

Three-Time 421

Chapter 421: 421. Yan Shiba with Amnesia

Capital City.

A few days before Yan Shiba was sent to the capital city, Su Liang received news from Hu Er's messenger.

It turned out to be Yan Shiba, but at the same time, it was a trap.

Su Liang informed Qiao Cong that Qiao Jing was disguised as Gu Ling and had been captured by Sheng Yue.

Qiao Cong furrowed his brows, "That's true. If Little Gu was captured, Jingjing might not be able to save him." However, Qiao Cong believed that Gu Ling would certainly find a way to rescue Qiao Jing.

"I don't know where they are now, I hope they are all right." Su Liang sighed softly. Things could not be said to be very bad, but they definitely were not good either, as they were somewhat passive. So far, there was still no news from Old Mu and Cen Man, both might most likely already be under the control of the people on Xingluo Island.

The more people who were taken away, the more challenging things would become if the other party started to use hostages.

"They must have gone south," said Qiao Cong, "If Jingjing doesn't expose himself, Little Gu following them to Xingluo Island is also possible."

It was indeed possible, but Su Liang felt that the possibility was not high. Gu Ling knew the route to Xingluo Island, so there was no need to follow Sheng Yue. Besides, tracking at sea was difficult to do, as ships were not invisible.

That's why Su Liang thought that Gu Ling would most likely take action before Sheng Yue took Qiao Jing out to sea. They would be far away from Su Village, so there would be no need to worry about relatives and friends being captured again. They could find a suitable location to rescue Qiao Jing. It might not be easy to deal with Sheng Yue, who had several experts, but as long as they could cope with his subordinates, he would probably choose to return to Xingluo Island first. His greatest advantage was being immune to all poisons, which had limited use, especially when the other party was aware and on alert. Apart from that, Sheng Yue would have no chance of winning against both Gu Ling and Qiao Jing.

"When the two of them go out together, they'll definitely come back together. I'm not worried about this!" Qiao Cong did not know if he was comforting Su Liang or himself. Qiao Jing's capture made him a little anxious, but at the same time, he had great confidence in Gu Ling's ability to rescue Qiao Jing.

Ji Xiaoshu came running in, saying that his father would be setting off for the northern trip tomorrow, so he was going to stay at the Yin King's Palace tonight.

"Go ahead." Su Liang patted Ji Xiaoshu's little head.

Ji Xiaoshu ran upstairs, grabbed his small pillow, and ran back down. "I'll come back after my dad leaves!" He turned to ask Su Liang at the entrance, "Mistress, when will Master return?"

Ever since Gu Ling left three days ago, Ji Xiaoshu had been asking almost every day.

Su Liang smiled, "We have to wait a few more days."

"All right, but don't tell Master I miss him very much!" Ji Xiaoshu said with a grin before running off.

Yan Shiba was sent to the capital city by Hu Er's men, but they didn't hurry on their way. On the day they arrived in the capital city, Su Liang had also received a letter from Jiaye City.

There was nothing written on the envelope. Su Liang opened it and saw Gu Ling's handwriting and let out a sigh of relief. She was still somewhat worried.

Gu Ling told about what had happened and his plans for the future. The former was almost the same as Su Liang's speculation, but she hadn't guessed the latter, which was precisely the solution to the problem she had been considering recently: saving people first, no more delay. If they continued to wait, more people would be captured, and they would become more and more passive.

Therefore, although Su Liang very much hoped that Gu Ling would return home soon, she absolutely agreed with and supported his decision. If she were in his place, she would do the same.

When Qiao Cong learned that Gu Ling had rescued Qiao Jing and the two were leading troops to bomb Xingluo Island, he couldn't help but laugh, "I knew it! Let's just wait for their good news!"

Su Liang felt that what Gu Ling was trying to do might not be easy to achieve, but it had the potential to change the situation.

There was also good news in the letter. Yang Yu was pregnant, and she and Nian Jincheng were on their way back to the capital city.

At the end of the letter, Gu Ling drew a cute smiling face. Seeing it, Su Liang couldn't help but smile, feeling that her recent worries and concerns had been eased by the smile.

That afternoon, a carriage entered the Su Mansion, bringing Yan Shiba with it.

Yan Shiba had already woken up on the way and seemed not much better than when he was in Su Village.

Su Liang asked Qi Yan to entertain Hu Er and arrange for the people who escorted and took care of Yan Shiba to stay in an inn for the night before leaving tomorrow.

Yan Shiba was arranged to stay in Nangong Qian's courtyard. The basket of dried kidney beans and dried mushrooms sent by the Bai Family to Su Liang were still intact, as well as the beautiful tiger-headed shoes made by Bai Madam for Gu Xiaonuan. Su Liang put the shoes on Gu Xiaonuan as soon as she got them. They were a bit big, but with straps, she could wear them for two years without a problem.

Lettres from Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi to Su Liang had previously been on Gu Ling's person, and were sent to Su Liang along with Gu Ling's letter this morning. Su Liang had already read them.

When Yan Shiba entered the mansion, she was not in a conscious state. Su Liang carefully examined her physical condition and asked Qiuyue to help take care of her, asking her to notify her as soon as Yan Shiba woke up.

After that, Su Liang asked Qi Yan to prepare some things for Hu Er and the Bai Family as return gifts. Su Liang prepared some tonics for Hu Er, as well as some cloth, leather, tea, and stationery for the Bai Family, Little Tiger, and Zhuzi. Su Liang also wrote a reply to the two children, encouraging them to study hard and exercise, and saying that she would return to the village when she had a chance. The letters and gifts were to be taken back to Bei'an County by the people who had come to visit, saving them from making an extra trip.

At this moment, Qiuyue came to Yuanming Pavilion to tell Su Liang that Yan Shiba had opened her eyes.

"Did she say anything?" Su Liang asked as she walked.

Qiuyue shook her head, "This servant told Miss Yan that she is in Su Mansion now, but she didn't react."

Su Liang felt that something was amiss. Was Yan Shiba still in shock after all her ordeal? Otherwise, with her former personality, she would have definitely mentioned Su Liang.

When Su Liang entered the room, Nangong Qian had just fed Yan Shiba half a cup of warm water.

Seeing Su Liang coming over, Nangong Qian whispered to her, "It seems that she has lost her memory."

Su Liang frowned and let Nangong Qian and Qiuyue leave first. She walked to the bedside and saw that Yan Shiba looked pale and weak. The look in her eyes was unfamiliar and even a bit guarded.

Although she was once a notorious assassin leader, Yan Shiba's appearance didn't match her identity and reputation. With a round face and soft features, she would not seem sharp at all if not for her eyes. Now that Yan Shiba had lost weight and her chin had become sharper, her eyes, devoid of their former sharpness, made her look even more fragile. If someone who didn't know her saw her, they would never associate her with the word "assassin."

"Don't you recognize me?" Su Liang asked. The people Hu Er had arranged for said that although Yan Shiba had woken up on the road, she hadn't spoken and they hadn't asked her much.

Yan Shiba pursed her pale lips and didn't reply.

"Do you know who you are?" Su Liang asked again.

After a moment, Yan Shiba finally answered, her voice hoarse, "I can't remember."

Su Liang had already checked the wounds on Yan Shiba's body. There was a healed scar on the back of her head. Su Liang had saved Yan Shiba more than once before and knew about her old injuries. Apart from those, there were many more scars from this ordeal. Beneath her clothes, not a

single inch of skin was left untouched on her chest and back, and her left breast had even been cut off.

If it really was done by Yan Shiqi, it could be seen how much he hated her.

Su Liang didn't want to comment on Yan Shiba and Yan Shiqi's grievances. If she had to say something, the cause of the conflict was indeed Yan Shiba's fault. She had known that Yan Shiqi admired her, but neither accepted nor rejected him, treating him like a servant, or even a dog, which was precisely what Yan Shiba herself had once said.

As the saying goes, you reap what you sow.

Su Liang always knew that Yan Shiba was not a good person, but her relationship with Yan Shiqi was irrelevant. Just because Yan Shiba had once wronged Yan Shiqi didn't mean Yan Shiqi was a good person.

Su Liang wanted to save Yan Shiba because he owed her and had sincerely helped her. They were friends.

The last time they met was in Xiangyue City, the original Yin Country, when Gu Ling was captured by Qiao Cong and Nangong Lin. Su Liang was alone and needed help, and Yan Shiba happened to be nearby and offered his help without hesitation. Su Liang had seriously talked to Yan Shiba at the time, asking him to leave his past behind, be a normal person, and live a good life. Although Yan Shiba had not made up his mind at that time, he was already hesitating and said he would consider it and then talk to Su Liang.

Yan Shiba's last interaction with the couple before this was when Su Liang was captured, and Gu Ling asked Yan Shiba to bring people to trouble Situ Xie. Yan Shiba had traveled a long way to Yao City, the original Liang Country.

Thinking of the past and seeing the current state of Yan Shiba, Su Liang couldn't help but feel a little sad. "My name is Su Liang, and I'm your friend. Your name is Yan Shiba. Focus on recovering from your injuries for now, forgetting what happened in the past might not be a bad thing."

"Can my memory... ever recover?" Yan Shiba asked quietly, looking at Su Liang.

Su Liang examined the scar on the back of Yan Shiba's head. It was apparent that the injury was severe at the time. She shook her head and said, "It's hard to say. It might suddenly come back one day, or it might never recover. The injury is in the brain, and we can't recklessly operate on your brain in an attempt to restore your memory. It's too dangerous."

"Where is my home?" Yan Shiba asked Su Liang.

Su Liang was silent for a moment. Home? Yan Shiba had no connection with that word.

"From now on, this will be your home," Su Liang told Yan Shiba.

Qiuyue brought the decoction medicine that had been simmered, and fed it to Yan Shiba to drink.

Su Liang left and returned to Yuanming Pavilion, where she found visitors. Madam Lin and Lian Shan had come. They often came to the mansion to see the children, so no advance notice was needed.

Lian Shan had made a colorful embroidered ball for Gu Xiaonuan, and she was now holding the child and playing with her.

Seeing the smiling Lian Shan, Su Liang suddenly thought of the first time she met her in Jiaye City. Lian Shan had also lost her memory due to injury. However, it was later proven that she was indeed injured and had lost her memory, but the memory loss was not caused by the injury. Instead, it was because she had discovered the enemy's secret, and they couldn't let her die, so they made her eat a drug that caused memory loss, then intentionally injured her brain to create the illusion of memory loss due to an accident.

Human brains are complex and fragile, and memory loss can be a random event. In this era without medical equipment, even the most skilled doctors could not accurately determine the situation inside the brain, and performing similar brain surgeries was impossible.

The reason Su Liang thought of this incident upon seeing Lian Shan was because she had just met Yan Shiba, who had brain injury-induced memory loss.

In light of the past experiences right in front of her, Su Liang's mind entertained a thought: Was Yan Shiba's memory loss really due to his injury? Or, like Lian Shan back then, was it the result of secret knowledge intentionally erased from his memory?

As a doctor, Su Liang was well aware that there is no inevitable cause-and-effect relationship between brain injury and memory loss. Most people with brain injuries don't experience memory loss, but a small mistake could be fatal. Trying to injure a person's brain through external force precisely to erase their memory is impossible. Such a consequence can only happen by chance.

However, Su Liang didn't find any residual poison in Yan Shiba's body. But when Lian Shan was drugged to erase her memory, it wasn't any poison that would remain in her body for a long time, and it was irreversible, unable to recover.

Su Liang felt that it was probably just her overthinking. Given Yan Shiba's physical condition, she could have been injured anywhere, and it wasn't particularly strange that she happened to suffer brain injury and memory loss.

Madam Lin greeted Su Liang, so she temporarily put her thoughts aside and attended to the guests.

Upon learning that Yang Yu was pregnant and would be returning soon, Madam Lin was very happy for her and Nian Jincheng. She couldn't help but mention Lian Shun, "Each of you is settling down and starting families, but I don't know when that smelly boy of mine will finally marry and let us hold our grandchildren!"

However, Lian Shun's parents were very open-minded, and as much as Madam Lin complained, it wasn't a problem for her. She said a few words and then changed the subject to the remarriage arrangement between Lian Shan and Yuan Pei.

Su Liang was surprised, "Really? Congratulations, congratulations."

Madam Lin was somewhat sentimental. "We never thought of reuniting the two of them. When I came to the capital city, I was always thinking about finding a good girl for Pei'er. But he said that after what happened before, he had seriously considered everything and couldn't forget Shan Shan. He hoped to marry her as his wife. My husband and I naturally approve."

Lian Shan blushed. Apparently, after the twists and turns they had gone through, the two of them had developed genuine love from their childhood friendship.

Su Liang found it satisfying. The time Lian Shan experienced can be seen as a mistake, which has now passed. The deep bond between childhood sweethearts is very precious: Lian Shan had forgotten about it, but Yuan Pei hadn't. It is a beautiful destiny that they didn't miss each other in the end.

Su Liang didn't mention Ying Ying. They didn't know how she was doing right now, so they would wait until they rescued her before discussing the matter.

After bidding farewell to Madam Lin and Lian Shan, Su Liang heard a familiar voice.

"Master!" Turning her head, Su Liang saw Ren Dong appearing not far away, running towards her.

Su Liang was overjoyed and embraced Ren Dong for a moment, noticing that she looked very well. Qi Jun and Bai Yang had also returned. Qi Jun seemed to have lost a little weight but appeared more energetic than before, chatting with Qi Yan.

"Bai Yang, you should go to the Prince Mansion and see your fiancée," Su Liang said with a smile.

Bai Yang bowed deeply to Su Liang, then disappeared from sight.

"Is my adoptive father back?" Su Liang asked.

Ren Dong nodded, "Yes, everyone is back. The Marquis went home first and said he would come to see you and the little miss later on. Where is the little miss?"

"Just call her Nuannuan." Su Liang led Ren Dong into Yuanming Pavilion, where Gu Xiaonuan was playing on the ground with her two older brothers.

Ren Dong's eyes brightened as she took out a sparkling gem from her purse and approached them. She had found the gem in Liang Country and had specifically brought it back as a gift for Gu Xiaonuan.

Qi Jun also ran inside and headed straight for Gu Xiaonuan.

Su Liang thought this was very normal, as her daughter had always been loved by everyone she met.

Ren Dong learned that Gu Ling and Qiao Jing had gone to Xingluo Island and immediately asked if she needed to go and assist them.

Su Liang shook her head, "Not for now, let's wait for news. You and Qi Jun should prepare for your wedding ceremony. You can get married from the Su Mansion, and I have prepared your dowry for you."

Qi Jun grinned happily, wanting to hold Ren Dong's hand but was slapped away. He coughed lightly and asked Su Liang, "Do you have any leads about my brother's marriage?"

Qi Yan kicked Qi Jun's leg, "Mind your own business and stop showing off. Go to the Marquis Mansion and check on the old lady!"

Qi Jun then took Ren Dong to the Marquis of Zhong Xin Mansion. Besides wanting to see Lady Xing, he was also eager to take a look at Xing Yusheng's son.

Every day when Su Liang went to treat Yan Shiba, she would chat with her for a while. Su Liang did most of the talking, while Yan Shiba rarely spoke.

That night, after Yan Shiba finished drinking her medicine, Qiuyue helped her with a simple wash and said, "Miss Yan, go to bed early. If you need anything, just ring this bell. I'll be in the next room." A bell hung by the bed with a rope that Yan Shiba could easily reach.

Yan Shiba nodded slightly, "Thank you." She closed her eyes as she spoke.

Qiuyue lowered the bed curtain, left the room without extinguishing the lamp. Nangong Qian was afraid of the dark, so Qiuyue thought it was safer to leave a light on since Yan Shiba was ill.

As the door closed, Yan Shiba, lying on the bed, slowly opened her eyes, squinted slightly, and whispered two words, "Su... Liang..."

Chapter 422: 422. About to arrive

That day, Bai Yang and Ji Yue Xuan visited the Su Mansion, especially to thank Su Liang for saving them and for her ongoing care.

Su Liang spoke frankly, "It's because you're Ren Dong's brother. If it were someone else, I probably wouldn't have bothered."

Bai Yang knew it, but regardless, he would never forget her kindness.

Since leaving the palace, Ji Yue Xuan had become very familiar with Su Liang and often visited the Su Mansion, always bringing gifts for Gu Xiaonuan.

Ji Yue Bai had gone to the north, and they decided to wait for him to return before getting married.

"I heard from my sister that the prince went to Xingluo Island, should I go and help him in the south?" Bai Yang asked Su Liang seriously.

Ren Dong had also proposed this idea before, but Su Liang had rejected it and did the same now, "No need. We'll wait for news." Although Ren Dong and Bai Yang's martial arts skills were not weak, they were still far behind Gu Ling and Qiao Jing. Going alone would probably not be of much help. Furthermore, Su Liang had never treated Ren Dong as a servant, and Bai Yang was even more of an outsider to her. It had not been easy for the two sisters to come this far, so they would not risk anything rashly.

Ren Dong and Qi Jun's wedding date was set for two months later. Su Liang gave them a mansion complete with everything and, in name, it was Qi Mansion. She also prepared a lot of dowry for Ren Dong. Anything that could be solved with money was not a problem.

After returning to the capital, Ren Dong still lived in Su Mansion, which she considered her home. Moreover, she wanted to take care of her family before getting married, especially since Gu Ling was not around and Su Liang needed her help.

Ren Dong suggested moving Yan Shiba to her courtyard and taking care of her, so that Qiuyue wouldn't be too tired. Su Liang thought about it and felt that it was a good idea.

Yan Shiba was then moved to Ren Dong's place, living right next door to her. On sunny days, Ren Dong would carry Yan Shiba to a wheelchair and push her outside to enjoy the sun or stroll in the garden.

Regarding the past between Su Liang and Yan Shiba, Ren Dong knew most of it. Su Liang had instructed her that if Yan Shiba asked, she should tell the truth; if not, there was no need to say more.

Lately, in addition to teaching her children and making medicine, Su Liang had been researching amnesic drugs and antidotes. She had sought Lian Shan's help several times but made no progress. It had been a long time since Lian Shan experienced memory loss from the drug, and she had no feelings about it.

The drug that caused Lian Shan's memory loss was initially provided by Yue Mei. What Yue Mei knew, Old Bai mostly knew too, so Su Liang had the memory loss drug formula and the finished product she had made. She once asked Old Bai if the drug could be reversed to restore memory, and he said it couldn't but suggested that Su Liang could try to make a reversible memory loss drug herself.

Because of Yan Shiba's memory loss, Su Liang resumed researching the once-stalled project. She had plenty of free time recently, and if she succeeded in finding a "solution" for memory loss, perhaps there was hope to restore the memories of Lian Shan and Yan Shiba.

Under Su Liang's medical treatment, Yan Shiba's health was gradually improving, and her complexion had also improved.

On this sunny day, Ren Dong pushed Yan Shiba to the garden, where Qi Yan and Qi Jun were picking pomegranates with Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu. The two children stood on the tree, choosing the reddest and biggest pomegranate, and agreed to compete; the loser wouldn't eat meat that day.

Seeing Ren Dong coming, Qi Jun greeted her with a smile and handed her a big, bright red pomegranate.

Speaking of this pomegranate tree, Qi Yan and Qi Jun were very familiar with it, as it was a gift from Xing Yusheng to Su Liang. Before being brought to the Su Mansion, this ancient tree had grown in the former Bei Jingwang Mansion.

Ren Dong asked if Yan Shiba wanted to eat any, but she shook her head slightly, "No need. You eat."

However, Ren Dong still peeled a pomegranate quickly using the method she learned from Su Liang, put the crystal-clear fruit in a bowl, and gave Yan Shiba a small spoon. Without refusing this time, she quietly ate the pomegranate while watching the lively scene not far away.

"Uncle Qi Yan, I want that one!"

"Uncle Qi Jun, hurry, that one's mine!"

Both children spotted a big pomegranate hidden at the top of the tree and called for their helpers.

Qi Yan and Qi Jun, almost at the same time, jumped up to grab the pomegranate.

However, Qi Jun was a little distracted by looking at Ren Dong and was a moment late, so the pomegranate landed firmly in Qi Yan's hands.

Ji Xiaoshu cheered, "I won!"

Zhengzheng sighed a little, "Uncle Qi Jun, you should just go play with Aunt Ren Dong." It seemed that his heart wasn't in it here.

Feeling guilty towards Zhengzheng, Qi Jun whispered that he would secretly take him out to eat meat later in the day.

Zhengzheng was truly speechless, "Outside, as in the restaurant my family owns? It's not like I'm missing a meal of meat."

Qi Jun: ...speechless.

Not long after, the largest, reddest, and most beautiful pomegranates on the tree were presented as a treasure by Ji Xiaoshu to Su Liang, "For my master!"

Su Liang ruffled Ji Xiaoshu's hair and asked with a smile, "Do you want to drink pomegranate juice?"

Ji Xiaoshu immediately nodded, "Yes!"

