

Three-Time 341

Chapter 341: 341. Count it on Su Liang's head.

Duanmu Yi coldly watched Duanmu Chen, making his heart hang in suspense.

Because Duanmu Chen knew very well that he was only subconsciously defending Su Liang, not truly doubting the origin of this letter.

The fact that "Ning Jing" is Gu Ling, Duanmu Chen hadn't thought of before. As for the other matters, he had already had suspicions. Even when he saw the line in the letter stating that the top scholar "Ning Jing" was simply a disguise by Gu Ling, it clarified Duanmu Chen's long-held doubts!

In other words, Duanmu Chen knew that much of what was said in the letter was true.

It wasn't that Su Liang and Gu Ling had shown any obvious flaws, but looking at the results, there were too many coincidences.

The "story" told in the letter, compared to what they visibly saw Su Liang and Gu Ling do, the former fits more with their natures! This, was the most lethal point!

Duanmu Chen somewhat regretted impulsively defending Su Liang just now. He still thinks that he should defend Su Liang, but saying those words so quickly might make Duanmu Yi suspect that he was already aware of everything and was in cahoots. After all, he had become the crown prince, while the original crown prince and both the Second and Fifth princes, seen as obstacles, had either died or were under house arrest Semi-crazy...

Looking at the results, if Duanmu Chen was suspected of colluding with Su Liang and Gu Ling, it would appear quite plausible that he swept away obstacles to ascend, they sought revenge, and thus formed a covert alliance.

And the truth is, Duanmu Chen truly had a cooperative relationship with Su Liang. It's just that many of the later developments were not discussed with him by Su Liang, and the purpose was not to help him, but the results were always to his advantage.

Duanmu Chen thought that Duanmu Yi would reprimand him, he was already thinking about how to reply next.

But, Duanmu Yi only looked at Duanmu Chen with profound eyes, not saying anything, making Duanmu Chen feel even more uneasy.

Just as Duanmu Chen's thoughts cleared and he prepared to explain, he heard Duanmu Yi say, "You're right, this letter must be related to Situ Xie. He wants to sow discord to cast doubt on Su Liang and Gu Ling, and use my hand to eliminate them."

Duanmu Chen felt a relief in his heart, "This servant also believes that this is Situ Xie's doing. Relying on his relationship with Gu Ling, he fabricated some seemingly plausible stories to confuse us."

"You may leave." Duanmu Yi's spoke and left the Imperial Study proceedings before Duanmu Chen could say anything else.

Duanmu Chen then came out of the Imperial Study, looking at the vague daylight outside, the morning mist hitting his face felt a bit cold, remembering the look in Duanmu Yi's eyes, his heart sank again.

Duanmu Chen knew, Duanmu Yi believed what was said in that letter, perhaps regardless of whether he defended Su Liang or not, Duanmu Yi would identify him as a conspirator in harming his brothers.

In fact, if Su Liang had initially approached Duanmu Chen to conspire to remove Duanmu Cheng and Duanmu Ao, Duanmu Chen would not have refused...

Chang'an was waiting outside the palace and was somewhat surprised when Duanmu Chen came out so quickly.

Duanmu Chen silently boarded the carriage, Chang'an hurriedly drove back to the mansion.

Halfway there, a voice suddenly came from the carriage, "Chang'an, do you think Su Liang would harm me?"

Chang'an was stunned for a moment, he pondered for a while before answering, "This servant believes, as long as the master does not do anything inappropriate, Miss Su will certainly not harm the master."

Duanmu Chen silently nodded his head, it was a reminder he had always given himself since knowing Su Liang.

At the moment, Su Liang was not around, she might still be under control or she might have escaped, but regardless, Duanmu Chen never doubted that she would definitely solve the trouble and return safely.

What mattered to Duanmu Chen was not about what Su Liang had deceived him about, because they were never really close friends.

More importantly, Duanmu Chen had received many benefits because of Su Liang, and firmly believed, there would be future "cooperation" between them. He even felt that without the help of Su Liang and Gu Ling, he might be stuck at the position of crown prince of Qian Country, unable to go any further.

These two years of experience have made Duanmu Chen realize his shortcomings. Sometimes, having status and cunning is not enough to get what one wants.

He was facing a cunning and cruel war without smoke of gunpowder, with endless enemies, some cleverer than him, and many with more power and means.

Duanmu Chen often felt uneasy after Su Liang's incident and increasingly realized that his luck played a large part in his success today. And his luck came from Su Liang.

Chang'an heard Duanmu Chen sigh and couldn't help but ask, "Master, what's wrong?"

It took a while for Duanmu Chen to reply, "Nothing."

He was worrying about his own situation, but considering the current condition of the royal family of Qian Country, if Duanmu Yi has not lost his sanity, he should know that he is the only suitable candidate for the crown prince.

Duanmu Yi might choose to continue to use Su Liang and Gu Ling, or he might turn against them.

Duanmu Chen did not just come to realize today, only that he became more aware that Duanmu Yi will sooner or later get rid of Su Liang and Gu Ling. Originally, he was going to “put away his bow after the birds are gone”, but now he may continue, or he may take action ahead of time.

And when Duanmu Chen subconsciously defended Su Liang in the Imperial Study, he had already made his choice. His interests and Duanmu Yi's are not the same, they even conflict, because he wants the position Duanmu Yi currently holds, and Duanmu Yi might not give it to him.

But, past experiences told Duanmu Chen that although his interests and Su Liang's were fundamentally different, they could reach the same result, and he was the one who benefited.

At this point, although Duanmu Chen felt uneasy, he had more clarity about his future.

Upon returning to the Crown Prince's mansion, Duanmu Chen behaved as normal and did not go out again.

In the middle of the night, Lin Shuzhi woke up suddenly. Sitting up, he noticed a letter on his blanket.

There was no one else in the room, all doors and windows were shut. He devoted his gaze, picked up the letter, scanned it and his face changed dramatically!

The letter was sent by Duanmu Chen, and it contained just one piece of information: Duanmu Yi had come to know that the past “Ning Jing” was a disguise of Gu Ling.

This was indeed a concern for Lin Shuzhi.

Duanmu Chen had guessed right. The Lin father and son were aware of the fact. His goal for sending this letter were twofold. Firstly, to utilise Lin Shuzhi to pass the message to Su Liang. Even if Lin Shuzhi didn't know where Su Liang was at the moment, Duanmu Chen believed that his family would find out before he does when Su Liang escapes. Secondly, by risking his identity Duanmu Chen is expressing his allegiance, he is on Su Liang's side.

Lin Shuzhi put the letter under his pillow, closed his eyes and sighed deeply.

Next day, before going to the court, Lin Boyan had a talk with Lin Shuzhi for a quarter in the study room.

Lin Xueqing, who is pregnant, often stays with her mother. She wished to go shopping on that day, and Xing Yusheng accompanied her. They bumped into Yang Yu at Yang Family's Embroidery Workshop, where they went to buy fabric for their nephew. As it was approaching noon, they decided to have lunch together at the Wan Family Restaurant.

In the afternoon, they all left the restaurant. Yang Yu returned to the Su Mansion, where she had moved in a while ago and had been living for some time.

Xing Yusheng took Lin Xueqing to visit the Marquis Zhong Xin's Mansion and meet the dowager. She mentioned sending some seasonal fruits to Xing Ji in Xuanbei City.

Xing Yuyan, who was originally to be married to Liang Country, was secretly sent to the capital city. Accompanying her was Situ Jing, the eldest grandson of Situ Xie.

That night, Ren Dong met Duanmu Yi again.

“Any news from Su Liang?” Duanmu Yi asked, his voice cold.

Ren Dong shook her head, “Your Majesty, General Nian sent a letter to the Madam Nian a few days ago to assure her of their safety, but still there is no news of Doctor Su.”

“Alright, retreat. Inform immediately upon receiving any news,” said Duanmu Yi.

Ren Dong paid her respects and left, unaware of Duanmu Yi’s icy glare.

When Ren Dong returned to Su Mansion, Yang Yu was still awake.

She went straight to her room without speaking to Yang Yu. The important news that Duanmu Chen had divulged was already passed to Yang Yu and Ren Dong by the Lin Mansion. Following this, Yang Yu would promptly inform Nian Jincheng. Xing Yusheng had also secretly sent someone to inform Xing Ji in Xuanbei City and make preparations.

The shadow stalking Ren Dong stayed in Su Mansion for another hour. Unable to glean any information, it left to report back.

Meanwhile in the Crown Prince’s mansion, Duanmu Chen, who had just gone to bed, suddenly sat up, his brows deeply furrowed.

He believed it was Situ Xie’s doing. However, Situ Xie had earlier sent his grandson as a spy, and had taken Su Liang into custody. If she was in his hands, he could not have sent such a letter, as it might risk losing her value as a threat to the royal family of Qian Country.

Duanmu Chen finally realised something. If the letter did come from Situ Xie, it meant that Su Liang had already escaped!

But if that were the case, the letter had been sent all the way from Liang Country to Qian Country and it took so long, yet there was no news nor a return of Su Liang...

Duanmu Chen looked worried. If Duanmu Yi figured this, he would be more doubtful of Su Liang and the missing Gu Ling!

“Chang’an!”

Chang’an entered quickly. Seeing Duanmu Chen walk out of his inner room, rubbing his forehead, he asked, “Any unrest in the palace?”

Chang’an shook his head, “Nothing unusual. Did the master have a bad dream?”

Duanmu Chen sighed, “If she doesn’t come back soon, I will truly start having nightmares.”

Chang’an was stunned for a moment, “Master, are you concerned about Miss Su? This subordinate believes that she is naturally blessed and will certainly return safe and sound!”

Duanmu Chen: ... Yes, there were signs of Su Liang escaping, yet no news of her. But she might stir up Duanmu Yi if she really came back.

For a moment, Duanmu Chen began to suspect that Su Liang was deliberately evading. Consequently, it would confirm her “disloyalty”. Furthermore, she had also married the son of a rebel....

The more he thought about it, the more uneasy Duanmu Chen became.

“Master, is all well?” Chang’an noticed that something was off with Duanmu Chen’s expression.

Duanmu Chen sat down, making and unmaking a fist, “Has there been any movements from Duanmu Che recently?”

Chang’an shook his head, “There hasn’t been any news from the fifth prince for quite some time.”

Duanmu Chen took a deep breath to calm himself down, “Alright, nothing is wrong, you may go rest.”

Xuanbei City.

After dinner that day, Xing Ji suddenly felt stabbing pains in his chest, occurring intermittently. Qi Jiang, who dined with him, also presented the same symptoms.

The military physicians were well-experienced in treating external injuries, but knew little about poisons. They diagnosed them as poisoned, but couldn’t identify which type of poison it was. They tried a silver needle on the remaining food, but it didn’t turn black.

An hour later, a letter was delivered.

The letter straightforwardly stated that Xing Ji must personally meet out of the city at midnight to exchange Situ Jing for the antidote. Otherwise, it was certain death before dawn!

“You absolutely mustn’t go! It’s definitely a trap!” Qi Jiang looked pale.

Xing Ji was relatively calm, “Situ Xie’s objective is just saving his grandson, not killing me.” But, he couldn’t rule out the possibility of them attempting to kill him after freeing Situ Jing.

“But Situ Jing isn’t here.” Qi Jiang furrowed his brows.

They had received the news earlier, that Situ Xie had captured Su Liang. Duanmu Yi then secretly transferred Situ Jing to the capital city.

Xing Ji summoned all the military commanders of Xuanbei City, instructing them on who should take over in case he met with misfortune.

Although encountering such a situation was unexpected, Xing Ji was psychologically prepared. His role was inherently in a high-risk position, it would be strange if the enemy didn’t want to get rid of him.

If he chose not to go, he would die from poison. If he went, there might be a turning point. Situ Jing wasn’t in Xuanbei City, providing a good chance to bargain and delay by negotiating terms.

Qi Jiang wanted to accompany him but was asked by Xing Ji to stay. Xing Ji wrote a letter to his family, or should it be more accurately called a “will,” just in case.

At midnight, Xing Ji led a team of soldiers, appearing at the agreed-upon location.

There were three people on the other side, and the female leader was actually Ying Ying, who had been arranged by Situ Xie to rescue Situ Jing.

“Where’s Young Master Jing?” Ying Ying asked coldly.

Xing Ji maintained a calm face, "He's ill, severely ill. He was sent back to the capital city for treatment before, he is not in Xuanbei City."

One of the men behind Ying Ying spoke up, "Stop playing tricks! If you don't hand over Young Master Jing, just wait to die!"

Xing Ji sighed, "I'm not playing any tricks. Your people should have searched Xuanbei City by now, he's really not here."

The two men glanced at each other, and the other one spoke up, "Then please accompany us on a little trip, General Xing!"

Ying Ying's eyes narrowed slightly, she lowered her voice, "What are you two planning to do?"

"Miss Ying, this is the prince's wish." The man's tone was firm.

Ying Ying was silent and placed her hand on the longsword at her waist.

Xing Ji wasn't surprised. He had no intention of getting caught in the hands of people from Liang Country.

"How about you give me the antidote first, set a time, and if Situ Jing hasn't been delivered by then, you may poison me. I believe you can do it." Xing Ji began negotiating with them, "I will not go with you. If I die from poisoning, your Young Master Jing will only die more miserably."

"Young Master Jing is not in General Xing's hands. If General Xing dies, I believe Emperor Qian won't do anything to Young Master Jing. After all, he still needs to give our prince some face!" The man scoffed coldly.

Xing Ji's heart sank slightly. He quickly reacted to the hard-line stance of the man before him, concluding that he wasn't an ordinary subordinate.

Xing Ji understood that if he died, he would lose his value. Duanmu Yi might use Situ Jing to negotiate other benefits with Situ Xie. It was not certain he would avenge him by killing Situ Jing.

"Hand over the antidote, or you three will stay here." At Xing Ji's command, the soldiers surrounded Ying Ying and her companions.

"I kindly remind General Xing that the poison you were poisoned with— if you fight, it will only accelerate your death! The antidote will only be sent over once Young Master Jing is seen. How could we carry it on our persons?" The man, unafraid, sneered back, "If General Xing values his life, he should obediently go with us! Otherwise, you will definitely regret it!"

In fact, the antidote was on Ying Ying. If she were really one of Situ Xie's people, she would think the two men accompanying her were quite clever.

But, she wasn't.

Moreover, she knew that Xing Ji wouldn't surrender. As the chief commander of Qian Country, the consequences of his capture would be severe.

The atmosphere became highly strained. Suddenly, Xing Ji gave the order for his soldiers to retreat.

“I can go with you. However, my friend was also poisoned, and I need the antidote to save him.” Xing Ji said.

The man said, “Deal! as long as General Xing goes with us, someone will deliver the antidote to your friend at the General’s Mansion in Xuanbei City! It’s impossible for us to produce the antidote right now, so save your breath!”

“General, you absolutely mustn’t go!” Somebody tried to stop him from behind.

Xing Ji didn’t look back. He took steps towards Ying Ying and her companions.

The two men exchanged glances and walked aside together, preparing to “welcome” Xing Ji.

At this moment, Xing Ji saw Ying Ying suddenly turn around. She pulled out her twin blades from her sleeves and viciously stabbed them into the backs of those two men!

Everything happened very quickly. Xing Ji had completely not anticipated that the three individuals would suddenly begin to slay each other. He was prepared to murder them, but he had not yet found the opportunity to make a move.

The pair fell forwards but promptly got up again. They drew their swords, aiming to kill Ying Ying, but their seven orifices bled and they died instantly.

Ying Ying was skilled in poison; if she wanted to kill someone, she would naturally smear the blades with lethal poison. As for the long sword she hung on her body, it was primarily used as a decoy to fool the enemy most of the time.

“I am Su Liang’s friend.” Ying Ying didn’t turn her head to look at Xing Ji, but she spoke in a low voice, “You should take me captive.”

Xing Ji’s face changed. He stepped forward and entered into a fight with Ying Ying.

Not long after, Ying Ying fell into Xing Ji’s hands.

To the soldiers watching, it looked as if the three enemies had suddenly revolted against each other, and then Xing Ji seized the opportunity to capture the only survivor.

Xing Ji ordered his men to bind Ying Ying. He searched the two bodies but didn’t find anything. He ordered his men to take everything back.

With his heart in his mouth, Qi Jiang anxiously waited. Seeing Xing Ji come back with a captive, he sighed in relief.

Xing Ji dismissed everyone else, leaving only Qi Jiang behind. He untied Ying Ying’s bonds.

“Miss Ying is Xiaoliang’s friend? May I ask your name?” Xing Ji was very courteous.

Ying Ying’s face didn’t look good. “My surname is ‘Ying’. I was the one who poisoned you, but it’s not lethal. You won’t need an antidote. It will pass in a few days. I am under Situ Xie’s control, thus I had no choice but to act. Please forgive me. I had intended to take Situ Jing back to settle matters, but I didn’t expect him to be absent here.”

Ying Ye, Ying Ying's younger brother, was under their grandmother Lady Yue's control. Therefore, Ying Ying had to obey Lady Yue's orders. Now that they knew Su Liang was safe, letting Situ Jing go wouldn't have much effect on Su Liang and Xing Ji. She had intended to rescue Situ Jing without harming anyone in order to avoid angering Lady Yue.

But plans couldn't keep up with changes. Situ Jing was missing here and Situ Xie's two subordinates were determined to take Xing Ji back, forcing Ying Ying to kill them in order to protect Su Liang's adoptive father.

Her request to be captured was only to deceive Lady Yue and Situ Xie. A failed mission was always better than betrayal.

"Thank you, Miss Ying, for your help." Xing Ji bowed. If Ying Ying hadn't shown mercy because of Su Liang, he would have had trouble dealing with this situation.

"If you need to make a report, just say that I confessed to killing those two because they insulted me." Ying Ying frowned, "Don't let anyone know that I am Su Liang's friend; it wouldn't be good for her."

According to the original plan, they should have arrived earlier. They had encountered something else en route, and one of them insisted on returning to report to Situ Xie, which again delayed their journey.

Xing Ji understood Ying Ying's meaning. Letting Duanmu Yi know that Su Liang had a friend who was adept in poison techniques, and that this friend was one of Situ Xie's men, would just make the situation more complicated.

"Then, Miss Ying, please leave tonight. I will tell them that you provided the antidote in exchange for your freedom." Xing Ji said.

"Alright." This was exactly Ying Ying's intention. She planned to take advantage of Lady Yue's presence in Liang Country to look for her brother.

"Su Liang is not in Situ Xie's hands." Ying Ying told Xing Ji.

Xing Ji already knew about it. Qi Jun had informed him when he was on his way to Liang Country.

Unable to hold back his curiosity, Qi Jiang asked about his son. He was very worried about Qi Jun's safety.

Hearing Qi Jiang say that his son was going to Liang Country to inform Su Liang's master, Ying Ying realized that it must be the young man who was shouting outside Baihua Forest on the outskirts of Yao City that night.

"He's alright. Situ Xie didn't capture your men." Ying Ying briefly described the situation from her understanding.

Qi Jiang breathed a sigh of relief, his heart lighter. He thanked Ying Ying again.

Ying Ying gave the antidote she had on her to Xing Ji, and also asked him to tell Su Liang that her master, Lady Yue, was a crazy poisoner who was currently working for Situ Xie. If they come across her, they must be careful.

“If Xiaoliang wants to find Miss Ying, where should we go?” Xing Ji asked.

Ying Ying frowned. She intended to invade Lady Yue’s lair, which was a dangerous place. She didn’t want to involve Su Liang.

However, considering that Su Liang would most likely encounter Lady Yue in the future, and if something happens, knowing Lady Yue’s lair could be helpful.

Thinking about this, Ying Ying told them a place so they could inform Su Liang when they saw her.

“If Miss Ying needs my help in the future, please don’t hesitate to ask.” Xing Ji thanked her seriously once again.

Ying Ying waved her hand, smiling, “I’ll owe it to Su Liang. I want her and Gu Ling’s child to consider me their godmother! I shall take my leave!”

Chapter 342: 342. I have one condition.

After Ying Ying left, Xing Ji couldn’t help but sigh, “Xiao Liang’s friends are all people of loyalty and righteousness.”

Qi Jiang agreed, “This time, we have Miss Ying to thank.”

Though Ying Ying was the one who administered the poison, it was not actually poisonous. If she hadn’t come, Situ Xie would have arranged for someone else, and it might have even been her master, Madam Yue, who they would not have been able to withstand.

Before going to sleep, Xing Ji was considering how to report this incident to Duanmu Yi and recalled what Ying Ying had said – Su Liang was being held somewhere, and Situ Jing had been poisoned blind and had gone to find her for treatment. But Su Liang had previously sent a letter to Jiaye City to report her safety. Was she still trapped, or had she already escaped?

