

Three-Time 431

Chapter 431: 431. The Little Monk's Determination

Su Liang hadn't forgotten Nian Ruxue, but it had been a while since she had heard that name.

Nian Ruxue once had a marriage agreement with Gu Ling, but later it was proven that the so-called marriage agreement was obtained through deception. She deceived Nian Ruting, Nian Jincheng, and used all available resources to climb up the social ladder.

If it were not for Su Liang's extraordinary return to the capital city to participate in the Military Exam, Nian Ruxue's deception would have continued. With her unscrupulous nature to achieve her goals, she could have reached a very high position.

However, what she gained through manipulation would ultimately be hollow. The reason why Nian Ruxue failed miserably and lost everything was that she lacked the talent and strength to truly stand on her own.

Her beauty, which she was most proud of, was not only inferior to Su Liang's, but also hardly worthy of mention in the eyes of truly shrewd men. For example, even Duanmu Chen, who was not the crown prince at that time, had no interest in Nian Ruxue. Instead, he admired ladies like Qin Yujin and Lin Xueqing who had both beauty and talent.

As for Nian Ruxue's strength in the Military Exam, it was also a deception, making Nian Ruting her puppet.

In Nian Jincheng's words: Nian Ruxue's ambition was sky-high, but she had mediocre talent and couldn't bear hardships. Focusing on taking shortcuts seemed to be her specialty.

With bad intentions and lacking morality and talent, falling down was just a matter of time.

Nian Ruxue, the primary cause of the disaster that befell the Nian Family, disappeared on the day the truth came to light. She had manipulated Nian Ruting to go to prison, nearly ruining Nian Jincheng's life and career, and others in the Nian Family were also exiled, yet there has been no trace of her since that day.

Su Liang knew that Nian Ruxue must hate her and may even blame her for all her misfortunes. Su Liang became the Martial Arts Champion, shined brilliantly, exposed her deception, and married Gu Ling.

One could say Su Liang had everything Nian Ruxue wanted: fame, power, status, and the best man in the world.

Considering the efforts Nian Ruxue made in disguising herself as Yan Shiba to deceive Su Liang, including hurting herself, Su Liang couldn't help but admire this woman who now lacked scruples and was willing to suffer.

It was clear from the words Nian Ruxue said to Qi Jun that her desire to kill Su Liang was extremely strong. If it were not for her lack of power, she would have done it a long time ago.

Qi Jun and Ren Dong noticed Su Liang was deep in thought, so they didn't interrupt her.

It was only when Su Liang picked up her tea that Ren Dong asked, “Master, what should we do with that woman?”

Su Liang drank a few sips of the cooled tea and said, “Ren Dong, you take Min Rou home. Qi Jun, don’t remove your disguise for now. I’m going to talk to Nian Ruxue.”

After finishing the conversation, Su Liang went upstairs. The broken porcelain in the room had been cleaned up, but not discarded. It was placed in a box on the table. It was Gu Ling’s favorite vase, and Su Liang thought that he might want to fix it when he had spare time in the future.

Su Liang took a box off the bookshelf in the room, opened it, and found a set of Gu Ling’s carving knives. Gu Ling had another set he always carried with him. She picked the sharpest-looking one, closed the box, and put it back in its original spot. As soon as she walked out the door, she saw Ji Xiaoshu sticking her head out from the opposite room.

“Mother, Uncle Cheng Yun seems really sad. He’s lying down but not sleeping at all. What should we do?” Ji Xiaoshu tiptoed over and whispered as she held Su Liang’s hand.

“Then you guys continue doing your makeup homework.” Su Liang said softly.

“Huh?” Ji Xiaoshu was dumbfounded as she watched Su Liang walk downstairs. With a small sigh, she went back and told Zhengzheng that their master had a new command—hurry up and finish their makeup homework!

Su Liang went downstairs and saw Qiao Cong talking to Qi Jun, and she already knew what was going on. Nangong Qian was feeding Gu Xiaonuan water nearby.

Qiao Cong stood up and followed Su Liang out.

“Master doesn’t need to accompany me, she can’t do anything to me. I can kill her with just the flick of my finger.” Su Liang said. To be honest, she had been suspicious before, but she couldn’t be sure, so she added a poison to “Yan Shiba’s” medicine that could be triggered at any time, sending her to see the Yama King.

“I won’t show my face, but I’ll watch,” Qiao Cong snorted coldly.

In fact, learning that Pu Cheng was Sheng Yue’s father made Qiao Cong think of his own past blunders. Su Liang was right in saying that people would do anything for their children and grandchildren, even breaking the principles and bottom lines of being a human. Qiao Cong knew that the present and future he had with his grandchildren was purely good luck, and this luck was given by Su Liang. Considering what they had done, it wouldn’t be excessive for Su Liang and Gu Ling to kill them all.

