuck deep within his own world, gazing into space.

\*The stele has split, in the era where a Lesser Sage has not appeared for a long time, there is a person who could shake Cheng's stele... \* Zhang Shen and Chen Tai exchanged looks, and saw in each other's eyes shock and confusion.

Soon after, they and Li Mubai all discovered Zhao Shou's unusual expression.

“\*To ordain conscience for heaven and earth, to secure life and fortune for the people, to continue lost teachings of past sages, to establish peace for all future generations... \*” Zhang Shen muttered.

He was utterly stunned by the soul, by the spirit, by the will imbued within that sentence, as goosebumps raised all over his body. His blood ran hot around his body.

“This is what a scholar really should do.” Chen Tai's lower lip trembled, saying “To be an official, is to serve the people, to serve the country, to serve all living things, and not for one family, for only the very few.”

This great scholar, praised as a master of governance, could not control his shaking, as his voice was hoarse, “An enlightenment, an enlightenment!”

Li Mubai took a deep breath, calming his emotions, “Who wrote this?”

The three of them all looked towards Zhao Shou. Their dean had been in solitary meditation for over a decade, for the sole goal of overturning the rationalism of Chen, pouring blood, sweat, and tears. In this current age, apart from him, no one could open up a new school of thought.

But the dean was just with them, and furthermore, his expression said all.

What replied them was silence, as after a long time, Zhao Shou said in a low voice, “Leave for now. If there's anything you want to say, we can discuss later.”

He added, "A Junzi is reticent."

The three great scholars bowed and cupped their hands, leaving the hall.

As the great door closed, the room fell into silence, as Zhao Shou stood silently in front of the stele, behind him a lattice window, the sunlight shining onto him in spots.

After a long, long while, he smoothed out his clothes, and bowed towards the characters on the stele, "In the morning, I heard the way. In the evening, I would die happily."

...

The eldest princess finally reached the Lesser Sage Hall, finding that within ten zhang of the hall, was covered in a qi wall, like an overturned bowl, separating within from without.

She did not rush, rather silently stood on the steps outside the hall, like a silently blooming flower.

Soon after, the three great scholars exited side by side, their faces solemn, but one could not tell whether the news was good or bad.

"My three good sirs, could you pray tell?" The Princess looked towards the hall.

"Your Highness is best not to ask," Chen Tai bowed, "This, we currently cannot make head nor tail."

The eldest princess smiled, her noble face was as calm as ever.

Leaving the three great scholars, she went back towards the Refined Hall herself. In the mountain breeze, her dress rippled, as if she was a spirit of the mountain, an immortal that had come down to the mortal world to play.

Two rows of armed, armoured soldiers guarded the hall like before, looking like a series of silent statues.

This contingent of twenty four Jinwu Guards was her bodyguard detail. At the mountain's foot were also a group of seven Nightwatchers.

But the Academy despised Wei Yuan, and so did not allow the Nightwatchers up the mountain.

The eldest princess lead her guards down the mountain, and located the seven Nightwatchers that were stationed by the road. She said with a clear tone "Azure qi rushes to the heavens in the Cloud Deer Academy, the Lesser Sage Hall has been

locked off, report this back to Duke Wei, and make him watch the Academy closely, and find out the root of this.”

“Yes, Your Highness!” the Nightwatchers clasped their fists.

She continued, “Investigate a person for me, bailiff Xu Qi’an of Changle County Constabulary.”

“At once, Your Highness!”

# 45. Big Brother is Too Annoying

Stargazing Observatory, Bagua Platform:

The white haired, white-clothed, and white-bearded Jianzheng was sitting in front of a table, sipping a glass of wine while looking towards the northwest of the capital.

There was a table on his left, which was full of delicacies. In front of the table sat Chu Caiwei, with an oval face, big eyes, delicate features, and sweetness hidden underneath.

While eating, she chattered endlessly, "Master, When could I step into the sixth rank and become a Master of Alchemy?"

Jianzheng smiled and replied, "When you don't care about eating and are willing to practice peacefully, The time will come for you to break through."

Chu Caiwei looked pained, "Looks like it will be impossible in this life."

