

Three-Time 251

Chapter 251: 251. Never left before

The day Bai Xiaohu was kidnapped, he wanted to go home early after school, but Zhuzi wanted to go play with Erniu.

So, Bai Xiaohu walked home alone from school. It wasn't a long way, and they usually walked and played together with their little brothers. The people in the village were familiar with each other.

As a result, he was walking halfway between two thick trees when someone jumped off and covered his mouth, put him in a sack, and took him away through the forest path.

Zhuzi returned home and panicked when he saw that Bai Xiaohu hadn't come back yet, saying that he had left first.

The Bai family searched all over the village, and when they didn't find him by nightfall, they knew something was wrong. Su Bai mobilized the village's young men to look for Bai Xiaohu in nearby mountains and villages for a long time, but they couldn't find him, and no one had seen him.

The Bai family felt that their world had collapsed. Grandpa Bai's hair turned white overnight, Grandma Bai cried every day, and Liu cried every night, saying that she would sit at the door and wait for Little Tiger to come home.

Zhuzi blamed himself, saying that he should have gone home with his brother after school so that the kidnapper might not have dared to act if they saw both of them together.

Everyone in the village, including Bai's family, believed Bai Xiaohu was kidnapped by traffickers.

Such things were often heard within a radius of ten miles. Boys and girls were abducted, but none were found. Except for the scandal caused by Gai Yun and Gai Huai'an, only Liu Xiaoyue was found, and now she had disappeared.

It was said that abducted boys were sold as slaves, and girls were mostly sold into brothels.

Originally, after getting to know Su Liang, Bai family's life was getting better and better. In the month since Bai Xiaohu's disappearance, they were in a state of anxiety and couldn't go on with their lives.

It wasn't until Su Bai received a letter from Su Liang from the capital city, stating that she had saved Bai Xiaohu and would be sending him home soon, that their excitement turned to joy. He rushed to Baits house and told them the good news.

In fact, Su Liang made it clear in the letter that Bai Xiaohu was involved because of her.

But Su Bai didn't tell the Bai family so much, only that Bai Xiaohu had been taken to the capital city, and Su Liang had saved him.

Upon confirming this and hearing Su Bai swear that it was true, they couldn't help but cry and laugh with excitement.

Since then, every day after school, Zhuzi would look towards the entrance of the village for a while, waiting for Su Liang and Bai Xiaohu to come back.

Su Bai had brought people to tidy up Su Yuanzhou's ancestral grave, clear the weeds and debris, and invite a Feng Shui master to select the grave's location, and the manpower was all ready.

The villagers all knew that Su Liang had saved Bai Xiaohu and would soon bring the family's coffins home for burial, praising her for both her skills and filial piety.

As September arrived, the days in the small northern village grew colder.

One day, Zhuzi, wearing the thin cotton jacket he had taken from Bai Xiaohu, stood on the bridge after school, looking at the entrance of the village, waiting for his brother.

After waiting for a long time, and as the sun was setting, he heard Grandma Bai calling him to come back. Zhuzi sighed, shifted his bag, and prepared to go home.

At the moment of turning around, Zhuzi heard faint hoofbeats.

There were cows, donkeys, and two mules in the village, but no horses usually.

Zhuzi rubbed his eyes, saw the carriage, and immediately rushed out, shouting, "It's my brother! My brother is back!"

Grandma Bai didn't hear it, but she stood at the door, looking at the bridge where her grandson had disappeared, and immediately panicked and ran over.

"Brother! Brother!" Zhuzi shouted, running toward the direction of the carriage even as he tripped and quickly got back up.

Bai Xiaohu poked his head out of the carriage and waved to Zhuzi, "Little brother! Little brother! I'm here!"

Qi Jun was also in the carriage, while Su Liang was in the carriage behind. The coffins of the Su family were following in the rear, and the procession was quite long.

The villagers, hearing the commotion, came out of their houses one after another and saw the carriage returning, knowing that Su Liang had come back.

The carriage pulled up next to Zhuzi, and Qi Jun reached out, lifting him up and onto the carriage. "Brother! "

"Brother! "

The two children hugged each other, starting with laughter, then crying together.

Qi Jun watched from the side, feeling a sour sensation in his heart. He suddenly missed his brother too, it had been a long time since they had a fight...

Madame Bai stood at the bridgehead, wiping her tears as she watched the carriage approach.

Thanks to Su Liang's medical care and Qi Jun's attentive nursing, Bai Xiaohu's health had improved. During the journey, he enjoyed good food and beautiful scenery. He had regained weight, his face was rosy, and his skin was a few shades lighter than before. He looked like a refined young man.

Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi got out of the carriage and both rushed to hug Madame Bai.

Seeing her grandson who was lost and now found, Madame Bai couldn't help but let her old tears flow freely and hold him tightly.

Many villagers gathered around, all saying that Little Tiger had grown taller and whiter, looking as imposing as the young masters from the capital city. They greeted Su Liang as she got out of the carriage.

During her last stay in the village, Su Liang had gotten to know almost everyone. At that time, the school she funded was on the right track, and the villagers were all very enthusiastic about her.

Su Liang greeted everyone by name in return.

Su Bai, who rushed over upon hearing the news, saw Su Liang bring Bai Xiaohu back safely and let out a sigh of relief. He still affectionately called her "Liang

Girl" and arranged for the coffins to be taken to the Grand Ancestral Hall of the Su Family.

After the escort master delivered the coffins, Su Liang settled the final payment with them, gave them extra rewards, and they withdrew.

They had originally thought that Su Liang's enemies might appear along the way, but nothing unexpected happened, making their journey quite relaxed.

Su Liang opened the door and returned alone to the familiar courtyard. The weeds in the yard had grown a bit taller, probably from seeds that had drifted down from the mountain.

But this was Su Liang's first home after transmigration, and the most comfortable and relaxing place for her. Even the green and yellow weeds on the ground seemed adorable to her.

Madame Bai called two daughters-in-law to help Su Liang clean and tidy up. As they entered, they saw her standing silently in the courtyard.

This scene reminded Madame Bai of "Ning Jing" and thought Su Liang must be grieving his death but didn't show it in front of others. Su Liang had left hurriedly last time after receiving the news that "Ning Jing" had been killed.

Madame Bai sighed deeply: "Liang Girl! Let us help you clean up!"

Su Liang turned around with a smile, which surprised Madame Bai as she had thought Su Liang was quietly crying over "Ning Jing's" room...

In any case, Madame Bai was a bit puzzled by this. When she mentioned it to her husband, Old Bai sighed: "Ning Jing has been gone for a while now, Liang Girl is strong. When have you ever seen her cry? She must have accepted it."

Su Liang didn't refuse the Bai family's help. Madame Bai and her daughters-in-law started cleaning and tidying up.

After putting her luggage in her room, Su Liang went into the backyard.

Last time she left, there were pumpkins and eggplants growing in the backyard. Gu Ling had picked an eggplant and a pumpkin to take with him. He had shown his true face for the first time in front of Su Liang after they had eaten delicious roasted eggplants together in the small grove one night. The pumpkin was too tender, so the next day he made Pumpkin Egg-filled Dumplings.

Now the eggplant leaves had turned yellow, but two late-ripening purple eggplants could still be seen, round and shiny.

Most of the pumpkin vines on the wall had dried up, but about four or five long old pumpkins still hung on the vines, covered in a layer of white frost. As soon as Su Liang saw them, she started thinking about how to make pumpkin pancakes and pumpkin soup.

The room's doors and windows were tightly sealed, and the room could be lived in after a simple cleaning.

After the weeds in the yard were removed, Madame Bai helped clean the kitchen. Su Liang thanked her and gave her special gifts such as cloth and desserts. Madame Bai was straightforward and didn't refuse, took them and left with her daughters -in-law.

As soon as they left, Old Bai came with a shoulder pole, bringing two large baskets of food, all from their own home, giving Su Liang a portion of everything.

Madame Bai had already invited Su Liang to eat at her house, telling her not to cook herself. But Su Liang said that she would be staying for a while and didn't want to rely on the Bai family for meals, it wasn't about being polite.

Of course, if it were just Su Liang, she would have eaten at Bai's house every day. But there was a hidden Xianxian, so she had no choice.

Su Liang thanked Uncle Bai and chatted with him for a while.

Su Bai came over and discussed the burial with Su Liang.

Since Su Yuanzhou had been gone for so long, and only Su Liang was left as his granddaughter, Su Bai felt that the funeral should be simple and focused on properly burying Su Yuanzhou in the ancestral grave.

Su Liang expressed that she would follow Su Bai's arrangements for everything regarding this matter, as he was always a considerate person. They would get help from the villagers, and after the burial, they would have a feast. Finally, it was decided to dig the grave tomorrow and bury the body the day after.

Su Liang had previously given Su Bai a silver banknote, and now she took out another one. Su Bai got up and left, "I haven't even used the previous one yet!

You should rest! I'll be going!"

Finally, tranquility returned to the small courtyard.

Qi Jun went to Bai Xiaohu's house, bringing the gifts that Su Liang had bought, one by one, and hadn't come back yet.

"Let him stay at Xiaohu's house." Gu Ling's voice suddenly rang out behind her.

Su Liang was not startled and turned to see him coming out of the inner room with his usual disguised face.

"Did you see the eggplant and pumpkin in the backyard?" Su Liang asked. Gu Ling nodded, "Crisp Eggplant and Pumpkin Pancake."

Su Liang smiled lightly, “Me too.” In fact, she didn’t usually crave for food, but when seeing her own grown vegetables, it made her feel like eating them.

“Let Qi Jun stay at Xiaohu’s house.” Gu Ling repeated.

Su Liang thought for a while, “That makes sense, otherwise, you won’t have anywhere to stay. This courtyard, though large, is quite open, unlike the Yuanming Pavilion. Let Qi Jun stay there and teach Xiaohu and Zhuzi martial arts for strength and fitness. If some other kids want to learn as well, they can join in, so he won’t be bored.”

At this moment, Qi Jun, who had just taken Xiaohu and Zhuzi out of Erniu’s house, was looking forward to the leisurely and comfortable life in the beautiful mountain village ahead...

When Qi Jun returned after delivering all the gifts, he had two tails behind him.

“Sister Su Liang! Sister Su Liang!” Zhuzi yelled as soon as he entered the door.

Su Liang came out, and Zhuzi ran to her with a smile, saying, “Sister Su Liang, I’ve grown taller!”

Su Liang rubbed Zhuzi’s still fluffy hair and smiled, “Yes, you’ve grown taller.” When they first met, he was a sickly child, but now he was like a robust calf, full of vitality.

After a while, Qi Jun said he would take the two kids back and picked the corner room which Su Liang had used earlier for practicing medicine in the firewood room, “I’ll live in that small room.”

But Su Liang said, “You can stay at Xiaohu’s house.”

Qi Jun was stunned, listening to Su Liang’s idea of teaching the kids martial arts. He thought it was a good thing, and he liked being with the kids, but did he have to stay at Xiaohu’s house?

“I didn’t consider Master’s reputation carefully. For her sake, I will stay at Xiaohu’s house,” Qi Jun thought for a while and agreed. Having a male servant stay with Su Liang, a young lady, would easily provoke gossip.

Su Liang nodded solemnly, “Okay, you can go. You will eat and live there, and I will look for you if I need anything.”

Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi were both very happy, one on each side, pulling Qi Jun away.

When Qi Jun arrived at the Bai Family, Uncle and Aunt Bai agreed that he should stay with them, as he was not a maid and could not live alone with Su Liang.

The Bai family warmly entertained Qi Jun, and Uncle Bai arranged for Qi Jun to stay in the room with Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi, while the two kids stayed with their parents.

Qi Jun quickly said that since he would be their master from now on, he could just stay with them in the same room.

Aunt Bai asked Qi Jun if he was married or engaged and what kind of girl he liked. Qi Jun quickly said that he would have to listen to his father about that.

Aunt Bai wasn’t trying to introduce local girls to Qi Jun, as they wouldn’t be suitable matches, but she couldn’t help asking him about these things when she saw such a good young man.

When they entered the village, the sun was about to set, and by the time Gu Ling lit the fire and Su Liang started preparing dinner, it was pitch black outside.

Xiaohu brought four Plain Steamed Buns, and Su Liang and Gu Ling each ate one before starting to make the Crisp Eggplant and Pumpkin Pancakes.

Gu Ling picked a pumpkin as long as his arm, lit the fire, and according to Su Liang's instructions, cut a section and placed the remainder aside. He then peeled and deseeded it.

"Don't throw away the pumpkin seeds, they can be eaten," Su Liang said.

Gu Ling put the pumpkin seeds in a clean big bowl, steamed and mashed the diced pumpkin, and then started to mix the dough.

As Su Liang cut the eggplant, she sighed, "It's as if I never left. What were we doing on this day last year?"

Gu Ling didn't hesitate to answer, "Sweet and Sour Ribs."

Su Liang was stunned, "Did I make Sweet and Sour Ribs for dinner on this day last year?"

Gu Ling nodded.

Su Liang said softly, "Great God, your memory is too good. I can't remember at all.

"I knew you wouldn't remember, so I just made it up," Gu Ling said, "Actually, I want to eat Sweet and Sour Ribs tomorrow."

Su Liang: ...

After tasting the first Pumpkin Pancake, Su Liang gave a piece to Gu Ling.

It was fragrant, sweet, and delicious.

By the time the Crisp Eggplant and Pumpkin Pancakes were ready, Su Liang asked Gu Ling to watch over the soup boiling in the pot while she took a bowl of Crisp Eggplant and a small basket of Pumpkin Pancakes to the Bai family.

All the Bai family members had just started eating when Su Liang arrived, and they quickly made room for her.

"I have more food at home, I'll go back and eat," Su Liang said, putting down the dishes and pancakes. Zhuzi tasted a hot pumpkin pancake and exclaimed loudly, "It's so delicious!"

Su Liang smiled and took her leave.

When she returned home, the small hall was lit, and Gu Ling's silhouette was reflected on the window as he set the table.

Su Liang looked up to see a meteor flash across the night sky, followed by another.

"A meteor shower!" Su Liang exclaimed with delight, "Great God, come out quickly!"

Gu Ling walked to Su Liang's side and gazed at the night sky with her.

"It's said that if you make a wish upon a shooting star, it will come true," Su

Liang clasped her hands together and closed her eyes, "Great God, please hurry and make your wish."

What Su Liang was referring to was Gu Ling's wish to travel to her previous life.

Gu Ling looked at the shooting stars, clasped his hands together, and silently made a wish in his heart, "May Su Xiaoliang and I never part."

When the meteor shower ended, the two of them walked back to their rooms.

Gu Ling asked Su Liang, "What did you wish for?"

Su Liang blurted out, "Peace and health, and peace throughout the world."

Gu Ling walked past Su Liang and entered the room, "We should eat the Crisp Eggplant while it's hot.."

Chapter 252: 252. Making people anxious

The next day, as dawn broke, Su Liang got out of bed and ran around the yard, just as she used to do.

After the first lap around the backyard, she saw Gu Ling appear under the eaves.

"Great God, want to join?" Su Liang waved at Gu Ling.

Gu Ling shook his head and walked towards the kitchen. He had to heat up water for Su Liang to wash up after exercising.

After finishing her exercise, Su Liang heard a knock on the door and went to open it. She saw Aunt Bai holding two large bowls outside. Seeing Su Liang's neat attire, Aunt Bai exclaimed, "No wonder Liang Miss could become the Martial Arts Champion. You practice every day. You are really tenacious."

Su Liang smiled, "It smells so good!"

Aunt Bai laughed, saying that it was breakfast for her, a vegetable pie and brown sugar millet porridge.

Su Liang quickly took it and heard Aunt Bai praise the pumpkin pancake and crisp eggplant she made last night. She said it was very simple and that she would show Aunt Bai how to do it next time she visited her house.

"Your uncle, Little Tiger's father, and his uncle went to tend to the graves before dawn. Xiao Qi also went. All the men in the village who could work went," Aunt Bai said. "You don't have to rush over. Lei Zheng is watching." "Thank you so much to everyone." Su Liang said seriously.

Aunt Bai's rough hand gently patted Su Liang's arm, and she went back. She said that Little Tiger would come to pick up the bowls later, so there was no need to hurry.

They heated up the leftover pumpkin pancakes from last night and didn't make anything else.

After washing up, Su Liang and Gu Ling had breakfast together. They cleared away the weeds in the backyard, picked the only eggplant left, and harvested the old pumpkins as well.

Looking at the tidy backyard, Gu Ling said, "No matter where we live, we should grow our own vegetables."

"Does Great God think our own vegetables taste better?" Su Liang laughed lightly.

Gu Ling nodded, "Yes."

"What would happen if you said one more word?" Su Liang hummed. Gu Ling spoke several more words, "I want to eat sweet and sour ribs."

Su Liang: ... Why did she hear a hint of willfulness? It must be an illusion.

"We don't have any ribs at home. If you want to eat them, go buy them yourself," Su Liang said.

As soon as she said that, there was a knock on the door from the front yard. She went to open it, and Gu Ling started a fire to burn the dried weeds.

The visitor was Hu Er. Last night he heard that Su Liang had returned, so he came to the village early in the morning.

Hu Er, who used to run a gambling house and lend money at high interest rates, was now in good health and doing honest business. He looked younger and more energetic than in the past.

Su Liang wanted to offer him tea, but there wasn't any hot water yet.

Hu Er laughed and said, "Miss Su, don't be so formal with me. I never thought Miss Su would not even have a maid by her side to serve her now, and she would do everything herself. It's really..." different, but very down-to-earth.

Su Liang thought to herself that it wasn't as if she did everything herself; there was a certain Great God who was even more down-to-earth. Of course, life was all about doing one's own things, and she still couldn't and didn't want to command anyone like a slave. Qi Jun was more of a hired assistant in her eyes, and she would never let him put himself in danger for her.

After chatting for a while, Hu Er got down to business, "Last time, Miss Su asked me to keep an eye on someone, and I finally have some news. I'm about to go and check it out."

Su Liang was taken aback, "Are you talking about the missing brother of my friend?"

Hu Er nodded and quickly added, "I'm not sure yet. The age matches, and there's a red birthmark on his neck."

Su Liang had only mentioned the age and birthmark to Hu Er. She thought for a moment and said, "Would you please check it out first without alerting anyone? If it's not him, it might cause trouble for someone."

Hu Er said solemnly, "Miss Su, don't worry, I understand."

Su Liang knew that Hu Er now had a flourishing business with the Wan Family and did not lack money, so she didn't bother with formalities. She said that whether it worked out or not, she would invite him for a drink afterwards. Hearing that, Hu Er nodded repeatedly, "I have a small matter to ask Miss Su." Su Liang nodded, "Go ahead."

"My family has two children who are of age to start learning. My older brother originally wanted to hire a tutor to teach them at home, but I thought of the school you founded. I was wondering if they could come here to study?" Hu Er asked.

"Do you plan to travel to the county every day? Won't it be a bit far?" Su Liang asked.