Zhengzheng stood behind Ji Xiaoshu and silently waved his hand, indicating that he didn't want any. He felt that everything Su Liang made was delicious, except for pomegranate juice.

Recalling the previous year, Su Liang had asked the same question when Gu Ling was present. At that time, Zhengzheng was as happy and expectant as Ji Xiaoshu, thinking that the delicious pomegranate made by his master would surely be the most delicious juice in the world!

Unfortunately, Zhengzheng had not realized at that time why his master just smiled and didn't say anything until he had tasted the attractive-looking pomegranate juice. The sourness had hit him with such intensity that he felt his mouth water even now...

Although Su Liang later said it was just a joke and added honey to the juice to make it taste better, Zhengzheng still couldn't forget the intense "sourness" of the first sip.

Su Liang and Gu Ling had a small house in Bei'an County town with a pomegranate tree in it. Su Liang had once made pure, natural, and additive-free pomegranate juice for Gu Ling, which left him speechless.

Now, this seemed to become a "tradition" to pass on.

Soon, Ji Xiaoshu's shout came from the Yuanming Pavilion, "Big brother, you knew it would be sour and didn't tell me, stand still!"

Of course, Ji Xiaoshu wouldn't blame his favorite master for teasing him deliberately, so Zhengzheng, the "scapegoat," was chased by Ji Xiaoshu all around the mansion.

That night, after putting her daughter to sleep, Su Liang sat by the window alone, deep in thought while facing a pile of medicinal herbs, but there was still no breakthrough.

"Master," Ren Dong knocked on the door outside.

Su Liang put down the piece of paper in her hand, "Come in."

Ren Dong entered the room, glanced at Gu Xiaonuan, walked over quietly, and lowered her voice, "I saw the light was still on, so I came to take a look."

"It's fine, you should go to sleep early." Su Liang said.

But Ren Dong didn't leave, "Master, there's something..."

Su Liang raised an eyebrow, "Sit. What's the matter? I heard from Xiaoshu that you and Qi Jun hope to stay here after getting married? It's fine with me."

Ren Dong shook her head, "That's not it. It's about Miss Yan."

Su Liang's expression became serious, "What happened to her? Is there anything wrong?"

Ren Dong thought for a moment and said, "It's not that there's something wrong, it's just that she seems to have become a different person. Can amnesia change a person so much? Her personality is completely different from before."

"Yes, it can." Su Liang nodded slightly, "She forgot everything, even who she was. Moreover, she was injured so badly, her body was weak, and she was in a strange environment. It's impossible for her to be the same as before." The old Yan Shiba was very arrogant, and now she couldn't afford to be arrogant at all.

Ren Dong nodded, "Master is right. I was just overthinking."

Su Liang smiled, "If Cheng Yun were here, letting her see Yan might trigger some reaction." Yan Shiba used to like two people the most, one was Su Liang, and the other was Cheng Yun. The last time she met Su Liang, Yan Shiba began to consider whether she should quit her past life and be a good person for Su Liang's recognition and a future with Cheng Yun.

Now many things have changed, and Yan Shiba has been forced to quit her past life. Her memories of the bloody past are completely gone.

After Ren Dong left, Su Liang still couldn't figure out how to make the antidote, so she went to sleep.

Two days later, Nian Jincheng and Yang Yu returned to the capital city. Su Liang calculated the time and thought that Gu Ling and his party who went to Xingluo Island should be arriving soon.

Nian Jincheng and Yang Yu were so fond of Gu Xiaonuan that they couldn't even catch up with Su Liang to reminisce.

Only when Gu Xiaonuan was taken away by Qiao Cong did Yang Yu go upstairs to find Su Liang and her first words were, "Xiaonuan is so good-looking."

Su Liang nodded, "Yes, my man is the best looking."

Yang Yu smiled, Gu Xiaonuan took after Gu Ling, whose beauty was unquestionable.

Su Liang took Yang Yu's pulse, reminded her to pay attention to rest, not to bump into things, and not to exercise with Nian Jincheng for the two months.

Yang Yu blushed, "What are you talking about? We certainly know that."

Nian Jincheng had a private chat with Su Liang about Gu Ling's trip to Xingluo Island. They only brought 500 elite soldiers. One reason was that they didn't have bigger ships, and the other was that they didn't need too many people for fire attacks or explosives. It wasn't a war, and sending ordinary soldiers to fight on Xingluo Island would be tantamount to suicide. In Gu Ling's plan, they wouldn't land on the island but rather maintain a distance and launch an attack. Bringing more people would require sufficient food reserves, and a larger, more concentrated target would make it easier to be attacked.

"Most of the explosives have to be made by Aling on the way. He brought a lot of raw materials with him." Nian Jincheng said. If they were to prepare everything in Jiaye City before leaving, it would take too much time.

Su Liang sighed slightly, "I'm actually worried that the people on Xingluo Island will see Qiao Jing and insist that Gu Ling is also there, just hiding, and force him to show himself. It could be quite troublesome."

Nian Jincheng nodded, "That's a possibility, but in this kind of situation, they can only adapt to the situation and see who can hold their ground."

There were hostages on Xingluo Island, and to some extent, Gu Ling was still somewhat passive. But Nian Jincheng and Su Liang, although worried, had absolute confidence in his abilities and intelligence. They just wanted to know the situation there as soon as possible.

For those who go out to sea for the first time, they always feel the vast sky and ocean at the beginning, with boundless horizons, stunning sunrises, magnificent sunsets, and even the seabirds appearing freer than those on the land.

But after a few days, when the novelty wears off, they start to feel bored and even looking at the endless blue sea for a long time can give rise to a sense of aimlessness and desolation, with the boat swaying with the waves, people often miss the stability of walking on solid ground.

The psychological changes in Qiao Jing also went through these stages. He shared them with Gu Ling, trying to find some sympathy, but unfortunately, Gu Ling was focused on making explosives and showed no emotional fluctuations. Occasionally expressing emotions was definitely about missing Su Liang and Gu Xiaonuan, and there could be no other reason.

Knowing that Gu Ling was uncommunicative, Qiao Jing still couldn't help but try. Since there was no one else he wanted to talk to beside him, after realizing that Gu Ling was really not in the mood to pay attention to him, Qiao Jing set a goal for himself: to encounter Sheng Yue unexpectedly.

This was a matter of luck, but when Qiao Jing began to look for Sheng Yue, who might be ahead or behind them on the sea, he found something to do for himself.

Unfortunately, until their destination was near, they saw no trace of Sheng Yue all the way.

"We'll be there when the sky lightens." Qiao Jing's expression was solemn, "Maybe the people on Xingluo Island have already noticed us."

"Mm." Gu Ling raised the gun in his hand, aiming it at Qiao Jing's brow.

Looking into the dark muzzle, Qiao Jing tightened his heart and subconsciously dodged to the side, "Don't scare people like that. Let's talk about the real issue. The problem we discussed before, if

the people on Xingluo Island insist that you're here and just hiding, using hostages to force you to show up, what will you do?"

Gu Ling put away the gun, "You take your people and follow the original plan. I'll leave before dawn and secretly go to the island."

Qiao Jing's face changed, "No way! We agreed that you can't show up, let alone go to that damned island! Who knows if there are traps waiting for you there? If Sheng Yue is sure you'll come, he might be prepared right now, waiting for you to walk right in! I don't agree with you going to the island alone. We left together and must return home together. How can I face Su Liang if I can't bring you back?"

Gu Ling frowned and thought for a while, "Since we're already here, if we don't go to the island, there's no way to figure out what they're really up to."

"I still disagree." Qiao Jing felt that safety should always come first. Gu Ling being captured was absolutely not allowed. However, Xingluo Island was too mysterious, and Min Rou had also been away from the island for some time. They didn't know the current situation on the island.

"Well, let's rescue the hostages first." Gu Ling said, "If everything goes smoothly tomorrow and we rescue them, I'll see how things are, whether to go to the island secretly or not."

Gu Ling didn't care about his own safety, on the premise that he knew Mo Yan and Sheng Yue wanted to catch him, but didn't want to kill him. Maybe they wanted him to do something dangerous after being caught, but in any case, he had to find a way to figure out what was going on to come up with a countermeasure. Otherwise, even if they managed to rescue the hostages and leave this time, there wouldn't be much change in the situation, and the many experts on Xingluo Island might capture more hostages at any time.

When Qiao Jing mentioned Su Liang, Gu Ling decided to wait and see what happened tomorrow after considering it.

However, what neither Gu Ling nor Qiao Jing expected was that Sheng Yue, who had been injured by Gu Ling earlier, did not rush back to Xingluo Island immediately but went in the opposite direction.

Qiao Jing had been keeping an eye out for Sheng Yue, hoping to "encounter" him and shoot him full of holes, but unbeknownst to him, Sheng Yue had already infiltrated the capital city secretly as they approached Xingluo Island...

Chapter 423: 423. You guys go first

The night sky over the sea was vast and filled with a myriad of stars.

Standing at the bow of the ship, Qiao Jing couldn't help but exclaim, "Min Rou was right, the most beautiful thing about Xingluo Island is the starry sky. I must say, it's really true."

Gu Ling narrowed her eyes, looking at the island appearing in their sight. It was pitch-black, making it difficult to see anything, resembling a dormant lion lying on the sea.

In the mainland, if you stand at a high point, you can also see the same beautiful starry sky... Gu Ling didn't want to spoil the mood, so she didn't say it out loud.

"Where shall we stop?" Qiao Jing asked. According to the plan, they wouldn't get too close to Xingluo Island. Their main goal would be reached through negotiation.

Gu Ling estimated the distance, "Wake everyone up, speed up and prepare the catapults. Throw the explosives first, and remember the positions."

Qiao Jing's expression sharpened, "Alright! If they don't release the hostages, we'll set fire!" Just as he was about to make arrangements, he reminded Gu Ling not to show her face, reveal her identity, or rashly board Xingluo Island. If she really wanted to go, they would go together.

Gu Ling nodded, "Understood."

Qiao Jing patted Gu Ling's shoulder, "If you dare to mess around, we're done." With that said, he went off to make arrangements.

The soldiers brought along were all elites and the best archers from the southern army of the former Qian Country. The daily training they had undergone during the journey was arranged by Gu Ling. Due to the limitations on the ship, the intensity was not very high, but they were all eager to act. At the order, they quickly prepared themselves.

Qiao Jing held the map of Xingluo Island and its surroundings, drawn by Gu Ling based on Min Rou's description. The positions of each ship, where to throw the explosives, and how far to throw them were all pre-designed by Gu Ling. All they needed to do was execute it carefully.

After the deployment was completed, the ten ships quickly dispersed, heading towards their respective positions.

Other than Qiao Jing lighting a lamp when making arrangements with the map, there had been very little open flame on the ship. Now, the lights were extinguished, leaving everything in complete darkness. Firstly, this was to avoid being discovered by the guards on Xingluo Island, and secondly, the ship was carrying a large number of flammable and explosive materials, making fire dangerous.

Originally, Min Rou accidentally acquired the sea chart of Xingluo Island and informed Gu Ling and Su Liang. The people on the island didn't know about this.

However, as Lao Mu and Cen Man arrived on Xingluo Island and were most likely captured, the people on the island naturally came to know that their position had been exposed.

It was because Gu Ling believed that the island had some special features that made Mo Yan stay there all this time. Otherwise, she would have suspected that the people on the island had already left.

In the darkest hour before dawn, all ten ships reached their designated positions, set up their catapults, and aimed at their targets.

Qiao Jing stood at the bow of the ship, feeling the cool sea breeze. He thought that if there were guards patrolling the coastal area of Xingluo Island at night, they would soon notice their ships.

Qiao Jing sent a silent signal flare into the sky. The next moment, all ten ships launched black “stones” that drew almost identical parabolas in the air, landing on the island.

The first wave, second wave, third wave... Each ship threw five times, scattering the explosives across various locations on the island. Though they couldn’t reach the center of the island, the explosions would be enough to turn the once beautiful, tree-covered Xingluo Island into a fiery inferno.

The ship carrying Qiao Jing and Gu Ling was facing the island’s exit water dock, where many big and small ships were anchored.

“How have we not been discovered yet?” Qiao Jing found it strange, “Have the people on the island evacuated already?”

Gu Ling shook her head slightly, “They won’t leave so easily. They might have set traps or formations, not fearing intruders.”

Qiao Jing nodded, “That’s also possible. Maybe Lao Mu and Cen Man were trapped on the island when they arrived. That’s why you definitely can’t go.”

Gu Ling’s tone was melancholic, “Stop worrying.” It seemed Qiao Jing had almost inscribed the words “I am your cousin, and I am concerned for your well-being” on his forehead.

“When do we take action? Shall we wait for them to discover us?” Qiao Jing asked.

Gu Ling took out a round object from her bosom, “Let’s give them a greeting.”

Qiao Jing’s gaze followed the black ball as it flew across the sky before the dawn, looking like a small rock, crashing towards the dock of Xingluo Island.

But it wasn’t a small rock. With a thunderous boom, the dock of Xingluo Island was destroyed within their sight. Most of the ships originally anchored around the dock were not completely destroyed, but they broke free from the land’s control and scattered with the tides.

Qiao Jing’s lips curled into a slight smile, approving of this way of greeting.

As long as there were people on Xingluo Island, they would appear soon.

The horizon turned the color of a fish’s belly, with the morning glow casting a colorful light over the sea.

At last, figures appeared on the shore, near the demolished dock.

Qiao Jing gave an order, and his ship moved forward a bit, making it easier to talk.

As they got slightly closer, they saw eleven people standing on the shore. The leader wore a half-face mask – it was He Wei, the man who almost blew himself up outside the capital city.

He Wei held hostage Lao Mu in his hands.

Lao Mu’s hands and feet were chained, his eyes covered with a black cloth and his mouth gagged. He was still wearing the same clothes as when he left home. He didn’t know what had happened, but he guessed that his people had arrived. He wanted to speak but could only utter muffled sounds.

Someone spoke to He Wei, who then asked, “Qiao Jing? Did Gu Ling send you?”

At this moment, Qiao Jing thought of Sheng Yue, who he had been worried about the whole time. Where was Sheng Yue? Was it because he was injured? Or had he not returned yet? If Sheng Yue hadn't returned by now...

Qiao Jing's eyes flickered, "Gu Ling didn't send me, but I'm here for him!"

He Wei frowned as he heard Qiao Jing say, "Sheng Yue captured Gu Ling. Hasn't he returned yet?"

He Wei's face changed instantly.

Seeing their reaction, Qiao Jing inferred that Sheng Yue truly hadn't returned.

At this moment, inside the ship's cabin, Gu Ling's heart sank a bit. Sheng Yue still hadn't returned? Otherwise, He Wei would immediately refute Qiao Jing's words. With Sheng Yue's abilities, even having lost one hand, he could still return faster than them. Was it possible that he had gone somewhere else...

For the time being, Qiao Jing didn't think too much about it. He just intended to continue lying, "He Wei? If you don't want your entire island to be blown up, release all of our people now! Gu Ling, Lao Mu, Cen Man, Ying Ying, Ying Ye, and Master Mo Fei."

He Wei scoffed coldly, "Ignorant fool, so arrogant!" With that, he drew his sword and held it against Lao Mu's neck. "Want to save them? If you dare, come here! If you don't come, I'll kill him first!"

Qiao Jing didn't waste words, gesturing to a ship on the right, "Let's greet the Great Elder He first!"

As Qiao Jing's words fell, ten flaming arrows were fired from the ship, all aimed at the same spot on the shore.

He Wei looked on coldly, thinking they just wanted to set fire, and waved a few men over to put out the fire.

However, when the clusters of flames landed on the island, they suddenly triggered a series of intense explosions. The fastest man He Wei sent to put out the fire was directly knocked unconscious.

He Wei's face finally couldn't maintain its composure.

Hearing the second explosion, Gu Ling deduced from the sound that it wasn't her explosives. This meant that Mo Yan had set up landmines around the island. Only his own people knew which areas were safe to walk while outsiders stepping on the island would perish if they weren't careful. Therefore, the island didn't need to patrol the shore day and night.

Since Old Mu was alive, Gu Ling thought that Cen Man should be fine too, only she hadn't been brought here. Those landmines must have been placed after Old Mu and Cen Man were captured.

Qiao Jing said coldly, "You should know how many boats and men we have. The explosives have been delivered to your island before dawn, everywhere. All it takes is a spark, and the consequences will be what you see now. Everyone, get ready!"

Qiao Jing raised a red flag, and the two nearest ships followed suit, passing the signal along. Soon, all ten ships surrounding the island were prepared to shoot their arrows.

He Wei's teeth clenched angrily, "Just a cheap trick! Call everyone out and burn their boats, let's see who gets blown up first!"

Qiao Jing remained calm, "You're only calling your men out now; can you really be faster than us? Most of your boats are already unusable. Since you're still on the island, there must be something important on it. Am I right? Our fire can only reach the peripheries, and we might not kill a single person, but the wind is strong today. When the fire spreads everywhere, will your people on the island still be able to save anything? Will your valuable items remain untouched? He Wei, from the beginning I said that we're only here to rescue people. Release the hostages and we will leave immediately. We won't discuss other grievances today! Otherwise, the consequences won't be what you desire! If you need to consult Mo Yan, then call him out! Of course, maybe you're too scared to let Mo Yan see us because you're hiding an important secret from him! If the commotion grows larger and Mo Yan appears, I will tell him!"

He Wei's face turned livid with anger, and when people around him asked if they should consult Mo Yan, he immediately denied the suggestion, "The Master is in seclusion, and no one is allowed to disturb him!"

With that, He Wei coldly said, "Qiao Jing, I don't know if Sheng Yue captured Gu Ling, but he never returned with his men!"

I know... Qiao Jing sneered, "I don't believe you!"

"You'd better believe it!" He Wei's sword drew closer to Old Mu's neck, "I can only release this one person, no more! If you don't agree, I will kill him!"

"If you dare touch our people, there's nothing more to talk about!" As Qiao Jing spoke, he prepared to raise his hand, ordering the ship on the left to continue the bombardment.

By now, the fire caused by the first wave of explosions was getting larger. If they didn't put it out quickly, the consequences would be severe. If Qiao Jing's side launched a full-scale fire attack, Xingluo Island would soon be engulfed in flames.

He Wei knew that they had hostages and that Qiao Jing wouldn't really burn Xingluo Island down. However, even if they didn't burn everything and only burned a few places, it would still be enough to create chaos, as there weren't many people on the island, and they had already lost quite a few masters. After all, putting out fires had nothing to do with one's martial arts.

And Gu Ling was right, many landmines were buried in the forest in case of enemy infiltration. Indeed, they were placed after Old Mu and Cen Man were captured, to guard against Gu Ling and his team's return. But He Wei hadn't expected the enemy to arrive and launch a fierce fire attack rather than infiltrating the island secretly.

They had to control the fire as soon as possible. If it spread or if another fire started elsewhere, not only would the explosives shot onto the island explode, but the landmines planted by Xingluo Island itself would also explode. The consequences would be unimaginable.

At the same time, He Wei was worried that the commotion would draw Mo Yan out. So far, Mo Yan was still unaware of the truth about Su Liang being his granddaughter, thanks to the meticulous cover-up by He Wei and Sheng Yue.

“Fine! We’ll return all your people to you! But Gu Ling isn’t here; he’s not on the island!” He Wei declared fiercely, “Quickly, go find people to put out the fire and bring back those hostages he mentioned!”

Then, he yelled angrily at Qiao Jing, “If you dare make another reckless move, I will kill one of your people for every movement you make! Put down your arrows!”

Qiao Jing furrowed his brow, “Has Sheng Yue really not returned? Did he possibly get killed on his way back with Gu Ling?”

Qiao Jing’s words were play-acting, but they made those on Xingluo Island wonder if it could be true.

Qiao Jing was actually considering whether to escalate the situation to draw Mo Yan out so he could reveal that secret. But he soon dismissed the idea.

Gu Ling had told him that the primary objective was to rescue the hostages and not create additional troubles. If He Wei was pushed into a corner and lost control of the situation, the hostages might get hurt. Treading the fine line where the situation was temporarily advantageous also meant not overreaching and causing other problems.

And so, Qiao Jing ordered his men to stand down, and they didn’t have to worry about the people onshore using fire attacks on their ships. That’s because, for those onshore to set fire to ships in the open water would be too evident, and it would be much easier to defend and intercept. On the other hand, it was impossible for the people on Xingluo Island to intercept the burning arrows shot from all directions by 500 soldiers.

This was the advantage of being proactive: as long as the strategy was well-prepared, it would gain the upper hand.

About a quarter of an hour later, the fire nearby the dock hadn’t completely died down, but another explosion occurred elsewhere.

Qiao Jing hadn’t noticed before, but he realized now that there were already landmines on Xingluo Island...They were useful for defense but extremely dangerous, as they could easily hurt one’s own people. If their plan this time had been to secretly infiltrate the island, it would have been disastrous.

As the sun rose, the light grew brighter.