She swallowed the food and continued to babble, "By the way, Fake silver burns easily and it explodes when thrown in water. It's hard to preserve it. It will be hard to report to the emperor."

Lord Jianzheng said softly, "The emperor has had his fill, tell him to fuck off."

Chu Caiwei stuck out the tip of her tongue, "This Disciple doesn't dare to say this to the emperor. You should speak to him yourself."

The Jianzheng kindly smiled.

"Master, Fourth Senior Brother has been affected by a demon, you should check on him. He always runs out of the city saying that the door of alchemy has opened for him."

"Master, I think it's not good for Xu Qi'an to be a bailiff. Why don't we bring him to Sitianjian? Oh, you may not know who he is, He's the one who solved the Tax Silver Case..."

"..."

"Master, What is grafting?"

The Jianzheng sighed, "Caiwei."

"Yes, master?"

"Why don't you shut your mouth when eating."

"Ah."

A few seconds later...

"Master, why do you always look over there?"

"Caiwei, your teacher has some regrets."

"Master, Tell me."

"Why don't I know the Confucian technique for forbidding speech?"

"Hee hee..." A smug expression appeared on Chu Caiwei's face, until she suddenly found that the food on her table spoiled instantly, giving off an unpleasant smell.

Her mouth shrunk, and her expression shifted to a crying one. She was distressed enough to not breathe, "Master, I was wrong. Please change the food back."

Jianzheng still looked towards the northwest, and said with a smile, "Master will teach you another truth. In Alchemy, most transformations are irreversible."

Chu Caiwei left crying while wiping her tears, "I'll never accompany you, a bad old person again."

...

In the pavilion outside the bamboo forest, Zhao Shou, the dean, said deeply, "It's forbidden to approach within 30 zhang of this location."

While speaking, he waved his sleeves and Qi spread, covering the pavilion and the area 30 zhang around it.

After finishing this, he turned around and looked at the three great scholars who had been summoned there.

Holding a teacup in his hand, Li Mubai said seriously, "I've inquired, and there were no students near the Lesser Sage Courtyard at the time, and we can't find out who had entered there."

"The handwriting on the stele doesn't belong to any student in the academy. I don't think our academy teaches its students to write such bad characters."

Speaking of this, Li Mubai felt anxious. If the culprit wasn't a student in the academy, Which outsider was at the academy except for his cheap student?"

"Tap tap..."

At the same time, Zhang Shen knocked on the table. This great scholar pushed aside all his cynicism and disrespect, and retorted with a deadpan face,

"Handwriting can be disguised. Especially by using bad handwriting."

Chen Tai suddenly asked, "Then, what would be the reason to disguise the handwriting? The monument has stood there for more than a decade. All the teachers and students in the academy have tried to write about it, and they are all willing to be known for this action. They have no motive to disguise their handwriting.

"Also, Xu Cijiu and Xu Ningyan happened to be traveling in the mountains at that time."

The three Great Scholars finished their discussion and remained silent.

Li Mubai took a sip of tea in his cup and sighed,

"\*To ordain conscience for Heaven and Earth, to secure life and fortune for the people, to continue lost teachings for past sages, to establish peace for all future generations...\* I'm ashamed of myself. I've already given up the thought of having an official career these years and have only thought of being famous to posterity and leaving my name in the history books."

"Brother Chunjing is a man of integrity." Zhang Shen gave him a thumbs up while praising him, and then said, "Then leave the poem for persuading learning to me."

Li Mubai immediately changed his words, "There is no contradiction in being famous in history while doing something for the country and the common people."

Dean Zhao Shou stared at Li Mubai in a daze with shining eyes, and said with surprise, "You are about to establish your Mandate soon?"

"!!!" Chen Tai and Zhang Shen were both startled.



Li Mubai stroked his beard while smiling, "I understood everything in a flash of insight, and enlightened on my Mandate."

The other two Great Scholars instantly became jealous.

After it was pointed out by Dean Zhao Shou, the two could also notice a subtle change in Li Mubai's Qi.

The third realm was the realm of Mandate Formation, which was the realm for finding one's life goals. Some people study for fame, some for profit, and some to help posterity... Everyone has their own mandate.