Hu Er quickly waved his hands, "Not far, not far! The elders in the family like living in town, so they will all live in town!"

Su Liang smiled, "If you think that's a good idea, of course you can. I'll mention it to Lei Zheng, and you just send the children over."

Hu Er's face lit up with joy, and he thanked Su Liang.

In fact, Su Liang knew that Hu Er's motives were to curry favor; perhaps he felt that she was now an important person with influence and would take care of any children coming from the village school. By sending his own children to the school, he was also trying to build connections.

But there was nothing wrong with that. It was normal for people to have personal motivations. Su Liang agreed to Hu Er, also out of self-interest.

Nowadays, the Hu Family was one of the top wealthy merchants in Bei'an County, with a good relationship with the government office. No one dared to provoke them easily. If Hu's children came to study in the Su Family Village, the Hu Family would naturally ensure the peace of the village school, and even the entire village.

And that's what Su Liang wanted, a win-win situation for all.

Hu Er asked Su Liang when she planned to return to the capital city, and said that he would confirm whether the person he found was Che Yun's brother as soon as possible. If Su Liang had already left, he would send someone to deliver the news to the capital city.

After Hu Er left, Su Liang went to the backyard. Gu Ling was no longer in sight, and she thought he must have gone to town to buy meat, so she didn't bother him.

After a while, Su Liang locked the door and went to the Bai Family's house.

Aunt Bai had just taken out a batch of dried kidney beans that she had sun-dried last month. Seeing Su Liang, she greeted her with a smile and took the bowl from her hand, "Come in and sit down."

"These dried kidney beans are good." Su Liang eyed the Bai Family's produce. It was already too cold in the north for fresh kidney beans this season.

"Whatever you want to eat, I'll cook it for you!" Aunt Bai happily said.

"Can I have a bunch to take back?" Su Liang asked with a smile.

Aunt Bai nodded repeatedly, "Don't be polite, just take them! They're home-grown, not worth much, and they're delicious when stewed with meat!"

Su Liang wanted Aunt Bai to take her to the Su Family's ancestral grave since she didn't know where it was.

Aunt Bai took off her apron and went out with Su Liang. The two children had gone to school and weren't at home. Mrs. Liu had given birth to her third child, a chubby baby girl who was still in swaddling clothes.

"I heard from Little Tiger that Xiao Qi is really good at martial arts!" Aunt Bai asked.

Su Liang nodded, "Yes, he's very good. I asked him to teach Little Tiger and Zhuzi some martial arts for physical fitness and self-defense."

"Yes, that's really great!" Aunt Bai's expression was grateful. "If it wasn't for you saving Little Tiger this time, our family would have been in a really difficult situation."

Yesterday, Su Bai specifically told Su Liang not to reveal too many details to the Bai family. Now that the people are safe and sound, everything is fine. Saying too much would only make them worry more and be scared in the future.

After this incident, Su Bai has already cautioned the school that no student should walk home alone from now on.

Even if kidnappers come to the village to snatch children, they would only dare to target those who are alone. Otherwise, as soon as one child is captured, the other would start shouting, and the kidnapper wouldn't be able to escape.

Having listened to Su Bai, Su Liang didn't say anything further to Bai's family. Letting them know that she had enemies who would try to threaten her by harming the children wouldn't necessarily distance them from her, but it would indeed make them worry every day.

When they arrived at the graveyard, they saw young and middle-aged people from the village working hard, as this time they were burying Su Yuanzhou's entire family.

Su Bai came over and said, "It'll be done after noon! We were planning to call you over after the graves were ready to be checked."

"Thank you, Uncle Bai, and thanks to everyone. Please accept some extra money for your hard work," Su Liang said.

Su Bai frowned, "What are you talking about? Whenever there's an event in the village, everyone helps out. Who would take money? You're treating us like outsiders."

Su Liang was taken aback, "Oh, my bad, just forget what I said."

Seeing Su Liang admit her mistake so obediently, Su Bai couldn't help but rub his forehead, "You go back and rest if there's nothing wrong, or you can go to the school and take a look. It's all dust and dirt here."

Qi Jun was working hard with other young men from the village and hadn't noticed that Su Liang had arrived.

Su Liang only asked for directions before going to the school with Bai's wife.

Standing outside the window, Su Liang saw Little Tiger, Zhuzi, and Erniu, all diligently writing.

Both people left quickly, with Bai's wife looking content, "It's different when you read books. They're really blessed to have you."

Su Liang had heard this many times and would always just smile in response.

After collecting some dry kidney beans and a jar of pickles made by Bai's wife, Su Liang returned home.

Gu Ling returned home nearing noon, carrying a large basket of goods, including ribs and various other fresh ingredients.

"Do you have to eat sweet and sour ribs? Bai's wife's dry kidney beans are quite good, I brought some back. How about we make braised rolls with ribs and kidney beans today? You used to like it a lot." Su Liang consulted with Gu Ling. "Dry kidney beans?" Gu Ling picked them up and took a look, "Still edible?" Su Liang nodded, "You'll see."

"What are those for?" Gu Ling pointed to the pumpkin flesh left over from yesterday.

Su Liang asked him to scoop out all the flesh from the cut pumpkin, wash it clean, leaving only the seeds, and then fry the pumpkin seeds for eating.

For lunch, they ate braised rolls with ribs and kidney beans. The dry kidney beans cooked with ribs had a unique taste that Gu Ling enjoyed very much, so he asked Su Liang to bring all the kidney beans from Bai's house.

After eating, Gu Ling washed the dishes while Su Liang dealt with the pumpkin seeds, "Shouldn't we go back sooner? Otherwise, Little Nian will hate you."

Gu Ling shook his head, "I don't want to go back."

Su Liang calmly nodded, "Anyway, he's your brother. Yang Yu will definitely not blame me."

"He listens to Yang Yu." Gu Ling said.

"True." Su Liang was also joking, Nian Jincheng wouldn't really blame Gu Ling. It was hard for them to come back, and if they rushed back to the capital city, they didn't know when they would be able to return again.

Gu Ling and Su Liang were willing to help their friends, but it wasn't an urgent matter, and there was no need to sacrifice their hard-earned leisure time for the sake of their friends.

The next day, Su Liang wore mourning clothes and buried Su Yuanzhou's family in the ancestral grave. Su Liang had originally brought back his own coffin and tombstone, but Su Bai firmly opposed his whimsical actions of arranging a grave for himself at such a young age, thinking it was very unlucky.

Of course, Su Bai meant well, but Su Liang's original intention was to set up a tomb for the original master.

The night before, Su Liang had placed all the original master's relics in Su Yuanzhou's coffin, as her grandfather had doted on her most since her parents had died.

According to the rules, no money was given to the villagers for labor, and only a banquet was held on the day of the burial.

The stir-fried pumpkin seeds prepared by Su Liang became Gu Ling's favorite snack. He wanted to scoop out all the pumpkin seeds at home but was stopped by Su Liang, who said they wouldn't be able to store the pumpkins that way.

Afterward, Su Liang and Gu Ling lived in a small house in the village by the mountains and rivers, returning to the rural life. Except for Gu Ling not showing his face, everything else was the same as before.

There were too many children who wanted to learn martial arts from Qi Jun, so he taught the children in the school some basic moves.

This was a meaningful and interesting thing to do. Qi Jun enjoyed it and quickly became friends with the children. He joined them in catching rabbits, finding bird eggs, climbing mountains and rivers, and having a good time.

Ren Dong, who had been ordered by Su Liang to go to Yin Country to fetch Mu Ya's head, arrived at his destination five days ago. He spent two days investigating Mu Ya's daily whereabouts and found the right timing to strike, but he hesitated to do so.

Because Mu Ya was pregnant and her belly was already showing, it was obvious at a glance.

Ren Dong hesitated whether he should still take the shot in this unexpected situation. What if Su Liang didn't want her to kill a pregnant woman?

After wandering in the capital city of Yin Country for several days, Ren Dong finally decided to give up the mission, report to Su Liang first and let him decide. If Su Liang still wanted to kill Mu Ya and didn't care about taking two lives, Ren Dong would come back again to claim Mu Ya's head.

But there were some gains. Before coming, Ren Dong knew that Qiu Jianren, Qiu Ming's uncle, was Mu Ya's pawn and one of the masterminds behind the poisoning of Gao Jiabao. Ren Dong had been secretly watching Mu Ya, and on the day she was preparing to leave, he finally caught Qiu Jianren.

Ren Dong turned to focus on Qiu Jianren, waiting for him to be alone before decisively taking his life. He chopped off his head, wrapped it up, threw the body into the chaotic burial mound and then hurried back to Qian Country day and night.

Qian Country's capital city.

Yang Yu and Nian Jincheng had come to the capital city together, but at this point, the attendant beside Yang Yu had "left," and the fact that she had a fiancé was not widely known. Nian Jincheng had secretly followed her.

According to the original plan, upon arrival in the capital city, Nian Jincheng would find Gu Ling, set a date to restore their identities, and Gu Ling would become Marquis Chang Xin. Nian Jincheng might return to his original position, or perhaps not. Yang Yu would go to live with Su Liang, following Su Liang's arrangements to meet Nian Jincheng again and bring them together.

However, it was only upon arriving in the capital city that they found out that Su Liang had gone back to Bei'an County. Without asking or checking, Gu Ling must have gone with her.

Nian Jincheng just grumbled a few words about his brother but not because Gu Ling didn't care about him. Instead, he grumbled that Gu Ling still hadn't captured Su Liang's heart and insisted on being inseparable, not willing to part even for a moment. He didn't understand what Gu Ling was thinking.

However, Nian Jincheng could only grumble silently because Yang Yu didn't know that Gu Ling was the former Ning Jing. Nian Jincheng planned to find an opportunity to talk to Yang Yu about it but needed Su Liang's approval first.

Although Su Liang wasn't there, Yang Yu still moved into Su Mansion, as Su Liang had specifically asked Lin Xueqing to tell her before leaving.

It was also convenient for Nian Jincheng to hide there. The Su Mansion was large and empty, so they could be more comfortable living there.

At night, Yang Yu and Nian Jincheng walked hand in hand by the lake, admiring the moon.

"Why hasn't Gu Ling appeared yet?" Yang Yu asked, "Will he not come back? If you restore your identity by yourself, will it be safe?"

Nian Jincheng smiled, "We'll just wait for Su Liang to come back." That certain person was Su Liang's shadow and would naturally come back when she did. The next time they met, Nian Jincheng planned to have a good talk with Gu and discuss whether he intended to become a monk or hurry up and marry Su Liang.. It was really worrying!

Chapter 253: 253. She Doesn't Understand (Second Revision)

Yin Country's Imperial Palace.

Duanmu Chen was tasting the soup that Imperial Concubine Xiao had made when Duanmu Yi suddenly arrived.

Mother and son quickly got up to greet him. Duanmu Yi smiled warmly, helped Imperial Concubine Xiao up, and took her hand to sit down together, "What kind of soup am I missing out on today? Are you making it just for Chen'er and not for me?"

Imperial Concubine Xiao hastily explained that she had just received the recipe and wanted Duanmu Chen to try it out first, fearing it might not turn out well.

Duanmu Chen pretended to be hurt, "So, the soup my mother made for me was just for me to taste it first before giving it to my father."

Imperial Concubine Xiao chided Duanmu Chen with a glare, "Don't talk nonsense."

Duanmu Yi burst out laughing.

The atmosphere was harmonious, and they really looked like a happy family of three.

However, after a while, Duanmu Yi made an excuse to send Imperial Concubine Xiao away, apparently having something to talk to Duanmu Chen alone about.

“Su Liang should have already dealt with her family’s funeral. I’ve been having headaches these past few days for some reason, and even the senior Imperial Physician couldn’t find anything wrong.” Duanmu Yi said, rubbing his forehead.

Duanmu Chen looked concerned, “Father, please take care of yourself. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

Duanmu Yi shook his head and sighed, “I’m fine. I’ll probably be better in a couple of days. I’m just wondering whether or not to send someone to summon Su Liang back to the capital. Your great-grandmother hasn’t been in good health recently!”

Duanmu Chen nodded, “Su Liang is indeed a brilliant physician. It would be more reliable to have her in the capital city. However, I’ve been thinking; since there have been some misunderstandings between her and my great-grandmother, having her treat her could make the situation worse.”

Duanmu Yi picked up his teacup, “It sounds like you don’t want Su Liang to come back anytime soon.”

Duanmu Chen’s heart leaped, but he didn’t show it on his face. He quickly shook his head, “I absolutely do not mean that. It’s just that another physician might be more suitable to treat my great-grandmother. As a citizen of Qian Country, Su Liang would naturally comply with my father’s wishes.”

It seemed as if Duanmu Yi finally heard what he wanted to hear, so he nodded and said, “In that case, I’ll leave this matter to you.”

Duanmu Chen lowered his gaze and obediently accepted the order, but he was not entirely happy about it. He had always wanted to be the crown prince, as the other princes were not as smart or capable as him, so he thought the position should be his. However, he was not in a hurry to ascend to the throne.

Currently, the three kingdoms were in a fragile peace, and war would inevitably break out sooner or later. In this situation, becoming the emperor too soon would be too risky. It was better to slowly accumulate strength and power as the crown prince, step by step.

It was only because of Su Liang that Duanmu Chen began to worry. If Duanmu Yi were to truly lose his senses and do something irreversible, his plans might take an unexpected turn...

Imperial Concubine Xiao returned, and the three resumed their pleasant conversation, as if Duanmu Yi had only come to see his beloved concubine out of idle boredom.

Adult princes had to live outside the palace, and the Crown Prince’s residence was also located outside. Only Duanmu Che had been an exception, having been allowed to live in the palace for a while by Duanmu Yi.

Upon returning to his residence, Duanmu Chen wrote a letter and sent someone to deliver it to Bei’an County, asking Su Liang to come back to the capital city.

Seeing Duanmu Chen’s uneasy expression, Chang’an couldn’t help but ask,

“Master, wouldn’t it be a good thing if Miss Su comes back sooner?”

Duanmu Chen didn’t nod, only saying two words, “Good thing.”

The tone seemed like he was affirming Chang'an's question, but also seemed like a rhetorical question. He then changed the subject, "Have there been any movements concerning Duanmu Chen lately?"

Chang'an shook his head, "None. Prince Number Five has stayed here, just like before."

Duanmu Chen's eyes narrowed slightly, "I almost forgot something. The next time I go to the palace, I'll remind my father to arrange a marriage for the Fifth Prince."

Chang'an blurted out, "Prince Number Five has feelings for Miss Su, so he might not agree."

Duanmu Chen sneered coldly, "But Father Emperor's attitude towards him is not as good as before, so if he acts recklessly again... it may not be a bad thing. We'll just wait and see."

The next day, Duanmu Chen went to the palace to attend court. After the court session, he was summoned by Duanmu Yi and reported that he had already sent someone to Bei'an County to order Su Liang to return to the capital as soon as possible.

Duanmu Yi appeared calm and brought up Gu Ling and Nian Jincheng.

"If they are far away from the capital and haven't made it back yet, it's possible."

Duanmu Chen pondered, "But I think they might not come back and instead choose to continue living in anonymity."

Duanmu Yi shook his head, "I believe they will definitely return." "Father Emperor's intention is..." Duanmu Chen respectfully asked.

"Even if they settle down themselves, and get married and have children in the future, will any woman be willing to hide with them and not be able to face anyone? Are they going to let their children continue hiding for a lifetime?" Duanmu Yi snorted lightly.

Duanmu Chen's expression became serious, "Father Emperor is right, I was not considerate enough. If Nian Jincheng returns, will Father Emperor use him again?"

Duanmu Yi nodded, "Why not? He is straightforward, and the matter in the past was not a slander against him. I also want to find out who the woman was who saved him."

Duanmu Chen's eyes flashed faintly, "It's essential to find out about this matter. That woman caused my fifth younger brother to be seriously injured at the time."

"Mmm. Che'er's health is much better now, you brothers should interact more." Duanmu Yi said.

After Duanmu Chen agreed, he smiled and said, "Father Emperor had selected consorts for me and my fifth brother before, but it was put on hold due to some issues. Now that my marriage has been settled, my fifth brother is still alone."

Duanmu Yi chuckled, "I have been too busy recently and forgot about this matter. Since Che'er's mother is no longer with us, let's entrust this matter to your mother. I trust her the most to handle this matter, and take the opportunity to select you another imperial concubine."

Duanmu Chen first expressed his gratitude, then hesitated for a moment and sighed softly, "I don't know if my fifth brother will be unhappy about this."

Duanmu Yi's expression darkened slightly, "It's a good thing, what does he have to be unhappy about? Let your mother take care of it, it's all according to my wishes!"

"Yes, Father Emperor." Having achieved his goal, Duanmu Chen went to find Imperial Concubine Xiao.

Now in charge of the Imperial Harem, Imperial Concubine Xiao took Duanmu Yi's instructions very seriously and immediately ordered the Ministry of Rites to send a list of imperial consorts and their portraits as soon as possible.

The next day, Duanmu Chen visited Duanmu Che in accordance with Duanmu Yi's instructions.

Duanmu Che's attitude was cold, and when he heard that Duanmu Chen was going to select a consort for him, he didn't show any displeasure, saying only that he would listen to Father Emperor's decision.

This surprised Duanmu Chen.

Upon returning to his mansion, the more Duanmu Chen thought about it, the more he felt that something was off with Duanmu Che. He instructed Chang'an to dispatch more people to watch the movements of the Fifth Prince's Mansion and report any abnormality to him immediately.

Su Family Village.

Su Liang had returned to the village for half a month. In addition to practicing martial arts and reading daily, she also treated patients who came to her door. Her days were fulfilling.

Her plan with Gu Ling was to not return to the capital unless someone came for her, and she hoped to stay in the village until after the New Year.

Because Gu Ling couldn't be seen by others, Su Liang kept the door locked during the day and night, only opening it when someone knocked.

That evening, as Gu Ling was tending to the fire, and Su Liang was preparing to fry vegetarian meatballs, they suddenly heard someone knocking on the door.

Su Liang told Gu Ling to go back to his room first, and without even taking off her apron, she went to open the door.

"Who is it?" Su Liang asked first. It didn't sound like someone from the Bai Family or Qi Jun, otherwise, they would have called her directly. Su Liang thought it might be a patient.

"Master." A female voice, not very familiar to Su Liang, came from outside the door.

Su Liang was stunned. To be honest, since she sent Ren Dong away before setting off from the capital city, she had forgotten about this girl, and never expected her to find her way here...

Su Liang opened the door and saw Ren Dong standing outside, tired and travel-worn, with two bundles on her back, one of which was round and bulging.

“Did you bring back Mu Ya’s head?” Su Liang asked.

Ren Dong shook her head, “Please forgive me, Master, I did not complete my mission.”

“What’s in there?” Su Liang frowned.

“It’s the head of Mu Ya’s lackey, Qiu Jianren.” Ren Dong replied.