Qiao Jing squinted as Cen Man was brought over, tied up by the hands and feet with iron chains like old Mu, with her eyes blindfolded and mouth gagged.

Soon, Old Bai was brought over, too. Lastly, Ying Ying and her brother Ying Ye were brought over.

Qiao Jing breathed a sigh of relief. He had genuinely worried about these people meeting with disaster on Xingluo Island before. Fortunately, they were all still alive. After all, only the living have value.

“How do I know you guys won’t leave once I release the hostages?” He Wei has calmed down. If all the hostages were released, and Qiao Jing then ordered them to shoot arrows, Xingluo Island would be truly destroyed.

This was within Qiao Jing's expectation, "You have no choice but to trust me."

He Wei sneered, "Enough talking! Listen well, one of these people must stay behind; the others, you can take away! Otherwise, who knows if you'll go back on your word later? There's no room for negotiation. You choose one!"

Qiao Jing knitted his brows, but then he heard Gu Ling's voice from behind, "Leave Ying Ye behind."

Qiao Jing knew it wasn't because Ying Ye had the shallowest relationship with them, so Gu Ling must have chosen him for a special reason. He said aloud, "Fine! Leave Ying Ye behind, and release everyone else!"

Who knew He Wei would change his mind, "No! It seems you guys don't care about Ying Ye's life, change to someone else!"

Old Mu, on the shore, raised his chained hands and waved at Qiao Jing, indicating that he should be left behind.

At present, the deadlock was disadvantageous to both sides. It was impossible to get He Wei to release all the hostages because that could not guarantee the subsequent safety of Xingluo Island. If Qiao Jing insisted on not compromising, He Wei might get angry and start killing. As long as there was still one hostage left, he could still threaten Qiao Jing.

"Will your master do?" Qiao Jing did not turn his head and asked Gu Ling. Among the hostages, only one was Gu Ling's master, who was Old Mu.

"That can work," Gu Ling replied.

Qiao Jing felt a bit strange, but didn't have time to think too much at the moment. Since Gu Ling said it was okay, he spoke loudly, "Then leave Gu Ling's master, Elder Mu behind! Release the others immediately!"

He Wei found a boat and had Old Bai, Cen Man, and Ying siblings board it. Then he sent one man to drive the boat towards Qiao Jing's side. Meanwhile, his sword was still at Old Mu's neck.

They were not far apart.

He Wei shouted after all the hostages got on Qiao Jing's boat, "Leave immediately! Or else, I'll kill him!"

"If anything happens to Elder Mu, the next time we come, we'll level Xingluo Island! Retreat!" Qiao Jing ordered, and the ten ships simultaneously changed direction and slowly regrouped, heading away from Xingluo Island.

The fire on the shore was finally put out, and He Wei looked at the smoky forest, fuming with anger. He removed the cloth gagging Old Mu's mouth and slapped him hard.

Old Mu laughed, "He, can you still sleep soundly in the future?" He was here to save people, so it didn't matter if he stayed behind. With only one hostage left, He Wei would be even less likely to kill him. Old Mu believed that Gu Ling would come to rescue him. They had already won this time.

As He Wei took Old Mu away, Qiao Jing discovered that Gu Ling was missing. In the cabin, he found a letter Gu Ling had left him, containing only one sentence: “You guys go ahead, I’ll save Master.”

Qiao Jing’s face darkened. Gu Ling had secretly infiltrated Xingluo Island after all. However, now that they knew about the landmines on the island, Gu Ling could find a way to avoid them.

Cen Man was thinner but otherwise uninjured, having been kept captive since being captured on the island. She said her eyes remained covered throughout her time on Xingluo Island, and she had little insight about it. However, to Qiao Jing’s surprise, besides Cen Man, Old Bai and the Ying siblings were unharmed, though they all had amnesia, clearly as a result of deliberate memory erasure.

“Shall we wait for Xiaogu?” Cen Man looked worried.

Qiao Jing shook his head, “No waiting. We’ll go back first. I believe he has a way to save Elder Mu and escape Xingluo Island unharmed.” He was genuinely a bit upset that Gu Ling hadn’t consulted with him, but on second thought, Gu Ling might not have decided whether or not to go. Gu Ling most likely hid under the boat that brought the hostages over to Xingluo Island and didn’t have time to discuss it with him on the spur of the moment.

So, Qiao Jing decided to follow Gu Ling’s arrangement and withdrew first. As for the rest, it all depended on Gu Ling.

Chapter 424: 424. Rescue Old Mu

The air was filled with the dust and smoke left behind by the extinguished fire, which danced and swirled in the sunlight.

A group of people were hurriedly repairing the destroyed dock and retrieving the drifted boats.

He Wei, with his face a furious green, reappeared by the shore with one of his sons and two grandsons by his side.

“Great Elder, there are explosives along the coast and the periphery of the forest,” an old man came to report, his forehead covered in a fine layer of sweat. It was not only due to running, but also the lingering fear. He wiped his forehead with his sleeve, “We’ve gathered all the found explosives in one place.”

He Wei’s face turned an even darker shade of green. “Search again, and don’t leave any stone unturned! Be careful around the forbidden areas!” There were many “forbidden areas” in the forest, with nearby trees marked to indicate them. Although their people knew of them, they still had to be very observant to avoid them. They usually stayed away from the forest, fearing to accidentally step on a trap.

He Wei’s eldest son, He Yun, stepped forward and spoke in a low voice, “Dad, we still have an important hostage, so they won’t come back. But what about that treacherous Sheng Yue? Could he really have been killed by Gu Ling...”

Seeing He Yun making a beheading gesture, He Wei fixed his eyes in the direction where Qiao Jing had left. “Do you think Sheng Yue being killed by Gu Ling would be a good thing?”

“Of course, it’s a good thing!” He Wei’s eldest grandson, He Peng, sneered coldly. “That treacherous man always curries favor with the Master and has been contending with Grandpa for the second most powerful position on the island. It couldn’t have been better if he died out there!”

However, He Wei shook his head and said in a low voice, “You are all too short-sighted. We haven’t achieved a single thing yet. No matter what, Sheng Yue is a member of Xingluo Island, and his death at this point would do us no good. I still hope that he can capture Gu Ling and bring her back, then many problems would be resolved.”

He Peng frowned. “Grandfather is right. But judging from what Qiao Jing said, Sheng Yue seems to have really taken Gu Ling away. If he’s alright, he should have returned by now! Unless he’s deliberately not coming back, harboring ulterior motives! I’ve always felt that those with the surname Sheng are not on our side and have their own plans.”

He Yun agreed with his son’s perspective.

He Wei sighed heavily. “Stop guessing. It’s useless. First, we need to stabilize the island, strengthen our defenses, and keep an eye on that Mu family.”

He Peng huffed lightly. “Grandfather, don’t worry. Those people only dare to provoke us outside the island. In the end, they left only one person and ran away. They dare not invade the island again, knowing that there’s no way back!”

“Don’t underestimate them!” He Wei’s brow furrowed.

“Yes,” his son and grandsons responded unanimously. But judging from the expressions on the faces of his two grandsons, they clearly thought the crisis had passed and that He Wei was overreacting.

As they strolled to the dock, He Peng brought up Min Rou. “It’s all because of that cousin! She ruined everything! Shouldn’t we send someone to deal with her? Otherwise, it’s hard to let go of the hatred in our hearts!”

He Wei’s face darkened, and he scolded angrily, “What nonsense are you talking about? She must have been controlled by some sinister means by Su Liang and Gu Ling. Otherwise, how could she do anything harmful to Xingluo Island?”

He Yun saw that the people working on the dock were looking at them with strange expressions, and he glared at He Peng fiercely. He raised his voice and said, “Su Liang is best at manipulating people’s hearts. Rou’er may have been used and harmed by her. How can you say such things? Isn’t it making your grandfather more heartbroken? It was the Master who arranged for Rou’er and her mother to go to Qian Country’s capital as insiders. We all disagreed, but we had no choice but to follow the Master’s plan.”

He Peng looked at He Wei’s cold eyes, realized his mistake, and shut his mouth. He joined his brother in the search for explosives.

In fact, the He Family knew very well that it was Min Rou who had betrayed the location of Xingluo Island. After Old Mu and Cen Man found Xingluo Island, the old man who had sent Min

Rou's family away remembered that Min Rou seemed to have seen his sea chart. There was no other possibility.

Everyone in the He Family, including He Wei, wanted to strangle Min Rou to death with their own hands. As long as the location of Xingluo Island remained a secret, they could always hide in the dark and maintain the initiative. If exposed, incidents like today's would happen, and today was just the beginning. As Old Mu had said, He Wei would probably find it hard to sleep peacefully from now on.

However, He Wei couldn't admit that "his granddaughter betrayed Xingluo Island." Because this would be a severe blow to his prestige on the island, especially after the humiliating events of today, with their side suffering casualties and the people on Xingluo Island filled with anger and resentment. Although not many people may have thought about how Old Mu and Cen Man found the island, and how Qiao Jing managed to lead the troops to Xingluo Island, it wasn't like no one knew about Min Rou's betrayal.

He Wei could only insist that his daughter and granddaughter were sent to the capital city of Qian Country as secret agents by Mo Yan, not by his arrangement, and even that he opposed it because it was very dangerous. He firmly claimed that He Qianqian and Min Rou had both fallen into Su Liang's hands, their lives hanging in the balance. If they had revealed any information about Xingluo Island, it must have been because they were controlled by Su Liang's evil techniques, and they would never have betrayed their home willingly.

However, it seemed that He Wei's grandson, He Peng, was a bit lacking in sense, as he couldn't help but publicly scold Min Rou. He forgot that Min Rou was from their He Family.

He Wei inspected the area and made arrangements, assigning eight small teams divided into two groups. From then on, day and night, there would be guards patrolling the shore. If any ship approached, they would immediately send a signal to report it.

Another elder on the island raised a question, "If we lose that hostage surnamed Mu, those invaders will be able to bomb the island without fear again. How can we resist?"

He Wei frowned, "As long as we can detect them in advance, we can blow up their ships before they attack the island! Or we can send people to fight them in boats!"

"But the people we can use right now..." The elder sighed heavily, "are becoming fewer and fewer. Our opponents have the entire army of the mainland, and they could easily summon five thousand, fifty thousand, or even five hundred thousand troops."

Initially, people who heard He Wei's words believed that it wasn't a significant problem, but now they began to discuss it among themselves. The sense of crisis became more severe. No matter how strong each person's Martial Arts, how could they resist being surrounded by thousands of soldiers and facing countless arrows? They had explosives, but so did their enemies. Would they really have to rely on a single hostage to ensure the safety of Xingluo Island in the future?

Someone mentioned Sheng Yue, "If only Young Master Sheng were here, our master said he was the most resourceful person on the island."

Upon hearing this, the atmosphere immediately turned delicate.

Although there weren't many people on the island, it was a small, closed society, and naturally, they had their groups. He Wei was the top person on the island, with many followers. Sheng Yue had only risen to prominence in the past couple of years, but his martial arts were outstanding, and his intelligence was exceptional. Mo Yan increasingly trusted him with important tasks, and many people who disliked the He Family's tyranny on the island began to secretly affiliate themselves with Sheng Yue.

He Wei sighed deeply, "I am also very worried about Sheng Yue. I fear that what Qiao Jing said is true: he apprehended Gu Ling, but something went wrong on his way back. This will be a severe loss for Xingluo Island."

Upon hearing this, those who had followed Sheng Yue began to wonder: if Sheng Yue were truly dead, opposing He Wei would no longer be wise. These people became more silent and cautious about expressing their opinions.

When asked about when Mo Yan would leave seclusion, He Wei replied that he didn't know. Over the years, Mo Yan frequently retreated into seclusion for short or long periods, and only one servant was allowed to see him during that time.

As dusk fell, Qiao Jing and his group had already left Xingluo Island far behind, speeding back home. When someone noticed that there was a person missing from the boat, Qiao Jing simply said that Qi Jun had gone to do something else.

At this moment, Gu Ling was hiding in the artificial mountain within the City Lord Mansion's garden on Xingluo Island, taking a short rest. It was silent all around, and no one knew that their biggest enemy had infiltrated the island.

Thanks to Sheng Yue not returning and his subordinates being dealt with by Gu Ling, there was no news of him on the island. The previous day's conversation between Qiao Jing and He Wei regarding Sheng Yue and Gu Ling led people on Xingluo Island to suspect something had happened to Sheng Yue, and many believed he might not return. Consequently, an impression formed subconsciously: Gu Ling had been captured by Sheng Yue, and Qiao Jing didn't know where he was; thus, he could not possibly be among the forces attacking Xingluo Island.

Otherwise, why wouldn't Gu Ling appear and let Qiao Jing preside over the situation?

It was a good question, but not one that had occurred to the people on Xingluo Island, including He Wei. Otherwise, they would have thought about why Qiao Jing let Gu Ling's master stay behind as the last hostage so easily. Was it because he really didn't want to save everyone? Did nobody care about this last hostage?

Of course someone did. When Gu Ling went underwater, he hid beneath the ship that had carried the hostages from Xingluo Island, and approached the island without anyone noticing his presence. He was only three meters away from He Wei at his closest; He Wei was on the shore, while he was in the water.

By the time He Wei left the shore and returned to the City Lord Mansion with the last hostage, Old Mu, Gu Ling had already come ashore from another hidden location, passed through the forest, and approached the Mansion himself.

The landmine array was only truly effective against those who were completely unaware of its presence. Since Gu Ling knew about the landmines, he could avoid them simply by not walking on

the ground – a task he found quite easy. Although it was his first visit to the island, he had detailed information provided by Min Rou, so he knew the layout and distribution of the buildings on the island.

Moreover, because he acted covertly, Gu Ling had arrived at the City Lord Mansion half a moment earlier than He Wei and his group.

At that time, He Wei and the others on Xingluo Island were all furious. Not a single one of them had the slightest inkling that an enemy had set foot on the island, let alone that Gu Ling had come. After all, their landmine array was still in place, and they had not yet grasped the situation that the landmine array had been exposed to the enemy. Even if they had realized that, they would have thought it deterred the enemy, who would think twice before daring to enter.

Therefore, Gu Ling watched from a safe distance as He Wei personally dragged Lao Mu back to a heavily guarded dungeon. After confirming Lao Mu's location, Gu Ling left.

There were many martial arts masters on the island, so Gu Ling was extremely cautious. He had wanted to investigate the forbidden area that Min Rou had mentioned, but unfortunately, it was heavily guarded, and he did not find an opportunity to break in, so he kept his distance.

Gu Ling's primary goal was to save Lao Mu. As long as he could safely rescue Lao Mu, he could bring troops to conquer Xingluo Island without any worries the next time.

During the daytime, Gu Ling did not snoop around the City Lord Mansion but instead chose a hidden location to rest and waited for night to take action. Since there was only one hostage left, there must be many guards watching Lao Mu. A careless move could cause the enemy to threaten him with Lao Mu's life and reveal his whereabouts, which would be disastrous.

As a result, Gu Ling was planning a foolproof strategy while resting.

The soaked clothes were already dry. Gu Ling looked at the brilliant stars in the night sky through the cracks of the rockery. He suspected that Sheng Yue had gone to the capital and wondered during the day whether he should rescue some people first and then rush home immediately. However, reason ultimately made him choose to stay and finish what he had to do. Since he could not go back home immediately even if he had wings, it would be too late if something happened at home. The root of everything was Xingluo Island, so solving the trouble here would give him more initiative against Sheng Yue in the future.

As midnight approached, there was only the sound of the night breeze and the calls of insects and birds.

Gu Ling, like a black feather, emerged from the rockery and quickly left following the route he had explored during the day, avoiding the eyes of the spies within the City Lord Mansion.

When Gu Ling passed through the dense forest from the treetops during the day, he had already discovered the markers of the buried landmines in the forest. These markers were inevitable and could be seen as long as one was careful. Otherwise, burying landmines without markers would sooner or later cause harm to their own people.

Gu Ling chose a spot and, from a distance, threw several stones in its direction.

An explosion sounded, startling the patrolling guards on the shore for the first time tonight, causing them to send out an enemy invasion signal immediately.

Soon after, a second explosion took place in another direction.

The third, fourth, fifth...

Each explosion made the patrolling guards feel more uneasy, and soon He Wei gathered the martial arts masters on the island.

"They must be here to save that Lao Mu!" The Second Elder furrowed his brows in anger, "Since they couldn't do it openly, they're trying stealth!"

A young man who had originally followed Sheng Yue muttered, "That's not right... They should have found the landmines we buried in the forest during the day, right? Why would they still dare to come to the island recklessly?"

However, this man was standing in the back, and others were voicing their opinions at the same time, so only the people beside him heard what he said. They didn't hear him clearly either, but patted him and reminded him to shut up and not say anything that might displease He Wei. The He Family members didn't like them even when Sheng Yue was present.

"Great Elder, we don't know how many people are here. Should we go out and fight?" Someone asked.

He Wei stared intently, "Stay in the City Lord Mansion and don't go out."

"Grandpa, what if they have people who can get through the forest and throw explosives at the City Lord Mansion?" He Peng asked.

"They came for the hostage. If we capture the hostage and keep them under our control, they won't dare to do anything reckless! No matter who comes or how many of them there are, they will have to put down their weapons and surrender to save the hostage's life!" He Yun said coldly, and many people voiced their agreement.

There was a report coming from outside the Meeting Hall – the patrolling guards had all returned. Nobody wanted to stay on the shore and guard it. If there were enemies, those guards would be the first targets.

He Wei listened as the people around him were all saying to hurry up and bring the hostage over. Not knowing the enemy's situation, the hostage was their best shield.

"With so many people going to the island, how could there be no boat? They didn't see it while patrolling..." The young man who sensed that something was wrong murmured hesitantly, but couldn't hold back and wanted to approach He Wei but was dragged away by his companion.

"Are you crazy? Don't you know that He Peng is preparing to cause trouble for us? Without Young Master Sheng, we'd better be careful."

"I just feel that something is strange." The man frowned, it might be possible not to see a boat since there were not many patrolling, but why were the explosions happening at regular intervals? However, he thought, though it was too coincidental,

it was not impossible. He couldn't figure it out for a while, and in the end, he silently closed his mouth under his companion's persuasion.

The master guarding the dungeon received the order and immediately took the hostage to the Meeting Hall.

Old Mu was sleeping when he was suddenly dragged up, still in a daze, "Where are we going?"

No one answered him. He was carried out by two men, with the iron chain on his feet dragging on the ground, making a crisp impact sound.

After leaving the dungeon, Old Mu took a deep breath and looked up at the sky. He was fully awake now. Not being blindfolded or gagged must mean it was an urgent situation? Was it his disciple who had come to rescue him?

Just as this thought appeared in Old Mu's mind, he heard very subtle strange sounds nearby, and the two men holding him fell to the ground in short succession.

Old Mu almost lost his balance, and saw that both men had a hole in their brows. He immediately realized: It must be his disciple who had arrived!

"There's an as...", a man not far away hadn't finished his last word, and he was instantly killed and collapsed to the ground.

Old Mu couldn't see where Gu Ling was hiding and sniping. He must be moving and had calculated everything before he even fired the first shot. His speed was incredibly fast, not giving these people any time to react, and the darkness was the perfect cover for him. Nail guns were the best assassination weapons, with almost no sound.

These strong masters, who fell one after another, did not know that someone had already infiltrated the City Lord Mansion, nor did they know that they were cannon fodder destined to die within Gu Ling's meticulous plan.

All the masters in the mansion besides the dungeon were summoned to the Meeting Hall, so when Gu Ling hid in the dark and calculated the timing to take down the men beside Old Mu, he quickly appeared and called out "Master." Then, with the Cold Moon Sword already drawn, he raised it, and the sword light illuminated Old Mu's excited face.

Old Mu instantly understood and spread his legs, which were bound by the iron chains, and raised his hands.

With two swift cuts of the Cold Moon Sword, Old Mu regained his freedom in his limbs. Gu Ling sheathed his sword and stuffed several pills into Old Mu's mouth. He didn't know if Old Mu had been poisoned and what kind of poison, but it was either muscle-relaxing powder or sealing his internal power. Gu Ling simply gave him all the possible antidotes.

Everything happened so fast that by the time a man appeared not far away, realizing something was wrong and yelling out, Gu Ling had already carried Old Mu and rushed into the densely forested garden.

There was hardly anyone guarding the garden during the day, and Gu Ling was quite familiar with it. He carried Old Mu for a while until he felt his body nearing recovery, then he let Gu Ling put

him down. Old Mu's martial arts skills were not as good as Lao Bai's or Qiao Cong's, but his lightness skill was quite powerful.

While He Wei and the other masters on Xingluo Island were waiting for Old Mu to be brought over, planning to use him as a bargaining chip to confront the intruders, they received terrible news: Just as the hostage left the dungeon, he was taken away!

On the other side, after the landmine had exploded several times, not even a single intruder was seen on the island.