Thinking about the suspicious Duanmu Yi, Xing Ji worried for Su Liang and Gu Ling’s situation. Their disappearance and the fact that one was captured and the other went in search of her, if they didn’t return soon, it would inevitably cause complications.

...

Jiaye City.

On their way to Jiaye City, Su Liang and Gu Ling discussed and decided not to go there but to Nanshan City, which was just across the river.

There were too many people watching Jiaye City, which would easily expose them. Whether to “return,” when to “return,” and how to “return” were all issues that needed careful consideration.

No one knew better than Su Liang and Gu Ling what they had done in the past. Since they had now turned against Situ Xie, there was a considerable possibility that certain matters would be revealed to Duanmu Yi. If this were to happen, their return to the capital of Qian Country would not end well.

Situ Jing had previously settled in Nanshan City, but since Nangong Lin also knew about that place, they couldn't go there again. After Gu Ling changed her appearance, they purchased a secluded and ordinary house in the city. The location was suitable and they stayed the night there.

Gu Ling unceremoniously took the best courtyard to stay with Su Liang, showing no intention of taking care of the sister and injured old man.

Seeing Gu Ling busily taking care of Su Liang, Lian Shun sighed quietly, "When will it be my turn for such fate?"

Su Liang laughed softly, "What kind of person do you like?"

Lian Shun: ...Is this something that can be asked? The only one he has ever confessed to was her...

"We are not suitable," Su Liang said, "I think you are more suited to a ... fiery girl."

Lian Shun's expression was strange, "What's a fiery girl? Fiery like fire? Spicy like pepper?"

"Well," Su Liang thought about how to describe it, "the kind who would beat you up whenever you disagree with her."

Gu Ling slightly hooked the corner of her lips, "Yes."

"Gu Xiaoling, you can actually laugh? You can actually smile?" Lian Shun found it miraculous, but then thought about what the two had said and was speechless, "Su Xiaoliang, what kind of strange taste is this? You just want to see me get beaten up, right? Why can't I marry a gentle and lovely woman when you and Gu Ling can enjoy such sweet moments together?"

"You're too proud," Su Liang said seriously, "You would find gentle and lovely boring."

Lian Shun smirked, "Well, Su Xiaoliang, you do know me very well. However, I disagree with your view that I should marry a wife who beats me up every day!"

Su Liang shook her head, "I didn't say every day, I was thinking maybe once every three days? You're the one who said every day, which means deep down, you really crave it."

Lian Shun touched his forehead and silently drifted away. He just happened to see Gu Ling's and Su Liang's interactions and suddenly wanted to get married, but the conversation took such a bizarre turn. This couple was really great at talking nonsense so seriously...

After a while, Lian Shun came back, "Let's talk business. What should I do now that you both are settled here? Can I go home?"

"How do you explain your sudden disappearance if you go back now?" Su Liang asked counter-questioningly.

Lian Shun scratched his head, "Say I was captured, but they released me because they caught the wrong person?" He shook his head as he spoke, "That's too far-fetched. Saying I randomly wandered off and disappeared is even more far-fetched."

No matter how they explained it, it would be difficult to justify his sudden disappearance for several days and then his safe return. But he wanted to let his family know that he was alright as soon as possible.

“We’ll talk about it tomorrow.” Gu Ling finally spoke.

“Alright, you guys discuss it and see what to do next.” Lian Shun felt the situation had become very complicated. He knew why Gu Ling and Su Liang weren’t going home, but he also felt that if they stayed away for too long, there would certainly be problems in the capital.

Living in Nanshan City made life much more convenient than before, as anything they needed could be quickly purchased.

Su Liang estimated that it would take Qiao Cong three months to recover from his injured foot. If all went well, Situ Jing’s eyes should recover in a shorter time, about ten days to half a month.

That night before bed, Su Liang and Gu Ling discussed their next steps.

“Situ Xie knows I’ve lost control, and he’s likely going to inform Duanmu Yi about the matters he learned from Uncle Liang,” Su Liang said with a slight sigh. She knew that this was bound to happen eventually. The moment she decided to return to the capital city for revenge on behalf of the Su Family, her conflict with Duanmu Yi was inevitable.

As the emperor, Duanmu Yi believed that only he had the right to deal with his son’s wrongdoings, no matter how heinous they were, and that no one else had the qualifications to interfere. However, he couldn’t possibly punish Duanmu Cheng and Duanmu Ao fairly.

Su Liang avenged herself in her own way, maintaining a superficial harmony with Duanmu Yi.

Unfortunately, this harmony would be shattered eventually.

Knowing that their secret had been discovered by Situ Xie, they also knew that he was not a good person. But Su Liang and Gu Ling adhered to the principle of not offending others unless provoked. They wouldn’t kill Situ Xie because of his affair with their sister-in-law, nor would they kill to keep their secret from leaking. Moreover, they might not be able to kill him at all. Situ Xie was not only powerful, but also had a huge influence.

Su Liang and Gu Ling never resorted to unscrupulous means to achieve their goals. However, for their actions, they would always have to bear the consequences.

Gu Ling calmly said two words, “Rebellion.”

Su Liang was a bit surprised, “Great God, do you want to be the emperor?”

Gu Ling shook his head, “I just want to be your man.”

Su Liang smiled, “I know. So what’s your plan for the rebellion?”

“Let Duanmu Chen take the throne,” Gu Ling said.

Su Liang thought about it. What she had done was unforgivable from Duanmu Yi's perspective, but for Duanmu Chen, it was all beneficial. And the Imperial Throne was something Duanmu Chen had always dreamed of.

"It's a good idea," Su Liang mused. "If it succeeds, many problems will no longer be problems. The key question is, how? Do we have to kill Duanmu Yi?"

"Let Duanmu Chen decide," Gu Ling said.

As long as Duanmu Yi knew that Su Liang carried out the deeds against Duanmu Ao and Duanmu Cheng, he would not let her go. It was a life-and-death situation.

It wasn't that Duanmu Yi valued his dead son more than anything else. Rather, the actions of Gu Ling and Su Liang were intolerable for an emperor. If Duanmu Yi were an emperor who could treat "the crown prince's crimes like those of common people," it would be different, but clearly, he was not.

Su Liang sighed deeply, "We've finally come to this point. However, Duanmu Yi is surrounded by many skilled masters, and it won't be easy to deal with him. We can't let him know our intentions in advance, or he will take action against our friends and family. If only my master were not injured, we could ask him for help."

The next day, Lin Shun came to ask Su Liang and Gu Ling if they had made a decision.

"I'll help you send a message of safety, and you'll go to the capital city," Gu Ling said as he handed Lin Shun a bottle of medicine.

Lin Shun, slightly stunned, took the bottle and asked, "What is this?"

"Poison," Gu Ling replied with one word.

Lin Shun frowned, "Explain clearly. What am I going to do in the capital city? Who am I poisoning?"

"The emperor," Gu Ling said.

Lin Shun's hand trembled and he nearly dropped the bottle, "You... What are you guys planning?"

"All you need to do is deliver this bottle of poison to the crown prince," Gu Ling said. "And this letter."

The letter was written by Su Liang, telling Duanmu Chen that the situation might soon spiral out of control. He could choose to stand with Duanmu Yi and continue as the crown prince, or ascend the throne earlier to avoid complications. If he chose the latter, they would still be partners.

"Are you sure?" Lin Shun was shocked by Gu Ling and Su Liang's sudden decision to join forces with the crown prince in a rebellion, as he was not aware of some previous events.

Su Liang nodded, "Definitely." But the poison would only cause a stroke-like symptom, not death.

Lin Shun tightly held the medicine bottle, "Good! With you all here, I don't need to worry about my home. I'll go today." He wasn't naive enough to believe that Duanmu Yi fully trusted Gu Ling

and Su Liang. One was the son of a traitor, carrying the bloodline of the enemy's Royal Family, and the other was suspected of killing two princes. Yes, Lian Shun had also guessed the latter, but he had never asked Su Liang for verification. Some things were better left knowing less.

Su Liang also gave Lian Shun some other medicines for self-defense.

Lian Shun asked, what if Duanmu Chen refused to take action against Duanmu Yi and betrayed them?

Su Liang only said one sentence, "He's not a fool."

Although it seemed that Duanmu Chen was the only suitable person for the position of crown prince in Qian Country, the other princes either went insane or were underage.

However, going insane could be cured, and being underage could be grown out of. If Duanmu Yi determined that Duanmu Chen had colluded with Su Liang in some matters, he might not hesitate to act against his own son. Because Duanmu Chen directly threatened his Imperial Throne. Even if he intended to pass the throne to Duanmu Chen, whether to give it and when to give it should be up to him; if Duanmu Chen harbored any intention to seize it, he could not be forgiven.

So, Lian Shun secretly left Nanshan City and headed for the capital city.

On the same day, Gu Ling secretly went to Jiaye City to see Nian Jincheng.

"Lian Shun is safe, and you're with Su Liang, that's great." Nian Jincheng heaved a big sigh of relief and was happy, "Aling, congratulations, you're going to be a dad! I didn't expect that you would have a child earlier than me, even though you got married late!"

As he spoke, Nian Jincheng sighed again, "I have been away on continuous trips since my marriage, leaving Xiaoyu at home alone."

Upon hearing Gu Ling talk about the task entrusted to Lian Shun, Nian Jincheng's expression changed abruptly, "In that case, will Xiaoyu be in danger in the capital city?"

Gu Ling shook his head, "If she leaves rashly now, it would only attract attention."

Nian Jincheng looked worried, "Can we rely on the crown prince? If something goes wrong, it will affect many people."

"Duanmu Chen is not that weak," Gu Ling said.

"Do you want Situ Jing to ascend to the throne of Liang Country?" Nian Jincheng frowned and asked.

Gu Ling shook his head, "He's not that strong. But he can cause some trouble for Situ Xie."

Not long after, Gu Ling left. He bought some medicinal materials that Su Liang needed in Jiaye City and then rushed back to Nanshan City.

Qian Country's capital city.

Duanmu Yi had claimed to be ill for three consecutive days and had not attended the court, making the officials somewhat uneasy.

Duanmu Chen had been seeking an audience for three days, and finally saw Duanmu Yi on this day. In March, Duanmu Yi had already deposed the original Empress Wan and established Duanmu Chen's biological mother, Xiao Imperial Concubine, as the new Empress.

Duanmu Chen saw Duanmu Yi's face as usual, without any signs of illness, feeling that something was amiss.

"Sit. I have something to tell you." Duanmu Yi sighed before he spoke.

Duanmu Chen nodded and respectfully said, "Please give your instructions, Father Emperor."

"The Liang Country princess that I originally wanted you to marry is now impossible. As the crown prince of Qian Country, your principal wife must be chosen as soon as possible." Duanmu Yi said.

Duanmu Chen was surprised inside but showed nothing on his face, "I don't know what Father Emperor meant?"

"After going through all the eligible choices in the capital city, the only suitable one in terms of status, talent, and beauty is Xing Ji's daughter. Since the marriage alliance is not possible, you should marry her!" Duanmu Yi said.

Duanmu Chen never expected that Duanmu Yi would actually decide to let Xing Yuyan, who was initially chosen to marry into Liang Country as the crown princess, marry him!

Duanmu Chen had met Xing Yuyan before, but she didn't leave a deep impression on him. He had heard from Chang'an that Xing Yusheng's relationships with his siblings were very distant, and that Xing Yuyan's mother came from a humble background with manners that were somewhat petty. What kind of daughter could such a mother raise to be outstanding?

Although Xing Ji was originally of a different royal surname, he is now the Marquis Zhong Xin, and the main commander of Qian Country's northern army. However, Xing Yuyan is a daughter born from a secondary wife, which makes her status inferior to that of a daughter from a primary wife. If her grandfather were Old Master Qin, and her uncle were Qin Kang, Duanmu Chen would be more willing.

"What, you're reluctant?" Duanmu Yi frowned.

Duanmu Chen lowered his eyes, "No, it's just that I'm a bit surprised, and I didn't react for a moment."

He was not originally interested in women, as long as she had a good background, matched in talent and appearance, was obedient, and could bear him children.

Situ Yao was indeed outstanding, and he liked her. However, there was nothing to regret if he couldn't marry her.

Upon careful thought, the fact that Xing Yuyan is Xing Ji's daughter made her a fairly good choice for Duanmu Chen.

In fact, no matter who Duanmu Yi suggested, Duanmu Chen would not object.

The problem was, why did Duanmu Yi make such arrangements? After receiving that letter, he clearly believed what was written in it. Therefore, he should have been suspicious of the Marquis Zhong Xin Mansion, because they were close to Su Liang and Xing Ji even acknowledged Su Liang as his sworn daughter.

Could it be that Duanmu Yi felt that by making Duanmu Chen Xing Ji's son-in-law, he could control Xing Ji? And even join with the Xing family and the Duke Qin Mansion of Lin Shuzhi as relatives by marriage...

Upon thinking about this, Duanmu Chen relaxed a bit, as it showed that Duanmu Yi had not given up on him.

"Since you're willing, I'll issue an edict for your marriage today." Duanmu Yi said.

Duanmu Chen respectfully said, "Thank you, Father Emperor."

"In addition, I feel that it's time to entrust Qian Country to you!" Duanmu Yi said with a heavy heart as he looked at Duanmu Chen.

Instead of feeling happy, Duanmu Chen was extremely shocked. This was completely unexpected.

Not knowing what to say, Duanmu Chen immediately stood up and knelt in front of Duanmu Yi.

Duanmu Yi sighed, "I've always noticed your talent, and the imperial throne would eventually have to be handed over to you. Only by entrusting it to you can I rest assured. I knew that the letter I received earlier was meant to incite conflict, but whether those things were done by Su Liang, I know in my heart."

Duanmu Chen's back was instantly soaked with sweat, and he lowered his head without daring to speak.

"However, I believe that you haven't conspired with her to harm your brothers."

Duanmu Yi looked at Duanmu Chen, "I understand your character. In the present world, the three countries are divided, and Qian Country is located in the Central Plains. Liang Country and Yin Country have been coveting Qian Country for years, especially in recent years, they have become increasingly restless. I know Su Liang and Gu Ling's capabilities and believe they will continue to support you, after all, your relationships with them are quite good."

Duanmu Chen's heart tightened. Every sentence Duanmu Yi said touched on his thoughts, and he felt completely exposed.

"But between Su Liang and me, there are irreconcilable conflicts. I can't act as if nothing has happened, and she won't believe me either. Qian Country must not have internal strife, especially at this critical time. In order to maintain Qian Country's stability and future, I have struggled to find this solution: the most secure way is to pass on the throne to you." Duanmu Yi said solemnly, "I will become the Grand Emperor and help you from behind the scenes."

Upon hearing this, Duanmu Chen finally understood Duanmu Yi's intentions completely.

Duanmu Yi indeed wanted to continue using Su Liang and Gu Ling. Their abilities were not only able to help Qian Country, but also because they had become enemies with the Liang Country's Royal Family, which would inevitably lead to continued struggles that would benefit Qian Country.

However, the previous harmony between the ruler and his subjects could no longer be maintained. Duanmu Yi might be able to continue pretending not to know, but if Su Liang were to suspect or find out that he was aware, she might strike first.

In fact, Duanmu Chen had already informed Su Liang's friends about Duanmu Yi's knowledge of the matter, and she was bound to find out.

Duanmu Yi's decision to abdicate in favor of Duanmu Chen had a simple reason: Duanmu Chen could make better use of Su Liang to achieve their goals while avoiding danger.

This move was truly brilliant in Duanmu Chen's eyes.

"I understand, thank you for your trust, Father Emperor!" Duanmu Chen spoke, accepting Duanmu Yi's arrangement. That position was what he had always dreamt of.

However, Duanmu Yi did not ask him to stand up, but instead told him to raise his head and look into his eyes, "I have one condition."

A bad premonition arose in Duanmu Chen's heart, but he heard Duanmu Yi's icy voice, "Swear to me that after Qian Country unifies the world, you will execute Su Liang and Gu Ling, as well as their children, to avenge and redeem your brothers' deaths!"

Chapter 343: Leave the medicine behind

"What, are you unwilling to swear? Are you really treating people like Su Liang and Gu Ling as friends?" Duanmu Yi's face darkened like ink.

Duanmu Chen was shocked in his heart and hurriedly shook his head, "No, Father misunderstood. I was just considering how to word it."

"Let me teach you." Duanmu Yi's eyes were icy cold, "Once the world is unified, I will definitely kill Su Liang and Gu Ling and their children. If I break this oath, I will never be at peace in the rest of my life and I will fall into hell after death!"

Duanmu Chen knelt on the ground, lowered his eyes, and said respectfully, "Yes, Father." After finishing his words, he took a deep breath and repeated the oath taught by Duanmu Yi word by word.

After listening to the oath, Duanmu Yi's face lightened slightly, and he pulled Duanmu Chen up.

Father and son faced each other, their eyes met. Duanmu Yi patted Duanmu Chen's shoulder, his words heavy and sincere, "You are the smartest among all my sons, and you should understand my painstaking efforts. Making you swear is not just for your deceased brothers, nor is it only for the Qian Country, but also for you!"

Duanmu Chen's expression was serious, "Thank you for your guidance, Father. I will bear this in mind and never break my promise!"

"Very good." Duanmu Yi's face was filled with gratification, "The future of the Qian Country lies with you. Do not disappoint me."

Duanmu Chen's expression was extremely serious, "I will definitely not fail Father's trust in me!"

Marquis Zhong Xin Mansion.

Grandma Xing was walking in the grape vineyard with Lin Xueqing, talking about the garden originally belonging to the Gu Family of Marquis Chang Xin Mansion, and mentioned Gu Ling and Su Liang.

"I don't know if little Su Liang is safe now." Grandma Xing sighed.

Lin Xueqing knew that Su Liang was fine, but she did not tell Grandma Xing about it. She comforted, "Grandma, don't worry too much. Su Liang is so smart and capable, she will be fine."

"Yes, she is just too smart and capable, that's why she can't even have a peaceful life." Grandma Xing shook her head, "Every time I see her, she is always happy, as if nothing in the world could bother her. But I know that she has been struggling all along."

Lin Xueqing, who was pregnant, should have been sensitive to emotions. When she heard the last sentence, her eyes reddened suddenly, "Su Liang has always been so good to us, bearing all the hardships and fatigue by herself."

Xing Yusheng hurriedly came over and saw Lin Xueqing crying, immediately frowning, "Qingqing, what's wrong? Are you feeling uncomfortable somewhere?"

Grandma Xing quickly said that nothing was wrong, they were just worried about Su Liang, and comforted Lin Xueqing to ease her mind.

Xing Yusheng coaxed her for a while before remembering the main point, "Someone from the palace has come to deliver an imperial decree, let's go quickly."

Grandma Xing's face changed. A sudden imperial decree always made people feel uneasy. The last time the Xing Family received an imperial decree, it was for Xing Yuyan to be conferred as a princess and marry into the Liang Country.

But this time, it really was "good news", and it was still related to Xing Yuyan.

The entire Xing Family knelt down to receive the decree, and after listening to the contents of the decree, Xing Yusheng and Lin Xueqing looked at each other, while Miao's face could hardly conceal her delight. Her children, including Xing Yuyan, were all surprised and happy.

Because Xing Yuyan had actually been granted to marry Crown Prince Duanmu Chen as Crown Princess!

The imperial palace had not yet announced the enthronement of the new emperor, so they still did not know that Duanmu Chen was about to ascend the Dragon Throne as the new emperor of Qian Country.

Grandma Xing led the younger generation to accept the decree and express her gratitude. After sending away the people from the palace, she turned around and saw Miao's hands clasped together, her face full of smiles, "Thank heavens! This time Yuyan has turned her misfortune into a blessing!"

Grandma Xing's face darkened, "What nonsense are you talking about!" What is misfortune? What is a blessing? She really can't make sense of it!

Miao reacted and realized that she had said something wrong. She dared not defy Grandma Xing, so she hurriedly slapped her own mouth, saying that she was just too happy.

"This is a great grace from heaven, a happy event. It is right to be happy, but remember to be cautious and prudent in your words and deeds, both at home and outside!" Grandma Xing swept her gaze sternly around the room.

Her grandchildren all said they would remember this.

Xing Yusheng was too surprised, so he left Marquis Zhong Xin Mansion with Lin Xueqing, and asked Qi Yan to go and find out more about the news. This was a good thing for the Xing Family, and from now on, they would truly become the Royal Family. However, from the bottom of his heart, Xing Yusheng was very resistant to the idea, because the recent events made him secretly calculate that it might also be good for his father to help Su Liang and Gu Ling rebel...

It wasn't that Xing Yusheng wanted to be the crown prince, it was just that he was worried that Duanmu Yi would make a move against Su Liang and Gu Ling.