Su Liang’s expression changed slightly, she made way, “Come in and let’s talk.”

Ren Dong entered the door without looking around. She followed Su Liang’s guidance and went to the small room in the corner.

Su Liang went to the kitchen first, seeing that the oil was already hot, she did not immediately go to ask Ren Dong what had happened, but continued to fry the meatballs.

The porridge and other dishes were prepared beforehand. When Su Liang finished frying the meatballs, Bai Xiaohu came over to deliver the steamed buns and took away a large bowl of vegetarian meatballs.

Su Liang served the food and let Gu Ling eat first. The two did not talk, Gu Ling already knew that Ren Dong had arrived and signaled Su Liang to send her away as soon as possible.

Su Liang had the same intention, but she had to find out what Ren Dong had done in Yin Country first.

Seeing that Su Liang had brought in the food, Ren Dong quickly got up, only to hear Su Liang say, “You go to the kitchen and wash your hands first, then come over and eat something.”

“I’m not hungry, I don’t want to bother you.” Ren Dong’s expression was somewhat uneasy.

“That’s an order from me.” Su Liang said indifferently.

Without a word, Ren Dong went out to the kitchen and came back after a simple wash, she took the chopsticks that Su Liang handed her.

“Eat and talk.” Su Liang sat down opposite Ren Dong, “Why didn’t you kill Mu Ya? Was it because you couldn’t, or was it for some other reason?”

Ren Dong replied respectfully, “When I reached Yin country and found Mu Ya, I found out that she was pregnant.”

Su Liang was taken aback; this was something she hadn’t expected. After Mu Ya had stirred up trouble in Qian Country’s military exams, she returned to Yin Country and became a concubine of the Crown Prince. It was normal for her to be pregnant now.

Su Liang asked coldly, “So you didn’t kill her because she was pregnant?”

Ren Dong’s face stiffened, she put down the chopsticks and knelt down in front of Su Liang, “Please forgive me, Master. I thought of your kindness and only intended to kill Mu Ya, not the child in her womb.”

Su Liang’s eyes narrowed, she stared at Ren Dong intently, “Then why did you kill Qiu Jianren? This was not my command either.”

"It's my own decision, thinking that... Master..." Ren Dong tried to explain in a panic but couldn't finish her sentence.

"What did you think?" Su Liang snorted coldly, "I thought that you didn't have your own ideas and would only obey others' orders. What if I order you to go and kill the pregnant Mu Ya now, would you do it?"

Ren Dong looked up at Su Liang with a startled expression, then quickly bowed her head again, "I will follow your orders."

"So, you didn't try to kill Mu Ya in Yin Country, not because you had a tender heart, but because you thought I should have a tender heart?" Su Liang asked coldly.

"Please forgive me, Master... I... I just couldn't bring myself to kill a pregnant woman..." Ren Dong said solemnly.

"You've seen the emperor before coming to find me, haven't you?" Su Liang asked.

Ren Dong lowered her head and did not speak, which meant she had admitted it.

"I am not your master, you may leave. You can either leave now or finish your meal before you go. This is my thank you for bringing back the head." With that, Su Liang got up and left.

Just as she reached the door, she heard a heavy thud, as Ren Dong's head hit

the ground. "Please show mercy, master! I am loyal to the emperor, and I was forced to do this!"

Su Liang's eyes narrowed, she turned back and sat down, "If I understand correctly, you intend to betray the emperor and truly pledge your allegiance to me? Is that what you mean?"

With tears in her eyes, Ren Dong looked at Su Liang, "Please take me in, Master! No matter what you want to know, I will tell you everything I know without reservation!"

"Why?" Su Liang asked, "Do you trust me? But we don't seem to know each other very well."

"Yes, I trust you, Master, because I know you are a good person." Ren Dong said seriously.

Su Liang sneered lightly, "A good person? What do you mean by a good person?"

Are you implying that the emperor is a bad person?"

"That's not what I meant..." Ren Dong's face turned pale.

"Then what do you mean?" Su Liang's tone was rather aggressive. She was surprised by Ren Dong's sudden change in attitude and couldn't easily trust her.

"I... I don't know how to say it..." Ren Dong fell silent for a moment, then raised her head again and looked at Su Liang, "Master treats me as a person. In the emperor's eyes, I am not even a human being!"

"I am a subject of Qian Country. You are talking about the Emperor like this, aren't you afraid that I will betray you?" Su Liang said coldly.

Ren Dong shook her head, "I'm not afraid!"

"Get up." Su Liang said, "Eat the food I made while it's still hot, don't waste it. While you eat, think carefully about what you want to tell me. Once you've thought it through, I'll come back and find you."

"Yes, Master." Ren Dong looked respectful, watching Su Liang get up and leave, she let out a small sigh of relief.

Su Liang returned to her room, closed the door, and sat down opposite Gu Ling.

She picked up her chopsticks, ate two meatballs, and then softly said, "She wants to pledge her loyalty to me. Can I trust her?"

Gu Ling nodded, "I told you to win her over."

Su Liang frowned slightly, "The key is, I didn't do anything to win her over, what if she's deceiving me?"

"You did win her over." Gu Ling said. Su Liang was startled, "What did I do?"

"You invited her to dinner." Gu Ling replied.

Su Liang held her forehead, "Who would change their loyalty just for a meal?"

Gu Ling drank pumpkin porridge elegantly and nodded slightly, "I would. It's delicious." Moreover, they had just cut open a large pumpkin today, so there would be delicious fried pumpkin seeds to eat tomorrow.

Su Liang rolled her eyes at Gu Ling, "Great God, I'm talking about serious matters here, can you stop joking?"

Gu Ling shook his head, "I'm not joking. If I were a spy, and you invited me to dinner with your own cooking, I would choose to follow you."

Su Liang was speechless, "That's because you're a strange person. Forget it, I'll let you enjoy your meal. I need to think carefully about Ren Dong's situation."

Gu Ling silently continued to drink his porridge, thinking that Su Liang had mentioned in her previous life, a widespread saying, "To grasp a man's heart, you must first grasp his stomach." He wanted to express that Su Liang had grasped his stomach, but was he being too subtle? She was so smart; how could

she not understand....

Chapter 254: 254. Watch me (an update)

Su Liang entered the room, and the bowls and plates in front of Ren Dong were empty.

“Is that enough?” Su Liang asked.

Ren Dong quickly nodded, “It’s enough. Delicious!”

Su Liang sat down, “Have you thought it through?”

Ren Dong nodded more slowly this time, but there was a firmness in her eyes, as if she had made a significant decision, “I have thought it through.”

“Why did you become a secret guard for the emperor? What is the story behind your master and your sister?” Su Liang asked bluntly.

Ren Dong took a deep breath and began, “Since the founding of Qian Country, there has been an organization that has been loyal to the Royal Family and obeys only the emperor. No one else is aware of our existence, including the Empress and the crown prince.”

Ren Dong said the organization is called Qianlong Guards, the secret protectors of the emperor.

Ren Dong didn’t know her true origins because she had been taken in by her master since she could remember. She might have been sold by her biological parents or abducted, or perhaps she was the child of a senior member within the organization. No one offered her any clarification.

The men in Qianlong Guards were all named after trees, while the women took names from flowers. Ren Dong’s master was called Shaoyao.

Each Qianlong Guard, after turning twenty, would begin to take disciples, ultimately cultivating one boy and one girl to succeed them in protecting the emperor. In reality, they were to unconditionally obey the emperor’s orders and do whatever was needed of them.

Ren Dong grew up with a girl one year older and a boy one year younger than her.

The three of them were named Jin Hua, Silver Flower, and Bai Yang. Silver Flower is the Ren Dong in front of Su Liang now.

Although the training was harsh, and Shaoyao was either abusive or scolding, the three siblings relied on each other like brothers and sisters. Jin Hua had the highest martial arts talent and was the most sensitive, always protecting Ren Dong and Bai Yang.

They not only had to learn martial arts but many other things, such as how to disguise themselves because they might be assigned to enemy countries as spies once they had mastered the necessary skills.

Until last year, Shaoyao told them that they would soon meet the emperor and instructed them to be prepared.

That night, Jin Hua committed suicide.

At this point, Ren Dong was tearful, and Su Liang could guess some of the reasons behind it.

“Because master told my sister that she only needed two disciples, and she took one in privately to select a better one. Only one of us sisters could survive. She told this

only to my sister and ordered her to kill me..." Ren Dong couldn't continue through her sobs.

The outcome was already known to Su Liang. Jin Hua couldn't bear to kill Ren Dong, whom she considered her sister, and perhaps she didn't want to continue that life either, so she chose to end it herself.

"Master lied to us. She told us that she had no idea why my sister committed suicide." Ren Dong said solemnly, "My sister left her hairpin to me, and a single word was carved inside its case: 'Escape'. Because she knew that people like us would not end well in the end."

Su Liang recalled the first time she heard the name Silver Flower, and she casually asked if there was a sister named Jin Hua. At that time, Ren Dong showed a noticeable change in her expression.

Ren Dong continued, stating that the reason why their names were Jin Hua and Silver Flower, and not officially flower names, was that Shaoyao had prepared only one name to hand down to her successors. One of them would ultimately use the name and the other was to die.

"That name is also called Shaoyao." Ren Dong's face showed disgust as she mentioned these two words.

Su Liang stared intently and asked, "So your name given to you by the emperor is Shaoyao? Does the emperor know that you call yourself Silver Flower in front of me?"

Ren Dong shook her head, "If the emperor knows, I only need to defend myself by saying I did it to hide my identity."

As her words fell, Ren Dong's eyes sparkled with tears, and she looked at Su Liang and said, "I really like the name 'Ren Dong' that Master gave me. Master said that Jin Hua and Silver Flower are both medicinal herbs, also known as Ren Dong. I feel that with this name, it's like my sister and I are both alive. She's in my bones and blood, and she's never left."

Hearing this, Su Liang sighed. She had initially known nothing about Ren Dong, and the name change was just a casual remark, but she never expected it would touch Ren Dong's deeply buried feelings.

"What about your brother?" Su Liang asked.

Ren Dong shook her head, "After we met the emperor, we were separated and never saw each other again. Master ordered me to go to Yin Country to kill Man Ya, and when I reported the task to the emperor, he said that if I couldn't complete the mission, my brother and I would both die."

Su Liang frowned. What Ren Dong said was true; Duanmu Yi indeed didn't see them as human beings. However, considering the world's power structure and the emperor's status, Su Liang shouldn't be surprised by his actions. Not only Duanmu Yi, but the royals of other countries likely also had people like Ren Dong or even more cruel selections.

From an objective perspective, before Su Liang could criticize Duanmu Yi, she should first criticize the laws of survival in this world.

However, from a subjective emotional standpoint, Su Liang naturally couldn't empathize with Duanmu Yi because the actual victim was Ren Dong.

The person who killed Jin Hua was Shaoyao. Duanmu Yi might not have even known about Jin Hua's existence, and even if he did, he wouldn't care.

"You're telling me all this in hopes that I'll rebel?" Su Liang looked at Ren Dong and asked.

Ren Dong shook her head incessantly, "No, no, not at all. I never meant that. The one who killed my sister is that poisonous woman Shaoyao. The emperor doesn't even know about my sister's existence. Ever since I met Master, I've been thinking about my sister's last words. She told me to escape, but where can I go? If I run away by myself, Bai Yang will surely die. The day Master named me 'Ren Dong,' I had a feeling that maybe it was destiny. Master is the opportunity I've been waiting for. Master is too kind; I don't want to be the emperor's spy and betray Master."

"So, what do you want to do?" Su Liang asked indifferently.

"I can only tell the emperor what Master wants him to know. No matter what the emperor asks me to do, I will inform Master." Ren Dong replied respectfully.

"I thought someone with your background would understand one principle better: knowing others, knowing their faces, but not their hearts." Su Liang's expression was calm, "You trust me so easily without considering the possibility of misjudging me?"

Ren Dong shook her head, "No, it won't happen. Although I haven't spent much time with Master, I believe I won't misjudge someone!"

"You're gambling. Anyway, I can't bring myself to kill you." Su Liang scoffed.

Ren Dong nodded, "I admit I'm gambling because Master is the opportunity I've been waiting for, so I don't want to miss it, nor do I want to make any more mistakes."

"You want me to help you find your brother?" Su Liang asked.

Rendong shook his head, "I have no right to ask you to do anything, Master. I just hope you will accept my loyalty. I only wish that if one day you encounter Baiyang, you could show some mercy."

"I can't promise you something that hasn't happened yet." Su Liang shook her head.

Rendong didn't bring up Baiyang again but talked about the two times she met the emperor.

Duanmu Yi's words didn't surprise Su Liang, as she had known Rendong was sent to watch her.

"What about someone like Shaoyao? After retirement... Where do they go after they have a successor?" Su Liang asked.

Rendong shook her head, "I don't know. But Shaoyao said that if she performs well and makes achievements, she can gain freedom and wealth when she reaches a certain age."

Su Liang thought to herself that this freedom might be wandering in the Underworld, and the wealth might be NTH Currency...

But it might not be. Because it occurred to Su Liang that young people are suitable for being spies, and the older they get, the higher their Martial Arts generally are. It's unlikely that Qianlong Guards in their forties would be killed, maybe they are still with Duanmu Yi.

All of them get in touch with Duanmu Yi individually and don't know where the others are, so they can avoid collusion and betrayal.

In fact, Rendong was the spy arranged to be by Su Liang's side. At first, because her figure was very similar to Su Liang, Duanmu Yi arranged her as Su Liang's stand-in.

"You just said that the Crown Prince has already sent someone to bring me back to the capital?" Su Liang frowned.

Rendong nodded, "Yes." Duanmu Yi wanted Rendong to observe Su Liang's reaction to the news about going back to the capital and report it to him.

"I see. You can rest here, get water from the kitchen." Su Liang got up and left.

Back in the room, Gu Ling was organizing some books that Su Liang had recently read.

"Great God, she stays, and you go," Su Liang said.

With a tearing sound, Gu Ling ripped a Medical Book borrowed from Duanmu Yi in half.

"Great God, be careful. This book needs to be returned." Su Liang hurried over and took the torn book from Gu Ling's hands, "You fix it if you break it. Have it rebound."

"Su Liang," Gu Ling looked at Su Liang, her tone cold, "What did you just say?"

While smoothing the torn pages, Su Liang said, "Oh, I think Rendong is not deceiving me. She sincerely wants to join me, but you can't meet her. She said someone from the capital city is coming to take me back. You should go first, return to the capital and regain your identity. Avoid arousing suspicion by returning at different times. Rendong is here, she can escort me back."

As Su Liang finished speaking, she looked up at Gu Ling, "Great God, are you not happy? What do you think would be more appropriate?"

Gu Ling frowned slightly, "Is there no other way?"

"I know the Great God doesn't want to go back, neither do I. But if someone from the Royal Family is coming, we can't justify not going back," Su Liang said.

"That Rendong, you plan to keep her around for good?" Gu Ling asked.

Su Liang shrugged, "It's not like I want to keep her. I can't drive her away, and I can't kill her, so what else can I do? If she becomes a double agent, it's good for me. I'll watch her for a while and see how she does."

"You want me to leave tonight?" Gu Ling's frown did not relax.

Su Liang sighed slightly, "Otherwise, it would be hard for you not to be discovered by her while living under the same roof."

Gu Ling was silent for a moment, and then said quietly, "Why am I the one always hiding?"

Su Liang put her hand on her forehead, "Great God, don't forget why you couldn't show your true identity from the beginning. If you don't want to hide anymore, you can only go back to the capital and be the Marquis Chang Xin." Gu Ling said nothing and got up to return to his room.

After a while, Gu Ling came over with a bundle, and Su Liang packed the leftover steamed buns and pancakes from dinner for him, "Make do with this for now, I'll make you something delicious when we get back to the capital."

"On the day you return to the capital, remember to look at Wan Family Restaurant," Gu Ling said.

Su Liang was stunned, "Huh? What am I looking at?" "Look at me." Gu Ling said calmly, "Don't forget what you said."

"Which one?" Su Liang felt a little bewildered.

Gu Ling just stared at her.

Soon, Su Liang realized what he meant and laughed, "Oh, I did say that when the Great God regains his identity, I'll perform a pretend love-at-first-sight scene on the street and pursue him. But is this plan still going on?"

Gu Ling stretched out his arm, hugged Su Liang for a moment, let go, and ended this farewell ceremony. His last words were, "Act well." With that, he left.

Su Liang held her face and pretended to be infatuated, "Wow, Marquis Chang Xin is so handsome!"

A familiar voice came from not far away, "You're such an idiot." When Su Liang ran after him, Gu Ling had already disappeared..

Chapter 255: 255. Beautiful Children (Second Revision)

Su Liang got up early in the morning and started jogging in the courtyard. After finishing her exercise, she didn't see Ren Dong's door open and suspected that she might have gone out, so she didn't knock on her door.

Gu Ling left last night. Although Su Liang will be leaving soon, and there's still someone else at home, she still felt somewhat unaccustomed. In the past, after exercising, Gu Ling would have already boiled hot water for her to wash up, and they would make breakfast together.

Today, Su Liang, who had to boil water on her own, had difficulty lighting the stove. After trying several times without success, she realized that she was indeed rusty at this task, which she rarely ever did.

In the end, Su Liang gave up, washed up with cold water instead, and didn't make breakfast. She planned to go to Bai Dame's house to eat.

As she was preparing to go out, she remembered Ren Dong and went to knock on her door. She heard Ren Dong's somewhat flustered voice, "Master, your subordinate is coming right away!"

Soon after, Ren Dong opened the door with slightly messy hair and a nervous expression, her head lowered. "This subordinate should have gotten up earlier to serve Master, I didn't expect to..."

"Didn't expect to sleep so soundly?" Su Liang said faintly, "That's good for you. You should rest a bit since we'll be hitting the road soon. Comb your hair and come with me to eat."

Ren Dong felt warmth in her heart and quickly tidied up before standing in front of Su Liang.

Su Liang observed this new subordinate, who was pretty and neatly dressed, pleasing to the eye. "Let's go," she said.

As Ren Dong followed Su Liang out, she watched her lock the front door but didn't ask where they were heading.

Soon, the two of them arrived outside the front gate of Bai Family's house.

A tall, handsome young man walked out from inside and smiled when he saw

Su Liang. "Master!"

It was Qi Jun. When he noticed Ren Dong standing behind Su Liang, he paused.

"You're back?"

Having interacted with Qi Jun in the capital, Ren Dong nodded slightly in response, not having met him the night before and assuming he hadn't come.

"Where are you going?" Su Liang asked.

"Little Tiger and Zhuzi have both gone to school. I asked Erniu's grandfather to make some wooden swords and wooden knives for the children to practice martial arts. They should be almost done. I'm going to take a look!" Qi Jun said with a smile.

Su Liang nodded. "You go on ahead."

Qi Jun was somewhat curious whether Ren Dong had completed her mission. Seeing Su Liang taking her around, it seemed as if something had changed since their previous interaction.

