

## Three-Time 38

### Chapter 38

[Yan Shiba leaves, Court Examination results released] Out of good intentions, Su Bai, who was originally worried about being too meddlesome, didn't expect Ning Jing to be so forthright, while Su Liang even gave him several big, red pomegranates. Watching the carriage cross over the bridge, Su Bai sighed softly, "Looking at it this way, they really aren't a match for each other." Otherwise, Ning Jing could have said that they would consummate their marriage after Su Liang came of age, rather than openly declare that they were now sworn siblings. This meant they were not together and would never be together. Carrying the pomegranates back home, Su Bai thought that he should clarify this matter more clearly to the villagers. After all, Ning Jing had asked him to do so. As the carriage reached the door, it seemed as if Yan Shiba had been waiting inside the whole time. Hearing the noise, she opened the door and enthusiastically greeted "LiangMeiMei" as she approached. Her wounds were severe, but under Su Liang's medical treatment and care, she had recovered well. She had been bumming meals at Mrs. Bai's house these past two days and hadn't gone hungry at all. Before Su Liang could get off the carriage, Yan Shiba deftly jumped up, hugging her tightly, "LiangMeiMei, you're finally back!" Su Liang did not mention the incident of running into Su Bai earlier. When the carriage stopped, both she and Ning Jing alighted, and Ning Jing carried the pomegranates and other things they had purchased. It was getting very late, but Su Liang and Ning Jing had not eaten dinner. Yan Shiba had already eaten, but she claimed she wasn't full. Su Liang washed her hands and cooked three bowls of pork and egg noodles. Just as she finished, Yan Shiba, dressed in the new clothes Su Liang had bought for her, swayed over gracefully. Stretching out her arms and spinning around, she asked Su Liang if the new clothes looked nice on her. "Ning Jing bought them." Su Liang said. Yan Shiba scoffed lightly, "He buys me clothes? He would only cut me and complain that I stained the ground." Su Liang nodded, "On this point, you're quite self-aware." "Liang-MeiMei!" Yan Shiba leaned against the kitchen doorway, watching Su Liang busy at work. Lowering her voice, she said, "There won't be a good outcome following Ning Jing. How about tonight, your sister takes you away with her?" Su Liang replied very calmly, "How about you take him away instead? I actually want to live on my own." Yan Shiba pulled a disgusted face, "Then I'd rather leave by myself!" "So be it." Both Su Liang and Ning Jing's voices rang out simultaneously, with their words matching exactly. Yan Shiba rolled her eyes dramatically, "You're both so full of yourselves!" On the surface, everything appeared harmonious. The three of them sat together eating steaming hot, fragrant noodles. Yan Shiba asked questions left and right, and Su Liang gave terse replies. After they finished eating, Yan Shiba took out a handkerchief to wipe her mouth, but Su Liang snatched it away. "This was embroidered by LiangMeiMei, right? It's so pretty, give it to your sister." Yan Shiba shook Su Liang's arm as she pleaded. Su Liang's expression suddenly became cold, "No. If you've taken anything else of mine, hand them over too." Yan Shiba didn't expect Su Liang to turn her face over a handkerchief, her laughter deepened, "I really like that plum blossom embroidered cloth, how about I buy it from you for a hundred thousand taels?" Without any hesitation, Su Liang shook her head, "It's not for sale. I've bought clothes and weapons for you. If you need them, take them. Now, please leave." Seeing that Su Liang was serious, Yan Shiba's laughter suddenly vanished, "What's wrong with you, LiangMeiMei?" "Nothing's wrong. I saved you, you've recovered, so it's time for you to leave." Su Liang said. "Are you blaming your sister for revealing that your marriage is fake?" Yan Shiba said, her gaze suddenly turning to Ning Jing. She sneered, "So, it's my fault? Ning Jing, don't think I