Today's imperial marriage grant made Xing Yusheng even more suspicious. Duanmu Yi really intended to act against Su Liang and Gu Ling, binding the Xing family and the royal family together first, cutting off their possibility of rebellion!

Xing Yusheng and Lin Xueqing went to Lin Mansion, and Lin Shuzhi had already received the news of the imperial marriage grant. As soon as the imperial decree arrived at Marquis Zhong Xin's mansion, the news spread rapidly in the capital city.

"Father, what to do? The emperor granting a marriage to the crown prince to my sister must be to hurt Su Liang, right?" Xing Yusheng was deeply worried.

Lin Shuzhi shook his head, "Don't think or say anything without basis." There is no cause and effect between "imperial marriage" and "eliminate Su Liang".

Xing Yusheng sighed repeatedly, "I always feel that the emperor is ill-intentioned."

Lin Shuzhi knew that Xing Yusheng always disliked the royal family and never had good words for them, but he was decent and never talked nonsense outside. He didn't care, but just asked him to be calm for the time being.

"No matter what, it's much better for your sister to marry the crown prince than to be married to Liang Country as a state-crossing marriage." Lin Shuzhi said, "The crown prince and Su Liang have always had a good relationship, and the imperial marriage must be the emperor's intention."

As they spoke, Lin Boyan returned from the palace.

Entering the study room and seeing Xing Yusheng, he closed the door and said, "The emperor wants to pass the throne to the crown prince and retire as the Grand Emperor."

Upon hearing this, both Lin Shuzhi and Xing Yusheng had stunned faces. In comparison, the imperial marriage grant seemed like a small matter.

"Why? Is the emperor seriously ill?" Xing Yusheng was puzzled.

Lin Boyan shook his head, "I haven't seen the emperor for several days. They say he's ill, but I don't know his condition."

"I met Gao Jiabao this morning. He said his grandfather had not returned home for several days." Xing Yusheng said with furrowed brows, "So, the crown prince will soon become the emperor, and my sister will become the empress?"

Lin Boyan nodded, "Yes."

Xing Yusheng thought of Xing Yuyan's temperament of crying and making a fuss at any disagreement and shook his head repeatedly, "She is not suitable to be an empress."

However, upon further thought, last year Duanmu Chen wanted to marry Lin Xueqing. If it were not for Su Liang stopping Duanmu Chen, Xing Yusheng would not have a chance to be Lin Family's son-in-law.

"From the standpoint of social status, it's very suitable," Lin Boyan sighed slightly, "Now it's a time of multiple troubles, and both the south and north are restless. First, the Wu family father and son betrayed the country, then the Wan Family was restless. This year, the veteran General Yuan was killed too. Only Lian Shun from Lian Family is still too young and injured. The promoted Che Yun is the prince of Liang Country. Su Liang and Gu Ling have become a thorn in the emperor's eye... In these two years, more than half of our country's important military commanders have been lost. Your father's position is extremely critical. If anything happens to him, no one can replace him."

Xing Yusheng frowned, "Based on what you've analyzed, big brother, I understand. The emperor must use my father but fears that he has a rebellious heart, so he marries my sister to the crown prince. This is both a grace and a constraint."

Previously he didn't think much about it. Now looking back, as Lin Boyan said, there were only a few young and strong military commanders left in Qian Country who could take on great responsibilities. In February, when the south had a crisis, if not for Su Liang and Gu Ling's efforts to turn the tide, the consequences would have been severe.

"It turns out that most of the military commanders lost were brought down by Su Liang." Xing Yusheng said, "But those people were either traitors, spies, or had rebellious intentions. If Su Liang didn't expose them, given time, Qian Country would have faced real danger."

Lin Shuzhi nodded, "Both Yin Country and Liang Country have been infiltrating Qian country's military ranks and have achieved quite some success. It was Su Liang's appearance that disrupted their plans. The emperor should see this point clearly. The military commanders of Qian Country cannot be lost any more, especially Su Liang and Gu Ling."

"Does father think the emperor won't touch Su Liang?" Xing Yusheng asked.

Lin Shuzhi nodded and shook his head, "At least not now. The emperor suddenly handing the throne to the crown prince is likely meant as a temporary reconciliation with Su Liang."

"I think the same as father," Lin Boyan said.

Xing Yusheng narrowed his eyes, "Are you suggesting that the emperor intends to use Su Liang and Gu Ling to protect Qian Country first, or even to unify the world, and then settle accounts with them later?"

Neither Lin Shuzhi nor Lin Boyan answered, but their silence itself was an answer.

"Damn it!" Xing Yusheng snorted, "Su Liang was seeking revenge for her family, which was justified. The emperor can't tolerate her but doesn't want to give up using her. He's so cunning!"

Lin Shuzhi frowned, "Yusheng, watch your words."

Lin Boyan sighed softly, "Don't think too much. Su Liang doesn't know her whereabouts at the moment. When she receives the news, she will make her own choice. The emperor's current arrangement is not a bad thing for us."

If Duanmu Yi suddenly went mad, not only would he want to get rid of Su Liang, but also he might target their friends who had a good relationship with Su Liang. That would be terrible.

Moreover, Lin Boyan believed that Su Liang should support Duanmu Chen's ascension. After all, she and Gu Ling have no interest in the throne, and it seems that Duanmu Chen is indeed very suitable for that position now.

It all depends on the extent to which Duanmu Yi, after retreating to the Grand Emperor's position, can control Duanmu Chen and the government. If he could really let go of power, there would be no need to worry too much.

As for whether Duanmu Chen would go back on his word in the future, no one knows now, and no conclusion can be drawn prematurely. Some things could only be taken one step at a time, focusing on what should be done now while remaining cautious.

"Anyway, I think the Crown Prince is also untrustworthy," Xing Yusheng said before leaving, revealing his true thoughts.

...

When the news that the original marriage alliance Princess Xing Yuyan was granted to Crown Prince Duanmu Chen was spread, everyone who heard it thought she was lucky.

When the news came that Duanmu Yi was going to abdicate and Duanmu Chen was about to become the new emperor, people began to suspect that Duanmu Yi had a serious illness and would not live long.

As a result, many people recalled Su Liang and felt that she would definitely be able to cure Duanmu Chen.

In short, this was regarded as the smoothest transfer of imperial power in the history of Qian Country and even in the history of all countries in the world.

The wedding was scheduled for the second day of May, and the coronation ceremony was set for three days later.

Duanmu Yi did not show up again and directly handed the government to Duanmu Chen.

Therefore, when Xing Ji's letter was sent from Xuanbei City to the capital city, it first reached Duanmu Chen's hands.

Xing Ji reported that Situ Xie had sent people to poison him in an attempt to rescue Situ Jing. Two men and one woman who came suddenly fought internally at a critical moment, and in the end, Xing Ji got the antidote with some close calls.

Duanmu Chen did not believe Xing Ji's words, but the result was good. He also knew very clearly that Xing Ji couldn't have any mishap, which was one of the purposes for him to marry Xing Yuyan.

As for the woman who suddenly turned against her own people, Duanmu Chen suspected there was an inside story. But it wasn't important at the moment.

After reading the letter, Duanmu Chen destroyed it and didn't mention it at all when he saw Duanmu Yi again.

As for the news of Lian Shun's disappearance in the south, Nian Jincheng blocked the news, telling outsiders only that he was still recuperating at home and did not send a letter to the capital city. Because it was not clear what was going on, it would arouse suspicion.

"Father, what should we do with Situ Jing?" Duanmu Chen was still very respectful in front of Duanmu Yi. "Situ Xie's people cannot find the hiding place of Situ Jing. They will either capture our people for exchange or come to negotiate terms openly."

"What do you think?" Duanmu Yi asked back.

After pondering for a moment, Duanmu Chen said, "I am worried that Situ Xie will send people to create trouble secretly. Instead, let's propose conditions to Situ Xie first."

Duanmu Yi nodded, "What conditions?"

Duanmu Chen solemnly said, "Marriage alliance. Let Situ Xie send his granddaughter here, and then his grandson can return."

Duanmu Yi snorted softly, "You are interested in Situ Xie's granddaughter, aren't you?"

Duanmu Chen shook his head, "I've just ascended the throne and need to fill the imperial harem, but that's only one aspect. The original two-way marriage alliance has turned into Liang Country

sending a princess unilaterally. On one hand, it serves as a deterrent to Liang Country for the previous incident, and on the other hand, it can shake Yin Country's determination to ally with Liang Country."

Duanmu Yi looked at Duanmu Chen with profound eyes, "Very well. Since you have thought it through, go ahead and do it."

So, Duanmu Chen soon sent an envoy to Liang Country to negotiate the continuation of the marriage alliance. On the surface, of course, it was said that Situ Jing was a guest in Qian Country for medical treatment.

When Xing Yusheng learned of this, he couldn't help but complain, "If he manages to have both marriage alliance princesses, it really gives him a lot of face."

Nanshan City.

Su Liang's treatment of Situ Jing went relatively smoothly. At the same time, she was also treating Cen Man's eyes. Because of the long duration of the illness, her situation was more complicated than Situ Jing's, but Su Liang had some confidence in her ability.

Nangong Qian's body recovered well, and Qiao Cong's injuries were also healing.

Every day, besides treating the four patients, Su Liang had nothing else to do. Gu Ling didn't let her cook, and she couldn't read books day and night without regard for time like before.

The food for Su Liang was cooked by Gu Ling, while Qiuyue took care of the others.

Every night before going to bed, Gu Ling would tell a story to the baby in Su Liang's belly.

Although Su Liang knew the child was too young to sense it, she and Gu Ling both enjoyed the process. Every day's changes were fresh, interesting, and full of anticipation.

In the meantime, Nian Jincheng received a letter from Yang Yu's messenger, informing Gu Ling that Duanmu Yi had received an anonymous letter of accusation. This was within Su Liang's and Gu Ling's expectations.

Seven days after Lian Shun left, Su Liang calculated the time and felt he should have almost arrived at the capital city.

On this day, Gu Ling went out to buy groceries and brought back the latest news from the capital city.

Su Liang was surprised, "Duanmu Yi voluntarily gave up the throne to Duanmu Chen? And asked Duanmu Chen to marry his adoptive father's daughter?"

Gu Ling nodded; the news had spread.

Su Liang's expression was indescribable, "Duanmu Yi is really smart! This move can be called a masterstroke." She knew very well what Duanmu Yi was doing and what his intentions were.

"Great God, when Lian Ershan arrives at the capital city and finds Duanmu Chen, will he still use that medicine?" Su Liang pondered. She intended to take preemptive action, but Duanmu Yi had predicted her actions and chose to retreat for the sake of progress.

Under the current situation, maintaining the status quo was temporarily safe for Su Liang and Gu Ling.

However, precisely because Duanmu Yi had retreated, Su Liang needed to see Duanmu Chen's attitude to determine whether they could continue to cooperate...

At this time, Lian Shun had already arrived in the capital city, and on the way, he had learned the news of Duanmu Yi's abdication and Duanmu Chen's ascension to the throne. Nevertheless, he decided to continue the task that Su Liang had given him.

As Duanmu Chen moved into the Imperial Palace, it became difficult for Lian Shun to see him. After waiting for more than half a day, he finally met Chang'an who was leaving the palace. Chang'an was going back to the Crown Prince's Mansion to fetch something for Duanmu Chen.

Lian Shun followed Chang'an to the Crown Prince's Mansion. When he suddenly appeared, Chang'an was initially on guard but then became a bit puzzled.

"I have important matters to discuss with His Majesty." Lian Shun got straight to the point.

Knowing that Lian Shun had a close relationship with Su Liang and had previously been in the south, Chang'an couldn't afford to neglect him. He asked Lian Shun to wait at the Crown Prince's Mansion and would first report to Duanmu Chen before making arrangements.

Inside the palace, when Duanmu Chen learned that Lian Shun had secretly arrived in the capital city, his first thought was that Su Liang had sent him.

To be cautious, Duanmu Chen didn't leave the palace but instead asked Chang'an to bring Lian Shun into the palace to see him.

Lian Shun agreed readily, put on guard's clothes, and followed Chang'an into the palace.

Under the cover of night, Duanmu Chen sat in his sleeping palace, watching the "guard" who entered behind Chang'an. He gestured for the others to leave.

After paying his respects, Lian Shun was granted a seat.

"Do you have any news about her?" Duanmu Chen asked about Su Liang right away.

Lian Shun nodded, didn't beat around the bush, took the letter from Gu Ling out of his pocket, and handed it to Duanmu Chen.

After reading the letter, Duanmu Chen looked up to see an extra bottle of medicine in Lian Shun's hand being offered to him.

Lian Shun smiled, "Your Majesty, I'm just here to run errands and deliver the letter. Please don't make things difficult for me. However, someone wanted me to bring your reply back. Is there a reply?"

"So, they're all fine?" Duanmu Chen asked calmly as he put away the letter, not taking the medicine bottle.

Lian Shun nodded, "As for the current situation, I don't understand it anyway. Your Majesty must be very clear about it. The medicine, do you want it?"

Duanmu Chen's gaze fell on the medicine bottle, his eyes slightly constricted, "Did she say anything?"

"It's all in the letter. Nothing else." said Lian Shun.

After a moment of silence, Duanmu Chen spoke again, "Leave the medicine. Stay in the capital city for three days and bring the letter back."

Chapter 344: 344. Father Emperor, don't worry

Su Mansion.

Yang Yu was about to go to bed when she suddenly heard Ren Dong's voice outside, "Who is it?"

"General Nian has sent me to deliver a letter." Lian Shun deliberately disguised his voice, but showed a jade pendant hidden in his sleeve, flashing it briefly in front of Ren Dong.

Ren Dong recognized the jade pendant belonging to Su Liang, and her expression changed.

Just then, Yang Yu opened the door, "Is it someone Achen sent to deliver the letter?"

Ren Dong nodded, "Yes." She turned to Lian Shun and said, "Come in."

Yang Yu found the visitor unfamiliar, but since Ren Dong was inviting him into her room, she didn't say anything.

Once inside, Lian Shun reverted to his normal voice, and with a smile, he greeted, "Sister-in-law, I am Lian Shun, Xiaonian's friend."

Yang Yu was stunned, then her face lit up with joy, "So it's Master Lin! Achen always mentions you in his letters, please sit!"

Ren Dong was somewhat surprised, but after confirming Lian Shun's identity, she went out to stand guard outside, leaving them to talk in the room. Recently, the Su Mansion had been under surveillance, as Ren Dong knew it was Duanmu Yi's people. She and Yang Yu were very cautious in their conversations.

Lian Shun's careful disguise was also a precautionary measure.

"Are you hungry? Did you come straight from Jiaye City? Do you want me to have someone prepare some food for you?" Yang Yu asked Lian Shun.

Lian Shun shook his head, "Sister-in-law, don't worry, I'm not hungry. I arrived this evening and went to see His Majesty first."

The next moment, Yang Yu asked anxiously, "Is Su Liang alright?"

Lian Shun's mood instantly lifted, "When I get back, I must tell Xiaonian that sister-in-law didn't ask first if he was safe and sound but was more concerned about Su Xiaoliang."

Yang Yu coughed lightly, "I know Achen is fine, we've been in regular contact."

“Su Xiaoliang is also fine; he’s with Gu Xiaoling.” Lian Shun smiled, “Of course, your Achen is also doing well. In fact, it was I who had an accident, but I’ve been rescued by Su Xiaoliang.”

Yang Yu’s face lit up with joy, “So Su Liang and Gu Ling are both fine? They’re together? That’s great! Are they coming back?”

Lian Shun shook his head, “It’s hard to say; they might return in a few days, but it’s not certain.”

“As long as they’re fine. Whether they come back or not, they must have their plans.” Yang Yu took a deep breath, “I also need to thank you. When Achen went to Jiaye City, your family took good care of him.”

“We’re not strangers, no need for formalities. There’s also another piece of good news to share with sister-in-law.” Lian Shun had a slight smile at the corner of his lips, “Su Xiaoliang is expecting.”

Yang Yu stood up in delight, “Really?”

She recalled when Su Liang and Gu Ling had last met, during their wedding. At that time, Yang Yu had suspected their marriage was a sham, but now Su Liang was pregnant.

Lian Shun knew how Yang Yu and Su Liang had met and could fully understand why she cared so much about Su Liang, hence her excitement now.

After talking for a while, Lian Shun handed Nian Jincheng’s letter to Yang Yu.

Yang Yu quickly finished reading it. There wasn’t much in it, only saying that he missed her dearly.

“Are you leaving tonight?” Yang Yu asked.

Lian Shun shook his head, “There are still some things to deal with, I’ll leave in three days.”

“Where will you stay?” Yang Yu inquired.

“Sister-in-law, don’t worry about that; I have a place to stay. There’s no rush to reply, I’ll come back for the reply before I leave.” Lian Shun said.

As for the details of Su Liang and Gu Ling’s previous experiences, as well as Lian Shun’s purpose for coming to the capital city, he did not say much to Yang Yu, and she didn’t pry. She just needed to know that Su Liang and Gu Ling were safe and sound, and that would give her peace of mind.

About Su Liang’s two masters and Qi Jun going to Liang Country, Yang Yu had mentioned it in a previous letter to Nian Jincheng, which both Su Liang and Gu Ling already knew about.

Now, with both Lao Bai and Lao Mu still not back, and no news from them, Lian Shun asked a few questions and then got up to leave.

After leaving the Su Mansion, Lian Shun noticed someone was following him. He walked around the city a few times, shook off the tail, and then went to Lin Mansion.

Upon meeting Lin Shuzhi, Lian Shun explained the whole story in detail, including the purpose of his visit to the capital city.

After listening, Lin Shuzhi sighed repeatedly, "It's right for them not to come back for now. As long as everyone is safe, it's fine. If His Majesty can make up his mind to resolve the conflicts, Xiaoliang and Xiaogu can consider whether to come back. Otherwise, we'll have to make other plans. Don't worry about us. Yu Sheng's sister is about to become the Empress, so His Majesty won't act rashly against us because of Xiaoliang and Xiaogu."

Lian Shun nodded, "That's good. His Majesty told me to wait for three days, and in three days, we'll know what choice he'll make."

When Lian Shun mentioned Su Liang was expecting, Lin Shuzhi was also excited, praising the news repeatedly. His real disciple, Ning Jing, had already passed away, but Su Liang and Gu Ling both called him master and had helped the Lin Family through numerous crises, even saving their lives and preventing Lin Xueqing from marrying into the royal family. They were like guardian angels to the Lin Family.

Lin Shuzhi had always been low-key and conservative in his actions, but now, hearing Lian Shun talk about the "rebellious" things Su Liang and Gu Ling would do, he didn't feel anything was wrong, or that it would pose any risk to the Lin Family. Whatever Su Liang and Gu Ling decided, he would absolutely support.

"I won't write to Xiaoliang." Lin Shuzhi said, "But I do have a letter here that needs to be given to her."

Lin Shuzhi went to the study room to get the letter and handed it to Lian Shun.

"What's this?" Lian Shun was curious about who had written it.

"It's a letter from my in-law, Yu Sheng's father, which was sent by a soldier who returned from Xuanbei City a few days ago. It's to let Xiaoliang know that they're safe and to tell her about some matters." Lin Shuzhi said, "You can read it."

Upon hearing that the letter was from Xing Ji in Xuanbei City and related to Su Liang, Lian Shun opened it.

The letter had already been opened, and Lin Shuzhi, his two sons, and son-in-law had all read it. It was brought back from Xuanbei City by a soldier that Xing Ji had sent and handed over to Lin Bojun.

The letter was about the poisoning and threats Xing Ji had received from Situ Xie's men.

However, unlike the letter to Duanmu Chen, Xing Ji revealed the truth in the letter.

As Lian Shun read halfway through, his expression became strange, "Ying Ying? How come I've never heard Su Xiaoliang mention her having such a friend before?"

Lin Shuzhi laughed, "It should be the girl Xiaogu sought the antidote from during Gao Jiabao's poisoning incident. Last year, when Xiaoliang and Xiaogu were in Liang Country, didn't Xiaogu ask Emperor Liang for a thousand-year-old Snow Lotus for another girl? I guess that Snow Lotus was for repaying Ying's favor."

"So it was her?" Lian Shun also knew about the two incidents Lin Shuzhi mentioned, "This young lady should have been the poison master whom Gu Xiaoling had known

from the beginning, right? As a result, she is now Su Xiaoliang's good friend, and she even betrayed her master for Su Xiaoliang, taking risks. She really is loyal, righteous, and clear about right and wrong, just like me, haha!"

Lin Shuzhi also laughed, "She is a good girl and very capable." Then he sighed slightly, "But this time, by betraying her master to help Xiaoliang's foster father, she may bring trouble to herself. Yu Sheng's father sent this letter to inform Xiaoliang as soon as possible, in case Miss Yuan needs help, only Xiaoliang and Xiaogu can help her."