Instead of asking directly, Qi Jun went to find Su Dakuan.

As Su Liang entered, Liu's wife was washing clothes by a well, and Bai Dame was holding her baby granddaughter. Bai Dame wasn't in sight.

"Little Liang is here!" Bai Dame happily greeted Su Liang upon seeing her. She held her granddaughter's hand, waving it at Su Liang. "This is your Sister Su Liang."

Su Liang smiled, taking the baby who reached out to her, gently swaying her. The fat, white baby girl grinned and drooled. Aunt Bai quickly wiped her mouth.

"Dame Bai, I've come for breakfast. Is it too late?" Su Liang didn't bother being polite with her.

“Not too late at all! What do you want to eat? I’ll make it for you. It’ll be ready soon!” Bai Dame said as she rolled up her sleeves.

“Anything is fine.” Su Liang took the baby’s hand away from her mouth, finding her hand gripped tightly by a small finger.

Bai Dame put on her apron and entered the kitchen. Turning back, Su Liang realized that Ren Dong was still standing outside the door, not coming in.

“Come in.”

Upon hearing Su Liang’s call, Ren Dong entered. Liu’s wife was curious, “Who is this young lady?”

“Like Qi Jun, she is my guard.” Su Liang smiled.

Seeing Liu’s wife’s astonishment, Su Liang continued, “A female guard? She must be a very capable person. Please sit down!”

Su Liang never treated Qi Jun as a servant, so neither the Bai family nor the Liu family would ever look down on Ren Dong.

Ren Dong knew that Su Liang had lived in Su’s village for more than a year before winning the title of Martial Arts Champion. However, she also knew that Su Liang grew up in the capital city and was far from a village girl as people had claimed.

Seeing Su Liang’s natural and harmonious interactions with the villagers today surprised and touched Ren Dong.

At one time, she, Golden Flower, and Bai Yang had fantasized about breaking free from Shaoyao’s control and living a peaceful life in a secluded mountain village.

Bai Dame and Liu’s wife were both genuine and enthusiastic. The farmhouse’s courtyard was a pleasant mix of order and chaos. Ren Dong felt as if she were in a dream, watching Su Liang hold the baby and smile brightly, reaching for the tree leaves above.

When Ren Dong snapped out of her daze, she found herself seated under the shade of a tree in the courtyard, urged by Liu’s wife. Meanwhile, her master Su Liang still stood nearby, holding the baby and touching the leaves on the tree.

Mrs. Liu didn’t find anything wrong with this and quickly brought out a bowl of warm sugar water for Ren Dong, only for her and not for Su Liang.

Seeing that Ren Dong didn’t dare to take it, Mrs. Liu smiled and put it in her hand, “It’s your first time here, no need to be restrained. We’re not outsiders, and you look so thin.”

“Little girl, your mother can’t even see us, let’s go,” Su Liang said, holding the little girl in her arms.

Ren Dong quickly stood up and handed the sugar water to Su Liang, but Su Liang shook her head, “It’s for you, just drink it, no need to be shy. You really are too thin, if others didn’t know, they might think you’re sick.”

Ren Dong silently sat down and sipped the bowl of sugar water. Actually, Mrs.

Liu didn't add much sugar, just enough to make it not plain water. But to Ren Dong, it tasted very sweet, as if it sweetened her heart all at once.

Mother Bai specially made breakfast for Su Liang and Ren Dong, steaming hot and placed on a table made of big wooden stakes in the courtyard.

"What is the young lady's name?" Mother Bai looked at Ren Dong with a smile, "She's really pretty, but too thin. Both Liang and you should build up your health."

Ren Dong told her name, Mother Bai didn't know anything about medicinal herbs, she just felt that the name was a bit strange since most people's names rarely include the character "Ren."

But Mother Bai still complimented her in her own understanding, "Nice name! Endure the winter, and it'll be warm in spring!"

Su Liang chuckled, "That's exactly the meaning."

Ren Dong was stunned. After enduring the winter, could her life really look forward to spring...

After breakfast, Su Liang said she would come again at noon. Mother Bai mentioned that Qi Jun had caught two wild chickens with the children yesterday, and there was still one left, which they would stew for lunch.

Su Liang took Ren Dong out of the Bai's house and walked to the bridge. She pointed in a direction and told Ren Dong, "Qi Jun went to Erniu's house, that one over there. You can go find him."

"What should I do when I find Guard Qi... Ren Dong was puzzled. "You go and see what he's doing, whether you can help or not," Su Liang said.

"Yes," Ren Dong nodded. Seeing Su Liang walking home, she crossed the bridge and headed for Erniu's house in the direction Su Liang pointed out.

The people sent by Duanmu Chen left the capital city one day earlier than Ren Dong, but they haven't arrived yet. Ren Dong traveled faster and took fewer rests. Duanmu Chen had hinted to the messenger not to hurry on the way.

Su Liang didn't pack her bags either, pretending not to know anything, and waiting for the people to arrive before taking further action.

She returned home alone and saw the pumpkin pulp from yesterday lying half-dry in a ceramic basin on a stool near the kitchen door. If Gu Ling hadn't left, he would have cleaned it up by now, washed the pumpkin seeds, and urged Su Liang to fry them for him.

With Gu Ling gone, Su Liang processed the pumpkin seeds herself. She planned to make a flavored version this time. She added clear water and cleaned pumpkin seeds to the pot, along with the available spices in the house, boiled it for a moment, skimmed the foam, soaked them in the pot after taking out the firewood.

After washing her hands and leaving the kitchen, Su Liang saw Qi Jun and Ren Dong entering the door one after another.

"Master, grandpa Da Kuan's craftsmanship is really good!" Qi Jun swung a wooden sword in his hand twice.

Ren Dong held a wooden knife in her hand and silently nodded in agreement with Qi Jun's words.

"Remember to pay for their work," Su Liang said.

Qi Jun nodded, "Don't worry, Master, I'll find a way."

The reason he had to find a way to pay was that Su Da Kuan, upon learning that it was for the children in the village, refused to take any money and even provided the wood himself.

"What delicious food did you make, Master? It smells so good!" Qi Jun asked with a smile.

Ren Dong frowned slightly. Qi Jun seemed to be a good friend of Su Liang's, calling her "Master" only as a formality, without a hierarchy involved.

Su Liang shook her head, "It's a secret."

Qi Jun laughed, "I wonder if I'll have the good fortune to taste it. Anyway, when I return to the capital, I have to find my brother and have a good chat with him.

He will surely be envious of me!"

Su Liang snorted, "You're just asking to get beaten."

Qi Jun's lips slightly hooked, "How can I not let my brother know about such a good life? It's worth it even if I get beaten up!"

Qi Jun was about to go to the school to teach the children martial arts, during their break of study; this was their daily schedule.

Su Liang let Ren Dong follow him, and although Ren Dong didn't know if she could help, she went with Qi Jun anyway.

Approaching noon, Su Liang scooped out the pumpkin seeds that had soaked and absorbed the flavors in the pot, drained the water, and dried them in the courtyard before heading to Bai's house for lunch.

After finishing lunch and returning home, Su Liang read a book for an hour. When the pumpkin seeds were dry, she slowly fried them over a low heat, stirring constantly.

Qi Jun and Ren Dong returned to find the alluring aroma of roasted pumpkin seeds wafting throughout the courtyard.

"The master must have made something delicious." Qi Jun said. Ren Dong nodded.

"Why don't you go take a look?" Qi Jun pointed at the kitchen.

Ren Dong shook her head, "You go."

As the two of them tried to outdo each other in "letting" the other go, Su Liang came out of the kitchen and poured the roasted pumpkin seeds onto a colander on the stone table in the courtyard, spreading them out evenly.

"Master, what is this?" Qi Jun asked curiously.

"Pumpkin seeds." Su Liang said.

“Can they be eaten?” Qi Jun looked surprised. Having grown up in Bei Jingwang Mansion with Xing Yusheng, although he was nominally a servant, he lived a better life than the young masters of ordinary families and had never seen this before.

Su Liang gestured for Qi Jun and Ren Dong to reach out their hands, and gave them a small handful each, “You can eat them with or without peeling.”

After peeling one and tasting it, Qi Jun tried another unpeeled one and kept nodding, “Delicious! So fragrant!”

Ren Dong also nodded, “Very delicious.”

“Don’t sneak any more of the leftovers.” Su Liang warned.

“Master, are you planning to bring these back to the capital city and give them to someone?” Qi Jun asked.

Looking very serious, Su Liang said, “There’s a beautiful little ermine that came down the mountain to my house a few days ago. It likes to eat these. It’ll come looking for me, and I’m preparing these for it.”

Qi Jun and Ren Dong exchanged a knowing glance.

Qi Jun sensed Su Liang was babbling nonsense, and Ren Dong also thought so, but unfortunately, they had no evidence...

As the sun set, Su Liang wrapped the cooled spiced pumpkin seeds in oiled paper and placed them into an exquisite snack box to keep them from getting damp.

The next day, a messenger from Duanmu Chen arrived at Su’s village.

It was two guards from the Crown Prince’s Mansion who came. They entered the village and asked the villagers, then found Su Liang’s house.

After having breakfast at the Bai Family, Su Liang returned home and was watering the trees in the courtyard. Ren Dong had been sent by her to help Qi Jun again.

After the two guards saluted, they handed over the letter from Duanmu Chen to Su Liang.

The letter was brief and impersonal, saying that the emperor had been suffering from a headache recently, the Empress Dowager’s old illness had relapsed, and Su Liang was commanded to set off for the capital immediately upon receiving the letter, without delay on the way.

Ren Dong had informed her earlier that Duanmu Yi wanted Su Liang to return earlier, but coincidentally, Duanmu Chen sent someone to call her, which appeared to contain hidden implications.

Of course, no matter whose command it was, Su Liang had planned to return anyway since Gu Ling had already left a step ahead.

“The two of you, go to the inn in the town and stay overnight. I’m going to pay my respects to my grandfather today, and I’ll catch up with you early tomorrow morning,” Su Liang said to the two guards after receiving the letter.

Following Su Liang's instructions, the two guards left the village and went to Feiyan Town.

At the time of burying Su Yuanzhou's family, Su Liang had kept some incense, candles, and paper money ready. She took them out and placed them in a basket, along with a pot of alcohol, and went alone to the family cemetery.

Su Liang sat in front of Su Yuanzhou's grave for a long time, burned the paper money, poured out the alcohol, and sighed softly before leaving, "I hope you and your grandchildren find peace in the afterlife. I will come back to see you." After Su Liang finished speaking, she picked up the empty basket and left.

By the time Qi Jun and Ren Dong found out that two men on horses had come looking for Su Liang, and someone had seen her go to the cemetery, the two went to find her. Halfway there, they saw her picking wild chicken eggs in the tall grass...

Qi Jun held his forehead while Ren Dong suddenly felt like laughing, even though she didn't really know how to laugh, just twitching the corners of her lips awkwardly.

"Is Master going back to the capital?" Qi Jun approached and took the basket from Su Liang's hands.

Su Liang nodded, "Be careful, don't break the wild chicken eggs. Get ready, and we'll leave early tomorrow morning. The people from the capital are waiting in the town. "

"Were they sent by the emperor?" Qi Jun frowned. "Didn't they say you were allowed to stay here longer?"

Su Liang snorted, "Are you questioning the emperor?"

Ren Dong watched Qi Jun quietly. His expression was calm and not panic-stricken, "I just feel a little regretful. I promised to teach the children a set of swordsmanship, but I haven't been able to."

"You can stay here." Su Liang said.

Qi Jun sighed slightly, "How can that be?"

"There's me." Ren Dong blurted out, realizing her slip of the tongue and quickly explaining, "I didn't mean it like that..."

Qi Jun noticed that the girl seemed to have an intention to compete for Su Liang's first guard position...

"You two fight? Whoever loses stays behind?" Su Liang laughed lightly.

Ren Dong nodded, "Alright."

Qi Jun shook his head, "Not alright."

Upon returning home, they found a visitor: Hu Er.

Su Liang asked Qi Jun and Ren Dong to take the pheasant eggs and other ingredients from their home to Bai's family while she entertained Hu Er in the courtyard.

"Did you find someone?" Su Liang asked.

Seeing Hu Er sigh, Su Liang knew that it must have fallen through again.

Hu Er explained, "Actually, it's not too far away. I personally took some people there to have a look. The boy's age and birthmark indeed match, but he looks exactly like his father, and has quite a resemblance to his uncles, so it definitely isn't Miss Su's friend's younger brother!"

Su Liang nodded, "If that's the case, it probably isn't. But thank you for going through all the trouble."

Hu Er waved his hands repeatedly, "Compared to the great kindness Miss Su has shown me, what is this? If it isn't this one, we'll keep looking!"

Then Hu Er took out a pile of gifts for Su Liang, insisting that she accept them, saying they were from his brother and sister-in-law, to thank Su Liang for allowing their grandson to attend school in Su Village.

Su Liang accepted, saying that she would set off for the capital the next day.

When Hu Er came from the town, he saw two guards of the crown prince's mansion, who were clearly not locals, and guessed they were looking for Su Liang.

After chatting for a few more moments, Hu Er took his leave.

Su Liang took the dessert in the gift to Bai's family.

At night, Su Liang packed her luggage and, thinking of something, went out to call Ren Dong.

Ren Dong immediately came out of the cabin and asked Su Liang for her orders.

"There are two old pumpkins in the storage room in the backyard. I want to bring them back to the capital, so remember to pack them in bags tomorrow and put them in the carriage." Su Liang finished and went back to her room. The pumpkins they grew themselves had to be taken with them if they weren't finished.

Ren Dong came to her senses, looked up at the sky, and saw the moon was very round, seemingly brighter than it was in the capital. She used to think the moon in the palace was covered with a layer of shadow, or perhaps it was the shadow in her eyes...

Before going to bed, Ren Dong whispered, "Bring the pumpkins."

As soon as dawn broke, Aunt Bai had already prepared breakfast and brought it over.

It was winter in the village, and Aunt Bai had made a pair of finely knitted cotton shoes for Su Liang, which she had made herself. Su Liang liked them very much, so she put them in her suitcase.

The first thing Ren Dong did when she got up was to go to the storage room in the backyard and pack up the two pumpkins and place them on the carriage.

The carriage crossed the bridge and headed for the village entrance. Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi waved their hands, their eyes red from crying.

At the entrance of the village, they saw Su Bai and Su Dakuan, as well as many villagers, gathered there, waiting to accompany Su Liang on her journey.

Qi Jun drove the carriage, while Ren Dong waited on horseback by the side.

Su Liang got off the carriage to say goodbye to everyone, saying that she would come back if she had the chance.

Su Bai repeatedly urged Su Liang to take care of herself.

The carriage moved once again, leaving Su Village.

In the carriage, Su Liang flipped through her books and found that the one torn in half by Gu Ling that night was not in the box. But she had clearly sandwiched it between two books, and all the books had been packed away last night. Could it be that Gu Ling had returned that night after she had fallen asleep and taken away the broken book? There was no need to be so stealthy...

Qi Jun laughed and asked, "Has Master's beautiful little friend not arrived yet?

Can I have a share of the delicious food that Master prepared for him?"

Su Liang closed the book box, "He is very fierce and dislikes sharing food with others. You better not think about it, I'm telling you for your own good."

Qi Jun's mouth twitched slightly, deeply doubting whether the beautiful friend Su Liang mentioned was really a little marten. Why did it sound so mystical....

Chapter 256: 256. Liang Yatou is not a superficial person (first update)

When Su Liang arrived at Feiyan Town, it was still early. After meeting up with the guards from the crown prince's mansion who had come from the capital, they continued on their way to the county town.

Upon reaching the county town for lunch, Su Liang had Qi Jun buy some Osmanthus Cake from a tea house.

After leaving Bei'an County, the group traveled during the day and stayed at inns at night, expecting to arrive in the capital in mid-October.

There wasn't much that Ren Dong could do for Su Liang, but because of her gender advantage, she seemed to be closer to Su Liang, which made Qi Jun feel a sense of "crisis."

Originally, Su Liang didn't need any followers, but now she had two. Ren Dong was given to her by the emperor, so she couldn't drive her away. However, Qi Jun felt that after returning to the capital, there was a high possibility he would be "sent back."

Although his relationship with Xing Yusheng was special, Qi Jun wanted to follow Su Liang even more. Not only was it more interesting, but he could also learn a lot. This kind of life was what he liked.

When Su Liang discovered that Qi Jun and Ren Dong were secretly competing, she felt amused, but she didn't let on. Watching it was quite interesting, but Su Liang had no intention of bringing them together. The "beautiful man plan" she had mentioned earlier was just a joke. The two had very different backgrounds and experiences, and it was uncertain whether they would be a good match. It was best to just let things develop naturally.

One night, when they were resting at an inn, Qi Jun and Ren Dong accompanied Su Liang to dinner, while the two guards from the crown prince's mansion sat at a separate table.

“Master, your silhouette is very similar to that of Ren Dong’s. It’s difficult to distinguish between the two from behind. I have a suggestion,” Qi Jun said to Su Liang.

Su Liang nodded, “Go ahead.”

“On the way to the capital, in order to avoid any accidents, why not have you and Ren Dong switch identities tomorrow?” Qi Jun suggested with interest.

Ren Dong immediately nodded, “I think it’s feasible.” She was willing to share the risk for Su Liang.

Su Liang pondered, “That way, if someone tries to assassinate me, they will have the wrong target, and we will have the advantage.”

Qi Jun and Ren Dong both nodded, indicating that Su Liang’s analysis was correct.

Su Liang shook her head, “But there’s a much greater chance of being attacked at night than during the day. Switching identities during the day means little, and it would also prevent me from reading in the carriage.”

It was just a casual conversation, but who would have thought that there would be an assassination attempt late that night.

The assassin was a man with impressive martial arts skills. Ren Dong was no match for him and was injured.

Eventually, Su Liang and Ren Dong joined forces and injured the assassin in turn, but he managed to escape.

Qi Jun, following Su Liang’s instructions, did not call for help or take action, instead hiding in the shadows and watching. Qi Jun knew that this was because his skills were not up to par, and Su Liang was trying to protect him.

After Su Liang treated Ren Dong’s injuries and had her return to her room to rest, Qi Jun came over.

“What’s the matter?” Su Liang asked.

Qi Jun nodded, “I noticed something strange about the assassination attempt tonight.’

Ren Dong took the initiative at first, testing the assassin’s intentions, rather than Su Liang pushing her to block the attack.

Qi Jun pondered, “My martial arts skills are not as good as yours or Ren Dong’s, but I was always watching from the side, and now that I think about it, something was definitely off. Ren Dong’s skills are comparable to yours, but the assassin injured her within a few moves, whereas he seemed far less confident when dealing with your techniques.”

However, relatively speaking, Su Liang was quite famous and had become well-known through the Military Exam. If someone had watched her compete in the exam or had made some inquiries, they would have a certain understanding of her techniques.

