

Three-Time 411

Chapter 411: 411. I have a star

Xuanbei City.

After being captured, the commander of Nanping City, Yi Fei, had not been subjected to any abuse. By the time Xing Ji appeared, he had regained his calm.

“Who provided you with the explosives?” Xing Ji got straight to the point without any nonsense.

Yi Fei looked coldly at Xing Ji, snorted lightly, and turned his head to look at the cypress trees outside the window.

It was now late March, and although Xuanbei City was not far from Nanping City, the ancient trees here had already sprouted fresh, green buds. In contrast, the same trees in Nanping City were still a dark, green color, covered in a layer of gray.

Liang Country had just endured another lengthy winter, but it had not ushered in the hoped-for spring. During the past winter, Yi Fei’s first grandchild had died shortly after birth. Despite his high status in Liang Country, even the best Imperial Physician could not help.

Yi Fei still remembered that when he first heard the bad news, his first thought was: would the outcome have been different if the Divine Doctor Su Liang had been sought in time?

But, Su Liang was a divine doctor, not Liang Country’s divine doctor.

Between Xuanbei City and Nanping City, which were not far apart, there was an invisible chasm. The Peace Temple, which stood in both cities, always seemed ironic during wartime, as if Buddha were watching with cold eyes the foolish people of the world killing each other.

Yi Fei immersed himself in his thoughts, and suddenly thought of Peng Wei. Perhaps someone on the side of Nanping City would use Peng Wei to exchange him, and Xing Ji would surely agree. Moreover, Peng Wei would not be harmed.

But immediately, Yi Fei felt that he was delirious. Peng Wei had done nothing wrong and was not a criminal. Moreover, he had gained more merits than Yi Fei himself, so why should he be exchanged? Who would dare to treat Peng Wei like this? Unless Peng Wei negotiated it himself, but when Yi Fei thought of the sarcastic words he had said to Peng Wei the last time they met, he felt like he was dreaming.

Xing Ji looked at Yi Fei, who was staring blankly at the trees outside, and did not urge him to answer the previous question. The two were of similar age and had crossed paths in their youth. Yi Fei was made a commander because he had been chosen by Situ Xie, and he naturally had talent. As for his personality, as far as Xing Ji knew, he was not impulsive or easily angered.

After a long silence, Yi Fei finally looked at Xing Ji and shook his head calmly. “I don’t know who provided it. I was just acting on the Imperial Edict. I think you probably know more about this so-called respected master than I do. Perhaps they are on the same side as you? Am I right?”

“Why do you think so?” Xing Ji asked in return.

Yi Fei sighed, "By exploiting such a person and inciting the emperor to wage war against Qian Country, Liang Country is morally wrong. At the right time, which was yesterday when the situation was reversed, he vanished and you counterattacked. Qian Country has always been known for its lawful name. You love these seemingly righteous acts."

"Without that person, would Liang Country be content with its current situation? There has never been a war initiated by Qian Country." Xing Ji asked.

Yi Fei fell silent again, and after a while, he snorted coldly. "Why should all the good places and things be yours, while we have nothing and are born to suffer? You were born of nobility, and everything goes smoothly for you. Your children and grandchildren live privileged lives. How can you possibly understand how difficult it is for the people of Liang Country to survive and have enough to eat? I was born in a commoner's family and starved and froze since I was a child. I barely made it through several times. I heard you have a grandson, and Divine Doctor Su Liang personally delivered him. But my grandson died as soon as he was born. You don't know what despair is, so don't criticize Liang Country for waging wars from a high and mighty position. Even if we lose, I don't regret it, and I won't betray my country for glory."

As the words fell, Yi Fei closed his eyes. Those thoughts had been hidden in his heart, and for the first time in his life, he revealed them to Xing Ji, which made him feel somewhat ridiculous.

But there was one thing that he did not say: his success in Liang Country was not only due to hard work but also good luck and meeting the right people, one of whom was Peng Wei. Without Peng Wei's support and cultivation, all his efforts would have been in vain. He could not say this because he had suddenly realized that he had also changed. Peng Wei was his teacher and benefactor, but he had treated him with such an attitude just the day before, simply because their status was different now...

Upon realizing this, Yi Fei became somewhat uneasy even before Xing Ji could respond to his words. As he criticized Xing Ji for his smooth life and not understanding the suffering of the people of Liang Country, he himself had forgotten his original intentions due to the erosion of power.

Xing Ji spoke, not mocking Yi Fei, but calmly asking him, "Do you truly believe that you are fighting for a better life for the people of Liang Country? Is Situ Xie waging war for the benefit of the people as well? You think it's unfair because Qian Country and Yin Country have better territories, but what if Liang Country wins? Will you drive the people of Qian Country and Yin Country to Liang Country, let them starve and freeze, or simply wipe them all out and dominate what originally belonged to them? Do you think that's fair?"

Yi Fei frowned, not answering Xing Ji's words, because he could not utter the answer. The high-ranking royal family would never truly care about the lives of the common people. The Situ family was just trying to satisfy their ambitions, and Yi Fei was not naïve enough to believe that Situ Xie was truly waging war for the people.

Xing Ji also looked at the cypress trees outside. "You know the situation in Liang Country better than I do, as you have experienced many things firsthand. Over the past few decades, the Liang royal family has always been trying to seize Qian Country's territory and resources through war. But have you ever looked back at what this has brought to the people? You may argue that it is worth sacrificing a portion of the people for a prosperous and stable Liang Country for future generations, and you may even say that if Liang Country does not attack Qian Country, Qian

Country will attack sooner or later, as it is the general trend of the world. However, there is absolutely no need to talk about fairness and justice; your actions have nothing to do with fairness and justice. No one can choose their own birth, and my being born better off than you does not mean I owe you anything or can sympathize with the sufferings of the people in Liang Country. Why don't you compare me to Situ Xie? He was born as royalty, and you say that I cannot understand the hardships of the common people in Liang Country because I haven't experienced it. Still, do you think Situ Xie can understand it?"

All the generals of Liang Country had been indoctrinated by the royal family: their wars were just, fighting for fairness, for the people, and for their descendants. Yi Fei was no exception.

But at this moment, Xing Ji's words punctured those feeble and unfounded bandit arguments.

After a long silence, Yi Fei suddenly laughed, full of self-mockery, "Even if what you say is right, what do you think should be done? Go back to the past, coexist peacefully, and change nothing? Should the people of Liang Country be resigned to their fate, living in poverty and hardship for generations?"

Xing Ji shook his head, "Of course not. But I do have a thought about this. Although there has not been a decree from the capital yet, I believe the emperor will agree."

Yi Fei's eyes immediately became alert, "What do you want me to do?"

Xing Ji smiled, "Don't worry, I won't force you. But I believe that you will make a wise choice, whether it's for yourself, for your descendants, or for the common people of Liang Country."

Nanping City.

Due to Yi Fei's capture, the morale in the Liang Country's army was very low. Peng Wei and his son Peng Qian kept a low profile during this time and didn't want to get involved. Although Peng Wei still had prestige in the army.

That night, Peng Wei was flipping through an old military book that was left in the General Mansion of Nanping City for many years, sighing while reading.

There was a sound from the window, and Peng Wei looked over as he heard it; his face suddenly changed! A masked man in black had already entered the room and was walking towards him.

Before Peng Wei could grab his sword, the intruder voluntarily removed his mask, revealing a young and handsome face.

"You..." Peng Wei frowned, "What are you here for?"

It was Qiao Jing. When Peng Wei met him several years ago, he was still a Junior Officer named Che Yun in Xuanbei City. Later, he became a General, then the second prince of Liang Country, and now the commander of Xuanbei City.

At this moment, Peng Wei was more puzzled than fearful because he knew that Qiao Jing would not harm him, thanks to Xing Ji and Su Liang.

"There's something I'd like to discuss with Master Peng." Qiao Jing sat down as he spoke.

Peng Wei picked up the book he had just thrown down and put it away neatly in front of him. He sighed deeply and said, "Go ahead."

At dawn, a group of people and horses left Nanping City. Among them was a carriage. When they arrived at Xuanbei City, the sun had already risen high in the sky.

After the hurried repairs, the bombed gate and city walls of Xuanbei City had been basically restored to their original state. Soldiers patrolled the city building, and as soon as they saw someone approaching from afar, they immediately reported it.

At first, they thought that the army of Liang Country was attacking again, but they realized there weren't many people when they got closer.

When Xing Ji and Qiao Jing were on the city building, the people of Liang Country had already arrived under the city. Leading them was Yi Fei's eldest son, Yi Chong.

Yi Chong looked very much like Yi Fei, with a square face and a tall, sturdy physique. He rode on his horse, looked up at Xing Ji and Qiao Jing, and shouted loudly with his hands clasped, "I, Yi, come today to negotiate peace." With that, he waved his hand to the back.

The curtain of the carriage was lifted by a soldier, and Peng Wei was helped out of the carriage. He looked weak and unsteady on his feet, coughing incessantly.

"General Yi, what do you mean by this?" Xing Ji asked coldly from above.

"Master Peng suddenly fell ill, and it's very serious. The military doctors in Nanping City said they couldn't treat him. Master Peng said that he has a good relationship with the Divine Doctor Su of Qian Country and wanted to go to Qian Country to ask Doctor Su for treatment." Yi Chong spoke loudly, "I believe that General Xing and General Qiao won't stop him, right?"

"If Master Peng is only here to seek medical treatment, no one will stop him," Xing Ji said.

Yi Chong nodded slightly, "That's good, but... whether Master Peng can go or not still depends on my father's approval. Master Peng came to Nanping City this time on the orders of the Emperor to guide my father. The Emperor asked my father to take good care of Master Peng. To go to Qian Country at this time is a big matter, and I can't make the decision. My father came to see General Xing yesterday to discuss the matter. I don't know if he got drunk last night and hasn't woken up yet? We still need him to come out and see Master Peng's condition before making a decision."

Qiao Cong appeared on the city building and scolded, "Stop talking nonsense! You want to exchange your father with an old general, and you still pretend to be decent! If you want face, don't come! If you come, don't disgust people! Exchanging a Liang Country person for a Liang Country person, what a joke! You, Liang Country, invaded us without reason, so what's wrong with capturing your father? Even if we captured your whole family, it would be justified! If you have the guts, don't push Master Peng out, and exchange yourself for your father!"

Peng Wei continued coughing, making everyone feel anxious.

Yi Chong's face turned pale, then red, as Qiao Cong scolded him. Just then, Xing Ji spoke, "Since Master Peng's matter can only be decided by General Yi, please ask him to come out of the city!"

Yi Chong's expression relaxed, and he let out a long breath. Last night, a letter appeared on his bed. He didn't know who had sent it, but he was sure that the handwriting was his father Yi Fei's. The letter instructed him to carry out the tasks he was currently doing.

Peng Wei couldn't hold on any longer and was sent back to the carriage. Yi Chong waited under the city for about an hour, and when he heard the sound of the city gate opening, his expression changed!

Yi Fei rode out on a horse, wearing regular clothes that were a little wrinkled. He looked unwell, as if hungover from the previous night.

As for Yi Chong's previous claim that Yi Fei had voluntarily come to Xuanbei City, no one paid attention to it.

"Father!" Yi Chong said emotionally.

Yi Fei shook his head at him, looking at the carriage. "Old Peng wants to go to Liang Country to seek medical treatment, it has nothing to do with other matters. Let him go."

Peng Wei lifted the curtain of the carriage and looked at Yi Fei, his face full of shame.

Yi Fei returned to the Liang Country's team. After the carriage carrying Peng Wei entered Xuanbei City, the city gate closed again.

"Farewell, General Yi. I hope next time we can have a proper discussion." Xing Ji sneered and left the city building.

After traveling far from Xuanbei City, Yi Chong raised his hand, signaling the team to stop and rest.

"How is father? Are you all right?" Yi Chong looked Yi Fei up and down.

Yi Fei shook his head. "I'm fine."

"Father ..." Yi Chong felt that Yi Fei had returned so easily, perhaps because he had been won over by Qian Country.

Yi Fei stared in the direction of Nanping City. "We'll talk about it when we get back." Xing Ji had assured him that as long as the Situ Family was gone and Liang Country was no more, the common people of Liang Country would have a better life than they do now. Yi Fei and his descendants would have a bright future for choosing the right path. Yi Fei was convinced, for he could no longer see any future for Liang Country on its current path...

As for Peng Wei, he was just a tool for today's play, who knew and cooperated. Because what Qiao Jing had said to him last night was exactly what he had been hoping for.

In the eyes of those who were uninformed, such as Qiao Cong, it seemed that after Yi Fei was captured, Yi Chong had chosen to use Peng Wei to threaten Xing Ji in exchange for Yi Fei's return. He even said some self-righteous words to cover up the truth.

Peng Wei found himself once again sitting in the meeting hall of Xuanbei City's military camp, holding a cup of hot tea. He couldn't help but sigh, "Last time I sat here, I was negotiating with Su Liang. I heard she gave birth to a daughter? That's nice; she must be beautiful."

Qiao Cong immediately took out a letter that he had nearly worn out from frequent reading. He unfolded it and showed Peng Wei the little handprint on the paper, belonging to Gu Nuannuan.

Many things didn't need to be said anymore. Peng Wei's heart had long been disappointed with the Situ Imperial Family. He had supported Yi Fei back in the day because Yi Fei had climbed up from the bottom, ambitious but also conscientious.

When asked about Peng Qian, Peng Wei shook his head. "He can take care of himself." If Peng Qian came too, it would be easier for the Peng Family to be suspected of betraying Liang Country.

Regarding Peng Wei's health, Xing Ji asked.

Peng Wei chuckled, "It's all an act; I'm fine. I was tired on the way here, but I've recovered over the last couple of days."

Qiao Cong went to say goodbye to Min Rou.

Min Rou was surprised. "Where are you going, Grandfather Qiao? Going home?"

"I wish I could, but I can't go back right away! If I do, I'll definitely take you with me!" Qiao Cong looked helpless. "Jingjing and I are going to Yao City to seek revenge on that dog Situ Xie! I originally wanted Jingjing to send you back to the capital city, but he's filial and doesn't feel at ease leaving me to go alone."

Min Rou nodded, "It's good for the two of you to look after each other. Take care on your journey, Grandfather Qiao."

"Don't worry, with the two of us going, it's easy to take Situ Xie's dog head!" Qiao Cong laughed heartily. "Are you in a hurry to get back to the capital city?"

Stunned, Min Rou quickly waved her hand to dismiss it, "No hurry, there's no need to arrange for someone to send me."

Qiao Cong nodded, "Then you wait here for us to come back, we'll go home together!" He had his own thoughts about it and worried that if Min Rou returned to the capital city early, some young man might whisk her away. Where would his precious grandson find a granddaughter-in-law? All the good girls around Su Liang were taken, leaving only Min Rou.

Unaware of Qiao Cong's thoughts, Min Rou agreed to wait for them. When Xing Ji asked if she wanted him to send someone to accompany her back to the capital, Min Rou thought of her promise to Qiao Cong and said it wasn't necessary. However, she wanted to write Su Liang a letter asking her to let Elder Statesman Min know she was safe and would return home later.

And so, amidst the fierce battle, the climax abruptly came to an end.

When Su Liang received the news, she was teaching her two little disciples how to identify the herbs Gu Ling had brought back while running errands out of the city.

"How is the battle going?" Zhengzheng asked, frowning as Su Liang read the letter.

Su Liang sighed slightly. "It should be over by now." The letter mentioned Min Rou and Qiao Cong's meeting with He Wei.

Gu Ling read the letter and looked indifferent. "It doesn't matter. I never intended for Mo Yan to recognize you. I simply wanted to end the war as quickly as possible, avoid causing too many casualties. Now that we can focus on the Situ Family, we can focus on dealing with Xingluo Island."

Ji Xiaoshu blinked. "Are there bad people on Xingluo Island? If the stars fall and crush the bad people, that would be great!"

Gu Ling shook his head. "If a star were to fall, we would all be crushed."

Zhengzheng looked confused, "But stars are so small."

"Yeah! Master, what are you talking about?" Ji Xiaoshu was puzzled as well.

Gu Ling flew across the lake and back, looking at the two little disciples and asking, "Did you see anything?"

Ji Xiaoshu looked amazed. "Did Master go crazy?"

Zhengzheng scratched his head. "Master's... lightness skill has improved a lot?"

"When I was on the other side of the lake, I looked smaller than when I was near you." Gu Ling said.

"So what?" Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu asked in unison.

Gu Ling explained, "The reason you see stars as so small is because they are very, very far away. If they were to truly fall, they would be larger than the sky and the earth."

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu were both shocked. Both of the little fellows even ran a short distance away to observe each other, verifying Gu Ling's statement. The conclusion was: It's true!

"How did Master know that stars are far away from us?"

"Does Master know how big a star is?"

"I know." Gu Ling nodded.

"How did Master know? Were you hit by a star?" Ji Xiaoshu clutched Gu Ling and asked.

Gu Ling tapped Ji Xiaoshu's forehead and looked at Su Liang holding Gu Xiaonuan nearby, his eyes suddenly gentle. "I have a star of my own who told me."

Chapter 412: One side rejoices, while the other side splits.

The latest news about the war was rapidly spreading back to the capital cities of Qian Country and Liang Country.

After returning to Nanping City, Yi Fei had ordered the lockdown of South City gate. All soldiers were on standby, prepared to respond to Qian Country's counterattack while awaiting new instructions from the court.

Yi Fei, who had used Peng Wei to stage a drama and was slapped angrily by Peng Qian in public, did not arouse suspicion from Liang Country. Although many people mocked Yi Fei and his son's actions behind their backs, others suspected that the Peng Family had long been spies for Qian Country. They believed there was nothing wrong in using Peng Wei to exchange for Yi Fei's return, and even suggested capturing Peng Qian to prevent him from causing any more trouble.

A junior officer who held this view approached Yi Fei with his suggestion. After some thought, Yi Fei said that it was unreasonable to arrest Peng Qian without a reason and assigned the junior officer to monitor Peng Qian's every move.

The junior officer believed that Yi Fei thought the same way as he did, and that he would be heavily valued now. Little did he know that Yi Fei was only humoring him. Monitoring Peng Qian would yield no results.

On the Xuanbei City side, the reinforcement of the shattered city wall and gates had been completed. Some people in the Qian Country army thought they should counterattack and show Liang Country a lesson. However, Xing Ji chose to remain still.

But that was only on the surface. In secret, Qiao Cong and his son Qiao Jing had already entered Liang Country and were rushing to assassinate Situ Xie in Yao City. This was not arranged by Xing Ji, but rather an action that the father-son duo had always wanted to take, if not for various obstacles in the past.

Now, with the current situation where Liang Country's General Yi Fei had been turned against them, although Qian Country had a higher chance of winning, there was no need to fight any further, as it would only cause unnecessary casualties.

As long as they could successfully kill Situ Xie, other members of Situ Imperial Family would not amount to anything, and Liang Country's fate would be sealed.

Peng Wei stayed indoors to avoid being seen by spies, living comfortably in Xuanbei City.

The only two women in the army, Ren Dong and Min Rou, quickly became good friends. Ren Dong shared many things about Su Liang with Min Rou, who was always amazed. The old Mu who had brought Min Rou hadn't left yet, planning to wait in Xuanbei City for Su Liang to send another message regarding whether they would go to Xingluo Island or not.

As for everything that happened on Xingluo Island, Min Rou occasionally recalled, feeling as if it all happened in another lifetime.

Capital city of Qian Country.

Upon receiving the news that the war had subsided and that the Qiao family's father and son were going to assassinate Situ Xie in Yao City, Duanmu Chen was overjoyed. He immediately ordered Chang'an, "Go call Gu Ling and Su Liang!"

Just as Chang'an turned around, Duanmu Chen changed his mind, "Today is a great day, let me go out of the palace!"