The young man, who had been suspicious all along, turned pale and blurted out, "Feint to the east while attacking the west!"

He Wei's face looked like it was struck by lightning, furious and rageful, "We've been duped! Chase them!"

Chapter 425: 425. Su Liang's Suspicion

Since most of the masters had been summoned by He Wei to the Meeting Hall, Gu Ling and Elder Mu had no obstacles as they left the City Lord Mansion and soon entered the forest.

Gu Ling leaped through the woods, from one tree to another, with Elder Mu closely following behind. Their feet never touched the ground, and their speed was extremely fast. This path had been explored by Gu Ling during the night when he went out to detonate the landmines. It was in the opposite direction of the dock that had been destroyed during the day and had a smaller dock.

As they emerged from the dense forest, the vast and beautiful sea of stars lay ahead, mysteriously magnificent.

Elder Mu was in high spirits, feeling both triumphant and thrilled, the stifling feeling after being caught dispersed like smoke.

The pair headed straight for the small dock where four boats were anchored. In fact, there were people patrolling this position earlier, but after Gu Ling detonated the landmines, they all returned to the City Lord Mansion, fearing that they would be the first ones to be killed.

Gu Ling untied the outermost small boat and jumped in. The boat drifted out, and Elder Mu landed steadily beside him, "Let's go!"

The boat pierced through the waves like an arrow, heading towards the distance. It appeared small under the night sky, and it became smaller and smaller.

Meanwhile, the "earthquake" and rage they caused on Xingluo Island had reached their peak.

When He Wei led his men to the large dock, the sky and the sea were vast, and not even a shadow was seen! Their only remaining hostage was gone, and they had no idea who the enemy was, how many people there were, and where they were!

For the arrogant masters who had hidden on Xingluo Island for years, believing themselves in an earthly paradise, not because they couldn't leave, but because they chose not to, only to stir up the world when they were willing, all that had happened from day to night today was a great disgrace!

If what happened during the day was a complete accident with no preparation and could only be passively dealt with, then some of them were aware of the peculiarities of tonight's events.

However, due to the internal strife on the island, a few smart ones dared not speak out and could only follow the group's will.

After the incident, they dared not say more about their discoveries, as it would be tantamount to seeking death.

But that didn't stop them from talking privately.

"I suspect that it's Gu Ling who came." The young man named Feng Ming was considered a confidant of Sheng Yue. From an outsider's perspective, he was closest to Sheng Yue. But in fact, Feng Ming didn't think he knew Sheng Yue well.

At this point, Zhu Zan, who had previously stopped Feng Ming from warning He Wei, realized that Feng Ming was right and sighed repeatedly, "Even if you had said it then, the He family wouldn't have listened to you. And at that time, you didn't know what was going on; you just felt that something was amiss. The person who came tonight was too powerful, as if they were entering an uninhabited territory on the island. Anyone who saw them was dealt with. You said it might be Gu Ling, and it's possible. If there were others who could do this, it would be too terrifying. But, you don't really think Gu Ling did all this alone, do you?"

Feng Ming lowered his voice, "That's what I think. Think about it; they were patrolling, but no one saw a boat coming. Maybe Gu Ling sneaked onto the island during the daytime standoff."

Zhu Zan's expression was shocked, "Impossible, right? How could he avoid our sight in broad daylight?"

Feng Ming was on the shore at the time and suddenly had an idea, "The hostage boat! He hid underwater and came from under the boat. We couldn't see him and didn't even think about it. And he must have explored the woods during the day, or how could he detonate our buried explosives at night? He had definitely calculated the positions beforehand. The explosions happened at almost the same time and distance, proving that he did it alone. He intentionally used this method to mislead us, making us believe that many enemies had come from different directions, causing us to panic! It must be like this!"

Zhu Zan frowned, "This is all your imagination. I still think Gu Ling couldn't do it alone; he must have had help. There must be at least two people, one to attract our attention and one to save people, right?"

Feng Ming's eyes were dark as he slowly shook his head, "It doesn't necessarily take two people. As long as his plan is thorough, and he runs fast enough and calculates what we will do next, one person can do it. If it's true that he sneaked onto the island during the day, then it must be just one person. If there were two of them hiding under the boat, the target would be too big."

"This..." Zhu Zan pursed his lips, "If you're guessing right, Gu Ling is too strong. His intelligence and courage are definitely not inferior to that of Young Master Sheng! No, if it was Gu Ling, and he hadn't been caught, where did Young Master Sheng go?"

Since they came together, why did Qiao Jingbai say during the day that Gu Ling was captured by Young Master Sheng?"

"Of course, it was also to mislead us." Feng Ming's eyes dimmed slightly, "I suspect that Young Master Sheng really met a terrible fate. They already knew that Sheng Yue didn't return and couldn't send any messages, so they deliberately brought it up, making us believe that Gu Ling certainly didn't come."

"It's over, it's over." Zhu Zan clenched his hands, "If Young Master Sheng really doesn't come back, we won't be able to survive on the island." Unlike He Peng, who was born on Xingluo Island with a family as a backer, they were both "recruited" as teenagers.

"Don't worry for now; maybe I guessed wrong, and Young Master Sheng is fine. For now, let's keep calm and not provoke the He family people." Feng Ming was very calm at the moment. But besides whether Sheng Yue was dead or alive, he believed that everything else should be as he guessed.

As they spoke, the two had already arrived at the small dock as planned. Feng Ming noticed at a glance that a boat was missing, further confirming his idea: the intruder didn't have a boat and needed to use one from the island to leave.

Feng Ming immediately went to inform He Wei of his discovery and respectfully shared his guess: it was Gu Ling, alone, who had sneaked onto the island by hiding under the boat during the day.

He Wei wanted to refute, but he knew that what Feng Ming had guessed was probably the truth. They, the many masters on the entire island, had been manipulated by Gu Ling alone, and their self-proclaimed terrifying landmine-defense was instead used by Gu Ling to carry out his plan.

He Wei wanted to send someone after them but realized that when the boat was found missing, there was no trace of anyone, and he didn't even know which direction to chase in.

He Yun suddenly spoke, "They have fled, but they don't have any food! To get back to the mainland from here takes at least a half a month. Even iron men will starve without food!"

Feng Ming thought to himself, how could Gu Ling, with his intellect, not have thought of this?

As expected, it didn't take long for a servant to report that the City Lord Mansion's kitchen lost a significant amount of food, to the point that even a pot and two sets of bowls and chopsticks were missing...

Two sets of bowls and chopsticks... there was no need to doubt any further; there could only be one person who had saved Old Mu.

Finally, the searchers found something: the words "I was here" were carved on the inside of the artificial mountain in the City Lord Mansion's garden.

No one said who it was, but everyone knew.

“I don’t know who leaked the location of our island, otherwise this wouldn’t have happened!” The one who spoke was another elder who didn’t get along well with He Wei, and his tone revealed his frustration.

Once that was said, many people started wondering: so far, everyone who had left the island hadn’t returned. They all sacrificed themselves for a greater cause—everyone but He Wei’s daughter and granddaughter.

Someone suggested that they must report the matter to the Island Master Mo Yan immediately and not delay any longer, “Now that we have no hostages, when Gu Ling comes again, he might bring troops to surround Starfall Island!”

“If we don’t inform the Island Master quickly to devise a plan, we might lose Starfall Island someday.” Another elder wore a livid expression on his face as he spoke.

He Wei knew that with Mo Yan in seclusion and Sheng Yue absent, he had the final say on the island. However, now that a significant problem had arisen, others would certainly consider him incompetent. Furthermore, there was the matter of Min Rou betraying the location of Starfall Island—Mo Yan had to be informed. The situation had become too dire for him to resolve with a few words alone.

By evening, He Wei finally met Mo Yan in the forbidden area.

Mo Yan’s complexion looked acceptable, and as soon as he saw He Wei, he said, “I heard everything that happened last night.”

He Wei froze. If Mo Yan was aware, why didn’t he come out earlier?

Mo Yan saw what He Wei was thinking and his expression suddenly turned cold, “I just didn’t expect that so many of you would be so stupid and incompetent!”

He Wei’s expression stiffened, and he lowered his head, “Master, Sheng Yue hasn’t returned yet. I thought he had captured Gu Ling, so I didn’t expect...”

“Didn’t expect Gu Ling would come, or didn’t expect Gu Ling would dare to come?”

Mo Yan coldly retorted, “I told you early on that you must be extremely cautious when dealing with Gu Ling! Haven’t you suffered enough losses from him?”

He Wei sighed deeply, “I’m afraid that Gu Ling really possesses foresight. I’m worried that Sheng Yue has already fallen into his hands.”

Mo Yan’s gaze became icy, “Sheng Yue isn’t that weak. If there’s no news, just wait a little longer.”

“Then, what should we do next? We don’t know where Sheng Yue is, and Gu Ling might come back to kill at any moment. When that time comes, we won’t have hostages...” He Wei’s face darkened.

“Is not having hostages a problem?” Mo Yan counter-questioned.

He Wei furrowed his brows, “Master means...”

“If we don’t have hostages, we’ll capture more. Go to Nanshan City and seize a hundred or so commoners. Let’s see if Gu Ling dares to attack with troops then,” Mo Yan sneered coldly.

He Wei immediately nodded, “Master is wise! I will make arrangements right away!”

After He Wei left, Mo Yan’s old servant sighed, “Will Young Master Sheng Yue really be in trouble?”

Mo Yan’s eyes were ice-cold, “Tell the two boys who have been following Sheng Yue to set off tonight and find out Sheng Yue’s whereabouts.”

The old servant frowned, “That... won’t be easy to inquire about!”

Mo Yan snorted coldly, “There are two things Sheng Yue set out to do, catching Gu Ling seems to have failed, but the other matter might not fail. Tell that Feng Ming to verify Su Liang’s condition after going ashore. As long as Su Liang is in trouble, then it means Sheng Yue is unharmed!”

The ones chosen by Mo Yan to carry out the tasks on the island were Feng Ming and Zhu Zan. They soon received their orders and left. After reaching the sea, they took a deep breath, feeling that leaving Starfall Island at this time was a good thing. Otherwise, they would always worry about being targeted by the people from the He family. Of course, they didn’t have any intention of betraying Starfall Island. Remembering Mo Yan’s orders, they headed to Nanshan City as quickly as possible.

He Wei only found out the next day that Mo Yan had sent the two followers of Sheng Yue out to take care of something; he guessed that they went to look for news about Sheng Yue, so he didn’t ask further.

Qiao Jing’s group, as well as Gu Ling and Old Mu, were still on the sea.

Old Mu found out that Gu Ling had not only stolen dried food from Starfall Island but even a pot. He laughed at the time, “You rascal! Are you planning to cook meat for your master?”

Gu Ling shook her head, “Let’s eat the dried food first. If that’s not enough, then we can hunt birds and fish.” They couldn’t possibly eat them raw, so having a pot would be more convenient.

“If we can catch up with Xiaoqiu, we can ask him to lead the troops back to attack Xingluo Island!” Lao Mu said.

Gu Ling shook her head again, “Let’s discuss it after we go back.” If they attacked Xingluo Island again, the people on the island would be prepared. The fire attack could only be used as a deterrent. If they really wanted to burn down Xingluo Island, those masters on the island would definitely have the strength to escape. By that time, the fighting would probably turn into a mutual exchange of explosives. The more troops they brought, the heavier the casualties might be.

However, there was still hope to deter Xingluo Island again because the forbidden area on the island must be Mo Yan’s treasure. That’s why he had been guarding it and couldn’t let Xingluo Island be destroyed. But it would only be a deterrent and not achieve their desired goal.

If they were to go again, Mo Yan would most likely show up, Gu Ling would have to go personally and couldn’t let Qiao Jing or other friends take the risk. But now, she was worried about her family

and suspected that Sheng Yue had gone to the capital city, so she wanted to rush back as soon as possible.

Hearing that Gu Ling said Sheng Yue might have gone to the capital city, Lao Mu's face changed drastically, "Quick! Let's hurry up!"

The former capital city of Qian Country had now become the political center of the entire world, even more bustling and prosperous than before. The checks at the city gates had also become stricter than before.

Two monks with bundles on their backs were in line to enter the city, and were also asked to open their bundles for inspection.

The young monk at the back, about 20 years old, had red lips and white teeth, and delicate features. Passers-by couldn't help but take a few more glances at him.

Lin Bojun happened to be riding a horse out of the city. Seeing the little monk, he smiled and called out, "Cheng Yun!"

Cheng Yun saw Lin Bojun, put his hands together, and chanted Amitabha Buddha, "Lin benefactor, we meet again."

"A few days ago, Xiaoliang mentioned you. You must go see her!" Lin Bojun said loudly.

Cheng Yun smiled, "This humble monk will pay a visit to Su benefactor."

Lin Bojun left the city, and the guards soon let the two monks pass.

"Master, can I go to the Su Mansion first and then return to Huguo Temple?" Cheng Yun asked.

The older monk was Cheng Yun's Master Pu Cheng, who often traveled outside. He had an extraordinary appearance and nodded, "Go ahead. You have been wanting to come to the capital city to find friends for a long time. I would like to meet your friend surnamed Su one day. There are many rumors about her, as if she had three heads and six arms."

Cheng Yun shook his head, "Master is joking."

Pu Cheng touched Cheng Yun's bald head, "I'm just joking with you. Go ahead."

Cheng Yun hesitated for a moment, and Pu Cheng had already smiled and walked ahead. Although he was a bald monk in a robe, he had long strides, casual, and natural – he was the least monk-like monk in Ping'an Temple.

Cheng Yun retracted his gaze, touched the things in his bundle, and headed towards the Su Mansion.

Su Liang was teaching her two disciples how to bandage wounds when she suddenly heard Ren Dong outside saying that Cheng Yun had arrived, and she was surprised.

Zhengzheng's eyes lit up, and she put down the things in her hands and ran out, "Uncle Cheng Yun!"

Ji Xiaoshu didn't know who Cheng Yun was, but she also ran out with Zhengzheng and hugged Cheng Yun's other leg.

Cheng Yun still remembered Zhengzheng, but he didn't recognize Ji Xiaoshu. These two children were much more enthusiastic than when he first met Zhengzheng.

"Cheng Yun, you finally came! I thought you had devoted yourself to Buddhist Dharma and forgot about us," Su Liang smiled and approached.

Cheng Yun put his hands together, "Su benefactor, this humble monk came to the capital city to visit Senior Pu Hui with my master."

Ji Xiaoshu chatted with Cheng Yun for a while, very curious about him. However, Cheng Yun always had difficulty answering Ji Xiaoshu's whimsical questions, such as "Have you never stepped on an ant before?"

Su Liang sent the two children out to play and made clear tea for Cheng Yun. She asked if he was hungry.

Cheng Yun shook his head, "No, this humble monk is not hungry." He then untied the bundle and took out the wooden box, handing it to Su Liang, "This is a gift for Miss Gu Xiaonuan."

It took Su Liang a moment to realize that "Miss Gu Xiaonuan" referred to her own Gu Xiaonuan.

Opening the box, there was a jade pendant inside, emitting a warm and gentle glow, looking very extraordinary.

"Thank you. She's playing outside right now; I'll let you hold her when she comes back later." Su Liang said with a smile.

Cheng Yun asked about Gu Ling, and Su Liang said that he was out on business and wouldn't be back for a few days.

"Did your master teach you martial arts? Who did he learn it from?" Su Liang asked.

Cheng Yun said that his master had become a monk halfway through his life, and had learned martial arts before that.

"Oh yes, Yan Shiba is also at my house," Su Liang said, "Do you want to meet her?"

Cheng Yun hurriedly waved his hands, "No, I'd better not. It's getting late, I should return to Huguo Temple." He said this and wanted to leave, as if he was afraid Su Liang would call Yan Shiba over.

Su Liang chuckled lightly, "What are you afraid of? I never intended to set you two up. Besides, she has lost her memory due to a serious injury and doesn't remember you at all. That's why I wanted you to see her and wonder if she'd still like someone like you despite her memory loss."

Cheng Yun had an expressionless face, "Please don't joke about this, Master Su."

Su Liang said seriously, "I was indeed joking just now, don't take it to heart. But what I said was true. I am trying to help her recover her memory and see if her preferences have changed after losing her memory. Please help me with this."

Cheng Yun found this strange, but Su Liang had already called Ren Dong over and asked her to bring Yan Shiba over, saying that an old friend had come to visit.

Cheng Yun asked if he could leave first, but Su Liang refused, "You've given Gu Xiaonuan a gift, but haven't seen her yet. Why the rush?"

Cheng Yun did want to see Gu Xiaonuan, but he really didn't want to see Yan Shiba. However, it was always difficult for him to refuse Su Liang's requests, especially since Su Liang had said it was to help him.

Yan Shiba arrived quickly. She had recovered quite a bit physically, no longer needing a wheelchair. Although her face was still a little pale, she was already able to move around freely.

After entering, Su Liang asked her to sit down with a smile and pointed to Cheng Yun, saying, "He's our old friend and someone you used to be close to."

Yan Shiba frowned at Cheng Yun, "You said that I used to be an assassin, so how could I be friends with a monk?"

"It's a long story," Su Liang said, "But don't you think this monk looks very handsome?"

Cheng Yun: ...Why isn't Gu Xiaonuan back yet? He would leave immediately after seeing the child.

Yan Shiba shook her head, "Nothing special."

Cheng Yun inexplicably breathed a sigh of relief. Yes, there was nothing special about him. He was just an ordinary monk; don't stare at him any longer...

Qiao Cong was heard coaxing Gu Xiaonuan at the entrance, and Su Liang looked at Cheng Yun, "You can leave now."

Cheng Yun felt as if he had been pardoned, "Master Su, Miss Yan, I'll take my leave." As soon as the words fell, he picked up his bundle and headed towards the door.

When he reached the door and saw Gu Xiaonuan, a smile appeared on Cheng Yun's face, "Little Master Gu looks a lot like Master Gu."

Gu Xiaonuan was very interested in Cheng Yun's bald head and reached out for him to hold her.

In the room, Yan Shiba asked again why she was friends with Cheng Yun, her eyes calm and undisturbed.

Su Liang only said that it was because Cheng Yun had saved her life and didn't elaborate. He then asked her to go back and rest.

Ren Dong came in and told Su Liang that Cheng Yun had left. Su Liang looked out the window at Yan Shiba's retreating figure and nodded to acknowledge the information.

"Miss Yan has no feelings for Monk Cheng Yun?" Ren Dong asked.

Su Liang nodded, "None at all. You were right. She's like a completely different person. However, Lian Shan only lost her memories. Lady Lin said that her habits and preferences are no different from before; I asked Yuan Pei, and he said that Lian Shun was the same except for forgetting past events. Things he was afraid of before, he's still afraid of now. Things he liked before, he still likes now. Lian Shan was drugged, but whether Yan Shiba's memory loss is due to injury or drugs is uncertain. At first, I thought it was normal for her to change so much after losing her memory, but the more I interacted with her recently, the more I feel that she's not Yan Shiba at all."

Ren Dong's expression changed, "Master, you mean... she's an imposter?"

“But that face isn’t fake. There must be some problem somewhere,” Su Liang pondered, “She came from Sheng Yue’s hands... Just in case, I’ll add another medicine for her today to keep her weak and powerless. Keep an eye on her. Tell me immediately if something’s wrong.”

Chapter 426: 426. Cheng Yun’s Master

On the same day, Su Liang put the jade pendant Cheng Yun gave Gu Xiaonuan around her neck. Gu Xiaonuan initially found it unfamiliar and tried to pull it off but was distracted by the toys held by her two brothers. Soon she forgot about the jade pendant altogether.

Dinner that night at the Yuanming Pavilion was served to Gu Xiaonuan by Ren Dong, who also accompanied her while eating.

After dinner, Su Liang continued her research on how to restore Lian Shan’s memory. As she had the drug that caused Lian Shan’s memory loss, it was easier to counteract its effect with a more targeted approach.

When Ren Dong came upstairs, she could hear the rambunctious sound of the three children playing, along with Qiao Cong’s hearty laughter. She gently knocked on Su Liang’s room door, entered after hearing Su Liang’s voice.

“Master.” Ren Dong only spoke after approaching Su Liang.” Yan asked why the taste of the medicine changed and why she feels lethargic after taking it. I told her that we forgot to inform her about the change in the medicine and that the fatigue is temporary, which will aid in speeding her recovery.”

“Mm.” Su Liang didn’t look up, “If she isn’t sleeping when you return, tell her that I will take the children to the Huguo Temple tomorrow for an outing and ask if she wants to join us.”

Ren Dong nodded, “Yes.” After saying this, she left. After a while, she returned and told Su Liang that Yan Shiba wanted to take a walk and agreed to accompany them to Huguo Temple the next day.

Another fruitless night. Before bed, Su Liang was wondering where Gu Ling was. By her calculations, he should have arrived on Xingluo Island a few days ago. If he were successful in saving someone, he should be on his way back.