On the other hand, Ren Dong was originally a secret guard in the Imperial Palace. Qi Jun had seen her exquisite swordsmanship before. Logically, the assassin should have been more familiar with Su Liang and completely ignorant about Ren Dong.

But that was not the case.

If Qi Jun's feeling was correct, this strange assassination attempt was no coincidence. He had already spotted the flaw, "Could it be that the assassin was sent by the emperor himself?"

Su Liang sneered, "Why couldn't it be? It's quite possible."

She and Ren Dong were both in the situation, focused on dealing with the assassin, so they didn't see things as clearly as Qi Jun, who was watching from the outside.

Qi Jun's expression changed, "The emperor sent someone to assassinate the master? What does he mean by that?"

"I'm unharmed, and Ren Dong was injured trying to protect me. What do you think?" Su Liang countered.

Qi Jun's expression became difficult to decipher, "Is the emperor trying to set up Ren Dong to gain your trust?"

"There's no other possibility," Su Liang said.

Qi Jun didn't know how to react, but in any case, he was speechless.

"Go back to sleep," Su Liang waved her hand. Emperor Duanmu Yi went to great lengths to plant someone by her side. Rather than being angry, Su Liang found it boring.

But from another perspective, this meant that she was very important to him. However, this matter was a double-edged sword. Su Liang had to be cautious and use the situation to her advantage, while never letting the blade turn towards her.

The next day, after learning that last night's assassination attempt was likely orchestrated by Duanmu Yi to pave the way for her to gain Su Liang's trust, Ren Dong's first thought was to explain to Su Liang that she knew nothing about it and didn't know the assassin.

Su Liang speculated that the assassin might have known Ren Dong's master, Shaoyao, which was why he was so familiar with her techniques.

However, this was just a minor incident. Ren Dong seemingly suffered a serious injury, but it was not life-threatening, which only confirmed Qi Jun and Su Liang's suspicions.

When they set out again, the injured Ren Dong sat in the carriage with Su Liang, who gave her a simple medical book to read.

Ren Dong had learned some common poisons from Shaoyao but not medical skills.

"There's nothing else to do, so learn as much as you can. If you don't understand something, you can ask me," Su Liang said.

Ren Dong began reading earnestly.

Qi Jun, who was driving the carriage, was overcome with a sense of loss. He suddenly understood the feeling of being ignored that Xing Yusheng experienced when Lin Xueqing hugged and fussed over Su Liang. No, the comparison wasn't quite right. But in any case, he felt lost, very lost. He had been here first...

"Qi Jun."

Hearing Su Liang call him, Qi Jun's expression immediately became serious,

"What are your orders, Master?"

"You don't have to follow me once we're back in the capital city," Su Liang said.

Qi Jun had expected it, but still wanted to try again, "Master, can I not leave?"

Su Liang chuckled lightly, "I think that you brothers all have skills, whether you want to join the military or seek other positions, I can recommend you to the emperor. I've discussed this with Xing Yusheng, and he has the same plan." Qi Jun furrowed his brow; he hadn't thought that far ahead.

After a while, Qi Jun spoke again, "If Master becomes a general again, I will definitely follow you in the army!" "Alright," Su Liang agreed.

Qian Country's capital city.

Yan Shiba's injuries had almost healed, and Yan Shiqi came to see him every day. However, just like before, she never showed a pleasant face and scolded him as soon as she opened her mouth.

At first, Yan Shiqi would get angry, but it didn't take long for her to get used to it.

However, Yan Shiba still didn't know that Nian Ruting was alive and by Yan Shiqi's side.

One day, Yan Shiqi came over again in a seemingly good mood, "Shiba, there's good news. Do you want to know?"

Yan Shiba snorted coldly, "You're terminally ill and dying? Nothing else counts as good news!"

Yan Shiqi helplessly smiled, "Shiba, you really need to change your temper. Who else can stand you besides me?"

"Get lost! I have nothing to do with you!" Yan Shiba spat out another string of curses.

Yan Shiqi just sat a little distance away and quietly watched Yan Shiba scold her. She didn't have to worry about Yan Shiba escaping because she had poisoned him, so he had no strength to leave the room. This was also the reason that Yan Shiba used all his energy to curse people; he couldn't do anything else.

After Yan Shiba got tired of scolding, Yan Shiqi brought her a glass of water, which was splashed back onto her by Yan Shiba.

Wiping the water off her hand and putting down the teacup, Yan Shiqi began, "Su Liang is coming back, are you happy?"

Yan Shiba visibly hesitated for a moment, "When?"

Yan Shiqi chuckled, "I heard it's soon. There are rumors outside that the

Empress Dowager is seriously ill, and they're waiting for her to be treated."

Yan Shiba exaggeratedly showed enthusiasm, "That's great! I miss Liang so much!"

"Shall I 'invite' her to come and accompany you when she returns?" Yan Shiqi asked.

Yan Shiba sneered, "Please do! If you don't, you're just a spineless turtle egg!

Hahaha!"

"You're provoking me; I know it," Yan Shiqi said calmly. "Whether or not to meet Su Liang will be decided later. Aren't we really waiting for Gu Ling? Once he appears..."

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door, and Yan Shiqi's face darkened, "Get out!"

"Master, Gu Ling has appeared!"

The expressions on both Yan Shiqi and Yan Shiba's faces changed.

When Yan Shiqi looked at Yan Shiba's face, she saw her smiling coquettishly, "The beauty I've been daydreaming about has finally appeared? I really want to see him right away!"

Yan Shiqi snorted coldly and turned to leave.

It was an ordinary late autumn day in Qian Country's capital city until an explosive piece of news spread like wildfire: Miss Gil was back!

When Yang Yu got the news, he was checking account books at Su Mansion,

Nian Jincheng was practicing swordsmanship at the training ground, Xing

Yusheng and Lin Xueqing were accompanying Old Madame Xing to the Huguo Temple to offer incense, Old Master Qin and Lin Shuzhi were playing chess at the Imperial College, and Zhengzheng was playing with the plane model Ning Jing had given him at his family's restaurant...

Yang Yu happily ran to tell Nian Jincheng that his good friend was back.

Xing Yusheng was a bit surprised, but more expectant. He was finally going to meet the legendary Gu and thank him in person for saving his mother. Old Master Qin's eyes narrowed, "That child really came back..." Lin Shuzhi was curious, "Is Master Qin familiar with Gu Ling?"

Old Master Qin shook his head, "Just met. He is... very special."

Lin Shuzhi smiled, "Exceptionally good-looking? I've always heard that no one can match Gu Crown Prince's beauty."

Old Master Qin chuckled, "Indeed, he looked like a fairy child when he was young, and more like an immortal after growing up. The last time I saw Gu Ling, he was playing chess with Master Pu Hui at the Huguo Temple."

"What does Master Qin think is the reason for Gu Ling's appearance?" Lin Shuzhi asked.

Old Master Qin pondered for a moment, "I don't believe that the child has ambitions. He was always distant from the messy affairs of the Gu family, as if he wasn't a member of the Gu family at all. I'm thinking that he chose to come back now, perhaps to settle down? To marry and have children? Hiding here and there under false names isn't a long-term plan."

Lin Shuzhi smiled, "Master Qin's words make sense."

Old Master Qin shook his head again, "I'm just guessing wildly. Perhaps he's changed from before and has different thoughts. To be honest, I can't imagine what kind of girl would be worthy of that boy from the Gu family."

Lin Shuzhi raised his eyebrow, "With such high praise from Master Qin, he must be more than just good-looking. If it were our Xiaoliang, would she not be worthy of Gu as well?"

Old Master Qin slapped his forehead, "I didn't think of Su Liang earlier! How could she not be worthy of that boy from the Gu family? It's that boy from the Gu family who's not worthy of Liang girl! He may look good, but it's unclear whether he has real skills. Liang girl is not superficial; she wouldn't be interested in him!"

At this moment, Gu Ling, who was riding a horse through the main street of the capital city under everyone's gaze, glanced at Wan Family Restaurant, then looked away and headed toward the Imperial Palace..

Chapter 257: 257. Why haven't you come back yet? (Second update)

Qian Country Imperial Palace.

Duanmu Yi's eyes were deep as he looked at Gu Ling, "I thought you wouldn't come back."

Gu Ling nodded slightly, "In response to Your Majesty, I traveled far and wide, and returned to the capital as soon as I heard the news of my pardon." "Oh?" Duanmu Yi's expression was faint, "Where were you when you received the news?"

Gu Ling answered, "A small fishing village in the southernmost part of Yin Country."

"Heh heh, no wonder my search parties couldn't find you, you ran so far."

Duanmu Yi's tone was gentle, but he suddenly asked about Nian Jincheng, "Why didn't the beloved Nian Minister come with you to meet me? Does he still hold a grudge in his heart?"

Gu Ling calmly shook his head, "This small minister doesn't know where Nian Jincheng is. "

Duanmu Yi's eyes narrowed slightly, "Wasn't it you who saved him back then?"

"When I heard about his troubles, he had already been saved by someone else." Gu Ling said, "Since I left the capital, I haven't seen Nian Jincheng again, and I don't know who saved him."

"Is that so? I thought you were together." Duanmu Yi clearly didn't believe him.

"The Gu Family's rebellion has nothing to do with this small minister, please discern the truth, Your Majesty." Gu Ling said, "When I left back then, it was not to flee from a crime, but rather not wanting to ruin my life because of other people's mistakes."

Duanmu Yi laughed, "After all, Gu Yuan is your father."

“On this matter, this small minister had no choice.” Gu Ling’s expression was faint.

Duanmu Yi sighed deeply, “If I remember correctly, the last time I saw you, you were only 14 years old. In the blink of an eye, five or six years have passed. Apart from growing taller, you seem to have not changed much, but if anything, you are even more radiant than before.”

“Thank you for your praise, Your Majesty.” Gu Ling nodded slightly.

Duanmu Yi changed the subject, his expression becoming serious, “However, as Gu Yuan’s eldest legitimate son, according to the law, you should be punished by death. Although the King of Liang Country interceded on your behalf this time, I am pardoning you because I have always known that you were not involved in the Gu Family’s rebellion. Now that you are back, remember that you are a citizen of Qian Country and do not disappoint me, do you understand?”

Gu Ling nodded again, “Yes, this small minister will keep it in mind.”

“Alright, you’ve just returned, go back and rest. If you have any complaints about Marquis Chang Xin’s residence, you can bring them to me.” Duanmu Yi appeared very magnanimous.

But as Gu Ling turned to leave, Duanmu Yi’s face darkened, and his eyes were full of scrutiny as he watched Gu Ling’s retreating figure.

Duanmu Yi arranged for Eunuch Han to guide Gu Ling and lead him to the Marquis Chang Xin’s mansion that had been granted by the emperor.

Leaving the palace, Eunuch Han sat in a carriage, while Gu Ling rode a horse behind him, heading towards the west city.

Marquis Chang Xin’s mansion was originally a royal garden in the west city called Qiuming Garden, which had the best scenery in autumn.

Three years ago, Qiuming Garden suffered a devastating fire at midnight. Most of the exotic flowers and plants, trees, rocks, and buildings were burned down, and more than a dozen people who guarded the garden were buried in the sea of flames.

It should have been rebuilt, but after the fire, strange tales of ghosts haunting Qiuming Garden spread throughout the capital, becoming ever more sinister.

The Empress Dowager Wan believed the rumors and felt that the garden, located in the west, was inauspicious. She not only ordered the destruction of Qiuming Garden but also forbade its reconstruction.

When Duanmu Yi granted the abandoned Qiuming Garden to Gu Ling as his residence, many people in the capital remembered again the eerie occurrences in the garden. Even if it was not haunted, no one knew what had become of it, and it hardly suited the identity of a Marquis.

Even ordinary people could sense that Duanmu Yi had pardoned Gu Ling and even allowed him to inherit the Gu Family’s title, but he absolutely didn’t welcome this son of a criminal minister.

Eunuch Han’s carriage stopped outside the gate of Qiuming Garden. He was helped out of the carriage by two junior eunuchs. Looking up at the mottled gate and the “Marquis Chang Xin’s Mansion” placard, he felt the new plaque

seemed out of place.

“Marquis Chang Xin, we have arrived. This garden is such a wonderful place.” Eunuch Han’s smile was insincere as he looked at Gu Ling.

“Thank you for guiding me, Eunuch Han.” Gu Ling’s expression was indifferent.

Eunuch Han casually mentioned Nian Jincheng, “Back then, I went with General Nian to find Marquis Gu in the north, but I didn’t expect Marquis Gu to go to the south. The south is nice with spring all year round.”

Gu Ling did not respond.

“Marquis Gu, please go back to your residence and rest. I will return to the palace.” As soon as Eunuch Han finished speaking, he got back in the carriage and left with his attendants without even entering the gate.

After the seal on the front door was torn off, there were some small scraps of paper left, with a large lock hanging on it, and no one gave Gu Ling a key.

Gu Ling approached the door, cleaned up the scraps of paper, and did not break the lock to enter, but got back on the horse and headed to the market in the east of the city.

A pair of eyes in the shadows followed Gu Ling closely but not too closely.

Today, people in the capital were talking about the return of the beautiful Gu Ling. After seeing him pass by on a horse, those who had seen him with their own eyes were describing his beauty as surpassing that of the past to others.

So when Gu Ling appeared again on the street, he instantly attracted the attention of the entire street. Business owners and shoppers all stared at him intently.

Gu Ling pulled on the reins and stopped in front of Wan Family Restaurant.

The waiter enthusiastically came out to greet him and froze when he saw Gu Ling’s face. By the time the waiter had recovered his wits, Gu Ling had already entered.

The waiter quickly led Gu Ling’s horse to the restaurant’s backyard stable.

Under the watchful gaze of the restaurant’s guests, Gu Ling walked gracefully up to the second floor and entered a private room facing the street. Only when the door to the private room closed did many people finally look away.

“So beautiful!”

“Like an immortal, it seems like he could ride the wind and go at any moment.” “It looks like he didn’t see anyone and doesn’t care about anyone.”

“Gu Ling is like a cloud in the sky, untouched by dirt no matter what he has experienced. Life is so unfair!”

Wan Hui and Zhengzheng had come to the restaurant today and had just left before Gu Ling arrived, so they didn’t run into him.

Gu Ling ordered four signature dishes and a soup. The Wan Family Restaurant's signature dishes are now all from Su Liang's recipes.

The window was open, and people in the tea house opposite stretched their necks to look over.

Gu Ling walked to the window, glanced down and then looked in the direction of the city gate before returning to his seat.

After he had finished most of his meal, he put down his chopsticks, called the manager over, and said he wanted to rent the private room.

Wan Family Restaurant was the best in the capital, and ordinary people couldn't afford it. Private rooms could be rented long-term, but the prices were quite high.

After quoting the price, Gu Ling handed over a silver note to the manager,

"Keep the rest on the account, I will come often."

"Yes, Marquis, take your time leaving." The manager respectfully saw Gu Ling off, then ordered that the room be reserved for Marquis Chang Xin for three months, and no other guests were allowed in even if he didn't come.

Leaving the restaurant, Gu Ling went not far to the Yang Family Embroidery Workshop to buy clothes.

She had come out on purpose after learning in Su Mansion that Gu Ling had returned to the capital, hoping to catch a glimpse of him. Nian

Jincheng had asked her to help observe how Gu Ling was doing. But Nian Jincheng knew that Gu Ling was being watched by the Emperor, so they couldn't meet for now, at least for a few more days.

"Miss." As soon as the manager saw Yang Yu, he quickly paid his respects.

Gu Ling turned to face her, and Yang Yu, just like everyone else who saw Gu

Ling for the first time, was amazed by his beauty, "This gentleman is...?"

"Miss, this is Marquis Chang Xin who has just returned to the capital." The manager quickly introduced them, then introduced Yang Yu to Gu Ling, "Marquis, this is our Yang Family's young lady."

With an indifferent expression, Gu Ling glanced at Yang Yu and did not bother to greet her, instead asking the manager, "Where are the ready-made clothes?" The manager quickly led Gu Ling up to the second floor, "Please, Marquis!"

Yang Yu looked a bit baffled but didn't think Gu Ling was impolite. As they were not acquainted and the status difference was obvious, Gu Ling's well-known aloofness was well known across the world. Otherwise, the saying "he only has one friend" would not exist.

Gu Ling's "stay away from strangers" demeanor made it difficult for Yang Yu to imagine how he and Nian Jincheng had gotten along before.

Not long after, Gu Ling bought several sets of clothes, shoes, and socks, along with a ready-made money pouch, and left with them.

“Living alone and having to eat at a restaurant, buying clothes on the spot”, these were the messages spreading around the capital on the first day of Gu Ling’s return apart from his stunning beauty.

Carrying the purchased clothes, Gu Ling returned once more to Marquis Chang Xin’s Mansion. Picking up a brick, he smashed the lock on the gate. As he opened the entrance, his eyes were met with a scene full of “natural charm” overgrown weeds, scattered stones, and an atmosphere of desolation and decay.

Duanmu Yi, who had seemed quite friendly and approachable when meeting with Gu Ling, surely knew of the state of the mansion when he had bestowed it upon him. But after such a long time, he had never sent anyone to clean or repair it, nor had he arranged for any servants to be provided for Gu Ling.

Gu Ling knew that Duanmu Yi’s intention was not to scare him by making him live in a haunted house. Instead, it was to test him, to see how he would react to such circumstances. Gu Ling could go to a restaurant for food, but he couldn’t choose to stay at an inn or live at the Huguo Temple as he did before, as that would be disrespectful to Duanmu Yi.

Gu Ling had long known about this place and had mentally prepared himself.

He closed the gate and stepped over the withered yellow grass of early winter to enter.

Before Qiuming Garden was burnt, Gu Ling had come here, and it was one of his favorite places in the capital city. In autumn, the garden’s maple leaves resembled fire, and it was an incredibly beautiful sight. Gu Ling would always sneak into Qiuming Garden at dusk, choosing the most beautiful maple leaves from the forest to bring home as bookmarks or to carve landscapes and flowers on them.

During that massive fire, most of the maple forest had been destroyed. Now, there were just a few red maple trees with sparse, swaying red leaves in the wind.

After crossing most of the garden, Gu Ling finally found a relatively intact house. Climbing vines covered the outer walls, and blackened bricks and stones were exposed at the foundation. However, the house had not collapsed or suffered significant damage.

Gu Ling went in, hung his bundle on a tree, rolled up his sleeves, and carried a wooden bucket to fetch water from the nearby lake. He then began cleaning and tidying up.

Before the sunset, Gu Ling went out once more and purchased many tools to use.

At night, Gu Ling cleaned a room, fixed a bed and a chair, then went to Wan Family Restaurant for dinner. Before the Yang Family Embroidery Workshop closed, he bought a set of bedding and carried it back to the mansion.

Qian Country’s Imperial Palace.

A master who had been tasked with tailing Gu Ling for a day was reporting to Duanmu Yi.

