

Three-Time 381

Chapter 381: 381. Discard the brain if it's not being used (Fourth Watch)

The day after the Lantern Festival, Su Liang had old Mu bring Zhengzheng over, and after discussing with Lu Yu and Wan Hui, they decided to let Zhengzheng stay at Su Mansion temporarily.

They didn't know the assassin's background, so they couldn't rule out the possibility that he was trying to kidnap Zhengzheng as a hostage against Su Liang and Gu Ling.

The assassin's corpse had been disposed of, and there was nothing left to investigate; they could only be more vigilant.

According to the original plan, Liang Country would go to war with Qian Country in the spring. Yin Country's grain had been given to Situ Xie's people before New Year, but there was still no sign of large shipments in Qian Country. Su Liang had confirmed with Zhengzheng's grandfather, Master Wan, that there were no unusual circumstances in the grain business recently. This made her really suspect the existence of a storage space-type magical item.

And, both Su Liang and Gu Ling felt that Situ Xie wouldn't stay put before the war.

However, the possibility of Situ Xie sending someone to assassinate Emperor Duanmu Chen was very small. Because Situ Xie knew very well that if Duanmu Chen died, the Duanmu royal family would be gone, and the next emperor would either be Gu Ling and Su Liang, or their friends. Qian Country would be even more dominated by Gu Ling and Su Liang, and it would be even more disadvantageous for Liang Country.

Therefore, Su Liang believed that Situ Xie would likely send someone to assassinate her and Gu Ling before March. In Situ Xie's eyes, they were the backbone of Qian Country and the biggest obstacle on his path to great achievements.

If Su Liang and Gu Ling could be eliminated before the war, then Liang Country would have a better chance of victory during the war.

After the previous incident, Su Liang thought it was unlikely that Situ Xie would resort to using hostages to coerce her and Gu Ling again. Because this kind of tactic could be easily countered, there were also Qian Country Royal Family's master infiltrators in Liang Country Yao City. Capturing Situ Xie wasn't easy, but capturing his grandson was not impossible. However, once this kind of thing started, it was easy to fall into a vicious cycle of mutual harm, and hostages involved would be in great danger.

Similarly, Su Liang and Gu Ling would also try not to use hostage-taking tactics to force the other party to submit, because they both had a lot of people they cared about and did not want to put them in danger.

One day, Gu Ling entered the palace to see Duanmu Chen.

Duanmu Chen knew that Gu Ling had come for official business, and as expected, once Gu Ling began to speak, he said, "The northern border may go to war after the beginning of spring; let Marquis Zhong Xin return to Xuanbei City as soon as possible."

Duanmu Chen's face tightened, "Did you receive any secret information?"

Gu Ling nodded, "Indeed. Situ Xie is getting old and can't afford to wait or delay."

Duanmu Chen frowned, "But Liang Country doesn't have enough grain to go to war, unless they've negotiated an alliance with Yin Country!"

Seeing Gu Ling nod again, Duanmu Chen's face darkened, "Is the information accurate?" If Yin Country was really planning to form an alliance with Liang Country, the situation of Qian Country would be terrible. The Emperor of Yin Country was not the same as before; Duanmu Chen did not know much about the new emperor, Ji Yuebai, but intuitively, she was a strong opponent.

Gu Ling admitted, "The information comes from Ji Yuebai herself."

Duanmu Chen froze for a moment when he heard Gu Ling mention the name of the Emperor of Yin Country directly. Suddenly remembering the time when Su Liang had gone missing, Gu Ling had also disappeared, and shortly after, the Crown Prince of Yin Country had become the originally unknown Ji Yuebai. At that time, Duanmu Chen had thought that perhaps Gu Ling was involved in the change of the crown prince.

But at that time, Duanmu Chen thought it was because of Mu Ya that Gu Ling had a grudge against the former prince and had removed him; he hadn't thought that Gu Ling's goal was to help Ji Yuebai become the emperor. Later, he forgot about the matter.

"You've known the Emperor Yin for a long time?" Duanmu Chen's expression kept changing.

Gu Ling nodded, "I saved him once many years ago."

"Did you help him become the crown prince?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Gu Ling nodded again, "I just gave him a push. Who holds power in Yin Country is very important for Qian Country."

"You mean, Ji Yuebai is now allying with Liang Country on the surface because of you, but in fact, he is allying with Qian Country?" Duanmu Chen's eyes suddenly brightened. He had just doubted Gu Ling but quickly could no longer doubt him because if Gu Ling didn't want him to know such a thing, he would never know. Since Gu Ling spoke it voluntarily, it meant there was no hidden agenda.

Gu Ling nodded, "Sort of." It wasn't only because of him, but there was no need to explain too much.

"Is Ji Yuebai really trustworthy? Don't be fooled by him!" The sudden good news made Duanmu Chen a little incredulous. If Yin Country was really determined to stand with Qian Country, the situation would be greatly beneficial to them, and Liang Country would no longer be a threat.

"Trustworthy." Gu Ling only said two words. Ji Yuebai wanted a stable world, not to be an emperor. He had explicitly stated that if Gu Ling approved of Duanmu Chen, he

wouldn't object, and when the time was right, he could transfer Yin Country's power to Duanmu Chen peacefully.

While there were many ambitious people in the royal family, not all who were born in the royal family desired power and the lofty position. There were always exceptions. Ji Yuebai was a member of the royal family with the ability and ideals who didn't aspire to be an emperor.

Duanmu Chen took a deep breath, "You should have told me earlier, so I wouldn't have to worry every day about what to do if Liang Country and Yin Country cooperate."

"Some things only became certain recently," Gu Ling said, "Ji Yuebai and I are just friends. He doesn't listen to me, but I'm sure he won't work with Situ Xie." Because the purpose of the war provoked by Liang Country was aggression, slaughter, and seizing better land and resources. Past history had already proven this.

Although people from Liang Country could say why they should be poor, Ji Yuebai believed that if the ruler of Liang Country truly cared for the people, they should voluntarily give up their imperial power, use peaceful negotiations to promote unity under heaven, and seek a better future for the people of Liang Country. Because people in other regions might have had a little more luck than the people in Liang Country, but they didn't owe them anything.

The world itself is unfair, the geographical gap is actually no different from the gap in birth, and the geographical factor is also a part of one's origin. Some people are born with a golden spoon and are wealthy all their life, while some are born poor and can't ever make a better living. Pursuing fairness is acceptable, but one shouldn't use the banner of eliminating injustice to justify robbery.

However, the Liang Country's Royal Family has always been using such a grand excuse. They are not truly for the sake of the people of Liang Country because war brings no benefits to the people. The ambitions of the Liang Country Royal Family have caused the already poor people to bear more taxes and labor, making their lives increasingly unsustainable, with many starving and freezing to death each year.

Duanmu Chen hesitated for a moment and finally asked what was on his mind, "If it is only me and Ji Yuebai left, who would you choose?"

By calling himself "me", he implied that he was also Gu Ling's friend.

Duanmu Chen was very clear that the foundation of his stable position as the emperor was Gu Ling and Su Liang, and the people who held military power were their absolute confidants. Duanmu Yi said that Duanmu Chen was unknowingly being manipulated, but Duanmu Chen believed that he was not being manipulated but rather chosen.

Now that Gu Ling has another Emperor friend, it means that he has another option.

Duanmu Chen knew that if Gu Ling gave up on him, he had no way of making a comeback and could only accept losing everything. Fortunately, he believed that so far, he had not done anything to upset Gu Ling and Su Liang. Given their personalities, they wouldn't take away his current possessions for no reason, even if they were only obtained with their help.

Gu Ling looked at Duanmu Chen and said a single word, "You."

Duanmu Chen was a bit surprised; even though it was the answer he had hoped for, he suddenly didn't know how to react.

After a moment of silence, Duanmu Chen thought of Gu Ling's intentions. "Alright, I will issue an order later to send Marquis Zhong Xin back to Xuanbei City."

Gu Ling then got up and left without further explanation to Duanmu Chen.

Duanmu Chen sat quietly for a while, mocking himself with a smile, "This result is the best it could be; why did I overthink it?"

Xing Ji received the decree that he would return to Xuanbei City tomorrow and was not surprised. Although he was unaware of many things, he could feel that the three-country stalemate was about to break. Last year, the throne of the three countries had changed hands, which was an unusual sign of a major change.

Old Lady Xing was extremely reluctant, but also helpless. There are only a few capable military commanders remaining in Qian Country. Besides Xing Ji, only Lin Bojun can go to Xuanbei City to lead the army, but he is Duanmu Chen's most trusted commander. He must be kept in the capital city to control the City Guard Army, not because of Su Liang's face that Lin Bojun was not sent to the border.

Late that day, Xing Ji came to Su Mansion to bid farewell to Su Liang and Gu Ling.

When he learned that it was Gu Ling who suggested he return to Xuanbei City, Xing Ji was stunned. "Is there going to be a war?" Of course, he wouldn't blame Su Liang and Gu Ling; he just thought they must have a reason for doing so. He was able to return last year with Su Liang's great help.

"Current news is that it will be early in March after the start of spring." Su Liang said.

Xing Ji's expression turned serious. "I understand. I will set off tomorrow morning. If you have any letters or items to be delivered to Qiao Jing and his grandfather, you can give them to me."

Su Liang said that she would have them sent to Marquis Zhong Xin's Mansion when they were ready.

Xing Ji hugged Gu Xiaonuan and then excused himself to leave.

Su Liang wrote a letter to Qiao Cong, and even had Gu Xiaonuan press a small handprint inside. It was expected that Qiao Cong would miss home in Xuanbei City. However, as long as Qiao Jing was there and Liang Country existed, Qiao Cong would not return.

Su Liang asked Qiao Cong and Qiao Jing to go outside Xuanbei City to Ping'an Temple to find Monk Cheng Yun and give him a letter. Su Liang wanted to ask Cheng Yun if he had seen Yan Shiba in the past half year.

During their last meeting, Yan Shiba was considering whether to give up his job as a head assassin because of Su Liang's words, to be a normal person and to pursue Cheng Yun.

So after that, Yan Shiba might have gone to find Cheng Yun.

Cen Man and Nangong Qian both wrote letters to Qiao Cong, and Nangong Qian even made shoes for the grandfather and grandson pair.

After collecting the letters and items, Su Liang asked Qi Yan to send them to Marquis Zhong Xin's Mansion.

The next day, as soon as the sky brightened, Xing Ji led a group of people and horses to set off to the north. Qi Jiang insisted on following him.

It was the end of January in a blink of an eye. Half a month had passed since Zhengzheng was attacked on the Lantern Festival. No other incidents related to the case had occurred since then, making Su Liang feel that the origin of the two assassins that night was very strange.

Su Liang couldn't think of targeting Nian Ruting because she didn't know that she was still alive. Nian Ruting decided to do so because she arrived in the capital the night before the Lantern Festival and saw Zhengzheng entering and leaving Su Mansion on the day of the festival. She then launched her poison plan out of impulsiveness, sacrificing two men she had seduced.

Shaoyao and Nian Ruting had been hiding in the empty Nian Family mansion. Shaoyao often went out alone at night, but she didn't allow Nian Ruting to go out again.

After half a month, Nian Ruting still didn't know what Shaoyao was up to and what she planned to do, so she couldn't help but ask one night, "Master, can you tell me the purpose of our trip? I can help Master."

Shaoyao was wiping her sword without even lifting her head, "What if I say that my purpose is to kill Gu Ling?"

Nian Ruting frowned, "Master can't kill him."

Shaoyao suddenly looked up coldly at Nian Ruting, "I was really blind to accept you, a fool who lost her heart to a man and hasn't awakened even after being abandoned like a worn-out shoe!"

Nian Ruting's face stiffened, "In a person's life, there must be something they desire and won't hesitate to pursue; otherwise, what's the point of living?"

Shaoyao pointed her gleaming cleaned sword in a different direction toward Nian Ruting, "You'd better forget about Gu Ling, even if he doesn't end up with Su Liang, he will never belong to you."

"What do you mean by that, Master?" Nian Ruting asked with an indignant expression.

Shaoyao sneered, "Master said that there is a big figure who wants Gu Ling alive. They just haven't taken action yet."

"Then why did you say it was to kill him?" Nian Ruting countered.

Shaoyao shook her head, "My purpose of this trip is not to kill people, but to find something in the Imperial Palace of Qian Country. Unfortunately, I haven't found it yet. Next, I must go to Su Mansion to search for it."

Nian Ruting puzzled, "What treasure is it?"

"The secret scroll of mechanisms of the Mu Family. Master said there must be a complete copy in the capital city of Qian Country. If it's not in the Imperial Palace, it must be in Su Mansion," Shaoyao answered.

“We could kidnap a hostage and force Su Liang to hand it over!” said Nian Ruting.

Shaoyao put her sword back in its sheath, “You don’t need to use your brain if you’re not using it. Don’t forget how you were taken out of the Heavenly Prison by Su Liang. Such crude methods are useless against her. Once Su Liang and Gu Ling are alerted, our identities will be exposed. I can leave, but you can expect to be torn to pieces by them!”

Chapter 382: 382. Lin Xueqing’s Self-defense Techniques

Since being scolded harshly by Shaoyao the night before yesterday, Nian Ruting had not spoken to her for two days, only watching coldly as she left the Nian Mansion secretly every day, came back after one or two four-hour periods, went out again, came back, looking more and more anxious because she always came back empty-handed.

The heavily guarded Imperial Palace of Qian Country was an extremely familiar place for Shaoyao, as she had once been the “ghost” who could freely move within the high walls of the palace and knew some hidden places inside the palace.

Although when Duanmu Chen became the emperor, he learned that Shaoyao, one of the secret guards trained by Duanmu Yi, had disappeared and increased vigilance, the layout of the palace remained the same and could not block Shaoyao’s snooping and investigation.

After not having any gains repeatedly, she came to the difficult place—Su Mansion, where people came and went every day.

Unable to kill Duanmu Chen, dare not take hostages, and even unable to startle the snake, finding a book that must be extremely well-hidden was almost impossible.

The deadline for Shaoyao’s mission was approaching, and she had to get away from the capital city of Qian Country within five days with gains, travel day and night back to report, otherwise all her choices after escaping the control of Qian Country’s Royal Family would turn into nothing, including her own life.

On this late night, when Shaoyao returned with a gloomy face again, Nian Ruting spoke to her again, calling her master with a respectful look and tone, as if the previous incident had not happened.

“Master, I have an idea that might not be very reliable, but you can consider it.” Nian Ruting had nearly been strangled to death by Nian Seventeen. Although she had survived, her vocal cords had been damaged and she had never recovered, her voice hoarse and dry, really unpleasant. If one only heard the voice and did not see the person, he/she would think it belonged to an eighty-year-old woman.

Shaoyao’s impatience and disgust faded a lot after seeing Nian Ruting’s pretending-to-be-clever eyes, “Speak.”

When she first arrived in the capital city of Qian Country, Shaoyao wore a delicate and gorgeous makeup, even though she stayed hidden during the day and avoided being seen by anyone.

Now, half a month had passed. Shaoyao's hair was frizzy and her bare face revealed her not-so-young skin underneath the heavy makeup, with obvious wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and a fierce look in her eyes when she wasn't looking at people. Due to her anxiety, pressure, and lack of rest for several days, her lips were cracked like the bark of a dead tree.

Shaoyao had no hopes for any good ideas from Nian Ruting at all.

However, when Nian Ruting finished speaking, Shaoyao squinted her eyes and looked at her steadily, "They all think you're dead, but Nian Ruxue is still alive."

Nian Ruting immediately nodded, "Yes, master. As long as I pretend to be Nian Ruxue, and catch that child from the Wan Family, we can force Su Liang to hand over the secret scroll. With more caution, there is hope for success. Didn't the master say that the child was recently staying at Su Mansion but often going out?"

Shaoyao snorted coldly, "He's going out because Su Liang is luring us to show ourselves, fool!"

Nian Ruting's face stiffened, and she pursed her lips, and spoke again, "Then we can change the target. It doesn't have to be that child. For example...Xing Yusheng's grandmother! I remember her relationship with Su Liang is very good, and she publicly supported Su Liang."

That was what happened during the Military Exam back then, but Nian Ruting had a deep impression because that exam led her life to turn upside down and plunge into the abyss.

Seeing Shaoyao frowning, Nian Ruting explained, "That old woman surely doesn't have any masters protecting her, and she is old and in poor health. If we take her as a hostage, Su Liang will listen to us and worry that we will hurt her! The exchange of hostages would be more careful!"

"But the master said..." Shaoyao was obviously tempted, but still hesitating.

Nian Ruting knew what Shaoyao was worried about, "She doesn't have time to fight back! Even if she guesses it's the master's doing, what can she do from such a distance? She must meet our conditions to save people."

Shaoyao was silent for a long time, looking at Nian Ruting's eyebrows and eyes, "I know you've pretended to be Nian Ruxue. Your foot is not completely healed, and walking fast will reveal that you are a cripple. Also, your voice cannot be concealed."

Nian Ruting reached out and touched her throat, coughed lightly, and tried to imitate Nian Ruxue's speech, but as soon as she opened her mouth, she heard her own hoarse and unpleasant voice.

Nian Ruting suddenly lost her spirit, her face twisted with disappointment and anger. She thought she had come up with a good strategy to divert the disaster and kill two birds with one stone. As long as Su Liang could believe that it was Nian Ruxue who had done it, Nian Ruxue would never have a good ending when she appeared again in the future, and Su Liang and Gu Ling would definitely use their power to investigate Nian Ruxue's whereabouts and kill her.

"You're right." Shaoyao spoke again.

Nian Ruting was stunned, "What does the master mean by... "

"The old woman from the Xing Family, let's choose her. Without any hostages, the task can't be completed. And what I mean is that you're right about Su Liang not

having time to fight back. I might have been overthinking.” Shaoyao’s tone softened a lot.

Nian Ruting blurted out, “But I can’t pretend to be Nian Ruxue anymore.”

Shaoyao’s eyes were impatient, “Prioritize the main issue, and stop thinking about using someone else’s hand to kill off your sister!”

“I’m not...” Nian Ruting wanted to explain.

Shaoyao interrupted, “It’s settled. We don’t have to show up, we just need to find a river for an easy escape.”

Nian Ruting dared not mention Nian Ruxue anymore, but when she heard Shaoyao say she was going to capture Old Lady Xing, she had a hunch that Shaoyao wanted to use her as cannon fodder, “Master, my foot hasn’t... ”

“But that doesn’t affect your martial arts. I’ll watch and protect you in secret, just in case. That’s the safest way. There used to be two servants who could help, but you got into trouble as soon as you entered the city and sent them to their deaths. Do you think I brought you here to reminisce about your past love?” Shaoyao’s expression was stern.

“I didn’t mean that, master, don’t be angry. I just lost my focus just now.” Nian Ruting became gentle and obedient again, “The master is right, this is the safest way.”

Shaoyao looked at the dark sky outside, “I am going to investigate Marquis Zhong Xin’s Mansion, and we will take action tomorrow night.”

“Let me go with master,” Nian Ruting said, “If there is no obstacle, there is still time to take action tonight. We cannot afford to delay.”

“Okay.” Shaoyao finished speaking and put on a ghost mask.

Nian Ruting also put on a mask, but hers was much nicer. A drop of “tear mole” was inlaid with a red gemstone at the corner of her eyes.

The master and disciple duo left the Nian Mansion where they had been hiding, and the mansion once again plunged into darkness.

After midnight, Marquis Zhong Xin’s Mansion was quiet.

When Shaoyao and her disciple Nian Ruting sneaked in from the backdoor, they overheard two old maidservants talking in a low voice, “Tomorrow the old lady is going to Huguo Temple to fulfill her vows”, “Since the birth of the young master, the old lady is happy, and our monthly income has increased”, “The master has gone to war again, who knows when he will be back”...

Shaoyao pulled Nian Ruting, hid in a dark corner, listened for a while, and then left with Nian Ruting.

When they stopped in the dark alley, Nian Ruting was puzzled, “Master, are we not taking action tonight?”

