

Three-Time 39

Chapter 39

[Taken Away] Su Xingzhe was staying in Su Erhui's house, with his own separate room. He put on the new clothes given by Su Erhui in the early morning, but later changed back to his old clothes. He heard the sounds of drums and gongs approaching, stopping outside. His anxiety subsided, and he could no longer suppress his excitement. He paced a few steps, sat down, picked up a book, and waited for someone to invite him in. At that time, he had to appear calm and composed. The chaotic footsteps grew closer, and Su Xingzhe couldn't help but curl his lips, but quickly retracted them. The moment the door opened, he stood up abruptly. The surprise he had practiced earlier, he now appeared particularly affected due to nervousness. At the same time, Old Lady Niu's cries, like floodwaters bursting through a dam, suddenly rushed into his ears! The word "thief" caused his face to change from red to white, then from white to blue in an instant. As the book fell to the ground, Su Xingzhe was stunned, and in a moment, he was locked in shackles by several strong bailiffs. He was practically carried out, his feet dangling in the air, passing through the crowd and exiting the house. Old Lady Niu's cries, Su Erhui's curses, and the villagers' mocking whispers mingled together, but Su Xingzhe couldn't hear any of it. He seemed to be in a soundless world, where the sky had collapsed, and he could only stare blankly and do nothing... "Are you Su Xingzhe?" The constable asked in a cold tone. There was no need for Su Xingzhe to answer. The villagers whom he offended in the past confirmed his identity one after another. "Su Xingzhe was bold enough to steal the exam template from the chief examiner on the eve of the Court Examination. The evidence is irrefutable. Take him away!" The constable waved his hand resolutely, his forceful determination reminiscent of a chopping blade on the execution ground, severing Su Xingzhe's life. "Wrongful! Wrongful!" Old Lady Niu cried and fainted. Su Xingzhe's father and brothers rushed up to block the way, saying that he was at home on the eve of the Court Examination and had not gone out. They could all testify to that. However, the constable sneered, "Family cannot testify." Su Erhui, who once thought of Su Xingzhe's future prospects and meticulously planned to let him become his son-in-law, now only felt bad luck and kicked him out. He shouted, "We only took him in out of kindness. We don't know anything else!" On the eve of the Court Examination, Su Xingzhe did not leave the house, and other villagers had not seen him. They couldn't prove that he had been at home the whole time. What if he had sneaked out before daybreak and didn't come back until nightfall? Who knew? Su Bai wanted to say something, but the constable's words, "The evidence is irrefutable," made him hesitate and eventually give up. Cheating in the Imperial examination was a matter of life and death, and as a minor village head, he didn't know the truth and couldn't say much. When the celebratory procession started playing and marching forward again, Su Xingzhe finally regained some clarity. With a pale face, he asked blankly, "Where... where are they going?" The constable slapped Su Xingzhe's face hard, "To congratulate the case-topper! Ning Jing! He has honestly earned his top rank!" A bolt of lightning struck Su Xingzhe's mind. He was dumbfounded and went mad. "It's Ning Jing! He framed me! He colluded with the chief examiner to frame me!" Su Xingzhe shouted at the top of his lungs. The constable slapped Su Xingzhe left and right, making his head spin, blood spilling from the corners of his mouth, and rendering him unable to speak. "Ning Jing, the crown prince's friend, framed you? What are you worth? Do you dare to slander the chief examiner? Add one more crime!" Thinking back to what happened that day, Su Xingzhe wondered what reason Ning Jing could have had to frame him. Right, his mother had conflicts with Su Liang, and his family wanted to take over Su Liang's house! It must be so! But