Lian Shun nodded, "That's right. After I return, I will give it to Su Xiaoliang, and she may know what kind of trouble Ying Xiaoying will encounter."

In the letter, Xing Ji also mentioned that Ying Ying had told Su Liang about her two masters and Qi Jun being safe, and Situ Jing being blind, and all these had connections with Su Liang.

However, Su Liang had already seen Situ Jing and was currently treating him.

Lian Shun confirmed that everything was fine with the Lin family, put the letter away, and then took his leave. As for Xing Yusheng and Duke Qin's Mansion, he wouldn't go to find them since Lin Shuzhi would tell them what was necessary.

Lian Shun told Yang Yu that he had a place to stay, which was actually an inn.

At midnight, Lian Shun, who had finally finished his official business, returned to the inn and fell onto the bed, feeling both tired and hungry. He regretted not saying he was hungry when Yang Yu asked him at Su Mansion earlier, so he could get something to eat. But when he called out to his sister-in-law, he thought he couldn't trouble Nian Jincheng's wife since it was so late already. When he arrived at Lin's house, he only drank a cup of warm water.

By this time, the restaurants must be closed.

Lian Shun lay in bed with an empty stomach, tossing and turning unable to sleep. He then got up, lit a lamp, looked left and right, found nothing to do and nothing to eat.

He reached into his pocket and found only the letter from Xing Ji that he had taken from Lin Shuzhi.

Lian Shun opened the letter again and lay on the bed, holding it up with both hands, reading it word by word from beginning to end, trying to distract his attention. He had to wait until daylight to eat something, and he didn't have the strength to go out and steal some food, let alone knowing where there would be any at this time.

"Ying... Ying..." Lian Shun read Ying Ying's name, imagining what she would look like. Since she knows poison techniques, she must not be an ordinary girl, and she couldn't possibly be gentle and pleasant. At least she must be much tougher than Su Xiaoliang. But actually, Su Xiaoliang doesn't look tough, only occasionally her actions being fierce. Her friends are pretty gentle, like Yang Yu and Lin Xueqing.

After reading the letter three times, Lian Shun still couldn't figure out what Ying Ying would look like, but perhaps because he was too tired, he finally fell asleep, with the letter still covering his face.

That night, Lian Shun had a dream in which a red-clothed woman with an unclear face waved a colorful whip made of snake skin, chasing after him. He kept running, but he couldn't get away...

When the day broke, Lian Shun woke up, feeling even more tired and hungry. Without changing his clothes and making sure his disguise didn't come off, he went out to look for food.

Imperial Palace.

Duanmu Chen went to the Imperial Study to review memorials after the morning court session. In the middle, he stopped and touched his chest, feeling a hard object, which was the medicine bottle that Lian Shun had given him the night before.

Approaching noon, Duanmu Chen came out of the Imperial Study, and Chang'an, who was standing outside, said that someone from the Empress Dowager's palace had come to invite Duanmu Chen to have lunch.

After abdicating, Duanmu Yi, who had become the Grand Emperor, lived in Empress Dowager Xiao's palace. Xiao was good at cooking, and she used to cook personally, which was what Duanmu Yi liked most about her, being considerate and gentle.

When Duanmu Chen arrived, Xiao had just finished stewing the last soup.

With a smiling face, Duanmu Yi waved for Duanmu Chen to come and sit down, and told him not to be so formal. He seemed quite leisurely and relaxed.

Duanmu Chen sat down and saw a sumptuous meal on the table, with a few dishes he was quite familiar with. He had given the recipe to Xiao, which he had taken from Su Liang.

"My son, you came just in time." Xiao came over with a smiling face. After letting the palace maids put down the soup bowl, she ordered all the servants to leave. In these few days, Duanmu Chen had been reporting state affairs to Duanmu Yi every mealtime.

Xiao's wife served the soup to the father and son, and Duanmu Yi took a sip and praised her cooking skills for being even more exquisite. Duanmu Chen also kept saying it was delicious.

Xiao's wife couldn't stop smiling, seeming very satisfied with everything in her life now. Her son became the emperor as he wished, her husband no longer went to other women, and there was no one in the harem to fight with her.

Seeing this, Duanmu Chen restrained his eyes and silently drank a bowl of soup. When he put down the bowl, Xiao's wife had already placed many dishes on his plate.

After finishing a bowl of soup, Duanmu Yi naturally passed the bowl to Xiao's wife.

Duanmu Chen quickly reached out to intercept the bowl halfway, "Let your son serve you, Father Emperor."

Xiao's wife laughed and said, "That's right, the imperial son is always the most filial. This soup is good for your body, so drink another bowl. You have to pay more attention to your health with all the busy political affairs."

“Mm.” Duanmu Chen nodded, and when he was serving the soup, he accidentally spilled a drop on the edge of the bowl. He placed it in front of himself, wiped it clean with a handkerchief, and then stood up respectfully to put it in front of Duanmu Yi. He then placed the spoon and said, “Please enjoy, Father Emperor.”

Duanmu Yi chuckled, “Chen’er has always been the one who gives me peace of mind.”

The three of them were harmonious and happy.

As Duanmu Yi finished his second bowl of soup and Xiao’s wife was putting more food on his plate, he suddenly trembled and spat out a mouthful of blood. His eyes widened as he stared at Duanmu Chen, raising his hand but unable to point at Duanmu Chen before his body went rigid and he collapsed onto the ground!

Xiao’s wife’s chopsticks fell to the ground as she screamed and rushed over.

Duanmu Chen calmly put down his chopsticks and walked to the door, only then showing an anxious expression on his face, ordering someone to immediately call the Imperial Physician Gao Lao.

As Duanmu Yi was planning to abdicate, he wanted outsiders to think that he was ill, so the Imperial Physician Gao Lao had been waiting in the palace recently.

While waiting for Gao Lao, Duanmu Chen returned to Duanmu Yi’s side.

Xiao’s wife cried anxiously, “What happened? What is going on with your Father Emperor?”

Duanmu Yi was conscious, his eyes bulging as he stared desperately at Duanmu Chen, his lips trembling but unable to make any sound, and his hands couldn’t be lifted.

Duanmu Chen knelt beside Duanmu Yi, holding his trembling hand. He sighed softly and whispered, “Don’t blame your son, Father Emperor.”

Xiao’s wife, upon hearing this, looked at Duanmu Chen incredulously, “What... what have you done?”

Duanmu Chen did not answer Xiao’s wife. Instead, he leaned over and whispered in Duanmu Yi’s ear, “I had no choice, Father Emperor. Your thoughts were quite similar to Su Liang’s. You both understand each other very well, and I was caught in the middle and couldn’t handle it. Qian Country needs Su Liang and Gu Ling. As long as you don’t fall, they won’t return to help me. I think, Father Emperor, you will understand my decision.”

Duanmu Yi’s expression became agitated, his face flushed red, and his lips trembled even more violently while the sounds he made became indistinct. A moment later, he vomited blood again.

“Father Emperor, don’t be like this. It’s not good for your health.” Duanmu Chen gently caressed Duanmu Yi’s chest. “Didn’t Father Emperor say that everything is for Qian Country and for the greater good? I am also doing this for Qian Country and for the greater good, out of necessity.”

However, it was evident that Duanmu Yi, like Su Liang, had just retreated for the sake of advancing. He appeared to relinquish power on the surface, but in reality, Duanmu Chen still had to

report everything that happened in the court to him every day. Duanmu Yi was simply hiding while pushing Duanmu Chen to the forefront as his puppet, all for the sake of better utilizing Su Liang and Gu Ling and reducing his own risk.

At this moment, Duanmu Chen could see it all clearly. Duanmu Yi's anger, frustration, and unwillingness had nothing to do with his previous bold statements about the greater good.

With that in mind, Duanmu Chen's gaze became even more resolute, but his tone became even more gentle, "Father Emperor, don't worry, everything will be fine. I will invite Su Liang back as soon as possible to treat Father Emperor."

Chapter 345: 345. Please master, watch the house.

Duanmu Chen knocked the soup bowl Duanmu Yi had used onto the ground, then picked up the fallen Duanmu Yi and carried him into the inner chamber. He gently laid him on the bed, took off his shoes and socks, and covered him with a quilt, his movements both gentle and meticulous.

If one were to ignore Duanmu Yi's furious eyes and trembling, twitching lips, it would truly be a scene of filial piety.

Turning around, Duanmu Chen saw Xiao Family's lady with red eyes and a pale face, looking completely at a loss. He took her hand and had her sit down by the bed, "Mother, there's no need to worry. Father will be fine."

The lady from Xiao Family looked at Duanmu Yi, and was frightened by his almost fiery gaze, shrinking into Duanmu Chen's embrace.

Duanmu Chen hugged her, "From now on, Mother will have to work hard to take good care of Father. As for the matters of the court, Father doesn't have to worry about them. Your son will do his best and will not disappoint Father."

At this point, Xiao Family's lady was well aware of what was happening and why Duanmu Chen had to do this.

Although she had feelings for Duanmu Yi and thought that everything had been quite satisfactory before he fell, Duanmu Chen, though sitting on the Dragon Throne, was still under Duanmu Yi's control and there was no guarantee that there wouldn't be any changes.

Xiao Family's lady was surprised by Duanmu Chen's sudden and ruthless move against Duanmu Yi.

However, at this point, as Duanmu Chen's mother, she could hardly blame him or stop him from doing what he wanted. For all these years, they had been enduring patiently, and now that there was a chance to rise, ensuring Duanmu Yi's "peaceful recovery" wasn't a bad thing.

Duanmu Yi was fully conscious and saw the mother and son embracing, rage surged, and blood seeped from the corner of his mouth.

Old Imperial Physician Gao, who had been waiting in the palace for several days, hurried over and knelt down to salute Duanmu Chen as soon as he saw him.

“You may rise. Please take a look at what’s going on with Father. He has been complaining of headaches and weakness these days, and suddenly became like this after lunch today. It seems like it’s a stroke.” Duanmu Chen sighed continuously.

The lady from the Xiao Family cried with a worried face, “My son, you must make sure to cure your father!”

Upon hearing this, blood seeped from the corner of Duanmu Yi’s mouth, speeding up and turning his collar red.

Old Imperial Physician Gao had been waiting in the palace for several days but had not seen the rumored sick Grand Emperor Duanmu Yi. Today, he finally saw him, and just as Duanmu Chen said, at first glance, it seemed like a stroke.

However, after taking the pulse, Old Imperial Physician Gao found that Duanmu Yi’s illness was not quite the same as Old Master Qin’s stroke. Instead, it was more like Uncle Wan Shan’s stroke later on...

Old Imperial Physician Gao’s heart sank, for he knew that the young and strong Military Commander Wan Shan had suffered a stroke at that time because he was drugged by Su Liang. And in that case, Su Liang went to Xuanbei City to deal with the Wan Family and the father and son on the orders of Duanmu Yi, who was now lying in front of Old Imperial Physician Gao, unable to move.

Wan Shan was dead, but before he died, his stroke symptoms were much improved by the treatment provided by Old Imperial Physician Gao. Moreover, the treatment method was learned from Su Liang.

But at this moment, Old Imperial Physician Gao was unsure if he should treat Duanmu Yi wholeheartedly. It depended on how Duanmu Yi had ended up like this...

Just as Old Imperial Physician Gao was uncertain and hesitant, he heard Duanmu Chen’s voice beside him, “Old Gao, your silence suggests that you have no confidence? If you are unsure how to treat Father’s abrupt and severe illness, just use some safe means and don’t let Father’s condition worsen. I will find Imperial Physician Su as soon as possible!”

Old Imperial Physician Gao had been dealing with the Royal Family for many years. Hearing this, he immediately responded, “This humble official indeed doesn’t have much confidence. If Imperial Physician Su comes back to treat the Grand Emperor, it would indeed be more secure.”

Duanmu Chen sighed deeply, “I understand. Old Gao, please stay in the palace to take care of Father. I will definitely bring Imperial Physician Su back.”

Old Imperial Physician Gao hurriedly agreed.

At this moment, Duanmu Yi’s anger had reached its peak, and another mouthful of blood spewed out. With a tilt of his head, he passed out completely.

...

People are not aware of Duanmu Yi’s physical condition, only that the old Imperial Physician has not left the palace for several days.

Lian Shun stayed in the capital for three days, eating and sleeping, recuperating and gathering strength. Unexpectedly, he would soon have to travel day and night to return to Nanshan City.

Finally, at the agreed time, Lian Shun appeared before Chang'an again.

Chang'an was not surprised this time and, like last time, took Lian Shun disguised as a guard into the palace.

Seeing Chang'an's reaction, Lian Shun already guessed Duanmu Chen's choice. Unless Duanmu Chen planned to stand with his father, get rid of Su Liang and Gu Ling, and capture Lian Shun as a hostage. This possibility is very unlikely; if Duanmu Chen were so unwise, Su Liang would not have cooperated with him in the first place.

This time, they didn't go to Duanmu Chen's Sleeping Palace. Lian Shun was taken directly by Chang'an to Empress Dowager Xiao's palace, where Duanmu Yi was recuperating, and Duanmu Chen was also there.

Duanmu Yi had drunk the medicine prescribed by the old Imperial Physician and fell asleep. He added sedative ingredients in the medicine. It is indeed good for Duanmu Yi's body because everything he saw and heard when he was awake could infuriate him further...

Duanmu Chen let Xiao Family take a rest and dismissed the servants. He alone guarded Duanmu Yi's bedside. Hearing footsteps, he looked up and saw Chang'an and Lian Shun coming. He calmly waved his hand, indicating that they didn't need to salute.

Lian Shun's gaze fell on Duanmu Yi. However, he looked like he was sleeping soundly, and it was impossible to determine whether he had had a "stroke".

Duanmu Chen had already done everything, and at this moment, he stopped pretending in front of Lian Shun. Without waiting for Lian Shun's questioning, he pinched Duanmu Yi heavily and woke him up abruptly.

Lian Shun approached, only to see Duanmu Yi open his eyes, wake up, but his whole body was stiff, his lips trembling, only able to make unclear sounds.

"Grand Emperor, I am Lian Shun." Lian Shun introduced himself.

Duanmu Yi's eyes bulged out, staring at Lian Shun to pieces. At this moment, he must think of where the medicine in Duanmu Chen's hand comes from.

Duanmu Chen spoke about Su Liang's situation in front of Duanmu Yi, "You go back and tell her that the trouble has already been resolved. Let her and Gu Ling come back as soon as possible, I will not treat them unfairly."

Lian Shun nodded, "I will deliver your message to her Majesty."

"If there is nothing else, you can leave." Duanmu Chen said.

Lian Shun saluted, and after that, Chang'an took him out of the palace.

Only Duanmu Yi and his son, Duanmu Chen, were left.

Duanmu Chen sat down by the bed, holding Duanmu Yi's hand, and sighed, "There is something that I have wanted to say for a long time."

Duanmu Yi's teeth were chattering. Duanmu Chen spoke with a melancholy tone, "The shameless things that Duanmu Cheng and Duanmu Ao have done, Father Emperor knows all about. They killed Su Liang's entire family, and Su Liang merely sought revenge on them, which is only natural, isn't it? Moreover, Su Liang has been cautious and disguised, avoiding being discovered by Father Emperor, while repeatedly making merits and protecting Qian Country. Since the real victim, Su Liang, has not vented her anger on Father Emperor, can't father forgive her? If it were for something else, I would understand, but is it worth it for your two shameless sons to be so?"

Duanmu Chen stared directly into Duanmu Yi's eyes, suddenly laughed, pulled the quilt for Duanmu Yi, and whispered, "Yes, I made a vow that I would one day take revenge for Duanmu Cheng and Duanmu Ao, otherwise I will not be able to rest in peace for the rest of my life, and fall into hell after death. However, if there really is a hell, Duanmu Cheng and Duanmu Ao should already be in there, and I would not join the excitement. It would be ridiculous for me to break with Su Liang for their sake. And don't worry about Qian Country or my own position, Father Emperor, when I made that vow, I was just... anxious to get the imperial throne. Heaven is watching, right and wrong, merit and demerit will be judged on their own."

As the words fell, Duanmu Chen stood up, "Father Emperor doesn't need to worry about those experts you have cultivated during these years. They are all smart people, and they will naturally choose to be loyal to me when I hold the throne. Except for a woman named Shaoyao who has lost contact, the others in the capital have met me in the past two days. If Father Emperor regrets giving me the throne, then I can only say I am sorry."

Lian Shun came to Su Mansion again, Yang Yu was still not asleep, waiting for him.

"Did everything go well?" Yang Yu prepared the wine and dishes in advance this time.

"Sister-in-law is too polite." Lian Shun said as he sat down and began eating without restraint, "Everything went smoothly. I'll be heading back to the south shortly."

"That's good to hear." Yang Yu sighed with relief and took out the letters she wanted to give to Su Liang and Nian Jincheng, placing them on the table, "I'll trouble you to deliver these letters to Xiaoliang and Achen."

Lian Shun nodded and casually asked, "Would Sister-in-law like to go to the south and accompany Xiaonian?"

Yang Yu hesitated for a moment before shaking her head, "I think I better not go. He's going there for official business, and I'm afraid I might distract him and cause troubles."

Lian Shun laughed, "Xiaonian is so lucky to have married such a good wife like you. Unlike me, I'm old and still single. Su Xiaoliang didn't even bother introducing me to a nice lady!"

Yang Yu laughed, "What kind of girl do you like? I don't know too many people, though, so Su Liang might be the one to rely on."

Lian Shun calmly said, "I like girls with fiery personalities." Su Liang said that, and he found it quite sensible. He couldn't stand boredom, and he had seen enough well-behaved girls, all of them were nice, but they were not his type. After all, he would have to spend his whole life with one, so if there was no fun, it would be better to live alone.

Yang Yu couldn't help but chuckle, "In that case, you should ask Su Liang for help. I hope you find a good match soon."

"Thank you, Sister-in-law. I have a feeling that my girl will appear soon." Lian Shun said seriously.

After a hearty meal, Lian Shun put away the letters and said farewell to Yang Yu before leaving the capital for the south overnight.

Nanshan City.

Su Liang was more than a month pregnant, and her stomach did not show any signs yet without any special reactions.

Gu Ling was more nervous than Su Liang and stayed by her side every day, always watching over her, afraid that she might hurt herself accidentally.

Half a month had passed since Lian Shun left, and on this day, after Su Liang treated Situ Jing with acupuncture once again, his completely blind eyes finally saw a hazy halo.

Situ Jing didn't mention it. When Su Liang asked if he sensed light, he silently shook his head.

However, Gu Ling noticed that Situ Jing's expression was off and threw a teacup at him.

Qiao Cong, who was sitting nearby, stood up on one leg, wanting to block it for Situ Jing.

But Situ Jing subconsciously reached out his hand and caught the teacup before it hit his face!

Qiao Cong frowned, "Jingjing, can you see now?"

Situ Jing, holding the teacup, realized that he'd been exposed and had to admit that he had just started to have a blurry sense of light.

Cen Man had been blind for many years and had very sharp senses, which she had honed over the years.

Situ Jing, on the other hand, had not been blind for a long time and always wanted to have his eyes cured. He never practiced his other senses.

Therefore, if he were completely blind, there was no way he could have caught the teacup that Gu Ling threw.

As soon as Qiao Cong heard what Situ Jing said, his face darkened even more, "When Xiaoliang asks you something, answer honestly! Otherwise, I think it's better for you to remain blind!"

Situ Jing:

Su Liang lightly laughed, "Master, calm down, it's alright. Whether he says it or not, I know the condition of his eyes. I asked him just to see if he would behave. Apparently, he was planning to pretend to be blind until he could see, and then run away."

As Su Liang finished speaking, Qiao Cong, who had just sat down, picked up his crutch and hit Situ Jing's head, "Apologize to Xiaoliang!"

Situ Jing had no choice but to apologize to Su Liang and promise not to do it again.

After treating Cen Man's eyes, Su Liang tried even harder, but there was still no improvement.

Cen Man believed that Su Liang was a real divine doctor, and she longed to see the light again, but she didn't want to put pressure on her, "It's okay. I'm content with just having you as my disciple. It doesn't matter if you can't cure me."

"Master isn't too old." Su Liang said seriously.

At her words, Cen Man laughed. Su Liang continued, "When your eyes are cured, Master, there will be many possibilities. Even now, there are."

Cen Man was stunned, "What possibility are you talking about, Xiaoliang?"

Su Liang smiled, "For example, finding a life partner?"

It took a moment for Cen Man to understand Su Liang's meaning, and her face became unnatural, "You girl, don't tease me."

"I'm serious. It's because Master is older that you should do what you want and be with the person you like." Su Liang said.

"What person do I like? Don't talk nonsense." Cen Man coughed lightly.

"Oh, I was just saying. From Master's reaction, there must be someone you like. Let me think, who could it be? I've got it! It must be me!"