Therefore, Qiao Cong cherished what he had even more, and wanted to make up for his past mistakes, protect Su Liang and her daughter, and this family. For this, he was willing to pay any price.

Su Liang was unaware of Qiao Cong’s thoughts, as they had long reconciled and let the past be the past. She was pondering what to say to Nian Ruxue...

Footsteps sounded in the courtyard, and Nian Ruxue quickly removed her shoes and socks, lay on the bed, and covered herself with a quilt.

Shortly after, a knock on the door sounded, followed by Su Liang's voice, "It's me."

After a while, Nian Ruxue sat up and replied, "Come in, Sister Liang. I just fell asleep."

Su Liang pushed open the door and entered, while Qiao Cong had already circled to the window.

Nian Ruxue got off the bed, yawned, "Why did you come here? Is there anything wrong?"

Su Liang walked straight to the bedside. The moment Nian Ruxue heard her say "something is wrong", she was suddenly pushed back down to lie on the bed.

Nian Ruxue's face turned pale in shock as she saw a silver-bladed sharp knife hanging in front of her! The blade was only half an inch away from her eyes!

Nian Ruxue broke out into a cold sweat and didn't dare to move. "Sister Liang, what are you doing..."

The next moment, Nian Ruxue saw Su Liang's lips move, and then she heard three familiar words that struck her like lightning!

"Nian, Ru, Xue." Su Liang enunciated each word, every one of them like a heavy hammer, fiercely pounding Nian Ruxue's brain, leaving her mind blank and her face devoid of color.

Before Nian Ruxue could even begin to think about how Su Liang could possibly know it was her, she heard Su Liang voluntarily explain, "The master who came just now was my guard in disguise. When you had Nian Ruting pretend to be you in the Military Exam, and now you're pretending to be Yan Shiba to be a spy beside me, why didn't you think that I would use the same method against you? Do you really think your disguise is flawless? Oh no, you panicked today, feeling that you were going to be exposed. You even mistook your own master for someone else. With that alone, I heard you want to kill me? Who gave you the courage and confidence?"

Su Liang's knife approached Nian Ruxue's eyes, clearly seeing the reflection of the blade in her eyes. "Now, you should only be thinking about one thing – prove your worth to me. Otherwise, I will first cut off your face that doesn't belong to you, and then have someone peel your skin alive. Because I'm busy and don't have the time, but I feel that I must send you off slowly and properly to do justice to your brilliant plan of using kidnapped hostages to threaten me. Within three breaths, give me one reason, or I will blind one of your eyes. Three, two..."

Nian Ruxue turned pale, "Yan Shiba... Yan Shiba is still alive!"

This was indeed one of the questions Su Liang had originally planned to ask. Su Liang guessed that Yan Shiba's chances of survival were slim, but hearing Nian Ruxue's words, she felt that it was not impossible for Yan Shiba to be alive. As the saying goes, "A living person has value." The real Yan Shiba was not suitable to be a spy, but "killing her" and "temporarily sparing her life for future use" were more in line with Su Liang's judgment of Sheng Yue's style.

“Useful,” Su Liang’s eyes turned icy. “But it doesn’t reflect your worth. You should persuade me that your life is useful, for example, by keeping you alive, I can make Sheng Yue hand over the real Yan Shiba. Do you have that kind of worth?”

“Yes!” Nian Ruxue blurted out, “Don’t kill me, I’m useful!”

Su Liang sneered, “After so long, seeing you now disappoints me. I thought you were hiding somewhere, biding your time, waiting to strike back and pose a threat to me.”

Nian Ruxue’s face stiffened, Su Liang’s words struck her deepest pain. When she learned that her secret was discovered and fled, she indeed thought that one day she would make a strong comeback, reclaiming what belonged to her and crushing Su Liang underfoot!

But dreams are often grander than reality. Without talent and strength, Nian Ruxue couldn’t find a place to practice her deception, nor an opportunity to improve herself in the years she was missing. And the result was her present state.

“Tell me, what use are you?” Su Liang coldly asked, “Three breaths time, and I’ve already picked an eye.” As she spoke, the knife in her hand slowly moved from above Nian Ruxue’s right eye to her left eye.

“I...” Nian Ruxue’s face turned ashen, “I’m Sheng Yue’s woman!”

“Really? I don’t believe it.” Su Liang’s face showed ridicule. To be honest, she thought Sheng Yue wouldn’t be interested in Nian Ruxue.