“Are you going to the Su Mansion?” Chang’an asked respectfully.

“Where else?” Duanmu Chen retorted, laughing, “We should make it in time for lunch. I wonder what delicious dishes Su Liang and Gu Ling have prepared today. Let’s go.”

Chang’an: ... His master, who once did everything to become the lord of the palace, now looked forward to leaving the palace and mooching meals at Su Mansion.

They ran into Situ Yao halfway. She was being attended by palace maids and was about to take a stroll in the Imperial Garden. She saw Duanmu Chen and performed a salutation, but the sparkle that had once captivated him was gone from her eyes.

“Wait for me to return to the palace and visit you.” Duanmu Chen no longer minded Situ Yao’s concern for her family. Although things could never return to the way they were, there was no true affection between the two. He only wanted to be responsible for each woman in the Imperial Harem as much as possible. Perhaps he couldn’t be a good husband, but he would try to be a good person. Of course, except for Ji Yue Xuan – the woman who kept waiting for her lover, who was not Duanmu Chen.

Situ Yao replied and watched Duanmu Chen leave. She could sense his good mood, which made her wonder if good news had come from the northern border.

Situ Yao gazed into the north, where only the tall palace walls stretched and a few birds flew out, flapping their wings and disappearing into the blue sky.

“Your Majesty, are we still going to the garden?” The maid worriedly looked at the aloof Situ Yao.

Situ Yao shook her head slightly, not knowing if she was answering the maid or her own heart, “I don’t know...” but continued to walk towards the direction of the Imperial Garden.

Situ Yao was lost. If Qian Country won and Liang Country fell, what should she do? Even if Duanmu Chen still granted her the honor of Imperial Concubine, she knew her father and brothers would die, and the murderer would be Duanmu Chen. How could she face him, and even share a bed with him? She couldn’t do such a thing.

If it weren’t for the child in her belly, Situ Yao had considered ending her life along with the downfall of the Situ Family...

When Duanmu Chen arrived at the Su Mansion, Gu Ling was cooking the last dish. Su Liang and the children were already seated and just waiting for the meal to begin.

Upon hearing Duanmu Chen’s voice outside, Ji Xiaoshu shouted loudly towards the doorway, “Oh my god! Uncle Emperor is mooching a meal at our house again! Big brother, let’s eat the chicken legs quickly!”

Zhengzheng laughed quietly, and Duanmu Chen entered with a slightly dark expression, rubbed Ji Xiaoshu’s head, and sat down next to him, “Xiaoshu, speaking of mooching meals, when are you going back to your home? This is not your home.”

Immediately, Ji Xiaoshu was displeased, "I am Master and Mistress's disciple, and their son too! This is my home! What is Uncle Emperor to them?"

"How did you become their son? I am their best friend." Duanmu Chen smiled.

Zhengzheng: ... He had heard this sentence from his Uncle Lin Shun, and also from his Uncle Xing Yusheng.

"Mistress, who's your best friend?" Ji Xiaoshu immediately sought confirmation from Su Liang.

Su Liang chuckled, "Of course, it's your Master."

"Then Master's best friend must be Mistress! Master and Mistress's best friend is me!" Ji Xiaoshu patted his chest, wearing a proud expression.

Duanmu Chen coughed lightly, "As long as you're happy. But don't you really miss home?"

Ji Xiaoshu complained to Gu Ling, who was entering the door, "Master, Uncle Emperor said I'm mooching meals here and wants me to go back to my daddy's house!"

Upon hearing "my daddy's house," Duanmu Chen's mouth twitched.

Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "He's right."

Duanmu Chen immediately laughed, hoping to comfort Ji Xiaoshu. However, he heard Gu Ling say, "You two are the same."

Now Ji Xiaoshu was happy, "It's not the same! I'm younger than Uncle Emperor!"

Duanmu Chen: ... That's true.

Little Nuannuan woke up in Su Liang's arms, and Duanmu Chen's attention was immediately drawn to her. He stood up and wanted to hold the chubby little girl but was met with a cold stare from Gu Ling. He silently sat back down and finally remembered the main issue, "There's good news."

Su Liang asked, "Have they stopped fighting?"

"How did you know?" Duanmu Chen still wanted to surprise her.

"I guessed it," Su Liang replied.

After Duanmu Chen had explained everything, Su Liang nodded, "That's for the best." As long as the war subsided and no more casualties were incurred, everything else was less important at the moment.

"That mysterious force, the one you mentioned called Mo Yan, he's left this time, but next time... could it be that he's coming to snatch my Imperial Throne directly?"

Duanmu Chen asked the question in his heart.

Gu Ling nodded, "Yes."

Ji Xiaoshu looked surprised, "Is the person on that island with falling stars really that powerful? Why didn't he snatch my father's Imperial Throne?"

Duanmu Chen gave Ji Xiaoshu a thumbs up, "You really are a dutiful son."

"In this respect, I'm not as good as Emperor Uncle." Ji Xiaoshu said with a serious little face.

Duanmu Chen's face stiffened for a moment, indeed, he was also a "dutiful son"...

Su Liang answered Duanmu Chen's question, "It's possible, so we still need to be cautious. However, we expect to find them before they come."

Ji Xiaoshu asked again, "Why don't you snatch my father's Imperial Throne?" He really didn't understand.

Duanmu Chen chuckled, "It's all possible."

"So if I kill Emperor Uncle, can I be the emperor of Qian Country?" Ji Xiaoshu frowned, "That doesn't make sense."

The last four words were strikingly similar to Su Liang's tone.

"It's not that simple, but to possess the throne of Qian Country, killing me is a must." Duanmu Chen explained, "Similarly, if you want the throne of Yin Country, you have to kill your father."

At this moment, Zhengzheng whispered to Ji Xiaoshu, "Little Shu, master wants to eat your chicken leg."

Ji Xiaoshu instantly threw the matter of the throne out of his mind and watched Gu Ling pick up the chicken leg. He rushed over with a bowl to catch it.

Gu Ling teased him for a while before finally putting the chicken leg in his bowl.

Duanmu Chen started eating as well, planning to have a proper chat with Su Liang after finishing, so as not to have Ji Xiaoshu's meddling spirit always interfering.

Lunch ended in a joyful atmosphere. Gu Ling instructed the two children to wash the dishes. They were not the first to do housework, even Ji Xiaoshu didn't bargain and went obediently.

Duanmu Chen asked with a smile, "Will my son have to come to your house to wash dishes in the future?"

Su Liang nodded, "If he wants to eat at my house."

"What about Nuannuan?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Su Liang smiled, "It's the same."

"That's great." Duanmu Chen didn't have any old-fashioned ideas of avoiding the kitchen, after all, he claimed to be Gu Ling's best friend, and Gu Ling was a man with superb cooking skills. After getting to know this couple, many of his old concepts changed, and he hoped his children could have a more relaxed and happy life different from his own.

After discussing the current situation for a while, Duanmu Chen returned to the palace. He was not worried about what was to come. As a fortunate emperor who “sits and enjoys the fruits of others’ labor,” he only needed to do his job, not cause trouble, and not give Gu Ling and Su Liang orders, then everyone would be happy.

The two little ones finished their chores and went to take a nap. Lin Shuzhi came to give them lessons in the afternoon and talked about the current situation with Su Liang.

After confirming that the northern war had subsided, Lin Shuzhi breathed a sigh of relief, “That’s great.” He knew that although Gu Ling and Su Liang had been in the capital city all year and hadn’t left, the current results must have been influenced and played a crucial role by them.

Almost at the same time as Duanmu Chen received the good news from Xuanbei City, in the Royal Palace of Yao City in Liang Country, Situ Xie also received a message from Yi Fei.

Two days before this message, Situ Xie received the previous one: Liang Country had successfully blown up the city gate and walls of Xuanbei City.

Although Qian Country had also used explosives at the time, which prevented Liang Country’s army from attacking Xuanbei City that day, Situ Xie felt that with Mo Yan’s help, they had made an important breakthrough, and it was only a matter of time before Xuanbei City fell, and it shouldn’t take long.

Now, the message that Situ Xie received was from the day after Mo Yan disappeared.

Seeing the line “Mo Zunzhu has disappeared, and there is no additional food and grass,” Situ Xie’s hand trembled violently, and his heart sank heavily!

Situ Jing, sensing something very bad, felt uneasy. Since Mo Yan started to help them, it was the first time that Situ Xie’s face showed such an expression, something bad must have happened.

Then, Situ Jing heard Situ Xie gritting his teeth.

“Your Majesty, is something wrong in Nanping City?” Situ Jing asked cautiously.

“Mo Yan...” Situ Xie gritted his teeth, his eyes darkening terribly.

Situ Jing’s heart skipped a beat, he had mentioned before that there might be something wrong with Mo Yan, but he had been scolded by Situ Xie.

Picking up the note Situ Xie had thrown on the ground, Situ Jing read it and opened his eyes wide, “Our food... Did he collude with Ji Yuebai and Duanmu Chen? Was it to provoke us Liang Country to launch war first so that they can counterattack Liang Country justifiably?”

“Not necessarily, but something must have happened related to Gu Ling and Su Liang!” Situ Xie still believed that Mo Yan was not with Gu Ling and Su Liang up to this point. An unexpected situation had occurred in the dark that influenced Mo Yan, and he simply abandoned Liang Country and took the crucial food and grass with him!

The reason why Situ Xie didn’t share Situ Jing’s thoughts was that he knew what kind of people Gu Ling and Su Liang were. They couldn’t possibly let a person like Mo Yan entice Liang Country to send troops for the sake of unifying the world, as there were simpler and more direct ways to

achieve their goals. There was no need for such a hassle. Moreover, a “divine” person like Mo Yan wouldn’t be used in such a place.

As Situ Xie was worrying about how to counter the situation and ordering the immediate collection of food from the common people, new news came from Nanping City: Yi Fei had been caught.

Situ Jing immediately said, “Use Peng Wei to exchange! It will definitely work!”

After a day, Situ Xie received the latest news that Yi Fei’s son, Yi Chong, really exchanged Yi Fei with Peng Wei, but there was not enough food or explosives, so Yi Fei dared not send out troops lightly. He asked Situ Xie what to do next.

Last night, Situ Xie hadn’t closed his eyes at all, and seemed to have aged a lot overnight. All his hair had turned white, and his eyes were red.

Hearing Situ Jing say that Qian Country would definitely counterattack Nanping City, Situ Xie remained silent. He looked at the lifelike golden dragon armrest on the Dragon Throne and recalled the ambitions he had when he first took the position, as if it were only yesterday...

A thunderous roar of thunder sounded, and Situ Xie looked outside, the dark clouds were menacing, and the wind and rain were about to come.

“Your Majesty, what should we do next?” Situ Jing’s expression was urgent.

Situ Xie suddenly turned his head and looked at him coldly, “Always asking me, no one has a brain! The only smart and powerful one among my children and grandchildren has betrayed me!”

Situ Jing was immersed in his worries about the situation, and suddenly got scolded. He didn’t dare to breathe, lowering his head.

At this time, the person Situ Xie mentioned as the “only smart and powerful one” had returned to Yao City, with the purpose of taking his head..

Chapter 413: 413. You die, I live

Yao City.

It was the end of March, the late spring in Qian Country. The springtime in Liang Country’s capital city had just begun.

Qiu Cong and his grandson, Qiao Jing, had just passed noon when they arrived in the city. Disguised, they went directly to the biggest restaurant in Yao City and ordered a table full of food and wine.

Halfway through a strong drink, Qiu Cong sighed in comfort, feeling his fatigue easing.

Qiao Jing only had a small sip, not wanting to drink too much. He had a low alcohol tolerance and didn’t want to make any mistakes.

The window was open, and the cool breeze blew in. People came and went on the streets below, unaffected by the distant war. There was no sense of tension in the most prosperous capital of Liang Country, as if the people there lived in a different world from those in the nearby border cities.

Qiu Cong spotted a corpulent man dressed in gold and silver, with a clean-cut girl with red eyes in his arms. He recognized him as a Liang noble and felt disgusted.

Qiao Jing also saw and commented indifferently, "That's the former Queen's nephew, a lascivious ghost." He was familiar with the members of the Liang Royal Family.

Seeing Qiu Cong raise his hand, Qiao Jing frowned but said nothing to stop him. Moments later, the fat man suddenly fell to the ground like a heap of meat, stirring up a cloud of dust. The girl he controlled screamed and retreated to the corner. A group of followers rushed forward, calling him "Young Master" and struggled to lift him up and headed towards the Medical Hall across the street.

An old man with patched clothes passed through the crowd, grabbed the girl, and ran off. Qiao Jing couldn't hear the sound, but from the girl's lip movements, she was the old man's granddaughter.

There was discussion in the restaurant, with many people believing that the fat man had been plagued by wine and lust and suddenly fell ill. No one had seen Qiu Cong's hidden weapon.

"Grandfather, this might end up alerting the enemy," Qiao Jing calmly warned, pouring Qiu Cong another drink.

Qiu Cong drank it all in one go, scoffing, "All the better! Let's see where Situ Xie can hide his useless children and grandchildren!"

Since Qiao Jing didn't stop him, it meant there was no serious harm. The only concern was whether the girl would bear the brunt of the man's revenge afterward, but that was also not a big issue. As the emperor, and given the current tense situation, Situ Xie couldn't hide. The grandfather and grandson planned to act tonight to prevent any possible changes.

After finishing their meal, they paid the bill and left the restaurant, strolling around the street for a while before disappearing into a dead-end alley.

Peng Mansion.

Peng Fan was holding a book about soldiers, not turning the pages for a while. He closed it and was about to check on his mother when he saw two shadows flash by, and the room suddenly had two strangers in it.

Peng Fan's face changed, and he immediately grabbed the longsword hanging on the wall, his eyes guarded. "Who are you?"

"Calm down, young man! I'm Xiaoliang's master!" Qiu Cong introduced himself this way.

Peng Fan was taken aback, "Su Liang? Senior, are you Su Liang's master?" Then he relaxed, lowering the sword he had raised.

Qiao Jing remained indifferent, "Aren't you afraid we're liars?"

"Are you... General Qiu?" Peng Fan recognized Qiao Jing's identity just from his voice. They had met before.

Seeing Qiao Jing nod, Peng Fan hurriedly asked, "How are my grandfather and father? How are they?" He had just received news that Yi Chong had exchanged Peng Wei for Yi Fei. Although Peng

Fan knew that Peng Wei would not be harmed in Xuanbei City, he was still anxious and more concerned that Peng Qian left in Nanping City would be persecuted by Yi's father and son.

"They're fine," Qiu Cong said as he sat down. "Nothing happened at your house, did it?"

Peng Fan nodded, "Everything at home is fine."

Qiao Jing then said, "We came to assassinate Situ Xie."

Peng Fan was momentarily stunned before nodding, "Oh." He was quite calm. He was still young, and his dissatisfaction with Liang Country's Royal Family would only be more significant than Peng Wei and Peng Qian. He had mentioned earlier that the Peng Family should move to Qian Country. But it was not that Peng Wei was unwilling, but rather that considering the many family members, young and old, and even the servants, it was almost impossible to leave under the watchful eye of the Royal Family and safely arrive in Qian Country.

"Is there anything I need to do?" Peng Fan asked.

Qiao Jing counter-questioned, "Aren't you afraid that our failure will implicate the Peng Family?"

Peng Fan smiled, "This senior is Su Liang's master; how can he fail? I believe in the strength of both of you."

Qiao Cong stared at Peng Fan, "You little brat, are you also fond of my apprentice?"

Peng Fan nodded, "Admiring, worshipping."

"Good boy! Find us a place to sleep!" Qiao Cong said. Coming to Peng's home was not only to send a message of safety according to Peng Wei's request but also to find a place to rest.

Peng Fan tidied up quickly and let Qiao Cong and Qiao Jing sleep in his bedroom and study room separately.

In the palace, after a string of bad news followed one after another, Situ Xie scolded Situ Jing, but he calmed down. However, no matter how hard he racked his brains and thought about the current situation, he couldn't find a way out.

At this point, using the method of threatening Qian Country with hostages might be feasible, but first, they had to capture someone, which takes time, and secondly, there are many masters in Qian Country, who would undoubtedly take revenge. Unless, Situ Xie could instantly teleport to the Su Mansion in Liang Country's capital city and abduct Gu Ling's precious daughter, but such a thing was impossible...

In the past, after the war between Liang Country and Qian Country, peace would always be quickly restored, as if nothing had happened. This was because Qian Country had always been wary of the Yin Country to the south and never dared to attack Liang Country aggressively, opting to keep the peace instead.

But this time was different. For the past several decades, Yin Country, which had always stayed neutral, chose to ally with Qian Country, leaving Qian Country with no strategic weaknesses.

Situ Xie had to admit that Ji Yuebai's unusual decision to cooperate with Gu Ling and Su Liang was sincere, and Ji Yuebai was not a "normal emperor."

Everyone in the Royal Family, whether they spoke or kept silent, looked at Situ Xie with the same question in their eyes: What to do next?

Situ Xie didn't know the answer. However, he couldn't avoid the fact that it was his direct grandson-in-law and one of his grandsons who truly defeated him and destroyed Liang Country's future.

That made him feel sorrowful and ironic, considering that everything he had pursued in his life seemed like a joke.

Situ Xie sat alone in the Imperial Study, with several memorandums piled up on the dragon case, which he hadn't dealt with for days, and he didn't want to open any of them. He heard someone talking outside the door, seemingly Situ Jing, and slowly came to his senses. Closing his eyes and opening them again, he saw Situ Jing entering.

"Your Majesty, please have some hot soup." Situ Jing placed a bowl of steaming hot soup in front of Situ Xie, "Taking care of your body is the most important thing."

"What happened outside just now?" Situ Xie opened the lid, revealing his favorite soup, which Situ Ning used to make for him before she got married, and later Situ Yao also made it very well.

Situ Jing shook his head, "Nothing, just a trivial matter that has been dealt with."

The fat man who had been knocked down by Qiao Cong in the street had been unconscious since he was carried home. His father had come to the palace gates asking to see Situ Xie, hoping to get the best Imperial Physician, claiming that his son had been secretly attacked by a mysterious person. The guards didn't dare to mistreat the former imperial brother-in-law and came to consult Situ Xie, but they were stopped by Situ Jing.

Situ Jing didn't believe in any mysterious attacks at all because he didn't think the useless, fat man had any value. Even if he had been secretly attacked, it was probably because he had been bullying men and dominating women for years in Yao City and got someone to take revenge on him; he deserved to die.

Thus, Situ Jing scolded the guard and told the former imperial brother-in-law to leave, feeling that there was no need to bother Situ Xie with such a broken thing.

As Situ Xie drank half a bowl of soup and put down the spoon, he looked at Situ Jing and asked, "Have you heard any news about Yaoyao recently?"

Situ Jing was momentarily stunned and shook his head, "No. Duanmu Chen keeps a close watch on her, and there has been no news from her for a long time. But she should be fine, pregnant and resting in Qian Country's Imperial Palace." In fact, it had been a long time since Situ Jing had thought of Situ Yao.

"Back then, we really shouldn't have married Yaoyao off to that place." Situ Xie showed regret, "Even more so, we shouldn't have married Ning'er off to Qian Country,

or else there wouldn't have been Gu Ling, that misfortune! He was born to be the bane of our Situ Family!"

To this, Situ Jing deeply agreed. What he dared not say was that Gu Ling's restoration of his identity in Qian Country and Qiao Jing's growth to his current status were both partly due to Situ Xie's efforts. He remembered that Situ Xie had said more than once that Gu Ling and Qiao Jing were useful, and Situ Jing had to admit that Situ Xie had an "extremely good" eye for people. Those two were indeed very capable, far beyond their expectations and completely out of Situ Xie's control...

"Imperial ancestor, do we still have hope of seeking peace with Qian Country? Since Qian Country has not counterattacked us yet, could their alliance with Yin Country also be unstable? Is there a chance everything will go back to the way it was before...?" Situ Jing asked tentatively.