“We are not familiar with Marquis Zhong Xin’s Mansion, we don’t even know which room the old lady lives in, or how many people are with her. What if Xing Ji really arranged a master to protect her mother? We will wait for an opportunity to take action on her way to Huguo Temple tomorrow.” Shaoyao said.

Today, Lin Xueqing went to Huguo Temple with Old Lady Xing to fulfill their vows together.

“Are you sure you don’t need me to accompany you?” Xing Yusheng asked, holding Lin Xueqing’s hand.

Lin Xueqing shook her head with a smile, “You stay at home and watch the children. Weren’t you going to learn from Gu Ling? Try it today.” Her milk was insufficient, so she had hired a wet nurse, thus leaving for half a day shouldn’t be a problem.

“Alright then.” Xing Yusheng nodded, “Come back early.”

After arranging the carriage and guards, the Old Lady Xing left for Huguo Temple with Lin Xueqing.

It was just past the first month of the lunar year, and the weather was still cold.

The carriage passed through the bustling market, Lin Xueqing lifted the curtain to look outside. The Old Lady Xing didn’t stop her, only reminding her after a while to close the curtain, so she wouldn’t be too cold.

Lin Xueqing sighed, “Before giving birth, I felt it was too hard and never wanted to do it again. Now every time I see Nuannuan, both my husband and I want to have another daughter!”

Old Lady Xing chuckled, her mouth could not close, “Nuannuan is so adorable that I really want to take her back to our house.”

The grandmother and granddaughter sat together talking warmly, unaware that they were being watched in the shadows.

The carriage stopped at the foot of the mountain where Huguo Temple was located. Lin Xueqing got off first, then helped Old Lady Xing down.

Although the temperature was low, today was a sunny day, and it didn’t feel cold when walking in the sunlight.

Lin Xueqing supported Old Lady Xing to slowly climb the stairs, with the servants and guards following behind them. Although Old Lady Xing could have used a sedan chair, she insisted on walking by herself after recuperating her health under Su Liang’s guidance in the past two years.

The winding stone path was lined with dense woods consisting mostly of pines and cypresses. The dark green color resembled a giant screen without any new buds yet.

Shaoyao first followed the carriage secretly, then sped up to the mountain and found Nian Ruting, who had been ambushing at the predetermined bend of the mountain road earlier. She was dressed in plain clothes and disguised as a woman going to worship with incense. It was broad daylight and impossible to wear a mask, so Nian Ruting disguised her appearance, which resembled Nian Ruxue’s face. Anyone familiar with Nian Ruxue would recognize her at first glance.

Shaoyao signaled Nian Ruting that they were coming, and to get ready.

To avoid accidents, they agreed not to harm or kill anyone if possible, mainly because they were afraid they would not be able to leave after the hostage exchange.

Although Shaoyao used to be a secret guard trained by Duanmu Yi and had high martial arts skills, she was very clear that she was no match for Gu Ling. The Su Mansion was now filled with hidden talents, and she cherished her life. Her purpose was not to assassinate anyone, so she didn't want to cause trouble and acted very cautiously.

The sound of Lin Xueqing and Old Lady Xing talking came over.

"Grandmother, are you tired? Let's take a rest at the stone platform ahead."

"We've been walking so slowly and stopping often; there's no need for a special rest."

Nian Ruting's eyes focused, and she gripped her dagger through her sleeve.

Peering through the gaps in the pine needles, Nian Ruting saw a figure approaching the planned location. She felt Shaoyao gently push her left shoulder, and she sprang out of her hiding place!

Lin Xueqing was daydreaming about taking her son and Gu Xiaonuan to climb mountains when they grew up, when she suddenly saw a figure flash out from the woods through the corner of her eye. She froze for a moment, then instinctively shielded Xing Laotaijun behind her.

Everything happened very quickly.

Nian Ruting appeared suddenly, and by the time the guards reacted, she was already in front of Lin Xueqing.

Lin Xueqing was not familiar with Nian Ruxue, so the disguised Nian Ruting's appearance did not immediately give her any special feelings. At this moment, all Lin Xueqing could think of were the self-defense techniques Su Liang had taught her.

She had not exercised for a long time due to her pregnancy and postpartum period, but after recovering, she thought she had gained weight and had flesh around her waist. Recently, she started training again and reviewed those self-defense techniques.

As a woman, I shouldn't go for the lower body... Lin Xueqing quickly analyzed in her mind, and her body naturally responded. Nian Ruting temporarily changed her plan to grab Lin Xueqing when she found Xing Laotaijun pushed away but did not expect Lin Xueqing to bend down and evade her control. Then, Lin Xueqing aimed her two fingers at Nian Ruting's right eye and ruthlessly stabbed into it!

She had practiced this move many times before, but it was always just simulation. This was the first time Lin Xueqing really used it, with Su Liang's serious teachings in mind: Be fast! Be fierce! Be accurate! Don't be afraid!

The sickening and chilling sensation of her fingers in the eye disgusts her, but she had no time to care; Lin Xueqing heard Nian Ruting's screams and Xing Laotaijun's gasps, the guards' swords arrived next to her, she instinctively withdrew her hand and quickly retreated, just in time to avoid the dagger Nian Ruting had stabbed at her.

In a split second, Xing Laotaijun's face turned pale. Watching Lin Xueqing run up to her with blood-stained hands, the gentle and adorable image of her daughter-in-law suddenly grew incredibly tall in her eyes.

Nian Ruting was surrounded and attacked by four guards. With her injured eye, her strength was greatly reduced, and she had lost her reason.

Just as Lin Xueqing reached Xing Laotaijun, grasped her hand, and breathed a sigh of relief, another shadow appeared ghostly behind them, grabbed Xing Laotaijun's arm, and dragged her back.

"Grandmother!" Lin Xueqing's face changed drastically.

Seeing this, the guards abandoned Nian Ruting to save Xing Laotaijun, but it was already too late.

Shaoyao dragged Xing Laotaijun into the dense forest, quickly disappearing from sight.

Nian Ruting did get a chance to escape, but because she had become blind in one eye, she panicked and took the wrong path, running through the woods only to find herself facing a cliff at the other side.

Nian Ruting walked to the edge of the cliff, shrank back, then retreated and ran in another direction. Blood from her eye flowed down her cheeks and chin, splattering on the ground.

When Su Liang received the news, he was practicing with his sword by the lake. Gu Ling, Gu Xiaonuan, and Zhengzheng were playing in the pavilion not far away.

Qi Yan rushed over with an ugly face, saying that Xing Laotaijun and Lin Xueqing had encountered assassins on their way to Huguo Temple, and Xing Laotaijun had been taken away.

"Is Xueqing okay?" Su Liang's face darkened.

Qi Yan shook his head, "Madam is fine. General Lin has already led the soldiers to search the mountain and told me to hand this over to the Master."

Su Liang took the piece of paper handed over by Qi Yan, which had been pressed by a stone, found by Lin Xueqing at Nian Ruting's hidden location, and was part of Shaoyao and her apprentice's plan.

But at this moment, Su Liang still did not know the identity of the enemy. The paper only read, "Tonight, at midnight, by the river outside the city, exchange Mu Family's secret scroll for Xing Laotaijun."

Gu Ling came over, looked at the paper, and upon seeing the words "secret scroll," he said coldly, "Situ Xie's people."

He was the only one they knew to be most interested in the secret scroll and knew they had the scroll in their hands.

As Su Liang had to feed Gu Xiaonuan later and couldn't leave for a while, he asked Gu Ling to check on the situation.

When Gu Ling saw Lin Xueqing, she had already returned to the Marquis Zhong Xin's mansion, her eyes red and her hands still stained with blood.

“Brother...” Lin Xueqing choked up and told Gu Ling the details of what happened.

“Now that I think about it, that woman looked a bit like Nian Ruxue,” Lin Xueqing said solemnly.

“Did she say anything?” Gu Ling asked.

Lin Xueqing shook her head and then remembered, “Her voice was quite hoarse.”

“I’ll go check on the situation at the Huguo Temple. They have a purpose and won’t harm your grandmother,” Gu Ling told Xing Yusheng.

“What do they want?” Xing Yusheng asked with a frown.

Gu Ling’s face was calm, “I’ll give it to them.”

When they arrived at the scene, Gu Ling saw Lin Bojun. His soldiers were searching for bloodstains and footprints in the mountains.

Gu Ling didn’t find any other useful clues, and went to the palace after coming down the mountain.

Duanmu Chen had already received the report and immediately asked about the situation when he saw Gu Ling.

After listening, Duanmu Chen sighed, “I never thought that Madam Xing would be so bold.” If it wasn’t for Lin Xueqing blinding the eyes of the person trying to capture her, the outcome wouldn’t have been like this. At present, they could not confirm whether the target was Lin Xueqing or Old Madam Xing, but in any case, her counterattack was meaningful.

Gu Ling did not explain that it was Su Liang who taught her. He just said that he wanted to see Duanmu Yi.

Duanmu Chen was puzzled. Gu Ling said that one of the assassins looked somewhat similar to Nian Ruxue.

Duanmu Chen was stunned, “Is she still alive?” He had almost forgotten about that incompetent and hypocritical fake talented woman.

“I think it’s Nian Ruting,” Gu Ling said.

If it were really Nian Ruxue, she would have disguised herself so that Lin Xueqing couldn’t recognize her, and if she didn’t disguise, it wouldn’t just be “somewhat similar.”

Gu Ling thought of Nian Ruting. They thought Nian Ruting was dead, but they didn’t see her die, they just heard. And Nian Ruting’s vocal cords were injured, making her voice hoarse.

Duanmu Chen finally understood why Gu Ling wanted to see Duanmu Yi.

Together, the two found Duanmu Yi, who was sunbathing in the Imperial Garden. He didn’t have a good expression when he saw Gu Ling, and even ignored Duanmu Chen.

“Who did Father Emperor order to execute Nian Ruting at that time?” Duanmu Chen got straight to the point.

Duanmu Yi didn’t speak, but his eyebrows furrowed.

“Father Emperor, this matter is very important.” Duanmu Chen said again.

A moment later, Duanmu Yi said only two words, “Shaoyao.”

And Shaoyao was a traitor.

“Damn it, that bitch might be really alive. If it’s Shaoyao and Nian Ruting, it seems that they are loyal to Situ Xie now.” Duanmu Chen really believed in Gu Ling’s intuition.

When Su Liang learned of Gu Ling’s speculation, he couldn’t help but sigh, “If it’s really Nian Ruting, she has a big life.”

“Who’s Nian Ruting?” Zhengzheng asked curiously.

Su Liang looked at Zhengzheng and began to wonder if the assassination on the Lantern Festival day was also done by Shaoyao and Nian Ruting.

Gu Ling had the same feeling.

As for the secret scroll, Gu Ling said he would give it, but it was one that he had “copied” in half a day. Outsiders couldn’t see any problems, and insiders would have a hard time understanding, but he had altered key parts, making it impossible to make real mechanisms and weapons.

It was getting dark, and there was still no news from Lin Bojun’s side. Su Liang thought that Nian Ruting must have escaped by now.

“I thought Master wouldn’t save me.” Nian Ruting’s voice was hoarse, half of her face covered with dried bloodstains. Her right eye was wrapped with cloth, sprinkled with hemostatic powder. The eyeball was broken, and there was no need for medical treatment.

She was almost captured, but Shaoyao turned back and rescued her.

Shaoyao sighed, “I only have you as my disciple now. Tonight, we will proceed according to the original plan, you in the open, me in the shadows.”

Angry, Nian Ruting didn’t hear clearly what Shaoyao said. She gritted her teeth and said, “That Lin Xueqing, I will definitely gouge out her eyes and crush them!”

Shaoyao sighed, “After the mission is completed, I will help you with your revenge.” But what she was thinking was, this fool is still useful as a shield, and she will continue to push her out tonight. The secret scroll must be obtained, whether she lives or dies...

Chapter 383: 383. Send back to Heavenly Prison

Old Mu was very angry about the turmoil caused by the secret scroll again, and he angrily scolded Situ Xie for his foolish wishful thinking.

Old Mu’s disciple, Mu Yu, had joined the Ministry of Industry as a craftsman last year upon Su Liang’s recommendation. Then, he was reassigned to a secret foundry a few months ago, and he has

not been back ever since. Shaoyao had wanted to catch Mu Yu and inquire about the exact news of the secret scroll upon her arrival in the capital city, but unfortunately, she could not find him.

That secret scroll had been passed on to Gu Ling, who had already studied it thoroughly. He found that most of the weapons recorded in it were complicated in structure but limited in power. Therefore, after communicating with Duanmu Chen, he did not put too much effort into making the weapons from the secret scroll.

However, Situ Xie was still unaware of the inside story and planned to wage war against Qian Country. He was not yet ready to give up on obtaining the secret scroll.

In the end, Old Mu accompanied Gu Ling to the riverside for the appointment and rescued Madam Xing. While Gu Ling was away, Cen Man would stay at Yuanming Pavilion with Su Liang and the child.

When it was time to leave, Gu Ling wrapped the fake secret scroll in a cloth and put it in his arms. He bent down and gently kissed Gu Xiaonuan's forehead, then kissed Su Liang. Patted the quilt, "Sleep for a while, I'll call you when I get back."

Su Liang shook her head and picked up a book from the pillow, "You go, be careful. I'll wait for you."

Gu Ling's eyes warmed, pinched Su Liang's cheek, and didn't say anything before going downstairs.

By coincidence, Cen Man came over and saw Gu Ling coming downstairs. She then reminded him, "Safety should always come first, don't be impulsive." Although she knew it was a cliché, Gu Ling has always been cautious.

Gu Ling nodded lightly, watching Cen Man going upstairs, he went out, and Old Mu, who was waiting outside, had turned around for several rounds already, "Hurry up, hurry up!"

At this time, in the dense forest by the riverside, Shaoyao and Nian Ruting were talking. At their feet was a hemp bag, containing the unconscious Madam Xing.

"You take her on the boat and go exchange for the secret scroll. Once you get the secret scroll, make sure there's no problem, throw the hemp bag into the water and leave. I will protect you from the shadows." Shaoyao explained her detailed plan.

Nian Ruting frowned, "How can I confirm that the secret scroll is genuine?"

Shaoyao took out a half-secret scroll and a night pearl for Nian Ruting, "This is the real part of the secret scroll. At that time, you can examine it, and if it matches completely with this, then it is genuine."

Nian Ruting flipped through the incomplete half of the secret scroll by the light of the night pearl, not understanding what the drawings were about. She had difficulty adapting to the vision of a one-eyed monster at that moment. Her vision of things flashed between blurry and clear, requiring her to adjust the angle and concentrate on it specially.

“Put it away. They’re coming soon.” Shaoyao looked up at the crescent moon in the night sky. “Don’t panic when the time comes. You have a hostage in your hands. I will protect you from the dark. Verify the secret scroll carefully before letting go.”

Nian Ruting silently stuffed half of the secret scroll into her sleeve and said, “Okay.” After her words fell, she added, “I will follow Master’s instructions fully.”

Shaoyao gently patted Nian Ruting’s shoulder, speaking in a gentle tone, “Don’t worry, everything will be fine. Once the mission is successful tonight, I will take revenge for you by gouging out Lin Xueqing’s eyeballs tomorrow. When we return to Liang Country, I will report your merits to the Master, and I will also ask a famous doctor to treat you. There might still be hope. As for Gu Ling, whom you want to get, only by helping our Master achieve his great cause can we possibly make him bow his head. Do you understand?”

Nian Ruting looked at Shaoyao with her only remaining eye, her gaze serious and submissive, “Thank you, Master. If that’s the case, it would be great!”

“Go.” Shaoyao pushed Nian Ruting gently again. Whenever she needed Nian Ruting to do something, she always liked to make this gesture, as if Nian Ruting was her child and she was encouraging her to do something.

Nian Ruting bent down, picked up the hemp bag on the ground, but after taking two steps, she bumped into a tree. She fell to the ground, the hemp bag landing on top of her, and let out a muffled groan.

Shaoyao frowned but still came forward quickly, removing the hemp bag before helping Nian Ruting up, “Are you alright?”

Nian Ruting’s forehead had turned red from the collision. She pursed her lips, speaking bitterly, “Master, it’s too dark in the forest. I can’t see anything.”

Although the sound of flowing water could be heard from their location not too far from the riverside, the river was not visible, and they would have to move to the edge of the forest for a more unobstructed view.

Shaoyao looked impatient, but her tone was still tolerable, “You sustained an injury today and haven’t yet gotten used to it. I will take you to the edge of the woods. They will be here soon.”

As she finished speaking, Shaoyao picked up the burlap sack off the floor, and Nian Ruting gently held onto Shaoyao’s arm, letting her lead them outside.

Along the way, Shaoyao sighed, “You’re injured, so I shouldn’t have let you take any risks. But you know how dangerous Gu Ling and Su Liang’s group are, so we must be extremely cautious, plan carefully, and not expose ourselves to them all at once. I can only protect you from the shadows.”

“Yes, I understand.” Nian Ruting replied. Her steps were quick and small, like a blind person guided by Shaoyao.

The light gradually became less dim, and the sound of the river seemed closer and clearer.

A few more steps, and they would be out of the forest and by the river.

“Master, I’m feeling better now.” Nian Ruting let go of Shaoyao’s arm when she stopped and reached out with both hands to take the burlap sack.

Shaoyao handed over the burlap sack while keeping an eye on the activity by the river, fearing that any misstep could cause accidents.

The next moment, Nian Ruting, under the cover of darkness and the burlap sack, thrust two sharp knives directly upwards from both sides of Shaoyao’s ribcage, aiming for her heart!

Nian Ruting’s move was fast, so fast that Shaoyao, who was unguarded and distracted by monitoring the surroundings, only reacted when the knife tips had pierced her heart.

“You...” Shaoyao’s mind went blank for a moment, her eyes bulging as she looked at Nian Ruting. She reached out to kill her, but her body involuntarily fell backward.

At this point, the burlap sack, which had just been released, landed on Shaoyao’s body, cushioning the fall and rolling to the side.

As if hearing movement from the riverbank, Nian Ruting’s eyes narrowed, and she strode forward, raising the blood-stained knives again to brutally stab Shaoyao’s neck from both sides of her collarbone!

With this final blow, Shaoyao, who had already been spewing blood due to the heart injury, took her last breath, not even having a chance to hear Nian Ruting’s explanation for her actions.

Nian Ruting did explain after confirming Shaoyao had stopped breathing. She pulled out the knives, looked at Shaoyao’s horrified dead face, and sneered, “In my whole life, I’ve always been used by others. I know all too well what you wanted to do. Your performance tonight and the words you said, you were like my dear sister, Nian Ruxue. But this time, you are my pawn.”

With that said, Nian Ruting stood up, threw the knives on the ground, walked over, and untied the burlap sack.

Mrs. Xing still lay there with her eyes closed, and Nian Ruting checked her breath, finding her alive and breathing steadily.

Nian Ruting tore off the burlap sack, then gripped Mrs. Xing’s arm, hoisting her onto her back, and walked steadily out of the forest.

Gu Ling stood by the river, looking at a small boat on the shore without seeing Shaoyao and Nian Ruting approaching, nor searching for them.

Gu Ling looked up at the crescent moon in the night sky, thinking of his cherished daughter, whose eyes would curve when she smiled, and wished to quickly finish the task and return home.

As for the goal tonight, it was to safely rescue Mrs. Xing, and whether or not they could kill Shaoyao and Nian Ruting was secondary. To be safe, if they couldn’t be killed, allowing them to bring the fake secret scroll back to Situ Xie would still be a good outcome.

As Elder Mu hid in the shadows and sensed that something was off, he saw someone emerge from the forest near the small boat!

Gu Ling saw it too.

At the same time, Nian Ruting saw him, “Gu Ling, is that you?”

Gu Ling didn’t answer but became more certain that it was Nian Ruting. Her voice couldn’t be disguised.

“I saved Mrs. Xing. It was all Shaoyao’s doing; I was controlled by her for a long time, but I killed her just now.” Nian Ruting, still at a distance from Gu Ling, spoke loudly, sounding almost breathless as if her throat was being squeezed.