“It’s true... it’s really true!” Nian Ruxue’s expression was desperate, “It was Mo Yan who arranged for me to be with him on Xingluo Island, and he didn’t refuse! I even had a son for him!”

Su Liang was stunned, and put away her knife, sitting down by the bed.

Just as Nian Ruxue was slightly relieved, Su Liang’s hand gripped her neck!

“Tell me your story, starting from the day you disappeared on the Military Exam. If I find you lying once, I will poke your eye out.” Su Liang sneered, “At the moment, I don’t see your true value. Even if what you just said is true, looking at your current state, it’s obvious that Sheng Yue doesn’t care about you and his son isn’t in your stomach.”

Nian Ruxue looked at Su Liang’s icy eyes, and suddenly burst into tears, sobbing, “Su Liang, you must know how hard these years have been for me. It’s not easy for me to be alive, being manipulated by others, arranged by Mo Yan to be Sheng Yue’s woman, to have a child for him. He changed my appearance to this state, even hurting me to deceive you, I had no chance to refuse... In your eyes, I’m worthless, you can kill me with a flick of your finger. But do we really have that deep of a grudge to make you want to kill me? I was wrong back then but I didn’t hurt you. I know you have a kind heart, can’t you let me go? You have saved so many people and helped so many people, why can’t you help me and let me break free from the control and suffering?”

Su Liang's hand did not withdraw, but neither did it tighten. She looked at Nian Ruxue, her expression calm, "Playing the victim? You've been in my house for a while. If you wanted to get free from Sheng Yue's control and break free from suffering, what were you doing before? He poisoned you, but I could cure it, if you had confessed everything at the beginning, I might've let you go. Seeing how excited you were to see Qi Jun pretend to be Sheng Yue today, wanting him to take you away, my house must be the real suffering and I must be the wolf to you."

Nian Ruxue's face stiffened, "I... some things are beyond my control, and you know I have always been confused, making the wrong choices in critical moments, but I really didn't mean to, I swear!"

Su Liang's expression remained indifferent, "Can you stop talking nonsense? Answer my previous question. You can also choose not to say anything, and I'll poke your eyes out and throw you in the dungeon to wait for death. What you want to say probably isn't very useful, but it'll save me some time."

Seeing Su Liang raising the knife again, Nian Ruxue's face changed drastically, "Alright! I'll tell!"

Su Liang looked at Nian Ruxue, and saw her tear-streaked face suddenly give a cold laugh, "I'm not Sheng Yue's woman, nor have I given birth to a child for him, but I know where he's keeping Yan Shiba. As long as you swear to let me go, I'll tell you where Yan Shiba is! This trade is not a loss for you, right? Unless you don't care about Yan Shiba at all, but seeing how you've taken care of me, I think you still want to save her as soon as possible."

"Fine." Su Liang nodded.

Nian Ruxue snorted, "Swear on your daughter, or I won't believe it."

At the next moment, the knife in Su Liang's hand cut across Nian Ruxue's face, drawing a crimson cross on it.

Nian Ruxue screamed, covering her face, blood seeping through her fingers. She stared at Su Liang, "Don't you want Yan Shiba's life anymore?"

"Her life is not in your hands. Since you waver in your words about your relationship with Sheng Yue, how can I be sure when you say Yan Shiba is still alive?" Su Liang said coldly, "Anyway, it's easy for Sheng Yue to get hostages to threaten me, adding another Yan Shiba. If she's alive, Sheng Yue would definitely use her. As for you, you can go to die now."

As the words fell, the sharp knife in Su Liang's hand stabbed towards Nian Ruxue's neck.

Nian Ruxue pushed Su Liang away violently and fell to the ground, her expression full of shock and horror, "Don't kill me, I'll tell you a secret!"

As Su Liang approached her with the knife, she heard Nian Ruxue's trembling voice, "Sheng Yue... Sheng Yue's mother was killed by Mo Yan! I accidentally overheard this, he thought I was under the influence of sedatives, but I woke up early! This must be useful to you! I swear it's true! Absolutely true!"

Su Liang's heart stirred. Sheng Yue's mother, the wife who made Pu Cheng sad enough to become a monk, was harmed by Mo Yan? What can be confirmed is that Nian Ruxue was transformed into Yan Shiba by Sheng Yue himself. From this, it can be inferred that Sheng Yue's mother, with a high

probability, was an unknown Transmigrator, and was discovered by Mo Yan back then, just as Mo Yan had sent people to investigate Gu Ling and Su Liang previously. Sheng Yue's "Divine Hand" art might have been taught to him by his mother.