“He can sweep the floor and wipe the tables, as well as do carpentry work?” Duanmu Yi’s expression was hard to read. “Have any other people appeared around him?”

“No, Your Majesty. There were no others around Marquis Chang Xin today.”

Duanmu Yi pondered, “After all these years, I still can’t see through that young man. Keep watching him. If anything unusual occurs, report to me immediately.”

Early the next morning, several carriages drove out of the Imperial Palace and stopped outside Marquis Chang Xin’s Mansion.

The gate was merely closed, and it opened with a push.

Eunuch Han led a group of artisans into the mansion, a smile piled high on his face as he met Gu Ling. “His Majesty only just learned today that Qiuming Garden had not been repaired. So he sent craftsmen and various things as rewards.”

Gu Ling didn’t refuse. He instructed the craftsmen to keep all the living trees in the courtyard, remove the weeds, and demolish all the other ruined houses, except for the place he lived in, without repairing them.

In the meantime, Gu Ling went out for a meal and didn’t pay any attention to the craftsmen working at his residence.

That day at noon, Xing Yusheng was also at Wan Family Restaurant.

He had come specifically to wait for Gu Ling. The day before, he had heard that Gu Ling had returned to the capital and had wanted to see him immediately, but he didn’t dare to recklessly make contact, knowing that the emperor would have assigned someone to watch him.

Upon hearing from Qi Yan about the situation, Xing Yusheng wanted to help but ended up holding back instead.

Lin Xueqing was also in one of the private rooms adjacent to the two men.

“Gu Ling is truly, truly so beautiful!” Lin Xueqing had just seen Gu Ling going upstairs.

Xing Yusheng nodded, “Indeed.” Gu Ling was so gorgeous that he couldn’t even bring himself to be jealous.

“Sir, will you go greet him? It should be fine, right?” Lin Xueqing asked.

Xing Yusheng hesitated, “Under the circumstances, if I were to just run up to him, wouldn’t it be awkward? He doesn’t know me either.”

“Are you afraid that Gu Ling won’t pay you any attention?” Lin Xueqing laughed softly. “How about I go?”

Xing Yusheng waved his hands in denial, “How could I let you do that? I’ll go. My father-in-law was right; it’s better to meet openly and honestly than to be secretive, which could arouse suspicion.”

“Marquis, go on then! In the past two days, you’ve been longing to meet Lady Gu, and you’ve been unable to eat or drink!” Lin Xueqing teased Xing Yusheng.

"If he really wants nothing to do with me, then so be it." Xing Yusheng took a deep breath, stood up, and knocked on Gu Ling's door. "Come in." A crisp, low voice came from inside.

Xing Yusheng pushed the door open.

As their eyes met, Xing Yusheng didn't see any resemblance to Ning Jing in Gu Ling. Their facial features were not very similar, and at first glance, Gu Ling's stunning beauty would make people overlook everything else. In terms of temperament, the Gu Ling of now and the "Ning Jing" he impersonated before were similar, both being too quiet and indifferent, but this similarity was quite subtle and not easy to notice.

"Marquis Gu, I'm Xing Yusheng, the crown prince of Marquis Zhong Xin's Mansion." Xing Yusheng bowed his hands and greeted Gu Ling seriously. Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "What do you want?"

Seeing Gu Ling's attitude, Xing Yusheng did not mention the incident of him saving Bei Jingwang's wife when they were children. Instead, he smiled and said, "It just so happens that I'm next door, so I came over to say hello." "Hmm." Gu Ling responded indifferently, but did not invite Xing Yusheng to sit down.

Xing Yusheng had no choice but to leave somewhat awkwardly.

Going back to his room, Xing Yusheng sighed, "He's indeed a difficult person to get along with. No wonder he has no friends."

Lin Xueqing shook her head, "Lady Gu does have friends, like General Nian Jincheng. "

"Who knows where he is now?" Xing Yusheng snorted, "And that Nian Jincheng isn't an easy person to get along with either."

"Do you not like Lady Gu?" Lin Xueqing asked.

Xing Yusheng shook his head, "What's there to like or dislike? It doesn't matter. I was the one who bothered him, so if he doesn't want to pay attention to me, that's fine."

Lin Xueqing was puzzled, "Wasn't it said that General Nian was saved by Lady Gu back then? They've both been pardoned now, so why didn't General Nian come back with him?"

"Who knows? His Majesty must have questioned Gu Ling about this matter. There must be some inside story that we don't know." Xing Yusheng was also confused.

Lin Xueqing chuckled, "Dad said that Lady Gu regained his identity so that he could have a normal life and get married and have children in the future. With his immortal-like appearance, would he think that all the women in the world are vulgar and not be interested in any of them?"

Xing Yusheng calmly said, "If he thinks all the women in the world are uglier than him, he can choose to be alone for the rest of his life. Honestly, when I greeted him just now, I felt that he was like a dead man, wanting to be alone forever and not wanting anyone to bother him."

Lin Xueqing couldn't help but smile, "Perhaps he's like that only with strangers. Maybe he's different with friends."

"I truly hope a young lady would come and cure him!" Xing Yusheng had long expected his first encounter with Gu Ling, but it left him somewhat disappointed. So he half-jokingly said, "He's my mother's benefactor, of course, I hope he won't be alone for the rest of his life. With his personality, it's best if there's a girl he likes, but she doesn't like him. I want to see how he pursues her."

Lin Xueqing looked surprised, "A girl who Lady Gu likes but doesn't like Lady Gu? Is that even possible?"

Xing Yusheng smirked slightly, "What's impossible about it? If this happens to your favorite Miss Su, is it impossible?"

Lin Xueqing widened her eyes, "You're saying that Lady Gu is fond of Miss Su but Miss Su doesn't like him? Oh, yes, if it's Miss Su, it might not be impossible. Thinking about her late Senior Brother Ning, Miss Su's taste in men is quite strange. Maybe she really likes the cold, aloof type who doesn't care about people. But it's also possible that Miss Su likes Gu Ling, but Gu Ling doesn't like Miss Su. Ah, that can't be! Miss Su is so wonderful, how could anyone not like

"At first, your Senior Brother said that it was Su Liang who liked him, and he didn't accept it. Su Liang also said the same thing." Xing Yusheng's tone was melancholic.

Lin Xueqing shook her head, "Senior Brother was pretending. Sigh, it's such a pity now that I think about it. He clearly liked Miss Su but never said so. If they had been together earlier, maybe they wouldn't have..."

Lin Xueqing sighed deeply, "Actually, I really hope that Miss Su could have someone by her side. I'm sure Senior Brother would think so too, if his soul is in heaven."

Xing Yusheng blinked, "Then what do you think about Gu Ling?"

Lin Xueqing was startled, "What do you mean?"

"Honestly, should we try to play matchmaker between Gu Ling and Su Liang?" Xing Yusheng said earnestly, "Regardless of whether he ignores me or not, his beauty is unparalleled, and he is my mother's benefactor, so I believe he is a good person."

"Ah? This..." Lin Xueqing felt that something was a bit strange about this matter, but she couldn't quite pinpoint it, "Gu Ling doesn't even bother with you, how can we play matchmaker? I'm sure Miss Su wouldn't like us meddling in her affairs either."

"How can we know without trying?" Xing Yusheng really wanted to give it a shot, somehow feeling that there should be something between Su Liang and Gu Ling, "Once Su Liang returns, we'll create an encounter for them and act accordingly."

The soundproofing at Wan Family Restaurant was actually quite good, but Gu

Ling's hearing was even better. He heard the conversation between Xing Yusheng and Lin Xueqing in the next room, then looked out the window and whispered to himself, "Why haven't they come back yet...."

Chapter 258: Is the young master alright?

When Gu Ling returned to the capital city and stayed in the Marquis Chang Xin Mansion for the second night, the person who had been ordered to keep an eye on him finally noticed something.

It wasn't that Gu Ling did something, but someone came to find him.

"Gu Ling!"

From the voice, the visitor was a young man who stood outside and called for Gu Ling without approaching the door of his room.

The watcher immediately held his breath, focused, and listened carefully.

It was late at night, and Gu Ling had not yet rested. There was still a light in his room, and he was repairing the medical book that had been torn in half at Su Family Village.

Su Liang's nagging was not wrong. That night, Gu Ling left and went to Feiyan Town but wanted to see Su Liang again, so he turned back to the village without disturbing Su Liang. In order to prevent Su Liang from suddenly waking up and discovering him, Gu Ling took the broken book as an excuse. In the end, Gu Ling stared at Su Liang's sleeping face for a long time until the sky was getting bright and took the book with him when he left.

Hearing the noise, Gu Ling put away the book, hid it, got up, opened the door, stood under the eaves, and looked at the visitor.

The cold moon was frosty.

The visitor was dressed in a black robe, his figure indistinguishable, and he wore a silver-cast mask on his face. The mask had only one eye hole, and the other eye was covered.

Gu Ling's face was half-bright and half-dark, still stunningly beautiful, demon-like in the dark night.

The visitor spoke again with a cold hum, "You, are you Gu Ling?"

Gu Ling looked at him coldly, "Are you sick?"

The watcher in the dark twitched the corner of his mouth. At first, they thought the visitor was Nian Jincheng or someone else related to Gu Ling, but after the questions and counter-questions, it was clear that they did not know each other at all.

The visitor coldly snorted again, "My master invites you, Marquis Gu, to come with me!"

The visitor suddenly let out a weird laugh, "A woman you definitely won't refuse."

The watcher stared wide-eyed, a woman? Gu Ling wouldn't refuse?

Gu Ling once again interrogated with his soul, "Are you sick?"

The visitor's eyes narrowed slightly, "Don't you want to see your only friend?" Gu Ling remained as calm as ever and asked again, "Who?"

“Marquis Gu knows best who his only friend is. My master kindly saved him for Marquis Gu and has been waiting to hand him over to Marquis Gu safely.” The visitor chuckled, “Marquis Gu, shall we go? My master has been waiting for a long time.”

Gu Ling now knew that it was Yan Shiqi who had come. Although Yan Shiqi had deliberately disguised his voice this time, the evil aura in his laughter could not be hidden.

The last time Su Liang saw Yan Shiba was months ago. At that time, Yan Shiba had just returned from Yin Country with serious injuries and claimed that Yan Shiqi had died saving her.

But Gu Ling was sure that this was Yan Shiqi, and the “master” he was referring to was naturally Yan Shiba.

However, Gu Ling believed that Yan Shiba, who had not appeared for a long time, was probably under Yan Shiqi’s control by now. Otherwise, it would have been Yan Shiba who came tonight, and she wouldn’t have used Nian Jincheng as an excuse. Gu Ling knew where Nian Jincheng was, so he was sure Yan Shiqi was setting a trap to lure him somewhere else, and there would be no good outcome.

But, Gu Ling did not expose Yan Shiqi. Knowing that Duanmu Yi had arranged for someone to watch him, and since Yan Shiqi had brought up that it was Yan Shiba who saved Nian Jincheng, Gu Ling could take advantage of the situation, confirm this, and dispel Duanmu Yi’s suspicion.

“Let your master come to see me.” Gu Ling’s expression was indifferent.

Yan Shiqi lightly hummed, “If Marquis Gu cares about his friend’s safety, he should follow me quickly. Although my master has told me not to make things difficult for you, she also ordered that she must see you tonight.”

Gu Ling shook his head slightly, “Let her come to see me.”

Yan Shiqi’s voice became even colder, “Marquis Gu, don’t force me to be rude by refusing a toast and having to take the punishment instead!”

“Go back and tell your master that if she wants to see me, come with Nian Jincheng.” Gu Ling turned around and was about to go back to his room.

Just before Gu Ling closed the door, Yan Shiqi moved, taking a step and swinging his palm towards Gu Ling!

Gu Ling deftly parried with a palm, remaining in his original position, while Yan Shiqi stumbled back two steps, his eyes full of astonishment. “I never thought that the legendary Gu beauty would be an unknown master! In that case, why don’t you dare to go with me?”

“Have your master speak to me.” Gu Ling finished, then heavily closed the door.

Yan Shiqi stood quietly in the courtyard, looking at his one remaining hand, his eyes full of hatred. Gu Ling was even more beautiful than the rumors, but what he never expected was that Gu Ling’s martial arts skills were above his! Fortunately, he had been cautious and decided to test the waters first. If he had taken action directly, it would have been difficult for him to escape unscathed!

Yan Shiqi cast one cold glance at Gu Ling’s room door before disappearing into the night.

After another quarter of an hour, Gu Ling's room darkened, and the secret guard quietly left the Marquis Chang Xin Mansion and headed towards the direction of the Imperial Palace.

Duanmu Yi had instructed that if there was any abnormal situation with Gu Ling, he should be informed immediately, regardless of how late it was.

It was already late at night, Duanmu Yi listened to the report with a surprised expression, "Could it be that he arranged for someone to act just to cover up the lie?"

Duanmu Yi contemplated, "A woman? It was indeed a woman who saved the Nian Jincheng siblings. If it was arranged by Gu Ling, he should have followed tonight, and then Nian Jincheng would naturally appear. You said, Gu Ling is a master?"

The secret guard was not quite sure, "Your Majesty, I was afraid of being discovered, so I stayed far away. I only saw Master Gu and that person exchange a palm strike, with the other person retreating two steps and not attacking again. I dare not speculate on Master Gu's strength."

But actually, Duanmu Yi was not surprised that Gu Ling knew martial arts. If he was truly just a gentle and beautiful person, he would not have been able to vanish without a trace back then.

Gu Ling had stayed in Huguo Temple for a long time. After he left, Master Pu Hui, the abbot of Huguo Temple, told Duanmu Yi honestly that a high monk was impressed with Gu Ling's talents, took him as a disciple, and taught him martial arts.

This point, from another angle, could be seen as the reason why Gu Ling didn't collude with anyone and managed to survive on his own until now.

Compared to Gu Ling being a master himself, Duanmu Yi was more wary of the idea of him colluding with others for treason.

"He is not willing to go because he is cautious. If there really is a woman who saved Nian Jincheng, and Nian Jincheng is still in her hands even now, the fact that Gu Ling has seemed to invite him tonight means..." Duanmu Yi calmly evaluated tonight's events, thinking that Gu Ling's actions were rational and not suspicious. "It seems that the woman is, more often than not, Gu Ling's admirer."

As things developed to this point, after sorting out all the known information, the only "truth" Duanmu Yi could deduce was: there was a mysterious woman who took a fancy to Gu Ling but couldn't find him. When she found out that Gu Ling's friend Nian Jincheng had been captured, she saved him. Perhaps she wanted to learn Gu Ling's whereabouts from Nian Jincheng, but after all this time, she got nothing. Either Nian Jincheng didn't know where Gu Ling was, or he knew but wouldn't tell. So now the woman was only contacting Gu Ling, not showing herself, but rather sending someone to try to use Nian Jincheng to get him to meet...

Highly skilled in martial arts, a mysterious woman wanted Gu Ling... this point, regardless of whoever else it would be, would seem far-fetched and even absurd without evidence. But happening to Gu Ling, it made perfect sense; his face was the evidence that even Duanmu Yi believed.

“Keep an eye on them and don’t do anything rash just yet. Let’s see what he will do.” Duanmu Yi felt that Gu Ling couldn’t possibly ignore Nian Jincheng. “Increase manpower, and if a woman appears, capture her!”

On the other hand, Yan Shiqi returned to see Yan Shiba.

Yan Shiba mocked and ridiculed Yan Shiqi for not having captured Gu Ling.

Yan Shiqi remained silent for a long time, as if he hadn’t heard it. When Yan Shiba was tired of cursing and prepared to sleep, Yan Shiqi suddenly spoke, “Gu Ling is very strong. Did you know before? You know him, don’t you? When? Where?”

Yan Shiba’s eyes, which had just closed, opened again, looking at Yan Shiqi with laughter. “Of course... in a dream...hahaha! You saw Gu Ling with your own eyes, and you were beaten by him. How could you still have the face to live?” Yan Shiqi snorted coldly, “I don’t believe he won’t care about Nian Jincheng!”

“But you don’t have Nian Jincheng in your hands.” Yan Shiba sneered, “I know where he is. Stab yourself and I’ll tell you!”

Yan Shiqi’s face turned cold, “Isn’t it you who wants to see Gu Ling?”

Yan Shiba smiled seductively, “Shiqi, can you come to your senses? I advise you not to provoke Gu Ling anymore. It’s just humiliating yourself. I really feel pity for you.”

Hearing this, Yan Shiqi snorted, “Just wait and see!” and then left.

Yan Shiba lay down, sighing softly. “I just love those who are beautiful and skilled in martial arts...” His voice suddenly lowered, his eyes became gentle,

and he whispered three words, “little monk.”

Early the next morning, after the court, Duanmu Yi received a report that Marquis Chang Xin was seeking an audience.

Duanmu Yi had a feeling that it had something to do with what happened last night. He met Gu Ling in the Imperial Study.

What happened next surprised Duanmu Yi. Gu Ling honestly told him about the person who came to see him last night, exactly as the secret guard had said. Finally, Gu Ling made a request, hoping that Duanmu Yi could arrange for someone to rescue Nian Jincheng.

“How does Marquis Chang Xin think he should be saved?” Duanmu Yi asked in a faint tone.

Gu Ling narrowed his eyes and said, “Seal the city gates and conduct a full city search.”

Duanmu Yi’s eyes were deep and mysterious, “Now is a time when we need people. If something really happened to Nian Jincheng, it is not what I hope to see. In that case, just follow your plan. You do this, no matter how many people you need, I will approve.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Gu Ling left the palace after expressing his gratitude, and soon Lin Bojun arrived with his men, following Gu’s orders.

In broad daylight, the capital city's gate was suddenly closed, leaving the common people confused and uneasy.

Soon the news spread that someone had captured Nian Jincheng and was hiding in the capital city. The emperor ordered Gu Ling to search for him, and anyone who provided useful clues would be heavily rewarded.

Nian Jincheng, who was staying at the Su Mansion, received the news and spat out a mouthful of tea.

Yang Yu handed him a handkerchief to help him wipe his face and looked worried, "How could this happen? If you're found out, won't that be bad? Will someone suspect I captured you?"

Nian Jincheng coughed lightly, "No. Since it's Aling personally leading the search, there's no need to worry. It seems I'll be able to restore my identity soon. I hope we can get married this year."

"Let's wait until Su Liang comes back. If she has other arrangements, we'll listen to her." Yang Yu said seriously.

Nian Jincheng: ... He had thought Yang Yu had no "head of the family" and was wrong. Su Liang was the one, and Yang Yu was so self-disciplined to follow her words!

Yan Shiqi had never expected things to develop in this direction. With his strength, it was easy to hide in the capital city.

However, just as the search began, another piece of news quickly spread that the thief they were looking for had one blind eye and one severed hand. Any clue about this one-eyed man with one hand would be greatly rewarded!

Upon hearing this, Yan Shiqi was furious. Compared to worrying about his own safety, he felt this was a great insult to him!