Old Mu was stunned, and Gu Ling still stood calmly in place, watching Nian Ruting approach, carrying someone on her back. It could be Madam Xing or someone disguised as Shaoyao.

It should be Madam Xing... Gu Ling thought, trying to guess what had happened to lead to this unexpected outcome.

Old Mu, hiding in the shadows, frowned upon hearing Nian Ruting’s words and saw her approaching Gu Ling. Gu Ling did not move, so he hesitated for a moment, then stepped out and stood in front of Gu Ling, staring coldly at Nian Ruting. “Put the person on your back down! Step back!”

“Alright.” Nian Ruting agreed, slowly putting down Madam Xing and letting her lie on the ground. Then, she stepped back carefully.

Old Mu turned his head and asked Gu Ling, “Shall I check her?”

Gu Ling walked forward, “I will.”

Old Mu stayed in place, watching Nian Ruting’s actions closely. Seeing that her gaze remained on Gu Ling, he snorted coldly, sensing that she still harbored a devious affection for Gu Ling.

Soon, Gu Ling confirmed that it was indeed Madam Xing. He first checked her breathing, then her pulse, before saying, “Madam Xing, it’s Gu Ling.”

Madam Xing slowly opened her eyes, looking at Gu Ling with a slightly excited expression. Her first question was, “Is Qingqing alright?”

Gu Ling nodded, “She’s fine. At home. I’ll take you back.” Saying that, he helped Madam Xing up and carried her on his back.

Seeing Gu Ling’s intention to leave, Nian Ruting’s expression turned anxious, and she walked forward two steps, immediately being stopped by Old Mu’s shout, “Stay where you are! Don’t move!”

Gu Ling didn’t look at Nian Ruting, and when Old Mu asked what to do next, he whispered, “I’ll go back first. Master, you capture her and send her to the Heavenly Prison, reporting that she’s a previous escaped convict.”

Old Mu hesitated for a moment, “She said...” Though Old Mu hated Nian Ruting, the full course of events for tonight remained unclear. According to Nian Ruting’s story, she killed Shaoyao and saved Madam Xing. Even if she didn’t save her, Gu Ling would have found a way.

Gu Ling said nothing more, and quickly left carrying Madam Xing on his back.

Nian Ruting’s fists clenched, then loosened, her eyes warily watching Old Mu as he approached her.

“My disciple will take that old lady back first,” said Old Mu politely, “Let’s check Shaoyao’s corpse first, then we’ll go back together.”

“Go back?” Nian Ruting’s expression brightened, “You mean to the Gu Family?”

Old Mu shook his head, “The Su Family.”

Nian Ruting turned and walked towards the small boat, “Senior, follow me.”

After dragging Shaoyao’s body out of the forest, Old Mu examined the wounds and asked Nian Ruting how she found the opportunity to kill her.

Nian Ruting took a deep breath, “When the Emperor ordered Shaoyao to kill me, I thought she took pity on me and spared my life, even taking me as a disciple. But it turned out, she just wanted me to be her servant, pushing me to my death when needed. To save my own life, I had no choice but to submit to her. Previously, Shaoyao sent someone to kidnap the young master of the Wan Family, and I only learned about it after the fact. I originally planned to explain to Miss Lin on the mountain yesterday and help them deal with Shaoyao. Instead, Miss Lin thought I was trying to kill her... Tonight, Shaoyao forced me to use Madam Xing as a hostage to exchange for the secret scroll, instructing me to push Madam Xing into the river after verifying the scroll.”

As she spoke, Nian Ruting took out half of the secret scroll Shaoyao had given her and handed it to Old Mu.

Old Mu was all too familiar with it, it was his possession, which had fallen into Situ Xie’s hands after passing through Mu Yu.

“I knew this was my last chance, and I didn’t want to hurt Madam Xing, so I set up a trap and seized the opportunity to ambush and kill Shaoyao,” said Nian Ruting solemnly. “Regardless of what you’ve heard, I was forced into all of this. My sister heartlessly used me, dragging me into the abyss, and when I tried to climb out, I was held back... Now, I only want to atone for my sins and ask for a chance to start over. With my current appearance, how could I dare to think about Gu Ling?”

Old Mu listened as she spoke and felt something was off with the last part: If she hadn’t blinded herself and destroyed her beauty, would she still feel entitled to think about Gu Ling? Wasn’t the key point that Gu Ling and Su Liang were already happily married?

In the deep night in the secluded forest, Nian Ruting spoke of her shattered life in a broken voice, evoking pity.

However, Old Mu didn’t feel anything. He only remembered that Gu Ling said to capture this woman and send her to the Heavenly Prison.

Old Mu admitted that he didn’t know Nian Ruting well and was even more aware of the truth that faces can be deceiving. But he didn’t show any sign of that, and just said that Shaoyao’s corpse should be taken back as well.

“I’ll do it.” Nian Ruting volunteered.

As Nian Ruting bent down to pull Shaoyao’s corpse, Old Mu struck her neck with a palm from behind, knocking her unconscious!

He then sent the unconscious Nian Ruting to Heavenly Prison, declaring himself as Marquis Chang Xin Gu Ling's master and captured a former fugitive.

It was well-known that Marquis Chang Xin and his wife were the most trusted people of the emperor. Even if they casually captured someone and sent them to Heavenly Prison, the prison would accept them without question.

Moreover, once they learned Nian Ruting's name, the official on duty in Heavenly Prison immediately confirmed that she was indeed a fugitive.

The matter dates back to when Nian Ruting was imprisoned in the Heavenly Prison due to cheating in the Military Exam. Su Liang asked Yan Shiba for help to save Nian Jincheng. At that time, Nian Ruting was also taken out of the death row, and after the incident, she should have been killed, but Yan Shiqi spared her life.

Thus, Nian Jincheng had been exonerated, but Nian Ruting was still recorded as a death-row escapee in the Heavenly Prison.

Afterwards, Old Mu went back to the river to bring Shaoyao's corpse to Su Mansion.

After sending Old Madam Xing back to Marquis Zhong Xin Mansion, Gu Ling went straight home, and Cen Man left Yuanming Pavilion after seeing his return.

"How did it go?" Su Liang inquired.

Gu Ling took off his coat, sat down by the bed, and briefly explained the situation to Su Liang.

This was beyond Su Liang's expectations. "Nian Ruting killed Shaoyao? Is she planning to change her evil ways and get closer to you, or is she just trying to take this opportunity?"

It wasn't that Su Liang was maliciously guessing, but Nian Ruting had always acted abnormally, especially her obsession with Gu Ling, which had reached the level of madness. Moreover, her character was problematic. To achieve her goals, she lacked moral and ethical boundaries.

If she didn't want to work with Shaoyao, why didn't she flee earlier, especially since she had the ability to counterattack and kill Shaoyao? Furthermore, it was impossible for Shaoyao to keep an eye on her all the time.

Regarding what happened at Huguo Temple during the day, if she genuinely wanted to repent and stop Shaoyao, why didn't she speak up at that time?

First, help Shaoyao capture the person in question, then find an opportunity to kill Shaoyao, run to Gu Ling and claim she saved them? Anyway, Shaoyao was dead, so whatever Nian Ruting said about the prior events would be taken as truth.

Gu Ling had an indifferent expression. "No need to worry about what she's thinking."

Su Liang nodded. "It's good that she's sent to Heavenly Prison. That's where she belongs."

Back to square one. As a person with normal intelligence, Nian Ruting had willingly cheated for Nian Ruxue in the Military Exam. As for being manipulated, it was only because Nian Ruxue deceived Nian Ruting and never planned to fulfill her promises. It wasn't that Nian Ruting didn't know she was engaging in illegal and immoral activities.

According to the laws of Qian Country, both Nian Ruxue and Nian Ruting were undoubtedly guilty.

Old Mu returned to Su Liang, went outside Yuanming Pavilion, saw the lights were out, threw Shaoyao's corpse there, and left.

However, when Old Mu was about to sleep, he suddenly sat up, ran out to Yuanming Pavilion, dragged Shaoyao's corpse away, and threw it into an empty courtyard. After finishing, he went back, muttering to himself, "This way, sweet Nuannuan won't be frightened by the dirty thing."

Chapter 384: 384. First teach him how to make a fire

Early in the morning, Su Liang recalled last night's events and wanted to ask Lao Mu what had happened after Gu Ling left.

Lao Mu took the initiative to come over, without even looking at Su Liang and Gu Ling, went straight to the crib with a big smile on his face, and his voice was upbeat, "Nuannuan, master is here!"

Su Liang watched Lao Mu pick up Nuannuan, raise her high, and spin around, having a great time.

It wasn't until Nuannuan wailed and was taken away by Gu Ling to change her diaper that Lao Mu remembered he was here to discuss serious matters with Su Liang.

"I brought back Shaoyao's corpse," Lao Mu said. "I didn't think too much last night, but when I woke up this morning, I realized that Nian Ruting could have just stabbed her twice, but the additional two stabs seemed like it was meant to silence her."

After the successful sneak attack, Nian Ruting had completely controlled the situation, and Shaoyao was injured and unable to counterattack or escape.

Nian Ruting plunging the knife through Shaoyao's neck was the fatal blow. If she was innocent, why was she so eager to kill Shaoyao?

Hearing this, Su Liang felt that she and Gu Ling were right in their suspicions. Nian Ruting tried to use the rescue of Grandma Xing by killing Shaoyao to clear her own name. After all the previous events, Nian Ruting finally realized where Su Liang and Gu Ling's real "weakness" lay.

Whether or not she was really being controlled by Shaoyao, at least this time, from the outcome, it was clear that Nian Ruting had calculated against Shaoyao.

After hearing Lao Mu's detailed account of Nian Ruting's behavior and her words, Su Liang shook her head, "A poor performance."

"Will you go to Heavenly Prison to interrogate her again? Maybe she knows some useful information," Lao Mu was still cautious.

Su Liang nodded, "I have been meaning to."

Nian Ruting had been calculating last night, and now that her face has been exposed, she can finally be forced to tell the truth. Since she followed Shaoyao and cast her lot with Situ Xie, she might be aware of some of Situ Xie's secret plans.

Su Liang didn't expect Situ Xie to send people to steal the secret scroll at this time. What they had originally guarded against was that Situ Xie would send assassins. They were the biggest obstacles for Situ Xie's upcoming great plans.

It was already February, and next month, it was the time for Situ Xie and Ji Yuebai's "agreed" alliance to attack Qian Country.

Su Liang asked Gu Ling, "Do you want to go, or should I?"

Gu Ling, avoiding Lao Mu's reaching hand and turning a circle, handed Nuannuan to Lao Mu.

Lao Mu was delighted, and Nuannuan laughed.

Su Liang:... How adorable this childish Great God is! Gu Xiaonuan really loved spinning around, laughing nonstop as she twirled.

Today was a sunny day. Hearing Zhengzheng calling for Nuannuan from outside, Lao Mu went downstairs with Nuannuan.

Gu Ling sat down and answered Su Liang's question, "You go." He was extremely disgusted by people like Nian Ruting who went mad for so-called love, and didn't want to see her again.

"Okay," Su Liang nodded, "It's hard to say who among us would make her more upset."

When Su Liang was ready and leaving the mansion with Qi Yan, Gu Ling was already fishing by the lake. Nuannuan was in the pavilion on the opposite shore, where he could see her at any time.

Before the morning court session in the palace, Duanmu Chen received a report that the Heavenly Prison death-row prisoner, Nian Ruting, who had been abducted earlier, was captured by Marquis Chang Xin's master last night and returned to the Heavenly Prison.

Duanmu Chen saw Gu Ling yesterday, not surprisingly, but was curious about what had happened in between.

Su Liang took out the token given by Duanmu Chen and smoothly entered the Heavenly Prison.

It was in the death-row cell at the deepest part of the Heavenly Prison that Su Liang finally saw Nian Ruting.

Nian Ruting had woken up just after midnight after being locked up in Heavenly Prison, then madly screamed and yelled until daybreak before stopping, because her originally damaged throat could hardly make any sound.

The officer who brought Su Liang to the prison cell left after opening the door.

Nian Ruting was tied to a Zhuzi with iron chains. She hadn't been tortured, but her hair was disheveled, and her injured eyes were bleeding again, drawing several red lines on her face. One red line twisted across her nose bridge, making it seem as if her entire face had cracks.

Su Liang stopped one meter away and Qi Yan spoke, "Nian Ruting, my wife has come to see you!"

My wife is definitely something Qi Yan said deliberately after understanding the relationship between Nian Ruting and Gu Ling.

Nian Ruting was conscious, and after hearing Qi Yan's words, she slowly raised her head after a moment. Her remaining eye was covered by her hair, so she twisted her neck and shook her head to see a figure that was both familiar and unfamiliar to her.

Unfamiliar, because Nian Ruting and Su Liang had few past interactions. They met during the Military Exam, and the only time they met in person was when Nian Ruting's identity was exposed and she was locked up in prison, while Su Liang simultaneously earned the greatest glory in the Military Exam with her real ability.

Familiar, because during the days and nights after Gu Ling reclaimed her identity and had interactions with Su Liang, Nian Ruting always mentioned this name with jealousy and unwillingness. As her life kept falling into despair, Su Liang's life took the opposite trajectory – she kept climbing higher and living better.

“You... came... to... laugh at me...” Nian Ruting's voice was hoarse, almost unrecognizable.

But standing close, Su Liang knew what she was saying, and then replied, “Yes. It's quite funny.”

Qi Yan turned his head away to keep from laughing.

Nian Ruting didn't laugh, but shook with anger, “You... bitch... it's you... you stole everything from me!”

Su Liang replied indifferently, “Are you referring to... things like luck? If you insist on discussing such a mysterious matter, I could only say your luck was stolen by Nian Ruxue. Even if I hadn't received the Martial Arts Champion title, it wouldn't have been yours, but possibly Nian Ruxue's. Including the position of being engaged to my husband, that was hers too. If you think these should originally belong to you, I won't deny it, but the former was something you willingly gave up. Have you ever thought that it was your own foolishness that destroyed your life? Of course, I'm not saying you're kind either, as you seemingly lack that as well.”

Qi Yan silently gave Su Liang a thumbs-up: So reasonable! So satisfying! This is how you should deal with such people! It's not even scolding, it's just the iron truth!

Nian Ruting spat out a mouthful of blood in a rage.

Su Liang stepped back to dodge it, “I have a few questions for you.”

Nian Ruting suddenly laughed, her blind eye, the “red lines” on her face, and her disheveled hair combined to form a gloomy and ghost-like face, “Let Gu Ling come to see me... if he comes, I'll speak...”

Su Liang shook her head, “Impossible. My first question: you said that on the Lantern Festival night, Shaoyao sent two people to capture Zhengzheng? Why did Shaoyao later choose to capture Lady Xing?”

Nian Ruting's eyes bulged, staring at Su Liang intently, but she didn't say anything.

“The two assassins who died in the Lantern Festival night weren't strong enough to be associated with Situ Xie. Knowing Shaoyao, she wouldn't team up with such people, nor could she find a reason for their loyalty. If she really wanted to catch

Zhengzheng during the well-covered Lantern Festival, Shaoyao should have done it herself, or even asked you to help instead of those two useless people. So I guess, those two were your people, right?"

As Su Liang finished speaking, she heard Nian Ruting grinding her teeth.

"You, of course, won't admit it. But that doesn't matter anymore." Su Liang's face remained calm, "Choosing to kidnap Old Lady Xing later was your idea, wasn't it? Did you plan to kill Shaoyao afterwards to clear your name? Old Lady Xing was a good choice, relatively easy to get hold of."

"Only two questions. Second question, Situ Xie must have arranged for a master to assassinate Gu Ling. Who was it? When?" Su Liang continued to ask.

Nian Ruting laughed again, "If you want to know... kneel down and beg me, and I'll tell you."

Qi Yan frowned, "Master, do you want me to pull out all her fingernails?"

"Don't dirty your hands." Su Liang shook her head and turned around, "Let's go. She doesn't know anything. Don't waste time anymore. Gu Ling is still at home waiting for me to come back."

Su Liang once again heard Nian Ruting's teeth grinding. She walked towards the cell door, counting silently: one, two...

When Su Liang counted to three, she heard the sound of chains shaking, and Nian Ruting gritted her teeth, "I know!"

Qi Yan looked at Su Liang, but saw that Su Liang didn't stop and had already walked out of the cell.

"Come back! I'll tell you!" Nian Ruting's hoarse voice echoed through the Heavenly Prison.

Only then did Su Liang turn around and walk back, her cold eyes staring at Nian Ruting, "My patience for you is very limited. It's impossible for you to see Gu Ling. You can talk now."

"The condition is, let me go." Nian Ruting no longer mentioned seeing Gu Ling. She recalled that last night, Su Liang didn't go to the riverside, and it was Gu Ling who had let Old Mu send her to the Heavenly Prison. The most urgent task now was survival.

Su Liang's face remained expressionless, "That depends on how valuable the information you provide is."

"Situ Xie said someone wants Gu Ling alive," This was a sentence Nian Ruting had always remembered Shaoyao saying. This must be important.

Su Liang's eyes narrowed slightly, immediately thinking of the mysterious "fellow townsman" who had come to the capital city to secretly investigate them. Could it be that the mysterious "townsman" was in collusion with Situ Xie? Following that, she recalled the recent discussions

about how Yin Country's grain supplies would reach Liang Country while avoiding Qian Country's surveillance. Was there such a mythical thing as Storage Space?

If, suppose there really were other transmigrators, and there really was a Storage Space, and that person was helping Situ Xie, some things would make sense.

However, this speculation was an absolute bad news for Su Liang.

Seeing Su Liang's silence, Nian Ruting continued, "If you want to know more, let me go!"

"If I let you out now, how far can you go?" Su Liang asked coldly.

Nian Ruting gritted her teeth, "You... You swear a poisonous oath that you won't deceive me! Swear on your daughter's life!"

Upon hearing the last sentence, Qi Yan's face turned cold, and he drew his sword. How dare she try to curse his little lady! She was seeking death!

Su Liang remained silent, not getting angry, not cursing or beating Nian Ruting. She simply turned around and walked out, not stopping or looking back, no matter how Nian Ruting raged.

The prison officer locked the cell door again, and Nian Ruting's voice was completely ruined. She was screaming, but no sound could be heard.

As soon as they left the Heavenly Prison, the bright sunlight was a bit dazzling for a moment. Su Liang raised her hand to cover her forehead and walked towards the carriage.

After Su Liang got on the carriage, Qi Yan drove off back to the mansion, unable to help but ask, "Master, aren't you going to interrogate her about that matter anymore?"

Su Liang let out a slight sigh, "She's just a small minion under Shaoyao. Shaoyao still needs to find the secret scroll to prove her loyalty, but Nian Ruting is nothing to Situ Xie. What she said may not be true, but if it is, it's probably what Shaoyao told her."

If it really was as Su Liang guessed, the identity of that mysterious transmigrator must be extremely secret. How could Situ Xie possibly let servants like Shaoyao and Nian Ruting know about it casually? Su Liang even doubted whether Situ Xie really knew that person's identity and strength.

Halfway through, Su Liang asked Qi Yan to change direction. She wanted to go to the palace and talk to Duanmu Chen about the situation.

The matter about the transmigrator could never be casually disclosed to a third person. Su Liang only said that there seemed to be a mysterious power in collaboration with Situ Xie.

On hearing this, Duanmu Chen pondered, "There has always been a rumor that there is a mysterious power on the sea, very powerful."

It was a legend about the Immortal Island on the sea. Many people had heard of it, but few believed it.

Duanmu Chen was skeptical, "A few years ago, Father Emperor sent ships to investigate. Of the three ships that went out, two returned without success and one disappeared, never returning. But it could have been due to bad weather."

Su Liang shook her head, "I don't think Nian Ruting would know about everything else. His Majesty can continue interrogating her; we won't see her again."

When Nian Ruting wanted Su Liang to swear a poisonous oath with her daughter's life, she was already a dead person in Su Liang's eyes. The difference only lies in whether she dies earlier or is subjected to torture by Duanmu Chen during interrogation before dying. The latter isn't bad either. Although Su Liang tends to think that interrogation would be of no use.