don't know what's in your heart! You're a man, to have a beautiful, understanding, and capable girl like LiangMeiMei serving you, you must be quite pleased with yourself, right? You only care about your own future; have you ever considered hers? She saved me once, and I can't let her be ruined by you!" Su Liang knew these words were also meant for her to hear, "Yan Shiba, pretending to be married is a fact, and I didn't mention it earlier because I didn't care. You're being too nosy." As for the issue of how Su Liang would marry in the future mentioned by Su Bai and Yan Shiba, she truly didn't care. The key was that Ning Jing pretended to be married to Su Liang to avoid being chased by the people behind Nian Jincheng. At the time, when Su Bai brought it up, Su Liang had intended to deny it, but Ning Jing admitted it first, so she didn't say anything else. Although the possibility was small, if the court still had people watching Ning Jing, revealing the fake marriage could arouse suspicion. After all, a down-and-out merchant's son wouldn't need to pretend to be married to conceal anything, but the hidden descendant of a rebel might... "LiangMeiMei, do you really hate me that much? In your heart, am I not worth even a bit compared to Ning Jing?" This question sounded sorrowful, but Yan Shiba's tone contained only curiosity and exploration. She noticed that Ning Jing and Su Liang's relationship was strange – there was no romantic love, but it seemed as if they had known each other for a lifetime as close friends. The strange thing was they had only been married for less than a month, and even the marriage was fake. Su Liang looked at Yan Shiba, her eyes calm and candid, "I don't hate you. But we're not the same kind of people. I chose to live with Ning Jing, and you have your own path to follow." In plain terms, the three of them were brought together for various reasons, unrelated to feelings. Yan Shiba was bound to be dismissed eventually. The main reason was that she didn't know Ning Jing and Su Liang well. When they first teamed up, they began by exchanging secrets, and nobody else knew those secrets. Suddenly becoming her murderous self again, Yan Shiba leaned in close to Su Liang, her eyes dangerously cold, "I've never tried so hard to please someone in my life. You, aren't you afraid of angering me?" Su Liang remained serene, "Would Yan Shiba try to please others? You just find me interesting and want to play with me." Hearing this, Yan Shiba's eyes suddenly narrowed, and she laughed coldly, "LiangMeiMei, your sister asks you one last time, do you want to come with me?" Su Liang shook her head, "I'll give you one last answer – no. Remember what you said, if you ask me the same question again, you'll be a dog." Ning Jing, who was quietly drinking soup, choked. Yan Shiba reached out to grab Su Liang's neck but seeing that Su Liang remained unafraid, she suddenly turned to look at Ning Jing, "You're actually hoping that I'll do something to her so you'll have an excuse to kill me!" Ning Jing nodded gently, indicating she had guessed correctly. Yan Shiba let go of Su Liang, sighed deeply, and said, "Never mind." Su Liang thought she was leaving, but instead, she picked up a big pomegranate from a nearby bamboo basket and handed it to Su Liang. "Peel this pomegranate for me, and I'll leave." Su Liang took out a small knife and a clean bowl, cut off the top of the pomegranate, sliced it along the membrane, and tapped it gently with the knife. Soon, she had a bowl of beautiful and crystal-clear pomegranate seeds, which she handed to Yan Shiba. With a bundle on her back containing clothes, medicines, and a knife bought for her by Su Liang, Yan Shiba held the bowl and walked out while eating. She said, "Sister Liang, if I ever see you again in this lifetime, I'll repay your kindness." When she reached the center of the courtyard, Yan Shiba stopped and looked back. "Little rascal, can't you say something to keep your sister here? Even if it's just a show!" Su Liang waved to Yan Shiba from the porch, "Take care." "I'll be back!" As Yan Shiba's words fell, she leaped over the wall and disappeared into the vast night. Su Liang returned to her room and saw Ning Jing learning to peel a pomegranate. She asked seriously, "Should we hide?" "Dodge Yan Sui? No need. Yan Shiba will take care of it, or be taken care of." Ning Jing shook her head. Su Liang wasn't thinking about Yan Sui, but seeing Ning Jing looking