This time, Situ Xie was very calm and shook his head, "It's impossible. You all need to be careful from now on."

Situ Jing frowned, "Be careful... What does Imperial Ancestor mean?"

"Qian Country does not want to wage war, otherwise we would have already received news of Nanping City being captured by now." Situ Xie sighed deeply, "Someone will definitely come to assassinate me next, and I know who it will be."

"Situ Jing?" Situ Jing blurted out.

Situ Xie nodded, "And his grandfather."

Situ Jing wanted to say something else, but Situ Xie waved his hand, "Now that things are at this point, I know what I'm doing. You can go back."

After Situ Jing left, he felt increasingly uneasy, and as he walked the streets, he felt as if someone was watching him. After he returned to his residence, he ordered the guards to keep a strict watch and never went out again.

That night, Qiao Cong and Qiao Jing sneaked into Liang Country's Imperial Palace under cover and approached the brightly lit Imperial Study.

Qiao Jing felt that it could be a trap; given Situ Xie's wisdom, he probably already guessed that someone would come to assassinate him and even suspected that they would be the ones to come.

Qiao Cong had wanted to kill Situ Xie for a long time, and now that the opportunity had finally arrived, he didn't care for any other trappings. He lit a fire and threw it at the window of the Imperial Study.

The night wind blew, and the flames grew quickly. The guards began to hurriedly put out the fire, but Situ Xie came out from inside.

Looking at Situ Xie, Qiao Jing felt that something was off. Qiao Cong, having taken out the nail gun given to him by Elder Mu, aimed it at Situ Xie's forehead. He didn't want to waste any words with Situ Xie, only to avenge and kill.

The fast-moving nail, illuminated by the firelight, penetrated Situ Xie's forehead and buried itself in his brain; no blood flowed out. With his body stiffening, Situ Xie fell headfirst to the ground among gasps and cries, motionless.

"Your Majesty!"

"Assassin! Save His Majesty!"

"Quickly call the Imperial Physician!"

Chaos erupted both inside and outside the Imperial Study, but nobody caught even a glimpse of Qiao Cong and Qiao Jing's shadows.

Qiao Cong muttered to himself, "That was too easy..."

Qiao Jing stared intently at Situ Xie's corpse, now surrounded by people, and felt that things had gone too smoothly to be real. Normally, Situ Xie shouldn't be so careless, and there should have been a master to protect him by his side. There must be something amiss.

Could it be a stand-in...? This thought popped into Qiao Jing's mind, but he didn't say anything more as he left Liang Country's Imperial Palace together with Qiao Cong.

Qiao Cong wanted to return to the Peng Family but Qiao Jing held him back, "Grandfather, let's go check out the old King Yue Mansion."

"Alright." Qiao Cong thought of visiting the place where his daughter grew up.

After Situ Xie became the emperor, there weren't many people left in the King Yue Mansion, but everything remained the same.

Qiao Jing headed straight to Situ Xie's study room in the mansion. He had been there before, where Situ Xie handled important matters, and there was a secret chamber in the study.

No one was guarding the study at the moment. Qiao Jing asked Qiao Cong to watch the outside while he pushed open the door, entering Situ Xie's study room.

It was pitch black inside, only lit by the moonlight seeping in from the outside. Qiao Jing took out a luminous pearl, glanced around to make sure no one was there, then walked towards the bookshelf.

After searching for a while, he found the mechanism to the secret chamber. Qiao Jing twisted it, and the bookshelf slowly moved, revealing the hidden chamber behind.

Standing at the entrance of the secret chamber, he quietly waited for a moment. Qiao Jing was about to step in but frowned and retracted his foot. If there was no one inside, there was no need to go in. If there was someone, it was definitely a trap.

The light from the luminous pearl in Qiao Jing's hand flickered as he was about to leave. Suddenly, a cold glint flashed in front of his eyes. Four shadows pounced from the secret chamber, attacking him with murderous intent!

When Qiao Cong noticed something was off, he saw Qiao Jing being forced into the secret chamber, and the slow-moving secret door closed quickly, blocking his vision!

"Jingjing!" Qiao Cong rushed in, swinging his palm at the bookshelf. The bookshelf trembled a bit but didn't collapse.

By the time Qiao Cong finally found the mechanism and opened the secret chamber, there was no one inside. Apparently, there was yet another secret passage inside the chamber. Despite Qiao Jing being careful, he still fell into the trap.

Not being able to find the entrance to the secret passage and in fear of more traps, Qiao Cong left in a rage, heading towards the Imperial Palace again.

It was while Qiao Jing was conscious that he fell into the secret passage. At this moment, he was somewhere underground in Yao City. Four blades were against his neck, and a silver-haired old man with cold eyes was standing not far from him. The man was none other than Situ Xie, who “died” in the palace recently!

So it was a substitute after all... Qiao Jing thought. He had guessed what Situ Xie would do. Similarly, Situ Xie also calculated how he would act and prepared a trap for him.

But Qiao Jing was calm at the moment, looking at Situ Xie with a faint expression and saying, “You can’t possibly find substitutes for all your grandchildren or hide them. Before dawn, if you don’t release me, my grandfather may kill one of your grandsons.”

Hearing this, Situ Xie sneered, “At this point, do you think I care about that? Grandsons? Grandchildren? They’re all either useless or against me. You’re not even willing to call me ‘grandfather’ again.”

A faint smile appeared on Qiao Jing’s lips, not reaching his eyes, “This is all the result of your own actions.”

“You think I won’t kill you?” Situ Xie asked coldly.

Qiao Jing shook his head, “Of course not. You’ve gone through so much trouble to capture me as a hostage, hoping to use me to turn the tables. However, you have no chance anymore.”

Situ Xie’s eyes narrowed as he strode over, raised his hand high, and slapped Qiao Jing fiercely several times, causing blood to flow from Qiao Jing’s mouth before stopping. The long-standing anger from being “betrayed” by Gu Ling and Qiao Jing was slightly relieved at this moment. But seeing Qiao Jing’s calm eyes, the extinguished rage in Situ Xie flared up once again.

Situ Xie approached and strangled Qiao Jing’s neck, his eyes cold and ruthless, “When you were born, I should have killed you!”

Four skilled masters who had been restraining Qiao Jing in the past now moved to the side. Qiao Jing suddenly sneered. Situ Xie felt that something was wrong, and he felt something tiny penetrate his body...

Situ Xie felt his body rapidly becoming paralyzed, and as he fell to the ground, he heard Qiao Jing’s cold voice in his ear, “I didn’t expect you to set a trap and wait for me in person because I thought that if you arranged for a substitute, you would run further away, hide deeper, and wait for an opportunity. You should have gone farther away, because I came to kill you. But you insisted on seeing me, so now it’s either you die or I live!”

Chapter 414: 414. The Death of Situ Xie

A chilling wind somehow blew through the dark secret passage.

It can't be said that Situ Xie was careless. That's because when Qiao Jing was held hostage by those four men with swords, he was fed with a pill that hindered his dantian, causing weakness in his limbs. Although he could still stand on his own and not fall, he had no chance of victory against Situ Xie, let alone fight back.

Indeed, Qiao Jing's weapons were confiscated, and the hidden weapons and poisons on his body were searched and taken away, except for the jade ring on his hand.

This ring was special, it was given to Qiao Jing by Situ Xie a few years ago, saying that it was a relic of his mother, Situ Xiang.

Thus, it was entirely normal for Qiao Jing to still be wearing the ring, and Situ Xie thought he knew it well, considering it just an expensive accessory.

However, two days before leaving Xuanbei City, Qiao Jing mentioned his upcoming assassination plan to old Mu, who scrutinized him with a "professional" gaze, focused on Qiao Jing's ring and learned that it was connected to Situ Xie. He immediately asked Qiao Jing to remove it and give it to him.

Qiao Jing didn't know what old Mu was going to do but didn't hesitate to give it. He had never even seen his birth mother, so there wasn't much emotional attachment. Wearing the ring was simply a habit, and there was no reason to take it off.

When Qiao Jing received the ring back the next day, it looked the same, but it had been transformed into a hidden weapon by old Mu.

"You only have one chance," old Mu told Qiao Jing. "And you have to be close to your target to use it. It's not fast enough. There's no way around it – jade is really not easy to work with, and there's not much time. Just make do with it!"

Back to the present, looking at Situ Xie, who had fallen to the ground with an ashen face, Qiao Jing thought that old Mu, as a descendant of the legendary Divine Craftsman, created something far from makeshift and perfectly suited to deal with Situ Xie. No other weapon or hidden weapon could have achieved this effect.

"Why don't you help me up..." Situ Xie shakily took out a small medicine bottle from his pouch. It was the antidote given to him by Yue Mei. Still, just as he was about to pour out the medicine, his hand trembled, and the bottle fell to the ground.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye.

Qiao Jing's neck was held by two swords, and the other two men went to help Situ Xie.

With a calm expression, Qiao Jing spoke, "I presume you four are familiar with the current situation in the world."

An old man who was about to pull Situ Xie back paused abruptly, his eyes flickering. He exchanged glances with another man and looked at the two comrades holding Qiao Jing hostage.

"It's not like Situ Xie saved your lives in any extraordinary way. You are all highly skilled in martial arts and are risking your lives for him only to secure a good future for yourself and your descendants. Am I right? If so, why not seize the opportunity

and pledge your loyalty to me?" Qiao Jing's expression was indifferent. "The days of Liang Country are numbered. If you try to save Situ Xie, in the end, you'll only be accompanying him to his grave."

Situ Xie's eyes were cold and menacing. He gritted his teeth, "Shut up! With just you trying to destroy Liang Country, you must be dreaming! Don't listen to his nonsense. Afterward, he will definitely kill you all! Give me the antidote quickly!"

"You four still have a chance to choose the path of survival. If you are being controlled by poison, there's no need to worry at all. My best friend is named Su Liang. You should all be familiar with this name, right? Speaking of which, I met General Yi Fei of Nanping City, and he mentioned that the outcome would be different if he could ask for help from Divine Doctor Su when his newborn grandson died prematurely. As long as you make a wise choice, if your children and grandchildren are sick or injured in the future, you will have the opportunity to find the Divine Doctor Su for treatment," Qiao Jing threw out a huge temptation. Choosing the wrong side is extremely lethal, but choosing the right side brings many benefits.

Life is not short, and most people have children and grandchildren. It's challenging to predict illnesses and injuries. Even someone in Yi Fei's position would want to befriend Su Liang, let alone these men. Among the four of them, two were originally loyal to Situ Han, and they still remember the strange illness Situ Han had a few years ago. The Imperial Physicians in the palace were helpless, and they had no choice but to send people thousands of miles to Qian Country to request Su Liang's medical treatment.

Therefore, when Qiao Jing brought up Su Liang, it was more effective than promising them countless riches and honor.

Having heard Qiao Jing mention Yi, the more astute among the four guessed that this general had also betrayed Liang Country. If so, how could Situ Xie possibly have any chance of victory? Even if he could escape with his life, he would never have the chance to make a comeback!

Situ Xie watched as one of his subordinates bent down and picked up the medicine bottle from the ground, his face lit up with joy, "Give it to me quickly!"

However, the man walked two steps to the side and handed the medicine bottle to Qiao Jing instead. At the same time, the two swords that had been pressed against Qiao Jing's neck were withdrawn.

Avoiding harm and seeking benefits is human nature. They were loyal to Situ Xie because of his status, but it was obvious that he had reached a dead end, and his position was no longer safe. As long as Qiao Jing could escape from this secret passage, he still had a great future ahead of him.

Situ Xie cursed and threatened to tear the four traitors to pieces. He quickly started promising them more benefits, hoping they would change their minds.

In such a closed environment, and with both Situ Xie and Qiao Jing poisoned, whoever could gather the support of the four masters would survive. For the other, there was only one path – death!

Qiao Jing had already won. He took the medicine bottle and sniffed it, but he didn't take it. Instead, he asked the old man who had searched him earlier to return his belongings.

The old man quickly brought Qiao Jing's belongings to him, including his weapons, hidden weapons, poison, and the antidote made by Su Liang.

Qiao Jing opened his antidote, and slowly poured out one pill in front of Qiao Cong, then put it in his mouth, "This is made by Su Liang."

At this moment, the four masters had already silently stood behind Situ Xie, pointing their swords at him.

Situ Xie regretted it so much that his guts turned green! He shouldn't have set a trap for Qiao Jing tonight! As Qiao Jing said, since he had used a body double that he had cultivated for many years, he should have run far away and waited for the right moment to strike!

Qiao Jing's body quickly recovered. He didn't kill Situ Xie immediately but asked him a question, "What do you know about Mo Yan?"

Situ Xie was startled for a moment, then sneered, "You want to know? If you let me go, I can tell you. He is the biggest threat to Gu Ling and Su Liang so far. I have witnessed his abilities with my own eyes, and they are special powers that you can't even imagine! If you kill me, you will be completely ignorant of Mo Yan!"

Qiao Jing's expression was indifferent, "Threatening me? So why do you think Mo Yan, who was cooperating with you well before, suddenly ran away?"

Situ Xie's face stiffened. He didn't know the reason why Mo Yan had left Nanping City, but it must have had something to do with Gu Ling and Su Liang.

"No matter what you know, it's worthless. I'm just asking one more pointless question." Qiao Jing said, and drew his sword, "The Emperor of Liang Country, Situ Xie, died in front of the Imperial Study's door an hour ago, as you arranged. As for you, this is a good place to be buried."

Situ Xie turned pale, "Jingjing... Jingjing, don't kill me! I... I can pass the Imperial Throne to you! As long as you spare me, I will issue an abdication decree once I get out, making you the emperor of Liang country! Weren't you once eager to become the Emperor? Now is the perfect opportunity! Why should you go back to Qian Country and be below Gu Ling? In terms of talent, you're not at all inferior to him! Once you become the Emperor of Liang country, given time, I believe you can eventually rule the world! I will support you from the sidelines!"

Qiao Jing's expression was impatient, "Are you done? Who cares about your Imperial Throne? Who cares about your support? I need to get out and find my grandfather quickly, so he doesn't worry." As soon as he finished speaking, he didn't give Situ Xie the chance to say another word. He thrust his sword into Situ Xie's chest!

Blood splattered. Situ Xie stared at Qiao Jing with wide eyes, opened his mouth, spewed out a mouthful of blood, tilted his head, and took his last breath.

Later, when people mentioned Situ Xie, they would always sigh, saying that he was clever all his life but died so suddenly and so easily.

Qiao Jing found such talk boring. Situ Xie's death, although sudden, was a long time coming on the "path of death". And for Qiao Jing to kill Situ Xie, there were the long-term efforts of many people at play.

As far as the ambition of Liang Country to always ally with Yin Country to destroy Qian Country is concerned, there is no right or wrong from the perspective of the overall situation and the rulers. The end result is just a confirmation of the old saying, "The winner becomes king, and the loser becomes a bandit." In the power struggle, Qian Country won, and Liang Country lost.

The death of Situ Xie was certainly related to Liang Country's situation, but there was also an important factor: he had personal grudges with both Gu Ling and Qiao Jing. Many things started because of him, and in the end, he reaped what he sowed.

Qiao Jing searched Situ Xie's body and found that he was still carrying the Jade Seal, showing how strong his desire to control the imperial throne was. As for whether Situ Xie had considered the possibility of failure and the consequences of failure when arranging a substitute and setting a trap for Qiao Jing tonight, it is unknown.

"Let's go." Under the guidance of four master-level people, Qiao Jing walked through a long, narrow secret passage. When they finally came out, they were not in the Study Room of the King Yue's mansion but in the Imperial Study.

Looking at the interior environment of the secret passage, it seemed to have been dug for some time, not recently. Probably, when Situ Xie was still the Prince of Liang Country, he had ordered someone to dig it. In this way, although he had not sat in the Dragon Throne, as long as he wanted to, he could dispose of the person on the throne as he pleased... Presumably, he enjoyed the feeling of secretly manipulating everything during those years.

The Royal Palace of Liang Country was in chaos.

Situ Xie was dead, Situ Jing was captured, and fires broke out in many places in the palace, with flames reaching the sky, it was unstoppable.

Qiao Jing saw the place where the fire was the most intense. That palace was where the sisters Situ Ning and Situ Xiang had lived many years ago when they entered the palace, and it was there that Situ Han had violated Situ Xiang. The person who started the fire was undoubtedly Qiao Cong.

"Please help me find my grandfather." Qiao Jing said. Qiao Cong must be frantic.

The four master-level practitioners respectfully responded and began to search in different directions for Qiao Cong. Qiao Jing waited in the empty Imperial Study.

Soon, Qiao Cong, who had set fire to various palaces, rushed over, "Jingjing!" Although he had set fires, he had chosen unoccupied palaces. His intention was not to harm people but to vent his anger and force Situ Xie to show himself.

"Grandfather, I'm fine." Qiao Jing stood up from the Dragon Throne. He had just sat down for a moment without feeling anything special, just a chair that was too wide and uncomfortable.

Qiao Cong furrowed his brow and came over, stretching out his hand to pinch and knead Qiao Jing's face, "Is it really you? Is it not a substitute arranged by that scoundrel Situ Xie? How many cups of wine did you drink at lunch?"

Qiao Jing couldn't help but smile, "Half a cup. If I were a substitute, I would have assassinated you, grandfather, just now."

Only then did Qiao Cong breathe a sigh of relief, "As long as you're alright. I thought Situ Xie was going to kidnap you and hide you away, then cut off your hands and feet and send them to me. It's terrifying!"

Qiao Jing:... The previous cold and stubborn old man seemed to be an illusion.

"Where is he?" Qiao Cong asked.

"Situ Xie? He's dead." Qiao Jing replied.

"Are you sure it's not a second substitute? Are you sure he's really dead?" Qiao Cong has been haunted by this all night. Everything was going smoothly at first, but soon Qiao Jing was taken away right in front of his eyes.

Qiao Jing nodded, "I'm sure it's him, and he's definitely dead."

"No!" Qiao Cong frowned, "I have to go and chop him a few more times!"

It is true that Qiao Cong's daughter was raised by Situ Xie, but Qiao Cong had already investigated the matter years ago. One of his enemies had kidnapped his wife and daughter when he was not at home, and that enemy turned out to be one of Situ Xie's minions. Qiao Cong's wife committed suicide due to the humiliation, and the man intended to sell Qiao Cong's daughter to the brothel but was caught by Situ Xie. Situ Xie adopted Qiao Cong's daughter for two reasons: one, because she seemed to be a beautiful girl who would be useful once she grew up, and two, because he wanted to find a companion for his beloved daughter Situ Ning. As for the evil deeds committed by his subordinate, he knew all about it but turned a blind eye to it.

The enemy had long been dead, causing Qiao Cong to search for his wife and daughter for many years without any news until his disciple Nangong Lin found them.

As for why Qiao Cong had made enemies, it was simply because he had won a martial arts competition against that person when he was young and vigorous. That person had pretended to make friends with him and tried to ask for the Cold Moon Sword Technique but was rejected, so he held a grudge in his heart. As for the fact that the person later served under Situ Xie, Qiao Cong was unaware of it for some time.

Therefore, it is absolutely impossible for Qiao Cong to be grateful to Situ Xie for raising his daughter. It's not like he couldn't afford it himself. He only had thorough hatred for Situ Xie and Situ Han! In the past, due to Qiao Jing's obsession, Qiao Cong had not taken revenge for his sake. Now, this great grudge has been avenged.

Qiao Jing patted Qiao Cong's shoulder, "Grandfather, if you want to go, just go." And then he called one of the four masters to lead the way for Qiao Cong.

Entering the secret passage, Qiao Cong saw Situ Xie's body lying alone in the dark and cold underground, walked over, kicked it twice, and then stabbed it several times with his sword.