"Let's interrogate her again," Duanmu Chen said.

Su Liang also had a purpose in entering the palace, suggesting that they send more troops to Xuanbei City.

Duanmu Chen frowned, "Are you sure nothing will happen in the south? You trust Ji Yuebai so much?"

"Nothing will happen for the time being. Ji Yuebai's son is going to be Gu Ling's disciple. We received a letter recently saying he would send his son to our house, and he should be arriving soon," Su Liang said.

Duanmu Chen was surprised, "Is this... sending his son as a hostage to show sincerity in cooperating?"

Su Liang smiled, "I don't know Ji Yuebai, but according to what Gu Ling said, his character should be rather quirky. I think he just simply feels that his son is mischievous and wants to send him to us for discipline, maybe to make his son a peerless master? But considering the outcome, His Majesty's opinion is not wrong."

Duanmu Chen also couldn't help laughing, "If that's the case, then I have nothing to worry about. I'll listen to you and issue a secret order as soon as possible to send more troops to the north."

When Su Liang returned home, Gu Ling had already caught two fat fish and was cooking fish soup with an apron tied around his waist.

After greeting each other, Su Liang went to feed Gu Xiaonuan first, then went to the kitchen to be Gu Ling's assistant.

After telling about her encounter with Nian Ruting, Gu Ling shared the same view as Su Liang: Nian Ruting couldn't know more, especially about the protagonist of the matter "someone wants Gu Ling alive." However, their overt and covert enemies may have joined forces.

"If there really is Storage Space, we can take it for ourselves." Gu Ling said.

Su Liang laughed, "It may not necessarily be an object. By the way, is Ji Xiaobai arriving soon? Are you going to teach him martial arts?"

Gu Ling shook his head, "There's no hurry, let's teach him how to light a fire first. In our house, if you don't work, you don't eat."

Su Liang: ...She already felt sorry for Ji Xiaobai, but she would definitely support her Great God at home...

Chapter 385: 385. This master is not too cold

Three days later, Chang'an came to inform Su Liang that Nian Ruting had died in the Heavenly Prison.

Although torture couldn't completely break her, Chang'an handed Su Liang a copy of her confession. Duanmu Chen had already seen it and believed there was nothing of value in it.

Su Liang read it from beginning to end, finding it somewhat chaotic, possibly because Nian Ruting had already been on the edge of insanity and collapse. The confession included how Shaoyao had spared her life, when they went to Liang Country as master and disciple, and the purpose of coming back to Qian Country.

However, regarding the assassination on Lantern Festival night, Nian Ruting still claimed it was done by Shaoyao and had nothing to do with her.

Nian Ruting said she knew Nian Ruxue's whereabouts and could help capture her in order to atone for her crimes with meritorious actions.

Su Liang shook his head and put down the confession. If Nian Ruting really knew where Nian Ruxue was, she would have either gone to kill her already or confessed it earlier instead of waiting until now. This was just her dying struggle.

What Su Liang was truly concerned about was the "someone" who wanted Gu Ling alive. Nian Ruting mentioned it, but she didn't give any more useful information.

Duanmu Chen didn't think too much about this either. Su Liang had told him about a mysterious force that seemed to be helping Situ Xie, and there could be many reasons for wanting Gu Ling alive. The simplest one might be that some woman was attracted to his beauty, which wasn't too strange at all.

Duanmu Chen had already issued a secret decree in accordance with Su Liang's advice three days ago, secretly sending reinforcements to Xuanbei City. Nian Jincheng and Lian Shun couldn't leave Jiaye City, as it would be too obvious, and they were definitely being watched by Situ Xie's informants. However, Ren Dong and his siblings, Bai Yang, could go. Their outstanding martial arts and assassination skills would also be useful in Xuanbei City.

One day, Zhengzheng was pushing a lovely baby carriage and playing with Gu Xiaonuan in the garden, while old Mu was shaking a rattle nearby, nodding his head with the beat and making Gu Xiaonuan laugh.

Suddenly, Zhengzheng saw someone behind a big tree not far away and immediately stopped, "Old Mu, there's someone over there!"

Amid the noise of the rattles, old Mu took a step forward and stood in front of Zhengzheng and the baby carriage, his elderly eyes narrowed, "Who's there? Show yourself!"

If it were an assassin, they wouldn't dare to break into Su Mansion during broad daylight. If it were a thief, it was even more impossible.

The next moment, two people, one old and one young, walked out from behind the big tree. They looked quite similar to the combination of old Mu and Zhengzheng.

Old Mu felt that the old man looked familiar, as if he had seen him somewhere before.

As for the kid... Old Mu's gaze lowered, and he saw a big-eyed, adorable child looking at him curiously.

The old man was Ji Yuebai's master, Lai Hong. Old Mu had indeed seen him in Su Mansion before, but only caught a glimpse of him entering Yuanming Pavilion from a distance and had never greeted him.

"We come from Yin Country," Lai Hong let go of the little boy's hand and saluted old Mu.

Old Mu was caught off guard, and the little boy slipped past him and ran over.

"Is this a little sister?" The little boy asked curiously, looking at Gu Xiaonuan in the baby carriage with sparkling eyes.

Zhengzheng frowned slightly, "Who are you? This is my little sister, not yours."

The little boy grinned, "I'm from your family!" He raised his hand to compare Zhengzheng's height, "I'm taller than you, so I'm your big brother!"

Zhengzheng looked speechless and was about to turn the baby carriage around and go back.

Old Mu had already learned the identity of these two visitors. Su Liang had mentioned that Gu Ling would have another disciple coming to live with them soon, and it must be this young prince from Yin Country, who indeed looked quite aristocratic.

Feeling a bit awkward by the conversation between the two children, Lai Hong hurriedly pulled his own disciple back, "Let's go pay our respects to your master and mistress first."

"What's his name?" Old Mu asked.

The little boy answered, "My name is Ji Tianyang! My nickname is Xiaoshu!"

Zhengzheng blinked his eyes. His name was Wan Zhengyang, and their last characters in their names were the same. But why wasn't Ji Tianyang's nickname Tiantian or Yangyang?

"Because I love to climb trees," Ji Xiaoshu explained with a grin.

Lai Hong: ... Actually, Ji Tianyang's original nickname was Jingjing, given by Ji Yuebai. During her pregnancy, Ji Tianyang was very "active", so Ji Yuebai hoped that her son would not be too disruptive after he was born. However, as soon as Ji Tianyang could walk, he would run around and try to climb trees whenever he saw them, acting like a little monkey. So they simply changed his nickname to Xiaoshu because calling him Jingjing didn't make any sense and was too comical...

Zhengzheng then asked, "Were you hiding behind the tree just now because you wanted to climb it?"

Ji Xiaoshu nodded, "That tree looked great, I wanted to climb up and take a look, but my master caught me!"

Lai Hong was genuinely embarrassed and explained that their visit was a secret, so they didn't enter through the main gate but rather the back door through the garden. They had also informed Gu Ling in a letter beforehand. Ji Xiaoshu's "tree climbing addiction" flared up, and as Lai Hong was catching him, they were spotted by Old Mu and Zhengzheng.

Old Mu laughed heartily, “Great, kids should have fun! Come to our house and play as much as you want!”

Ji Xiaoshu ran over to the baby stroller and curiously looked at it, asking Zhengzheng if he could try pushing it.

Zhengzheng was not very willing, but considering they were guests from afar, it would be impolite to refuse, so he moved aside and suggested pushing it together with Ji Xiaoshu.

The next moment, Ji Xiaoshu pushed the stroller forward, and Zhengzheng let go, falling a step behind.

“Stop!” Zhengzheng chased after him, “Give me back my sister!”

Ji Xiaoshu ran even faster, “She’s my sister!”

Gu Xiaonuan was drowsy in the stroller, not caring what the childish boys were fighting about...

Old Mu watched Ji Xiaoshu’s retreating figure, thinking that his house was about to get even livelier.

When Su Liang saw Old Mu accompanying Lai Hong to find her, she wondered, “Where’s Xiaoshu?”

From outside came Zhengzheng’s voice, “I’m one month older than you!”

Another even louder voice replied, “I’m half a head taller than you!”

Su Liang looked outside the bed, only to see Zhengzheng confronting another little boy, with Gu Xiaonuan sleeping soundly in the stroller in between them.

It seemed Ji Xiaoshu was indeed a bit taller than Zhengzheng.

Zhengzheng said solemnly, “My master said I’m the eldest disciple!”

Ji Xiaoshu smiled with raised eyebrows, “Eldest senior brother, please take care of me from now on.”

Zhengzheng was dumbfounded. Weren’t they fighting about who got to be the boss? What’s this kid’s angle?

The next moment, Ji Xiaoshu grabbed Zhengzheng’s arm, “Big brother, I’ve just arrived and don’t know anything here. You must take good care of me. Now, I’m hungry!”

The last three words were spoken emphatically and confidently.

Su Liang couldn’t help but smile. Ji Yuebai’s son was lively and clever, very cute. He had wrapped Zhengzheng around his finger right away.

However, Zhengzheng quickly recovered and told Ji Xiaoshu, “You have to listen to me then.”

Ji Xiaoshu nodded, “No problem!”

But later, countless incidents proved that Ji Xiaoshu did listen, but not completely. He let things go in one ear and out the other. It wasn’t easy being the eldest senior brother!

When Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu brought Xiaonuan back to the Yuanming Pavilion, Lai Hong, holding a teacup, coughed twice to remind Ji Xiaoshu of their agreement on the way here, to behave well.

Ji Xiaoshu then obediently walked up to Su Liang, and then, jumped into her arms and affectionately said, "Mother!"

Lai Hong: ...Now I have a feeling that once I send him away, I won't be able to take him back...

Su Liang smiled and rubbed Ji Xiaoshu's head, "Are you hungry, Xiaoshu? What do you want to eat?"

This kid had very fair skin and a lively expression, with a hint of natural cunning.

"Delicious," Ji Xiaoshu said, sniffing the aroma from Su Liang's body, and suddenly feeling a little upset, "I miss my mom."

Su Liang sighed softly. Ji Xiaoshu was the biological son of Ji Yuebai's original wife, but she passed away due to illness when Ji Xiaoshu was just three years old. The current Empress of Yin Country is not Ji Xiaoshu's mother.

Before Su Liang could console him, Ji Xiaoshu laughed again, "Where's my Master? My dad told me he's the most handsome man in the world!"

At this moment, Gu Ling appeared at the door, wearing an apron and holding a kitchen knife.

Ji Xiaoshu's eyes widened, "Ma...Master?"

"Come here," Gu Ling said indifferently.

Ji Xiaoshu immediately hid behind Su Liang, "Is Master going to chop me?"

"Come here," Gu Ling repeated.

"Go ahead, he was just cooking something delicious and forgot to put down the knife," Su Liang explained.

"Master can cook? That's amazing. Unlike my dad, who only knows how to eat." Ji Xiaoshu ran towards Gu Ling and respectfully greeted him with a bow, "Master, your disciple greets you."

"Hmm," Gu Ling nodded, and reached out. Everyone thought he was going to pat Ji Xiaoshu's head, but he instead grabbed the collar of Ji Xiaoshu's shirt, lifted him up, and walked out.

Lai Hong: ...He thought Ji Yuebai's way of raising his child was already outrageous enough, but what on earth was Gu Ling doing? Was this how they raised children in his family?

Lai Hong turned his head to look at Gu Xiaonuan in the baby carriage and noticed her appearance, his eyes immediately softened, and he smiled at Su Liang, "Your love is truly beautiful." As for Ji Xiaoshu, Lai Hong was only responsible for bringing him here. Ji Yuebai had told him to return to Yin Country immediately after he dropped off Ji Xiaoshu because he had other matters to attend to and didn't need to stay and watch over Ji Xiaoshu here.

Lai Hong felt that with Su Liang, the wife of the master, present, he could rest assured. Besides, Zhengzheng was there to be Ji Xiaoshu's playmate, a child who appeared to be well-behaved and sensible. As for letting Ji Xiaoshu learn martial arts, that was only secondary; the most important thing was for him to be happy.

Ji Yuebai now had other children, all of whom had mothers. He had mentioned before that Ji Xiaoshu liked to climb trees and hide when no one was paying attention, just to attract his attention.

However, regrettably, Ji Yuebai was an emperor, and he had too many matters and people to attend to, leaving him without enough time and energy to accompany this most cherished son of his. After Ji Xiaoshu entered the palace, Ji Yuebai found him even more unhappy. Upon receiving Gu Ling's letter stating that he agreed to accept Ji Yuebai's son as his disciple, Ji Yuebai, after much deliberation, decided to send Ji Xiaoshu to live with Gu Ling and Su Liang for a while.

It wasn't that Ji Yuebai didn't care about this son and wanted to dump him on someone else; rather, he thought that letting Ji Xiaoshu experience a change of environment and adjust his mood would be better for him, treating it like an education trip combined with a vacation. As for Gu Ling and Su Liang, Ji Yuebai completely trusted their character and admired their abilities.

Ji Yuebai had even investigated the connection between Zhengzheng and Su Liang, and thus believed that Gu Ling and Su Liang would definitely be good at dealing with children.

As for whether Ji Xiaoshu would want to return later and when he would return, Ji Yuebai planned to let him decide. If Ji Xiaoshu expressed his wish to return home, Gu Ling and Su Liang would certainly send him back.

However, Ji Yuebai certainly didn't expect that Ji Xiaoshu was now sitting properly on a small stool, helping Gu Ling start the fire.

"Master, why am I lower in seniority than Wan Zhengyang? I'm taller than him," Ji Xiaoshu asked in his not-so-well-behaved manner.

Gu Ling replied indifferently, "It's based on arrival."

"Alright. Then why can Master cook? My dad can't," Ji Xiaoshu asked.

Gu Ling responded while cutting vegetables, "Why don't you know how to cook?"

Ji Xiaoshu was taken aback, "I haven't learned."

Gu Ling replied nonchalantly, "I have learned."

Ji Xiaoshu scratched his head with the small branch in his hand, that's it?

Ji Xiaoshu's stomach growled, and he said weakly, "Master, I'm so hungry." This Master was indeed good-looking, but he was also very aloof and strict, making Ji Xiaoshu a bit afraid. He really wanted to find the sweet-smelling, gentle wife of his Master instead!

Gu Ling handed over a plate of freshly-fried steamed buns, the golden-brown crust still steaming and fragrant.

Ji Xiaoshu's eyes lit up as he stood up and dropped the branch. He reached out to grab the plate but then frowned and showed his dirty hands to Gu Ling, "Master, my hands are dirty." He seemed to be requesting to be fed.

Gu Ling placed the plate on the cutting board and continued cutting vegetables, “There’s water over there. Wash your hands yourself.”

“Oh.” Ji Xiaoshu pouted. He knew he should wash his hands, but he was too hungry and wanted to eat right away, plus he still had to tend to the fire later.

Ji Xiaoshu washed his hands, took a handkerchief from his bosom, wiped them, folded the handkerchief and placed it on a small stool, then ran over to the chopping board and picked up a hot, freshly fried dumpling, taking a bite.

It was filled with juicy meat, and the crust was crispy. Ji Xiaoshu thought it was delicious and quickly finished it, asking Gu Ling, “Master, can I have another one?”

Gu Ling shook his head, “No.”

Ji Xiaoshu immediately hung his head, silently turned and walked over to the little stool, picked up the handkerchief in his hand, sat down, and stared at the fire in the stove.

The next moment, Gu Ling walked over, told Ji Xiaoshu to get up, and move aside.

Ji Xiaoshu stood up with the stool and watched as Gu Ling picked up a pair of iron tongs, bent down and pulled a lump of charcoal out of the stove.

Ji Xiaoshu pursed his lips and kept quiet, glancing at the doorway, wanting to run out, but thinking about how Gu Ling had dragged him over with a cleaver in his hand, he worried he might get hit if he ran out...

Seeing Gu Ling crack open the charcoal, Ji Xiaoshu smelled a tempting sweet scent and couldn’t help but swallow. Was that actually something to eat?

The next moment, Gu Ling looked over, and Ji Xiaoshu immediately stood up straight.

“Come here,” Gu Ling said.

Ji Xiaoshu silently approached, and the closer he got, the more alluring the scent became.

Then, Gu Ling handed Ji Xiaoshu the roasted sweet potato he had just cracked open and placed in a small bowl.

Ji Xiaoshu’s eyes widened, was it really something to eat? He had never seen such a thing before, it was amazing that it had come out of the fire.

Ji Xiaoshu put down the stool, took the small bowl, and Gu Ling handed him a small wooden spoon with a cute little carved rabbit on the handle.

Ji Xiaoshu touched the rabbit’s ear and quickly shifted his attention to the roasted sweet potato, scooping a bit with the spoon and putting it in his mouth. The sweet potato was fragrant, tender, and melted in his mouth.

“So delicious!” Ji Xiaoshu’s eyes squinted with happiness.

This sweet potato was specially sent by Aunt Bai from Su Family Village before the Lunar New Year, and there was only one left. Gu Ling had originally planned to roast it for Su Liang, but decided to give it to Ji Xiaoshu as he had never had it before.

With only the skin of the sweet potato left in the bowl, Ji Xiaoshu placed the bowl on the chopping board, looking at the dumpling Gu Ling had not allowed him to eat a second time, feeling not so hungry now. He turned to see Gu Ling ladling something out of the pot, and smelled a different kind of fragrance.

So, when Ji Xiaoshu sat down on the small stool again, he had half a bowl of milky white fish soup in his hands.

After finishing the fish soup, Ji Xiaoshu let out a comfortable sigh, "That was so good."

Gu Ling took the bowl and asked Ji Xiaoshu, "Do you still want a dumpling?"

Ji Xiaoshu blinked and shook his head, "Nope." It turned out his master didn't let him eat a second dumpling not because he was stingy, but because there were more delicious things to eat!

"Go out and play," Gu Ling waved his hand.

Ji Xiaoshu was stunned, "Master, didn't you catch me just to make me tend the fire?" At the time, Gu Ling seemed so scary, as if he had finally caught a little child to tend the fire and wouldn't let him go.

Gu Ling tapped Ji Xiaoshu's forehead with his finger, "Didn't you say you were hungry?"

Ji Xiaoshu blinked again, "Master, you heard me telling my senior brother I was hungry and caught me to have something delicious?" He had waited for a while after coming in because... the dumplings were too hot right out of the pot? The sweet potato wasn't done roasting yet, and the fish soup hadn't finished cooking!

Gu Ling didn't answer and turned back to cutting vegetables.

Ji Xiaoshu hesitated for a moment, darted over, and hugged Gu Ling's leg from behind, before darting off and running away shouting, "Mom! Help! Master is going to hit me!"

Gu Ling: ...

Chapter 386: 386. Who is in the dominant position

As Li Hong was about to get up and leave, he heard Ji Xiaoshu's "terrified" voice and immediately frowned.

Zhengzheng shook his head, "Impossible! Master is the best, he would never hit him!"

Then, Ji Xiaoshu ran in from the door, not looking at anyone else, but only at Su Liang, "Master's wife!"

Su Liang stretched out her arms to hug the oncoming Ji Xiaoshu, and could smell the food aroma from the kitchen on his body.

"Master's wife, my master is so fierce, why don't you take my sister and move in with me?" Ji Xiaoshu snuggled against Su Liang, hugging her arm with his small head rubbing against it.

Li Hong: ... Gu Ling must not have hit Ji Xiaoshu, but he must want to do so now...

“No!” Zhengzheng answered for Su Liang, “If you want to go home, go by yourself!”

Ji Xiaoshu said with a grin, “I’ve already gone home! My dad said that from now on, I belong to my master’s wife’s family!”

Li Hong cleared his throat, “It’s time for this old man to leave.”

Ji Xiaoshu slid off the chair, ran over to hug Li Hong, and quickly let go, “Master, please leave quickly and tell my dad that when I grow up and have time, I will visit him.”

The words sounded affectionate, but not too much so.