unconcerned, she thought she might have overthought it. As for Yan Shiba, she had to go because it was time for her to leave anyway. In such a life-and-death situation, she couldn't just stay here and live in luxury. Whoever took control of the situation was crucial. Before the announcement of the results of the Court Examination, Su Liang and Ning Jing never left the village. After buying a sword, Su Liang started learning swordsmanship from Ning Jing and intensified her training. Besides practicing swordsmanship, reading, and writing, Su Liang also treated the villagers' illnesses, and even patients from neighboring villages began to come. Other than teaching Su Liang swordsmanship, Ning Jing also washed dishes, cleaned, and learned woodworking from Grandpa Erniu. After every lesson, she'd bring home some practical small items. Thanks to Su Liang becoming a doctor, their reputation in the village improved. With Su Bai's help in clarifying the truth, the majority of the villagers believed and accepted that they were not husband and wife, but siblings. Hu Er visited once and was shocked when he learned the truth. He brought news that a new County Magistrate would be taking office the day after the Court Examination, a very young man with a remarkable background. "What kind of background can a mere County Magistrate have?" Su Liang was curious. Hu Er pointed in a direction, "Bei'an County has the largest iron mine in Qian Country. This is not an ordinary place. I heard that someone has been smuggling a large amount of iron ore to Yan Country. Our new County Magistrate is a secret envoy sent by the court to investigate the smuggling!" In this era, iron ore was an extremely important resource, the foundation of a country's weaponry. Selling iron ore to enemy countries was not just simply smuggling, but an act of treason. "If even we can find out this kind of secret, isn't it dangerous for the County Magistrate if he's really a secret envoy?" Su Liang asked. Hu Er didn't seem to care, "Miss Su has a point. But as a commoner, I don't deserve to worry about the court's affairs. Let's just wait for the results to be announced and celebrate with Mr. Ning by throwing a banquet!" As for the fate of Su Daqiang's family, Hu Er had already mentioned it during his last visit. Although Ning Jing and Su Liang didn't say anything, he had guessed that it had something to do with them. ... August 14th. On the day of the announcement of the examination results, Ning Jing and Su Liang didn't go to the county town. In the early morning, Su Liang found out that tomorrow was the Mid-Autumn Festival and decided to make mooncakes. After describing her plan to Ning Jing, he sat in the courtyard under a tree and began carving the molds. A group of government soldiers came to Su Family's village, beating gongs and drums, followed by many villagers, who came to watch the excitement. Even the Town Chief and the wealthy landowner had come. Up to this day, not many people knew about Ning Jing taking the Imperial examination. Seeing the celebration procession entering Su Family's village, everyone naturally assumed that Su Xingzhe had become a scholar and ranked in the top three, as only they would warrant such a grand event. The cowherd's family, who had been living in Su Erhui's house, was overjoyed upon receiving the news, and the villagers came to congratulate them as well. However, Su Xingzhe, trying to maintain his composure, had expectations mixed with a strange sense of unease... The examination paper given to Ning Jing by the Chief Examiner was indeed the same one used in the Court Examination. Su Xingzhe racked his brains, thinking that it must have been intended for Ning Jing to reference the standard answers, to ensure his position as the Examination Chief. There were specified fonts for answering the examination questions, which judges couldn't see to avoid cheating by the examinees. Su Xingzhe wanted to take a gamble. After hesitating, he wrote the standard answers. After all, he had seen Ning Jing burn the paper with his own eyes, and when the Chief Examiner reviewed the papers, he would treat his answers as Ning Jing's special case. Once the results were fixed, they could not be changed, and no one would dare cause a fuss. Sure enough, the celebration procession stopped near Su Erhui's house. As Su Bai greeted them with a cheerful face, he saw

several court bailiffs with shackles and chains emerge from the procession. They shouted, "On the eve of the Court Examination, a sample examination paper was stolen from the Chief Examiner. Upon investigation, the thief who cheated with the sample paper was Su Xingzhe. Where is he?" All the people present were stunned. The heavily made-up cowherd's wife's eyes were wide open as she screamed, "Impossible! This must be a mistake!" Su Bai stared at the government officials in front of him, clearly there to celebrate, and was completely baffled. How did they suddenly start making an arrest? Just then, a loud voice shouted, "There are two Examination Chiefs in this year's Bei'an County Court Examination. One is Ning Jing, the young master from Su Family's village. Which way to his house?"