Looking at her daughter’s face, which closely resembled Gu Ling, Su Liang’s longing for Gu Ling surged like a tide every time it was late and quiet at night. This feeling persisted for a long time.

Early the next morning, Su Liang only informed the children that they would be visiting the Huguo Temple that day.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu cheered. They loved to go out to play, but as Gu Ling was not at home, Su Liang rarely took them out.

After breakfast, the carriage was ready, and everyone from the mansion was going along.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu insisted on riding their horses. Both of them had a horse each, given by Duanmu Chen. Zhengzheng named his horse Zhuifeng, and Ji Xiaoshu named his Shandian. Su Liang taught both of them horsemanship.

To protect the two little ones, Qiao Cong also rode a horse and stayed close to them.

Su Liang and Yan Shiba shared a carriage, and Gu Xiaonuan was in the carriage with Nangong Qian.

Yan Shiba's complexion seemed worse than yesterday. She leaned on the cart wall and looked at Su Liang, "The new medicine makes me very uncomfortable, can we use the old medicine? Or even not take the medicine at all? I think I will get better slowly."

Su Liang frowned slightly, pulled Yan Shiba's hand over to take her pulse, "The discomfort you are feeling is temporary. It will take some time to adapt to the new medicine, and the adverse reactions will disappear after a few days. The old medicine is not of much use to your body anymore. Your impression of getting better is only superficial. Your internal injuries are severe, and it has not yet recovered to the point of healing without medicine. Trust me, I'm a doctor."

With a helpless expression, Yan Shiba said, "Okay, then I'll listen to you, sister Liang."

Su Liang paused. This was the first time Yan Shiba called her "sister Liang" since they met.

However, Yan Shiba closed her eyes and began resting. Su Liang could not see her expression now, and the tone of her voice did not resemble the past.

Yan Shiba used to like calling Su Liang's name, sometimes so endlessly that it was like beckoning a soul, which annoyed Su Liang. Every time Yan Shiba called Su Liang's name, she would deliberately raise her voice, with a tone filled with joy, mockery and carelessness. Outsiders may think that it sounded intimate and affectionate, but Su Liang knew that more than half of the times Yan Shiba called her "sister Liang," there was no sincerity. She just wanted to tease her, observe her reactions, sometimes just to annoy her on purpose.

Su Liang hadn't mentioned their original terms of address to the current Yan Shiba, so hearing those three words again made Su Liang doubt if she was being overly suspicious. Maybe Yan Shiba was only unwell due to her severe injuries and mental exhaustion, causing her personality to differ from her usual arrogant and unrestrained self.

The children's voices outside the window interrupted Su Liang's thoughts. She lifted the curtain and heard Ji Xiaoshu sweetly call her "Master" and pass her a Candied Hawthorn that he had just bought from the street.

Su Liang smiled and said, "Your master loves to eat this, but I don't like it much, so you eat it."

"Our Master is only four years old this year, right!" Ji Xiaoshu jokingly teased Gu Ling, took a bite of the Candied Hawthorn, and then held it up to feed Qiao Cong.

Qiao Cong laughed heartily, "I don't love that; it's too sour."

"Mother, can little sister eat it?" Ji Xiaoshu asked.

Su Liang shook her head, "Don't give it to her. You guys eat."

Yet, Ji Xiaoshu surreptitiously snuck into the carriage, feeding Gu Xiaonuan half a piece of candied hawthorn. She kindly removed the hard candy shell on the outside, leaving just the hawthorn for the little one to eat. Yet the sourness of the fruit caused Gu Xiaonuan to spit it out immediately, with it conveniently landing on Ji Xiaoshu's face.

Nangong Qian couldn't help from crying and laughing at the same time as she wiped Ji Xiaoshu's face, while Ji Xiaoshu sighed. "If only Master was here, I would give it to him when I don't want to eat."

Gu Xiaonuan seemed to understand what Ji Xiaoshu was saying, and lightly tapped her.

Ji Xiaoshu coughed lightly. "Little sister, I didn't feed you because I didn't want to eat it, I thought you would like it. I sincerely wanted you to try it, please don't misunderstand."

The carriage stopped at the foot of the mountain. Su Liang heard Zhengzheng calling out for Uncle Nian; when she lifted the curtain of the carriage, she saw Nian Jincheng holding Yang Yu and approaching.

"Had I known you guys were coming today, we would have gone to your place and set off together." Yang Yu exclaimed happily when she saw Su Liang. She was pregnant and Nian Jincheng was extremely cautious around her. Today Yang Yu made a spontaneous decision to step outside and walk about.

Su Liang assisted Yan Shiba out of the carriage and asked if she could walk by herself.

Yan Shiba winced her gaze off Nian Jincheng and glanced at the zigzag staircase heading uphill. "I'll try, I'll tell you if I run out of energy."

"If Miss Yan can't walk, I'll carry you." Ren Dong volunteered.

"Ok." Su Liang handed Yan Shiba over to Ren Dong before turning around to assist Yang Yu.

Yang Yu laughed and held Su Liang's hand, "No need to help, I feel perfectly fine. Let's go."

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu launched into another one of their childish contests, vying to see who could reach Huguo Temple first. The loser would have to do frog jumps down the mountain.

Nian Jincheng let Gu Xiaonuan sit on his shoulders, following behind Su Liang and Yang Yu. Qiao Cong was accompanying Nangong Qian in the back.

By the time Su Liang reached the entrance of Huguo Temple, she saw Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu burst out from behind a big tree, each grabbing one of her hands.

"Mother, guess who won!" Ji Xiaoshu plastered a jovial smile on his face. Meanwhile, Zhengzheng merely sighed and dropped his head low.

"I guess..." Su Liang chuckled, "It's a tie?"

Zhengzheng immediately lighted up with happiness, while Ji Xiaoshu gave a thumbs up, "Mother is brilliant! How did you guess it!" To avoid losing the race and performing frog jumps down the mountain, both of them were very committed, ensuring neither emerged victorious.

“Go find your Uncle Cheng Yun.” As soon as Su Liang finished speaking, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu rushed into Huguo Temple.

Ren Dong had to carry Yan Shiba for the latter half of the climb uphill, and they were the last to arrive.

Su Liang waited for Yan Shiba, only entering the temple once they arrived. Yang Yu said she wanted to light the incense and pray. Su Liang, supporting Yan Shiba, said they would join her.

“You’ve recently gone through a catastrophe. Now that we are here, why not light some incense as well?” Su Liang suggested to Yan Shiba.

Yan Shiba gave a slight nod in agreement, “Okay.”

After Su Liang assisted Yan Shiba in lighting the incense with Yang Yu, performed their prayers and exited the shrine, they saw Ren Dong rushing over with several wooden tags attached with red strings, “Master, we’ve come here so many times, yet we’ve never hung a wish tag on the wishing tree. Let’s hang one this time.”

Every temple Su Liang visited in her previous life had a wishing tree full of red tags and ribbons. Huguo Temple was no exception. The tree was well past the front hall. During her previous visits, Su Liang would always walk under the tree, watching people sincerely writing down their wishes, requesting the monks in the temple to hang it on the tree for them. However, she and Gu Ling had never participated in this before.

Su Liang accepted the three tags Ren Dong passed to her, then gave one to Yang Yu and another to Yan Shiba, keeping one to herself. “Let’s go, we’ll make a wish too.”

Next to the wishing tree was a row of tables set up, equipped with a brush, ink, paper, and inkstone for devotees to write down their wishes on the wooden tags. Those that couldn’t write could request the monks to write for them.

Su Liang approached the tables, took a seat alongside Yan Shiba, and carefully wrote down the words “safety” on her wooden tag. After she finished, she gently blew on the ink to dry it. Seeing Yan Shiba unmoved, she passed the brush to her.

Yan Shiba shook her head slightly. “I don’t know what to write. I’ve got nothing to write about.”

Su Liang smiled, “Your health isn’t good right now. You could write ‘health’, or even ‘longevity’.”

Over there, Yang Yu had also finished writing her wishing card. Nian Jincheng got on tiptoes and hung it on the branch she indicated. By this point, Gu Xiaonuan was with Qiao Cong, going to the back mountain to watch clouds.

“Write it for me, I don’t have much strength in my hand.” Yan Shiba returned the pen.

Su Liang shook her head, “The wishing card must be written by your own hand for it to be efficacious. Write it slowly, don’t hurry, sincerity is the most important.”

Saying this, Su Liang passed her card to Nian Jincheng and asked him to help hang it on the tree.

Nian Jincheng saw the word “Peace”, nodded and said, “Aling will definitely return safely.”

Su Liang looked at Yan Shiba again only to see her looking exhausted as she put down the wooden card, “To be honest, I don’t believe in this, don’t really have anything I want to write. Let’s go.”

“Since we are here, let me write one for you.” Su Liang reached for Yan Shiba’s wooden card and carefully wrote the word “Health” on it. She then asked Nian Jincheng to hang it on the tree before helping Yan Shiba towards the back mountain.

Everything looked very natural, with nothing out of the ordinary.

But actually, the visit to Huguo Temple and Ren Dong giving them the wishing cards to write on, all was planned by Su Liang the previous night for one reason – she wanted to see Yan Shiba’s handwriting.

Memory was gone, but muscle memory would not disappear easily. In fact, Su Liang had previously prepared books and stationery for Yan Shiba, thinking that it could aid in memory recovery when she had nothing else to do. However, the writing paper in Yan Shiba’s room was always blank.

Then, Su Liang thought of the Wishing Tree at Hugou Temple, leading to the events of today.

Su Liang was clear about Yan Shiba’s physical condition, how much strength she had, and whether she could write.

When Yan Shiba refused to write on the wishing card time and time again, Su Liang really began to suspect that this person might not be Yan Shiba... because if she were truly Yan Shiba and truly lost her memory, there would be no reason for refusing to write two characters.

The real Yan Shiba undoubtedly wouldn’t believe in wishes granted by a tree, but given her personality, she would have torn the wishing card into pieces for fun when Su Liang handed it to her, rather than holding it so long before stating her disbelief. Moreover, since she didn’t believe it, why didn’t she refuse when Su Liang asked her to offer incense earlier?

Su Liang was thinking, maybe she should have a good think about whether the face of the person beside her was real or not. No disguise didn’t mean the face looking exactly like Yan Shiba’s would necessarily be hers. In her previous life, plastic surgery could completely change a person’s appearance. Su Liang thought it would not be possible in this world, but what if someone really found a person who looked exactly like Yan Shiba? What if, what she believed to be impossible was actually feasible for someone else? After all, there are other transmigrators, and even before coming here, Yan Shiba was already in the hands of those people.

Or perhaps, Yan Shiba was hypnotized and brainwashed after she lost her memory... Su Liang came up with another possibility.

In any case, Su Liang planned to have a good think when she returned home on how to further confirm what’s going on with this “Yan Shiba”.

By the time they arrived at the back mountain, they saw the children were all there, and Cheng Yun had also been brought over, as well as his master Pu Cheng.

“Benefactor Su, this is...” Cheng Yun began to introduce.

Pu Cheng pushed Cheng Yun away and greeted Su Liang with a laugh, “You must be the famous Dr. Su, right? Nice to meet you.”

Su Liang had heard about him from Cheng Yun, this master was not an ordinary monk. No ordinary monk would travel around the world for many years.

Despite his shaved head, Pu Cheng had outstanding features and a unique demeanor, tall and lean with an elegant and floating aura whilst in his monk robes. Su Liang was curious about his identity before he became a monk when she thought of what Cheng Yun said about Pu Cheng being a layman before.

“Master Pu Cheng, we finally meet. Cheng Yun often mentions you.” Su Liang smiled.

Pu Cheng was a very charming man, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu both liked him, and Gu Xiaonuan was also willing to let him hold her. Gu Xiaonuan clutched the Buddha beads on Pu Cheng’s chest and wouldn’t let go, so Pu Cheng took it off and hung it around Gu Xiaonuan’s neck.

Su Liang tried to give it back to Pu Cheng, but he waved her off saying, “These Buddha beads have been with me for many years, and I’ve taken them through many places. Since they seem to have a connection with the young benefactor Gu, let her have them. These three children, all have a deep connection to Buddhism! I wish to take your love as my disciple, what does Benefactor Su think?”

Su Liang was speechless, before she could speak, Cheng Yun protested, “Master, young benefactor Gu is a girl, it’s not appropriate.”

“What’s wrong with a girl? I said I want to take a disciple, not have her join Buddhism. Believe it or not, my martial arts skills are pretty good, and I’ve gained some other skills from my years traveling. This is the first child I’ve come across who I think I have a connection with, what does it matter if it’s a boy or a girl?” said Pu Cheng, looking serious.

Su Liang had thought of the possibility that someone prestigious might want to take her daughter as a disciple, but she never imagined that the first person wanting to take Gu Xiaonuan as a pupil would be a monk.

Cheng Yun furrowed his brow, “If that’s the case, why not allow this little monk to take Miss Gu as a disciple? We seem to share a strong bond, this way, we will not confuse the orders of seniority. Later, if Master Uncle wants to teach her anything, he certainly can.”

Su Liang coughed lightly, “I appreciate both of your good intentions, I don’t have any objections, but I don’t have the final say in this matter. Her father is not at home, he might have some objections, so whether it can be done or not, we have to wait until his return for confirmation. If he then agrees, we will bring our daughter to find...”

Pu Cheng pulled Cheng Yun behind him, his smile deepening, “Of course, it would be to find me as her master. Xiao Yun, you will be Little Nuannuan’s older martial brother then.”

Cheng Yun: ...he didn’t want it, if he knew earlier, he would have been the first to propose to take Gu Xiaonuan as his disciple.

Su Liang indicated there was no problem, but her words didn’t matter, everything could be discussed when Gu Ling returned.

After having vegetarian dishes at Huguo Temple, the group descended the mountain and went home.

On the carriage ride home, Yan Shiba fell asleep. Su Liang watched her quietly, planning to change her medicine again to allow her to recover as quickly as possible, to see what she would do next. Meanwhile, Su Liang would poison her with a toxin that could be triggered at any time, without any warning signs before its onset, just in case.

Yan Shiba noticed that the taste of the medicine had changed again. Ren Dong explained according to what Su Liang had said, stating that it was because she felt uncomfortable after drinking the previous medicine. So, Su Liang thought of an improved new prescription today, the medicinal effect would be the same, but it wouldn't cause discomfort to the body. Huguo Temple.

At dusk, Cheng Yun came to find Pu Cheng. He had just finished playing chess with Master Pu Hui and returned.

"Let's go to the Su mansion to see Little Nuannuan tomorrow." Pu Cheng said with a smile.

Cheng Yun couldn't help but ask the question that had been in his heart for a long time, "Master Uncle, why did you choose to become a monk?"

Pu Cheng chuckled, "Who decided that a monk must be like you?"

Cheng Yun shook his head, "I didn't mean that. I just feel that Master Uncle, as a person who likes freedom and spontaneity, there is no need to become a monk."

Pu Cheng's expression was somewhat lost, "I once had a family, which I no longer have. Only I am left, whether I leave the house or not, I am always away from home."

Cheng Yun frowned, not continuing the topic.

Pu Cheng said seriously, "Xiao Yun, I took you to Ping'an Temple. Aren't you curious about your own background? You're still young, if you want to leave the monkhood..."

Cheng Yun shook his head, "No, I've never thought about leaving the monkhood."

Pu Cheng stretched out his hand to rub Cheng Yun's bare head, "As long as you're happy."

Only then did Cheng Yun remember why he had come to find Pu Cheng, "Master Uncle, we have already paid a visit to Senior Pu Hui, when are we going back to Ping'an Temple?"

Pu Cheng shook his head, "What's the hurry? There is nothing to do when we go back, I seldom come to the capital city, let's stay for a while longer. At least wait until Little Nuannuan's father comes back, so she can acknowledge me as her master."

Cheng Yun shook his head slightly, "Master Uncle, I think Master Gu might not agree. If Miss Gu wants to learn martial arts, Master Gu can teach her. Master Gu's martial arts are very strong."

Pu Cheng laughed, "You're not Gu Ling, how would you know?"

Cheng Yun silently left.

In the middle of the night, Pu Cheng had just blown out the candle when the window opened without any wind and quickly closed again, leaving a shadow in the room.

Pu Cheng's eyes slightly condensed, and he heard the person call out, "Father." The voice was low, but very young.

Pu Cheng was stunned, and after a long silence, he finally spoke softly, “Ayue, why are you here?”

Chapter 427: 427. The last time

Gu Ling and Old Mu caught up with Qiao Jing on the fifth day of their departure from Xingluo Island. Their boat was smaller and faster, and they took turns sailing without stopping in between.

When Qiao Jing received the report that a boat was approaching, he thought it was someone chasing after them. He immediately ordered everyone to be on guard and prepared to face the enemy, but then he heard the voice of Old Mu.

Qiao Jing was overjoyed and shouted, “Friendly people, don’t fight!”

He and Cen Man stood at the stern of the ship, watching the small boat approach. Old Mu waved at them, and there was a tall figure – who else could it be other than Gu Ling?

Cen Man’s eyebrows relaxed, and she took a long breath. “That’s great, that’s great! I knew Gu would be able to save them without any problem!”

Gu Ling and Old Mu abandoned their small boat and boarded Qiao Jing’s boat. Seeing Gu Ling holding a pot in his hand, Qiao Jing’s mouth twitched, “Did you take that from Xingluo Island?”

“Weapon.” Gu Ling raised the iron pot, pretending to hit Qiao Jing’s head with it.

Cen Man laughed and took the pot, “Stop fooling around. Your eyes are red; you certainly haven’t slept for several days. Go take a rest.”

Qiao Jing didn’t order to continue sailing and pulled Gu Ling aside to ask, “Should we go forward, or turn back and fight?”

Gu Ling shook his head, “Let’s head back to Jiaye City first.”

Qiao Jing looked in the direction of Xingluo Island, where he could only see the line where the sea and sky met, and sighed, “That’s fine. We’re out of explosives, and after wandering the sea for so long, I see that everyone is low on energy. Going back to fight won’t be as smooth as last time.” He gave the order to move forward at full speed.

Gu Ling then met Old Bai and the Ying siblings. Their complexions were okay, but they had lost their past memories.

It was only then that Gu Ling learned of their memory loss, and his eyes grew sharp as he thought of Yan Shiba, who he had saved from Sheng Yue’s hands and sent back to the capital city.

So many people losing their memories could not be a coincidence. If Yan Shiba had learned some secrets about Xingluo Island or Sheng Yue and had his memory erased, it wouldn’t be a problem. However, if Sheng Yue had ulterior motives and wanted to use Yan Shiba for something...

Ying Ying’s personality hadn’t changed, and she was still bold and forthright even after losing her memory. She had already heard Qiao Jing talk about Su Liang and Gu Ling’s affairs and looked forward to meeting Su Liang soon.

Ying Ye had been injured years ago and had some mental problems, so he was very dependent on Ying Ying. He was wary of strangers, never letting anyone touch him and always crouching behind Ying Ying in silence. Gu Ling tried to take his pulse, but gave up.

Gu Ling checked Ying Ying and Old Bai's conditions but saw no signs of poisoning. He suspected that their amnesia was caused by Yue Mei, or she provided the drugs to Xingluo Island, similar to Lian Shan's condition before.

The most emotionally unstable person was Old Bai. He was always trying hard to remember, unable to bear the blankness in his mind. He kept pounding his head and spent most of his time in restless frustration.

Old Mu's eyebrows knit together, and he pulled at Old Bai's hand, "Don't hit yourself anymore! Whatever you want to know, I can tell you!"

"Who are you... I don't know you..." Old Bai frowned as he looked at Old Mu.

Old Mu said irritably, "We've known each other for decades, I know everything about you!"

"Really?" Old Bai looked at Qiao Jing for confirmation.

Qiao Jing nodded and said solemnly, "Yes, the two of you have been good friends for half a lifetime. Elder Mu went to Xingluo Island to save you before."

Gu Ling had already learned from Old Mu about how he and Cen Man were captured on their previous mission to save people on Xingluo Island. At that time, they sneaked onto the island and hadn't even entered the City Lord Mansion when they ran into Sheng Yue out of bad luck. They were in a very secluded forest, and they had no idea that Sheng Yue was sitting on a tree above their heads during daylight, doing who knows what... In the end, unsurprisingly, Sheng Yue used a stun bomb on them.

Old Mu and Cen Man didn't see Mo Yan, and when they woke up, they were in the dungeon with Sheng Yue standing in front of them, telling them not to mess around. He wouldn't kill them but would erase their memories.

Old Mu and Cen Man had no choice but to endure and wait for a chance to escape. They didn't see Old Bai and Ying siblings on Xingluo Island, and when Old Mu asked about them, Sheng Yue didn't answer.

As for what happened to Old Bai and the Ying siblings, no one knew since all three had lost their memories.

Cen Man prepared some hot soup and rice for Gu Ling and Old Mu, and Gu Ling went to sleep afterwards.