However, Li Hong knew that Ji Xiaoshu was “retaliating” against Ji Yuebai’s parting words to let him have fun and not miss home. When Ji Xiaoshu was initially sent away by Ji Yuebai, he was somewhat sad, although he didn’t show it in front of Ji Yuebai. Later on, he discovered that the outside world was fun, and as he got farther from home, his mood improved.

“Why don’t you stay for a meal before leaving, Senior? It won’t make much difference.” Su Liang suggested. They were guests, after all, and it was dinner time.

After thinking about it, Li Hong agreed. His main purpose was to see if Gu Ling and Ji Xiaoshu could get along as master and disciple, so he could report back to Ji Yuebai.

At lunch, Li Hong was pleasantly surprised. Gu Ling’s cooking skills were so good, and it seemed that he usually cooked their meals. This was perhaps a unique talent in the world.

Ji Xiaoshu wanted to sit next to Su Liang, which was originally Gu Ling’s position.

Gu Ling glanced at him, picked him up, put him to the side, and sat down.

Su Liang couldn’t help but laugh, “Be nicer to your disciple.”

Gu Ling’s expression was indifferent, “He said I’m fierce, which means he wants me to be fierce towards him.”

Ji Xiaoshu was taken aback for a moment, wondering if that was how the logic worked...

Li Hong lowered his head to drink soup, while Zhengzheng held his bowl and giggled.

Seeing Ji Xiaoshu only eating vegetables, Li Hong picked up a steamed bun for him, thinking that he had said he was hungry earlier.

But Ji Xiaoshu refused, “You eat it, Master. My master has already given me a steamed bun, fish soup, and a delicious... What’s that sweet thing called, Master?”

Gu Ling replied, “Roasted sweet potato.”

“I also had roasted sweet potato!” Ji Xiaoshu remembered the taste, “It was so delicious!”

Li Hong then realized that Gu Ling had taken Ji Xiaoshu to the kitchen to feed him and understood why Ji Xiaoshu dared to yell out loud that Gu Ling was going to hit him. It was precisely because Ji Xiaoshu had figured out that Gu Ling was not fierce, but a kind and loving person.

This child was quite sensitive. Although he seemed lively and playful, not many people saw this side of him. He showed extraordinary closeness to both Su Liang and Gu Ling, albeit in different ways.

Ji Xiaoshu ate a little more and was full. Zhengzheng put down his chopsticks and asked Gu Ling, "Master, can I take my junior disciple upstairs to see the fun stuff?"

Gu Ling nodded, and the two youngsters raced upstairs.

"Senior Brother, what's the fun thing?"

"You'll know when you see it. I guarantee it will open your eyes!"

Li Hong was also a bit curious about what it was.

After a while, Ji Xiaoshu and Zhengzheng's voices came from upstairs.

"What is this? It's so strange!"

"Wow! It can run like a big bug!"

"There's also a jumping one!"

"Why would Master make a fake toad that can jump?"

"It's a frog!"

Lai Hong wanted to put down his chopsticks and see what was so amusing. Ji Xiaoshu was the crown prince of Yin Country and must have seen many treasures before, yet he was so surprised.

After lunch, Old Mu took Lai Hong to his place to rest.

Lai Hong reluctantly agreed, thinking that he would leave after a short rest.

Later in the afternoon, when Lai Hong prepared to leave and went to Yuanming Pavilion to bid farewell to Ji Xiaoshu, he was astonished to find him in class.

While Lai Hong was resting, Su Liang had already arranged for Ji Xiaoshu and Zhengzheng to have a nap in the study room upstairs, waiting for Lin Shuzhi to come and wake them up.

Zhengzheng was Lin Shuzhi's disciple, and in the past, he always went to Lin Shuzhi's house to write and read books. After the New Year, the lessons were changed to Lin Shuzhi coming to Su Mansion to teach Zhengzheng. The main reason was because of Gu Xiaonuan. Lin Shuzhi liked his little disciple so much that he simply wasn't busy anymore. He had classes at the Imperial College in the morning and taught Zhengzheng at Su Liang's house in the afternoon. He could also hold Gu Xiaonuan.

Today, Lin Shuzhi arrived on time, only to find that Gu Ling and Su Liang had arranged for him another little disciple.

Upon learning of Ji Xiaoshu's identity, Lin Shuzhi asked uneasily, "Does the emperor know you're hiding the Crown Prince of Yin Country at home?"

When Su Liang told him that Duanmu Chen already knew Ji Xiaoshu would come and was very pleased, Lin Shuzhi understood why, but still felt a little speechless.

However, Lin Shuzhi was no longer surprised at anything that happened to Su Liang and Gu Ling and quickly accepted the new arrangement. Teaching one or two was the same. His original plan was to set up a small school at home when his grandchildren, outer grandchild, and Gu Xiaonuan grew up a little, and he would be in charge of all their studies. The thing he liked and excelled at the most in his life was teaching and nurturing others, especially his own family.

Ji Xiaoshu and Zhengzheng were of the same age, and since he was born as a royal grandson and now the crown prince of Yin Country, he had naturally begun his enlightenment early.

Lin Shuzhi inquired and found that Ji Xiaoshu's learning progress was similar to Zhengzheng's, teaching them together was just

right, and the two could also keep each other company.

Lai Hong stood outside the window, watching Lin Shuzhi read aloud while Ji Xiaoshu and Zhengzheng listened attentively. Suddenly, Ji Xiaoshu nudged Zhengzheng with his elbow, wanting to whisper something to him, but Zhengzheng immediately gave him a serious look to show that it was not allowed.

Lin Shuzhi smiled warmly, "Xiaoshu, if you're not focused, you'll have to copy a page of characters as punishment."

"Master, I was wrong." Ji Xiaoshu blinked his big eyes and looked at Lin Shuzhi.

Lai Hong thought, this child was testing Lin Shuzhi's temper to see if he was really strict or quite relaxed. Ji Xiaoshu always did this with people he just met, including Gu Ling, who had also been carefully tested by him. The only exception was Su Liang, who was very intimate at their first meeting.

"Don't want to write more?" Lin Shuzhi asked.

Ji Xiaoshu nodded, then saw Lin Shuzhi nod too, "Fine, no penalty for copying characters, running is the punishment. Run three laps around the lake."

"Huh?" Ji Xiaoshu was dumbfounded.

Lin Shuzhi looked at the well-behaved Zhengzheng and the lively Ji Xiaoshu, thinking that they were really like Lin Boyan and Lin Bojun when they were young. Back then, Lin Bojun couldn't sit still while studying, so Lin Shuzhi asked him to practice martial arts.

Lai Hong nodded silently, thinking that this was very good indeed. He had long heard of Lin Shuzhi's great reputation, as a father and son both earning the title of Top Scholar. Having Lin Shuzhi teach Ji Xiaoshu was something Ji Yuebai couldn't even ask for. Lin Shuzhi's gentle but disciplined attitude also impressed Lai Hong.

Finally, when Lai Hong left, Ji Xiaoshu was already running around the lake, with Zhengzheng voluntarily accompanying him, and Gu Ling fishing by the lake.

Lai Hong heard Zhengzheng's joyous voice, "Xiaoshu, as soon as Master catches a fish, we'll have fried fish to eat! Master's fried fish is the best in the world!"

Lai Hong couldn't help but reveal a gratified smile, now knowing for sure that Ji Yuebai sending Ji Xiaoshu here was absolutely correct. Ji Xiaoshu had a master like a mother, a versatile and perfect

master, a younger brother to study and practice martial arts with, and his studies wouldn't fall behind, in fact, he would do even better than when he was in the Imperial Palace of Yin Country. Most importantly, Ji Xiaoshu would definitely become happier.

Lai Hong didn't say goodbye to Ji Xiaoshu specifically, but just said hello to Su Liang, took Gu Ling's letter and gift for Ji Yuebai, and left.

The gift was not just a polite gesture, but several different antidotes, all made by Gu Ling and Su Liang themselves. Ji Yuebai might not need them, but it was better to be prepared.

Ji Xiaoshu couldn't run anymore when he reached the last lap, while Zhengzheng, half a head shorter, still maintained a steady pace. This level of exercise was nothing more than a daily routine for Zhengzheng.

In the end, Zhengzheng dragged Ji Xiaoshu to finish the run, and Ji Xiaoshu immediately lay down, gasping, "Eldest Brother, I'm so tired."

Zhengzheng didn't pull Ji Xiaoshu up but lay down next to him instead, patting him in consolation, "You'll get better with more practice."

"Will Master punish me if I don't take martial arts seriously?" Ji Xiaoshu asked.

Zhengzheng nodded, "Yes. The punishment would be writing."

Ji Xiaoshu suddenly laughed, "That's perfect! I always want to run out when I'm reading, and I want to go back to my room and write when I'm practicing martial arts!"

No sooner had he said this than a shadow seemed to envelop him.

The next moment, Ji Xiaoshu was lifted by Gu Ling, "Repeat what you just said."

Ji Xiaoshu quickly waved his little hand, "Master, I was just joking with Senior Brother."

"Zhengzheng, go to the other side." Gu Ling suddenly said to Zhengzheng.

Understanding his meaning, Zhengzheng got up and agilely used his light skills to cross the lake. In the blink of an eye, he landed on the other side in a particularly handsome pose.

Ji Xiaoshu was dumbfounded.

"Do you know why you are the junior brother?" Gu Ling asked.

Ji Xiaoshu lowered his head, "Yes, I know."

"Do you want to learn?" Gu Ling asked.

Ji Xiaoshu raised his little face, his voice loud and clear, "Yes!"

Gu Ling's expression was serious, "No matter what, either don't do it, or do it seriously. Understand?"

Ji Xiaoshu saw Su Liang standing not far away, smiling tenderly at him. He straightened his back and nodded firmly, "Master, I understand."

Gu Ling didn't immediately teach him light skills and instead walked back to where they had been fishing earlier.

Zhengzheng once again flew across the lake and landed beside Ji Xiaoshu, pulling him over to look at the wooden barrel next to Gu Ling, which already had two fat fish swimming in it.

“Master, when are we frying the fish?” Zhengzheng asked with a smile.

Gu Ling finished packing up the fishing rod and picked up the wooden barrel, “I’ll let you know when it’s ready.”

Zhengzheng then took Ji Xiaoshu around the mansion, introducing him to various places, including the different types of plants and trees, speaking with authority.

“Senior Brother, how do you know everything?” Ji Xiaoshu was a little shocked.

Zhengzheng said proudly, “It’s all taught by Master and Mistress.”

“Isn’t Master only teaching martial arts?” Ji Xiaoshu wondered, “My dad said that he wants me to learn martial arts from Master.”

“There’s so much Master knows. There’s nothing he doesn’t know, only things we can’t think of. Mistress knows even more than Master,” Zhengzheng earnestly shared his experience with Ji Xiaoshu.

Ji Xiaoshu’s eyes widened, “Mistress knows even more?”

Zhengzheng nodded, “Of course, you’ll learn it all gradually.”

“But why do I need to know that this tree is a Dawn Redwood?” Ji Xiaoshu asked about his confusion.

Zhengzheng was momentarily stumped by the question and thought for a moment before saying, “When you’re learning, you may feel it’s not useful, but the future is long, who knows when you’ll need it. Mistress once said, ‘skills learned become your own. Some things can be left unused, but they must be known. Only after you learn them can you choose to use them or not.’ Just like this tree, you may think it’s not important to know what kind of tree it is, but what if ten years from now, the girl you like wants you to tell her its name, and if you get it wrong, she will think you’re a fool and ignore you?”

As Ji Xiaoshu listened, he thought it made a lot of sense and that Mistress was truly amazing. Hearing the last sentence, he rolled his eyes, “Senior Brother, your example is so strange.”

Zhengzheng shrugged, “Who can predict the future? Everything is possible.”

“Did you learn all these lines and sayings from Mistress?” Ji Xiaoshu hugged Zhengzheng’s shoulder, their height difference just right.

Zhengzheng nodded, “More or less, and also from Master.”

Ji Xiaoshu then sighed, “Mistress must be an immortal who came down from heaven! And Master must’ve been her personal cook when she was still an immortal! Haha!”

Not far away, Gu Ling’s voice called out, “Zhengzheng, come eat fried fish. There’s no portion for Xiaoshu.”

Ji Xiaoshu hesitated for a moment then immediately shouted, “My master is an immortal! My master and mistress are heavenly immortal couples!”

Gu Ling turned around, “You can have two pieces.”

After Ji Xiaoshu and Zhengzheng had finished a plate of fried fish together, he sighed comfortably, “I don’t want to go home.”

“Don’t you miss your dad?” Zhengzheng asked.

Ji Xiaoshu snorted, “I don’t miss him at all!”

Zhengzheng tried to imagine Ji Xiaoshu’s father nonchalantly sending him to someone else’s home and couldn’t help but feel sorry for him. He took the initiative to share his own background, “My real father was a scumbag, and he’s already dead.”

Unexpectedly, Ji Xiaoshu replied, “Wow, that’s great!”

Zhengzheng: ...Well, yes... you’re right...

In the evening, Zheng’er and Ji Xiaoshu stayed in Gu Ling and Su Liang’s study room. Knowing that they were coming, a bunk bed had been prepared for them, and the two children took a nap there during the day.

When Ji Xiaoshu learned that he had several junior disciples who were still babies, he felt happy and expectant, hoping that his juniors would grow up soon to become his little brothers.

Before going to sleep, Su Liang heard that the two kids were still playing in the study room, so she asked Gu Ling to go and check on them.

Gu Ling pushed the door open, and the room was quiet as if the noise Su Liang had heard was an illusion. However, some building blocks were scattered on the floor...

“Ji Xiaoshu, your father is here,” Gu Ling said.

Ji Xiaoshu immediately sprang up from Zheng’er’s bed, “Really?”

Gu Ling walked over, picked him up, threw him onto the upper bunk, and tucked him into bed, “Go to sleep.”

Ji Xiaoshu held the quilt with his small hands, his eyes sparkling, asking, “Can Master tell us a story?”

“Fine,” Gu Ling nodded, “Once upon a time, there was a child who refused to sleep well.”

“What happened next?” Ji Xiaoshu felt something was amiss.

“Then he never grew taller,” Gu Ling finished and turned to leave.

Ji Xiaoshu: ... What a scary story!

Gu Ling returned to the room, and Gu Xiaonuan was already asleep. He lay down beside Su Liang, who leaned close to him and asked about his feelings on accepting new disciples today.

“Very good,” Gu Ling said. He loved children, but he didn’t plan to let Su Liang have more babies unless she wanted to herself. In this case, he would just treat these disciples as his own sons.

The next day, Duanmu Chen, dressed in plain clothes, left the palace to visit his goddaughter Gu Xiaonuan in Su Mansion and also wanted to see the little crown prince of Yin Country.

Upon learning Ji Xiaoshu’s nickname, Duanmu Chen’s mouth twitched, “Ji Yuebai really isn’t a decent person.”

Ji Xiaoshu was just very curious about Duanmu Chen and asked him a question, “Is it fun to be an emperor?”

Duanmu Chen shook his head, “No, it isn’t.”

“Then why become an emperor?” Ji Xiaoshu asked.

“Because someone has to do this unenjoyable job,” Duanmu Chen smiled.

Ji Xiaoshu nodded, “That’s exactly what my father said.” With that said, he ran out.

Duanmu Chen laughed. Indeed, he had something in common with Ji Yuebai, as both of them were Gu Ling’s friends. Seeing Ji Yuebai’s son, Duanmu Chen felt that the concerns he had been thinking about for a long time weren’t that important. How the world’s situation would change in the future might be revealed next month, but it was certain that Ji Yuebai wasn’t his enemy.

In Yao City of Liang Country.

Situ Xie saw the mountainous piles of grain and fodder in the warehouse that had been prepared long ago, but he had no idea how they appeared there.

A day later, when Situ Xie went to check again, the warehouse was empty as if what he saw yesterday was an illusion.

Situ Xie returned to King Yue’s mansion and went straight to the study room, where a distinguished guest was waiting.

Upon entering, Situ Xie bowed, “Brother Mo.” His attitude and tone were very polite.

The person sitting in the shadows looked up with aged eyes, “No need for unnecessary words. The grain and fodder will be delivered to Liang Country’s border in early March.”

“I wonder if there’s anything Brother Mo needs my help with?” Situ Xie’s tone carried even more respect, “As for Gu Ling’s matter..”

“Is he really your grandson?” the elderly man in the shadows asked.

Situ Xie was somewhat baffled, “Gu Ling is my daughter Aning’s only child.”

“Has he ever been seriously ill or injured to the brink of death and then come back to life from a young age?” the old man asked.

Situ Xie thought for a moment and shook his head, “Maybe, but it’s been too long ago, and I’m not clear about many of his experiences.”

The old man was silent for a while before asking another question: "In the events that have occurred over the past two years, do you think that Gu Ling changed because of Su Liang, or Su Liang changed because of Gu Ling? Among them, who holds the dominant position in their marriage?"

Chapter 387: 387. She looks so much like that person.

Regarding the "noble guest's" question, Situ Xie pondered for a long time before answering, "In fact, my grandson Gu Ling has never changed. Since he was a child, he appears to be born with a pair of perceptive eyes, able to see through the human heart. As a result, he is extraordinarily indifferent to people, even towards his parents, with no normal child's closeness and dependence, let alone me."

The old man sitting in the shadows straightened, and his hoary eyes squinted, "What age are you referring to him?"

Situ Xie replied, "Four years old. It was when my daughter Ning took Gu Ling back to her home after marrying, and it was the first time I saw my grandson. I still remember his eyes, deep and calm, seemingly bottomless pools, always staring directly into the center of one's brows as if he could see through the flesh and discern one's thoughts. It was because of this that I paid special attention to him and always felt that he was no ordinary person. He would surely achieve greatness in the future. I was not mistaken. He is a genius. The only mistake I made was that he has never been under my control."

"What about Su Liang?" The old man asked.

This time, Situ Xie answered more quickly, "As for Su Liang, I think Brother Mo's investigation results are almost the same as mine. She is the granddaughter of Su Yuanzhou, a famous doctor in the Qian Country's capital city. She was once unknown and luckily escaped when the Su family encountered troubles and returned to her hometown. Then she married Ning Jing, whom Gu Ling was disguised as. When the two of them returned to the capital city, Su Liang had already transformed and rose to prominence."

"What do you think brought them together?" The old man asked again.

Situ Xie said that when Su Liang and Gu Ling first married in the Su family village, there was a person present, Uncle Liang. According to Uncle Liang, Gu Ling took pity on Su Liang and wanted to help her escape the control of her wolfish relatives.

"It is certain that when Su Liang first married Gu Ling, her body was weak and she had no other strengths apart from her excellent embroidery skills," Situ Xie said. "It is rumored that she met a high monk who taught her martial arts and medical skills, but as far as I know, her real master was Gu Ling."

"You mean she learned her medical skills from Gu Ling?" The old man asked.

Situ Xie shook his head and then nodded, "She is Su Yuanzhou's granddaughter, so it's natural for her to know medical skills. Later, I found out that Gu Ling's medical skills were also very strong, but unknown to others. He claimed that Su Liang taught him, but in my opinion, he probably knew

all along and just didn't want people to know about it. Just like his powerful martial arts. In addition, he knows many other things, such as carving and perhaps mechanism techniques."

"Why would the genius Gu Ling take a fancy to Su Liang?" The old man asked, looking at Situ Xie.

Situ Xie gave his own opinion, "This woman has an extremely likable character and is very skilled at winning people's hearts, a perfect match for my grandson. I think she was once powerless when her family encountered troubles and later gained guidance and support from Gu Ling. She is equally talented and grew rapidly, undergoing a transformation."

"Do you think that Gu Ling is the one leading between them?" The old man asked.

Situ Xie contemplated for a moment, "Not entirely. In external matters, I think Gu Ling leads, because many problems are solved based on his strength. Su Liang's ability is still far behind his, and I think that Gu Ling is still hiding in some unknown talents. But emotionally, Su Liang leads, for she has completely conquered Gu Ling. It is also her who changed Gu Ling from a person who once desired nothing and only wanted to live in isolation to choose a different path."