After that, Qiao Cong stood by the side, silently watching Situ Xie's cold body, spit, and turned to leave.

Killing an emperor and trying to get the Imperial Throne is often impossible. But if the killer happens to be of royal blood, it becomes much simpler.

Situ Xie's subordinates were not righteous and principled people, and Qiao Jing was willing to give them a chance, which they craved. As for whether to use these people in the future or to clear the sins of some of them, this is a matter for later. The most important thing at the moment is to maintain stability and settle the situation without causing chaos.

On this point, Qiao Jing had already thought about what to do before he came.

Because Situ Xie's control was too strong, his legitimate descendants only became true royal members after he became emperor last year. They had not experienced real royal struggle, and their minds were not very useful. When Situ Jing was brought before Qiao Jing, he immediately knelt down and said everything was Situ Xie's doing, and he had nothing to do with it.

After two days, Qiao Cong urged Qiao Jing, "Hurry up and deal with these messy matters here, I want to go home early to see Nuannuan! Nuannuan is already half a year old, and I haven't even held her yet!"

Capital city of Qian Country.

Su Liang calculated the time, the matter that Qiao Cong and Qiao Jing went to Yao City to handle should have been almost resolved. There were still risks, after all, Situ Xie had always been full of cunning schemes. However, Su Liang believed that the chances of success were not small, as Qiao Jing was much more mature now than ever before.

"Once the Third Master returns, we will have to plan to save people from Xingluo Island," Su Liang said. Destroying Xingluo Island was secondary. The most important thing was to find the siblings of Old White and Ying Ying and bring them back.

Gu Xiaonuan waved cheerfully at Su Liang from Gu Ling's arms, Su Liang couldn't help but smile, "Gu Xiaonuan, if you speak first, if you call Daddy first, I'll hit you."

Gu Ling nodded, stroking his daughter's fluffy little head, looking serious, "You have to call Mom first." It was the hardest thing for a mother to give birth to a child, and it was only reasonable that the second one should call Dad.

Two little ones ran in, Ji Xiaoshu grabbed Gu Xiaonuan's hand and shook it, saying in a serious tone, "In order to avoid conflicts between Master and Mistress, it's better for my sister to call Brother first! What do you think, Senior Brother?"

Zhengzheng nodded, "I think that's best."

Then Gu Ling held his daughter in one hand and picked up Ji Xiaoshu with the other, throwing him out of the open window, turning around to see Zhengzheng already on the windowsill, "Master, I was wrong, I'll jump myself." With that, he agilely jumped down from the second floor...

Chapter 415: 415. Peace and stability throughout the world

Three months later.

Duanmu Chen often felt lately that the things happening to him were somewhat unreal. Since his childhood, he had seen a great deal of intrigue and infighting within the royal family, and he thought that he would inevitably experience the same, because he wanted the highest position.

But looking back, his ascension to the throne of Qian Country was much easier than he had originally imagined, and within just a year, he was actually going to become the Lord of the World?!

With the death of Situ Xie, the royal power of Liang Country was quickly taken over by Qiao Jing, and the military led by Yi Fei had long turned against Liang Country in favor of Qian Country. It was not a simple process, and there were several opposition forces that emerged, but none of them could make much of an impact.

In the face of Qian Country's promised benefits and new policies after the merger, there was little resistance from the common people of Liang Country. After all, over the years, the Liang royal family had repeatedly demanded provisions and troops for war against Qian Country, increased taxes, and the people were already suffering. They naturally longed for the life of Qian Country's people, and now becoming Qian Country's people directly meant that they could at least have peace and tranquility in the future, which wouldn't be worse than it was before.

What was even more shocking was King Yin of Yin Country, Ji Yuebai. He announced to the world in a single decree: For the sake of unifying the world, he wouldn't be involved anymore!

There were many opponents within the court and among the people of Yin Country, and there were other members of the Ji royal family who wanted to take advantage of the situation to seize the throne. However, just because Ji Yuebai didn't want to be emperor didn't mean he was weak. He could sit in that position because he didn't want Yin Country to be harmed by incompetent people. How could he possibly let someone he didn't approve of take that position?

Ji Yuebai didn't want any more wars, and that was also the reason why he chose to give up the throne and promote unification. Whether the world was divided into three parts or two, the resurgence of war was only a matter of time. Although the saying went "a long union will eventually divide," what was wanted was a "long union." A unified and peaceful dynasty could develop better, and the common people could have long-lasting peace.

So, in the past three months, there was only a bit of turbulence in Liang Country, and instead, there were several big fights in the court of Yin Country. However, no one could defeat Ji Yuebai, and he took advantage of this opportunity to eliminate unstable factors during the transition period.

Ji Yuebai knew very well that those who opposed him were not really trying to benefit Yin Country, but simply couldn't bear to give up their glory and wealth as royals and nobles who had enjoyed a high position all their lives. After all, if they wanted to have a good life in the future, they would have to have real abilities. However, the vast majority of them were nothing more than wine and rice bags, and many even turned out to be hypocritical villains and perverts who bullied men and women with their power. Ji Yuebai dealt with them ruthlessly.

In this process, officials who were truly virtuous and talented didn't need to worry about their future prospects, since the world, no matter how it changed, would need people to govern it. Ji Yuebai had already said that in the future, if anyone wanted to make a name for themselves, there would be only one way – relying on their true abilities. Clearing away those without abilities actually provided more opportunities for talented people who were unable to achieve their ambitions.

In the past three months, Duanmu Chen had been so busy that he had lost a lot of weight. A huge stuffed pastry pie fell from the sky, and he had to catch it, and catch it steady, so as not to disappoint the good fortune and expectations of Gu Ling and Su Liang that had brought him this far.

During the period of change, many things required his attention, and many new policies had to be formulated and promulgated. Duanmu Chen didn't call Gu Ling and Su Liang into the palace anymore, and whenever he encountered a problem, he would run to Su Mansion to consult the couple.

At first, Duanmu Chen had doubts about whether Gu Ling and Su Liang knew anything about governing a country, since they themselves said they did not. However, no matter what difficult problem Duanmu Chen encountered, Gu Ling and Su Liang always gave him a satisfactory solution.

As for this matter, Duanmu Chen could only say that the two monsters claimed not to know about governing a country simply because they had never done it before, and they never spoke casually about things they had not done themselves. However, this did not prevent them from being top-level “problem-solving gods” with their starting point being for the sake of the common people. They were extremely thorough in their thinking and had many new ideas that Duanmu Chen could never have come up with.

Despite having the guidance of the two great gods behind him, Duanmu Chen still felt tremendous pressure because he really wanted to do this job well.

Empress Dowager Xiao concocted nourishing soups for Duanmu Chen every day, but still could not stop him from losing weight. However, in the end, he gradually began to enjoy the process, because this was actually his biggest dream since childhood. Since it had been so easy to achieve, he had to cherish it even more.

In Su Liang's words, Duanmu Chen already had all the basic conditions to become a wise ruler and he would be a qualified good emperor, ruling over the new world.

At midnight, Duanmu Chen opened the last note on the Dragon Desk, which was sent from the south. Nian Jincheng and Lian Shun took over the Yin Country's army, and there were some uprising incidents, but they had already been quelled. Ji Yuebai was leading the rest of the Ji family on their way to Qian Country's capital city. This was to reassure Duanmu Chen that the Ji family members would be under his watch, and also to let the people of Yin Country give up hope.

Duanmu Chen closed the note, took a long breath, and stood up from the Dragon Throne, stretching his sore neck and wrists.

“Where will the Emperor rest tonight?” Chang'an asked. Duanmu Chen had never had eunuchs around him, and now, more so on Su Liang's suggestion, the eunuch system

had been completely abolished, and the eunuchs in the palace could either stay or leave as they pleased.

“Let’s take a walk in the garden.” Duanmu Chen said. He actually wanted to visit the children, but it was too late.

Xing Yuyan gave birth to a healthy son for Duanmu Chen. Her delivery was somewhat difficult, but luckily Su Liang was there to help, and there was no danger.

On the second day of Xing Yuyan’s delivery, Situ Yao gave birth to a daughter for Duanmu Chen. She had been depressed throughout her pregnancy, and Duanmu Chen often visited her, trying his best to comfort her and apologize for the past unpleasantness. However, the differences between them were not about feelings but rather their fate. Situ Yao could not get over it, and no one could persuade her otherwise.

As the Situ family of Liang Country fell, Situ Yao could no longer hold on. She had a premature birth, and her weak body and lack of will to live led to the child being taken out by Su Liang by cesarean section. The child barely survived, and Su Liang tried her best to save Situ Yao, but she still couldn’t save her life. At the last moment of her life, Situ Yao shed tears, gripping Su Liang’s hand, and Su Liang knew that Situ Yao was asking her to help look after the child.

Now Duanmu Chen’s daughter was out of danger and being taken care of by Empress Dowager Xiao. She had half of the blood of the Situ family in her veins, and the Situ family was famous for their beautiful women. The little girl was very pretty and loved to laugh. Duanmu Chen named her Duanmu Zhen and let her acknowledge Su Liang as her godmother.

As he strolled through the Imperial Garden at midnight, Duanmu Chen felt much less tired when he thought of his children. As he sat down in the pavilion, he asked Chang’an, “If I hadn’t asked for permission to go to Bei’an County that time, would everything be different now?”

Chang’an nodded, “Yes.”

Duanmu Chen smiled, “This is what they mean by ‘whoever gets Su Liang gets the world.’ I still believe that the stone at Huguo Temple back then was man-made.”

On a beautiful day, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu were pushing Gu Xiaonuan by the lake to play, when they suddenly heard a vigorous shout, “Nuannuan!”

“Who is that?” Ji Xiaoshu turned back; he saw a white-haired old man coming towards them.

Zhengzheng laughed, “It’s Third Master! Third Master is back!”

Qiao Cong went to the side of the small cart, and seeing the delicate and beautiful baby girl inside, the fatigue from the journey instantly dissipated. His heart melted as he lifted her gently and swung her, “My disciple is the most beautiful in the world!”

Qiao Jing walked over with a smile, greeted Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu, checked on Gu Xiaonuan, and then went to see Nangong Qian.

From the time Situ Xie died until today when they returned home, Qiao Jing’s ears had been filled with Qiao Cong’s constant nagging. Qiao Cong wanted to return early, and so did Qiao Jing, but

things had to be done and done well; they couldn't leave a mess behind. Although Liang Country was a bit better than Yin Country, there were still many problems, and Peng Fan was almost exhausted by Qiao Jing's "exploitation."

Qiao Jing had told Qiao Cong many times to return home first, but the older man neither left nor stopped complaining about it. He worried that remnants of the Situ family would come to assassinate Qiao Jing and that Mo Yan's group might return.

It wasn't until things were mostly resolved and Xing Ji arrived that Qiao Cong and Qiao Jing were able to return. On their way back, they picked up Min Rou at Xuanbei City. Halfway through their journey, Min Rou returned to the Ministry Mansion and said she would visit Su Liang later.

When Qiao Cong saw Su Liang, he asked if there was any news about Lao Bai.

"Second Master and Fourth Master have gone to Xingluo Island, and there is no news yet." Su Liang said.

After chatting with Qiao Cong for a while, Su Liang went to the palace. She now checked on Duanmu Zhen every other day.

Duanmu Chen happened to be visiting his daughter in the Empress Dowager's palace.

"Why didn't you bring Nuannuan with you?" Duanmu Chen asked, as Su Liang had brought Gu Xiaonuan and Gu Ling with her when she came the day before yesterday.

"My Third Master has returned." Su Liang said. If she were to take Gu Xiaonuan away from Qiao Cong, he might have gotten angry with her.

Su Liang performed a routine check-up on Duanmu Zhen, and there was nothing wrong. After playing with her for a while, the Empress Dowager took her granddaughter away and let Su Liang chat with Duanmu Chen.

"Any news yet?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Su Liang shook her head, "Not yet."

Two months ago, Old Mu had returned after receiving Su Liang's letter about Lao Bai's whereabouts. At that time, Situ Xie had passed away, and Old Mu said he would go to Xingluo Island to check if he could meet Mo Yan and inform Su Liang about the matters regarding her granddaughter. At the time, Min Rou hadn't met Mo Yan outside Nanping City, and it was highly likely that He Wei and Sheng Yue had hidden Su Liang's background and deliberately urged Mo Yan to leave to prevent him from changing his original plan.

Gu Ling and Su Liang had the same idea. However, it was possible that upon Old Mu's arrival, someone on the island had already been on guard and would prevent him from meeting Mo Yan. But in any case, it was still worth a try.

Because now there was one thing that was still advantageous for Gu Ling and Su Liang: the people on Xingluo Island probably didn't know that Min Rou had seen the route map to the island and had reported back to Su Liang and Gu Ling.

As such, the situation on Xingluo Island might still be the same as before, meaning that the route provided by Min Rou, along with her suggestion for secretly entering the island, could still be useful.

Old Mu had originally wanted to bring He Qianqian, who was still alive, thinking she could be useful. But in that case, he had to control her and prevent her from running away, which would greatly slow him down. In the end, he decided not to bring her.

Cen Man proposed to go with Old Mu. She had lived on a sea island for many years in the past, and even though she couldn't see anything at the time, she still knew some techniques for sailing at sea, so the two could take care of each other.

So Su Liang prepared some things and let them set off, telling them to prioritize their safety and flee if the situation was dire.

More than a month had passed now, and there was no news yet.

Duanmu Chen sighed slightly, "Those people will come to assassinate me sooner or later, right? They must have thought about waiting until we unified the world before making their move."

Su Liang nodded, "It won't be that easy."

Duanmu Chen looked around and lowered his voice to ask Su Liang, "Gu Ling can predict the future, right?"

Su Liang shook her head, "Of course not. If he were that powerful, we wouldn't have to worry."

Duanmu Chen had a look that said, "I knew you wouldn't be able to hide it," he laughed, "Anyway, after that incident, I really don't worry too much about my safety in the future."

Su Liang snorted, "What if I don't stay in the capital city?"

Duanmu Chen's face froze, "You can't be irresponsible to me!"

Su Liang: ...

Duanmu Chen said solemnly, "This throne and the world are all obtained with your help. If you leave, and something happens to me, will Gu Ling come back to be the emperor?"

Su Liang shook his head, "If something happens to Your Majesty, there is still Ji Yuebai."

Duanmu Chen rubbed his forehead, "I regard you as my best friends."

"Just kidding. Your Majesty, rest assured, even if we want to leave, we will solve the problem of Xingluo Island first." Su Liang said. Duanmu Chen used to be just their partner, but now he is a true friend.

"That's more like it." Duanmu Chen stood up, "I'm going to see my son, you go back. By the way, Ji Yuebai should be arriving soon. I plan to make him a prince, but I can't think of a suitable title."

Su Liang chuckled, "Prince Yin?"

Duanmu Chen's lips curled slightly, "If he doesn't mind, I think it's quite good."

When Su Liang returned home, Gu Ling had just finished his work. He had been working on a new weapon recently.

“Zhenzhen is quite good, she still remembers me.” Su Liang told Gu Ling, “If you think about it, you are her close cousin. Today when I saw her, she does look a bit like Gu Xiaonuan.” Duanmu Chen had said so at the beginning, but Su Liang didn’t see it at the time.

When Gu Ling learned that Duanmu Chen planned to make Ji Yuebai a prince, he also suggested, “Call him Prince Yin.”

Su Liang told Ji Xiaoshu during dinner that his father would arrive soon.

Ji Xiaoshu was very happy, “Really? That’s great! Does Uncle Emperor wants me to live with my father? Tell him no way!”

Su Liang couldn’t help but smile, “You can tell him yourself the next time you see him.”

A few days later, Ji Yuebai and his entourage arrived in Qian Country’s capital city. Duanmu Chen had already arranged a large mansion for them, which was fully equipped.

Although Ji Xiaoshu said that he didn’t miss his father at all, he still pleaded with Gu Ling to take him to the city gate to wait early that day.

When Gu Ling said he wouldn’t go, Ji Xiaoshu hung on him like a monkey, refusing to let go.

When Su Liang asked why Ji Xiaoshu insisted Gu Ling take him, Ji Xiaoshu had his own reasons: I have to let my father know that my master loves me!

Su Liang: ... Probably Ji Yuebai had said something about Gu Ling being difficult to deal with.

Of course, Gu Ling still cared for Ji Xiaoshu very much. He let him make a fuss for a long time before finally taking him. Ji Xiaoshu also took Zhengzheng with him. They originally planned to take Gu Xiaonuan, but Qiao Cong disagreed.

Gu Ling took the two children to the Wan Family Restaurant and waited for Ji Yuebai to appear.

Ji Xiaoshu was dressed in new clothes today, his hair combed neatly, and there was a small purse made by Gu Ling hanging around his waist. It was his request for a birthday present.

“Why isn’t he here yet? Did my dad get assassinated halfway?” Ji Xiaoshu leaned on the windowsill, half of his body sticking out, looking towards the city gate.

Zhengzheng grabbed Ji Xiaoshu’s leg, worried that he would fall, “Xiaoshu, don’t jinx it. It won’t happen.”

Finally, a procession appeared in their field of vision, slowly approaching.

Ji Xiaoshu’s eyes lit up, as the procession got close, he jumped down from the windowsill, “I can’t let my dad know that I’m waiting for him, he would be so smug! I didn’t miss him at all!”

Zhengzheng suggested, “Xiaoshu, when your dad is about to reach the bottom later, you can use your lightness skill to jump down from above, land on his horseback, and give him a surprise!”

Ji Xiaoshu's eyes lit up, "That's a good idea! But it's not a surprise; it's to let him know that my lightness skill is very powerful!"

Zhengzheng nodded, "Right, right, you are correct."

Zhengzheng was in charge of "scouting", and when he saw that Ji Yuebai was at an approximate position, he gestured to Ji Xiaoshu.

Then Ji Xiaoshu grabbed Gu Ling, "Quick! Master, lift me up!"

Gu Ling skillfully picked up Ji Xiaoshu, walked to the edge of the bed, and "threw" him out.

The crowd on the street was shocked to see a child suddenly fly out of the restaurant, causing a commotion.

Ji Yuebai, who was sitting on the horse, reached out to catch his son. Gu Ling, who was smiling and standing by the window, waved to him, "Xiaogu, nice to see you again."

Spectators: So, it turns out that this man from Yin Country is acquainted with Marquis Chang Xin?

"Dad!" Ji Xiaoshu called out, "Is my lightness skill good?"

Ji Yuebai paused, "Lightness skill? Where? It's all because your master threw you well."

Ji Xiaoshu was so angry that he wanted to get off the horse, "Master, help! My dad wants to hit me!"

Gu Ling silently closed the window, and Zhengzheng sighed, "Now I know who Disciple Xiaoshu inherited his temper from."

That evening, Ji Yuebai sent Ji Xiaoshu back to the Su Mansion.

When he saw Su Liang, Ji Yuebai bowed and said, "Thank you, sister-in-law, for taking care of Xiaoshu during this time."

He also thanked Zhengzheng, which made Zhengzheng feel embarrassed.

Only to Gu Ling did Ji Yuebai say, "Xiaogu, I heard from my son that he does the dishes every day at your house and always gets beaten?"

Ji Xiaoshu silently hid behind Su Liang, but Gu Ling calmly nodded, "Yes. If you're not satisfied, just take him away."

Ji Yuebai coughed lightly, "No need... Doing dishes is good, and he must have done something wrong if he got beaten."

Ji Xiaoshu: ... Didn't dare to speak, otherwise, he would really be sent away. Scary. He didn't want to leave his master's wife!

While chatting, Ji Yuebai was very talkative, asking about Bai Yang and said that he was grateful to Duanmu Chen for treating Ji Yue Xuan well. He planned to discuss marrying Ji Yue Xuan to Bai Yang when he entered the palace the next day.

Ji Xiaoshu interjected, "Do people have to get married?"