Considering what Min Rou said about Sheng Yue's age and process of getting to Xingluo Island, Su Liang had a bold guess: Did Sheng Yue follow Mo Yan outwardly but actually sought revenge?

Su Liang looked at Nian Ruxue again, "Where is Yan Shiba? If you tell me, I won't kill you today, and I might consider how to use you later. This is the best condition I can give you, or else you'll see Yama King within three breaths."

Nian Ruxue bit her lip, "If I tell you, you really won't kill me?"

"Don't test my patience any further." Su Liang frowned.

"In Liang Country, on Wolong Mountain." Nian Ruxue stated a place that surprised Su Liang.

"Alright, since you've learned to be obedient, now answer my previous question and tell me what happened between your disappearance and appearing in Su Family Village again." Su Liang sat down once more.

Nian Ruxue's expression stiffened, and it was apparent she didn't want to say it, but Su Liang was insistent. It was difficult to weave fabrications into a coherent story that could stand up to scrutiny.

"It's meaningless for you to fight against me right now." Nian Ruxue was still trying to stall, "You should hurry and figure out how to deal with Sheng Yue. He may come back tonight."

"You don't need to worry about that." Su Liang shook her head. She had already thought about how to deal with Sheng Yue and Pu Cheng next.

After leaving Ren Dong's courtyard, Su Liang walked back to Yuanming Pavilion alone, only to see Cheng Yun coming out from inside.

"Su Liang." Cheng Yun spoke, his voice somewhat hoarse, and he no longer called her Su benefactor.

"How are you?" Su Liang asked.

Cheng Yun shook his head, "I am fine. But there is something I need to tell you."

Su Liang nodded slightly, "Go ahead."

Cheng Yun's eyes suddenly became sharp, "Since that person is my master, you said he cares about me. If he takes another hostage to threaten you again, don't show yourself. If he doesn't back down, I'll end my own life!"

Chapter 432: 432. The same jade pendant

Hidden behind the door, Ji Xiaoshu listened with astonishment. “No wonder Uncle Cheng Yun was so heartbroken and didn’t say anything when asked. So it turns out that the big villain who caught Third Junior Brother last night was actually Cheng Yun’s master!”

Zhengzheng frowned, “True, we can’t judge a person by their appearance. He looked like a good person.”

“That’s called a hypocrite, a real villain!” Ji Xiaoshu huffed. “This kind of person is more hateful than those who openly do harm! They’re not only bad but also deceive people’s emotions!”

Zhengzheng let out a small sigh and gestured for Ji Xiaoshu to stop talking. He listened intently to Su Liang and Cheng Yun’s conversation, thinking that Su Liang would definitely not let Cheng Yun take his own life.

Unexpectedly, Su Liang said, “Alright, I’ve been thinking the same.”

Both kids were a bit stunned. This didn’t match their expectations.

Soon, Zhengzheng whispered, “This must be Master’s plan. It’s not as simple as it seems.”

Ji Xiaoshu immediately nodded in agreement, “Yes, yes, right! It must be the case!”

The next moment, Su Liang turned her head to look at them. The two little ones immediately retracted their heads, only to hear Su Liang ask, “Has your homework been completed?”

Ji Xiaoshu quickly pulled Zhengzheng to the desk by the window, “Was Master just asking about homework? Does Uncle Cheng Yun also have homework assigned by Master? Master is really terrifying. She doesn’t spare even the monks.”

Zhengzheng covered Ji Xiaoshu’s mouth, stopping him from speaking. His attempt to cover up his eavesdropping had been quite terrible.

Upon hearing the footsteps behind her, Su Liang saw Qiao Cong returning. Earlier, while she was questioning Nian Ruxue, Qiao Cong had been listening under the back window.

“Are you discussing how to deal with Sheng Yue? Why not go inside and talk?” Qiao Cong asked.

Su Liang shook her head slightly, “I want to chat with Cheng Yun. I will see Master later.”

“That’s fine, too. I know you’ll have a plan. I’ll go check on Nuannuan.” With that, Qiao Cong left.

Su Liang led Cheng Yun to the pavilion by the lake, where they could see two children diligently writing in the Yuanming Pavilion across the lake.

“Did Pu Cheng ever mention your background?” Su Liang asked Cheng Yun.

Cheng Yun sighed faintly, “He mentioned it once, saying I was the orphan left behind by his old friend.”

“Did he ever mention who his old friend was, or what kind of person your parents were?” Su Liang asked.

Cheng Yun shook his head, “No.”

Su Liang found it hard to believe that if Cheng Yun really was the left-behind orphan of Pu Cheng’s old friend and Pu Cheng truly wanted his nephew to return to secular life, he wouldn’t share the details about his parents with Cheng Yun.