The old man stood up, his figure very tall and thin, his empty ink clothes shaking on his body.

Situ Xie also got up, "Brother Mo, are you leaving?"

"Yes." The old man stepped towards the door, "The grain will be delivered on time. But whether or not you can win the battle, it's not up to me."

Situ Xie nodded, "Thank you, Brother Mo, for your help. If there is anything I can do for you..." Before he finished his sentence, the old man had already disappeared at the door.

Situ Xie walked to the eaves, squinting at the cotton-like clouds in the azure sky, recalling the conversation he had just had with the old man.

Situ Jing came and saw just this scene, Situ Xie looking at the sky, but not really looking.

"Your Royal Ancestor." Situ Jing spoke, breaking the silence.

Situ Xie regained his senses, looked at him, his expression indifferent, "What is it?"

"About the grain issue..." Situ Jing asked.

Situ Xie interrupted, "Don't worry, I have already arranged everything."

Situ Jing then said that he was just curious about how the grain was transported from Yin Country to Liang Country without being discovered by the people of Qian Country.

Situ Xie, however, did not resolve his confusion. "This is a top-secret matter, it's not the time to tell you now."

Situ Jing closed his eyes slightly, "Yes, I've talked too much."

"Is there any news about Shaoyao and her apprentices?" Situ Xie asked.

Situ Jing shook his head, "Not yet. I think their chances of success in stealing the secret scroll from Qian Country's capital city are very small."

“Just give it a try. If it doesn’t work, then so be it.” Situ Xie shook his head. Since he believed that the Qian Country’s Royal Family would definitely use the large-scale weapons invented by the Mu Family on the battlefield after obtaining the secret scroll, Shaoyao was sent to search for the secret scroll in order to better understand the enemy and prepare for defense. But now time is of the essence, so there’s no other choice.

“Grandfather Emperor, can we really rely on Yin Country?” Situ Jing hesitated for a moment, then asked.

Situ Xie sneered lightly, “Befriend a distant state while attacking a neighbor, this is a simple principle. In the matter of attacking Qian Country, Liang Country and Yin Country are in a similar position. They both want to wait for us to both be weakened, but once the war begins, either Liang or Qian Country will become stronger, leaving Yin Country unable to resist. Especially in the past two years, Qian Country has gained Gu Ling and Su Liang. Ji Yuebai should know that if he teams up with Liang Country, they can fight for the division of the world. Otherwise, without Liang Country, Yin Country will not survive either.”

Situ Jing nodded, “Grandfather Emperor’s words are reasonable. I’ve learned something.”

“Moreover, the food and supplies sent by Yin Country are tangible gestures of goodwill. Ji Yuebai has no way out once he takes this step. If Yin Country fails to act at that time, I will let Qian Country know that most of Liang Country’s food and supplies were given by Ji Yuebai, forcing Yin Country to send troops.” Situ Xie said coldly.

Upon hearing the last sentence, Situ Jing, thinking back to the previous events, immediately realized that there must still be key spies placed by Situ Xie in the north of Yin Country’s army. As long as the war starts in the north, even if Yin Country does not want to fight, Situ Xie will order someone to create a fuse to cause a war between Qian Country and Yin Country, which is actually quite simple.

“Grandfather Emperor is brilliant!” Situ Jing admired.

“This battle is a matter of Liang Country’s national destiny. We can only win, not lose!” Situ Xie’s eyes were firm, as he was speaking not only to Situ Jing but also to himself.

Xuanbei City of Qian Country.

When Xing Ji arrived, Qiao Jing was training the army. He had received the secret order that Liang Country might launch an attack in early March, and that he should be prepared for everything.

After finishing the training, Qiao Jing sat down with Xing Ji to discuss the current situation. According to the spies’ report, the training frequency of Liang Country’s army has recently increased, with many changes in the main general and movements.

“His Majesty’s intention is that you are still the main general.” Xing Ji told Qiao Jing, “I’m here just in case, to give you some advice when necessary.”

Qiao Jing nodded, understanding Xing Ji's meaning. Duanmu Chen wanted to cultivate young people, while Xing Ji himself also wanted to retire early. But due to Qiao Jing's unique identity, he faced a high risk of assassination. In case something happened to him, Xuanbei City needed someone to take over, which was the reason why Xing Ji had to come.

"Where is your grandfather?" Xing Ji asked.

"After receiving Su Liang's message, my grandfather has been going to Nanping City every day to check on the situation." Qiao Jing answered, "He hasn't returned today."

Qiao Cong only came back at dusk. Upon seeing Xing Ji, he immediately asked, "Who does my disciple resemble? Is she very cute?"

Xing Ji thought of Gu Xiaonuan and smiled, "Her appearance resembles Xiaogu more, and she is extremely cute."

Previously, Su Liang had written a letter with Gu Xiaonuan's little handprint. Qiao Cong had been carrying it with him, taking it out to have a look whenever he had the chance.

After hearing Xing Ji's words, Qiao Cong sighed even more, "I really want to go home as soon as Liang Country is defeated!"

"Is there any abnormal situation in Nanping City?" Xing Ji asked.

Qiao Cong shook his head, "No! I go and check every day. Nanping City has only so much grain and fodder, and there hasn't been any massive increase! I even walked a bit further today and checked out the city to the north of Nanping City, but there was no sign of a huge amount of grain and fodder either! What exactly gives Situ Xie the confidence to go to war with us? Could it be that they've reached an agreement with Yin Country?"

Su Liang wrote a letter asking Qiao Cong to pay attention to whether the grain and fodder supply of the Liang Country's army had increased significantly. Qiao Cong was quite certain that it had not.

Xing Ji shook his head, "Xiaoliang said Yin Country won't make a move. Qiao Lao, please continue to keep an eye on Liang Country's grain and fodder supply."

"Don't worry, I'll go again tomorrow! If there's a large shipment of grain and fodder coming in, they won't be able to hide it! As soon as I find it, I'll set it on fire! Let's see how they're going to fight!" Qiao Cong snorted.

Qian Country's capital city.

On the 100th day of Gu Xiaonuan's birth, the Su Mansion held a banquet, with only close friends and relatives invited.

Old Master Qin arrived early, bringing with him his great-grandson. He was the son of Qin Yu Heng, Qin Yujin's older brother, and only a month younger than Lin Shuzhi's grandson. In fact, the two children were cousins because Qin Yuheng's wife, Min Jingya, and Lin Boyan's wife, Min Jingwen, were twin sisters and granddaughters of the former Minister of Industry, Min Lao Shangshu.

Old Master Qin held Gu Xiaonuan tightly in his arms, and Su Liang was playing with the Qin family's young master. Old Master Qin mentioned an event, "Min Rui has returned."

Su Liang hesitated for a moment, certain she had heard the name for the first time. However, she quickly realized that this Min Rui must be the long-lost son of Min Lao Shangshu who had left home many years ago. It seemed to have some connection with the Qin family.

Duke Qin's Mansion and the Ministry of Industry's Mansion were very close, almost neighbors. Min Rui, the son of Min Lao Shangshu, was infatuated with Qin Xiang, the only daughter of Old Duke Qin, in his youth. Min Lao Shangshu even went to the Qin family to propose marriage, but Old Master Qin didn't approve of Min Rui, who spent his days indulging in pleasure, and Qin Xiang didn't like him either, so the proposal was rejected. Qin Xiang was later granted marriage to Bei Jingwang, Xing Ji, and as a result, Min Rui left home and disappeared for more than twenty years. Many people thought he was dead.

This was an old story that Su Liang had learned from Qin Yujin when she talked about her elder brother's marriage.

"That's good news," Su Liang said with a smile. "I'm sure Min Lao Shangshu is very happy."

However, Old Master Qin sighed, "I'm afraid he's not happy at all! I ran into Old Min today, and he said Min Rui is very ill and wanted to ask for your help. Since there's a celebration at your house, he didn't want to disturb you by paying a visit."

Upon hearing this, Su Liang nodded, "No problem."

The 100-day celebration was lively. Ji Xiaoshu met his three little junior brothers and instantly felt like an elder brother himself, looking forward to them growing up a bit so he could play with them.

Aside from Lin Shuzhi, no one else knew about Ji Xiaoshu's identity. Gu Ling only said he was a friend's child who was staying temporarily, and his name was Xiaoshu, without mentioning his surname.

After the 100-day celebration was over, Su Liang fed Gu Xiaonuan and put her to bed before going out with Old Master Qin, who hadn't left, to visit the Min family. Gu Ling stayed at home to look after the child, and Cen Man accompanied Su Liang.

Upon arriving at the Min family's residence, they were quickly ushered in.

High Monk the Imperial Physician had already been summoned and had not left yet. Upon seeing Su Liang, he explained Min Rui's condition to her. He had a severe case of tuberculosis and had already started coughing up blood.

Su Liang heard a cough from outside the door and saw Min Rui when she walked in. A plainly dressed woman was supporting him by the bed, holding a handkerchief in her hand with a trace of blood on it.

Su Liang asked the woman to step aside, and the woman looked at her tearfully, falling to her knees, "Please, Divine Doctor Su, save my husband!"

It was then that Su Liang realized that Min Rui, who had left his home due to Qin Xiang, got married while he was away.

Su Liang took Min Rui's pulse and examined his condition. She then went out to discuss treatment options with High Monk the Imperial Physician. Once they had agreed on a plan, she prepared to leave.

Min Lao Shangshu asked Su Liang whether Min Rui's life was in danger.

Su Liang said that he could be treated, and they would check his condition again in half a month.

Min Lao Shangshu heaved a sigh of relief and expressed his gratitude repeatedly.

After Su Liang left, a beautiful young girl appeared beside Min Lao Shangshu, "Grandfather, was that the rumored Divine Doctor Su just now? She's really beautiful."

Min Lao Shangshu nodded, "Yes, that's her. She said she could cure him. Your father will definitely get better."

The young girl's eyes lit up with joy. "That's great! My mother and I have been urging my father to come back for years, but he felt that he had disgraced the Min family and was too ashamed to see you, so he had always refused. If it weren't for his serious illness this time, he might still be unwilling to return!"

Min Lao Shangshu shook his head repeatedly, "He's just a stubborn mule! A fool!"

After returning home, Su Liang first took a bath in Cen Man's room, changed her clothes, and then returned to Yuanming Pavilion.

Gu Xiaonuan was awake and was babbling in Gu Ling's arms, not knowing what she was saying.

"Tuberculosis," Su Liang simply said about Min Rui's condition. "I won't go there in the future."

That night, Chang'an came.

Su Liang thought Duanmu Chen had something to ask her or Gu Ling for, but it turned out to be about Min Rui's condition. He had come specifically to inquire about it.

Given the current tense situation, Duanmu Chen needed to rule out the possibility that Min Rui and his family were spies. So he arranged for someone to investigate Min Rui's experiences over the past years and the background of his wife.

After Su Liang informed Chang'an of the situation, she asked if there was anything suspicious about Min Rui.

Chang'an shook his head. "Nothing has been found so far. However, he claimed that he had lived in Yin Country for all these years, which is quite far away. It will take more time to verify whether his claim is true."

Late at night, coughing sounds could be heard intermittently from Min Rui's room.

Min Rui's wife brought in the prepared medicine, and sat by the bed without immediately feeding Min Rui.

Min Rui coughed up another mouthful of blood, but instead of wiping his mouth, his wife asked him a question, "Did you see what Su Liang looks like?"

Min Rui had a pale face and spoke weakly, "I saw her... What's wrong?"

“She looks too much like that person.” Min Rui’s wife instinctively lowered her voice, and whispered.

Min Rui looked puzzled, “Who does she look like?”

Min Rui’s wife shook her head, “You’ve never met her.”

Min Rui became even more confused, “What on earth are you talking about...”

“My father came to investigate specifically, but he hasn’t even seen Su Liang’s face. Otherwise, he would’ve noticed the resemblance earlier.” Min Rui’s wife’s eyes darkened, “We must eliminate her before our Master sees Su Liang!”

Chapter 388: 388. His forehead is darkened.

Initially, Zhengzheng only occasionally stayed overnight at Su Mansion. Since Ji Xiaoshu came, the two little brothers were inseparable, and Zhengzheng rarely went home. He only occasionally went back to visit his parents and younger brother.

In the past, Ji Xiaoshu had difficulty focusing on his studies and martial arts training, always easily distracted. Now with Zhengzheng by his side, he secretly competed with him, not wanting to lose, so he became more serious about learning.

Of course, when they weren’t studying, they were even more mischievous. In just a few days, they climbed every tree in the mansion and played hide and seek with Gu Ling.

But Gu Ling had ways to deal with him. She made some delicious food and as soon as Ji Xiaoshu smelled it, he quickly came running out on his own.

The only restriction was that Ji Xiaoshu couldn’t go out and play at will. Even though the people of Qian Country’s capital city didn’t know the appearance of Yin Country’s little crown prince, if someone was keeping an eye on Su Mansion, they would be suspicious of a strange face appearing in the Su Family.

However, there was still a way.

After Ji Xiaoshu watched old Mu taking Zhengzheng out for the third time without being able to go himself, he grumbled and ran to Su Liang, asking, “Master’s wife, can I wear a mask and go out to play? Last year during the Lantern Festival, my father and I wore masks to see the lanterns, and nobody recognized us!”

Su Liang smiled, “I can make one for you.”

Ji Xiaoshu’s eyes lit up as Su Liang brought over a jar.

Su Liang asked Ji Xiaoshu to close his eyes and sit still. Ji Xiaoshu didn’t understand but obediently did as she asked. Then he felt something like fragrant paste being applied to his face.

Soon, Su Liang asked Ji Xiaoshu to open his eyes and he saw a mirror with, “Big Senior Brother?”

Su Liang laughed softly, “Take another look.”

Ji Xiaoshu raised his hand, pinched his nose, and the “Zhengzheng” in the mirror did the same. He laughed, and the “Zhengzheng” in the mirror also laughed.

Ji Xiaoshu looked at Su Liang with amazement, “Master’s wife, I turned into Big Senior Brother?!”

“It’s just a disguise. It can be washed off,” Su Liang said with a smile, rubbing his little head, “Once your grandpa Mu comes back, ask him to take you out again.”

Ji Xiaoshu took the mirror and examined himself closely, now blinking, now opening his mouth, now making a grimace, and having a great time, “That’s awesome! Can Master’s wife teach me how to do it? When I go home, I can transform into my master’s appearance and scare my father!”

Su Liang couldn’t help but smile, “Does your master look very scary?”

“Of course not!” Ji Xiaoshu immediately shook his head, “I want my father to think my master has become younger, haha!”

As soon as he finished speaking, Ji Xiaoshu’s collar was grabbed, and his feet left the ground as he was lifted up. He didn’t have to look back to know it was his beloved master. Gu Ling liked grabbing him like this...

“Am I very old?” Gu Ling said with a cold tone.

Ji Xiaoshu laughed, his eyes squinting, “Older than me! Isn’t that right, Master’s wife?”

“Absolutely.” Su Liang nodded.

Gu Ling put Ji Xiaoshu down, and he immediately begged Su Liang to teach him the Disguise Technique.

Su Liang used her own face as a demonstration, showing Ji Xiaoshu how to create a disguise.

Gu Ling watched as Su Liang transformed herself into his likeness, holding Gu Xiaonuan in her arms.

Ji Xiaoshu looked at Gu Ling, and then at Su Liang, exclaiming, “So amazing!”

Gu Xiaonuan stared in confusion as her mother transformed into her father’s appearance, her little face bewildered, and she cried out, indicating she was hungry.

Su Liang carried Gu Xiaonuan to feed her, feeling her daughter’s eyes opened especially wide today.

Feeling he had learned enough, Ji Xiaoshu clung to Gu Ling’s leg, refusing to let go, “Master, let me try! Wasn’t it you who said either not to do it or to do it seriously? I’m serious, I want to learn! I want to learn now!”

Gu Ling remained silent, waiting for Ji Xiaoshu to make a big fuss before finally speaking, “Did I say you can’t?”

Ji Xiaoshu: ...I didn’t say I could either, so does Master’s silence mean consent? He made a note of this!

Gu Ling sat down, and Ji Xiaoshu stood on a small stool, imitating Su Liang’s command, “Close your eyes, don’t move.”

Gu Ling closed his eyes, and then felt two small hands on his face, causing mischief.

After a long while, Su Liang returned with Gu Xiaonuan, seeing Ji Xiaoshu tiptoeing down from the stool and trying to run outside.

“Well done, Little Tree,” Su Liang laughed softly.

Ji Xiaoshu’s footsteps halted, and he turned to see Gu Ling opening his eyes.

Su Liang saw Gu Ling’s appearance and couldn’t help but laugh, asking Ji Xiaoshu what he had planned to disguise Gu Ling as in the first place.

Ji Xiaoshu hid behind Su Liang, knowing full well he was going to get scolded, and weakly said, “I wanted to disguise Master as my father, I really miss my dad...”

Su Liang deeply doubted that the kid was playing the sympathy card, as he never mentioned Ji Yuebai before.

Gu Ling took the mirror, his face transformed by Ji Xiaoshu bore no resemblance to Ji Yuebai at all. It was ugly, and ugly in a very peculiar way due to its asymmetry – one side of the face was big, and the other side was small, making the whole face look comical.

However, although Su Liang often affectionately called him the ‘Great God,’ Gu Ling never had any concern about his own image. This was the first time he saw himself turn into such a figure; he found it fascinating and made a few facial expressions in the mirror.

Ji Xiaoshu quietly asked Su Liang, “Was Master ugly-shocked by himself?”

The next moment, Gu Ling’s voice was heard, “Come here.”

Ji Xiaoshu tried to run away, but Gu Ling caught him and put him on a chair.

Ji Xiaoshu covered his face, “Don’t hit me in the face.”

But Gu Ling just said, “Sit properly and look at me.”

Ji Xiaoshu moved his small hand and looked at Gu Ling, but couldn’t help laughing out loud. Gu Ling grabbed his hand and said, “This side is wrong. Do it again.”

Ji Xiaoshu really didn’t expect that he wouldn’t get hit for making his beautiful master so ugly. As a result, Gu Ling just patiently taught him how to correct and change the disguise.

Under Gu Ling’s guidance, Ji Xiaoshu eventually managed to make Gu Ling look somewhat like Ji Yuebai, figuring out where the problem lay.

At this moment, Zhengzheng’s voice came from outside, “Xiaoshu, I brought you some delicious food!”

Ji Xiaoshu’s eyes lit up, and he jumped off the chair and ran outside. After two steps, he turned back and said to Su Liang with a grin, “Master didn’t hit me, he must really like me!”

Gu Ling, standing nearby, listened and removed the disguise expressionlessly. He’d remember this for later, and they’d settle the score.

Zhengzheng was stunned when he saw Ji Xiaoshu, “Xiaoshu? How did you become like me?”

Ji Xiaoshu was instantly proud, "Isn't it very similar? I'm your senior brother, call me 'Senior Brother' and let me hear it!"

Zhengzheng knew about the disguise technique, but he found it fascinating to see a face exactly like his own.

Old Mu laughed, "Ah! It's like you two are identical twins."

"I'm taller!" Ji Xiaoshu emphasized his advantage.

"Don't worry, outsiders won't pay attention to this slight height difference," Su Liang smiled, "Xiaoshu really wants to go out and play, so please take him out for a stroll, Master."

Old Mu happily agreed, feeling that it was a very unique experience.

Zhengzheng had brought some special snacks for Ji Xiaoshu, asking Gu Ling and Su Liang if they wanted some.

Su Liang shook her head, and Gu Ling took the snacks and ate them.

After that, Ji Xiaoshu became addicted to this identity-changing game, and Zhengzheng also enjoyed it. The two of them really were like identical twins, imitating each other's way of speaking and walking, and enthusiastically having their acquaintances guess which Zhengzheng was the real one.

The two young brothers also enjoyed changing each other's appearance. If it weren't for Su Liang reminding them that using disguise medicine too much wasn't good for the skin, they might have wanted to change faces every day.

Time passed quickly, and it was now late February.