Ji Yuebai smiled, "Not necessarily. But if you meet someone you like, you can get married."

"I like my master's wife the most!" Ji Xiaoshu said loudly.

The look in Gu Ling's eyes became cold, and Ji Yuebai felt embarrassed. Then he heard Ji Xiaoshu continue, "The second person I like is my sister, so can I marry her later?"

Ji Yuebai's lips curled, looking at Gu Ling.

Gu Ling shook his head decisively, "No, you can't."

Ji Xiaoshu hugged Zhengzheng, "Then I'll marry my big brother, I like him too!"

Ji Yuebai choked on his tea, "Son, you can consider these things when you grow up. There's no need to rush."

Chapter 416: 416. I'm going for a trip

On her first visit to Su Mansion, Ji Yuebai brought many gifts, each of fine quality and high value.

Half of them were for Su Liang. Initially, Ji Xiaoshu was sent to Qian Country due to the overall situation, but more importantly for Ji Xiaoshu's own sake. Ji Yuebai knew his son was unhappy and he didn't have much time to accompany Xiaoshu, but he trusted Gu Ling a lot, so he decided to let Ji Xiaoshu experience a different environment. In Ji Yuebai's expectations, the most important aspect of Ji Xiaoshu coming to Su Mansion was not just to learn, but also to find a master.

Previously, Ji Xiaoshu would write to Ji Yuebai every once in a while, and Gu Ling would arrange for someone to deliver the letters. In those letters, he always told Ji Yuebai in a happy tone: My master is amazing, she can do this and that, she teaches me many things, she makes me delicious food, she's the person I like the most!

With that, Ji Yuebai knew that not only were his expectations met, but they were also exceeded.

Of course, Ji Yuebai also knew that Gu Ling was very fond of Ji Xiaoshu. Precisely because of that, Ji Xiaoshu dared to be so mischievous in front of Gu Ling, clearly relying on her protection.

The other gifts were for Zheng'er and Gu Xiaonuan.

There was only one thing for Gu Ling: a set of carving knives. They were used by a great master in the Yin Country, looking a bit old, but it was an extraordinary item.

"Dad, you only prepared one gift for my master, that's too stingy," Ji Xiaoshu expressed his dissatisfaction first.

Ji Yuebai smiled and explained, "There's no other way, I truly can't think of anything your master lacks."

Ji Xiaoshu immediately retorted, "So, Dad gave my master so many treasures because she lacks those things?"

Ji Yuebai lightly coughed, "Of course not... Your master and mistress are together, why differentiate between them?" With that, he covered his son's mouth, so as not to spoil his own good intentions!

As for the medical and poison-related books from the library of the palace in Yin Country, they had already been secretly transported to Su Liang and Gu Ling by Ji Yuebai earlier, along with many precious medicinal ingredients.

“Xiaoshu, your family is really rich,” Zheng’er commented as he wore the golden mask that Ji Yuebai had gifted him, with a playful smile on his face.

Ji Xiaoshu shook his head, “The one thing my senior brother’s family doesn’t lack is money. There’s no need to be so polite to my dad. Our family is already declining.”

Ji Yuebai laughed heartily, “That’s right, from now on we’ll follow your master and mistress!”

Although he said that, Ji Yuebai was a clear-headed person who always knew what he wanted. He directly told Gu Ling and Su Liang about his upcoming plan. He intended to visit the Liang Country to investigate and find some suitable crops to promote there, so the people of Liang Country could have enough food to eat and lead a good life.

Su Liang was surprised. Gu Ling had said that Ji Yuebai was truly ambitious and idealistic, but she thought he would be content after uniting the world and live as a wealthy, idle king. She had never thought that he wouldn’t want to rest and planned to take on a painstaking project.

Zheng’er took off the golden mask from his face, sat beside Ji Yuebai, and said earnestly, “Our family is in the grain business, I don’t know if we could help.”

Ji Yuebai smiled and rubbed Zheng’er’s small face, “You’re such a good boy! I was just thinking of discussing it with your grandfather later!”

“Master, can my dad’s plan work?” Ji Xiaoshu asked his most trusted Su Liang.

Su Liang nodded, “As long as there is determination, there is hope. I have some ideas that may or may not work.”

Ji Yuebai’s eyes brightened, “Sister, do you also know something about this? That’s great!”

Based on her knowledge from her previous life, Su Liang gave Ji Yuebai some suggestions.

Upon hearing this, Ji Yuebai knew that Su Liang really understood the subject. He seriously took notes and planned to have a good talk with Duanmu Chen the following day. After uniting the world, the next step was to make the lives of the people better than before, particularly the people of the bitterly cold Yuanliang Country. Some of them might choose to move to warmer places, but the vast majority of them wouldn’t leave their homeland. Giving the abundant food from the south directly to the hungry people in the north could only solve short-term problems, not as a long-term solution.

After discussing the serious matters, Ji Yuebai brought up the previous topic, “Xiaoshu, you said you like your master the most, then your sister and senior brother. So, what rank is your master’s?”

Ji Xiaoshu grinned, “Anyway, it’s one rank higher than Father’s!”

Ji Yuebai silently got up and left. He initially planned to sleep with his son tonight but decided against it. His son had already found a happy new home and didn’t need him as a father...

Then he heard Ji Xiaoshu’s voice from behind, “Master, look, my dad doesn’t want me again! He didn’t even ask if I wanted to go with him, how heartbreaking!”

Ji Yuebai immediately turned back, “Son, let’s go! Go home with Dad!”

Ji Xiaoshu revealed a triumphant smile, “This is my home, Dad, you’d better hurry up and leave. It’s impolite to stay so late as a guest!”

Ji Yuebai looked speechless. Then he saw Ji Xiaoshu being “thrown” out of the Yuanming Pavilion by Gu Ling, accompanied by Gu Ling’s calm voice, “Sleep with your father tonight.”

Ji Yuebai: Xiaogu is really a person with a cold exterior and a warm heart!

While carrying Ji Xiaoshu on his back and walking outside, Ji Xiaoshu gazed at the stars in the sky and asked, “Dad, why didn’t Master let Nuannuan marry me? Who does he want her to marry?”

Ji Yuebai shook his head, “Maybe he wants to wait until Nuannuan grows up? When the time comes, whoever Nuannuan likes, she will marry.”

Ji Xiaoshu blinked, “Could it be that Nuannuan won’t like me? That’s impossible!”

Ji Yuebai laughed, “The kind of love needed for marriage is something you don’t understand yet. You will know when you both grow up.” Of course, he would like to become in-laws with Gu Ling and Su Liang, but such matters should go with the flow.

“Just like Master and Mistress, I know,” Ji Xiaoshu said, referring to the best example around him.

Ji Yuebai then asked with a smile, “So, what do you think your master and mistress are like?”

After seriously pondering for a moment, Ji Xiaoshu replied, “It’s the kind of...telepathic feeling! Master doesn’t need to say anything, Mistress knows what he’s thinking, and vice versa!”

Ji Yuebai raised an eyebrow, “That’s very accurate.” His son had grown a lot but still retained his cuteness, very pleasing indeed.

Next, Ji Xiaoshu said, “My senior brother and I are also practicing that ‘telepathic’ feeling. He’s easy to guess, but he can never guess what I’m thinking. It’s so frustrating!”

Ji Yuebai rolled his eyes, quickly changed the topic, and inquired about Ji Xiaoshu’s progress in his studies.

On the following day, Duanmu Chen held a banquet in the palace to entertain Ji Yuebai, and Ji Xiaoshu was also present. Duanmu Chen had invited Gu Ling and Su Liang in advance, but they had other commitments that day and couldn’t attend.

Duanmu Chen was surprised by what Ji Yuebai wanted to do but immediately expressed strong support. He and Ji Yuebai could not say that they hit it off at first sight, but they got along well and agreed to chat more in the future.

After the banquet, Ji Yuebai took Ji Xiaoshu to visit Ji Yue Xuan.

“Aunt Yue!” When Ji Xiaoshu rushed in, Ji Yue Xuan was in the courtyard tending to flowers. She knew Ji Yuebai had come, but Duanmu Chen did not let her attend the banquet. It was better this way, as it would have been awkward if she had gone and Duanmu Chen’s Imperial Concubine’s identity appeared.

“Xiaoshu is here.” Ji Yue Xuan had a gentle smile, put down the shovel in her hand, wiped her hands with a handkerchief, and embraced Ji Xiaoshu who rushed over. Su Liang would occasionally bring Ji Xiaoshu to the palace to see her before.

“It seems that my younger sister is living a good life.” Ji Yuebai walked in afterward. Looking around, the environment was quiet and elegant, and Ji Yue Xuan’s complexion was better than when she was in the Yin Country’s Imperial Palace. She was dressed in plain elegance, not wearing much jewelry, but the fabric was very precious, and she had a calm and relaxed look between her eyebrows, unlike a woman in a deep palace.

“Brother...” Ji Yue Xuan’s eyes turned red as soon as she saw Ji Yuebai. The two were not born of the same mother, but Ji Yuebai had secretly helped Ji Yue Xuan a lot in the past. Moreover, she knew that the first person she had to thank for her present life and the future she wanted was Su Liang, and the second was Ji Yuebai. It was because Ji Yuebai chose to form an alliance with Qian Country that Duanmu Chen was so tolerant and generous to her.

“Why are you crying? I have talked to the emperor, and I have come to take you out of the palace today.” Ji Yuebai smiled brightly, “From now on, you will be the lady of Yinwang Mansion. When Bai Yang returns, I will preside over your marriage.”

Ji Yue Xuan was overjoyed, “Really? Can I leave the palace?”

“Of course!” Ji Xiaoshu nodded, “Uncle Emperor agreed very readily, saying that Auntie can leave at any time! Auntie, are you reluctant to part with the flowers you have planted here? You can take them with you! Uncle Emperor definitely won’t mind!”

Ji Yue Xuan let out a long breath, “Alright, I’ll pack up now.” Although there had been no unpleasant days in the palace, the environment itself was oppressive. Leaving the Imperial Palace meant that she had truly gained her freedom. Besides, her most trusted elder brother had come to pick her up, and from now on, she would have family members to rely on.

“Auntie, can I pick a flower to give to my master’s wife?” Ji Xiaoshu stared at Ji Yue Xuan’s flowers.

Ji Yue Xuan smiled and said, “Of course you can. Just pick any one.”

“Well, there are too few flowers here, I’d better go stroll in Emperor Uncle’s garden instead!” Ji Xiaoshu did not treat herself as an outsider.

Ji Yuebai let Ji Yue Xuan pack up slowly, and he took Ji Xiaoshu to the Imperial Garden. Chang’an was ordered to accompany them.

In the end, Ji Xiaoshu picked a large bunch of flowers and asked Chang’an to find beautiful silk to wrap them. When he left the palace, he planned to give them to Su Liang.

As she left the palace, Ji Yue Xuan looked back and couldn’t help but sigh, “Compared to Liang Imperial Concubine, I am much luckier.” She knew she had made mistakes in the past, and if it hadn’t been for Su Liang’s help, she would have fallen into irreparable situations.

Ji Yuebai nodded, “There’s still a long way to go in the future, just look ahead.”

“Yinwang... is this title set by the Emperor?” Ji Yue Xuan felt that this title was not auspicious.

Ji Yuebai laughed and said, “What a resounding title! From now on, you will be the sister of Yinwang, and no one would dare to provoke you!”

Ji Xiaoshu patted his little chest, “I am the crown prince of Yinwang! But the title of Regent King’s disciple sounds more prestigious!”

Ji Yuebai: ...the son is no longer controlled by his father...

Ji Xiaoshu only stayed with Ji Yuebai for one night, then happily returned to Su Mansion with a large bouquet of fresh flowers.

Su Liang was very happy about having a son without giving birth, and he enjoyed being close to the children.

After another two days, an unexpected guest arrived at Su Mansion.

Su Liang knew this person, who was an assassin from Yanyun Building. After Yan Shiba and Yan Shiqi fell out, this person became her confidant. His name was Yan Shijiu, and he was also one of Yan Sui’s disciples.

Last year, Yan Shiba learned from Gu Ling that Su Liang had an accident and took most of the assassins from Yanyun Building to find trouble with Situ Xie in Liang Country. After the incident, she completely broke off contact with Gu Ling and Su Liang.

In between, Su Liang never stopped looking for Yan Shiba and had sent people several times to ask Monk Cheng Yun. However, they could never get any news of her, and the assassins from Yanyun Building seemed to disappear overnight, never to be found again.

Su Liang had previously thought that Yan Shiba might have had an accident, and perhaps Yan Shiqi had killed her way back and taken control of Yanyun Building. With no luck in finding her, he could only give up.

But on this day, Yan Shijiu suddenly appeared at Su Mansion, and said to Su Liang that Yan Shiba was still alive, but almost dead.

Su Liang’s gaze became more focused, “What happened? Where were you before?”

Yan Shijiu had an empty sleeve on one side, his arm gone, and a long scar on his face. He sighed deeply, “Last year, the leader took us to Liang Country to do something, and after completing the task, we left Yao City to find a place to rest for half a month before returning to Qian Country. But before we even left Liang Country, we ran into trouble.”

Yan Shijiu said that there was a traitor in their team who leaked their whereabouts. Yan Shiqi colluded with a group of people, all top-notch masters, resulting in heavy casualties for them. Both he and Yan Shiba were captured and locked up in a dark place, subject to Yan Shiqi’s torturous entertainment.

“At first, I feigned surrender, but Yan Shiqi didn’t believe it at all and even cut off my arm. About three or four months ago, I’m not quite sure, it seemed that the group he

colluded with left without a word. Yan Shiqi disappeared as well, leaving someone to watch over us. He hated Shiba too much and said he would never let her die. Before he left, he suddenly changed his mind and said that he would talk to me when he came back, not knowing whether he intended to accept my surrender. Maybe it was because there was a problem with his backing, and he needed manpower.” Yan Shijiu’s face was grim. “I’ve been trying to persuade the people who were guarding us, but in the end, I failed. However, because I wasn’t tortured anymore, my body recovered some, and half a month ago, I finally got a chance to kill the guards and take the severely injured Shiba to escape.”

“Where is she?” Su Liang asked.

“In Bei’an County, Su Family Village.” Yan Shijiu tousled his empty right sleeve, “I originally wanted to bring her here directly, but her body is too weak to endure the bumps along the way. When we passed Bei’an County, she insisted on going to Su Family Village, saying she would wait for you at your old home. The neighbors from the Bai Family still recognized her and said they could help take care of her, so I came here alone. Su Divine Doctor, you must save her!”

Yan Shijiu also brought a letter from Bai Xiaohu and the Zhuzi brothers addressed to Su Liang. Both children missed him and Gu Ling and hoped they could come back to their hometown to visit when they had time, and mentioned Sister Jiujiu, saying she was very ill and was being taken care of by Aunt Bai.

“Qi Yan, take him to get some food and rest for a while,” Su Liang called out to Qi Yan.

Yan Shijiu shook his head, looking anxious, “I’m fine, Su Divine Doctor, can you go to Su Family Village?”

Su Liang neither nodded nor shook his head, “I need to discuss with my family before giving you an answer.”

After Yan Shijiu left, Gu Ling carried Gu Xiaonuan down from upstairs. He had heard the entire conversation during that time.

“Great God, do you think he can be trusted?” Su Liang furrowed his eyebrows and asked.

“I’ll go and check it out,” Gu Ling said. Even if there was deception involved, he needed to go and see if it concerned the people of Su Family Village.

Chapter 417: 417. I will find the opportunity to take action myself

When Yan Shijiu saw Su Liang again, she had changed into a new outfit.

“You go first, we still have some matters to arrange, and will catch up later,” Su Liang said.

Yan Shijiu was taken aback, “Are both Divine Doctor Su and Marquis going?” Though Gu Ling was now the Regent King, many people still referred to him as the Marquis out of habit, as his regency was hardly noticeable.

Su Liang sighed softly, “The child is still young, neither of us wants to be separated from her, so let’s go together. We had also planned to return to Su Family Village this year, so this will just speed up the trip.”

Yan Shijiu’s expression was one of gratitude, “Thank you, Divine Doctor Su!”

“That being said, you should return first and tell Yan Shiba to hang on. We will be arriving shortly,” Su Liang said.

“Alright,” Yan Shijiu nodded, “Then I will take my leave now!”

“I forgot to write replies for Little Tiger and Zhuzi.” Su Liang frowned, “Never mind, time is of the essence, we’re going over anyway.”

And so, Yan Shijiu left the Su Mansion first.

When Su Liang told him that she and Gu Ling would take Gu Xiaonuan to Su Family Village together, she didn’t really mean it. It was true that neither of them wanted to leave their child, but Gu Ling also didn’t want to bring the child along on their journey – it would be too much of a hassle. Since there was business to attend to, it was pragmatic to get it sorted out as quickly as possible and return.

Gu Ling would go, leaving Su Liang behind. First, their daughter needed her mother more. Second, Gu Ling was skilled in martial arts. Third, he had essentially mastered the medical skills that Su Liang possessed, so saving people would not be a problem.

But letting Gu Ling go alone made Su Liang uneasy. She wanted at least one more person to accompany him. Among those in the mansion, only Qiao Cong and his grandson, Qiao Jing, had high martial arts skills and wouldn’t be a hindrance.

Considering Qiao Cong was elderly and had just managed to return home, Su Liang called for Qiao Jing, asking him to accompany Gu Ling on the trip.

Qiao Jing agreed without even asking what the matter was. Ji Yuebai had been crowned king, but Qiao Jing had not. Because he had already severed ties with the Situ Family of Liang Country, he was essentially a military commander of Qian Country. However, in times of peace, military commanders were not as busy, and he was on leave.

Upon learning that the matter related to Yan Shiba, Qiao Jing wasn’t surprised. He had known for a long time that Yan Shiba and Su Liang were closely connected. When Qiao Cong and Qiao Jing were in Xuanbei City, they had heard Su Liang give several instructions to inquire from Little Monk Cheng Yun at Ping’an Temple whether he had seen Yan Shiba.

“Although it seems safe for now, we must always be vigilant,” Qiao Jing stated, advocating caution. Yan Shijiu’s severed arm served as evidence of the previous calamity he mentioned, but it was not clear if it was caused by a different reason or was part of some intricate plot.

Yan Shijiu claimed that Yan Shiqi had colluded with a group of top-notch masters to plan another attack on Yan Shiba. According to the timeline described by Yan Shijiu, it was possible that these people were from Xingluo Island.

“If only I knew medical skills, then I could go alone and you wouldn’t have to split up,” Qiao Jing blurted out, and then realized how awkward his statement sounded, as if indeed stating the obvious.

Qiao Cong had no objections to Qiao Jing leaving with Gu Ling on a mission. He had complete faith in Gu Ling’s abilities. He knew that Qiao Jing would be safe with him, and besides, their mission was a secret. It was unlike before when everyone knew where Qiao Jing was, making him an easy target for assassins.

“You both should go and return quickly. There’s no need to worry about home, I will manage it well,” Qiao Cong said.

Gu Ling had already said goodbye to Su Liang, had given his daughter a hug and a kiss. Gu Xiaonuan, oblivious to the fact that Gu Ling was leaving on a long trip, kept smiling gleefully. Meanwhile, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu, the two little ones, clung to him reluctantly.

“Master, have a safe journey. Go quickly and return quickly,” Zhengzheng said with a serious expression on his little face.

Ji Xiaoshu held onto Gu Ling’s leg, “Master, you must miss me!”

“I won’t,” Gu Ling assured.

Ji Xiaoshu huffed, “If Master comes back late, baby sister will call me brother first! Ha, ha!”

Gu Ling’s face darkened slightly, indeed this was a valid threat. He almost forgot that his daughter would soon start talking, and he wouldn’t be home then. Thinking about it, he was very tempted to either stay or take Gu Xiaonuan with him.