When the search reached the Su Mansion, Yang Yu had already had Nian Jincheng hide in the dungeon in advance.

"This is Su Mansion; you're not a Su, where is the master of the house?" Gu Ling asked Yang Yu with an indifferent look. They had met yesterday at the Embroidery Workshop, so he "could know" who Yang Yu was.

Yang Yu smiled, "Marquis, this mansion belongs to my friend named Su Liang, who has been away from the capital recently. I'm staying here."

"Su, Liang?" Gu Ling repeated the name and nodded slightly, "I have heard of her."

Gu Ling stood by the lake next to Yuanming Pavilion, waiting for the search to continue. Yang Yu stood not far away, and the atmosphere became silent.

"The one-eyed, one-handed man is Yan Shiqi, the owner of Yanyun Building." Gu Ling suddenly said in a low voice.

Yang pretended to bend down to pick up fallen leaves from the ground.

avoiding anyone seeing her astonished expression.

By the time Yang Yu stood up, Gu Ling had turned his back to her. Lin Bojun came running over and reported the search results to Gu. Naturally, there was nothing suspicious.

“It’s been hard; let’s go.” Gu Ling said as he prepared to leave. Yang Yu hesitated and called out to him, “Marquis, please wait!”

Lin Bojun frowned, “Miss Yang, do you have any leads to provide?”

Yang Yu frowned and asked, “I heard that the person you’re looking for is a one-eyed, one-handed man?”

Lin Bojun nodded, “If Miss Yang knows anything, please be sure to inform us.”

Yang Yu sighed softly, “I don’t want to cause trouble. If I tell you, can you promise not to let anyone know that the information came from me?”

Lin Bojun looked at Gu Ling, who nodded slightly, “You can tell.”

“There was an incident at my home before, and I offended someone. I’ve been targeted by assassins more than once.” Yang Yu said seriously, “Later, I wanted to find the owner of Yanyun Building, pay a high price to protect myself, and ask Yanyun Building to name a price but not to accept any business related to me.”

Lin Bojun was puzzled, “What does this have to do with the current situation? Please, Miss Yang, be clear.”

Yang Yu’s eyes narrowed, “Now, the owner of Yanyun Building has only one eye and one hand.”

Gu Ling said indifferently, “As far as I know, Yan Shiba is a woman.”

Yang Yu shook her head, “Yanyun Building has changed hands, and the owner is not Yan Shiba, but Yan Shiqi.”

“Yan Shiba is a woman?” Lin Bojun frowned, “Yan Shiqi is the one-eyed, hand-amputated man? Marquis, could it be that these are the people we are looking for?”

Lin Bojun is friends with Nian Jincheng and is very concerned about his safety. He genuinely wants to find him and takes the clues provided by Yang Yu very seriously. He also understands why she didn’t want to say anything and promises not to leak any information.

After leaving the Su Mansion, Gu Ling and Lin Bojun continued to lead a search party. After searching for another hour, they released the news that a mysterious person had provided a clue that the one-eyed, hand-amputated person they were looking for was none other than Yan Shiqi, the new leader of Yanyun Building.

Lin Bojun reported the latest progress to the Imperial Palace, not daring to conceal from Duanmu Yi that the clue was provided by Miss Yang.

Duanmu Yi’s face darkened, “Yan Shiba, Yan Shiqi... Yes, the woman who rescued Nian Jincheng back then must have been Yan Shiba! No wonder she is so ruthless! I didn’t expect Gu Ling to be taken fancy by a female assassin leader!”

But after searching until nightfall, they still did not find any sign of Yan Shiba or Yan Shiqi.

However, Gu Ling's goal had been achieved. He had no interest in what had happened between Yan Shiba and Yan Shiqi, nor in whether Yan Shiba needed his help. After this, it would be enough to make Duanmu Yi believe that the rescue of Nian Jincheng was done by Yan Shiba.

After a few more days, Nian Jincheng could reappear, claiming that Yan Shiba and Yan Shiqi had an internal conflict, and he escaped amidst the chaos.

In the following days, Yan Shiqi did not show up again, and Gu Ling still went to the street-facing private dining room in Wan Family Restaurant every day. Xing Yusheng often brought Lin Xueqing along, always sitting in the next room.

On this cloudy day, Gu Ling estimated that Su Liang would arrive either today or tomorrow. After dinner, he sat by the window, his stunning side profile facing the street, visible to anyone passing by on horseback.

Gu Ling held a teacup in one hand but did not drink, putting it down to switch hands, avoiding the cup blocking his face.

After the tea had cooled, Su Liang still hadn't appeared. Gu Ling didn't leave, instead taking out a book to read.

Just after turning a page, he heard a knock at the door, "The Emperor commands Marquis Chang Xin to enter the palace immediately!"

Gu Ling furrowed his brows but had no choice but to close the book and open the door. Standing outside were two palace guards who repeated their earlier words.

Gu Ling went downstairs, and a waiter brought a horse. Just as Gu Ling was about to mount, he heard someone shout from a short distance, "The Martial Arts Champion has returned!"

Gu Ling didn't turn to look, his movements to mount the horse as graceful as flowing water, his back straight, and his face and silhouette otherworldly.

Gu Ling seemed not to hear the approaching hooves as he "naturally" rode out of the alley next to the Wan Family Restaurant.

"Watch out!"

A familiar female voice rang out, and the two horses were about to collide. Su Liang leapt up from her horse in the open and grabbed Gu Ling's arm, pulling him as they both landed safely on the ground.

"So beautiful!" someone exclaimed.

"Are you alright, sir?" Su Liang asked, smiling as she let go of Gu Ling's arm.

Gu Ling, his head lowered, slowly looked up at Su Liang.

A thunderclap echoed through the sky, the wind picking up and blowing Gu Ling's hair across Su Liang's cheek.

Their eyes met, seemingly isolated from everyone else.

"Master," Qi Jun spoke.

After calling her name three times, Su Liang finally came to her senses.

The crowd around them seemed to understand, the Top Scholar, Su Liang, was enchanted by the beautiful Gu Ling!

“I am Su Liang. May I ask your name, sir?” Su Liang inquired with a bow.

Gu Ling, with an indifferent expression, turned and left, leaving two words behind, “Gu Ling.”

Su Liang’s gaze followed Gu Ling’s figure until he disappeared, then she sighed, “Truly, truly, truly beautiful!” Qi Jun: ...I can’t bear to look.

Ren Dong: ...This is not her master!

The onlookers: ...Their gossip-souls burning, they couldn’t wait to see the scene of Su Liang madly pursuing Gu Ling!

Chapter 259: 259. This is a kind of disease

The secret guard responsible for monitoring Gu Ling’s every move day and night had already met Duanmu Yi before Gu Ling entered the palace and reported the second “unusual situation” that had occurred to Gu Ling since the appearance of Yan Shiqi that night.

“What did you say?” After listening, Duanmu Yi simply doubted his own ears.

The secret guard respectfully repeated his report, “Upon receiving the order,

Master Gu left the restaurant to ride to the palace, and happened to meet Imperial Physician Su, who had just arrived at the capital and was passing by the restaurant. Their horses nearly collided, and Imperial Physician Su helped Master Gu while publicly praising his extraordinary appearance, seemingly captivated by him.”

An image of Su Liang’s infatuated expression towards Gu Ling on the street surfaced in Duanmu Yi’s mind, and he immediately shook his head, “Impossible! Su Liang is not so superficial!”

The secret guard blurted out, “But that’s Gu, the beautiful one...”

Duanmu Yi’s face darkened. Gu Ling’s beauty was unparalleled, and his temperament was like that of a celestial being. Moreover, he was also a martial arts master. Could it be that Su Liang had truly fallen in love with him at first sight?

Someone reported from outside the door that the crown prince had arrived.

Duanmu Yi waved his hand, and the secret guard disappeared.

At this time, Gu Ling had already entered the palace gate. Duanmu Chen arrived earlier than him, and after paying respects, he sat upright, waiting for Gu Ling to arrive.

Duanmu Chen knew that Duanmu Yi had summoned him and Gu Ling to discuss how to save Nian Jincheng. The city had been sealed off for investigation a few days ago, and although no one had been found, a clear clue had been obtained nonetheless.

If the incident had really been orchestrated by the two leader assassins of

Yanyun Building, Yan Shiba and Yan Shiqi, both Duanmu Yi and Duanmu Chen believed it was normal they hadn't caught them that day. With the reputation of Yanyun Building and its numerous assassins, ordinary investigations couldn't touch them. By now, they might have escaped or still be hidden somewhere in the capital city.

But since they had important clues about Nian Jincheng's whereabouts, they couldn't do nothing.

Duanmu Chen hadn't learned about Su Liang's "love at first sight" with Gu Ling on the street yet because he had gone straight to the palace after receiving the notice. He had not had any contact with Gu Ling since Gu Ling returned to the capital city.

"Did you know that Gu Ling is highly skilled in martial arts?" Duanmu Yi began.

Clearly stunned, Duanmu Chen replied, "In response to Your Majesty's question, this minister has not heard of this matter before."

The fact that Gu Ling knew martial arts did not come as much of a surprise to Duanmu Chen. The reason was simple: if Gu Ling had been weak, he would have been dead long ago.

What surprised Duanmu Chen more was Duanmu Yi's sudden mention of this matter. Could it be that he was wary of Gu Ling?

"On the night of that day, Yan Shiqi, the owner of Yanyun Building, went to find him and was forced to retreat two steps by Gu Ling's palm strike," Duanmu Yi sighed, "He has always kept his abilities hidden."

Upon hearing this, Duanmu Chen was indeed somewhat surprised, "Is Gu Ling really so powerful?"

But with just this point, Duanmu Chen believed that it actually proved Gu Ling had no intention of rebelling. Martial arts could not be achieved overnight in just three or five years. Gu Ling, as the legitimate eldest son of the traitorous Gu Yuan, would have a future like Duanmu Chen's present if the Gu Family's rebellion succeeded. Moreover, it was apparent that the Gu Family was backed by Liang Country's King Yue and Situ Xian in that incident.

However, there was no trace of Gu Ling at all, and even Gu Yuan had been found to have repeatedly scolded Gu Ling as a disaster at home, wishing he could strangle him to death...

In short, now that Gu Ling's strength was so strong, he had refused to help Gu Yuan back then, and even after the incident, he had not taken any action to save the Gu Family members. At least for now, there was no evidence suggesting that he had been in contact with Situ Xian. Logically, Gu Ling's behavior was not only unrelated to the rebellion, but even anti-rebellion in nature.

The father and son discussed briefly, and then Gu Ling arrived.

Duanmu Chen secretly observed Gu Ling and could not help but sigh that he was indeed blessed by heaven, captivatingly beautiful, not resembling a mortal.

"Did Master Gu encounter any problems these days?" Duanmu Yi asked in a gentle tone.

Gu Ling shook his head, "This humble servant has been waiting, and the people from Yanyun Building have not appeared again."

“I heard that Master Gu had a close call on the street just now?” Duanmu Yi casually mentioned, “Were you injured?”

Duanmu Chen’s eyes flickered. Duanmu Yi had already received news of the incident on the street just now? That must mean someone had been keeping an eye on Gu Ling all along, and they didn’t mind letting Gu Ling know about this. Whether or not it was mentioned, Gu Ling probably was aware that his behavior was being watched.

Duanmu Chen was very curious about what Gu Ling had encountered on the street that was worth Duanmu Yi’s special inquiry.

Gu Ling’s expression remained indifferent, “Thank you for your concern, Your Majesty. Nothing happened, I just encountered the rumored Martial Arts Champion Miss Su Liang.”

Duanmu Chen’s heart stirred! It actually had something to do with Su Liang?

No wonder Duanmu Yi asked about it! What exactly happened? Could it be that Gu Ling and Su Liang had a public dispute? Given Gu Ling’s and Su Liang’s personalities, it was unlikely. It couldn’t be that Gu Ling took a fancy to Su Liang, could it?

However, looking at Gu Ling’s indifferent expression as he mentioned Su Liang’s name, Duanmu Chen didn’t think it was likely either.

Duanmu Yi smiled and asked, “What do you think of Su Liang, Marquis Gu?”

Duanmu Chen found this question a bit like trying to set up Gu Ling and Su Liang, but this was not something Duanmu Yi would do. He inexplicably felt the atmosphere had become a bit strange, deviating from their original purpose of meeting.

Gu Ling’s face remained calm, “As it was our first meeting, this humble official does not know much about Top Scholar Su.”

“First impressions are the most profound. Tell us, what is your impression of Su Liang?” Duanmu Yi still did not give up on this question.

Gu Ling’s beautiful brows slightly furrowed, “I feel that Top Scholar Su has a bold and uninhibited manner.”

Duanmu Chen: ...What, what, what? Did Su Liang do something to Gu Ling on the street?

Duanmu Yi chuckled, “Bold and uninhibited? Where does that come from?”

Gu Ling explained, “This humble official does not like being touched, especially by a strange woman.”

Duanmu Chen: ...So did Su Liang really do something to Gu Ling? Touching his body? Was it that upon seeing Gu Ling’s beauty, she directly pounced on him? Impossible!

Duanmu Yi’s smile deepened, “Marquis Gu, you’d better clarify what happened. Perhaps it’s a misunderstanding.”

“Top Scholar Su mistakenly thought that this humble official was about to fall off the horse, so she rushed to help me. She was overthinking it, as I intended to dismount by myself,” Gu Ling said indifferently.

Duanmu Chen: ...So Su Liang had just grabbed Gu Ling’s arm? Was Gu Ling ill? Was it worth mentioning this? Was he even a man? He didn’t like to be touched? Even a beauty like Su Liang was not allowed? He might as well become a monk!

Duanmu Yi burst into laughter, “We thought it was something serious. Marquis Gu, you shouldn’t be too sensitive. Su Liang had good intentions. However, when we see her next time, we must remind her to be more careful as men and women should not be intimately close, and such actions can easily lead to misunderstandings.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Gu Ling gave a slight nod.

“Alright, you can all go back now.” Duanmu Yi waved his hand.

Duanmu Chen was speechless. He didn’t know if Duanmu Yi had forgotten the main issue or had changed his mind at the last minute, but he had made a trip in vain.

As Duanmu Chen and Gu Ling walked together on the way out of the palace,

Duanmu Chen asked solemnly, “How does Marquis Gu plan to save General Nian?”

“Wait,” Gu Ling replied with a single word.

Duanmu Chen thought: ...He didn’t like being touched or talking more than necessary. Could Su Liang have really taken a liking to such a person?

“Marquis Gu won’t dislike Su Liang because of her kind gesture, will you?” Duanmu Chen half-jokingly asked.

Gu Ling shook his head, “It was a misunderstanding this time, but I hope there won’t be a next time.”

Duanmu Chen: ...Ah, why did he feel annoyed knowing Gu Ling was like this? Many men pursued Su Liang, and Gu Ling looked down on her? If he knew, one of the main reasons Duanmu Chen didn’t pursue Su Liang was because he knew he’d be rejected, it wasn’t because he had no feelings!

Duanmu Chen felt very upset in his heart and planned to let Chang’an pass on the message to Su Liang after leaving the palace: avoid Gu Ling in the future and stay away from him!

Upon leaving the imperial palace, Chang’an was waiting outside with the carriage. After watching Gu Ling ride away, he sighed, “There is such a perfect person in this world.”

Duanmu Chen in the carriage raised his foot and kicked Chang’an through the curtain, “Is your sleeve broken?”

Chang’an subconsciously looked down at his sleeves, “No, they’re fine.”

Duanmu Chen kicked Chang’an again, who then realized what he meant.

Chang’an quickly explained, “This subordinate was only amazed by Marquis Chang Xin’s beauty; there was no other meaning, Master, please don’t misunderstand!”

“Whether you misunderstand or not is not important. It is important whether a certain person will misunderstand. Hurry up and go!” Duanmu Chen said with a hint of gloom.

Chang'an didn't know who Duanmu Chen was referring to as “a certain person”, and he found Duanmu Chen too cryptic!

Su Liang returned to Su Mansion, and Yan Yu was overjoyed. Nian Jincheng had hidden early and did not show up.

“Qi Jun can go look for your brother, don't worry about coming back soon, there's nothing much on my side,” Su Liang said.

Qi Jun then went out with gifts for Qi Yan and Xing Yusheng.

Ren Dong's injury was not serious last time, and she had almost recovered. She had to wait until night to meet Duanmu Yi and report the situation of monitoring Su Liang during this time. As for what should be said and what should not be said, and how to deal with Duanmu Yi's inquiries, Su Liang had already given Ren Dong a special “training” before returning to the capital city.

After a simple wash and change of clothes, Su Liang and Yan Yu sat in her room on the second floor of Yuanming Pavilion and talked.

“Where's he?” Su Liang asked.

Yan Yu said Nian Jincheng was hiding in a vacant courtyard in the mansion, and also mentioned Gu Ling's visit to the capital.

“Marquis Chang Xin has returned, but he hasn't come looking for Achen. Achen doesn't dare to go look for him either. Previously, Marquis Chang Xin led people to search and secretly instructed me to provide clues, but I don't know what his plan is for the next step. Achen said that he was being closely watched by the Emperor and didn't dare to act rashly.” Yan Yu sighed softly.

Su Liang picked up the teacup and calmly replied, “Oh.”

Yan Yu was startled for a moment, “Why don't you ask anything? Aren't you curious about that beauty Gu?”

Su Liang's lips curled slightly, “Not curious.”

Yan Yu felt something was strange and suddenly had a thought, “Could it be that you already knew each other?”

Originally, Su Liang's daring move to save Nian Jincheng had puzzled Yan Yu

because their friendship didn't seem deep. If there was Gu Ling's shadow behind that incident, everything would make sense.

“You keep guessing.” Su Liang teased.

Yan Yu frowned and thought, “You knew Gu Ling beforehand, so you saved Achen to help Gu Ling? Then why has he been avoiding Achen and not seen him? Achen has never mentioned where he is.”

Seeing Yan Yu trapped in a dead end, Su Liang hinted, “This time you didn’t even ask me if I was heartbroken when Ning Jing died.”

Hearing Su Liang suddenly change the subject and mention Ning Jing without any warning, Yan Yu was taken aback, “Brother Ning, he...” she widened her eyes, covered her mouth, and looked subconsciously around and outside the window, “He... he couldn’t be... he is...”

Su Liang just smiled without saying a word.

Yan Yu was shocked, and it took her a long time to recover, “How could it be like this? Did Achen know it early on? You’ve been hiding it from me to protect me, but he won’t even tell me the truth!”

Hearing Yan Yu’s annoyance, Su Liang “added fuel to the fire,” “That’s right, I thought he had told you long ago. It’s harmless for you to know this, you two will get married soon, and you must be honest with each other.”

Nian Jincheng, who was secretly hiding in an empty courtyard waiting for Su Liang to find him, suddenly sneezed, feeling like someone was talking bad about him...