Cen Man laughed and hugged Su Liang, "Yes, yes, it's you."

But Cen Man knew that Su Liang could tell that there was something special between her and Qiao Cong. They just didn't address it openly.

Su Liang guessed that there was a past between Cen Man and Qiao Cong that she didn't know about. She just joked about it and didn't want to get involved.

That night, before going to sleep, Su Liang calculated the time again, "If everything goes well, Lian Ershan should be coming back soon. Great God, if Duanmu Chen has already given Duanmu Yi the medicine, should we return to the capital?"

"If you don't want to go back, we won't go back." Gu Ling shook his head.

Su Liang sighed softly, "Hiding here for ten months is not realistic. So many things can happen in ten months that we can't predict. And what about after the baby is born? Hide for safety? I would be happy to find a place to live in seclusion with you, but not right now."

"Alright, then we'll go back." Gu Ling said, "Invite all your masters to come back and watch the house."

Su Liang smiled, "That's what I was thinking. We have to hurry up and find Lao Bai and Lao Mu back. I want to learn all of Lao Bai's skills as soon as possible. Then, with you and four powerful masters at home, who would dare to bother me and the baby? Just bring it on!"

Chapter 346: 346. Go home

When Lian Shun returned to Nanshan City, Situ Jing's eyes had largely recovered with Su Liang's treatment, and he could take care of himself, though his vision had not fully recovered yet.

“As expected of Su Xiaoliang!” Lian Shun gave a thumbs up while kicking towards Situ Jing.

Qiao Cong watched them with narrowed eyes, not moving.

Situ Jing reached out and grabbed Lian Shun’s leg, pulling him down to the ground.

Lian Shun didn’t get up, “Grandfather Qiao, your grandson is hitting me!”

Qiao Cong silently picked up his cane and tapped Situ Jing on the head, “Apologize to Xiaolian.”

Situ Jing: ...

Seeing that he didn’t speak, Qiao Cong tapped him again, “Hurry up!”

Situ Jing frowned and helped Lian Shun up, “Is this fun?”

Lian Shun grinned, “Yes, very much so, extremely fun!” He turned to Qiao Cong, “It’s right to hit him on the head, he has too much water in his brain!”

Qiao Cong nodded, “Mhm, you’re right.”

In fact, Situ Jing, who was being taken care of by Qiao Cong, was also being disciplined by him. He would get hit all the time, but he was getting used to it. His status here was the lowest, and sometimes he felt even lower than the maid Qiuyue. But, honestly, he didn’t find it uncomfortable, and his occasional annoyance would quickly dissipate. It was even more relaxed than his days in the Che family.

After Lian Shun’s playtime, he started talking business with Su Liang and Gu Ling.

When Su Liang heard that Duanmu Chen had drugged Duanmu Yi, she wasn’t surprised. It was more accurate to say that this time, letting Lian Shun go was a direct way to resolve the conflict rather than testing Duanmu Chen.

After all, the biggest “rift” between Duanmu Yi and Su Liang was his two deceased sons.

But that was also the biggest obstacle Su Liang had cleared in Duanmu Chen’s path to power, which was extremely advantageous for him.

If Duanmu Chen had any slight objection to Su Liang because of Duanmu Cheng and Duanmu Ao’s deaths, he would have been blinded.

“Your friends in the capital are all well. The Emperor is going to marry Miss Xing’s family, and it is said that Situ Xie will have his granddaughter married in exchange for a grandson. They are quite pleased.” Lian Shun took out a letter from Lin Shuzhi and handed it to Su Liang, “Your foster father had a close call, but it turned out alright. This is the letter he wrote you.”

Su Liang opened the letter, surprised to see Ying Ying’s name, and then laughed, “Sister Ying is really kind.”

Lian Shun looked at Gu Ling, “Hey! Gu Xiaoling, how did you meet Ying Xiaoying?”

Gu Ling didn’t bother to comment on Lian Shun adding ‘Xiao’ to the name of someone he didn’t even know. He also didn’t want to answer his question.

Because Gu Ling was carefully carving a piece of jade to give to the unborn baby.

Lian Shun, who was used to Gu Ling ignoring him, turned to Su Liang after she finished reading the letter and asked, “Su Xiaoliang, tell me, who is Ying Xiaoying? Such an interesting friend, and you guys never mentioned her to me before!”

“Oh, I’ve only met Sister Ying once.” Su Liang put the letter away, “She’s Gu Ling’s friend from before. She saved Gao Jiabao’s life with an antidote when he was poisoned because of me, and so we owed her a favor.”

Lian Shun nodded, “I know about that. So the plan was to pay her back with the Thousand-Year Snow Lotus?”

Su Liang shook her head and chuckled lightly, “Not exactly. The condition was something else at that time.”

Lian Shun was even more curious, “What condition? It can’t be that Ying Xiaoying wants Gu Xiaoling to repay her with his body, right?” He couldn’t help it, Gu Ling was too beautiful, so that was how he thought about it.

Su Liang nodded and shook her head again, “Almost. But the final agreed condition wasn’t so direct. Sister Ying said that if Gu Ling doesn’t get married, it’s fine. But if he does, she will challenge his bride on their wedding day. If the bride’s strength is inferior to Sister Ying’s, Gu Ling will have to go with her.”

Upon hearing this, Lian Shun was completely dumbfounded.

Su Liang explained, “Don’t misunderstand, Sister Ying is a reasonable person, just straightforward and outgoing.”

Lian Shun praised, “How domineering! So when you guys got married in Liang Country, did Ying Xiaoying try to snatch Gu Xiaoling away? What a pity, I left early due to injury and missed her. I didn’t see how she tried to snatch Gu Xiaoling away, haha!”

Su Liang coughed lightly, “It’s not what you think. She happened to be going to Yao City to look for Thousand-Year Snow Lotus to save her brother, and Gu Ling was planning to use the Thousand-Year Snow Lotus to pay back the favor. Since he found one, he just gave it to her.”

“She and you didn’t fight before you knew each other, right? Weren’t you competing for Gu Xiaoling?” Lian Shun had a “it wouldn’t be fun if you didn’t fight” look.

“Gu Ling and I were just putting on a show when we got married. What’s there to compete for?” Su Liang gave Lian Shun a white eye. “I helped Sister Yuan make a life-saving medicine for her brother with the thousand-year-old Snow Lotus. She likes me, okay?”

Lian Shun quickly understood, “I see, she saw you and ‘moved on,’ not caring about Gu Xiaoling anymore!”

“More or less.” Su Liang thought that when it came to matters of affection, Yuan Ying and Lian Shun had similar attitudes, able to let go and move on.

“It’s the opposite for me. Honestly, after getting to know Gu Xiaoling, I like him even more.” Lian Shun said seriously.

Su Liang frowned, “Are you sure you’re not into my man?”

Lian Shun also gave Su Liang a white eye, “The friendship between Gu Xiaoling and me is a pure male friendship, just like you and Ying Xiaoying.”

“Oh, actually, I have a crush on Sister Yuan.” Su Liang said seriously.

Gu Ling’s carving knife paused for a moment, and he looked up at Su Liang.

Lian Shun laughed and went out, waving his hand behind him, “I have to hurry back home and send a letter to Xiaonian. I’ll be back tomorrow! If you guys are going back to the capital city, wait for me!”

After Lian Shun left, Gu Ling asked Su Liang, “Who do you like the most?”

Su Liang thought seriously, “I have to think about it.”

Gu Ling’s beautiful brows furrowed slightly, “If you’re considering me and Bao Bao, that’s fine. But if there are others...”

Su Liang laughed, “I wasn’t considering you and Bao Bao, because I love you guys the most.” Not just like.

Gu Ling’s eyes relaxed, and the corners of his lips lifted into a light arc. He lowered his head and continued carving, “That’s good.”

“Then, should we go home?” Su Liang asked.

Gu Ling nodded, “Let’s go.”

At this point, Duanmu Chen had made a statement, and the capital city was safe. Although going back would let the enemy know their whereabouts, as long as they were well-guarded, they could still deal with those who came to their doorstep while ensuring their safety. It would be difficult for them to achieve a peaceful outcome if they stayed out of the picture.

“Then, I’ll talk to both masters to see when we can set off.” Su Liang said.

When Su Liang and Gu Ling planned to return to the capital city, Cen Man immediately said she would go with them. Her eyes were finally showing some subtle changes these days, just a very slight sensitivity to light, but it was enough for her to be overjoyed and hopeful of regaining her sight.

For a blind person, it is hard to live in a normal place without someone to take care of them. Cen Man had initially chosen to live in seclusion to avoid discrimination and trouble for herself and others, but it was also an act of desperation to stay out of trouble.

As long as her eyes could recover, she could still choose to live in solitude or go somewhere else. Not only would it be more secure for her, but she could also better protect the people she cared about, such as Su Liang.

“You can ask Old Qiao. He must be willing to go with you too. But you have to make arrangements for his grandchildren.” Cen Man said.

When Su Liang found Qiao Cong, he was sweeping the floor with his crutch. He was not used to having people take care of him.

“Master, Gu Ling and I are planning to return to the capital city.” Su Liang cut to the chase.

Qiao Cong put down the broom, turned back, narrowed his eyes, “Are you... going to abandon us?”

Su Liang suddenly felt like laughing. How did she hear aggrievement in his words? Was this still the cold-hearted, top-notch master she had known at first?”

“Master, if you’re willing, you can come back home with me.” Su Liang smiled, “I have two more masters at home. They may not be there now, but they will be back. I think you can become friends.”

As a result, Qiao Cong said, “I rank third?”

Su Liang: ...There’s no need to rank... But after counting, she still had another master, Lin Shuzhi.

“Nangong Qian’s body has recovered a lot, but she still needs to recuperate for a year or so. Once Situ Jing’s eyes are fully recovered, Gu Ling will make arrangements.” Su Liang said.

Qiao Cong sighed, “Jing Jing... I’m really afraid he’ll do something he shouldn’t.”

“Master, you need to learn to let go. Protection and restraint are not the same, but neither can last forever,” Su Liang said. “He obviously feels discontented, and the pain brought by his experiences from childhood to adulthood must be relieved in some way. Perhaps when he has hit rock bottom and realizes that he is not the Chosen Son, he can understand what is most important in life.”

Su Liang and Gu Ling knew that allowing Situ Jing to go to Liang Country might cause him to get out of their control. But since they couldn’t kill Situ Jing because of Qiao Cong at the moment, they let him go, to seek redemption or, perhaps, find his own demise.

There was no need to worry that Situ Jing might pose much threat to them. His strongest asset was his Martial Arts, but compared to Gu Ling, the secrets he knew were far fewer than Situ Xie’s.

Moreover, Su Liang felt that Situ Jing somehow had a check on Situ Xie... at least when it came to the things that had happened before. If not for Situ Jing’s continuous sabotage, Situ Xie’s plans would not have failed so thoroughly.

Upon hearing Su Liang’s words, Qiao Cong heaved a deep sigh, “That’s true. Even if you don’t let him leave, he would find a way to leave by himself. Some things, only after experiencing them, will they come to their senses.”

After the conversation, Qiao Cong asked Su Liang, “Our master-disciple relationship is permanent, right?”

Su Liang smiled lightly, "It seems that our master won't hold it against me because Situ Jing tried to strike me. In fact, he might do so because I tried to hit him. Of course, we are family now."

Qiao Cong nodded, "Once I recover from my injury, I will help you fight."

With that, the matter was settled. Gu Ling and Su Liang decided to set off for home the day after tomorrow. Qiao Cong, Cen Man, Nangong Qian, and Qiuyue would go with them, as would Situ Jing, but they would send him off once his eyes were treated.

Jiaye City.

Lian Shun handed Nian Jincheng the letter from Yang Yu and chuckled, "Do you know what the first thing your sister-in-law asked me when we met?"

Nian Jincheng calmly replied while opening the letter, "I know. She asked if Su Liang is safe and sound."

Lian Shun originally wanted to tease Nian Jincheng, but seeing his reaction, he coughed lightly, "You don't mind?"

Nian Jincheng shook his head, "You go ask Xing Yusheng if he minds."

"You really are..." Lian Shun sighed, "In the future, when Ying Xiaoying gets married, maybe she'll be like that, too."

Nian Jincheng asked who Ying Xiaoying was, and Lian Shun replied with a serious expression, "My new friend. Much more interesting than you."

Nian Jincheng started reading the letter, "Goodbye, then."

Lian's Family members already knew that Lian Shun was safe, but seeing him return safely, they finally felt at ease.

Father Lin and Mother Lin listened to Lian Shun's account of the changes in the capital city, and they both sighed in relief.

Father Lin also asked about his nephew Duanmu Che, and Lian Shun said nonchalantly, "He's a prince, so Dad doesn't need to worry about him. We have to distance ourselves from him in the future so as not to arouse the Emperor's suspicion."

Father Lin worried about the son his sister had left behind, but he also knew that Lian Shun was right. There were no feelings to speak of in matters concerning the Royal Family.

Mother Lin pulled Lian Shun aside and asked about Situ Jing.

As soon as Lian Shun heard this, he knew it was about his sister Lian Shan, and he told the truth: Situ Jing was still alive.

"Your grandfather and old Mr. Yuan made arrangements for marriage. Our family called off the wedding, and we were unfair to Apei. A few days ago, Apei came and brought up the subject of the marriage continuing if Shan is willing," Mother Lin sighed.

Lian Shun frowned, "Does Apei still want to marry my little sister?"

Mother Lin shook her head, "Apei has always been a thoughtful child, and I guess he might think that we want to continue the marriage but are too embarrassed to bring it up, so he took the initiative to mention it. He did the same when he was calling off the marriage."

"What do you and Dad think? What does my little sister say?" Lian Shun asked.

Mother Lin sighed again, "Your father and I hope to let nature take its course. If the two children are willing to be together, that's good, but we don't know Apei's true intentions. Shan has lost her memory, and she feels that she has caused trouble for the family and is not fair to Apei, so she is unwilling."

Lian Shun nodded, "I see. I'll go talk to Apei and see what he really thinks."

Just as he was about to leave, Lian Shun turned around and said to Mother Lin, "Mother, why don't we all move to the capital city?"

Mother Lin was surprised, "Move to the capital city? Did Xiaoliang suggest it?"

Lian Shun shook his head, "No, it's my own idea. The current situation changes rapidly, and this place is a border town. After the previous incidents, it's hard to guarantee that Yin Country won't try the same tactics again and target us. I will stay here to guard Jiaye City, and you can all move to the capital city. If you want to come back when the world is at peace, you can always return. Apei has long wanted to leave Jiaye City and see the world. We can't rest easy if he goes on his own, so I plan to let him go to the capital city with Su Liang this time."

Upon hearing this, Mother Lin's expression became serious, "Alright, I'll go talk to your dad about this. You should go talk to Apei. When it comes to his relationship with Shan, be gentle and don't put pressure on him."

When Lian Shun saw Yuan Pei, he was reading a book.

Yuan Pei sighed in relief when he saw Lian Shun return, "As long as you are alright."

Lian Shun briefly explained his recent experiences and the situation in the capital city. Then, he asked Yuan Pei if he truly liked Lian Shan and wanted to marry her. He wondered if Yuan Pei was doing it to fulfill his grandfather's arranged marriage or to make things easier for the Lin family.

Yuan Pei frowned, "I haven't thought about it that much. I just feel that continuing with the marriage arrangement isn't a bad thing."

"So, you really don't mind that your sister had feelings for someone else in the past?" Lian Shun asked while looking at Yuan Pei.

Yuan Pei shook his head, "That's all in the past."

Lian Shun sighed, "Fine, it seems you and your sister don't have strong opinions about this marriage right now. Let's not rush into deciding anything. You still have to mourn for your grandfather. Wait until the mourning period is over. In the meantime, you can go with Su Liang and Gu Ling to the capital city. I want to move my family there as well, it's safer."

Yuan Pei agreed, "Alright, but I'm worried about causing trouble for General Su."

"It's fine, she is currently pregnant and won't be going to war. You've always admired Mr. Lin, right? He's Su Liang's master, she can introduce you to him when the time

comes,” Lian Shun said with a smile as he patted Yuan Pei’s shoulder, “They are in Nanshan City, they might be setting off in a couple of days. You should pack your things and follow me there tomorrow. Go to the capital first, my family will join later as we have many people and might be slower.”

Since Lian Shun had already arranged everything, Yuan Pei agreed.

When Lian Shun returned to Nanshan City, he told Su Liang that he had entrusted Yuan Pei to her care.

Su Liang said it was no problem to take Yuan Pei to the capital city. She would introduce him to Lin Shuzhi, and if he was willing, he could continue his studies at the Imperial College and take the next Imperial examination.

As for Lian Shun wanting to move his entire family to the capital city, Su Liang thought it was a good idea.

“Too bad we can’t move the Orange Garden over there,” Su Liang said while caressing her belly, “my baby would definitely love the fruits.”

Lian Shun laughed heartily, “My godson and goddaughter will have enough to eat! There won’t be any for you and Gu Xiaoling!”

The most frustrated person was Nian Jincheng. He was originally ordered to bring troops from the capital city to help with the reinforcement of Jiaye City. By the time they arrived, Su Liang and Gu Ling had already quelled the unrest. As the military commanders of Jiaye City had suffered heavy losses, Nian Jincheng had no choice but to stay and serve as the guard general, not knowing when he could return to the capital city.

Although Nian Jincheng missed Yang Yu, he didn’t want her to come to Jiaye City. His reasoning was similar to Lian Shun’s decision to send his family to the capital city.

Nian Jincheng could have asked Su Liang to talk to Duanmu Chen about transferring him back to the capital city. However, under the current circumstances, Qian Country’s military commanders had been heavily infiltrated by enemy forces in recent years, with many of the senior officers being lost. Nian Jincheng knew that if he were to return to the capital, it was highly likely that Duanmu Chen would send Lin Bojun to serve as the guard general in Jiaye City.

This was because the position was crucial, and no suitable replacement could be found.

As such, Nian Jincheng had no choice but to stay and fulfill his duties.

On the day of departure, Gu Ling woke up early and made breakfast. After eating with Su Liang, their luggage was already loaded onto the carriage.

Gu Ling carried Su Liang into the carriage. Although Su Liang felt that her movements were not affected, she couldn’t help but feel that someone thought she was becoming incapable of taking care of herself...

“Oh right, where’s the gift you made for Little God?” Su Liang remembered the jade piece Gu Ling had carved.

Gu Ling took it out, and Su Liang couldn't help but laugh.

Gu Ling had used a high-quality piece of green jade to carve a cute little bamboo shoot, completely imitating the "friend" Su Liang had named Little God before.

"So cute." Su Liang held it in her hand, "Great God, your carving skills are truly divine. It's called Little God, and the baby is also called Little God; they're going to get confused."

Gu Ling thought for a moment and said, "Then let's call the baby Little Shoot."

Su Liang found it amusing, "If you really dare to give our baby such a nickname, you'll be beaten up by our masters."

Chapter 347: 347. The Pride of the Little God

After leaving Nanshan City, Su Liang's group didn't travel day and night, and their pace was not too fast.

Gu Ling took half a day to determine the most comfortable carriage speed, making sure the driver maintained it, without going too fast or causing any bumps.

In addition, Gu Ling tried his best to ensure that Su Liang enjoyed her meals, including fruits and desserts, three times a day.

The people traveling with them could clearly see Gu Ling's versatility and his indulgence towards Su Liang.

When they stayed at an inn again, Qiao Cong couldn't help but go to Situ Jing's room to lecture him, "Are you as good-looking as him? Apart from martial arts, what else can you do? He is an excellent cook; can you do that? He is proficient in music, chess, calligraphy, and painting; can you do that? His carving skills are unparalleled; do you understand? He can even do needlework; do you know why Su Liang calls him Great God now?"

Situ Jing was somewhat speechless, "Grandfather, I don't think about Su Liang anymore."

Qiao Cong snorted coldly, "I'm talking about Gu Ling. He is stronger and knows more than you. His past experiences are not much better than yours. Why doesn't he want to use power to prove himself?"

Situ Jing's expression darkened, and he remained silent.

Seeing that he was still unwilling to accept his fate, Qiao Cong recalled what Su Liang had said before, and looked coldly at Situ Jing, "If you insist on seeking your own death, I can't stop you."

Situ Jing said solemnly, "Didn't Gu Ling ask me to be a spy in Liang Country after my eyes recover?"

"If you don't want to go and would rather stay, I'll go to Su Liang and beg her! Do you want to stay?" Qiao Cong asked coldly.

Situ Jing shook his head, "Their home will never accept me. I'm not you, and you're not me. I know you truly care about me, but you don't have to worry about me in the future. With my sister

and Su Liang, you will have a good life. I will deal with the consequences of the path I chose myself.”