Dean Zhao Shou's Mandate was to create a new school of Confucianism and to break the shackles of thought to find a new path for the scholars in the world.

Therefore, He couldn't break through until the day he achieved his goal.

The others didn't ask for Li Mubai's life goals, since he only had a hazy impression of them at the time.

Zhang Shen and Chen Tai looked at each other, and secretly decided not to end their retreat at the Lesser Sage Hall unless they enlightened on their Mandate.

"As of today, Students are forbidden from entering the Lesser Sage Hall." Zhao Shou's eyes, sparkling with light, swept across the Great Scholars present, and he said, "The matter isn't allowed to be circulated outside. I want to speak with the three of you."

The three Great Scholars looked at each other and nodded slightly.

Zhao Shou focused his \*dantian\*<sup>[^1]</sup> and gathered his qi at the tip of his tongue, "A Gentleman should keep silent."

...

The two riders galloped very fast. When they approached the capital, the brothers slowed down and let the horses trot on the road.

They had rented lowly riding horses, which were only a bit better than pack horses. Their advantage was that they were cheap, and their disadvantage was that they weren't physically strong.

They couldn't keep running at high speed for a long time.

If the horses ran to their death, they would have to pay more than a dozen taels of silver. The two brothers were very conscious of the contents of their wallets.

Xu Xinnian let out a turbid breath, and finally showed his doubts, "Shouldn't you explain, Brother?"

He was referring to the astonishing axiom.

"What do you want me to explain?" Xu Qi'an asked back.

"Brother is only literate, how could you say such shocking words?" Xu Xinnian raised his head proudly.

"These words could only be spoken by a scholar."

\*Look at what you're proud of... Everything except Scholarship is vain, right... I've got nine-year compulsory education and have graduated from the police academy... And I'm also a senior keyboard warrior who's proficient in keyboard culture. What if I know a little?... If you want to compete in the depth of knowledge, all of you scholars can only be regarded as children in front of me!\*

Xu Qi'an wanted to speak out these words.

He pondered for a moment, and changed his words, "Cijiu knows that there are some problems with contemporary Confucianism. But, when I asked you what a scholar should do, you had given me an answer that matched the present consensus of scholars."

Xu Xinnian pondered on the statement.

"This is the limitation of thought. All you scholars are influenced by certain kinds of thoughts, and over some time, you are all influenced by it. Even if you realize something is wrong, You find it hard to jump out of it." Xu Qi'an eloquently said.

Describing it in another way, "Thought Imprisonment, ideological shackles."

"Ideological shackles..." Xu Cijiu murmured and repeated these two words.

"The dean of Cloud Deer Academy was also imprisoned by his thoughts and was influenced by Cheng's philosophy. He wants to break through and form a new school. How could he lead the world's scholars out of the vortex when he himself is inside the vortex?"

"The only ones who can do this are the ones outside the vortex."

"Maybe it's because your big brother hasn't read too many books, I can take a slanted path, be unconventional as well as not imprisoned by Cheng's Neo-Confucianism."

\*Of course, I also have shackles in my thought, but they originate from the 21st century. But no one has influenced them ...\* Xu Qi'an thought.

To say it bluntly, Ideological Shackles were equivalent to Three Views, and Three Views were influenced by the times. If you were in a certain era, you didn't see a problem with them. Only when a significant amount of time has passed could we find problems from a better position.

Xu Cijiu didn't speak for a long time and thought for some time, when he radiantly looked at Xu Qi'an.

"Big Brother's words made me suddenly see the light."

\*My elder brother is amazing.\*

\*His perception is pretty strong...\* Xu Qi'an was evaluated mentally, but he didn't express any seriousness over it and showed a mocking look.

"It's a pity. You didn't inherit the fine genes of my Xu family but inherited your talent from the Li family."

\*Big Brother is too annoying...\* Xu Cijiu suddenly didn't want to talk to him anymore.

\*If mother had heard those words, she would have slapped the table in anger again, cursing "This rascal is just trying to rebel at every opportunity!"\*

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[^1]: 丹田, qi focus flow centres, important in qigong and TCM