There was still no news of Old Bai and Ying Ying. Su Liang believed that they were likely captured by Madame Yue.

Both the south and the north were temporarily quiet, but Su Liang knew that the short-lived peace between the three countries was about to be shattered.

Ren Dong and Bai Yang secretly led their troops on their way to Xuanbei City, with Qi Jun accompanying them.

News from Xuanbei City kept returning to the capital. Qiao Cong continued monitoring the food supply of Liang Country's army and had not yet found any significant increase.

That day, Old Imperial Physician Gao visited Su Mansion to inquire if there was really going to be a war in the north, as his grandson Gao Jiabao had previously asked for permission to go to Xuanbei City with Xing Ji.

Gao Jiabao had always dreamed of becoming a general, and despite some previous setbacks, he never gave up.

Hearing Su Liang say that a war was very likely, Old Imperial Physician Gao sighed repeatedly, "I couldn't stop him from going."

“Don’t worry too much, Old Gao. My godfather will make arrangements and won’t let Gao Jiabao be on the front line,” Su Liang comforted Old Imperial Physician Gao. Gao Jiabao was the only child of his family’s third generation, so his family was very protective. But this was also one of the reasons he wanted to independently prove his strength.

Imperial Physician Gao mentioned Min Rui’s condition again. He hadn’t been to the Min Family yet today and planned to go later.

“His condition has improved, but it will still take some time. I was thinking, would it be better if we add acupuncture as a supplement?” Imperial Physician Gao asked.

Gu Ling’s voice came from the entrance, “I’ll go and administer the acupuncture for him.”

When Imperial Physician Gao saw Gu Ling holding Gu Xiaonuan, he immediately broke into a smile.

Gu Ling handed Gu Xiaonuan over, and Imperial Physician Gao carefully took her, playing with her happily and forgetting the matter at hand.

After a while, the two little ones were brought over by Old Mu after their light exercise, and Gu Xiaonuan was put in a small cart and taken out to play.

Imperial Physician Gao finally remembered Min Rui’s condition, “It’s good that Marquis Gu is going. In terms of acupuncture, I am inferior to you.” Gu Ling’s needle application was more precise and reliable, which made Imperial Physician Gao truly feel inferior. Although he was told that Gu Ling had learned medical skills from Su Liang, he often felt that Gu Ling’s medical skills seemed like a hidden talent, very powerful but rarely used.

It was still early, so Gu Ling said he had time now. Imperial Physician Gao then went to the Min Family with him. Su Liang didn’t teach Gu Ling what kind of acupuncture techniques to use again.

Su Liang knew why Gu Ling volunteered to go. It was because a transmigrator was secretly watching them, trying to confirm who among the couple was the real transmigrator. Regardless of the other party’s purpose, both Gu Ling and Su Liang were determined to confuse them. Gu Ling’s excellent medical skills would lead to a speculation: maybe Su Liang’s medical skills were actually taught by Gu Ling.

Prefect Min heard that Imperial Physician Gao had arrived, accompanied by Marquis Chang Xin, and immediately went out to greet them.

After learning that Gu Ling had come to administer the acupuncture for Min Rui, Prefect Min was surprised, “Marquis Chang Xin... also knows medical skills?” Gu Ling had actually administered acupuncture to Old Master Qin and Duanmu Yi, but very few people knew about it.

Imperial Physician Gao laughed, “It’s more than just knowing; he’s really good, better than me, at least. But he doesn’t practice often.”

Prefect Min hurriedly invited Gu Ling to Min Rui’s side.

As they entered the courtyard, they ran into a girl in white who stopped in her tracks and gazed at Gu Ling, seemingly entranced.

“Rourou! Hurry and pay your respects to Marquis Chang Xin!” Prefect Min spoke.

Min Rui’s daughter, Min Rou, came to her senses, her face flushing as she bowed her head and greeted, “Min Rou pays her respects to Marquis Chang Xin.”

Gu Ling responded indifferently and proceeded inside with Min Rui.

Min Rou watched Gu Ling’s retreating figure disappear into the room before she withdrew her gaze and mumbled softly, “The famous Gu beauty indeed lives up to her reputation...”

Gu Ling administered the acupuncture to Min Rui while Imperial Physician Gao and Prefect Min watched by the side.

Imperial Physician Gao nodded his approval from time to time, as Gu Ling’s acupuncture technique was exquisite. His medical skills were most certainly not limited to this alone.

When Gu Ling was about to leave, Lady Min gratefully said, “Once my husband recovers, we will definitely visit and thank the Marquis and his wife.”

“That won’t be necessary.” Gu Ling’s expression was indifferent as he packed up his needles and headed out.

Prefect Min escorted him out, where they met Min Rou again offering tea, “Marquis, please have a cup of tea before you go.”

Prefect Min shook his head, “Marquis is a busy man. Let’s do this another day.”

Min Rou brought the tea into the room, closed the door, and asked Lady Min, “Is Marquis Chang Xin’s medical skill really that good?”

Lady Min pondered, “Yes, it seems that he is capable of anything. Just like...”

“Like Grandfather Mo,” Min Rou said.

Lady Min’s expression changed, and she scolded in a low voice, “Don’t talk nonsense!”

“It was you who mentioned it first,” Min Rou sighed, “It’s amazing that there is such a stunning, talented man in the world, just like a mortal fairy. It’s a pity that he’s already married. Only after coming to the capital of Qian Country did I realize how barbaric our island is. The young talents that my grandfather has brought back are just mediocre. No wonder Grandfather Mo is always dissatisfied and sends them away one by one.”

Lady Min’s face turned angry, “What nonsense are you saying? Stop talking this instant!”

“Why is Mother angry?” Min Rou asked puzzledly, “By the way, isn’t Grandfather coming too? When will he arrive?”

“You don’t need to worry about that,” Lady Min’s tone was stern, “Don’t mention the people and affairs of the island again.”

"I know." Min Rou nodded, "I heard that in this capital city, the Su Family is even harder to enter than the Imperial Palace. I wonder when I'll have a chance to have a look."

"Don't think about these pointless things. Be cautious in your speech and actions." Mrs. Min frowned.

After Min Rou left, Min Rui whispered to Mrs. Min, "Is my father-in-law coming to take Gu Ling away?"

Mrs. Min snorted lightly, "It's none of your business. My father has his own plans."

When Gu Ling returned home, he took a bath and changed clothes before returning to Yuanming Pavilion. As soon as he hugged Gu Xiaonuan and kissed her, Chang'an arrived, asking for either Gu Ling or Su Liang to go to the palace.

"I'll go." Gu Ling tried to hand Gu Xiaonuan over to Su Liang, but she clung to his collar and wouldn't let go.

So, when Chang'an saw Gu Ling coming out of the Yuanming Pavilion, he was wearing a large cape and carrying... the little princess of the Su Family?

Chang'an smiled and waved to Gu Xiaonuan. Emperor Duanmu Chen would definitely be happy to see Gu Ling bringing Gu Xiaonuan into the palace.

Su Liang had just fed Gu Xiaonuan and thought it wouldn't take too long for her to go. She didn't follow them. Gu Ling could handle anything, and she hadn't cooked for a long time since her pregnancy. She planned to cook today, making some dishes that Gu Ling loved.

Emperor Duanmu Chen asked for Gu Ling to discuss the upcoming matters. In three days, it would be March.

Seeing that Gu Ling actually brought Gu Xiaonuan, Emperor Duanmu Chen was overjoyed, "Nuannuan, do you still recognize me?" He said, taking Gu Xiaonuan from Gu Ling's arms. Seeing Gu Xiaonuan staring at an ancient painting on the wall, Duanmu Chen laughed and said, "You can take whatever you like."

Gu Ling sat down, picked up a teacup, fixed his gaze on Emperor Duanmu Chen's forehead for a moment, and drank a cup of tea slowly. Only then, after Duanmu Chen had shown Gu Xiaonuan around the Imperial Study, did he sit directly on the Dragon Throne with Gu Xiaonuan in his arms and began discussing serious matters.

"I know you two, husband and wife, won't be separated. I am also at ease with you in the capital city. However, I always feel that Liang Country is coming fiercely this time, and this battle might not be easy to win." Duanmu Chen sighed.

Gu Ling reached out to Gu Xiaonuan, who raised her little hand and babbled, indicating that she wanted to go back to her father's side.

Duanmu Chen picked up Gu Xiaonuan and brought her over, then sat down beside Gu Ling without going back, "How on earth did Yin Country's grain and supplies get to Liang Country? I'm really puzzled. If you know anything, don't hide it."

Gu Ling didn't answer but brought up another matter, "Can your majesty trust the secret guards around you?"

Emperor Duanmu Chen was stunned, "Trustworthy. Do you think someone will assassinate me?"

"Yes. Be careful." Gu Ling said.

Duanmu Chen rubbed his forehead, "Yes, at this point, if Situ Xie can kill me during the war, it would surely be a good strategy to strike at the morale of Qian Country's army and people."

Previously, Su Liang and Gu Ling thought that Situ Xie wouldn't want Emperor Duanmu Chen to die because if Duanmu Chen died, the imperial power would truly fall into Gu Ling and Su Liang's hands. However, as time went on, Emperor Duanmu Chen completely trusted Gu Ling and Su Liang, which meant that his value as an emperor in Situ Xie's eyes diminished.

Moreover, there is now a mysterious force that seems to be colluding with Situ Xie, so his decisions can no longer be considered solely based on what he himself might do, making them very difficult to predict.

When Gu Ling arrived today, he saw that Emperor Duanmu Chen's forehead had a black mist. As of now, Duanmu Chen would not kill anyone for no reason, which means he would be in grave danger within three days. And in three days, it would be the first day of March. If someone does try to assassinate him, the black mist represents that Gu Ling will undoubtedly die if he doesn't intervene.

After Gu Ling left the palace, Emperor Duanmu Chen strengthened the palace's defenses.

Returning home, Gu Ling saw that Su Liang had already prepared a few dishes. He held Gu Xiaonuan in one hand and hugged Su Liang with the other, kissing her.

Gu Xiaonuan was sandwiched in the middle, babbling, but no one paid attention to her.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu peeked in from the door, but Ji Xiaoshu accidentally pushed Zhengzheng in.

Zhengzheng covered his eyes, "Master, madam, I swear I didn't see anything!"

Gu Ling released Su Liang and turned to look at the two little ones, "Go wash your hands."

"Yes!" The two ran away in a puff of smoke.

"What did the emperor want from us?" Su Liang asked.

Gu Ling answered irrelevantly, "He has a dark mark on his forehead."

Su Liang's eyes narrowed, "Is someone going to kill him?"

Gu Ling nodded, "I will guard the palace at night for the next three days. If it's not Situ Xie's people, even better."

Su Liang understood the meaning. If the assassin was not sent by Situ Xie, it might be the mysterious force who had made a move, and it would be hard for an ordinary person to assassinate the emperor.

At the moment, Gu Ling and Su Liang hope to find out the details and intentions of the other transmigrator as soon as possible. If they can catch someone relevant, they might be able to find a breakthrough.

Gu Ling told Mr. Mu that he had to go out at night to do something and asked him to watch over Su Liang and the three children in Yuanming Pavilion.

So, Mr. Mu moved into Yuanming Pavilion, slept in the study room, taking the lower bunk while Ji Xiaoshu and Zhengzheng shared the upper bunk.

Ji Xiaoshu asked Mr. Mu to tell them a story, and he vividly told them about the “Fan-selling Trick”, which was about Gu Ling and Su Liang using a fan to lure someone out in Liang Country’s Yao City.

The children were completely fascinated, and when Mr. Mu said he would make each of them a fan just like the one in the story, they happily jumped around on the bed.

Su Liang’s voice came from outside, “Zhengzheng, Xiaoshu, go to bed early.”

The two replied in unison, “Goodnight, mom!” Then they obediently lay down.

Ji Xiaoshu poked his head out to look at Mr. Mu below and whispered, “Mr. Mu, when will we get the fans?”

Mr. Mu thought for a moment and said, “In three more days.”

Min Mansion.

It was late at night, and Min Rui had fallen into a deep sleep after taking his medicine. Lady Min was sleeping in her clothes on the soft couch, with the lamp lit in the room.

Master Min had intended to assign servants to attend to Min Rui and his wife, but Lady Min refused to allow them into the room, saying that she was not used to having others around, and that she had been personally taking care of Min Rui during his long illness. So, Master Min let her have her way and arranged for his granddaughter Min Rou to have her own courtyard and servants, just like her two elder female cousins before they got married.

The sound of pebbles hitting the window caused Lady Min to open her eyes and sit up immediately. She got out of bed, took off her blanket, and first glanced at Min Rui, who was still asleep.

When she turned back, there was one more person in the room.

“Father!” Lady Min’s face lit up with joy, and she grabbed the arm of the grey-clothed old man, “I thought you’d never get here!”

“What’s the matter?” the gray-clothed old man asked.

Lady Min shook her head, “No problems on our end, everything went smoothly, and Rou’er is doing well too. Just as father advised, we haven’t done anything.” Saying this, she pulled the old man to have a seat and picked up the teapot on the table. Feeling that it was cold, she put it back down.

The grey-clothed man looked at Min Rui and asked, “How is he?”

“He’s better,” replied Lady Min, her eyes lacking warmth. “Su Liang and Gu Ling have both treated him.”

The grey-clothed old man’s face turned a shade more serious, “Gu Ling? He treated Min Rui?”

Lady Min nodded, “Yes. According to Imperial Physician Gao, Gu Ling’s medical skills are also very remarkable but are not widely known. He performed acupuncture for Min Rui today.”

The grey-clothed old man slowly nodded, “Did you discover anything else?”

Lady Min, who was usually soft-spoken, looked toward the doorway and only resumed talking after confirming that the surrounding area was quiet, “Father, have you never seen Su Liang’s face when you were investigating before?”

The grey-clothed old man frowned and, after a moment of silence, shook his head, “Now that you mention it, I never met her face to face.”

Lady Min sighed, “She resembles Mo Liang so much. When I first saw her, I was startled as if I were seeing Mo Liang standing before me.”

The grey-clothed old man’s expression changed, “Her mother’s background is unknown, and her name is Liang. Could it be... she is Mo Liang’s daughter?”

Lady Min nodded, “It’s possible. Father, we need to act quickly. If my adoptive father sees Su Liang, all our efforts over the years will be in vain!”

The grey-clothed old man contemplated for a while, “We cannot act rashly and cause unnecessary trouble. We must do as Mo Yan instructed for now.”

“But...” Lady Min looked anxious, “My adoptive father will inevitably meet Su Liang one day. By then, everything we have done for him, whether good or bad, will have been for nothing!”

Cold light flickered in the old man’s eyes, “I never came here tonight, and you never told me about Su Liang’s resemblance to Mo Yan’s daughter. In the meantime, you shouldn’t do anything. Just stay here quietly. Understand?”

Lady Min’s eyes widened, “Understood. Have you thought of a plan, father?”

The grey-clothed old man snorted coldly, “All the signs indicate that Gu Ling is the person Mo Yan is looking for. I will persuade Mo Yan to eliminate Su Liang, the obstacle, soon. Only then can he achieve his goal.”

Lady Min’s expression changed as she looked at Min Rui by the bed, still lying quietly without any movement.

Lady Min asked the grey-clothed old man in a low voice, “What did my adoptive father ask you to do this time?”

The grey-clothed old man replied, “Kill Duanmu Chen.”

Lady Min’s looked surprised, “Why?”

“To push Gu Ling to the emperor’s position and prevent him from hiding.” the grey-clothed old man said.

Lady Min looked puzzled, “I don’t understand what he really wants to do. Do you have to take matters into your own hands?”

The grey-clothed old man shook his head, “Not necessary.” As soon as he finished speaking, he got up and left.

When dawn came, Su Liang was nursing Gu Xiaonuan while Gu Ling entered the room and immediately closed the door behind him. He held his nightclothes and mask in his hand, and when Su Liang looked over, he shook his head, saying, “A peaceful night.”

Su Liang felt that it wasn’t a good thing. Confirming that there was a “wolf” was a good thing, but the earlier they showed themselves, the better.

“Are you hungry? If you’re not hungry, wash up and go to sleep. If you’re hungry, eat something before you sleep.” Su Liang said.

Gu Ling, with an inscrutable gaze, stared at a certain part of Su Liang’s body. She coughed lightly, “Great God, your daughter is here, mind your gaze.”

“I’m hungry too.” Gu Ling hinted heavily.

Once Gu Xiaonuan was full, Gu Ling held her and coaxed her for a while before handing her over to Mr. Mu.

Since they didn’t know when Gu Ling would come back, Su Liang had told them to go to Nangong Qian’s place for breakfast the night before.

So, Mr. Mu, holding one and leading two, left Yuanming Pavilion. Meanwhile, Su Liang and Gu Ling closed the door and began their “morning exercise”...

After a while, Old Physician Gao came again. As agreed with Gu Ling the day before, they went to the Min family together.

Ji Xiaoshu disguised himself as Zhengzheng again and wanted to go with Gu Ling, but was rejected. Min Rui was ill, and they were afraid his illness would affect the children. When Su Liang and Gu Ling returned from the Min family, they always bathed and changed their clothes before having contact with anyone.

So, after Ji Xiaoshu finished his class, he went to play at Lin Family with Lin Shuzhi. For his safety, Mr. Mu followed him secretly.

Before Gu Ling left, he hung a new pouch on his waist. Su Liang had made it for him, and on it was embroidered an airplane pattern, which was a symbol for certain specific people to see.

Today, Gu Ling didn’t run into Min Rou at the Min Family because she went with her aunt to visit the Lin Family. Lin Boyan’s wife is Min Rou’s cousin.

Mrs. Min noticed Gu Ling’s purse, but her expression remained normal, not showing any strange signs.

After Gu Ling finished administering the treatment and left, Mrs. Min brought the medicine she had prepared for Min Rui.

Min Rui sat propped up in bed, and after drinking a bowl of bitter medicine, his gaze fixed directly on Mrs. Min.

Mrs. Min's face showed displeasure, "What are you looking at?"

"I know that you don't really like me, you're just with me because I resemble your dead lover," Min Rui's complexion was much better than when he had just returned to the Min Family, but his speech was still a little weak.

Mrs. Min snorted lightly, "What, now that you're back at your own house, you want to act like a husband? If it wasn't for me saving you back then, you would have been long dead."

Min Rui smiled bitterly and shook his head, "You're overthinking it. I just wanted to say that, actually, I've never loved you either."

Mrs. Min's face darkened, and she listened to Min Rui say, "In my life, I have only loved Qin Yuan, and that has never changed. If I hadn't encountered trouble and had no place to turn to, I wouldn't have gone with you to that island."

"Unfortunately, your beloved Qin Yuan has long been dead." Mrs. Min coldly snorted.

"It's mutual." Min Rui immediately retorted.

"What exactly are you trying to say?" Mrs. Min coldly asked.

Min Rui suddenly sneered, "I heard everything you talked to your father about yesterday night."

Mrs. Min's eyes grew even darker, and she approached Min Rui, reaching out her hand to strangle his neck, "You better shut your mouth right now and don't say another word, or don't blame me for being rude!"

However, Min Rui didn't seem to be afraid, "You won't kill me. Your father said not to cause extra trouble. I know that if it wasn't for your adoptive father keeping an eye on you all these years, you would've gotten rid of me a long time ago. This time, it was I who begged your adoptive father without your knowledge, saying I wanted to kowtow to my own father one last time before I die, and have Rouer acknowledge her ancestor and return to her family. I don't know why your adoptive father agreed, otherwise, you wouldn't have come back with me. You were probably hoping I would die of illness quickly."

Mrs. Min's face was dark and gloomy, grinding her teeth, "What do you want?"

Min Rui snorted, "I don't want to mess up your plans. After all, if you get Mo Yan's treasure, it would be beneficial to Rouer as well. However, if you want me to keep my mouth shut, you need to help me with something."

Footsteps sounded outside, and Mrs. Min immediately picked up the empty medicine bowl and went to the door.

It was Elder Minister Min who had come to check on Min Rui after seeing Gu Ling off.