“Junior brother, stop making nonsense! Our sister will definitely first call ‘mom’, then ‘dad’, and then ‘brother’!” Zhengzheng is a thoughtful and obedient child.

Ji Xiaoshu blinked, “But master is not at home, who is our sister going to call ‘dad’?”

Su Liang knocked on Ji Xiaoshu’s forehead, “Your master already feels bad about going out, don’t make it worse.”

Ji Xiaoshu immediately behaved, “Master, I’m sorry, I was joking. Brother and I will definitely protect our sister, and before master returns, we will only let her learn to call ‘mom’! We won’t even let her call ‘brother’!”

Zhengzheng nodded hurriedly, “Right!”

Gu Ling simply didn’t want to be separated from Su Liang and the children. But when problems arise, they need to be resolved as soon as possible.

After Gu Ling left, Qiao Cong stayed in Yuanming Pavilion with two little disciples, responsible for teaching them martial arts. However, many times, Qiao Cong wanted to be strict but was always disrupted by naughty Ji Xiaoshu.

Su Liang rarely went out anymore, apart from looking after the children, she mostly stayed at home reading, messing with herbs, and tending to the orchard.

Since she and Gu Ling got married, went through separation and reunion, they have never been apart. From the time she transported to this side, Gu Ling was omnipresent in her life. When Gu Ling was gone, Su Liang felt a little out of place, and during the initial two nights, she didn't sleep well, always worrying about not hearing the baby's cry, as Gu Ling used to take care of everything at night including comforting the children and changing diapers. Even for night feeds, Su Liang didn't need to get up.

Gu Xiaonuan didn't notice anything wrong during the day, but obviously started looking for Gu Ling at night, sometimes Su Liang couldn't calm her down when she cried. After several days, it slowly got a little better.

However, this made Su Liang worry if Gu Xiaonuan would forget about Gu Ling, and by then Gu Ling would surely be heartbroken upon his return.

Therefore, Su Liang carefully drew a portrait of Gu Ling and hung it over Gu Xiaonuan's cradle for her to see every day.

Regarding this, Ji Xiaoshu expressed his sigh: We are really breaking our hearts for our master!

Upon learning about Gu Ling's departure, Duanmu Chen asked Su Liang about the cause, didn't say much, only reminded her to be careful in daily life, in case Yan Shijiu and Xingluo Island were in collusion, this would be a strategy to lure the enemy away.

Su Liang knew, Gu Ling also knew, but some things had to be done.

Gu Ling and Qiao Jing are cousins, but their relationship has never been very close. Initially, Qiao Jing was friends with Su Liang, due to some reasons, he was once very jealous of Gu Ling, not only because of Su Liang. But looking back now, he finds his past jealousy childish and ridiculous.

Neither of them are talkative like Lian Shun, so they didn't make small talk on the way, which resulted in hardly any conversation except for necessary brief exchanges.

Qiao Jing knew that Gu Ling must be feeling bad about leaving Su Liang and the kids, and his only thoughts were to get the task done as fast as possible, he was wholly accommodating to Gu Ling's pace of travel, when to rest, including meals and water breaks, he completely followed Gu Ling's arrangements.

As such, the two of them traveled day and night, with only a brief rest each day, they arrived at Bei'an County in the shortest possible time, five days after leaving the capital city.

By the time they reached Feiyan Town, it was already dark, there were very few pedestrians on the road, and many shops had closed. Qiao Jing hadn't eaten all day, he was famished, he thought that Gu Ling would head straight to Su's village without stopping, but to his surprise Gu Ling stopped at Luoyan Restaurant and went inside.

Qiao Jing followed him, there were still some customers in the restaurant, they glanced at them and quickly shifted their gaze away.

Gu Ling ordered some of the restaurant's signature dishes and a pot of wine.

The manager was still the same. Hearing how familiar Gu Ling was with ordering, he asked with a smile if he had been here before.

Gu Ling nodded, "Does the manager know whether Hu Er is in town?"

At the mention of Hu Er, the manager's face changed. Nowadays, Hu Er was a famous businessman in Bei'an County, his business was considerable, and he had completely shed his former bully image, often performing acts of charity, earning the reputation of being a benevolent figure within tens of miles.

Hu Er was a regular patron at the Luoyan Restaurant, having entertained many business friends there. The manager, observing Gu Ling's demeanor, speculated that he had been invited by Hu Er to dine there and was definitely no ordinary person. So he called a waiter and asked him to find out if Hu Er was in town.

The waiter returned in a quarter of an hour, reporting that Hu Er was indeed in town. Hu Er was returning from out of town, just in time for the banquet his grandfather, the head of the Hu family, was about to host in their old house.

Gu Ling rewarded the waiter with a piece of broken silver, saying nothing further. After finishing his meal with Qiao Jing, he settled the bill and left.

"Is Hu Er a friend of yours?" Qiao Jing asked.

Gu Ling nodded. Su Liang had once asked Hu Er to take care of the people in Su's village. Gu Ling was inquiring about his whereabouts to confirm his recent presence in town. If he just returned from out of town, he probably didn't know that Yan Shiba moved into the Su's village, so there was no need to find him.

"I have a suggestion." Qiao Jing pulled Gu Ling into a quiet alley.

Gu Ling frowned, "Go ahead."

"Our physiques are similar," Qiao Jing took a look at Gu Ling. Originally, he was more robust than Gu Ling, but after two years of constant activities that had made him lose quite a bit of weight. He proposed, "I'd like to suggest a deception. I could pretend to be you in public while you work in the shadows. This could provide greater security."

Seeing that Gu Ling was silent, Qiao Jing explained, "If I get into trouble, I trust you will find a way to save me. But if you encounter trouble, I might not be able to save you." He now clearly realized — in every aspect other than martial arts, he paled compared to Gu Ling. Even in martial arts, he was not as good as Gu Ling, but this was the only area in which they could compare.

This idea came to Qiao Jing midway. He felt he should discuss it — his explanation was factual, but also a manipulation, fearing that Gu Ling might not agree.

To be honest, Qiao Jing felt Su Liang and Gu Xiaonuan needed Gu Ling and he couldn't get into trouble. As for himself, he didn't have much to worry about, his grandfather and sister were both doing well, and he was also still unmarried. Regardless, based on past events, he felt he owed something to Gu Ling and Su Liang.

Gu Ling spoke, "You don't have medical skills."

Qiao Jing had already considered this, "I can fake some phrases, then say that I need to prepare something, which then allows you to act secretly."

After thinking for a while, Gu Ling nodded, "Sounds good." This was the more rational method.

Thus, when the two of them departed for Su's Village once more, they had already exchanged clothes, with Qiao Jing disguised as Gu Ling and Gu Ling disguised as him.

Late into the night, the small village was quiet and peaceful. Compared to Gu Ling's last departure, there were a few newly built bridges over the small river, and the houses of many people were somewhat larger than before.

The first house that Su Liang and Gu Ling had stayed in was located by the river, it remained unchanged.

Qiao Jing had been here before. He crossed the bridge alone, and as soon as he passed the courtyard wall, a shadow appeared from a short distance, "Who is it?"

"Me." Qiao Jing mimicked Gu Ling's voice. It wasn't too difficult because Gu Ling seldom spoke, so he also tried to keep it brief.

"Marquis Gu?" Yan Shijiu came over and looked behind Qiao Jing, "Did Divine Doctor Su not come?"

"It's inconvenient with the child." Qiao Jing replied calmly, "Where is Yan Shiba?"

"Over here." Yan Shijiu lead Qiao Jing towards a room quickly. It wasn't the original dwelling of Gu Ling and Su Liang, but the small corner room where Yan Shiba used to live, originally it was the firewood room.

Yan Shijiu opened the door, a light was turned on in the room, the bed curtain was drawn, and it was very quiet.

Qiao Jing was cautious; he quietly scanned the surroundings but found no lurking figures.

Yan Shijiu lifted the bed curtain, revealing a woman with a pale face lying there with her eyes closed.

"I arrived last night, and she has been unconscious." Yan Shijiu sighed deeply, "Marquis Gu, please examine her quickly."

"Em." Qiao Jing nodded and approached, "You go find some food."

Yan Shijiu hesitated for a moment, "Alright, I'll be right back!" After saying that, he turned and left, even closing the door behind him.

Qiao Jing looked at the woman on the bed, pondering whether they were overthinking things. So far, he hadn't detected anything unusual.

Qiao Jing, not knowing any medical skills, only checked Yan Shiba's breathing to confirm she was alive. He took a thorough look around the room, it was very clean but with not much furniture.

Gu Ling didn't show up, and Qiao Jing didn't look for him, guessing that he was probably keeping an eye on Yan Shijiu.

Yan Shijiu returned soon, bringing two steamed buns, “This was made by Neighbor Bai. Marquis, please make do as you see fit.”

Qiao Jing accepted it. It was cold, but he didn’t mind, he ate one and then told Yan Shijiu, “I’ve checked her condition, I need to prepare some medicine; I’ll go to the county town in a while for the ingredients.”

Yan Shijiu looked grateful, “Thank you, Marquis Gu, I appreciate your efforts!”

Qiao Jing finished both steamed buns, drank a glass of water and then left. After leaving the village and making sure no one was following, he waited in the forest they had agreed upon for a while before Gu Ling appeared.

“How is it?” Qiao Jing asked.

Gu Ling shook his head, “I didn’t see anyone else.” He had confirmed that other than Yan Shiba and Yan Shijiu, there were no other people hiding. Also, he had checked after Qiao Jing left. It was indeed Yan Shiba who was seriously ill but still alive.

“I ate the buns Yan Shijiu gave me.” Qiao Jing suddenly frowned, “What if he poisoned them... I was really not careful enough.”

Gu Ling looked at Qiao Jing with cold eyes.

Qiao Jing lightly coughed, “What should we do next? Do you need to find some herbs?”

“Mm.” With that, Gu Ling disappeared. Since it was really Yan Shiba, he would have to save her.

Qiao Jing found a place to rest in the forest, waiting for Gu Ling to return.

At Su Liang’s house.

Yan Shijiu stood by the backyard wall, knocking his fingers against it rhythmically. After a moment, someone responded.

“Master, Gu Ling has arrived, alone.” Yan Shijiu lowered his voice.

A low but youthful male voice came from beyond the wall, “Su Liang has to take care of the child; it’s not convenient for him to come. Gu Ling’s medical skills are not inferior to Su Liang’s.”

“What should we do next?” Yan Shijiu asked.

“You don’t have to do anything, and don’t communicate with me either, so as not to arouse Gu Ling’s suspicion.” The man’s voice was light, “I will find an opportunity to act.”

Chapter 418: 418. Gu Ling, come with me

Having not rested properly the entire journey, Qiao Jing fell asleep in the forest.

As deep autumn was approaching the nights were rather cold, he was abruptly awakened by the chilly air. Not knowing how much time had passed, he vigorously rubbed his face, stood up, stretched his limbs, and looked up but couldn't see the moon. It was the darkest time before dawn.

Gu Ling hadn't returned yet. To keep himself warm, Qiao Jing quietly practiced a set of Martial Arts in the woods.

While practicing, he suddenly felt someone watching him. Instantly on guard, the next moment, he heard a familiar voice from behind him, "You're practicing so hard. Are you trying to beat me?"

Qiao Jing: ...this joke is a bit cold...

Previously, Qiao Jing aimed to surpass Gu Ling, but now that he understood the real gap wasn't about Martial Arts, his ambition dissipated.

Gu Ling brought back a large bag of medicinal herbs. Some of them had been "bought" from the county town – self-service, but the change left was more rather than less money. And some of them were precious herbs he had asked for from Hu Er.

Hu Er was deeply asleep and was suddenly woken up in the middle of the night. He was startled, but after confirming Gu Ling's identity, he respectfully asked what he needed, willing to do anything even if it involved danger or hardship. After all, not only was Su Liang the benefactor who saved Hu Er's life, but she also inspired him to reform and start a new life. She even provided him with the opportunity to associate with the Wan family and grow an honest business. To Hu Er as well as his family, Su Liang and Gu Ling were their benefactors.

When Gu Ling needed medicinal herbs, Hu Er went to get them himself. He used to have poor health, and so he had quite a lot of good herbs at his disposal. Also, while conducting business trips these years, he had collected many more. After hearing that Gu Ling needed ginseng, Hu Er generously took out a thousand-year-old ginseng stem from a carefully packaged gift box originally prepared as his father's birthday present.

"There's one thing missing, which we have at home in the county town. I'll send someone to fetch it. Prince, you may rest here while waiting." said Hu Er, while hot soups and meals were served.

Gu Ling didn't refuse, he ate a bit, then went to rest in the room arranged by Hu Er, instructing him to wake him up as soon as the herbs arrived.

Hu Er waited personally, as soon as the man sent to the county town returned, he woke Gu Ling up and packed the herbs.

"I was going to go to the village today anyway." Hu Er said as he saw Gu Ling off.

Gu Ling replied indifferently, "Ah, you can carry on as usual, just pretend you didn't see me last night."

Hu Er was taken aback, "Understood. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"You suggested moving me and the patient in my home to the county town." Gu Ling replied.

Hu Er nodded, "Alright."

Without another word, Gu Ling departed with the herbs. Hu Er thought it over and concluded that Gu Ling must have run into some kind of trouble. He remembered Gu Ling's request and told his confidants not to let any information slip about tonight.

At this moment, Gu Ling briefly explained Hu Er's situation to Qiao Jing.

"Does this mean I should take Yan Shiba to the county town?" Qiao Jing asked.

Gu Ling shook his head, "No, back to the capital."

Qiao Jing pondered, "That's better. Leaving the village sooner will prevent causing harm to the villagers if there really is a trap. We can let Hu Er arrange the transportation. I will just say that Yan Shiba is not going to die and that Yan Shijiu can attend to her."

"Alright." Gu Ling handed the herbs to Qiao Jing, and they parted ways in the woods.

When Gu Ling saw Yan Shiba last night, he gave her a pill made by Su Liang. Not seeing any black fog between Yan Shiba's eyebrows, he knew that she would not die within three days.

Returning to the courtyard in the early morning mist, Yan Shijiu, who had been waiting, came out immediately from Yan Shiba's room upon hearing noises, "Prince, did you succeed in finding the herbs?"

Without answering Yan Shijiu's question, Qiao Jing walked straight to the room previously occupied by Gu Ling, "I need to rest."

Yan Shijiu watched as Qiao Jing entered the room and closed the door. With a flicker in his eyes, he then returned to Yan Shiba's room.

When Qiao Jing said he needed rest, he truly fell asleep. By the time he woke up, it was already broad daylight outside, and he heard low voices talking. After getting up, he saw the table full of herbs, some of which had already been processed...

Qiao Jing: ...when did Gu Ling come? Why didn't I notice it?

As he opened the door, a breeze of fresh, moist air greeted him. The sunlight illuminated the entire courtyard brightly.

Madam Bai, wearing an apron, peeked out from the kitchen. When she saw "Gu Ling's" face, she was taken aback. Though there were rumors previously saying that the top scholar Ning Jing had been masquerading as the current regent, Gu Ling, Madam Bai knew only Ning Jing's face. At the sight of "Gu Ling," she was initially apprehensive and awe-struck. She bent forward and called out, "Prince."

"There's no need for such formalities. Just behave as before," Qiao Jing imitated Gu Ling's tone. "Is everything well at home, Madam?"

Madam Bai hurriedly nodded, "Yes, everything's good! Little Tiger and Zhuzi always miss you. They were here this morning, but now they're off to school!"

"Hmm." Qiao Jing nodded his head, "Thank you for your efforts, Madam."

"Oh, don't mention it. You're not an outsider." Madam Bai waved her hand, "Your meal will be ready soon."

When Qiao Jing entered Yan Shiba's room, Yan Shijiu was passing by. The door was open, and Yan Shijiu "accidentally" glanced in to see the partially processed medicinal herbs on the table. He silently withdrew his gaze, entered the kitchen, fetched hot water for Qiao Jing to wash with, and brought it to the room door, but didn't go inside.

Qiao Jing came out of Yan Shiba's room, "I gave her some medicine yesterday. Her condition has improved a bit."

Yan Shijiu was taken aback. Qiao Jing hadn't mentioned this before. He was unaware, but he noticed that Yan Shiba's condition had indeed shown slight signs of improvement.

Qiao Jing took the wooden basin from Yan Shijiu, entered his room, and closed the door.

Breakfast was something Qiao Jing ate alone in his room. He found Madam Bai's cooking to be really delicious; the homely meals were very comforting.

After breakfast, Yan Shijiu asked Qiao Jing when Yan Shiba might be expected to regain consciousness.

Qiao Jing shook his head, saying it was uncertain for now. It could take a few days, or it could take half a month.

Madam Bai brought a pair of finely stitched tiger-head shoes that she had made for Gu Xiaonuan. Qiao Jing accepted them and thanked her.

Qiao Jing spent the entire morning in the room "processing herbs". As noon was approaching, Hu Er arrived.

A large carriage stopped outside the courtyard. Yan Shijiu walked over and saw a tall, thin middle-aged man get off the carriage.

"I heard from Madam Bai that the prince is back?" Hu Er assumed that Yan Shijiu was one of Gu Ling's attendants.

"Who might you be, sir?" Yan Shijiu asked.

"Hu Er. I have just returned from doing business out of town. My father's birthday is in a few days. I got back a bit late yesterday and didn't get to visit. Today, I came to the village and didn't expect the prince to be back. Is he in?" Hu Er said, his eyes turning to the closed room door.

Qiao Jing opened the door and came out.

Hu Er immediately straightened up and bowed deeply, "I pay my respects to the prince!"

"There's no need to be overly polite." Qiao Jing's expression was calm, "Thank you for looking after the village these past two years."

Hu Er looked terrified, "Prince, you're too kind. Without the prince and the princess, where would I be today? Being able to serve the prince and the princess is a great privilege. If there's anything the prince needs during this visit, just give the word."

Qiao Jing glanced in the direction of Yan Shiba's room.

Yan Shijiu lowered his eyes, hiding his unease. He didn't know who Hu Er was, but from his words, it seemed he was a local who had a close relationship with Gu Ling and Su Liang.

Before Qiao Jing could speak, Hu Er offered, "I just saw Little Tiger's grandmother. I heard the prince came back this time to save a friend? If the prince won't mind, why not bring the friend to my house for the time being? After all, the conditions in the village are rather limited and there's no one to provide care. It might be inconvenient."

Qiao Jing did not agree nor disagree; instead, he turned around and went back to Yan Shiba's room.

Hu Er waited where he was, and after a while, Yan Shijiu also went into Yan Shiba's room.

When Yan Shijiu entered, he saw Qiao Jing had just finished taking Yan Shiba's pulse and had turned towards him.

"Prince, considering Eighteen's current condition, can she be moved?" Yan Shijiu asked. He had initially addressed him as Marquis Gu, but after hearing Madam Bai and Hu Er call him prince, he changed his address and did so quite naturally.

Qiao Jing's expression remained calm, "It's not that serious, she won't die."

"Well..." Just as Yan Shijiu began to speak, Qiao Jing walked past him and left the room, without any intention of discussing with him.

Yan Shijiu's eyes darkened slightly. He gave a chilling glance at Yan Shiba who was on the bed, then turned around and followed Qiao Jing out.

"Get me a larger carriage." Qiao Jing ordered Hu Er.

Hu Er quickly agreed, "No problem! I'm in the carriage business now, and I have new ones ready. Thanks to the blueprints provided by the prince and princess. Perhaps, prince, you should stay at my house, either in town or at the county town."

Qiao Jing shook his head, "No, I'm heading back to the capital."

Yan Shijiu was taken aback, "Your Highness, the health of the Eighteenth..."

Qiao Jing looked at him, a hint of suspicion had already risen in his heart, but he didn't show it on his face. He only said four words, "I'm a doctor."