Yan Yu listened to Su Liang’s words, sighed, and began to explain for Nian Jincheng, “He didn’t want me to know so much to protect me. After all, Gu Ling had not been pardoned then, and it’s best not to mention his name to avoid trouble. ”

Su Liang smiled lightly, “That’s right, you trust each other, and you can get married.”

Yan Yu glared at Su Liang, “Stop joking. Let’s not talk about our business, I really didn’t expect that Brother Ning was actually Gu Ling in disguise. So what are your plans for the future? Pretend you don’t know each other? Or have an encounter, and then...”

Looking at Yan Yu’s meaningful smile, Su Liang calmly said, “As soon as I entered the city, I already had an encounter with Marquis Chang Xin, which was breathtaking. ”

Yan Yu sighed, “As long as you two are happy.”

Yan Yu left to serve tea to Nian Jincheng, letting Su Liang rest for a while, and they would discuss other matters later.

However, as soon as Yan Yu left, Ren Dong came to report that a guest had arrived.

It was Crown Prince Duanmu Chen. After leaving the palace, he changed direction halfway and headed to Su Mansion.

Although the two were in a cooperative relationship, formal visits were rare, and most of their interactions were secret.

And Duanmu Chen came today for a very good reason.

Ren Dong invited Duanmu Chen to enter the mansion and head to Yuanming Pavilion.

On the way, Duanmu Chen looked at Ren Dong and asked, “You used to work in the palace?”

Ren Dong respectfully answered, "Yes. The Emperor arranged for this slave servant to serve Physician Su."

Duanmu Chen entered Yuanming Pavilion, and Su Liang came down from upstairs, ordering Ren Dong to prepare tea.

Chang'an nodded and smiled at Su Liang outside, then went to wait by the lake.

As they sat down on the first floor of Yuanming Pavilion, Duanmu Chen looked at Su Liang, "You look well."

"Your Highness, the Crown Prince looks even better." Su Liang smiled.

"That maid, are you comfortable using her?" Duanmu Chen was referring to Ren Dong.

Su Liang shrugged, "Actually, there's no need, but I can't refuse the Emperor's kindness."

The two looked at each other, knowing some unspoken matters, there was no need to say it out loud. Duanmu Chen knew that Ren Dong was here to monitor Su Liang, and he also knew that Su Liang understood this.

Ren Dong served the tea, and Duanmu Chen took a sip, got scalded and was somewhat speechless, "This maid is really not good, clumsy and inept. If you really need someone to serve you, I'll send you a maid."

Su Liang shook her head, "I'm not someone who can't afford to hire people, so there's no need for your Highness to worry."

Duanmu Chen cleared his throat, "Actually, I came to see you today for a serious matter. I have just come out of the palace with Marquis Chang Xin."

Su Liang's lips curled up slightly, "It turns out that Marquis Chang Xin was in a hurry to enter the palace for an audience."

Duanmu Chen's expression was strange, "Su Liang, don't tell me you're really into Gu Ling?"

Su Liang nodded, and asked back, "Is that not allowed?" Duanmu Chen frowned, "I'm not joking with you."

"I'm not joking either," Su Liang said.

Duanmu Chen stared intently, "Are you really into him? Then I've come to the right place. Do you know how he evaluated you when my father asked him about you in the palace just now?"

Su Liang's eyes lit up, "Beauty Gu mentioned me? What did he say?"

Duanmu Chen looked speechless, "Can you be more composed?"

Su Liang coughed twice and asked seriously, "Please tell me, your Highness, how Marquis Chang Xin evaluated me."

Duanmu Chen snorted lightly, "He said he felt you were very bold because you touched him the first time you met. He doesn't like people touching him and doesn't want it to happen again!"

After saying this, Duanmu Chen watched as Su Liang's expression faded and she suddenly became quiet.

Duanmu Chen looked serious, "He is indeed beautiful, it's normal for you to like him, and I don't think you're unworthy, but it's better to forget it. That person has always been mysterious, doesn't like to interact with people, and might have some unspeakable problems."

Su Liang nodded slightly, "Indeed."

Duanmu Chen then laughed, "It seems you were just temporarily amazed by his beauty. I knew you weren't that superficial."

Su Liang smiled, "Your Highness is right. He doesn't like being touched by me.. This is a disease and must be cured!"

Chapter 260: 260. What a coincidence

The weather was clear and sunny.

Chang'an, who was playing by the lake, caught a glimpse of Duanmu Chen coming out of the Yuanming Pavilion. He immediately dropped the stone in his hand and ran over, "Master, are you leaving so soon?"

Duanmu Chen looked back at the Yuanming Pavilion and snorted lightly, "Crazy, she's really crazy."

Chang'an was confused, "Who's crazy?"

"Who else could it be? Su Liang!" Duanmu Chen walked away.

Chang'an, feeling as though he was being clawed at by a cat, followed Duanmu Chen and asked what was wrong with Su Liang and why she was called crazy.

"She's been enchanted by Gu Ling." Duanmu Chen's tone was somewhat dreary.

Chang'an was stunned for a moment, and then blurted out, "Both are unmarried and beautiful, and both are lonely. They are quite a match!"

Duanmu Chen stopped walking, frowned at Chang'an, "Do you really think they're a good match?"

Chang'an blinked, "Can you really say that... "

Duanmu Chen snorted, "If Gu Ling doesn't like Su Liang, but Su Liang still pursues him, do you think it's right? Is that still Su Liang?"

Chang'an thought for a while, "They just met. Marquis Gu may not like Miss Su today, but maybe he will tomorrow, what's wrong with that? Miss Su has always been straightforward and open-minded, if she likes someone, she likes them, if she doesn't, she doesn't."

Duanmu Chen's expression was indescribable, "So she's the type who would fall for someone?"

Chang'an said solemnly, "Miss Su is genuine. Master finds it surprising because Miss Su hasn't met the right person before. Now that she has, she naturally shows a side Master hasn't seen before."

Duanmu Chen retorted, "Then what about Ning Jing?"

Chang'an shook his head, "In my opinion, Young Master Ning and Miss Su are just close friends. Although they have a tacit understanding, they lack a bit..." "Lack what?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Chang'an thought for a long time, and only came up with an answer when he left the Su Mansion, "It's impulsiveness! When you really like someone, you become less calm. Miss Su and Young Master Ning are together, and they are both so calm. Now Miss Su wants to pursue Marquis Gu, even if she's rejected, she won't give up; that's impulsiveness! Master thinks it's not like her, that's right! It means Miss Su is truly moved!"

"Where did you hear all this nonsense?" Duanmu Chen was speechless. Chang'an lowered his head weakly, "That's what is written in the storybooks..." Duanmu Chen: .

Su Liang packed her things simply and returned to the Su Mansion without reporting to the palace.

"Su sister! Su sister!"

Lin Xueqing's voice sounded, followed by the sound of footsteps going upstairs.

Xing Yusheng didn't go up but sat on the first floor, muttering, "Su Liang really has her eyes on Gu Ling? I'm a real prophet!" He chuckled, very satisfied, feeling that the match between Su Liang and Gu Ling had been destined by heaven.

As soon as Lin Xueqing saw Su Liang, she grabbed her hand and sat her down, looking at her anxiously and asking, "I heard that you fell in love with Marquis Chang Xin, Gu Ling, at first sight?"

Su Liang nodded.

"Really? I thought Ajun was exaggerating! You like Gu Ling? You really like him? You want to be with him?" Lin Xueqing asked several questions in a row.

Su Liang nodded her head again.

Lin Xueqing was happy, "Su sister, you have no idea, my husband and I originally thought about waiting for you to come back and creating opportunities to bring you and Marquis Chang Xin together. We never thought that you would meet without us doing anything. It's fate!"

Su Liang: ...Yes, their "love at first sight," arranged early on, with Gu Ling waiting every day at the Wan Family Restaurant, was indeed fate-the fate of acting in a play together.

Lin Xueqing was particularly happy, "It's so great! Marquis Gu has such beauty like an immortal, Su sister, you have good taste! Others don't deserve him, and they don't deserve you either. You two are such a great match!"

Su Liang sighed softly, "The Crown Prince just came here and said that Marquis Chang Xin had complained about me touching him in front of the emperor, claiming that I was very bold and told me to stay away from him."

Lin Xueqing was dumbstruck, "What?" After a while, she came to her senses, slammed the table and stood up, "He... he has a problem with his eyes? Miss Su is so beautiful and cute, but he doesn't like her, it's simply unjust!"

Downstairs, Xing Yusheng knit his brows: ...Gu Ling doesn't like Su Liang? What kind of person is he looking for? Could it be that Gu Ling already has someone in his heart? It shouldn't be. With his

unfriendly appearance, and his previous status as a rebel fugitive, what good girl would be with him?

Su Liang pulled Lin Xueqing down to sit, "Don't worry. It's just a misunderstanding, and I won't give up."

Lin Xueqing was even more surprised when she heard this, "Su sister, you want to pursue Marquis Chang Xin?"

Su Liang smiled, "Is that not possible?"

Lin Xueqing shook her head, "No, it's just that I feel... I can't even explain it, just tell me quickly how you plan to pursue him."

"Ren Dong." Su Liang suddenly shouted downstairs.

Ren Dong, who was waiting outside, immediately rushed upstairs. Xing Yusheng only saw a shadow fluttering past him from a distance.

"I have a task for you," Su Liang said to Ren Dong.

Ren Dong nodded, "Master, please give your orders."

"You go to the Wan Family Restaurant and reserve the room next to the one Marquis Chang Xin booked. From now on, I'm going to eat there." Su Liang said.

"Yes!" Ren Dong immediately turned and went downstairs to carry out the task.

Lin Xueqing sighed, "Su sister, you really have guts!" A girl chasing a boy in this world is not only very rare, but also seldom so high-profile.

Downstairs, Xing Yusheng's voice rang, "Su Liang, I support you! Hurry up and take down Gu Ling! When you get married, I'll be the one blocking your door!

He doesn't call me his brother, I won't let him in, haha!"

After leaving the Su Mansion, Xing Yusheng and Lin Xueqing went back to Marquis Zhong Xin's Mansion to tell Old Madam Xing about Su Liang's situation.

When Old Madam Xing heard that Su Liang had taken a liking to Gu Ling and even wanted to pursue him, she couldn't help bending over giggling, "We'll just wait for their wedding banquet then! It's so nice, I'm sure the person Liang'er likes must be a good choice!"

Lin Shuzhi and Old Master Qin, who had discussed Su Liang and Gu Ling before, felt that they had hit the nail on the head: the two were indeed meant to be together.

Later that evening, news spread throughout the capital city that Su Liang had reserved the room next to Gu Ling's at the Wan Family Restaurant, further stirring people's interest in gossip.

And in the evening, when Gu Ling appeared at the Wan Family Restaurant on time as usual, Su Liang had already arrived a step ahead. She even made use of her private relationship with the owner of the Wan Family Restaurant to take a look at the room Gu Ling had reserved.

However, not only was Su Liang there, but Yang Yu was also accompanying her. She was carrying a medicine box, which was normal since she carried it almost everywhere before.

Gu Ling entered his private room, closed the doors and windows, and shut out the view from the outside.

Soon, the waiter quietly served the dishes and then left.

Gu Ling didn't immediately start eating, but instead got up and began searching for something in the room.

After a while, Gu Ling found an oil-paper wrapper hidden in a wide-mouthed vase and took it out.

This was Su Liang's real reason for coming to the Wan Family Restaurant to eat – to give Gu Ling a snack...

When Gu Ling heard that people were discussing Su Liang entering his private room, he guessed that she must have hidden something in there.

Now that Duanmu Yi had people watching them day and night, the two could not meet in private. They could only communicate through Su Liang's "ardent pursuit" tactic.

Upon opening the oily paper package, it contained Gu Ling's favorite pumpkin seeds, which Su Liang had made the day before leaving Su Village. They were flavored with five spices.

There was also a note inside, which read: "Is Little Nian able to reveal himself yet?"

Gu Ling took out a piece of paper with writing on it from his pocket and quickly folded it into a paper crane. Then, he put Su Liang's note in his purse, repacked the oily paper package and put it back into the vase, along with the paper crane.

Only then, he returned to the table and started eating.

"Auntie!"

From the outside of the room came the joyful voice of Zheng'er. Gu Ling glanced at the door.

Knowing that Su Liang was there, Wan Hui brought Zheng'er to find her, also meaning to ask Su Liang about her and Gu Ling's situation.

As a result, Zheng'er asked when Uncle Ning would return.

Su Liang still didn't know, but she thought that your uncle is just next door, but unfortunately, he can't acknowledge you. However, this is only temporary.

When Gu Ling finished eating, he instructed the waiter to make a bowl of soup for him to take back as a late-night snack.

Shortly after, the waiter came in with a delicate food box. Seeing that Gu Ling was still drinking tea, the waiter placed it down and left.

Gu Ling took out the oily paper package from the vase once again and placed it in the food box before leaving the room.

Ren Dong, who was guarding outside Su Liang's room, saw Gu Ling come out and immediately knocked on the door to report to Su Liang, "Master, Marquis Chang Xin is leaving."

Thus, under the watchful eyes of the restaurant guests, Su Liang rushed out from her room, met Gu Ling face to face, and sweetly smiled at him, "What a coincidence! We meet again!"

The onlookers thought: ...how incredibly coincidental!

Gu Ling's gaze swept past Su Liang's smiling eyes, his face emotionless, nodding slightly, "Miss Su."

"It's more enjoyable to have an accidental encounter than an intentional one, shall we have a drink together?" Su Liang invited Gu Ling.

Gu Ling shook his head, "I don't feel like drinking today. Excuse me, Miss Su."

"What about tomorrow? If you don't want to drink, how about going to Huguo Temple to watch the clouds together?" Su Liang suggested.

"I don't want to watch the clouds tomorrow." Gu Ling's expression was indifferent.

Yang Yu came out to pull Su Liang back, and Su Liang smiled at Gu Ling, "See you tomorrow."

After Ren Dong closed Su Liang's door from the outside, Gu Ling took the food box downstairs.

The onlookers all couldn't help but sigh. Su Liang, the Top Scholar, was indeed a heroine. When she set her sights on the beautiful Gu Ling, she was really bold in pursuing him! Although it seemed that Gu Ling was unmoved, many people felt that they were a good match, and a woman's pursuit of a man was like a veil separating them. Gu Ling might not be able to hold on for a few days!

Before leaving the restaurant, Su Liang had carried a delicate and expensive vase into Gu Ling's private room, and when she came out, she had a different vase.

As for this matter, the rumor was that Su Liang had deliberately changed the vase in Gu Ling's room to please him.

However, Yang Yu knew that it was all fake. But Su Liang had already asked Yang Yu to help her get a batch of beautiful vases because she wanted to exchange vases every day with Gu Ling to pass messages.

Yang Yu could only think that compared to Su Liang and Gu Ling, her love story with Nian Jincheng was quite uneventful...

In the carriage on the way back to the mansion, Su Liang took out the paper crane left by Gu Ling from her purse. She gently pulled the tail of the crane and its wings started to flap.

"How clever!" Yang Yu took a look and then handed it back to Su Liang.

When they arrived home, Su Liang went back to her room and opened the paper crane. It was a letter written by Gu Ling with his left hand, discussing Nian Jincheng's situation—something that Su Liang also wanted to know.

Yang Yu sighed, "The tacit understanding between you two is unparalleled.

What you wanted to ask, he had already anticipated and prepared the answer." There were no writing materials in the private room of the restaurant, so Gu Ling must have prepared it beforehand.

In the letter, Gu Ling wrote that Yan Shiba had been controlled by Yan Shiqi and that they didn't need to deal with them for the time being. He asked Nian

Jincheng to “return” to the capital city within three days and meet Duanmu Yi.

He would tell Duanmu Yi that at the time, he was rescued by Yan Shiba. Yan Shiba forced him to disclose Gu Ling’s whereabouts, but he didn’t because he genuinely didn’t know. Later, there was a conflict within the Yanyun Building, Yan Shiba was usurped by Yan Shiqi, and Nian Jincheng took the opportunity to escape. He hid in a mountain in the north until he came down the mountain to buy food and heard that both he and Gu Ling had been pardoned before heading back to the capital.

After reading it, Su Liang handed it to Yang Yu, who was relieved. “That’s good,” she said, taking the letter to find Nian Jincheng.

The night deepened.

After bathing and preparing to rest, Su Liang instructed Ren Dong, “I’m fine now, you can go and rest.”

“Yes, Master,” Ren Dong replied.

After the lights dimmed in Su Liang’s room, and a quarter of an hour had passed, Ren Dong secretly left the Su Mansion and headed in the direction of the Imperial Palace.

Ren Dong reported in detail what she had seen by Su Liang’s side over the past few days. This included the harmonious relationship between Su Liang and the people of Su Village, her daily activities, the assassination attempt on the way back, and her developing feelings for Gu Ling after returning to the capital.

On hearing the last part, Duanmu Yi’s expression darkened, “Has she really fallen for Gu Ling?”

Ren Dong nodded, “In response to Your Majesty’s question, yes, Miss Su is indeed pursuing Marquis Chang Xin.”

Duanmu Yi’s eyes narrowed, and he remained silent for a long time.

Ren Dong knelt on the ground, her legs were numb from squatting, and only then heard Duanmu Yi let her stand up. “Go back, keep watching, and don’t let her find out that you’ve left.”

After Ren Dong bowed and took her leave, she left the Imperial Palace.

When she returned to the Su Mansion, she went to the door of Su Liang’s room and knocked softly twice.

“How was it?” Su Liang’s voice came from inside the room.

Ren Dong responded, “His Majesty asked if my Master truly likes Marquis Chang Xin. I replied yes, and His Majesty’s expression was unhappy.”

Su Liang snorted lightly but wasn’t surprised, as she had already guessed that Duanmu Yi had feelings for her. Perfect, she thought, using Gu Ling to see what Duanmu Yi would do.

After Ren Dong left, Su Liang closed her eyes and went to sleep.

At the Marquis Chang Xin Mansion.

It was past midnight, and there was still a light on in Gu Ling's room. The secret guard hiding in the tree, waiting for his "colleague" to take over, tightened his clothes, rubbing his eyes as he could barely stay awake any longer.

In the room, Gu Ling finally completed fixing the medical book that he had torn in half when they were at Su Village. It was sandwiched between two other books and had a wooden box on top of it.

Then, Gu Ling took out the illustrations he had drawn during the bedtime stories that Su Liang had told him every night. He had bound them into an album, and as he looked through it, he spelled out Su Liang's name on the table using pumpkin seeds.

If Su Liang were here at this moment, she would definitely scoff: What a crazy person!

Then, Gu Ling slowly and carefully ate the pumpkin seeds that spelled "Su Liang" one by one.

As the image of Su Liang's blossoming smile from their encounter earlier that day appeared in his mind, Gu Ling whispered to himself almost inaudibly, "It's quite a coincidence, you crossing over here and appearing right in front of me.."