Qiao Cong looked at Situ Jing’s determined and decisive eyes, and left disappointedly.

Early the next morning, Qiuyue came to knock on Situ Jing’s door to deliver the washing water, but no one answered for a long time.

Qiao Cong heard the sound and came over, pushed the door open forcefully, and saw the neat bedding on the bed, and the bundle on the table was gone.

“Did the young master... leave?” Qiuyue was stunned.

Qiao Cong’s face was grim, “If he leaves, he shouldn’t come back!”

When Qiao Cong met Su Liang and Gu Ling again, he still spoke for Situ Jing, “I talked to him last night, and my words were a bit heavy. He left overnight. He must have gone to Liang Country as you requested before.”

Su Liang shook her head calmly, “It doesn’t matter.”

Qiao Cong was stunned for a moment, “Don’t you have anything to tell him to do?”

“No. Let him adapt to the situation and try to seize the throne.” Su Liang said, “As long as Situ Xie believes him.”

Qiao Cong sighed deeply. It was really hard to say whether Situ Xie would suspect that Situ Jing had “changed sides” to become Su Liang’s ally. Situ Jing should have known that his situation would not be easy when he returned to Yao City, but he still persisted in doing so.

As for this, Qiao Cong didn’t want to say anything more. Good or bad, Situ Jing would have to bear the consequences himself.

Because they traveled slowly on the road, by the time Su Liang’s group returned to the capital city, Duanmu Chen’s wedding and ascension ceremony had already passed, and there was no turbulence in between.

Su Liang guessed that Duanmu Chen had taken over the group of masters that Duanmu Yi had cultivated for years, otherwise, it would not have been so smooth. This was normal. Those masters were powerful and not aimless death soldiers, so they would naturally be loyal to whoever holds power.

Duanmu Yi’s plan was well calculated, but unfortunately, he was still confused at the moment, overconfident, thinking that being the Grand Emperor would still allow him to control the situation, not knowing that power is only useful when firmly held in his hands. The moment he relaxed, it would be snatched away.

As for this opportunity, Duanmu Yi actively gave it to Duanmu Chen, even making Duanmu Chen appear to be justified. In the end, it was still directly contributed by Su Liang.

They arrived at the capital city at dusk. At the routine inspection at the city gate, Gu Ling, who was sitting in the first carriage, showed his face.

The city guards instantly perked up and quickly bowed, saluting the swaying carriage curtain, “Greetings, Marquis!”

As the group entered the city, news of Gu Ling and Su Liang's return spread quickly. At the same time, someone hurried to the palace to report. This was in accordance with Duanmu Chen's instructions to inform him immediately upon Gu Ling and Su Liang's return.

By the time Gu Ling and Su Liang's carriage arrived at the entrance of Su Mansion, Duanmu Chen in the palace had already received the news.

To be honest, he was somewhat excited. Although Su Liang had been away from the capital for three months, she still had a significant impact on many people and events. Duanmu Chen also knew that he owed his easy ascension to the throne largely to Su Liang. If not for Su Liang and Gu Ling's strength and wisdom, making Duanmu Yi wary yet unwilling to eliminate them, it would not have been possible for the throne to fall into Duanmu Chen's hands.

"Your Majesty, do you wish to invite General Su and Marquis Chang Xin into the palace?" Chang'an asked respectfully.

"You go..." Duanmu Chen began, then glanced at the outside sky, "It's too late today, go to Su Mansion and check on Su Liang on my behalf. If they don't request an audience with me, tell Su Liang to come to the palace tomorrow to treat the Grand Emperor."

Chang'an left the palace to carry out his orders, sighing inwardly that Duanmu Chen's attitude towards Su Liang remained quite special even though their status had changed.

Afterward, like every other day, Duanmu Chen went to Empress Dowager Xiao's place for dinner and checked on Duanmu Yi, "reporting" the day's political affairs to him.

However, in the past, these reports had been genuine, and he had listened carefully to Duanmu Yi's opinions. Now, he only spoke of his thoughts in front of Duanmu Yi, without needing Duanmu Yi's appraisal.

"Father, Su Liang and Gu Ling are back, unharmed." Duanmu Chen wiped Duanmu Yi's hands with a towel, his face showing a calm smile, "I really want to meet her and have a good talk about what happened during this time. However, it might have to wait until tomorrow. I asked her to come to the palace to treat Father's illness. But the treatment is not important; the important thing is for her to see Father, who must miss her very much, right?"

Duanmu Yi stared at Duanmu Chen intently, his lips trembling but still unable to utter any clear words.

"Father, don't be like this. The Imperial Physician said that this disease requires relaxation and rest. Excessive emotional fluctuations will only exacerbate the condition." Duanmu Chen threw the towel into the basin, placed Duanmu Yi's hand back under the blanket, and stood up, "I will bring Su Liang to see Father tomorrow." With that, he left.

When Xing Yuyan saw Duanmu Chen coming out from the inner room, she quickly got up and greeted him with a smile.

They had just married not long ago, and Xiao Shi was teaching Xing Yuyan how to be a qualified Empress. Initially, she was gentle, but soon discovered that Xing Yuyan appeared obedient on the surface but harbored many little schemes. Xiao Shi became displeased and treated her more harshly, implementing strict palace rules and replacing most of Xing Yuyan's servants with two nannies assigned by Duanmu Chen after consulting with her.

Last night, Xing Yuyan sobbed and complained to Duanmu Chen about the two maids who had served her since childhood being sent back to Marquis Zhong Xin's Mansion. She said she was not used to being served by others.

Duanmu Chen was impatient but didn't show it. After all, they were newlyweds, and he was still gentle with Xing Yuyan, explaining that these were palace rules and that the Empress Dowager had her best interests at heart. Soon, there would be a selection for the Imperial Harem, and other noble ladies would enter and become her "sisters." If the people around her were not competent, it would be detrimental to the image of the Empress.

Xing Yuyan never had any significant ideas, and her little schemes were learned from Miao Shi. Now that they were married, she naturally focused on Duanmu Chen. Hearing his words, she felt he made sense, and the arrival of her "sisters" also gave her a sense of crisis, so she stopped crying and making a fuss.

After marrying Xing Yuyan, Duanmu Chen found her not as bad as he had heard. After all, she came from a noble background. Miao Shi became Xing Ji's wife purely because she was lucky, and Xing Ji had poor judgment when he was young and impulsive. His first wife, Qin Yuan, had a misunderstanding and passed away early.

Duanmu Chen was never a romantic; he even avoided allowing his emotions to affect his rationality. In his eyes, Su Liang was a capable subordinate and an essential partner. As for the women in his harem, all they needed to do was obediently bear and raise children without causing trouble. Xing Yuyan met these basic requirements.

Ultimately, in Duanmu Chen's eyes, Xing Yuyan's most significant advantage was that she was Xing Ji's daughter. This alone made Duanmu Chen overlook her minor imperfections.

Yang Yu and Ren Dong were overjoyed to see Su Liang and Gu Ling return.

Su Liang asked Ren Dong to prepare rooms, food, and hot water for their guests while she and Gu Ling went back to Yuanming Pavilion. Yang Yu told them to rest first and come to talk later.

As they walked to the stairs, Gu Ling habitually tried to carry Su Liang, but she dodged him, "I can walk by myself. This is our home; I wouldn't bump or stumble even with my eyes closed."

"Don't walk with your eyes closed," Gu Ling warned sternly.

Su Liang smiled and linked her arm with Gu Ling's, "It's just an analogy, can't you be less nervous, Great God? I need to make sure to have moderate exercise, as it's good for my health."

Gu Ling understood and accompanied Su Liang on daily walks, counting the steps to make sure they were neither too many nor too few.

He knew he was somewhat overly anxious, but he couldn't control it. After all, it was his first time becoming a father, and he had no experience. He always felt that Su Liang was struggling, and he wanted to share some of that burden but couldn't.

Gu Ling embraced Su Liang as they went upstairs, and the room was decorated with bright red colors. This was supposed to be their bridal chamber on their wedding night, but they didn't stay home that day.

"It doesn't seem appropriate now. After the baby is born, we'll make up for it with a proper wedding night." Su Liang said with a smile.

Gu Ling nodded, "I'll remember that."

Letting Su Liang rest in the room, Gu Ling asked her what she wanted to eat, and he would prepare it.

"Just make something simple at this hour." Su Liang said. She had previously suggested that Gu Ling didn't need to cook for her every day, but he insisted, saying it was his way of raising their child together with her...

While Gu Ling was cooking, Chang'an arrived.

In the past, whenever Chang'an came to their mansion, Su Liang would jump out of the window to talk with him. Now, however, she didn't dare to do that, fearing to scare Gu Ling.

Chang'an stood by the lake in front of Yuanming Pavilion and waited for a while before Su Liang came out.

"Madam Gu." Chang'an greeted with a bow, changing his address. Su Liang was married now and could no longer be called Miss Su.

Su Liang raised an eyebrow, never having been called this way before. It was refreshing and sounded nice.

"Did His Majesty have any orders?" Su Liang asked.

Chang'an smiled, "His Majesty simply ordered me to check on Madam Gu's well-being."

"Alright," Su Liang nodded, "Thank you for His Majesty's concern."

Seeing Su Liang still as she was before, not fond of small talk and not expecting her to take the initiative to go to the palace tonight, Chang'an directly said that Duanmu Chen asked Su Liang and Gu Ling to enter the palace tomorrow.

"Understood." Su Liang complied.

While Chang'an was wondering why Gu Ling didn't show up, he saw a figure coming out from the small kitchen beside Yuanming Pavilion. He was wearing an apron and holding a shiny kitchen knife in hand. In the moonlight, the cold and beautiful face was still astonishing. Who else could it be other than Gu Ling?

"Greetings, Marquis," Chang'an hastily bowed.

Gu Ling didn't come over, just looked at Chang'an and said, "You may leave."

Chang'an cast another silent glance at the kitchen knife in Gu Ling's hand before turning around to leave.

Back in the palace, Chang'an reported his meeting with Su Liang to Duanmu Chen, quickly finishing in a few brief sentences.

"When I went there, Marquis Gu was cooking," Chang'an described Gu Ling's appearance at that moment.

Duanmu Chen's expression was inexplicable, "Gu Ling? Cooking by himself? Wasn't it always Su Liang who did it before?"

After learning that Gu Ling was actually the "Ning Jing" from Su's Village, Duanmu Chen was somewhat speechless about the couple's continuous marriages, which seemed like child's play. However, he believed that their relationship was genuine now. But he still couldn't imagine Gu Ling cooking.

"Marquis Gu has always been inscrutable," Chang'an commented.

Duanmu Chen spoke profoundly, "What's so inscrutable about it? Before their relationship was settled, they led their lives together and shared responsibilities. Now that Gu Ling has been conquered by Su Liang, he's willing to do anything for her."

Hearing this, Chang'an nodded repeatedly, "Your Majesty is wise."

Duanmu Chen sighed, "Now it seems that, compared to their time in Su's Village, apart from their relationship changing from friends to husband and wife, nothing else has changed. Whether in a small village or in the capital city, no matter how much wealth or status they possess, they still prefer to cook for themselves and not be served by others."

Chang'an nodded, "In my opinion, Marquis and Madam Gu have never employed servants because they don't want to be disturbed. Just now, when I spoke to Madam Gu, Marquis Gu came out with a kitchen knife to drive people away."

Duanmu Chen's mouth twitched slightly, "Isn't Gu Ling's reaction a bit excessive? Does he really think that any man could steal Su Liang away from him?"

Chang'an shook his head, "That's impossible."

"So, think about it, is there anything that Gu Ling dislikes about you that he doesn't want to see you?" Duanmu Chen huffed.

Chang'an: ...He was sure he hadn't offended the two of them.

"Ah, I really want to go to Su Mansion now and taste Gu Ling's cooking, but they definitely won't welcome me." Duanmu Chen sighed, "Back in the Su Family Village, although those two always didn't give me face, but now that I think about it, it was quite interesting. I have a real connection with them."

Su Mansion, Yuanming Pavilion.

After chatting with Su Liang for a while, Yang Yu left, fearing that she would get tired, and let her rest early.

Su Liang was indeed tired, and after bathing, Gu Ling helped her dry her hair and she quickly fell asleep.

The next morning, Su Liang woke up and, thinking about going to the palace today, she asked Gu Ling, “Should I tell the Emperor about my pregnancy?”

Gu Ling nodded, “If you tell him, you won’t have to bow.”

After breakfast, Ren Dong prepared the carriage, and Su Liang and Gu Ling went to the palace. As soon as they left, Old Master Qin, Lin Shuzhi, Madam Xing, Xing Yusheng, and Lin Xueqing’s husband and wife all arrived. Hearing that they had gone to the palace, everyone said it was no problem – those fishing went fishing, those who wanted to chat chatted, all waiting for Su Liang to return.

Chang’an was waiting at the palace gate and took Su Liang and Gu Ling to the Imperial Study.

“Emperor, Marquis Gu and his wife have arrived,” Chang’an reported respectfully.

Duanmu Chen put down the paper in his hand, looked at the door, and said one word, “Enter.”

Gu Ling, with his arm around Su Liang, walked in, and Chang’an, behind them, closed the door. There were no guards, palace maids, or eunuchs inside.

Seeing Su Liang, Duanmu Chen’s face broke into a smile, “You’re finally back.”

“Congratulations, Emperor.” Su Liang stopped and bowed.

Duanmu Chen actually wanted to see if, with their changed status, these two would bow deeply to him when they met him again.

But he just saw them standing upright, not to mention kneeling – they didn’t even bend their waists.

Although Duanmu Chen didn’t demand this of Su Liang and would be surprised if she did kneel, he would certainly exempt her from kneeling.

But Duanmu Chen thought that at least they should bow their upper bodies to show respect, right? After all, he was the Emperor! Were these two testing him? Showing off to him? Provoking him?

Just as Duanmu Chen was feeling a little uncomfortable and thinking about how to react, Su Liang smiled slightly and gently touched her belly, “Emperor, I’m expecting.”

Duanmu Chen was startled for a moment, and then realized that Su Liang was explaining why she didn’t bow. With this reason, Duanmu Chen couldn’t complain. Because, looking at Su Liang’s eyes and smile, she was clearly sharing her joy with him. And it really was something to be happy about. What’s so important about bowing or not bowing compared to Su Liang and Gu Ling having a beautiful and intelligent baby?

Duanmu Chen smiled, “Congratulations to you both! Please sit down! When the child is born, let them recognize me as their godfather!”

When Xing Yusheng said that, Su Liang rolled her eyes at him. When Lian Shun said it, Gu Ling gave him a kick and sent him flying.

But, after all, Duanmu Chen was the Emperor, so Su Liang couldn’t not give him face, so she politely declined with a smile, “There are too many people who want to be the baby’s godfather, and I’m worried that he’ll be spoiled when the time comes.”

Duanmu Chen's mouth twitched slightly, "Knowing that it's for the child's sake, I exempt you from bowing."

Su Liang and Gu Ling looked at each other and, with the conversation going this far, it would be inappropriate to refuse again.

So Su Liang nodded, "In that case, on behalf of the baby, I thank the Emperor for his kindness."

Chapter 348: 348. Dispute among Masters

Duanmu Chen asked, and Su Liang selectively recounted her experiences over the past three months.

Telling about the sudden change of the Yin Country's crown prince having something to do with Gu Ling was not an option. Moreover, Gu Ling was not exactly controlling the crown prince; she was merely helping him in view of the future.

After Duanmu Chen finished listening, he couldn't help but sigh, "Su Liang, your ability to win people's hearts is so strong!" This was in reference to Qiao Cong and Cen Man.

Su Liang smiled, "Your Majesty overpraises me. Success in such matters is not up to me but depends mainly on the other party. I just do what I think is right, and if the other party agrees with me, everything can be discussed."

Duanmu Chen's eyes darkened as he realized that Su Liang was hinting at him too.

"Haha, that makes sense." Duanmu Chen nodded with a smile, then took the initiative to mention his plan of asking Situ Xie to exchange his granddaughter for his grandson and asked Su Liang what she thought of it.

"Very good." Su Liang nodded, "There are many benefits."

As for Situ Jing staying, he might be useful, but not necessarily. He was initially here for a marriage alliance, and Qian Country detained him on the pretext of his illness. However, at that time, Xing Ji kept him because he suspected that the war in the south was related to Liang Country and that Liang Country might take advantage of the chaos.

Now that the three countries have temporarily restored a peaceful situation, no matter how much Qian Country wants to destroy Liang Country and Yin Country, they have to maintain a superficial "friendship" before taking action, so that there is room for negotiation in both war and peace.

Therefore, Situ Jing can be released. However, simply letting him go would be too cheap for Situ Xie, considering the elaborate "gift" he sent to Qian Country beforehand.

But other conditions would not be suitable. Asking Situ Xie to continue the previous marriage alliance would provide an excellent opportunity.

This is not an exchange of hostages; it is an opportunity for Liang Country to continue its marriage alliance with Qian Country. As for a mutual marriage alliance, don't even think about it.

Hearing Su Liang's approval and not mentioning Situ Yao in a single word, Duanmu Chen felt very comfortable. When Duanmu Yi asked him if it was for Situ Yao, it really wasn't. He did want Situ

Yao, after all, she was a beautiful and talented woman, but it wasn't a big deal if he couldn't have her.

Duanmu Chen didn't discuss the future plans with Su Liang. They had just returned, and there was no need to be so anxious about some things, and he also needed time to plan the next steps carefully.

After that, Duanmu Chen took Su Liang and Gu Ling to see Duanmu Yi.

"Father, look who's here!" Duanmu Chen sat down by the bed, holding Duanmu Yi's hand.

Duanmu Yi was awake, staring straight at the ceiling. Hearing Duanmu Chen's words, his eyes turned before seeing Su Liang and Gu Ling standing beside him.

Doubt and surprise quickly turned into rage, erupting like a volcano!

"You..." Duanmu Yi's lips trembled, uttering an indistinct sound.

Su Liang stood calmly, "This minister pays respect to the Grand Emperor."

Duanmu Chen stepped aside, "Su Liang, you should examine Father's pulse."

Officially, today was the day for Su Liang to enter the palace to treat Duanmu Yi, and Gu Ling was carrying the medicine box.

Su Liang went forward to take Duanmu Yi's pulse, then shook her head and sighed, "The Grand Emperor's illness is difficult to cure, and this minister has no confidence."

Duanmu Chen looked disappointed, "Just do your best."

Duanmu Yi was well aware that Su Liang and Duanmu Chen had conspired to keep him half-dead.

After applying the acupuncture to Duanmu Yi with a golden needle, Su Liang was about to leave when she heard Duanmu Chen say, "I think Father wants to talk to you. I'll step back, and you can chat." As soon as he finished speaking, he went out alone.

Su Liang raised an eyebrow, "Unfortunately, I don't understand the Grand Emperor's intentions. However, I do have some grievances that need to be aired."

Duanmu Yi stared intently at Su Liang, who sighed calmly, "Actually, being an emperor in and of itself isn't a big problem for the Grand Emperor, and even compared to Situ Han and the emperor of the Yin Country, you are much more astute. But I always believe that no matter what your status, you must first be a person. If you have children, you should teach your own children how to be a person. Instead of letting your son become a prince or crown prince and look down on the common people, take their lives for granted, and act shamelessly, you are nothing more than a beast wearing human skin."

Duanmu Yi's eyes flared with rage, if he could move, he would rip Su Liang apart.

Su Liang continued, "My entire family was killed by your son without any wrongdoing on our part. I've taken revenge for my relatives and considered your feelings as well as the relationship between us as monarch and subject, taking the big picture into account. Why is it that my grandfather deserved to die, while your beastly son deserved to die and I should pay with my life? Grand Emperor, as a person, don't be so hypocritical. Your status, even as an emperor, doesn't belong to

you forever. You should be happy that the current emperor is rational, prioritizes the greater good and is a blessing of Qian Country, and we will do our best to assist him.”

As the conversation ended, Su Liang stood up and left with Gu Ling. In front of others, Gu Ling was still aloof and reticent. He had nothing to say to Duanmu Yi. After all, the people of the Gu Family were executed by Duanmu Yi. But unlike Su Yuanzhou, Gu Yuan’s death was not unjust, and Gu Ling had no affection for that father.

Before leaving the palace, Su Liang suddenly remembered something and asked Duanmu Chen, “Does His Majesty know that there used to be a woman named Shaoyao by the side of the Grand Emperor?”

Duanmu Chen knew about the masters around Duanmu Yi, but it was Su Liang who reminded him. However, he was surprised when she specifically asked about Shaoyao, “You know Shaoyao?”

Su Liang shook her head, “I don’t know her personally. She is Ren Dong’s master.”

Duanmu Chen knew Ren Dong, who was originally called Silver Flower and was a maid arranged by Duanmu Yi to serve Su Liang.