"Father, I'll go check on the chicken soup I prepared for Xianggong." Mrs. Min smiled.

Elder Minister Min nodded and entered the room.

Min Rui discussed the current political situation with Minister Min, who sighed deeply, "Just after the Lantern Festival, the emperor ordered Marquis Zhong Xin to return to Xuanbei City. It seems that war with Liang Country is inevitable."

Upon hearing the three words "Marquis Zhong Xin," Min Rui's eyes flickered, but Minister Min didn't notice.

After a while, Mrs. Min came back with the chicken soup, and Minister Min left.

As soon as the door closed, the couple's pretense of warmth and concern vanished instantly.

Mrs. Min sat down at the bedside with the chicken soup but didn't give it to Min Rui. She stirred it with a spoon, letting off some steam before starting to drink it herself.

After a few sips, Mrs. Min looked at Min Rui again, "Tell me. What do you want me to help you with?"

Min Rui's voice was low, "Help me kill someone."

Mrs. Min suddenly sneered, "Do you want to kill Xing Ji? Still jealous of him after all these years? But I think you have no reason to be jealous. Xing Ji didn't steal Qin Yuan from you. She was married to him through an imperial edict. Though the person who issued the edict is dead now."

As Mrs. Min spoke, her tone became more ghostly and mocking. Seeing Min Rui's uncomfortable expression, she felt satisfied and said, "Killing Xing Ji is impossible. It's too far away. I can't go to Xuanbei City. You surely don't want to kill Qin Yuan's only son, do you?"

Min Rui gritted his teeth, "Stop talking! It's not them!"

Mrs. Min raised her eyebrows, "Oh? Then who is it?"

Min Rui said coldly, "That damn Old Qin!"

Mrs. Min was stunned for a moment, "You blame him for breaking you and Qin Yuan apart? But you two were never meant to be together, she never loved you."

Min Rui grabbed Mrs. Min's neck, and the chicken soup in her hand fell to the ground with a crisp shattering sound.

However, Min Rui didn't have much strength, and he was soon pushed away by Mrs. Min and slapped so hard that he fell onto the bed.

Min Rui seemed to be talking to Mrs. Min but also talking to himself, "We grew up together, like children in love. She did like me, but she didn't realize it because she was too young. My father personally proposed marriage to her, but Old Qin refused without giving any face. I begged him on my knees to let me marry her, saying I wouldn't marry anyone else, but he told me to give up so resolutely... if he had just agreed, she would have become my wife and wouldn't have been married to Xing Ji and died in despair! You don't understand, none of you understand... her life and mine were destroyed by that old bastard, all because of him!"

Mrs. Min looked at Min Rui coldly as he cursed Old Master Qin on the bed, without saying a word.

After an unknown length of time, Min Rui calmed down a bit. He turned and stared at Mrs. Min, "Within three days, I don't care how you do it, send that old bastard to meet Yama King. Otherwise,

I'll tell Gu Ling your secret. After all, Rourou knows nothing, and she won't be in danger, so I have no worries."

From outside the door came Min Rou's voice, "Dad, Mom, I'm back."

Mrs. Min whispered coldly into Min Rui's ear, "Fine, I'll find a way. Just make sure you don't do anything you shouldn't, or say anything you shouldn't. Otherwise, I'll make sure your whole family dies miserably!"

As Min Rou entered, Mrs. Min was picking up the shattered porcelain from the floor. Min Rui sighed, "It's my fault, always causing you trouble."

"Let the servant clean up. Dad, your blanket is dirty," Min Rou pulled Mrs. Min up and said, "I know Mom wants to take care of Dad personally, but you don't have to work so hard."

After saying this, Min Rou noticed the slap mark on Min Rui's face and frowned, "Dad's face..."

Min Rui forced a bitter smile, "I slapped myself. I hate myself for being so foolish. I should have listened to your mother and taken you home earlier."

"Don't be like that, Dad. It's not too late now. Our grandparents are still alive, and once you recover, you should be a good son to them," Min Rou smiled and said, "I like this place, and today I went to see my cousin with my aunt. I'm so envious of her! My brother-in-law from the Lin Family is such a good man, and Uncle Lin is very kind. Oh, by the way, Uncle Lin brought a kid home today. His name is Zhengzheng, he's so cute."

Mrs. Min looked indifferent, "Your father is still sick. Don't go running around all the time. People might think you're being unfilial, only caring about having fun."

Min Rui immediately retorted, "I'm much better now, and Rourou just returned. Going out more often is good for her."

Hearing this, Min Rou laughed, "Mom always takes care of Dad herself, so I don't have a chance to help. By the way, I'm going to the Duke Mansion to play with my second cousin tomorrow, you don't mind, do you?"

Mrs. Min frowned but didn't object.

When Min Rou left, leaving just the two of them alone again, Mrs. Min said coldly, "I'll find an opportunity in the next two days. I'll create an accident and help you get rid of Old Master Qin. Just watch your mouth and don't say anything nonsense to Rourou!"

That night, Gu Ling went into the palace again, waiting until the wee hours of the morning. Finally, someone arrived!

Chapter 390: 390. Unnoticed by gods or ghosts

The night was pitch black, with stars sprinkled across the sky.

Duanmu Chen didn't know that Gu Ling had been guarding him for two nights in a row. As soon as he heard the sounds of fighting outside, he immediately got up, took Chang'an, and hid in the secret chamber of the sleeping palace.

"Your Majesty, as Marquis Gu predicted, there are assassins." Chang'an pricked up his ears, but the walls of the secret chamber were thick, and he couldn't hear the commotion outside.

Duanmu Chen sat down, his eyes deep and dark, "It must be Situ Xie's men. The battle is imminent, and he wants to kill me."

At this time, Gu Ling, who was outside, had not yet revealed himself. He hid in a tall, ancient cypress tree, holding his breath and concentrating, quietly observing the assassins.

Initially, only two assassins appeared, blocked by four secret guards. Gu Ling knew that these guards were still from the batch trained by Duanmu Yi.

The assassins were very powerful, and the guards were not weak either, but the latter, even with their two-to-one advantage, could barely hold off the assassins.

Soon, two more secret guards appeared to reinforce them. This should have been Duanmu Chen's strategy, not to show all his cards at once.

As a result, the number of assassins increased by one. Apparently, this assassination plan was meticulous and determined to succeed.

All of the assassins wore the same night-clothes and iron masks. Their figures seemed to blend in with the darkness, and from a distance, it looked like three masks floating and swaying in different positions.

Gu Ling quickly judged that all three assassins were of the "old demon" type, each of them more powerful than Old Mu and comparable to Old Bai.

In this case, Gu Ling suspected that these three might not necessarily be Situ Xie's men but were more likely to be from that mysterious force.

So, whether Situ Xie or the mysterious power wanted to kill Duanmu Chen was in question.

Duanmu Chen's guards continued to emerge, eventually totaling ten people. They formed groups of three, three and four, facing the three assassins.

About half a quarter of an hour later, the Forbidden Army gathered around Duanmu Chen's sleeping palace. The archers in the front row took their positions, but the ten-odd people engaged in the battle were all masters, moving quickly and changing positions constantly, making it difficult for the archers to aim at the assassins.

Looking at the three floating iron masks in his line of sight, Gu Ling thought of the gray-robed old man who had come to the capital city last year to investigate him and Su Liang. When they had fought, the old man had used a hidden weapon similar to a hand grenade.

This made Gu Ling worry a bit at the moment. If these three powerful assassins were in league with the gray-robed old man and were determined to kill Duanmu Chen, would they just throw a hand grenade at Duanmu Chen's sleeping palace?

However, if this were the case, they could have started by throwing a powerful weapon right away, and there would be no need for a fight... Gu Ling thought he could wait a little longer to see if there were any more assassins yet to reveal themselves.

Duanmu Chen's secret guards were gradually injured, and even with a ten-to-three advantage, the battle remained difficult.

After four of the guards were injured, Gu Ling saw another iron mask flash by in the shadows and rush towards Duanmu Chen's sleeping palace.

It seemed that the assassins' group was also testing how many secret guards Duanmu Chen had. By now, there should be just about this many in the palace.

Gu Ling squinted his eyes, raised his right arm, and aimed his homemade nail gun at the "iron mask" about to enter Duanmu Chen's sleeping palace. He adjusted the position and pulled the trigger.

The iron nail didn't pierce the smooth iron mask, but quickly passed through the gap between the fighting masters and disappeared from Gu Ling's sight.

The iron mask swayed, fell, and collided with the ground... Gu Ling had applied a paralyzing poison to the nail, so even if his shot missed, as long as the poison entered the body, it could quickly bring down the enemy.

The three assassins attracting firepower finally noticed the tree where Gu Ling was hiding.

One of the assassins broke out of the encirclement and leaped towards the ancient cypress.

This finally gave Lin Bojun, who had been brought to guard the palace the day before, an opportunity. He immediately ordered the archers to shoot!

The dense arrows all aimed at the nearest assassin to the old cypress, and even with his great skill, he had no choice but to block with his sword.

As the assassin moved, Gu Ling's nail gun aimed at his sword-wielding right arm and fired again!

Of the four assassins, two were down.

The other two assassins saw the situation turn unfavorable and decided to retreat.

Gu Ling shot one with his nail gun and intentionally let the other one go.

Lin Bojun ordered another round of arrows to be released, but it failed to stop the fleeing assassin.

The ancient cypress tree swayed slightly, Lin Bojun did not see Gu Ling, but he had guessed as much. Although the assassination appeared to be over, the Forbidden Army did not retreat, but instead called in the Imperial Physician to treat the injured secret guards.

Lin Bojun reported the situation at the entrance of Duanmu Chen's sleeping palace, Duanmu Chen heard, letting Chang'an go out to take a look while he remained inside.

Soon, after verifying the situation outside, Chang'an returned to inform Duanmu Chen.

"All three assassins were brought down by hidden weapons, I suspect it might be Marquis Chang Xin," Chang'an said.

Duanmu Chen was stunned for a moment, "Is Gu Ling here too? Did he come specifically to protect me?"

"It's just a guess. One of the assassins escaped, and if it really is Marquis Chang Xin, he must have gone to track down the assassin," Chang'an said.

Duanmu Chen nodded, "I think it should be him too." Thinking of Gu Ling's presence, he suddenly felt much more at ease. From tonight's situation, where ten secret guards could not withstand four assassins, if Gu Ling was not present, Duanmu Chen's safety would be uncertain.

Recruiting top martial artists from the outside is a very cautious move for the Royal Family, fearing to let the wolves into the house. The higher the martial arts skills, the more absolutely loyal someone has to be, otherwise, they cannot be used.

As a result, most of the martial arts masters serving the Royal Family are cultivated by the Royal Family itself, with clear backgrounds and transparent life details. However, this also limits the strength of the secret guards.

True top-notch masters must possess both talent and strength; the vast majority are elderly, with their life's accumulation required to become a presence that crushes the younger generation.

Gu Ling, who possesses such an outstanding martial arts skill at such a young age, is extremely rare.

Duanmu Chen planned to wait for Gu Ling to return before coming out of the secret chamber. He cherishes his life and is always cautious, but he would not have made such a meticulous arrangement this time if it hadn't been for Gu Ling's reminder. The terrifying thing is that even though he had made the most thorough arrangements, it seemed that he could not stop those assassins. Thankfully, Gu Ling was there.

Lin Bojun dragged the three unconscious, injured assassins together and watched over them outside the sleeping palace without doing anything else.

Gu Ling chased the assassin out of the palace for not long before another iron-masked man appeared.

Just as Gu Ling thought he was going to face a two-on-one situation, a thick smoke suddenly filled the air. To avoid the possibility of poison, he had to retreat.

In just a moment, the thick smoke was dispersed by the night wind, and the traces of the two iron-masked men disappeared completely.

Gu Ling returned to the imperial palace, and Lin Bojun recognized his expression when he took off his mask, "I knew it was you!"

Chang'an told Duanmu Chen that Gu Ling had returned.

Duanmu Chen immediately came out of the secret chamber, and the lights in the sleeping palace were quickly lit again.

Gu Ling entered, and Lin Bojun ordered the assassins to be dragged in as well.

Upon seeing Gu Ling, Duanmu Chen asked, "Have you been watching over me all this time? Were you here last night too?"

Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "I came to protect Chang'an."

Chang'an was coming in with hot tea when he heard the words, nearly tripping and falling. He stuttered, "Marquis Chang Xin must be joking."

Duanmu Chen snorted lightly, "You obviously care a lot about my safety."

Gu Ling had already bent down to examine the three assassins and did not respond to Duanmu Chen's words.

Lin Bojun: ...Couldn't help feeling that Duanmu Chen's expression and tone just now seemed somewhat similar to Lian Shun's...

Removing the iron masks, the assassins were old, just as Gu Ling had guessed. The three assassins did not carry any special items, nor did they have any tattoos or the like. Their clothes and masks were identical, their weapons were different, but there were no particularly famous weapons with obvious ownership.

"Are they Situ Xie's men?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Gu Ling shook his head, "I don't know."

Gu Ling moved the assassins to a side palace, saying he wanted to conduct a separate interrogation. Duanmu Chen let him do as he pleased.

"Does Your Majesty want to rest?" Chang'an asked.

Duanmu Chen yawned but shook his head, "Let's see what Gu Ling can find out."

In the side palace, Gu Ling chose an assassin, tied him up, and fed him the antidote.

Before long, the assassin woke up, his eyes fixed on Gu Ling.

"Who sent you?" Gu Ling asked.

The assassin's eyes cleared, and then he bled from his seven orifices and died!

Gu Ling's eyes narrowed, and he pulled open the mouths of the other two assassins, finding a poison pill hidden deep within their lower left teeth. The one who had taken his own life must have bitten and broken the pill's outer shell.

Gu Ling hadn't expected that the martial arts master assassins would choose suicide over revealing secrets, just like death soldiers.

Gu Ling collected the poison pills, intending to study them with Su Liang later to determine the type of poison.

Then, he woke up the second assassin.

Gu Ling saw the assassin clench his teeth after waking up, and his expression changed abruptly.

"Your poison is in my hands." Gu Ling's face was expressionless, "As long as you confess honestly, I can spare your life."

As a result, Gu Ling watched as the second assassin decisively bit his tongue and killed himself.

In just a short while, two of the three assassins were dead. Gu Ling didn't wake up the last one but dragged him out of the side palace.

"How did it go?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Gu Ling shook his head, "They are death soldiers, and I couldn't get any information out of them."

Duanmu Chen frowned, "They're death soldiers."

"I'll take this one back and let Su Liang figure it out." Gu Ling said and walked away.

Duanmu Chen hurriedly spoke up, "The night isn't over yet. What if the assassins return?"

Gu Ling looked back at Duanmu Chen, his gaze resting on the latter's forehead for a moment before moving away and said indifferently, "The Emperor has great fortune and will be fine."

Duanmu Chen was rendered speechless as Gu Ling's figure disappeared at the doorway.

Su Liang was woken up by her daughter and saw Gu Ling holding Gu Xiaonuan in his arms, trying to soothe her.

Su Liang looked out the window; it was still pitch dark outside, "An assassin came? Has it been resolved?"

Gu Ling nodded, "They came. Let's talk after dawn; you go back to sleep."

Su Liang sat up, "We're all awake, let's sleep together later. What happened exactly?"

Gu Ling gently swayed Gu Xiaonuan to sleep and whispered the events that happened in the palace that night to Su Liang.

"Four old fellows, one escaped, two committed suicide?" Su Liang was also surprised, "Why didn't the one who released the poisonous smoke attack you?"

Considering the overall strength of the assassins tonight, two against one would not necessarily mean a victory over Gu Ling – of course, excluding the influence of hidden weapons and poison.

"Perhaps their target was only Duanmu Chen, and they didn't want any unnecessary complications. Or maybe, it was that group of people." Gu Ling said, referring to the group that wanted to capture him alive.

"Is Duanmu Chen's crisis resolved?" Su Liang asked. If there were still threats to Duanmu Chen's life in the next three days, Gu Ling should be able to perceive them.

Gu Ling nodded, "He's safe for now."

"It seems that there are only those two left in the city. They won't attack easily again. After all, masters like them aren't cabbages, they aren't abundantly available." Su Liang sighed, "The one you brought back will surely try to commit suicide once he regains consciousness. It's a pity that the 'Emperor's Heart Medicine' mentioned earlier can't be made."

Previously, when Duanmu Chen tried to test Situ Yao, Gu Ling gave him a fake "Emperor's Heart Medicine," a psychological ploy.

Su Liang had asked Old Bai if there was a medicine that could control people's minds. Old Bai said it was possible but he didn't know how to make it and hoped that Su Liang could research it...

"Let's keep it for now." Gu Ling said.

Gu Xiaonuan refused to sleep no matter how she was coaxed and pointed at the outside.

Gu Ling and Su Liang decided to bring their precious daughter to the garden for a walk. Old Mu, who was sleeping in the study room, heard them and, upon confirming that Gu Ling had returned, didn't bother with them any further.

During the darkest moment just before dawn, the stars in the sky still sparkled, and the wind was chilly.

Gu Xiaonuan wanted to go outside, but once she was out, she got sleepy again and fell asleep in Gu Ling's arms.

Gu Ling and Su Liang strolled around the lake without speaking, each contemplating the dilemma they were facing.

It wasn't until the morning light appeared that the family of three returned to Yuanming Pavilion.

Ji Xiaoshu and Zhengzheng got up early and quietly went downstairs, afraid of disturbing Gu Ling and Su Liang.

By midday, when Gu Ling and Su Liang woke up, had breakfast, and freshened up, Chang'an arrived, asking if Gu Ling had obtained any information from the captive he brought back the previous night.

Gu Ling shook his head, "No."

Chang'an didn't know what to say. He waved at Gu Xiaonuan and was about to leave when he suddenly remembered something, "His Majesty asked me to inquire if Marquis Gu will be coming to the palace tonight? If you are coming, His Majesty will prepare food and drinks and play chess with you."

Gu Ling shook his head, "I'm not going."

Chang'an refrained from commenting. Anyway, after the events of last night, Duanmu Chen was sure that Gu Ling was his good friend who cared about his safety.

Chang'an had just left when the high imperial physician arrived. He called Gu Ling to visit the Min family together, intending to apply acupuncture to Min Rui for half a month.

After Gu Ling left, Su Liang took out the two poison pills Gu Ling had brought back the night before and began researching their composition. As for Gu Xiaonuan, she was carried by Cen Man on the lake, having a great time. Su Liang sat by the window; she could see her daughter by looking up.

At the Min Family's Ministry Mansion.

When Gu Ling saw Min Rui, Lady Min was not present, and Min Rou took care of him.

With a serious expression, Min Rou asked Gu Ling a question, "Is the medical skill of Marquis Changxin taught by the Divine Doctor Su or the other way around? Or are you originally divine doctors?"

Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "It's none of your business."

Min Rou's face stiffened, and she silently left the room without noticing the airplane pattern on Gu Ling's waist pouch.

Upon reaching the door, Min Rou muttered, "I was just curious, no need to get so angry..."

After Gu Ling finished applying acupuncture to Min Rui and left, he saw Lady Min approaching as he exited the mansion. His gaze momentarily rested on her forehead before withdrawing.

After leaving the Ministry Mansion, Gu Ling told the high imperial physician that he wanted to visit Old Master Qin at the Duke Mansion and they parted ways.

Gu Ling really did enter the Duke Mansion, but when Old Master Qin received the news and waited in vain for Gu Ling to arrive, the servants reported that Gu Ling had left halfway through without using the main entrance.

Old Master Qin was puzzled, "I was waiting for him to go fishing together, I'll go alone this afternoon!"

At this time, Gu Ling had quietly returned to the Min Family's Ministry Mansion, avoiding the servants' eyes and approaching Min Rui's room.

His hearing was exceptional. While an ordinary person wouldn't be able to hear the conversation inside the room, he could.

"Old Master Qin likes fishing...When he's fishing by the water, I'll lead the servants away and push him into the lake...It will only be seen as an accident, undetected by gods and ghosts..."