When he woke up, it was already dark. Gu Ling sat up, surrounded by pitch-black darkness. He could hear people whispering outside as if they didn't want to disturb him, along with the clear sound of the waves.

Gu Ling had a nightmare in which Su Liang and Gu Xiaonuan were captured by Sheng Yue. He felt a bit cold, as though the sea breeze had blown in.

"Are you awake?" Qiao Jing's voice.

Gu Ling stood up, "How many days till we reach Jiaye City?"

Qiao Jing thought for a moment, "Probably seven or eight days."

"I'll go ahead." Gu Ling came out of the cabin, took a deep breath, and the sea breeze was cool.

Qiao Jing was startled, "Will you go alone?"

"Yes." Gu Ling nodded, "I'm worried about my family. Sheng Yue might have gone to the capital city."

Qiao Jing's expression changed abruptly. He had been focusing on Xingluo Island and hadn't considered this possibility.

"It's good if you go back first, just in case..." Qiao Jing sighed, "But you can't go alone. Let Elder Cen accompany you back so you can look out for each other." Old Bai couldn't leave Old Mu now.

"Alright." Gu Ling nodded and instructed Qiao Jing, "Once you return to Jiaye City, set up defenses near the shorelines of Nanping City and Jiaye City where you can land, as well as on the side of the former Yin Country. Prohibit the common people from going out to sea to fish, and treat all boats as coming from Xingluo Island. If any boat appears, don't allow them to approach the shore. Now that the hostages are gone, they might come back to capture people soon."

Qiao Jing said solemnly, "I understand. Now the thing we lack the least is soldiers. I will make arrangements as soon as I land."

"My master can make explosives and other weapons. Let him prepare them for when the time comes." Gu Ling said that Old Mu's stay was just in time to be useful.

When Cen Man found out that Gu Ling wanted to go home with her ahead of time, she didn't ask any questions and quickly prepared a few days' worth of dried food and water. They had emergency boats on their ship, and after lowering one into the water, the two of them left the team and went ahead.

"Don't worry too much, Xiaogu. Xiaoliang is always cautious and will be fine." Cen Man saw Gu Ling's nervousness and tried to comfort him.

Gu Ling looked up at the bright moon in the night sky without saying anything.

Yesterday, they met Chéng Yún's master uncle Pǔchéng at Huguo Temple, and today, in the afternoon, Pǔchéng and Chéng Yún came to Su Mansion.

Unfortunately, Su Liang was about to take the children to Duke Qin's Mansion for a banquet. Old Master Qin had added another great-grandson, who was having his full moon celebration today.

Upon hearing the news, Pu Cheng smiled and said, "We are the ones being rude for disturbing you. Shall we come again tomorrow?"

Su Liang said that tomorrow would be fine.

Pu Cheng brought a small flower he had picked while coming down the mountain and stuck it in Gu Xiaonuan's hair, which was very cute. Then he left with Cheng Yun.

Yan Shiba said she wouldn't go, so Su Liang asked Ren Dong to watch her at home. Everyone else, including Qiao Cong and Nangong Qian, went together.

The full moon party at Duke Mansion was bustling, and there were many children. Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu had become the kings of children, leading a group of little ones to play happily.

Gu Xiaonuan was the most popular one besides the full moon baby. The more Su Liang heard people say Gu Xiaonuan looked just like her father, the more she missed her great god at home.

Leaving Duke Qin's Mansion in the afternoon, Su Liang held Gu Xiaonuan in her arms and rode the carriage back home, while Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu rode horses outside.

Gu Xiaonuan was tired from playing and dozed off. Su Liang gently coaxed her, and suddenly heard Gu Xiaonuan murmur, "Mom."

Su Liang immediately froze, "Gu Xiaonuan, what did you just call me?"

Gu Xiaonuan, with her little head rubbing against Su Liang's chest, found the most comfortable position and fell asleep...

When they got home, Gu Xiaonuan still hadn't woken up. Su Liang put her in the cradle and stayed by it, waiting for Gu Xiaonuan to wake up and see if she would call her mother again.

In fact, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu had been teaching Gu Xiaonuan to talk recently, but she seemed to think it was a game and wouldn't follow her two brothers in learning to speak.

Su Liang didn't mind; it would be even better if Gu Xiaonuan didn't start speaking until Gu Ling came back. That way, Gu Ling wouldn't be heartbroken when he came back to find Gu Xiaonuan speaking everything but not recognizing him.

Finally, Su Liang saw Gu Xiaonuan's thick eyelashes tremble and knew she was about to wake up. She gently shook the cradle.

Gu Xiaonuan opened her eyes, blinked, and Su Liang approached her, uttering two simple words, "Call mom."

Gu Xiaonuan chuckled and climbed up, leaning in and giving Su Liang a kiss.

Su Liang: ...That's not what she wanted.

Then, she saw Gu Xiaonuan's small hand pointing at the portrait of Gu Ling that was hanging above her crib, and clearly called out "Dad."

Su Liang was shocked. She was worried that Gu Xiaonuan would forget Gu Ling, so she had hung his portrait for her to see. Could it be that because they went to the Duke Mansion today, people kept telling Gu Xiaonuan that she looked like her father, which actually taught her to call "Dad" instead?

But why isn't she calling "Mom"? Was the call on the way back an illusion?

“Call me Mom,” Su Liang picked up Gu Xiaonuan, pointed at herself, and gave her instruction again.

Gu Xiaonuan kissed Su Liang again

By the third time Su Liang was seriously teaching Gu Xiaonuan, it was as if Gu Xiaonuan suddenly understood, and called out very loudly, “Mom!”

Su Liang instantly felt as if her heart was filled. This feeling was intriguing and hard to describe.

This was a day worth commemorating, Gu Xiaonuan started talking. When Su Liang told Gu Ling about today’s events afterward, Gu Ling was happy that his daughter had never forgotten him. However, he and Su Liang had a disagreement on whether Gu Xiaonuan’s first word was mom or dad?

Su Liang believed she had misheard in the carriage, and Gu Xiaonuan first called dad. But, Gu Ling insisted that Gu Xiaonuan called mom first.

At dinner time, Su Liang announced an important matter, and Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu both sat up straight to listen carefully. Then Su Liang looked at Gu Xiaonuan, pointed at herself, giving her an instruction.

Gu Xiaonuan immediately understood, and called out “Mom”

Qiao Cong clapped his hands in praise, “Nuannuan can talk now! So smart! Well said!”

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu gathered around Gu Xiaonuan, competing to have her call them brother. Qiao Cong grabbed the two children and placed them behind him, then leaned forward with a bright smile, pointing at himself, “Master, call me master.”

“Master!” Gu Xiaonuan called out sweetly.

Qiao Cong was so satisfied that he could hardly stop smiling.

After Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu grumbled for a bit, Gu Xiaonuan finally called them “brother.”

Both children were very happy and said in unison, “Little sister called me brother!” Then they looked at each other and began arguing over whom Gu Xiaonuan was actually calling. Normally, Zhengzheng was very much like the big brother, and would give in to Ji Xiaoshu on many things, but he was unyielding on this matter, saying that Gu Xiaonuan was calling him.

“Both of you are brothers, she was calling both of you.” Su Liang ended the childish dispute between the children, “You should teach her to call you big brother and second brother. See if she can tell the difference. First, eat.”

The two children always listened to Su Liang, and obediently returned to their seats. Ji Xiaoshu suddenly widened his eyes, “Oh no! Little sister can’t call dad yet, master will be so heartbroken when he finds out!”

Su Liang chuckled lightly, “The first thing she called out was dad.”

“Really?” Qiao Cong was a bit skeptical.

“Really.” Su Liang said seriously.

At night, Ren Dong went to deliver hot water to Yan Shiba and found her smiling. This was quite rare since Ren Dong was usually a reserved person.

“Is there some happy news?” Yan Shiba asked.

Ren Dong smiled and nodded, “The little master can speak now.”

“That’s great.” Yan Shiba nodded slightly.

The next day, Pu Cheng and Cheng Yun came to Su Mansion again.

Upon hearing that Gu Xiaonuan could speak, Pu Cheng wanted to teach her to call him master, but was stopped by Qiao Cong, “Xiaogu hasn’t agreed yet, she can’t call!”

Pu Cheng chuckled, “I hope Benefactor Gu returns soon.”

Today’s weather was perfect, with a clear blue sky and a gentle breeze.

Qiao Cong had laid thick cushions by the lake, and Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu took off their shoes to play on them; Gu Xiaonuan was also carried over by Qiao Cong and placed on the cushions.

Su Liang entertained Pu Cheng and Cheng Yun at a window seat on the first floor of Yuanming Pavilion, serving them tea and specially prepared vegetarian snacks and homegrown fruits.

Noticing that Cheng Yun was continually glancing outside, Su Liang smiled, “You can go outside and join them.”

Cheng Yun was somewhat tempted, but he also felt a bit embarrassed, being an adult and a monk.

“Go on, no one will laugh at you. The children all like you.” Pu Cheng got up and pushed Cheng Yun out.

Pu Cheng then returned to his seat, took a sip of tea, and nodded slightly, “I almost forgot that you are now the head of the Ning family; this tea is quite good.”

“If Master Pu Cheng likes it, take a pack of tea leaves when you leave.” Su Liang smiled.

Pu Cheng shook his head, “Don’t call me master; it makes me sound like an old monk. Just call me Pu Cheng.”

“Then, Uncle Pu Cheng?” Su Liang chuckled. After all, he was an elder.

Pu Cheng laughed, “Good, good, that’s better.” Saying so, Pu Cheng looked outside; Ji Xiaoshu held a model train and was pushing it around on the ground.

Pu Cheng looked back and said, “Actually, I intended for Xiaoyun to leave the monastery, but he was unwilling. It was me who brought him to Ping’an Temple, and he only became a monk for the sake of living there. He’s still young, and I hope he can have a different life, especially since he has interesting friends like you. It would be a pity if he returned to the temple to burn incense and recite scriptures for the rest of his life.”

Su Liang asked, “Does Uncle Pu Cheng know about Cheng Yun’s background?”

Pu Cheng nodded, "He is the orphan of a friend I had before I became a monk. It's my fault; I've been traveling the world for years and haven't taken good care of him."

"Why didn't Uncle Pu Cheng bring Cheng Yun along to travel?" Su Liang smiled and asked.

Pu Cheng was startled, "I thought he was too young and I feared I couldn't take care of him... you're right, I should have brought him with me to travel, so his mind wouldn't be filled with just Buddhist Dharma. I brought him to the capital city this time, saying it was to pay respects to my elder brother Pu Hui, but, in fact, I wanted him to meet you all and ask for your help in persuading Xiaoyun to leave the monastery. Since I myself am a monk, whatever I say doesn't work."

"Can Uncle Pu Cheng tell me about his life before becoming a monk? I'm just curious, and it's alright if you don't want to talk about it. Pretend I never asked." Su Liang was genuinely curious.

Pu Cheng sighed with a melancholic expression, "It's just that my family was destroyed and my life was ruined; there's nothing to talk about. I haven't forgotten the past even though I became a monk. Perhaps I've been deceiving myself, thinking that by shaving my head and entering Buddhism, I could start a new life. Over the years, I've always been traveling, unwilling to settle in one place because once I stayed somewhere for too long, it felt like I had a home, but I don't have a home anymore, and I don't want to have one again... In fact, the reason I didn't keep Xiaoyun by my side was because seeing him reminded me of my old friends..."

Seeing that Pu Cheng's eyes suddenly reddened, Su Liang sighed softly and refilled his cup with hot tea, "I'm sorry for bringing up your past sorrows."

"It's alright," Pu Cheng took a few sips of tea and smiled again. "My Buddhist mind is impure, and this is how my life will be. But there's still hope for Xiaoyun to lead a happier life. I'm counting on you."

Su Liang nodded, "I'll give it a try. I really like Cheng Yun; if he's willing to leave the monastery, that would be great."

Pu Cheng and Cheng Yun had a vegetarian meal at Su Mansion, cooked by Su Liang herself, and it tasted great. Afterwards, the two returned to Huguo Temple in the afternoon.

Pu Cheng pushed the door open and entered, quickly turning to close it again.

"Has father made a decision?" a deep voice sounded not far away.

Pu Cheng's face darkened slightly, "Ayue, stop this. I won't let you hurt Su Liang. I've told you that her mother saved your mother back then. We owe her a great debt."

"Her maternal grandfather killed my mother. How do you account for that?" Sheng Yue's face emerged from the shadows, his eyes cold as ice.

Pu Cheng shook his head, "What you are planning to do will not succeed."

"Whether I succeed or not, I won't give up." Sheng Yue said coldly, "I want Gu Ling, but I won't hurt Su Liang. I promise she won't be harmed afterward. How about that?"

Even if Father doesn't help me, I won't back down. If I die, Father won't have to worry about me anymore."

Pu Cheng's expression grew even more distressed, and after a long silence, he let out a deep sigh, "Remember what you said. I'll help you, but for the last time."

Chapter 428: 428. Benefactor Su is not at home

It was already winter, and for Ji Xiaoshu, who had lived in the south since birth, this was the first time he had experienced the cold season. Each time, he would run outside to feel the cold air, only to come back shivering before reluctantly putting on more clothes.

One morning during breakfast, Ji Xiaoshu looked worriedly at the leaves falling outside the window, with the trees already bare. "Auntie, my dad has gone to the north, will he freeze?"

Su Liang laughed, "No, your dad is an adult, he knows to wear thicker clothes when it's cold."

"What about master? When will he come back?" Ji Xiaoshu asked.

Su Liang counted the days every day, so she answered without thinking, "If all goes well, he can return in ten days or half a month." If Gu Ling's rescue mission went smoothly and he didn't encounter any other troubles, he should be on his way back to Jiaye City now.

"Great!" Zhengzheng's eyes lit up, "Before Master returns, we will teach little sister to speak more. He will be so happy when he sees it!"

"Little sister, who am I?" Ji Xiaoshu pointed at himself as he faced Gu Xiaonuan.

Gu Xiaonuan waved her little hand, her voice clear, "Big brother!"

Zhengzheng looked helpless and leaned his face closer, "Little sister, I'm the big brother. He is the second brother."

Gu Xiaonuan's chubby white finger poked Zhengzheng's cheek and called out, "Second brother!"

Ji Xiaoshu was extremely smug, "Aww, little sister, you have such discerning eyes!"

"Eat your meal, stop fooling around." Su Liang suspected that Gu Xiaonuan was doing this on purpose, knowing it was more fun this way.

At the end of breakfast, Ji Xiaoshu was still thinking about Gu Ling's imminent return, "When Master comes back, let's go together to Wangxiang Mountain to see if the tadpoles have grown into big frogs!"

"Sure." Su Liang rubbed Ji Xiaoshu's head, "But don't forget, when your master returns, he will also check your lessons."

"Huh?" Ji Xiaoshu sighed, looking just like Su Liang in her previous life when she realized she had forgotten a summer homework assignment before school started, "Big brother, could you not be so diligent?"

Zhengzheng, who had already started reciting the poems he learned yesterday, looked up seriously, “Master said, either don’t do it, or do it well. Little Tree, come on, let’s write together.”

After watching the two children write for a while, Su Liang heard Gu Xiaonuan shouting “Outside, outside, outside” in her little cart. This was also taught by her two brothers; if she wanted to go outside, she would say this. But Gu Xiaonuan only said one word, which sounded more like a question “Why, why, why.”

After putting a red hat with fur balls on Gu Xiaonuan and wrapping her in a small blanket, Su Liang carried her to the lake outside for a walk.

“Mom!” Gu Xiaonuan’s eyes sparkled as she called out to Su Liang, her little hand pointing towards the forest.

Su Liang shook her head, “No use calling mom, we’re not going there.”

Gu Xiaonuan immediately changed her tune, calling out, “Dad!”

Su Liang couldn’t help but laugh, “Right. If your dad was home, he would definitely pamper you. You just miss him!”

I miss him too... Su Liang looked at the not yet frozen lake, reminiscing about the small river in Su Family Village. During her first winter since crossing over, Gu Ling would often go fishing by the river and bring his catches back for Su Liang to cook. It had been more than three years since then.

In the end, Su Liang took Gu Xiaonuan for a walk in the forest before returning to Yuanming Pavilion.

After a while, Cheng Yun came, saying that his master had asked him to borrow a set of chess, as agreed with Su Liang.

Su Liang smiled, “Since you’re here, stay for lunch before you go.”

Even though Cheng Yun said he wouldn’t eat, Su Liang asked him to help look after Gu Xiaonuan while she was busy with something.

Qiao Cong had accompanied Nangong Qian to the Lin’s family to visit and had not come back yet, while the two children were still diligently making up their homework. With Su Liang heading upstairs, Cheng Yun had no choice but to take care of Gu Xiaonuan.

Gu Xiaonuan touched Cheng Yun’s shaved head for a few times, then her attention shifted to the window and she pointed outside, wanting to go out.

Cheng Yun picked up Gu Xiaonuan and went upstairs to ask Su Liang if he could take the child out.

“Alright, put a hat on her and wrap her in a blanket,” Su Liang said.

Cheng Yun found Gu Xiaonuan’s hat and put it on her, then wrapped her in a small blanket and carried her outside. They went wherever Gu Xiaonuan pointed, eventually ending up at the main gate.

Gu Xiaonuan kept pointing outside, but Cheng Yun looked serious. “That’s not allowed.” To prevent Gu Xiaonuan from crying, he quickly flew back to Yuanming Pavilion with her, only to find her laughing happily and wanting to play more as soon as they landed. She had completely forgotten about wanting to go out the gate.

Cheng Yun took Gu Xiaonuan around the mansion several more times until it was noon.

Su Liang prepared vegetarian dishes for Cheng Yun, but there were also meat dishes on the table for everyone else.

Cheng Yun appeared uncomfortable. Su Liang calmly said, "Whether you look or not, we're all going to eat. There's no need to pretend you don't hear the bell."

Cheng Yun frowned, thinking there was some truth to that... so the two children dragged him to sit down.

"Cheng Yun, have you ever thought about trying secular life for a year or so?" Su Liang suggested. She had truly thought about persuading Cheng Yun to return to secular life, especially after receiving Master Pu Cheng's request for help. So when Cheng Yun came to borrow chess today, Su Liang decided to detain him as a guest.

Zhengzheng immediately joined in, "I think that's a good idea. Uncle Cheng Yun, why don't you try? If it doesn't work, you can always go back to Buddhism."

Ji Xiaoshu nodded, "Yeah! Uncle Cheng Yun, are you afraid? Are you afraid you'll be too happy after returning to secular life?"

Cheng Yun shook his head, "It's not that I'm afraid. I simply do not have that desire."

Su Liang smiled, "Without experiencing the world, can you truly understand the Buddhist Dharma?"

Cheng Yun was taken aback, "I... I am still far away from fully understanding the Buddhist Dharma..."

Zhengzheng's little face looked serious, "Uncle Cheng Yun, if you don't know the suffering of sentient beings, how can you save them?"

Ji Xiaoshu was amazed, "Where did you learn this, big brother? It sounds like you've been through a lifetime of hardships!"

Zhengzheng shook his head, "I didn't learn it from anyone. I just said it casually."

"Big brother, you have the potential to become a great monk!" Ji Xiaoshu gave him a thumbs up.

Cheng Yun couldn't help but laugh, "Zhengzheng has a strong connection with Buddhism."

Su Liang asked, "Then do you want to take him into Buddhism?"

Cheng Yun hesitated, "Of course not... He has parents and siblings. How could he break free from them?"

Ji Xiaoshu was quick to retort, "Uncle Cheng Yun, we're here for you too! Why do you have the heart to break away from us?"

"You... all of you..." Cheng Yun was a bit bewildered, "I... I... aren't you all...?"

"Don't we count as Uncle Cheng Yun's favorite people?" Ji Xiaoshu put his little face close to Cheng Yun's, almost touching it.

Cheng Yun hurriedly shook his head, "No... yes, you're all the most... Ah, I don't know what to say anymore."

"Uncle Cheng Yun, we need you." Zhengzheng grabbed Cheng Yun's hand, "You can teach us martial arts and help take care of our sister."

"I can do all of that now, without returning to secular life," Cheng Yun shook his head.

"It's different," Ji Xiaoshu shook his head, "You have to live with us! My master is not at home, and there are bad people who want to bully my master's wife. We need someone to protect us right now! Uncle Cheng Yun, don't leave today! If something happens to my master's wife, what will we do? Don't you care about her and our sister, or our safety?"

Ji Xiaoshu kept up his barrage of "moral kidnapping," speaking righteously and leaving Cheng Yun speechless.

Zhengzheng shook Cheng Yun's arm, "Uncle Cheng Yun, please stay. We really need you. At least, you have to stay with us until my master returns. When he does, if you still want to leave, we won't stop you."

"Right!" Ji Xiaoshu expressed his confidence that he and Zhengzheng could "secure" Cheng Yun before Gu Ling returned.