“Shaoyao has disappeared and hasn’t come to see me,” Duanmu Chen said, “All the other masters in the capital have already visited me.”

Su Liang frowned, “Shaoyao has another disciple, Ren Dong’s brother. Does Your Majesty know where he is?”

Duanmu Chen shook his head, “I don’t know about such a person.”

Shaoyao was in direct contact with Duanmu Yi. Her disciples were unknown to others. Ren Dong’s brother had been arranged by Duanmu Yi to work in another place and was not in the capital city. Perhaps only Duanmu Yi and Shaoyao knew about his whereabouts. Now that Shaoyao had disappeared, she might have learned that Ren Dong had followed Su Liang and was afraid of retribution. In that case, she might do something terrible to Ren Dong’s brother...

Su Liang reminded Duanmu Chen to be careful, as Shaoyao might become a traitor and join another master, which would be detrimental to both Qian Country and Duanmu Chen.

On their way out of the palace, Su Liang asked Gu Ling, “Shall we cure Duanmu Yi first, ask him where Ren Dong’s brother is, then poison him? But he might not tell us.”

Gu Ling nodded, “We can give it a try.”

“I didn’t bring it up in the palace, afraid that His Majesty would think we were going too far. Let’s go home and ask Ren Dong first,” said Su Liang. She had to be mindful of Duanmu Chen’s politeness to her.

As soon as Su Liang returned home, she saw her familiar friends and relatives who knew she was pregnant.

Old Master Qin said cheerfully, “When the baby is born, I’ll teach him to fish!”

Lin Shuzhi smiled, “I will enlighten the child and teach him to read and play chess.”

Qiao Cong spoke up, “I will teach my apprentice Martial Arts.”

Cen Man smiled, "I will teach the child how to use hidden weapons for self-defense."

Old Madam Xing felt that she should also say something, "Let the child's Grandfather teach him how to lead troops and fight wars."

Su Liang touched her forehead, "The baby hasn't been born yet. There's no need to arrange so much. We'll discuss it when the time comes."

Lin Xueqing held Su Liang and smiled, her eyes turning red again, "Sister Su, it's so good that you're okay!"

Su Liang comforted Lin Xueqing, "Don't worry. If anyone tries to cause trouble, it won't be me who ends up in trouble. Otherwise, my master wouldn't agree."

Before she could finish her last sentence, Lin Shuzhi, Qiao Cong, and Cen Man all nodded in agreement.

At this moment, a familiar voice came from outside the hall, "Girl, your master has returned!"

Full of energy, it was Old Mu who had previously gone to Liang Country.

Behind him were the expressionless Old Bai and the travel-weary Qi Jun.

Su Liang's face lit up, "Master has returned!"

Qiao Cong squinted his eyes, examining the incoming Old Mu and Old Bai.

"Ha! You are both safe and sound! Good! I knew you'd be fine!" Old Mu was delighted to see Su Liang and Gu Ling in good condition and teased Old Bai, "If it wasn't for this old man being afraid of that crazy woman, we would have brought back Situ Xie's head to avenge you!"

Qi Jun quickly explained, "Elder Bai was just being cautious. The enemy had a crazy poisoner, and Situ Xie himself was very powerful. It would have been difficult for us to succeed if we had attacked again."

Su Liang knew that Lady Yue was Old Bai's junior apprentice sister, Ying Ying's grandmother, and a tough and ruthless character.

"It's good that Master returned safely. Nothing else matters." Su Liang smiled and introduced them to each other.

As a result, when Old Bai and Old Mu learned that Qiao Cong was the one who kidnapped Su Liang, they immediately turned against him and unisonously struck their palms towards Qiao Cong!

Qiao Cong narrowly avoided the attack, and Su Liang blocked his back, fearing his injury might worsen.

"Master, Old Bai..." Su Liang began.

Old Bai glared and asked, "What did you call me?"

"Old... Bai... Ah... Didn't you ask me not to call you Master?" Su Liang replied innocently.

Old Bai snorted, "Anyway, that mad woman already knows!"

"Oh, my two Masters." Su Liang smiled, "Don't fight. It'll harm the harmony, and the person behind me is also my master."

"Move out of the way!" Old Mu glared at Qiao Cong, "What kind of master is he? I don't agree! You're just too kind-hearted and easily deceived by others!"

Old Bai didn't even want to waste words, and directly walked around Su Liang to attack Qiao Cong.

Gu Ling went to make soup for Su Liang and didn't interfere in this matter. Helpless, Su Liang revealed her trump card, "I'm pregnant!"

Old Bai stopped in his tracks, and Old Mu was a little dumbfounded, "What do you have? What good news?"

Su Liang coughed lightly, "You two are going to be grandmasters. Are you happy?"

The next moment, Old Bai and Old Mu's eyes lit up, staring at Su Liang's belly as if it contained some rare treasure.

Qi Jun, who was standing at the door, was also overjoyed.

Old Mu grinned and laughed, "Hahaha! That stinky boy is really capable! Good boy! Good apprentice! How big is my dear grandson now?"

Su Liang's voice was soft, "A little over a month."

Old Bai was clearly excited, his eyes reddened, and he looked at Su Liang, repeating one word, "Good... good... good..."

After the surprise, Old Mu's gaze fell on Qiao Cong again, still very unhappy, "Didn't he almost hurt my precious grandson? Why are you protecting him?"

Su Liang shook her head, "It's nothing. Don't think too much. Wait for him to recover, and then you can fight."

Old Mu snorted, "Alright! I'll teach him a lesson then!"

Qiao Cong knew he was in the wrong and didn't say anything. But when it came to fighting, once he recovered, he had to show these two a thing or two, to see who was Su Liang's first master and who was the strongest grandmaster of the baby.

Old Master Qin and Old Lady Xing didn't stay for dinner. They checked on Su Liang and then left, telling her to rest more.

Su Liang introduced Yuan Pei, who came to the capital city with her, to Lin Shuzhi. Yuan Pei wanted to study at the Imperial College, and Lin Shuzhi said it was no problem.

Xing Yusheng and Lin Xueqing also followed Lin Shuzhi away.

Qi Jun told Su Liang about what happened after he went to Yao City and brought back a letter from Xing Ji for Su Liang.

"You go and rest too." Su Liang said, "I'll give you a break for the time being."

Qi Jun shook his head, "There are more people at home now, and I have a lot to do. I'm not taking time off." Saying that, he went to find Ren Dong.

Su Liang thought, let him be.

In the afternoon, Su Liang asked Ren Dong to come and talked to her about Shaoyao's disappearance.

"I can try to inquire about your brother's whereabouts from the Grand Emperor, but at this time, Shaoyao might have gone to find him first." Su Liang sighed softly, "I'll give you two choices: either forget the past and stay here or leave to go anywhere you want, regardless of what Shaoyao does, or I'll try to find your brother's location for you to search for him, though it's not guaranteed you'll find him."

Upon hearing this, Ren Dong knelt in front of Su Liang, "Thank you, Master! Whether I can find him or not, I must try. Otherwise, I will never have peace of mind for the rest of my life. If I can find him, we siblings will be loyal to you for life, with no disloyalty!"

"Alright, I got it. However, I can only give it a try, and I will let you know once I find out." Su Liang said.

This matter was handled by Gu Ling. Afterwards, Su Liang didn't need to enter the palace, as Gu Ling went every day to treat Duanmu Yi. When he could speak, they stopped the treatment and asked him about Ren Dong's brother's whereabouts.

Although Su Liang rarely practiced medicine, Gu Ling had read and memorized all the medical books she had read and would timely ask her for clarification. He had also diligently learned many medical skills from her previous life and had even assisted her multiple times. By now, his medical skills were quite good, especially in acupuncture. Theoretically, he was even stronger than most doctors in this world.

Su Liang had seen the poison made by Old Bai previously and planned to take it out, sort it and distribute it to everyone for self-defense. She couldn't use that much at home, and since Old Bai had returned, her main task now was to quickly learn poison techniques from him. By then, she could make whatever she needed herself.

Returning home felt great, especially since both masters who had gone out and Qi Jun had also safely returned. The mansion's atmosphere suddenly became livelier.

Gu Ling entered the palace once again, bringing the medicine box and explaining his intentions.

After hearing this, Duanmu Chen was speechless, "Is this Su Liang's idea? Curing his father first then drugging him again..."

Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "If Your Majesty doesn't agree, let's forget it."

Duanmu Chen became even more speechless, snorted lightly, and said, "You know I won't object."

Duanmu Chen himself had drugged Duanmu Yi personally, so he had no regard for father-son affection. What made him speechless was that Su Liang was actually causing trouble to the Grand Emperor for the sake of a servant, completely disregarding the imperial authority. However, this was exactly who Su Liang was, and Duanmu Chen had long been aware of this.

And the reason why Duanmu Chen wouldn't object was because this matter also had benefits for him. Shaoyao's defection was a hidden danger. If they could find Ren Dong's brother, they might also be able to locate Shaoyao and eliminate this threat.

Moreover, Duanmu Chen knew that since Su Liang dared to do this, she must have considered the pros and cons for him and knew that he would agree.

He asked Chang'an to take Gu Ling to find Duanmu Yi, and Duanmu Chen couldn't help but laugh. Su Liang really knew him well. Since becoming emperor, they couldn't be friends, but with no one suppressing him anymore, perhaps he could try seeing Su Liang as a friend. After all, many incidents have proven that she was his lucky star...

Upon returning home after treating Duanmu Yi and leaving the palace, Gu Ling saw Qi Jun about to go out.

Seeing Gu Ling, Qi Jun quickly said, "Marquis, please go and persuade them. They've started fighting!"

Gu Ling frowned, "Who?"

"Three senior elders! Well, four, actually. Elder Cen has also joined to help Elder Qiao!" Qi Jun said helplessly.

"Where are you going?" Gu Ling asked.

Qi Jun coughed lightly, "Master wants me to go to Huguo Temple and see if the little master Cheng Yun is still there."

"Okay." Gu Ling walked past Qi Jun and went inside.

As they approached Yuanming Pavilion, they could hear the sound of swords clashing.

The sun shone brightly, and Bi Lake was as clear as a mirror.

Old Bai, Old Mu, Qiao Cong, and Cen Man were all sitting in wheelchairs, fighting intensely, two against two.

Su Liang was sitting in the pavilion by the lake, with desserts and fruits placed in front of her, leisurely watching the battle.

Seeing Gu Ling approach, Su Liang picked up a peach slice with a fork and handed it to him.

Gu Ling lowered his head, ate it, and leaned in to kiss Su Liang's lips before sitting down beside her.

With a smile on her face, Su Liang said, "I asked Old Bai to teach me poison techniques, and at the beginning, he suddenly started insisting that he must beat Old Qiao first, or else he couldn't bear to live under the same roof. Since I had no choice, to be fair, I let Ren Dong and Qi Jun find four wheelchairs."

Looking at the four elderly people with a combined age of over 300 fighting fiercely, Gu Ling said calmly, "I'm your first master."

Chapter 349: 349. Old White's Secret

The duel between Su Liang's four masters lasted almost half an hour. As they were all confined to wheelchairs, unable to use their legs, Su Liang couldn't judge who between Qiao Cong and Old Bai had higher martial strength under normal circumstances. Old Mu was obviously weaker than Old Bai and Qiao Cong, and Cen Man was not on the same league as the other three old men.

"Considering just the martial arts, Qiao Cong has a slight advantage." Gu Ling gave his opinion.

Su Liang stated that she fully trusted Gu Ling's judgement, "But Old Bai's greatest strength is not his martial arts, but his poison techniques. In terms of overall strength, he is the strongest. I plan to learn all of Old Bai's poison techniques before our baby is born. They need to finish their fight and make peace quickly."

Gu Ling shook his head slightly, "That will take a while."

It was May now, and their baby was just over a month old. Considering the usual ten-month pregnancy, the birth of the child would only be next year.

Gu Ling believed that with Su Liang's wisdom and diligence, if she was not disturbed by anything else, she might be able to master all of Old Bai's lifelong learning within two or three months, after all, it was all existing experience. The types of medicines in the world determined that the art of poison had no bounds, but what Old Bai knew was limited.

Su Liang laughed, "That can't be said for sure, let's see. You deal with the things outside in the next days, Great God. Meanwhile, I will be pregnant and studying. Once I have learned, I'll teach you."

Originally, Su Liang intended for them to study together under Old Bai, but Gu Ling insisted on taking care of her as a priority and managing the family affairs and external issues, many of which were originally handled by Su Liang.

Su Liang felt it was also fine this way. What she learned, she could teach Gu Ling. This not only helped to reinforce her own memory but also allowed them to inspire new ideas through communication, benefiting both sides. This was the process she had experienced when teaching Gu Ling medical skills.

Finally, the unconventional duel concluded when Qiao Cong knocked over Old Mu's wheelchair first, and in a matter of seconds, Old Bai toppled Cen Man's wheelchair.

Although there were no verbal agreements on what circumstances would determine victory or defeat, not long after the fight began, all four men agreed tacitly due to their unique and nearly balanced strength distribution. The real contest of victory lay between Old Bai and Qiao Cong. Old Bai was protecting Old Mu, and Qiao Cong was protecting Cen Man. Whoever's protector was knocked down first would be the loser.

Therefore, the result aligned with Gu Ling's judgment. In a straight fight, Qiao Cong had a slight advantage.

But for Su Liang, it wasn't an all-around happy result. The reason for the fight was that Old Bai and Old Mu held prejudice against Qiao Cong due to his past actions towards Su Liang and Gu Ling and wanted to teach him a lesson. Although Old Bai and Old Mu had the dignity of martial artists,

not taking advantage of Qiao Cong's foot injury and choosing to fight from wheelchairs, their original intention was to defeat Qiao Cong and curb his arrogance.

As a result, the resentment in Old Bai and Old Mu's hearts did not dissipate but only became stronger...

"Master, come and have some fruits." Su Liang called out with a tone of humor.

Old Bai and Old Mu, who just got up from their wheelchairs, quickly crossed the lake's edge in one leap, reached Su Liang first, and occupied the last two spots in the pavilion.

With a unhealed foot injury, Qiao Cong had to use a crutch if he wasn't in a wheelchair. By the time he made it to the pavilion side of the lake with Cen Man's help, Old Bai and Old Mu had eaten all the fruits and dessert.

Looking at Qiao Cong's raised foot and Cen Man's eyes covered with black cloth due to ongoing treatment, Old Mu suddenly felt relieved. He burst out laughing, "Old Bai, why are we even comparing ourselves with him? His damned grandson is giving him enough frustration! Unlike us, our good disciple is so filial!"

Qiao Cong's face darkened, but he had no counter-arguments. Although Situ Jing had disappointed him repeatedly, he was the child left behind by his daughter, and he could not possibly let go of him. Having to deal with past misdeeds and possible future troubles, when compared with Old Bai and Old Mu, he surely lost, and that touched his sore spot...

Su Liang knew that Old Mu was a good-natured man. Though he seemed to have a sharp tongue, he knew where to draw the line when speaking. Like now, Old Mu never ridiculed Cen Man. He only pointed out Situ Jing's problems since Qiao Cong was well aware of them.

"Master..." Su Liang began to speak.

Except for Cen Man, the three old men all turned to look at her in unison, "Who are you calling?"

Su Liang:... actually, she hadn't called anyone yet, there was still a "s" at the end of "master" that she hadn't uttered. Those two letters were just too sensitive for them...

Ren Dong brought two chairs from the Yuanming Pavilion for Qiao Cong and Cen Man to sit.

Su Liang proposed to them, "To avoid misunderstandings, it's clear that referring to all of you collectively as Master won't do. So should I address you all as Old White, Old Mu, Old Qiao and Miss Man? Or should I..."

Hearing herself being addressed as "Miss Man", the three old men all wore speechless expressions while Cen Man paused, then couldn't help but laugh. "That won't do." It was not that she thought Su Liang was being disrespectful, it was just amusing. She was of a considerable age, yet Su Liang referred to her as a young miss.

Gu Ling understood that in Su Liang's previous life, it was not uncommon to address elders by their names, and it did not denote disrespect.

Su Liang chuckled, "It sounds like we're sisters. But if you find it uncomfortable, why don't all of you discuss it among yourselves, deciding how I should address you?"

Cen Man was indeed uncomfortable but felt quite pleased after hearing Su Liang's explanation. Throughout her life, she had no children of her own and had not formed close friendships with other women when she was young. Being with Su Liang made her feel as if she had retained her youth.

"I am the Grand Master," said Old White.

Old Mu quickly followed him, "I am the Second Master."

Qiao Cong was displeased, "I just won the match. I should be the Grand Master."

Old White looked at Qiao Cong with cold eyes, Old Mu spoke up with irritation, "Do you understand the principle of first come, first serve? Who said that the martial contest earlier was for deciding our ranks? If you're unhappy, challenge us again. Don't blame Old White for poisoning you and rendering you useless for real this time. I haven't even used my unique hidden weapon yet. Considering what you did in the past, it was fortunate we didn't kill you. And now you dare to challenge us?"

Cen Man tugged on Qiao Cong's sleeve, silently telling him to stop.

Qiao Cong understood what Cen Man meant. Indeed, the order was determined by who had come first, and he was the third to arrive. While he did not fear any martial contest, his dark past left him in deficit of good deeds, and he had no retort on this matter.

As Old Mu had said, the true abilities that both Old White and he had, which interested both Su Liang and Gu Ling, were not martial arts. One was a Poison Master, the other was a descendant of the Mu Family who had inherited their mechanism techniques. These were abilities that no one else could replace.

Therefore, Qiao Cong had no choice but to concede, "I am the Third Master."

Cen Man smiled, "Then you should call me the Fourth Master."

As for Su Liang's other masters – like Lin Shuzhi – there would be no need for them to vie for rankings, nor to establish any sort of order with these old men. As for Gu Ling, who was the first to teach Su Liang martial arts, he called himself the first master, but only wanted Su Liang to know, without the need to compete with these old fellows. Su Liang loved him and their baby the most; everyone else was nothing in comparison...

This way, the "dispute" about the masters was temporarily resolved.

As noon approached, Gu Ling went off to cook again. All the others left, leaving Old White with Su Liang in the pavilion.

"Grand Master, could you tell me now, what is the matter with 'Little Junior Sister' and Madam Yue?" Su Liang seriously asked Old White.

When Old White didn't want to disclose it at first, Su Liang didn't push. But now that Madam Yue had appeared and knew Su Liang was Old White's disciple, Su Liang needed to understand their conflict as soon as possible to decide how to deal with this development.

Upon hearing this, Old White fell silent.

Su Liang didn't rush him, understanding that revisiting the past was not easy for him and might require time to collect his thoughts.

After about fifteen minutes of silence, Su Liang felt it was about time to broach the subject again, "Could it be that I am the granddaughter of Grand Master's younger martial sister?"

Given Old White's age, "daughter" would be impossible.

"Hmn." Old White looked at Su Liang, nodding his head. "You should be, given how much you resemble my Little Junior Sister."

"Only because of our resemblance?" Su Liang slightly furrowed her eyebrows. "But appearances could be coincidental. Did Grand Master's Little Junior Sister have something important, like a jade pendant or anything that she might have passed down to her child?"

Old Bai furrowed his eyebrows, "There was a jade pendant."

Upon hearing this, Su Liang thought of the purple jade pendant that the original master had carefully hidden in the Su's village.

Unexpectedly, Old Bai continued, "It was an Ink Jade Pendant, with the character 'Shen' carved on it."

"Did 'Little Junior Sister' have the surname 'Shen'?" Su Liang asked. The Ink Jade Pendant naturally was not the one left by the original master. However, this did not necessarily mean that the original master had no relation to "Little Junior Sister". Perhaps the Ink Jade Pendant wasn't passed down to the original master, or it was lost, and the purple jade pendant was given by someone else, after all, in the span of three generations and decades, many other people and events would have occurred.

Old Bai nodded, "Her name was Shen Qingxue. Her father, was my and Yue Mei's master, Shen Zhong."

"What was grand master's full name?" Su Liang asked.

"My original surname was Mo." Old Bai said, "Mo Fei."

Su Liang: ...So he used the pseudonym "Turning Black and White"...

Then Old Bai opened up, his expression nostalgic as he recalled his experiences during his youth.

He originally came from the Yin Country, his family was in business, their life was affluent, with no worry about food and clothing. When he was young, a sudden misfortune befall his family, resulting in the destruction of his family and the deaths of his relatives. He ended up drifting, and was "picked up" by the Poison Master Shen Zhong.

Later, Shen Zhong brought Yue Mei home, and hence the family had two disciples and a little daughter.

Old Bai's childhood memories at the Shen family were happy. He treated Yue Mei like his own little sister, but his favorite was still the little junior sister Shen Qingxue. To Old Bai, she was like a flawless jade, cherished in his heart.