Hu Er quickly echoed, "If the prince says there's no problem, then there definitely won't be. I'll go get everything ready and assign a maid to serve the prince's friend."

"Mm." Qiao Jing nodded slightly. Hu Er then hurried away.

Upon learning that "Gu Ling" was leaving, Mrs. Bai also agreed, "It's a good thing too, the princess and the children are all in the capital, the prince should hurry back."

Yan Shijiu didn't dare to say anything more, for fear of arousing suspicion. All of Qiao Jing's actions were instructed by Gu Ling, and everything was very consistent with Gu Ling's character: Making sure Yan Shiba was not in mortal danger, and was confident of saving her life, of course he would want to return to Su Liang and his daughter as soon as possible.

Su Bai, the village head, came to see Qiao Jing and asked about Su Liang and the children.

Qiao Jing briefly said a few words. Su Bai reported to him about the situation in the village school. Everyone knew that they were the relatives of the Regent's queen, no one dared to provoke them. Everything was going smoothly, and the lives of the villagers were getting better and better, much more harmonious than before.

When Gu Ling's woodworking master, Su Dakuan, learned that he had returned, he brought a small cart he made for Gu Xiaonuan, which Qiao Jing accepted on behalf of Gu Ling.

By almost noon, Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi were done with school and they ran straight to Su Liang's house.

The two boys rushed in, one after the other. Seeing Qiao Jing's face, they both stopped in their tracks, unsure of how to address him.

Qiao Jing waved to them, calling them over. He ruffled Bai Xiaohu's hair, then pinched Zhuzi's little face, "You've all grown taller." He wasn't sure, but saying this would certainly not be wrong.

"When will Sister Su Liang come back?" Zhuzi asked eagerly.

Qiao Jing responded flatly, "In a few more days, she'll come visit you."

"This is the letter I wrote for Sister Su Liang!" Bai Xiaohu took out a letter from his schoolbag that he wrote during recess.

Zhuzi also took out one, "This is mine."

"May Brother-in-law Gu help deliver these." Bai Xiaohu formally gave a hand bow.

Qiao Jing accepted the letters, promising to deliver them.

Hu Er had not come back yet, so Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi invited Qiao Jing to dine at their home. He accepted, leaving Bai's wife to look after Yan Shiba.

The last time Gu Ling and Su Liang saw Tiger and Zhuzi's little sister, she was still in her swaddling clothes. Now she was already able to run. She charged over and hugged Qiao Jing's leg, raising her little face and smiling at him.

Qiao Jing picked the little girl up and suddenly thought that having a baby of his own would be a pretty good idea. However, he would first need to find a wife. The image of Min Rou's gentle smile floated in his mind. Qiao Jing shook his head, the situation was still far from settled, he would consider it back in the capital. Perhaps he could take Qiao Cong's advice and actively pursue Miss Min.

After a lively and warm lunch at the Bai's family, Qiao Jing became increasingly envious of the days Gu Ling and Su Liang had spent living in the mountain village. It must have been fun. Given the opportunity, he would like to stay here for a while too.

After Qiao Jing finished his meal, Mrs. Bai informed him that Hu Er had returned. As Qiao Jing was about to leave, the head of the Bai family handed him a bamboo basket full of their homemade dried goods, such as dry kidney beans and dried mushrooms, all of which Gu Ling and Su Liang liked to eat.

Qiao Jing accepted gratefully. After all, it was not a gift for him, and there was a carriage, they could bring all of it.

“Prince, he’s called Siqi. He’s clever, knows martial arts, and he can drive the carriage.” Hu Er introduced the driver to Qiao Jing.

Qiao Jing looked at the driver named Siqi, a tall and skinny man dressed in a neat short outfit. He had a horse whip hanging at his waist, a long knife, and wore a straw hat. His features were quite ordinary.

“Greetings, Prince.” Siqi bowed with a somewhat raspy voice.

“We’ll have to rely on you from this point.” Qiao Jing said.

There was also a maid, whose bright eyes revealed a sharp intelligence. Hu Er said her name was Yu Ru, and she came from a family that once owned a martial arts school. She too was skilled in martial arts.

Yu Ru carried a still unconscious Yan Shiba onto the carriage, which was lined with quilts and blankets. Qiao Jing stored all the medicinal herbs and gifts given by everyone. He was ready to set off now.

Siqi drove the carriage while Qiao Jin and Yan Shijiu rode horses, departing from Su Village in the afternoon.

They spent the night at the county town’s inn. The next day, Yan Shijiu saw that Qiao Jing had already processed all the medicinal herbs and prepared new medicine for Yan Shiba.

Yu Ru stewed the medicine, fed it to Yan Shiba, and the party set out after breakfast.

The weather was bad that day, with thick clouds covering the skies. After a while, it started to rain. Siqi snapped his whip and suggested that there was a decrepit temple not too far away where they could take shelter.

Qiao Jing had seen the temple when they had arrived, but he had no idea that it was the place where Gu Ling and Su Liang had once saved Zhengzheng.

The rain quickly grew heavy and the wind picked up. Travelling into the wind, both the horses and the carriage found it hard to move forward.

Once they reached the run-down temple, Siqi parked the carriage in the open space inside, took out oilcloth from the carriage, and covered the carriage in the rain.

Yan Shiba and Yu Ru, the maid, stayed in the carriage while Qiao Jing and Yan Shijiu led the horses to a place sheltered from the wind and rain. After a while, Siqi also came in.

There was nobody else in the worn-out temple, but there was some dry hay and firewood.

Siqi quickly gathered some firewood and started a fire, spreading dry hay out for Qiao Jing and Yan Shijiu to sit on. He then took a box of desserts from the carriage, cradling it in his arms as he ran back. He offered Qiao Jing some osmanthus cakes from a tea house in Bei’an County – a favorite of Gu Ling’s.

Qiao Jing ate a few pieces and passed the box to Yan Shijiu.

“Thank you, Prince.” Yan Shijiu wiped his hands on his clothes and took a piece, quickly finishing it.

“This rain won’t stop for a while,” Siqi said, looking at the sky.

Yan Shijiu then asked, “Prince, do we want to move Shiba out of the carriage? It may be warmer here.”

“There’s no need. She’s got blankets.” Qiao Jing shook his head.

“Right.” Yan Shijiu bowed his head.

Siqi stood up, “Prince, someone’s coming.”

A large man wearing a rain cape and a bamboo hat walked into the entrance of the decrepit temple, his face obscured.

Yan Shijiu also stood. “Prince, should we drive him off?”

“No need.” Qiao Jing said, “We don’t own this place.”

When the man reached the eave of the temple, he paused and looked at Qiao Jing, his voice flat and emotionless. “Gu Ling, come with me, or your neighbor the Bai Family in Su Village will be razed to the ground today.”

Before his words fell, a group of men dressed in black fell from the sky, standing behind him with a threatening aura.

“I don’t like bullying children, or else it wouldn’t be hard to kidnap one as a simple solution.” the man added, “I’ll give you ten breaths to think it over.”

Chapter 419: 419. I can predict the future

Three breaths later, Qiu Jing turned his head, a cold, fierce gaze fell on Yan Shijiu’s face.

Yan Shijiu lowered his head, readily admitting he was in collusion with the newcomers, “Sorry, I too, am trying to survive.”

Siqi’s eyes were on alert, “Who are you all?”

“Gu Ling, have you made up your mind?” Completely ignoring Yan Shijiu or Siqi, the man in the straw cloak always kept his eyes on Qiu Jing.

In a swift movement, Qiu Jing drew out his Cold Moon Sword. Yan Shijiu lifted his gaze to see an exquisite sword technique employed at a rapid speed. Without even looking at him, Qiu Jing plunged his sword into Yan Shijiu’s chest!

Although Yan Shijiu was not without strength, he never expected that “Gu Ling” intended to kill him! He watched as Qiu Jing’s sword thrust changed its course abruptly from attacking the man to targeting him instead.

The Cold Moon Sword was already withdrawn, untouched by blood, returning to the scabbard at Qiu Jing’s waist. Yan Shijiu’s face turned deathly pale, clutching his chest, vibrant red blood seeped from the gaps between his fingers. In panic, he fled toward the outside, crying, “Master, save me!”

The next moment, a silvery gleam was released from beneath the straw cloak. Yan Shijiu stumbled to a halt, his eyes growing wide with shock. It was as if time had slowed to a crawl. Above his line of sight, there appeared a curved sliver- a silver coin. Then, like a half arched moon obscured by clouds, the portion of it he could see got smaller and smaller until finally, it completely disappeared... The silver coin entered his forehead, piercing through his brain, and flew out, no longer shining bright. The blood streaks added an unsettling brightness to the pattern on the coin. Speed undiminished, it nailed onto a pillar behind him!

Qiu Jing's Cold Moon Sword ultimate move and the man's brain-piercing coin were used in a silent skirmish with Yan Shijiu.

At the very moment Yan Shijiu toppled, exactly ten breaths had passed.

Qiu Jing spoke, "Don't trouble them, I will go with you."

"Very good." The man nodded slightly, rainwater coalesced into thin lines down his straw hat. As he turned, the lines fragmented into dewdrops. "The Cold Moon Sword Technique, truly lives up to its reputation. Let's go."

Qiu Jing turned to look at Siqi. "You escort Yan Shiba back to the capital city with Yu Ru. Tell Su Liang that I have gone to Xingluo Island as a guest, there's no cause for worry."

"Yes, my prince." Siqi nodded, removing her grass hat and handed it to Qiu Jing.

Qiu Jing caught it, donned it, and followed that man into the rain.

The troupe of black-clothed individuals followed behind Qiu Jing, closing him in with a tight formation.

After a moment, tranquility returned to the dilapidated temple, while Yan Shijiu's blood painted a large patch of the ground red.

Yu Ru, the maid, lifted the carriage curtain, her face riddled with anxiety as she watched Siqi approach. "What do we do next?"

"You take her back to find Hu Er," Siqi commanded once again.

Yu Ru's eyes widened in shock because this was unmistakably Regent King Gu Ling's voice!

But before Yu Ru could question further, the figure in front of her had vanished, leaving her momentarily wondering if it had been her imagination. It took her a moment to realize what had happened. Although she was still mystified, Yu Ru carried the body of Yan Shijiu onto the carriage. Then braving the rain, she navigated the carriage away from the dilapidated temple with Yan Shiba, taking a detour back to Bei'an County.

Qiu Jing followed the group in the rain. Instead of heading north, they were moving away from Bei'an County towards the south.

It wasn't until dusk that the rain stopped. They arrived at a valley where the leader found a dry cave to halt and rest.

Qiu Jing watched as the man threw off his straw cloak outside the cave, revealing a tall and upright figure. But even after removing his straw hat, a mask remained, only his eyes, deep as a dead sea, were visible.

“Are you... Sheng Yue?” Qiu Jing asked. He heard from Min Rou that there was a man called Sheng Yue on Xingluo Island, a martial arts master who was immune to all poison, and a trusted aide of Mo Yan. Aside from Sheng Yue, the others causing trouble on Xingluo Island were all old timers.

“Min Rou told you.” Sheng Yue, by saying this, acknowledged the fact.

“What do you guys want me to do?” Qiu Jing asked. He knew that one of the primary purposes of the people on Xingluo Island all along was to capture Gu Ling.

It was evident that this time, everything about Yan Shiba was arranged by Sheng Yue. Yan Shijiu was a trusted aide of Yan Shiba, known for his close ties with Gu Ling and Su Liang. Hence they used a gravely injured Yan Shiba as a trap. Yan Shiba’s state was authentic, so was her severe illness, and Yan Shijiu missing an arm was also a reality. His story held no flaws. Additionally, the location was Su Village, home to many of Su Liang’s kins and friends. Even if they suspected something was amiss, Su Liang and Gu Ling couldn’t just sit by and do nothing.

Moreover, Sheng Yue would have certainly predicted that Gu Ling would be the one to show up, and he would come alone, without Su Liang. This was because Su Liang and Gu Ling wouldn’t take their daughter, who was less than a year old, on long journeys. Besides, the child couldn’t be without her mother, and Su Liang’s martial arts skills were her weakness.

If Gu Ling hadn’t made use of Hu Er’s acting, leading Yan Shiba away from Su Family Village, it would have been difficult to avoid Bai Xiaohu or Zhuzi being randomly grabbed by Sheng Yue as hostages to achieve the same goal. Choosing Su Family Village itself was a form of invisible threat to Gu Ling and Su Liang.

Qiao Jing was very wary of Sheng Yue, although they had met for the first time that day, and had a brief encounter that couldn’t be counted as a fight, this man gave him a very dangerous feeling. From a strength perspective, Qiao Jing suspected that his martial arts might not be far off from Gu Ling, but while Gu Ling looked cold, he didn’t emit the kind of fear-inspiring chill; this man, however, gave Qiao Jing the feeling that he was capable of anything.

In response to Qiao Jing’s question, Sheng Yue only answered after a pause, “You’ll know when we get there. Stay composed; if you dare to act rashly, innocent people may lose their lives because of you.”

The tone was very calm, but it caused chills. Qiao Jing realized Sheng Yue was not joking, but this man truly disgusted him.

However, for the moment, Qiao Jing was somewhat relieved that he had insisted on disguising himself as Gu Ling then. After all, they were cousins. Their physique and facial features were rather similar, and both were inheritors of the Cold Moon Sword Technique. Their martial arts were enough to confuse the enemy. At the time in the ruined temple, one of Qiao Jing’s aims in killing Yan Shijiu was to show off his Cold Moon Sword Technique.

At least for now, Sheng Yue hadn’t suspected at all that the person he captured was not Gu Ling.

As for the one who was captured, Qiao Jing felt it was quite good. Although when they swapped identities, it was said that if Qiao Jing was captured, Gu Ling could save him. But at this moment,

he didn't expect Gu Ling to come to his rescue immediately. This group of people was difficult to deal with. No matter how powerful Gu Ling was, it would be difficult to deal with them alone. If Sheng Yue wasn't killed and he escaped, he would likely invite even more trouble.

In fact, Qiao Jing hoped that his act would last longer, preferably only being discovered after Sheng Yue took him back to the Xingluo Island. That way, it would give Gu Ling and Su Liang more time to understand Xingluo Island and deal with its power.

Something was thrown onto Qiao Jing. He caught it and found it was a mask.

"Put it on," Sheng Yue said.

Qiao Jing silently put it on, thinking it was for the best.

Sheng Yue took away Qiao Jing's Cold Moon Sword and asked him if Nangong Lin was already dead.

Qiao Jing nodded, "Dead." He actually wasn't dead and was still in the dungeon of Su Mansion in the capital city, waiting for his death. But since Sheng Yue asked, Qiao Jing intentionally said the opposite to prevent any plots he might have.

"Take this pill." Sheng Yue took out a medicine bottle, poured out a pill and handed it to Qiao Jing.

"What is it?" Qiao Jing asked.

Sheng Yue straightforwardly said, "To suppress internal power."

Qiao Jing frowned, said nothing, and put it in his mouth.

"Why don't you ask if anyone has gone to the capital city to kill your wife and child?" Sheng Yue asked.

Qiao Jing replied indifferently, "If you want to say it, just say it."

"No," Sheng Yue said, "The previous incidents have caused Xingluo Island to lose a lot of masters, otherwise, we wouldn't need to go to so much trouble."

It sounded like he was explaining to Qiao Jing.

But Qiao Jing found him incomprehensible. He was sure this man was not an upright person, but it seemed that his interests were different from those of some people on Xingluo Island?

All of Gu Ling's items on Qiao Jing were taken away by Sheng Yue, including a spear, several medicine bottles, a cute little rabbit purse, a hand string, a ring. There was also a letter from Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi to Su Liang.

Sheng Yue handed the letter back to Qiao Jing, took the purse, and asked, "Made by Su Liang?"

Qiao Jing did not answer, only asked him to return the hand string.

After examining and finding no hidden weapons, Sheng Yue gave Qiao Jing the hand string, which was just an ordinary fragrant wood hand string with crude carving. He also returned the purse to him, fired a shot at the stone wall of the cave with the spear, then tucked it into his bosom.

Qiao Jing thought... Just wait, sooner or later Gu Ling will kill you with that thing...

After not resting for long, they set off again.

Qiao Jing, who originally intended to leave a message for Gu Ling advising him not to save him for now, couldn't find the opportunity under Sheng Yue's watch. But after one night, when Gu Ling did not appear, Qiao Jing was wondering, wasn't Gu Ling worried that he'd be killed after being exposed? Really...

On the other hand, when Hu Er saw Yu Ru bring back Yan Shiba, as well as Yan Shijiu's dead body, he wasn't too surprised. Hu Er knew that the carriage driver Siqi was Gu Ling. Having heard from Yu Ru about what had happened in the ruined temple, Hu Er guessed that Gu Ling had encountered a tough enemy this time.

Hu Er arranged another team of horsemen to escort Yan Shiba to the capital city. Gu Ling left a bottle of medicine, instructing them to give Yan Shiba one pill a day to preserve her life. As for the corpse of Yan Shijiu, it was dumped directly at the chaotic burial hill.

Nothing unusual happened in the Su Family Village. The Bai Family had no idea that they were used to threaten Gu Ling. Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi were determined to study well, to pass the examinations and become officials in the capital city, and bring their entire family to the capital city to continue being neighbors with Su Liang.

In the past three days, Qiao Jing thought Gu Ling wasn't likely to rescue him. Just as he had thought, as long as Gu Ling kept her presence hidden, maintaining the status quo and delaying the enemy, perhaps old Mu and Cen Man from Xingluo Island had already arrived and met Mo Yan, creating a turning point in the situation.

At least, for now, the enemy hadn't apprehended Gu Ling and remained unaware of it, which was advantageous for them.

So, Qiao Jing continued impersonating Gu Ling seriously. He needed to be very cautious all the time to avoid revealing any flaws to Sheng Yue.

That day they changed their route and took the waterway. By boat, they could reach Nanping City directly and more quickly.

During the journey, Sheng Yue and Qiao Jing didn't communicate much. He didn't intend to reveal the true purpose of apprehending Gu Ling ahead of time, and Qiao Jing didn't ask to avoid making mistakes by speaking too much. Qiao Jing had always known that there was a major secret involving the couple, Gu Ling and Su Liang. Perhaps, the people from Xingluo Island reaching out to them was related to this secret.

Other than losing his freedom, Qiao Jing didn't think that anything was wrong. He found himself with plenty of free time to contemplate many things, both from the past and for the future.

That night, when they were crossing a narrow river mouth, the distance between the two banks being only ten meters, their boat, which wasn't that big, could get through.

There was no moon or stars that night, and it was very dark, with only the sound of rippling water in the air.

Qiao Jing and Sheng Yue were respectively leaning against the two ends of the boat cabin pretending to sleep.

Qiao Jing was thinking about Min Rou again, letting his imagination run wild at the thought of what their children would look like if they married each other.

The boat suddenly rocked. Sheng Yue opened his eyes and asked, "What's happening?"

"Seems something is blocking the way," came the voice of the old boatman from outside, followed by a muffled grunt and the sound of a heavy object falling into the water.

Sheng Yue's pupils constricted, he rushed over, grabbed Qiao Jing, and pulled him out of the cabin.

It was very quiet outside, but the boat was stuck in the middle of the river mouth, not moving forward anymore. It was indeed blocked by something sharp under the water since the hull had been pierced and water was seeping in.

Gu Ling is here... Qiao Jing's heart pounded. It must be her!

The old boatman had been shot with an arrow and fell into the river; his body floated away.

Apart from Sheng Yue and Qiao Jing, there were four other old men on board; they all came out and protected Sheng Yue in the middle.

"Did you lead them here?" Sheng Yue asked Qiao Jing coldly.

Qiao Jing shook his head, "I didn't do anything."

"Come out!" Sheng Yue ordered coldly. They weren't far from the shore, but their boat was broken. They dared not to land immediately, fearing an ambush.