Cheng Yun looked at Su Liang, "Benefactor Su, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu are just joking, right?"

Su Liang shook her head, "That's not really the case, honestly. Recently, a group of people have been causing trouble for us, and Gu Ling went out because those people captured my three masters. He went to save them, but we don't know the result yet. Actually, I've been worried that someone would come to harm me, so I really need a master like you by my side. I don't trust outsiders. If you could stay here for a while, that would be great, and it would really help me out. As for the matter of returning to secular life, you can take your time to think about it."

"Uncle!" Gu Xiaonuan raised her little hand and smiled at Cheng Yun.

Cheng Yun was instantly won over and could no longer refuse, "In that case, this humble monk will take advantage of your hospitality. I will only stay until Master Gu returns home, and please don't mention the matter of returning to secular life."

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu agreed cheerfully, exchanging a tacit look, and a new mission began: to move Uncle Cheng Yun and persuade him to return to secular life.

Cheng Yun said he had to go back to Huguo Temple first to inform his master, Pu Cheng, and pack up some things. Su Liang asked Qi Yan to accompany Cheng Yun, but Cheng Yun politely declined, "Master Su, please be assured, since this humble monk has promised, I will not break my word."

Su Liang nodded, "Alright, you can go by yourself then."

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu each grabbed one of Cheng Yun's hands and escorted him to the front door, waving at him, "Uncle Cheng Yun, hurry back home, we'll be waiting for you!"

The scene was heartwarming, and Cheng Yun felt warm inside. He urged the two children to go back quickly and not to catch a cold outside, promising that he would come over as soon as he finished packing at the temple.

When Cheng Yun left, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu ran back to Yuanming Pavilion.

“Elder martial brother, let’s bet on how many days it will take Uncle Cheng Yun to agree to return to secular life. I guess three days!” Ji Xiaoshu said.

Zhengzheng shook his head, “I think three days is not enough, Uncle Cheng Yun is still quite resolute, not easy to persuade. It would take at least five days.”

“So if it’s four days, who wins?” Ji Xiaoshu countered.

Zhengzheng thought for a moment, “If it’s within three days, you win; if it’s more than three days, I win.”

“That’s not fair. I win if it’s three days, you win if it’s five days. As long as it’s not those two times, nobody wins!” Ji Xiaoshu was very shrewd.

“Alright!” Zhengzheng agreed.

The two returned to Yuanming Pavilion and told Su Liang about their bet, even having thought up the stake.

Su Liang laughed, “Then I’ll bet four days.”

“How many days do you want to bet, little sister?” Zhengzheng asked Gu Xiaonuan with a smile.

Gu Xiaonuan shook her two little hands.

Zhengzheng nodded, “Little sister bets ten days; I think little sister will win. Maybe our master will be back by then.”

When Qiao Cong brought Nangong Qian back, he heard that Cheng Yun was going to move in and live with them.

Qiao Cong couldn’t help but laugh and cry, “Where will Master live, then?”

“Master can go live with Auntie Qian.” Ji Xiaoshu suggested, “What if some bad guys come to catch Auntie Qian?”

Qiao Cong had been staying at Yuanming Pavilion and was indeed worried about Nangong Qian. Now that Su Liang had invited Cheng Yun over, he felt this arrangement was better, so he moved his belongings to Nangong Qian’s place and then returned to Yuanming Pavilion, saying he wanted to wait for Cheng Yun to come and test his martial arts skills.

When Cheng Yun returned with his luggage, he also brought back the chessboard that Su Liang had lent to Pu Cheng. With a helpless expression, he said, “When I returned to Huguo Temple, my uncle had already left.”

Su Liang was not too surprised. She had not made a prior agreement with Pu Cheng to lend him the chessboard, so it seemed that Pu Cheng intended to leave Cheng Yun behind and return without

notice. His determination to have Cheng Yun return to secular life was quite strong. Given Pu Cheng's wandering nature, it was not surprising that he would do such a thing.

Qiao Cong suggested testing Cheng Yun's strength. While Cheng Yun was not fond of fighting, he could not refuse when faced with Qiao Cong, an elder. The two men went outside.

"You all stay inside and watch, don't come out, it's cold outside," Qiao Cong instructed.

Thus, Su Liang, the three children, and Nangong Qian all sat by the window to watch the battle.

Qiao Cong used the Cold Moon Sword Technique, and Cheng Yun borrowed a long stick from Su Liang. Su Liang had also learned stick techniques, taught by Gu Ling, but it had been a long time since she had used them for the Military Exam.

Su Liang actually didn't know much about Cheng Yun's true strength. She had seen Cheng Yun in action before, but he definitely hadn't been going all out. Also, given his personality, he would not use powerful moves because he did not want to hurt people.

However, the martial arts competition was still quite exciting.

Qiao Cong held nothing back, and Cheng Yun's strength turned out to be higher than Su Liang expected, probably about the same as Qiao Jing and not much worse than Gu Ling. Keep in mind, he was using a stick for the first time in his hand. It seemed that his moves were not very sharp, but he didn't fall behind. He was fast and had quick reactions. Although he stopped as soon as he touched the opponent, his strength and accuracy were very strong.

After the competition ended, Qiao Cong won, but he said, "You little monk have no viciousness. If you did, you could have exerted three times more strength!"

In other words, if Cheng Yun were not such a kind-hearted and gentle monk, his actual martial arts prowess could have been even stronger.

Considering the age difference, Qiao Cong didn't really win. Cheng Yun was just in his early twenties, and he was definitely a martial arts prodigy.

Su Liang prepared hot tea for them. After Cheng Yun drank a cup of tea, Su Liang asked, "I'm a bit puzzled. Since you're so devoted to Buddhist Dharma, how have you developed such strong martial arts skills?" To some extent, these two aspects are somewhat conflicting.

Cheng Yun said that Master Pu Cheng had been very serious about his martial arts practice since he was a child and had taught him very strictly.

Cheng Yun was not used to sharing a room with two children and staying next to Su Liang, but he was here to protect her and the children, so he couldn't be too far away. Besides, he really liked children, so he accepted it.

The night was quiet.

Cheng Yun listened to the even breathing of the two children but didn't sleep. He couldn't sleep in the new environment and felt the bed was too soft. On top of that, he wasn't planning on sleeping—Su Liang had asked for his help to guard the house, so he was afraid that he would not notice if intruders arrived while he was asleep.

Just in case he didn't hear the intruders enter Su Liang's room... Cheng Yun thought about it and felt that lying on the bed was not safe, so he quietly got up, went out, and sat in the small living area between the two rooms.

Before, when it was just Su Liang and Gu Ling, they used to sit here and eat meals. There were tables and chairs, and windows to look outside.

Cheng Yun opened the window, and a cool breeze came in. He sat facing the window without turning on any lights.

The moonlight was bright, and Cheng Yun could see the dark lake and pavilion outside. However, from the outside, he could not be seen in Yuanming Pavilion.

An hour later, Cheng Yun became a little sleepy. He rubbed his forehead and then rubbed his face, continuing to stare outside, silently reciting that he must protect Su Liang's family until Gu Ling returns. These were all his favorite people.

As soon as a dark figure appeared on the edge of the forest, Cheng Yun noticed it, and his expression grew serious. He immediately went back to his room, pulled up Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu, and whispered in their ears, "Intruders are coming!"

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu immediately became alert and, well-trained, rushed out of the room and downstairs. There was a maze-like secret chamber under Yuanming Pavilion. Gu Ling had taught them that if something happened, they should just run into the maze and hide without bothering with anything else.

Cheng Yun then went over and knocked on Su Liang's door three times, one loud and two soft.

Su Liang immediately sat up, not putting on her outer clothes or shoes, and picked up the sleeping Gu Xiaonuan beside her. She opened a piece in the floor and jumped down. The secret chamber entrance was right below her room.

All this happened in an instant. Cheng Yun was simply following Su Liang's instructions on what to do if something unusual happened.

Cheng Yun entered Su Liang's room and had just restored the floor when he heard the window moving. He grabbed the long stick he had used during the day when he returned to his room to call for the kids. Now, he held the stick tightly, waiting for the intruders.

As the window opened, the silvery moonlight poured in, and Cheng Yun's bald head stood out in the dim room.

There were two intruders, both wearing masks. As they saw the situation in the room, they both paused for a moment and glanced at each other.

Then, Cheng Yun heard a child's cry coming from one of the intruders' arms.

"Let Su Liang come out, or we will choke Lin Jingyun to death," said the other intruder, his voice low and calm.

Lin Jingyun? Cheng Yun knew him; he had held him when he visited Su Mansion last time. He was Lin Shuzhi's eldest grandson, a very well-behaved child, and Gu Ling's third disciple. Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu both called him their third junior brother.

Cheng Yun did not expect Su Liang's enemies to be so shameless and vicious, kidnapping a child from the Lin Family to threaten Su Liang. It was despicable!

Cheng Yun's eyes grew serious, and he raised the stick in his hand. "Master Su is not at home. Put the child down. If you want to do something to Su Liang, come at me!"

Chapter 429: 429. Not an innocent, naive child

In the underground secret room of Yuanming Pavilion.

Su Liang hugged Gu Xiaonuan and jumped down from the upper floor into the secret room and saw Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu standing side by side, wearing the adorable pyjamas Gu Ling made for them. One had a little wolf design and the other, a little tiger pattern. They held gleaming knives in their hands, their eyes alert, ready to fight off the enemy. But the whole scene was rather amusing.

Seeing it was Su Liang, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu sighed in relief and followed her through a passageway into another room.

Su Liang asked Zhengzheng to hold Gu Xiaonuan while she lit a lamp. The room was filled with a dim yellow glow, and it was fully furnished. The bed was made.

Zhengzheng placed Gu Xiaonuan on the bed and tucked her under a blanket. Su Liang then messed up his hair a bit and said, "You two go to bed too, and watch your little sister."

Ji Xiaoshu frowned, "Are you going to fight the bad guys, Master?"

Su Liang nodded, "Your Uncle Cheng Yun is still upstairs, I'm worried about him."

"But what if the bad guys are after you, Master? Wouldn't it be better for you to hide?" Zhengzheng's little face was serious.

Ji Xiaoshu nodded repeatedly, "Right! Going out would be very dangerous! Uncle Cheng Yun is very powerful, he can definitely drive the bad guys away!"

Su Liang sighed softly. She knew that during this time of crisis, she was most likely the target of the people who came to stir up trouble. The two kids were right—it would be the most prudent decision for her to hide. Once captured, there would be endless trouble.

However, she was thinking from the perspective of her personal safety. Since the situation outside was unclear, she was also worried about Cheng Yun's safety. The little monk, with his pure and innocent personality, would exert his full effort to help Su Liang, even if it meant risking his life.

Moreover, if the person who came was Sheng Yue, and he only showed up now, it must mean that he had made sufficient preparations. He likely wasn't someone Cheng Yun could handle.

"I'm going to go up and see what's happening." Su Liang quickly put on stockings and shoes from the wardrobe, and then dressed herself in an outer garment. Everything they could need was prepared here, just in case.

The two children looked worried, but Su Liang comforted them, "I'll be careful. You two stay here and don't come out." As for Gu Xiaonuan, she still hadn't woken up and was fast asleep.

Su Liang tucked two grenades into her clothing, grabbed a long sword and a nail gun, took one last look at Gu Xiaonuan, and went outside.

“Be careful, Master. We’ll be waiting for you.” Zhengzheng looked serious.

Su Liang waved back as she left, “I will.”

Upstairs, Cheng Yun was still facing off against the intruders, yet no fight had broken out.

In fact, Cheng Yun would never have guessed that the person not holding a child was none other than his most trusted and beloved Master Pu Cheng who had been like a father to him. The one holding the child was Sheng Yue, Pu Cheng’s secret son.

Sheng Yue had previously had one of his hands severed by Gu Ling, but now it had been replaced with an iron hand, covered by a long sleeve. Pu Cheng wore a wig on his head, so no one could tell he was a monk beneath it.

The two were indeed prepared—Sheng Yue had brought Lin Jingyun, a hostage they could use. Abducting someone from Su Mansion to use as a hostage was too risky and could easily alert the enemy. But for a master like Sheng Yue, kidnapping a child from the friend of Su Liang was almost effortless and effective.

“What do you want in exchange for the child’s life?” Cheng Yun asked coldly.

Sheng Yue spoke calmly, “Let Su Liang come out. I know she’s nearby. If she doesn’t come out, prepare to recover Lin Jingyun’s body.” He then turned and leaped to the edge of the window.

“You... Why do you do such unconscionable things? Benefactor Su is a good person. Her medical skills are excellent, and she has saved many people. She has never harmed anyone without reason! If there’s any misunderstanding, it can be discussed. What you are doing is wrong—don’t stray any further down this path!” Still believing in the inherent goodness of people, Cheng Yun, the little monk, actually tried to persuade Sheng Yue and Pu Cheng.

Suddenly Sheng Yue turned, “Let’s go outside. There’s something strange about this room. If Su Liang doesn’t come out within a quarter-hour, I’ll throw this kid into the nearly frozen lake below.” With those words, he flew out the open window.

Pu Cheng glanced deeply at Cheng Yun, “You better call Su Liang out quickly. This matter has nothing to do with you, and it’s not something you can solve.” He then turned to leave as well.

Cheng Yun’s face darkened. These people were here to harm Su Liang, so he had to prevent her from coming out! So he charged forward with his staff.

Half of Pu Cheng’s body was already out of the window, but the other half was still inside. With Lin Jingyun’s cries and Sheng Yue’s threats echoing in his ears and Su Liang’s trusting and gentle gaze in his mind, Cheng Yun swung his staff and knocked Pu Cheng back into the room!

Pu Cheng had always thought he understood Cheng Yun well and never expected him to suddenly attack. Cheng Yun had been diligent in practicing martial arts but had never wanted to use those skills to attack others, let alone take the initiative. Even when bullied, Cheng Yun never fought back]

Pu Cheng thought he knew everything that had happened between Cheng Yun and Su Liang, but Cheng Yun already had secrets of his own. Like the time when Qian Country's Empress's family, the Wan clan, had kidnapped Bai Xiaohu from Su Village to threaten Su Liang. Su Liang had asked Cheng Yun for help, and he had watched as Su Liang knocked the culprit into the well. The next day, he learned the man had died.

For Cheng Yun, this was a difficult kill to accept, but Su Liang persuaded him not to think that way. The early death of a bad person is like a merciful salvation.

Although Cheng Yun didn't agree with Su Liang's "early death, early salvation" concept, he didn't mention the incident to anyone else, including his master and his fellow martial artists. He had promised Su Liang not to tell anyone, so he didn't say a word, only repenting for a long time in front of the Buddha.

If Pu Cheng knew that Cheng Yun had indirectly killed someone, his perception of him would inevitably change and he would gain a better understanding of Su Liang's influence on him and the extent of his trust in her.

When they first met, their real stories intersected when Cheng Yun, Su Liang, and Gu Ling saved Zhengzheng, a kidnapped child, on a rainy day. They had one thing in common: they loved children and had a stronger protective instinct for them, and at the same time, they had a greater aversion to those who took children as hostages.

For Cheng Yun, Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue's capture of Lin Jingyun was like touching his reverse scales.

Pu Cheng had no guard against Cheng Yun. After being beaten back to his room, he didn't want to fight, so he feigned a move and tried to leave.

But Cheng Yun's plan was to capture Pu Cheng and exchange him for Lin Jingyun, thus keeping Su Liang out of danger. So how could he let Pu Cheng leave so easily?

Pu Cheng didn't want to fight, fearing Cheng Yun would recognize his moves and also fearing hurting him.

But Cheng Yun was determined to take him down. He swiftly moved, blocking the door and window with a stick.

When Su Liang came out of the underground secret room, she heard the sound of fighting upstairs, but not the child crying. That's because Sheng Yue was holding Lin Jingyun by the lake, waiting for Pu Cheng to come out.

Su Liang held the nail gun in her hand, its cold touch making her very alert. She leaned against the wall and quietly went upstairs.

No lights were lit in Yuanming Pavilion, and the fight on the second floor grew louder. Cheng Yun's stick hit the vase that Gu Ling liked the most, and it fell to the ground with a crisp shattering sound.

The door to Su Liang's room was left ajar. She gently pushed it open a little and at first glance saw Cheng Yun's bald head moving quickly in the room. As for the person he was fighting, it was just a shadow, and her identity couldn't be distinguished. However, it was certain that she wasn't Sheng Yue, because Su Liang saw that both of her hands were intact.

This made Su Liang a little puzzled: it wasn't Sheng Yue, and there was only one person... unlike what she had guessed.

But that didn't matter. Su Liang raised the nail gun, held her breath, and aimed at the person's chest.

A moment later, Cheng Yun saw the person he was fighting with suddenly sway, staggered a few steps, and covered her chest with one hand while looking at the door.

Cheng Yun took the opportunity to hit the person's knee with his stick!

Su Liang pushed open the door, was about to add another shot, but Cheng Yun stopped her, "Don't kill him! They caught Little Jingyun and he's by the lake!"

Su Liang's expression changed abruptly. Was there an accomplice outside?

Pu Cheng's chest was pierced, and he felt numb around the wound. It was poisoned! He tried to leave, but Cheng Yun wouldn't let him. At the same time, he warned Su Liang, "You go back and hide, don't come out! I'll take him in exchange for Little Jingyun!"

Hearing this, Su Liang raised her gun again and shot Pu Cheng in the thigh. He swayed and knelt on the ground!

Su Liang walked over, Cheng Yun frowned, "You better go back, I can handle this."

Su Liang shook her head slightly, walked forward, pulled off the mask on Pu Cheng's face, revealing a strange and ordinary face. For safety reasons, Sheng Yue had arranged a disguise for Pu Cheng.

"You are Sheng Yue's subordinate?" Su Liang asked coldly. She and Cheng Yun hadn't thought of Pu Cheng at all, so at this moment, they didn't have any doubts about his disguise.

Pu Cheng nodded with a pale face, "Yes."

"Then it's no use. Sheng Yue wouldn't compromise for a subordinate," Su Liang said coldly.

Pu Cheng looked down and said, "I am his father."

Su Liang was stunned and looked at Cheng Yun, "In that case, you take him to exchange for Lin Jingyun."

Cheng Yun nodded, hesitated for a moment when Su Liang handed him the sword, took it, and dragged Pu Cheng up, putting the sword to his neck, "Let's go!"

Su Liang watched Cheng Yun and Pu Cheng leave the room and go downstairs. She didn't return to the secret room, but turned and saw a figure standing by the lake, which should be Sheng Yue. Sheng Yue had a father, something that even Min Rou didn't know. Min Rou had said that Sheng Yue was an orphan taken in by Xingluo Island. It seemed that there were still many secrets about Sheng Yue.

Sheng Yue watched Cheng Yun abducting Pu Cheng out of Yuanming Pavilion with a calm expression, while the crying Lin Jingyun in his arms had fallen asleep.

“He said he’s your father.” Cheng Yun said coldly, “Release the child, and I’ll release him.”

Sheng Yue countered, “Are you a monk? Would you really kill my father?”

Cheng Yun’s face froze, “I...I am a monk, but if you dare to hurt little Jingyun, you are not human!”

Pu Cheng looked at Cheng Yun, his eyes filled with complexity. This child had already changed, but he hadn’t noticed, which was the main reason for his failure tonight. Cheng Yun hadn’t become bad, just more intense.

Sheng Yue nodded, “Fine. Let’s do the exchange.” As soon as he finished speaking, he walked over to Cheng Yun.

Cheng Yun kept a guard on her eyes, and Sheng Yue quickly approached and handed over the child in his arms.

Cheng Yun held the sword in one hand and took the child with the other. Pu Cheng was then dragged away by Sheng Yue.

The reversal of the situation Su Liang worried about did not happen, as Sheng Yue left immediately with Pu Cheng.

From the shadows, Su Liang came running out and fired a few more shots at the two men. However, the nail gun had limited range, and Sheng Yue was alert, so it didn’t hit him. He looked back at Su Liang, his eyes deep, and then turned away, disappearing into the woods with Pu Cheng.

“Quickly check if little Jingyun is alright? Why isn’t he crying anymore?” Cheng Yun looked anxious, having already thrown the sword away.

Su Liang looked at the child and shook her head, “He’s fine, just asleep. We should send him back...no, let him stay for now; I’ll have Qi Yan inform the Lin family.”

As they spoke, Qi Yan came running over with the worried Lin Bojun, “Xiaoliang, Jingyun has been stolen!”

Lights were lit in Yuanming Pavilion, and by the time Su Liang brought the three children out of the secret chamber, it was well into the night.

Lin Jingyun was taken away by Lin Bojun. Su Liang apologized, but Lin Bojun said it wasn’t her fault. He would be careful to protect his family now that he knew someone was plotting in secret, and he would come to talk to Su Liang tomorrow about tonight’s events.

“Are you hurt?” Su Liang asked Cheng Yun.

Cheng Yun shook his head, “I’m fine. Why did those people want to kidnap you?”