Soon, they grew up. Both Old Bai and Yue Mei lived up to Shen Zhong's expectations and were gifted in the ways of poison techniques. Shen Qingxue, however, detested dealing with poison since she was young and insisted on learning medical skills.

And Shen Qingxue's mother, Bai's master's wife, was a doctor.

That family, although might appear strange to outsiders, was surprisingly harmonious and content within.

However, everything turned out to be Old Bai's wishful thinking.

Because the family he liked, the respected master and mistress, the beloved junior sisters Yue Mei and Qingxue, as well as his own fate, were all undergoing silent changes, which he only realized in hindsight.

One day, Yue Mei confessed her love to Old Bai, saying she liked him and wanted to be with him. She even proposed to leave the Shen family with Old Bai and start a new life somewhere else.

Honestly, Old Bai only regarded Yue Mei as his sister. He liked Qingxue, and as long as his master did not kick him out, he would never leave.

"I can never forget Yue Mei's expression at that time..." Old Bai's eyes filled with pain.

Su Liang suddenly realized that perhaps the relationship between Old Bai and Yue Mei was not as simple as just hatred.

"I confessed my feelings to Qingxue, who also liked me. We went together to our master and mistress, asking them for their blessings. Neither of them objected, but they said someone had predicted that Qingxue couldn't get married before she turned eighteen, otherwise disaster would befall. We didn't question it, and I was willing to wait." Old Bai's voice became low, and then fell silent.

Su Liang waited. After a while, Old Bai continued the story.

One day, Shen Zhong sent Old Bai out on a task. When he returned, he found that his home, all the people, had disappeared without a trace, as if they had never existed.

He searched for them like a madman, but no matter what, he couldn't find them.

It wasn't until several years later that Lao Bai finally found Yue Mei, who was accompanied by a skeletal child. She claimed that the child was her son and that the father was their master, Shen Zhong.

At that moment, everything Lao Bai had believed collapsed.

Yue Mei revealed that she had been abused by Shen Zhong since she was thirteen years old. He threatened her if she dared to tell anyone, claiming he would kill both her and Lao Bai.

After enduring four years of abuse, Yue Mei sought Lao Bai, hoping to escape together. She thought Lao Bai would not refuse, but all her dedicated waiting turned out to be in vain.

At first, Lao Bai didn't believe her, but later he questioned why she didn't reveal the truth sooner.

When Yue Mei heard Lao Bai admitted he liked Shen Qingxue, her heart died. She hated Shen Qingxue because Shen Zhong did not sneak into Shen Qingxue's bed at night and do disgusting things to her. Even Lao Bai, whom she had a crush on, fell in love with Shen Qingxue.

From that moment on, Yue Mei swore to completely destroy the Shen family and Shen Qingxue's life.

When Lao Bai asked Yue Mei what she had done, she admitted to selling Shen Qingxue.

But the truth was more complex and brutal. Shen Zhong and his wife had climbed into a mysterious and powerful force. Yue Mei was even given to two men from that force to play with, and they wanted to marry their beloved daughter to the young master of that force.

"What force?" Su Liang was curious. Besides the royal family, he hadn't heard of any great mysterious force in the world today.

Lao Bai shook his head, "I don't know, and neither does Yue Mei."

When they promised Lao Bai he would marry Shen Qingxue, they were just deceiving him.

Su Liang formed an uncertainty in his heart, "With their moral character, why would Shen Zhong adopt Yue Mei for her beauty, and why adopt the grand master too? For what purpose?"

Lao Bai's fists clenched suddenly, and his face became extremely ugly. He gritted his teeth and said, "Yue Mei said I am Shen Zhong's illegitimate son! The Mo family was ruined by Shen Zhong because he wanted to take me away without any worries."

Su Liang was dumbfounded. Indeed, everything had a reason.

So, Lao Bai and his beloved little martial sister Shen Qingxue were actually siblings?

Su Liang could suddenly understand why Lao Bai had been living in a dream for so many years. Who could bear such a fatal blow?

After revealing the darkest secret in his heart, Lao Bai continued to tell the story of how Yue Mei colluded with the two men who had played with her, and turned the tables on Shen Zhong and his wife. After Shen Zhong confessed Lao Bai's origin, he was brutally tortured by Yue Mei for three days before he died in front of his wife and daughter. The lady Shen was also tortured to death. Yue Mei originally wanted to torture Shen Qingxue, but was stopped by the two men. They wanted to take Shen Qingxue back to report, so Yue Mei took a copper coin from them, saying it was for selling Shen Qingxue to them...

"Was everything Yue Mei said true?" Su Liang asked, frowning.

Lao Bai nodded, his face dark, "It's true, I look a lot like Shen Zhong. He said he adopted me because of our similarity. Yue Mei forced Shen Zhong to write a blood letter confessing what he had done, just to show me. She said if I had taken her away at that time, none of these things would have happened. So, she hates me, as long as she is not well, I can't expect peace..."

Finally, Su Liang understood that Lao Bai didn't fear Yue Mei, but loved and hated her. She was once like his sister, humiliated and hurt under his nose without him noticing, and the one who abused her was his biological father. Lao Bai hated Yue Mei for what she did to Shen Qingxue, but that hatred was not pure, and he hated himself and Shen Zhong couple more than hating Yue Mei. Even though Lao Bai did nothing wrong, many things were destined to be tragic from the start, and he couldn't escape from the vortex ever since...

This also explains why Lao Bai, knowing that Yue Mei is a big problem, did not want to confront her when they met in Liang Country, and he did not eradicate her without considering the consequences, but insisted on returning.

He said Yue Mei was crazy, and he knew best how Yue Mei had gone mad, and thought he was responsible for it.

Su Liang poured Lao Bai a cup of warm water, which was shivering in his hand, "I will never let Yue Mei hurt you. If she won't be satisfied until I die, then after I pass on all my knowledge to you, I will go find her, and we will die together."

Chapter 350: 350. On the way, go meet that person called Su Liang

Su Liang sighed, "Grand Master, you can't force feelings. Yue Mei has the right to like you, and you have the right to reject her. You don't have to feel guilty about it."

Old Bai shook his head, "Coming here was an accident, and meeting you was an accident too. I'm just worried that Yue Mei will fixate on you because of me. She will surely go crazy after seeing your face. If she hurts you, I won't be able to forgive myself."

Su Liang knew that Old Bai had reached this age without getting married or having children and was already living a life of drunken oblivion, waiting for the end to come.

Old Bai's words about ending his life along with Yue Mei's were due to his concern about Yue Mei targeting Su Liang. The grudges of their older generation were affecting Su Liang.

Upon hearing this, Su Liang shook her head, "Grand Master doesn't need to worry too much. Even without you, perhaps Yue Mei and I would inevitably confront each other sooner or later."

Old Bai frowned, "Although you look a lot like my junior sister, as long as she hasn't seen you, she knows nothing. But now that she thinks you're my disciple, she will come after you sooner or later."

"I know, but what I want to talk about is another matter." Su Liang said, "I not only know Yue Mei's granddaughter, but we are also good friends."

Old Bai was stunned, "Her granddaughter? Who is she?"

"Her name is Ying Ying. Although Yue Mei claimed to Grand Master that she had a son born out of Shen Zhong's violation, it is uncertain whether that's true or if Ying Ying is that son's daughter. After all, her surname is Ying, and I think there must be a reason behind that." Su Liang said thoughtfully, "What I can be sure of

is that Yue Mei is indeed crazy, unable to treat even her own grandchildren kindly, her mind completely twisted.”

Old Bai was deeply moved to learn that Gu Ling and Su Liang had already met Ying Ying long ago, and that Ying Ying also had a younger brother named Ying Ye. He sighed deeply, “After so many years, my understanding of Yue Mei is still stuck in our youth, and I have no idea where she went or what she has done since then.”

“That’s why, Grand Master, even now, you shouldn’t feel that the harm she suffered then is your responsibility. The truth is, you have no responsibility, you once loved her and cared for her, but the harm was caused by others. If anything, you are also a victim of Shen Zhong’s evil deeds. And the harm Yue Mei has suffered does not give her the right to hurt innocent people.” Su Liang said seriously, “If Grand Master is afraid to face her, it will only make her think that you truly feel guilty and wronged her, and she will torture you, and me, even more.”

Old Bai’s face darkened, “How dare she?”

“Don’t you think your Junior Sister was also wronged? Does she also owe Yue Mei an apology?” Su Liang asked.

Without hesitation, Old Bai replied, “Of course not!”

“Exactly. In their dealings with Shen Zhong and Yue Mei, Grand Master, you and Shen Qingxue are exactly the same. Shen Qingxue is innocent, so of course, you are as well. But think about what Yue Mei has done to Shen Qingxue? If you still feel a sense of old affection for Yue Mei, what about Shen Qingxue? She may have been tormented and humiliated; she may still be alive; she is your true sister.” Su Liang said.

Ever since that incident, Old Bai had been living in a daze, constantly evading the past, the future, and the complicated relationship and feelings between him and Shen Qingxue.

At this moment, hearing Su Liang’s words, Old Bai’s face was filled with pain, “Is she... still possibly alive?”

“Unless you have confirmed her death. If Yue Mei is still alive, why can’t Shen Qingxue be?” Su Liang countered.

For a brief moment, Old Bai’s eyes lit up, and his expression became excited, “You’re right. I’ve wasted so much time, I should have been looking for my Junior Sister earlier. Even if we can’t be together, I am her elder brother, and I should save her. I’ve been so confused, it’s been a lifetime of confusion!”

As he spoke, Old Bai shed tears again, “But it has been so many years, where can I find her now?”

Su Liang sighed softly, “Fate is indeed a game. All I want to say is, some problems will not fade away with time, and evasion is even more futile, only tormenting yourself day by day. Finding Shen Qingxue or facing Yue Mei are issues Grand Master should resolve.”

“I’ve lived for most of my life, and I’m not as clear-minded as you, a girl in her teens.” Old Bai’s expression was filled with shame.

Su Liang shook her head, “There’s no need for such a comparison; our experiences are different. Besides, I’m an outsider, so I can see things more clearly. It’s just that you, Master, have been immersed in the pain of the past and haven’t been able to get out. Yue Mei made her choices in life, and now it’s time for Grand Master to look ahead.”

Old Bai took a deep breath, then slowly exhaled, suddenly slapping the table and standing up, “You’re right! I’m going to Liang Country to settle accounts with Yue Mei!”

Su Liang coughed lightly, pulling Old Bai’s arm down and gesturing for him to sit down, “Grand Master, rest assured, you will surely meet her again. There’s no need to travel thousands of miles to find her. What if she’s not in Yao City anymore? I need Grand Master to teach me poison techniques.”

Old Bai nodded immediately, “You’re right. I should teach you all the poison techniques. That’s the most important thing right now, or else I wouldn’t deserve to be called your Grand Master. I also need to stay and protect my disciple.”

Su Liang: ...Protecting my disciple? Alright, the baby comes first.

As for the matter of Old Bai possibly being Su Liang’s uncle-in-law, she felt it was best to ignore it for now. Firstly, aside from their looks, there was no other evidence proving her connection to Shen Qingxue. Even if there was, it might not necessarily be a granddaughter or a granddaughter-in-law. Secondly, Old Bai’s love affair with Shen Qingxue and her brother was still a thorn in his heart.

Although Su Liang believed that Old Bai initially stayed and taught her poison techniques because of her appearance, their current master-disciple relationship had nothing to do with Shen Qingxue.

That day, Old Bai carefully planned Su Liang’s poison technique learning progress with her. As for the needed medicinal materials, the list had been given to Su Liang at the beginning, and she had Song Qi gathering them. Over the three months she had been away from home, the materials had been continuously collected and sent over, and there was now quite a large medicine store in the mansion.

That night, before bedtime, Su Liang talked to Gu Ling about Old Bai and Yue Mei.

Gu Ling looked into Su Liang’s eyes, “Don’t worry about your origin.”

Su Liang nodded, “I’m just a little curious.” The original master’s mother’s identity was unknown, but after so many years, she wondered if there would be anyone from her mother’s clan looking for her, and if it really had anything to do with Shen Qingxue.

Compared to Shen Qingxue, Su Liang was even more curious about the mysterious and powerful force that Old Bai mentioned had kidnapped her, which even made the Shen Zhong couple so eager to join.

Gu Ling narrowed his eyes slightly, “The legendary Immortal Island?”

Su Liang became interested, “The Immortal Island you mentioned before, Great God? What’s the legend?”

Back when Su Liang was kidnapped, Gu Ling had sent her to the riverside, talking about wanting a child, and later going out to sea together to find the legendary Immortal Island.

It was a legend circulating in the coastal areas of Yin Country and the northern part of Qian Country, which Su Liang didn't know much about. Gu Ling had traveled to many places and heard some old people mentioning it.

But the legend was simply about a fairy island in the sea that only the destined could see, filled with heavenly treasures, where everyone was beautiful and powerful.

Su Liang laughed after listening, "Is it true or false? I thought there was only one fairy in this world."

Gu Ling blinked, and Su Liang leaned over to give him a kiss, "It's my Great God, the most beautiful and powerful."

Gu Ling's eyes suddenly deepened, he reached out to hold Su Liang, allowing her to lie on his chest, "If you like me so much, you can kiss me freely."

Su Liang, smiling, leaned on Gu Ling's chest, "I was thinking if there really is such a mysterious force hidden from the world that even a scumbag like Shen Zhong wants to join, it must not be a good place."

If it were a peaceful utopia, what would Shen Zhong gain from it? It didn't make sense.

"Ah," Su Liang suddenly remembered another thing, looking up at Gu Ling, "Do you remember that an old man once sent me a note, saying he knew my secret?"

Of course, Gu Ling remembered.

They had speculated what the so-called secret on the note could be, whether it was about Su Liang being a Transmigrator. If that was the case, it would mean that there were other Transmigrators in this world.

But nothing similar had happened since then, Su Liang couldn't confirm it, so she yawned, got off Gu Ling, hugged his arm, and closed her eyes, "Let's sleep, just leave what we don't understand for now."

Ever since Su Liang had opened up to Old Bai that day, his mental state had improved significantly. Old Mu secretly asked Su Liang what she had talked to Old Bai about, and Su Liang said, "I just told my grandmaster that if he's too depressed, it will have a bad effect on the baby."

Knowing that Su Liang was talking nonsense, Old Mu didn't ask any further, as he was also quite busy recently. Besides teaching Gu Ling the mechanism technique, Old Mu was doing another thing.

Previously when Su Liang wasn't home, Qi Jun and Ren Dong had dug a secret chamber under the Yuanming Pavilion to store the poisons made by Old Bai.

Upon returning and inspecting it, Old Mu despised it so much that he caught Qi Jun and demanded a proper makeover of the secret chamber, while also expanding it.

Old Mu took action, naturally incorporating some powerful mechanisms. This was something he was good at and enjoyed doing, but he previously had no opportunity to use it. Now, for the sake of his disciple and unborn grand-disciple, he was bursting with inspiration and enthusiasm.

Qi Jun was very willing to listen to Old Mu's orders, as this was a great opportunity to learn new skills.

As for Old Mu's previous disciple, Mu Yu, he was now living in the capital city with no worries about food or clothing. Old Mu told him to see the world first and think about how he wanted to live his life before coming back to him.

In the meantime, Su Liang wanted to go and see what Old Mu was working on, but was stopped.

Old Mu said he wanted to surprise Su Liang and would not allow her to watch it in advance, nor allow Gu Ling and Qi Jun to reveal it beforehand.

Su Liang said she was looking forward to it.

At the end of May, the envoy sent to Liang Country returned, bringing back "good news."

Situ Xie and Situ Han had agreed to continue the marriage alliance, sending Situ Yao to marry into Qian Country, while taking back the "sick" Situ Jing.

At the same time, the Royal Family of Yin Country also sent an envoy to Qian Country, proposing a marriage alliance.

Qian Country had no princesses of marriageable age to marry out, so Yin Country would send a princess to marry the new emperor, Duanmu Chen. His imperial harem was currently quite empty, and the selection of scholars had just begun.

For a moment, it seemed as if both Liang and Yin countries were trying to please Qian Country.

However, this was not really the case. When Su Liang met Duanmu Chen again, he mentioned it himself, saying that they must not be deceived by the superficial peace and still be on guard against an alliance between Yin and Liang countries.

As for the marriage alliance, it was mostly symbolic.

To suggest that the princess would be used as a hostage to force the other side to withdraw troops during a war was absurd.

On this day, Su Liang and Gu Ling went to the palace together, with Gu Ling going to give Duanmu Yi acupuncture.

Duanmu Chen asked Su Liang what she thought about the upcoming situation.

Su Liang replied, "Stabilize Yin Country and deal with Liang Country first."

Duanmu Chen smiled, "That's what I think as well." In fact, he had discussed it with Qin Kang and Lin Shuzhi's father, and they all believed that the biggest threat among the two was Liang Country.

Although the most recent war was fought against Yin Country, Liang Country had been scheming behind the scenes.

For many years, it has been said that Yin Country's royal family is treacherous, but that is from Liang Country's perspective. From Qian Country's royal family's point of view, they would prefer that Yin Country continue to be two-faced towards Liang Country.

Both upfront and hidden tactics were used by both sides, but the Liang royal family tended to be more warlike, while the Yin royal family preferred to gain benefits in other ways.

Thus, if Qian Country were to wage war against Yin Country, Liang Country would certainly take the opportunity to launch an attack, joining forces with Yin Country. It was because Liang Country had always hoped to fight Qian Country with Yin Country.

But, if Qian Country were to fight Liang Country, Yin Country might wait a long time before intervening, waiting for both sides to be injured and then reaping the benefits. As long as Qian Country could maintain an advantage when facing Liang Country, minimizing consumption and not giving Yin Country any chances, they would be fine.

It is difficult for Qian Country to genuinely befriend Yin Country, but stabilizing Yin Country and focusing on dealing with Liang Country first seems more feasible.

"So, do you think we're ready for war now?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Su Liang shook her head, "No. Qian Country needs more time to train troops and select generals."

As the old saying goes, as long as there is no war, Qian Country still has a chance to grow. Once the war begins, the situation is likely to become unfavorable for Qian Country.

Duanmu Chen sighed, "You're right. But I'm worried that after these two years, Liang and Yin countries have truly allied."

"Well, we could hope that Yin Country betrays Liang Country again." Su Liang said calmly.

Duanmu Chen chuckled, "Since you think so too, I can rest assured."

On the other hand, after Gu Ling's acupuncture, Duanmu Yi clearly said, "What do you want?"

Gu Ling asked, "Where has Shaoyao gone? Where is Bai Yang?" Bai Yang was Ren Dong's younger brother.

Duanmu Yi's face regained some composure and sneered at Gu Ling, "If you want me to tell you, kneel down and kowtow first, then I'll consider it."

Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "The poison doesn't harm the brain."

Duanmu Yi's face stiffened, as he heard Gu Ling continue, "Shaoyao has disappeared. If you hope that she sides with Liang or Yin Country and assassinates your only son who could become the emperor someday, you can keep silent. If Duanmu Chen dies, who do you think will take the throne?"

Duanmu Yi gritted his teeth, "You're really bold!"

"Where are Shaoyao and Bai Yang?" Gu Ling asked again.

Duanmu Yi stared intensely at Gu Ling, "You swear to be loyal to Chen'er for the rest of your life!"

Gu Ling shook his head, "No."

Duanmu Yi was so angry that he almost spit blood, but he still had some sense left in him. He knew that Shaoyao's defection was a significant threat, and as much as he hated Su Liang and Gu Ling, he had to admit that they were still on the same side when it came to the bigger picture.

Moreover, what Gu Ling said about who would inherit the throne if Duanmu Chen died caused Duanmu Yi great internal pain. He knew that Gu Ling and Su Liang supported Duanmu Chen and that he was the best son of Duanmu Yi, the backbone of the Duanmu Royal Family. If something happened to Duanmu Chen, the Duanmu royal family would be finished.

In the end, Duanmu Yi told Gu Ling about Bai Yang's whereabouts. As for where Shaoyao had run off to, he didn't know.

After listening, Gu Ling gave Duanmu Yi another cup of tea, restoring him to his "original state."

Anger overtook Duanmu Yi, and he passed out from fury.

Gu Ling found Su Liang and took her out of the palace and back home with him.

"Bai Yang is in Xiangyue City? That's perfect, Sister Ying said her location is also near Xiangyue City. Let's go home and discuss who will accompany Ren Dong on the trip." Su Liang said.

Yao City.

Situ Xie looked at Madam Yue with a gloomy expression, "Your favorite granddaughter has not come back yet?"

Madam Yue's eyes were cold, "I need to go back. Rest assured, my lord, once I find Ying Ying, I will bring her to you for disposal as you wish! I will also meet this Su Liang on the way!"