On the right bank was a large rock; a figure landed lightly upon it. Subsequently, Qiao Jing heard "his own" voice, "Release Gu Ling."

"Situ Jing?" Sheng Yue recognized Qiao Jing.

"Qiao Jing." Gu Ling corrected.

"How did you find us?" Sheng Yue squinted at her.

"I am clairvoyant." Gu Ling stated.

Qiao Jing:...

Sheng Yue scoffed, "Ridiculous. If I can't escape, Gu Ling will accompany me in death. Get out of the way." As he finished speaking, he pulled out the pistol he had taken from Qiao Jing and aimed at Gu Ling.

The reason why Sheng Yue hadn't immediately attacked Gu Ling was to understand how someone had found out about their whereabouts. This was essential, but he hadn't yet got an answer.

"Okay." As soon as Gu Ling finished his words, he disappeared completely.

Listening to Sheng Yue's coarse breath, which showed he was obviously enraged, Qiao Jing suddenly found it somewhat amusing... He didn't know what Gu Ling was planning to do, but it was bound to be interesting. The boat was already damaged, and even if they cleared the obstacles in their path, they could not use it. They would have to get ashore as soon as possible, but there might be some "surprises" waiting for them on the shore.

Water was already pouring into the boat, and it wouldn't be long before it sank, as it had reached Qiao Jing's feet.

Sheng Yue looked at two of the four elderly men and said, "You two, go check out the path over there." He was referring to the left bank.

The two elderly men leapt ashore swiftly. The shore was covered with dense trees. They had weapons in their hands, and they were about to walk into the forest when they heard Sheng Yue say, "Walk along the bank."

It was a smart approach. After getting ashore, there was no necessary need to hide in the forest. The conditions within the forest were unclear and potentially more dangerous. With a hostage in hand, all they needed was a clear path.

Next, Qiao Jing witnessed a scene of a "hunting" scenario.

An arrow flew out from the forest on the opposite bank at an extreme speed and hit one of the elderly men, who toppled into the water.

The other elderly man quickly hid in the forest, but soon after, an explosion sounded, and the entire river surface started to vibrate.

Qiao Jing understood clearly. Gu Ling either had a lot of mines buried in the forest, or he had calculated every step of theirs. The latter seemed more likely. Gu Ling had been following them all this while, and he probably didn't have time to prepare much.

Qiao Jing was held hostage by Sheng Yue, who positioned him in front of his own body.

At this point, the boat began to tilt. Sheng Yue knew that sending someone ashore to explore the path meant sending them to their death. Even if the other party was alone, they were stuck in the river, clearly exposed, while the other party was hidden in the darkness.

"How the hell did he find us?" Sheng Yue's voice was no longer as monotonous as before, but was filled with anger. Obviously, he was a person with a strong desire to control, and he initially thought he had everything under control. However, a major mishap caught him off guard.

"Master, we should move in the water," one of the elderly men suggested.

Just then, something fell towards the stern of the boat and hit the wooden rail.

Sheng Yue's face turned pale instantly, "Jump!" As soon as the word fell, he dragged Qiao Jing and jumped into the river.

The moment they left the boat, there was a loud boom. The entire boat exploded, and thick smoke rose accompanied by flames.

An elderly man who was slow to react and was near the stern was left with his upper body intact when he entered the water.

But Qiao Jing had seized the opportunity, the moment they plunged into the water, to wriggle free from Sheng Yue's grip. As he was pondering which direction to swim in, he suddenly felt a strong tug on his arm. He was pushed forcefully and quickly found himself by the shore and hurried ashore.

"Be careful, he has a gun!" Qiao Jing shouted back, knowing that Gu Ling was in the water.

Sheng Yue, however, did not see Gu Ling and swim as fast as possible towards the right bank.

The water around him suddenly began to ripple disturbingly. Sensing something was not right, Sheng Yue subconsciously evaded, but by the next moment, he saw his right hand severed from his wrist, floating away with the current.

Turning around, Sheng Yue saw the last of his subordinates grappling with a person.

Seizing this opportunity, Sheng Yue ignored his severed hand, reached the shore quickly, and saw the elderly man who rescued him earlier had already floated up, dead.

Sheng Yue shot a chilling look at Qiao Jing on the opposite bank and dashed into the forest.

Immediately afterwards, Gu Ling emerged from the water, pursuing Sheng Yue.

"Hey ...," Qiao Jing, standing at the opposite bank, began to say but the figure had disappeared from his line of vision.

Looking around, Qiao Jing was the only living person left. The river was filled with debris from the destroyed boat as well as dead bodies.

Qiao Jing's poison hadn't been cured yet, so he sat down on the spot, waiting for Gu Ling to return. Thinking back on the horrifying experience, he was impressed by Gu Ling's meticulous plan to take on many by himself but couldn't help muttering: if Sheng Yue hadn't reacted so quickly, they would all have been blown up on the boat...

From another perspective, Gu Ling calculated even Sheng Yue's responses accurately—they were flawless. No wonder Su Liang always called him Great God. Only such tactics could possibly deal with enemies like Sheng Yue. Even if Sheng Yue was lucky enough to escape this night, this time, in his encounter with Gu Ling, he was completely defeated.

Chapter 420: 420. Going out to sea

Qiao Jing's clothes were soaked through, and sitting was uncomfortable, so he stood up. The cold wind blew, giving him a shiver. He looked at the river, planning to find something to do.

So he fished out several corpses from the river that hadn't floated too far away, placed them on the shore, and collected some wooden planks left behind from the blasted boat.

When Qiao Jing dived into the water for the last time, he had a clear target: Cold Moon Sword.

Initially taken away by Sheng Yue when captured, it had been placed in the cabin before the explosion. The ancient sword made of black iron might still be intact, but it had fallen into the river.

But in the night, it was difficult to see the situation under the water, and although it was a narrow river, the search area was not small. Qiao Jing searched for a while, feeling slightly fatigued, and decisively gave up, returning to the shore.

Just as he stood still and was about to wring the water from his clothes, he suddenly saw a figure on the other side of the river. Qiao Jing's expression condensed, and the person on the other shore had already flown over with light martial arts.

It was Gu Ling... Qiao Jing's heart relaxed. He took a long breath, "Did he run away?"

Gu Ling landed beside Qiao Jing, "He used poison."

There's no way," Qiao Jing sighed slightly, "He's immune to poison, and you have to avoid it."

"Great God" also has a mortal body. In terms of using poison, Sheng Yue has an absolute advantage. With his intelligence, he must be carrying deadly poison, which he would use when necessary. People who know him would immediately retreat, or it would be very dangerous.

Gu Ling looked at the corpses and wooden planks on the shore. Qiao Jing said, "The Cold Moon Sword should be in the river, but I didn't find it."

"We'll look for it during the day," Gu Ling said.

The two searched the corpses but found nothing useful, so they buried them in the nearby woods.

By the time they finished, the sky was nearly bright.

When Gu Ling dismantled the spiked boards he had placed in the river in advance, he found the Cold Moon Sword. It was blocked by the spiked board, the scabbard destroyed, but the sword itself was still intact.

Qiao Jing bent down, pulling Gu Ling out of the river. He looked around, the dim environment gradually becoming clearer, "Where is this?"

Gu Ling answered in two words, "Qian Country."

Qiao Jing's mouth twitched slightly, "I know." Sheng Yue was planning to take him out to sea, and before that, they would of course be in the territory of Qian Country.

"Near Fang City," Gu Ling said.

Qiao Jing was stunned. Some people, he hadn't thought of for a long time. When he was still Che Yun, he had pretended to search for Che Xiao, Che Family's youngest son, for many years. Later, he found him in Fang City based on the clues provided by Gu Ling and Su Liang. In a blink, the past seemed like another lifetime.

Qiao Jing spoke again, "Will Sheng Yue vent his anger on innocent commoners if he escapes?"

Gu Ling stared at the fish-white sky in the east, "No."

"I think he's very vengeful," Qiao Jing said.

“Yes, but he’s very smart. Extraneous troubles aren’t good for him.” This was Gu Ling’s assessment. Back in Bei’an County, Sheng Yue once said that he didn’t want to bully children. Although it might have been hypocritical, it showed that Sheng Yue was very “clean” in his actions and didn’t want to create meaningless hatred, which would not be beneficial to him. In other words, he was a person who considered the consequences of his actions and was not impulsive.

At this moment, Sheng Yue was injured and had to hide and quickly return to Xingluo Island. Killing people recklessly would only deepen the conflict with Gu Ling and strengthen his determination to kill, and increase the risk of exposure.

“I hope so,” Qiao Jing sighed, “What should we do now? Go home or...”

Gu Ling looked at Qiao Jing, “I’ll go home, you go to Xingluo Island.”

Qiao Jing frowned immediately, “Even though I trust you, and I’m not afraid to die, don’t you think you’re being a bit too cold to me? You didn’t appear for such a long time, and what if Sheng Yue discovered my disguise earlier and wanted to kill me? When you blew up the ship last night, I had to rely on Sheng Yue’s quick reaction to survive. If he hadn’t reacted in time, my body might have only been left with its upper half. Now you want me to go to Xingluo Island alone? Gu Ling, you’re not like this to other friends. Is there any misunderstanding between us?”

“It’s not me who proposed that you pretend to be me.” Gu Ling’s expression was faint.

Qiao Jing snorted softly, “I volunteered, but I didn’t expect you to be so heartless.”

“What do you want?” Gu Ling asked in return.

Qiao Jing’s face stiffened, suddenly feeling that his previous words were exaggerated... Yes, what did he want? He had proposed the exchange of identity, which was safer, and it was proven so. He seemed to blame Gu Ling for putting him in danger, but it was his own choice. He had to replace Gu Ling and fall into Sheng Yue’s hands. Of course, there would be risks in exposure, and escaping would not be simple. He was prepared for it, but why couldn’t he help but express dissatisfaction?

After a while, Qiao Jing finally spoke with an awkward expression, “To be honest, I always feel that you’ve been treating me as an outsider. Your attitude towards me and towards Nian Jincheng and Lian Shun is different. Although you appear cold to everyone, you are coldest to me.”

Gu Ling frowned slightly, “Do you want me to be more enthusiastic towards you?”

Enthusiasm didn’t match Gu Ling at all... Qiao Jing shook his head, “No, it’s just... never mind. I’ve just had some wild thoughts recently; it’s nothing. Let’s go. It’s fine for you to send me to Xingluo Island. Since we’re already in the south, there’s nothing wrong with going straight home.”

Gu Ling shook his head, “I was joking when I said I’d send you to Xingluo Island.”

Qiao Jing paused, his words just now seemed even more ridiculous...

“I don’t dislike you. Don’t think too much,” Gu Ling said before crossing the river to the other side.

Qiao Jing stood in place, reacting for a while, and couldn't help but laugh. Yes, perhaps what he wanted was this sentence. Although it still sounded cold, it was indeed the subconscious question and anxiety in his heart: because of the past, he always felt that Gu Ling disliked him. This time, when the two went out alone to do things, it amplified his feelings.

Qiao Jing crossed the river and caught up with Gu Ling, "Can you really predict the future?"

Gu Ling shook his head, "No."

"Then can you read minds?" Qiao Jing asked.

Gu Ling shook his head again, "No."

Qiao Jing asked, "I've wanted to ask for a long time, why does Su Liang call you 'Great God'? You must have some special abilities."

Gu Ling nodded, "Because I am exceptionally good-looking."

Qiao Jing: ...

"Are you sure I don't need to go to Xingluo Island?"

"If you want to go, I won't stop you."

"Well... I don't really want to go. Where are we going now?"

"Jiaye City."

At this time, the borders of the Three Kingdoms had been broken, and the world was officially unified. Duanmu Chen ascended the throne once again a few days ago, becoming the sole emperor.

Although people were still used to saying that a certain area was Qian Country or Yin Country, it became just a name. Jiaye City was no longer a border city. However, in order to prevent unrest in the former Yin Country, there were still troops stationed in Jiaye City.

When Gu Ling and Qiao Jing arrived in Jiaye City, Lian Shun was not there. He and Nian Jincheng had gone to the former Yin Country before to take over the army and stabilize the situation. Nian Jincheng was also accompanied by Yang Yu.

Not long after discovering that Yang Yu was pregnant, Nian Jincheng brought her back, just returning to Jiaye City yesterday, and planning to embark for the capital the next day.

Seeing Gu Ling's sudden arrival, Nian Jincheng was surprised, "Aling, how did you come here?"

Qiao Jing silently called out "Aling" in his heart, feeling a little strange.

Gu Ling briefly explained the situation to Nian Jincheng, who then asked about his plan and whether he would go to Starfall Island.

"I'll send Yang Yu home, and you go with Qiao Jing to Starfall Island," Gu Ling said.

Nian Jincheng remained calm, "That's not funny."

Qiao Jing: ...Indeed. Gu Ling doesn't have to joke if he doesn't know how to.

In fact, Gu Ling came to Jiaye City to see if there was any news about Elder Mu and Cen Man. They had been on Starfall Island for quite some time, and if there was any news, it would first be reported to Jiaye City.

“No,” Nian Jincheng shook his head, “People in both Jiaye City and Nanshan City were assigned to assist Elder Mu and Senior Cen, but there’s been no news since they set sail.”

Seeing Gu Ling silent, Qiao Jing asked, “If you go, won’t it be just what they want? They want to capture you.”

As of now, apart from Elder Bai and Ying Ying who were initially captured, Elder Mu and Cen Man could also have possibly been controlled by Starfall Island. Rescuing people is the most important task at the moment.

Furthermore, Gu Ling and Su Liang have been trying to figure out the purpose behind the people on Starfall Island wanting to catch a transmigrator alive. If they could find out, perhaps the situation would become much simpler.

Both Qiao Jing and Nian Jincheng disapproved of Gu Ling taking the initiative to go to Starfall Island, thinking he should stay home and defend. Since Starfall Island’s target was him, they would definitely try to find him again.

“Let me go, disguised as you. As long as I’m not discovered, I should be able to understand their intentions,” Qiao Jing said seriously.

Nian Jincheng shook his head, “I don’t think it’s appropriate. Once you’re on Starfall Island, don’t even think about leaving. Even if you learn important information, you can’t get the message out to us, and it would be a loss. Moreover, I think it would be difficult not to be discovered as a fake. I think it’s the same for Aling if he goes. Unless he can investigate without being discovered, once his identity is revealed, they will absolutely not give you any chance to escape once they catch you. Starfall Island is their territory, and all their members are top-tier masters. Aling, even if you have great martial arts, it may be meaningless once you are on the island. If you are caught, we will be very passive.”

Qiao Jing immediately nodded, “That’s right. Gu Ling must not fall into the hands of the enemy.”

After a brief silence, Gu Ling looked at Qiao Jing and said, “You should go.”

Qiao Jing was taken aback, “Disguised as you? Didn’t we say that’s not possible?”

Gu Ling shook his head, “No. Lead troops and launch a strong attack.”

Both Qiao Jing and Nian Jincheng looked serious, and Gu Ling continued, “There are woods surrounding Starfall Island, so bring enough explosives and oil to start a fire.”

Qiao Jing’s eyes narrowed, “It’s feasible... However, the other party will certainly use explosives and could blow up our ship.”

Nian Jincheng pondered, “It’s not about blowing it up, but deterrence. It’s their territory, so if they’re not willing to cause mutual harm and are forced to abandon Starfall Island, they should be more afraid of our offense.”

Over the years, Mo Yan has recruited numerous masters to occupy Starfall Island, and Gu Ling speculated that there must be something special on the island that has caused them to never “go ashore”. Min Rou mentioned before that there is a mysterious forbidden area on the island.

At this point, Gu Ling felt he had no choice but to come to the sea, and returning home while constantly guarding against Starfall Island’s actions was not a long-term solution. He didn’t like being passive, and he didn’t want Su Liang to worry for an extended period.

Since there were secrets on Starfall Island, and they had been unable to uncover them, it was better to switch tactics and take the initiative, pushing the conflict into the open and forcing those on the island to no longer hide. The first step was to get them to release the captured people.

Sometimes, a strong, violent threat must be used to break the deadlock.

“Alright, I’ll lead the troops there!” Qiao Jing understood Gu Ling’s plan and felt that it was the best option, “You’re the Regent King, and you can use the military without having to report to the Emperor. You should prepare the explosives, bring a catapult, and have enough bows and arrows. Oil won’t be a problem.”

“Is there anything you need me to do?” Nian Jincheng asked Gu Ling.

Gu Ling’s expression was indifferent, “You should take Yang Yu back to the capital as soon as possible.”

“And you...?” Nian Jincheng thought Gu Ling would go to Xingluo Island with Qiao Jing.

Gu Ling nodded, “I will conceal my identity.”

“Very well,” Nian Jincheng sighed slightly, “Then it’s settled. Whatever you need, I will arrange for people to prepare it before we leave. How many soldiers do you plan to take? I can arrange the elite forces in the city to accompany you, and there are already ships available.”

In the dead of night, five days later.

From the waters of Liuxian River, halfway between Nanshan City and Jiaye City, ten ships sailed off. Five hundred elite soldiers onshore boarded the ships and headed east. Before daybreak, they could set out to sea.

This secret mission was known to the soldiers as an operation to suppress bandits on an island. Previously, the bandits on the island had colluded with the Liang Dynasty’s royal family and attempted several assassinations on the emperor.

No one knew that Gu Ling had come to Jiaye City. From start to finish, only Qiao Jing officially appeared, and he was also the one leading the team. And beside him was a junior officer who was Qi Jun, Gu Ling’s disguised persona.

A long time ago, Qi Jun had once disguised himself as Gu Ling as they had very similar builds. Now Qi Jun was far away in Liang Country and did not know that Gu Ling was impersonating him. With such a distance between them, causing a time difference, the people in Jiaye City and Xingluo

Island could not possibly know Qi Jun's whereabouts since he was not a high-ranking officer anyway.

This was just to cover their tracks, as there might be spies from Xingluo Island in both Nanshan City and Jiaye City.

However, if the spies wanted to send a message, they would have to go by sea. Even if they discovered something wrong, there was little chance they could convey the information to Mo Yan's ears before Qiao Jing's fleet arrived at Xingluo Island. There was only one route, and the spies would first need to avoid being seen by Qiao Jing's men.

If they were lucky enough, Qiao Jing still planned to take a good look at the possibility of having a "chance encounter" with Sheng Yue, who had been injured and returned home. At that time, with vast ocean around, they wouldn't need to fear Sheng Yue's poison anymore. With one command, each person with an arrow would shoot Sheng Yue into a sieve within minutes.

This was Qiao Jing's first time at sea and his first time witnessing the sunrise at sea. He couldn't help but marvel at its magnificent beauty.

Standing beside Qiao Jing, Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "I don't want to watch it with you."

Qiao Jing snorted lightly, "I know you're thinking about Su Liang. Can't you consider the feelings of those of us who are all alone?"

Gu Ling nodded, "Speaking of which, there's something I want to remind you."

Qiao Jing looked puzzled, "What?"

"One of the people we're going to save on this trip is Ying Ying. Lian Shun is interested in her. If you don't want to quarrel with Lian Shun again, keep your distance from her when the time comes," Gu Ling's tone remained cold.

Qiao Jing looked up at the sky, speechless, "Thanks for the reminder. There's something I want to remind you, too."

Gu Ling gazed into the distance without asking.

Qiao Jing looked serious, "Considering our mothers, you should also address me as your cousin."

Gu Ling nodded, "If we're talking about Su Liang being your grandfather's disciple, you should call me your master. I don't mind either."

Qiao Jing's expression stiffened, "Forget it, as if I ever mentioned it." Suddenly, he missed Lian Shun; with him around, there would never be awkward silences. Unlike now, going out with Gu Ling was too "cold."

Qiao Jing deeply believed that Su Liang could fall for Gu Ling because of his good looks. If it weren't for his extremely beautiful face, who could stand his temperament!