“To kill me,” Su Liang said.

Cheng Yun frowned, “Evil people.”

The two children nodded, “Big bad guys!”

Ji Xiaoshu was furious, “Despicable! To think they’d kidnap Third Junior Brother! He’s so well-behaved!”

“Exactly! Too cruel!” Zhengzheng clenched his tiny fists and said.

“You two should go back to your rooms and sleep,” Su Liang pulled them up, “I have something to discuss with your Uncle Cheng Yun.”

After the children left, Su Liang sighed softly, “I’m lucky you were here tonight, otherwise I would have been kidnapped.”

Cheng Yun nodded but remained silent, hesitating to speak.

“What’s the matter?” Su Liang asked.

“The person I fought with...” Cheng Yun’s eyebrows furrowed.

“You know him?” Su Liang was surprised.

Cheng Yun shook his head, “No...his moves are somewhat familiar, like I’ve seen them somewhere before.”

Su Liang’s eyes narrowed, “There aren’t many people who have fought with you, are there?”

“It shouldn’t be. It’s my mistake...just a coincidence, I guess.” Cheng Yun shook his head repeatedly.

Su Liang’s heart was struck with a thought, “Don’t tell me that the martial arts moves you found familiar came from your master?” Su Liang knew Cheng Yun; he was highly skilled in martial arts, but back then he was a simpleton who would rather be beaten up by a crowd on the street than fight back. He had only done some things contrary to the monk’s code of conduct under her guidance; nothing else. The fact that Cheng Yun was so conflicted and denied his own feelings meant that it could not be an illusion or a coincidence.

Moreover, Su Liang suddenly thought that during the day, Cheng Yun’s master had left without saying goodbye, and the mysterious monk Pu Cheng, whom she had met at night, had the same face as Sheng Yue’s father... Those eyes, the way he looked at Cheng Yun, it was him!

Earlier, when it was dark, Su Liang’s attention had been so focused on observing Sheng Yue that she had seen certain things but did not have time to process them, and only now recalled her memory.

Cheng Yun’s face turned pale, “That wasn’t my master. My master has no hair, no son, and he’s not a bad person.”

“Do you know everything about his past?” Su Liang asked.

Cheng Yun nodded, “He said someone killed his wife, and he became a monk out of despair.”

“Since he had a wife, it’s possible he had a son.” Su Liang asked Cheng Yun to tell her what happened from the beginning to the end of the night, including what they said.

Cheng Yun started from the moment he saw someone coming out of the woods until Su Liang appeared. She knew everything that happened after that.

After listening, Su Liang was even more certain that the man who claimed to be Sheng Yue’s father had to be Pu Cheng.

Cheng Yun was involved in the situation and unwilling to believe that his master was not a good person. However, from what he told Su Liang, it was apparent that both of them were polite to Cheng Yun and did not want to fight him. Furthermore, Sheng Yue's father even told Cheng Yun, "Tonight has nothing to do with him." This clearly implied that he wanted Cheng Yun to stay out of the matter, so as not to ruin their plans or make things difficult for them.

At the time, there was no light, and Su Liang only saw the man's face in the moonlight without taking a close look, so she did not notice any signs of disguise. However, since Sheng Yue knew the Disguise Technique, it was entirely possible for him to make Pu Cheng appear completely unrelated to a monk.

"You... do you really think it's my master?" Cheng Yun looked incredulous.

Su Liang nodded, "That's what I think. No one else should have shown that kind of behavior. Perhaps your master tricked you into coming to see me today, taking the opportunity to leave himself, not expecting me to keep you at my house."

"My master... why would he do this? He's not that kind of person!" Cheng Yun still refused to believe it.

"What else could it be for, of course, it's for his son." Su Liang snorted coldly, "Maybe his nature isn't bad, but some people would do anything for their children. At the time, if it was someone else in your place, with Sheng Yue's capabilities, there would have been a chance to kill you and continue threatening me with Jingyun. Tonight, if it hadn't been for you, they wouldn't have been so merciful. They didn't fail, they just gave up temporarily because of you."

As soon as Su Liang finished speaking, she could tell from Cheng Yun's expression that he was somewhat on the verge of collapsing. For a moment, he could not accept that the person who could do such evil deeds was the Pu Cheng he regarded as a father.

As Su Liang looked at Cheng Yun, she remembered what Pu Cheng had said about his background: an orphan left behind by a good friend.

In her previous life, there was a saying – I have a friend... At this moment, Su Liang even began to suspect that Cheng Yun might also be Pu Cheng's son. Although the two did not look alike, Pu Cheng genuinely cared for Cheng Yun.

Su Liang didn't voice her suspicion, as she might be overthinking, and she didn't want to provoke Cheng Yun any further at this point. However, she kept this guess in mind.

"They won't come again at least for tonight. You should rest first, and we'll talk about the rest tomorrow." Su Liang gently patted Cheng Yun's shoulder.

Cheng Yun walked out with a blank expression, stumbled over his stick after two steps and nearly fell. He steadied himself and then turned back to ask Su Liang, "Little Nuannuan... She wasn't scared, right?"

Su Liang smiled, "It's fine, she doesn't know anything, sleeping like a pig, carefree."

“Carefree... It’s not so bad, actually.” Cheng Yun walked out with a bitter smile on his face, not returning to his room, but sitting in the small hall, looking out of the window.

Su Liang sighed, closed the door, went back to the bedside, and looked at Gu Xiaonuan, letting out a long breath.

The moon was bright, and the stars were sparse outside the city. The wind was sighing through the woods.

Sheng Yue removed the two nails from Pu Cheng’s body and gave him an antidote.

Pu Cheng leaned against a large tree with a pale face.

Sheng Yue sat down beside him, speaking softly, “Father, were you helping me tonight?”

Pu Cheng’s tone was sour, “What do you expect me to do? Kill your brother?”

“Brother...” Sheng Yue snorted, “It seems he isn’t the naive, innocent child father described. If I wanted to kill him, I could have done so at that moment, but I gave up. Adding today’s failure, father owes me twice. If we don’t act soon, Gu Ling will be back.”

Chapter 430: 430. She is fake.

Gu Xiaonuan, who had slept the best last night, was the first to wake up today. She rolled around beside Su Liang, calling for her mother and father one moment after the other.

With Gu Xiaonuan in her arms, Su Liang sat up, looking at her radiant smile, she sighed, “I envy you so much.” She also wanted to have a carefree life. However, since transmigrating to this time, troubles have been non-stop.

When Su Liang came out of her room, she saw Cheng Yun sleeping on a small hall table. The sunlight passed through the window and shone on his bald head, like a piece of pure and flawless jade.

As Su Liang prepared to quietly go downstairs, Gu Xiaonuan shouted out loud, “Uncle!”

Cheng Yun instantly sat upright and then stood up. He looked at Gu Xiaonuan while wearing a confused look on his face, but his body had already reacted. He waved his hand at Gu Xiaonuan and managed to pull out a smile.

After catching Gu Xiaonuan’s outstretched hand, Su Liang said to Cheng Yun, “Go back to your room and continue sleeping.”

But Cheng Yun was already wide awake and remembered the events of last night. A faint shadow loomed over his clear eyes as he said, “I want to take a walk outside.”

“That’s fine. But just walk within the mansion grounds.” Su Liang nodded.

“Alright.” Cheng Yun went downstairs, his footsteps heavy. His gray monk robe was wrinkled, and there was a tear on the back.

Seeing Cheng Yun's torn clothes, Su Liang was even more certain that Pu Cheng didn't want to hurt him. As Cheng Yun's master, Pu Cheng's strength was undoubtedly superior to Cheng Yun's, and it was abnormal for Cheng Yun to stop him last night.

As she went downstairs, Su Liang encountered Qiao Cong, who frowned and took Gu Xiaonuan from her, "Are you all okay?"

Su Liang shook her head slightly, "It was a close call."

"Damn it!" Qiao Cong couldn't conceal his anger, "Shameless scoundrels, using such a small child to threaten you!"

Ren Dong and Yan Shiba appeared at the door.

Yan Shiba's complexion was much better. She no longer needed a wheelchair or help walking. As soon as she entered, she asked Su Liang, "I heard there was an assassin last night? Are you all okay?"

Seeing Yan Shiba's concern, Su Liang sighed softly, "Temporarily safe. But the assassin wasn't captured, and given their methods, they might come again tonight."

"What should we do?" Yan Shiba frowned, "Shall we hide first?"

"It's useless." Su Liang shook her head. Sheng Yue knew very well how to handle her. She had already experienced hiding but being forced out last night. Although she didn't come out specifically because Sheng Yue had captured Lin Jingyun, if it hadn't been for Cheng Yun, anyone else facing Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue would have inevitably called Su Liang to come out to avoid a terrible outcome.

Seeing Yan Shiba sigh, Su Liang changed the topic, "Gu Ling is not at home now, and there is a shortage of people here. Your health has improved a lot these past few days, haven't you forgotten how to use martial arts?"

Yan Shiba was stunned for a moment, then shook her head, "I can't remember what kind of martial arts I used to be able to do."

"Give it a try, and you'll know. The body has its memory." Su Liang looked at Ren Dong, "After breakfast, you spar with Yan Shiba to help her recall her skills."

Ren Dong immediately nodded, "Yes, Master. I will be careful not to hurt Miss Yan."

Yan Shiba closed her eyes, while Su Liang turned to talk to Nangong Qian.

After breakfast, Cheng Yun hadn't returned from his walk outside, and the two children upstairs were still asleep.

Ren Dong and Yan Shiba went to the open space by the lake to prepare for the spar as Su Liang had instructed. Qiao Cong was there to watch the fight.

Su Liang, holding Gu Xiaonuan, sat by the window and watched without going out.

Yan Shiba picked up the long sword with a bewildered expression. It seemed as if she had forgotten even the basic starting stance.

Qiao Cong frowned, "That's not right. You've lost your memory, not your intelligence. Go ahead and try again. What feels the most natural?"

Yan Shiba changed her position again, and this time it was almost correct.

Ren Dong turned her head and looked at Su Liang.

Su Liang raised her hand, giving Ren Dong a signal.

Just as Qiao Cong looked in disbelief at Yan Shiba still adjusting her posture, Ren Dong suddenly attacked Yan Shiba, aiming straight for her heart!

Qiao Cong was stunned for a moment, then saw Yan Shiba quickly sidestepping and narrowly avoiding the attack. The sword in her hand changed positions as well. This time, she didn't have that lost and bewildered look as before.

Ren Dong's eyes narrowed slightly, "It seems Master was right; Miss Yan's body does have memory!" She attacked Yan Shiba again after saying this.

However, Yan Shiba became slow and unresponsive again, hurriedly retreating. Her long sword fell to the ground, and she almost fell into the lake, but Ren Dong pulled her back.

Qiao Cong, who had been watching the whole scene, couldn't make sense of it and went back to Yuanming Pavilion.

With a concerned expression, Ren Dong looked at Yan Shiba, "Are you alright, Miss Yan? I'm sorry, I was too impatient."

Yan Shiba's face was pale, "I'm fine... Su Liang may be right, but after the first attack, I came to my senses. I thought too much, and now I can't do it."

"That should be the case." Ren Dong nodded, "Let's stop here for today. I'll take Miss Yan back to rest."

"No need to accompany me, I can go back by myself." Yan Shiba shook her head.

"Alright then." Ren Dong straightened Yan Shiba's clothes and picked up the long sword from the ground. As she watched Yan Shiba's slow footsteps, her eyes suddenly turned cold.

At this moment, Qiao Cong was talking to Su Liang, "Her behavior is strange!"

Su Liang gently shook Gu Xiaonuan's little hand, "She is not Yan Shiba, I'm sure." Even if her memory was erased, the body's reaction, especially in martial arts, was ingrained in the muscle memory over the years and shouldn't be like that.

Ren Dong came in, "Master, should we capture and interrogate her?"

Su Liang shook her head, "That won't work. If my guess is correct, she's an imposter. Remember the injuries on her body when she arrived? Her life was hanging by a thread, and some damages were beyond recovery."

Rendon's expression became serious. She had seen the injuries on that person's body, even her left chest had been cut off. What kind of person would go to such lengths to impersonate someone else?

“Her disguise is so good that I’m still not sure, I always felt that I was overthinking it.” Su Liang said thoughtfully. The injuries were a strong piece of evidence that she was Yan Shiba since Su Liang knew the ins and outs of Yan Shiqi and Yan Shiba’s past grudges; Yan Shiqi would be able to do such things to Yan Shiba.

If it wasn’t for the fact that Su Liang learned about Yan Shiba’s amnesia and then saw Lian Shan visiting the mansion, she wouldn’t have become suspicious.

“Are there identical twins who can fool even your eyes?” Qiao Cong frowned.

“It’s not uncommon for twins to look very similar, but Yan Shiba shouldn’t have a twin sister, or she would know.” Su Liang said. Considering that this Yan Shiba came from Sheng Yue and that there are transmigrators on Xingluo Island, Su Liang thought of what she had previously considered impossible: plastic surgery.

“What should we do then?” Ren Dong asked.

Su Liang pondered for a moment, “Go to Minister Min’s Mansion and invite Min Rou over. Also, ask Qi Jun to come.”

Ren Dong obeyed and left.

Qiao Cong looked puzzled, “What are you planning to do?”

“Test her directly to see if she recognizes Sheng Yue.” Su Liang said.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu didn’t wake up until late in the morning, and Su Liang reheated breakfast for them.

Both of them were concerned about what happened last night, so after finishing their breakfast, they didn’t go out to play. Instead, they snuggled up to Su Liang’s side and asked her how to deal with the bad guys. As smart kids, they knew that the villains from last night would come back after escaping.

“I haven’t thought about it yet.” Su Liang sent the two children to accompany Cheng Yun, “Uncle Cheng Yun is in a bad mood. Go and play with him, or ask him to teach you Stick Techniques.”

“Alright.” Ji Xiaoshu nodded and shouted at Cheng Yun, who was still wandering by the lake, “Uncle Cheng Yun, we’re coming!” Then he and Zhengzheng ran out together.

Su Liang knew that Cheng Yun needed time to digest the fact that his master’s senior brother was not a good person. Adjusting his mood and letting him see other important people and events in his life would help him.

Cheng Yun was pulled by the two children to the forest. Zhengzheng kindly handed him a Plain Steamed Bun to eat.

After a while, Rendong brought Min Rou over, and Qi Jun also arrived. Su Liang asked Rendong to go back and watch Yan Shiba.

"I learned from Miss Rendong that Sheng Yue came last night and captured Little Jingyun?" Min Rou's face was tight, "He's really despicable! He'll do anything to achieve his goals! Tell me what you need me to do."

Su Liang signaled Qi Jun to sit down, "I want to disguise him as Sheng Yue. You watch and tell me what it should look like."

Min Rou was stunned for a moment, then nodded, "Okay."

About a quarter of an hour later, Qi Jun's face had changed to a different appearance.

"It's almost like this, able to deceive the real from the fake." Min Rou praised Su Liang's Disguise Technique, "Qi Jun's figure is also very similar to Sheng Yue's."

Qi Jun took a bronze mirror, looked at the face in the mirror, and was surprised, "It looks a bit familiar. I've seen it somewhere."

"Pu Cheng." Su Liang's eyes were cold.

Pu Cheng had been to the mansion three or four times recently, and Qi Jun had only met him once. He had an impression of him, but because Pu Cheng was bald and much younger than Sheng Yue, he felt a vague familiarity but didn't think of him.

Even if Min Rou had drawn a portrait of Sheng Yue for Su Liang, it wouldn't be easy to see that he resembled Pu Cheng because of the vast differences in temperament and style, and the fact that they were completely separate worlds to Su Liang until last night.

Min Rou was puzzled, "Who is Pu Cheng?"

"Sheng Yue's father." Su Liang said.

Min Rou was stunned, "His father is actually still alive? He said his parents were dead, and he had a younger brother, who also died from illness."

A younger brother... Su Liang looked at Cheng Yun, who was being pulled by Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu toward the Yuanming Pavilion, and figured that he was probably the "dead" brother Sheng Yue mentioned. Sheng Yue looked like Pu Cheng, while Cheng Yun might resemble his mother, so their relationship with the father and son was not apparent.

The two adults and two children entered the door. Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu greeted Min Rou, and they both curiously looked at Qi Jun. They recognized him from his clothes but not his face.

Cheng Yun, on the other hand, froze when he saw Qi Jun's face, "This is...?"

"The man who held Jingyun hostage last night. His name is Sheng Yue, and he looks like this." Su Liang said.

Cheng Yun's hands clenched tightly. Su Liang said the person he fought with last night was Pu Cheng. Cheng Yun didn't doubt Su Liang's judgment, but he didn't want to believe it. He kept telling himself that there might have been some misunderstanding. But now, looking at Qi Jun's disguised face, he knew Su Liang was right.

"You two take Uncle Cheng Yun upstairs to rest." Su Liang said to the children.

Cheng Yun was dazed as they led him upstairs, one on each side.

Before the disguise started, Min Rou had already answered Su Liang's questions about Sheng Yue's clothing style. Now, Qi Jun returned from outside with a new set of clothes and shoes, which Min Rou looked at and said were similar enough.

Qi Jun changed into them and put on a mask that Su Liang had given him. Sheng Yue had worn a similar mask that night, and Gu Ling had one too.

"Very similar." Min Rou examined Qi Jun in front of her, "Pay attention to the eyes. His eyes are always cold, as if he doesn't care about anything."

As for the voice, Su Liang had heard Sheng Yue's voice last night, and Min Rou confirmed that Qi Jun's imitation of it was accurate.

"It's good enough." Min Rou nodded, looking at Qi Jun's calm and unflappable eyes.

Su Liang instructed Qi Jun that she would later call Ren Dong away and let Qi Jun pretend to be Sheng Yue and secretly find Yan Shiba to test her reaction. Although it's broad daylight, Sheng Yue's strength allows him to sneak into the mansion without being noticed during the day.

Qi Jun nodded in understanding, "I know what to do."

As for Sheng Yue's severed hand, Su Liang didn't make a fuss, and Yan Shiba wouldn't know, so Qi Jun didn't need to disguise that specifically.

Ren Dong's courtyard.

"Miss Yan, the Master has asked me to come over, are you all right here?" Ren Dong asked from outside the door.

Yan Shiba's voice came from within, "I'm fine, I want to rest for a while, you go ahead."

"Alright." With that, Ren Dong left.

Yan Shiba listened to the retreating footsteps and sat on the edge of the bed, clutching her hands anxiously.

About two quarters of an hour after Ren Dong left, the slightly open window suddenly moved.

Yan Shiba looked alert as a shadow came through the window, which was then closed immediately after.

The figure turned, and Yan Shiba met those calm eyes, breathed a sigh of relief, stood up and blurted out, "Master!"

Qi Jun: ... As Su Liang guessed, this was definitely not Yan Shiba. Moreover, the voice was not unfamiliar; he was sure he had heard it before.

Qi Jun didn't speak, quietly looking around.

"Yan Shiba" sighed and said, "I think Su Liang is starting to suspect me. Today, she let her maid test my martial arts, I'm not sure if I'm exposed. Master, if you don't come, I really don't know what to do."

Qi Jun looked coldly at “Yan Shiba,” “What did I tell you to do?” His tone was intimidating.

“Yan Shiba” stiffened and lowered her head, “Master told me not to arouse Su Liang’s suspicion, I promised I could do it at the time, I’ve tried my best, but she’s too suspicious. My face clearly has no flaws, and even with such injuries, she doesn’t believe me. I should have taken the opportunity to kill her when I could stand! At the beginning, she hadn’t been suspicious!”

“Did I tell you to kill her? Do you think you can kill her?” Qi Jun asked coldly.

“Yan Shiba” shook her head, “No. Master told me to lie in wait by Su Liang’s side for further instructions, but I can’t stand it any longer. Please take me away now, Master.”

Qi Jun suddenly approached “Yan Shiba,” staring at her face, “Is Su Liang really not suspicious of this face?”

“Yan Shiba” nodded, “This I can confirm, she didn’t notice anything wrong at all. Master truly has a pair of divine hands and is a real divine doctor.”

“Since she deliberately tests you, she won’t do anything to you for the time being. I’ll come back tonight and take you away,” Qi Jun said.

Then I’ll wait for Master. “Yan Shiba” relaxed her brow, “Master, be careful too. The little monk is very powerful. But threatening Su Liang with hostages from outside will surely work, she’s the kind of person who won’t stand idly by and watch innocent people get hurt because of her.”

“You don’t need to lecture me.” Qi Jun left the same way he came in after saying.

“Yan Shiba” sat back on the bed, exhaling deeply.

Seeing Qi Jun return, Su Liang asked, “How did it go?”

“It’s fake, she said that the face was made by Sheng Yue’s divine hands,” Qi Jun said affirmatively, “And I recognized who she is from her voice.”

Su Liang’s eyes narrowed as she heard Qi Jun utter three words, “Nian Ruxue.”