before Su Xingzhe could explain, the constable slapped him again, knocking him unconscious. Su Bai led the congratulatory procession to Ning Jing's doorstep, followed by a large crowd of onlookers. Granny Bai and her family were both frightened and delighted. They didn't know that Ning Jing had taken the Court Examination, let alone that he had ranked first. However, when Granny Bai heard about Su Xingzhe's matter, her first reaction was not to gloat but to express her disbelief, "How could he have the ability to steal something from the chief examiner's house?" ... The door was opened by Su Liang, who was wearing an apron. Ning Jing was still sitting in the courtyard, carving mooncake molds under a tree. Among the people in the congratulatory procession, a man stared at Su Liang's appearance and was momentarily taken aback. When she heard Su Bai excitedly mention that Ning Jing got the top rank, Su Liang didn't seem surprised and just smiled slightly, "Thank you all." "Tomorrow, the County Magistrate will host a banquet to entertain the scholars of this round. Mr. Ning, please make sure to attend." The leader of the group was courteous. Su Liang thought that this might not only be because he ranked first, but also because Ning Jing was recommended by Crown Prince Bei Jingwang. She looked back and saw that Ning Jing had no intention of coming over, so she accepted on his behalf, "Alright." Su Liang accepted the reward of fifty taels for the case-topper but refused gifts from the Town Chief and the rural gentries. Accepting the latter would imply a relationship. After the officials left, the villagers came forward one after another to offer their congratulations. Su Liang remembered something, asked them to wait, and went back in to bring out the remaining half basket of pomegranates she had taken from the county town earlier. Each family who came to congratulate received one. The bright red pomegranates were pleasing to the eye. The villagers thought they brought good luck, and some even said they would take them home for worship. Bai Xiaohu muttered, "Sister Su Liang's family must have too many pomegranates to eat." Liu's mother glared at her son, telling him not to blurt out such truths. Indeed, they had only picked a small portion of pomegranates from the tree in the county town last time. This fruit wasn't convenient to eat and there were only two of them, so they couldn't eat too many. In the end, only the Bai family was left outside. Su Liang invited them in to talk and suddenly asked, "Did Su Xingzhe pass the exam?" Zhuizi shook his head, "He got arrested!" Su Liang was very surprised, "Arrested?" The two children took turns telling Su Liang about Su Xingzhe's family's downfall from heaven to hell. After listening, what else could Su Liang not understand? Even if Su Xingzhe was brave, how could he possibly know where the chief examiner's sample paper was hidden? Besides, such important papers would never be stolen by a country scholar, right? It must have been the so-called sample paper that the chief examiner asked Su Xingzhe to convey to Ning Jing after visiting the County School that day. At that time, Su Liang had suspected that Su Xingzhe might take a peek, and now the facts were in front of her. It was not a backdoor for Ning Jing opened by the chief examiner but a trap to frame him. Su Xingzhe, who was blinded by greed, jumped into it! However, Su Liang was puzzled. The chief examiner of Bei'an County had no grudge against Ning Jing, so why did he do this? Was it because the wealthy Ning family in Xunyang could "make the ghosts push the millstone"? Or was it because Ning Jing was recommended by Crown Prince Bei Jingwang and thus targeted by Bei Jingwang Mansion's enemies? What a troublesome constitution. Su Liang looked at Ning Jing and thought. "Big Brother Ning, what's this?" Bai Xiaohu curiously looked at the mold Ning Jing had carved. Zhuizi's eyes sparkled brightly, "There are flowers inside!" Su Liang smiled, "Let's make mooncakes together tomorrow for the festival." ... Su Bai escorted the celebration party to the entrance of the village. One of them asked, "I wonder who the young lady from Ning Gongzi's family is to him?" Su Bai solemnly replied, "They are siblings." Looking at Su Xingzhe being taken away, Su Bai sighed repeatedly. If he were really convicted, he would never be able to return. Su Bai also heard Su

Xingzhe continually saying that Ning Jing framed him deliberately, which was quite puzzling. It was not like Ning Jing stole the sample paper and put it in his house, but the officials didn't search it either. Moreover, Su Bai thought Ning Jing couldn't possibly do such a thing. ... County government. "The task entrusted by the master has been completed. I just didn't expect Ning Jing to be unscathed," the chief examiner of the Court Examination said respectfully. The gentleman in the main seat dressed in fine clothes had a playful expression, "He can befriend Xing Yusheng; he indeed has some tricks. I will meet him tomorrow." The door opened, and a man walked in. The well-dressed gentleman waved his hand, and the chief examiner bowed and left. "Have you seen Ning Jing?" The well-dressed young man asked. The man nodded, "I have seen him." Then he recounted his experience after arriving at the Su Family Village. Finally, he said, "Ning Jing has a younger sister, she's the young lady we met at the restaurant on the day of the Court Examination. The one our master said seemed a bit special." "Oh?" The well-dressed young man was very surprised, "She is actually Ning Jing's sister?" "She is not a blood-related sister, but sworn siblings. The young lady is a doctor with good medical skills. She originally grew up in the capital city. Her grandfather, whom our master may know, is called Su Yuanzhou." The well-dressed young man's eyes narrowed, "Who?" "Su Yuanzhou." The man repeated. The well-dressed young man's face darkened, "Wasn't his whole family supposed to be dead? How come there's a granddaughter still alive?" "When I found out about her identity, I was also puzzled. I don't know how she escaped, and there was no news from the capital. The people here don't even know what crime Su Yuanzhou committed." After a long silence, the well-dressed young man sneered, "Tomorrow, I will have a good chat with Ning Jing and ask him to hand over Su Liang. When we return to the capital, we will take her and execute!"