With Cheng Yun’s personality, even if he didn’t want to return to secular life, he wouldn’t defy his elders and reject hearing about his parents. Moreover, Cheng Yun’s reluctance to return to secular life stemmed from his upbringing in the temple and his strong self-discipline, not because he despised his unknown birth parents so much that he rejected knowing about them.

As long as Pu Cheng was willing to share, Cheng Yun would not refuse to listen. However, Pu Cheng mentioned wanting Cheng Yun to return to secular life on the one hand, while on the other hand, he only brushed off Cheng Yun’s origins with the phrase “orphan of an old friend,” which made no sense.

Unless there was a hidden truth that couldn’t be revealed.

“Did Pu Cheng ever give you anything?” Su Liang asked.

Cheng Yun nodded, “A jade pendant. As a monk, I don’t wear it, but I keep it in my bundle.”

“Show it to me,” Su Liang said.

Cheng Yun immediately stood up, jumped across the lake using his martial arts skills, and entered Yuanming Pavilion through the second-floor window without using the front door.

Overnight, this highly skilled but previously passive little monk had changed a lot.

Soon, Cheng Yun brought the jade pendant back with him to the pavilion and handed it to Su Liang.

Looking at the familiar purple jade pendant in her hand, Su Liang was suddenly at a loss for words.

“What’s the matter, have you seen it before?” Cheng Yun asked, frowning.

Su Liang reached out and pulled off the jade pendant around her neck, revealing it to Cheng Yun.

Cheng Yun’s eyes widened in disbelief as he stared at the two identical jade pendants in Su Liang’s hand. Apart from Su Liang’s pendant being tied with a red string, they were exactly the same in size and pattern!

Su Liang turned both jade pendants over, and the other side was also exactly the same!

The translucent violet color, mysterious and beautiful, reminded Su Liang of when she discovered this jade pendant in the Su Family Village shortly after she arrived in this world.

Su Liang had always suspected that the jade pendant was related to the original owner’s unidentified mother, and now she was even more certain.

Nian Ruxue said that she accidentally overheard Sheng Yue mentioning that his mother was killed by Mo Yan. And without surprise, the original owner’s mother should be Mo Yan and Shen Qingxue’s biological daughter.

Su Liang even began to suspect that Cheng Yun might be her real brother... if there was something mysterious about the death of the original owner’s mother.

However, it shouldn't be that clichéd... Su Liang thought. Her speculation that Cheng Yun was Pu Cheng's son and Sheng Yue's real brother was most likely true. Maybe the original owner's mother and Pu Cheng's deceased wife had a similar relationship as Situ Xiang and Situ Ning, which was why the jade pendants were identical?

Although it was just speculation, Su Liang was determined to tell Cheng Yun the reality of the situation. As things stood, Cheng Yun was already involved and could not turn back. He had to move forward.

"What on earth is going on here?" Cheng Yun was obviously confused by the two jade pendants. He stared blankly at Su Liang and, hesitating for a moment, asked the question in his heart. "Could it be that I'm your brother?"

It was normal for two people of unclear backgrounds, holding the same tokens, to have thoughts like that.

Su Liang placed the two jade pendants side by side and sighed softly, "I wish it were the case, but based on what we know right now, it probably isn't."

Cheng Yun frowned, his eyes obviously disappointed. Just now, when the thought of being siblings occurred to him, he had felt very excited, very much looking forward to a positive response. Su Liang was his most important friend and someone he liked very much. If they were real siblings, he might have chosen to return to secular life without hesitation. For Cheng Yun, who was emotionally wounded at the moment, having such a beautiful family and a good relative was undoubtedly a great comfort.

"However," Su Liang continued, "based on these two jade pendants, our mothers might have been sisters or had a similar relationship."

Cheng Yun's eyes immediately brightened, "Really? So, I'm your cousin?!"

If you are, then so is Sheng Yue... Seeing Cheng Yun's expression, Su Liang could hardly bear to tell him the more certain truth.

Still, she had to say what needed to be said. The entanglements of the older generation had little to do with them in reality.

"Let's keep the jade pendants here for now," Su Liang collected the two jade pendants and said to Cheng Yun, "What I'm going to tell you next might be hard for you to accept, but I hope you can look at it calmly."

Cheng Yun's heart sank, and he took a deep breath, "Go ahead. After last night's events, what else can't I accept?"

"Pu Cheng might actually be your real father," Su Liang dropped a bombshell.

Upon hearing Su Liang's words, Cheng Yun seemed to have turned to stone, his expression rigid and his body even more so.

Su Liang continued, "You already know who Sheng Yue is. I suspect he is your elder brother. After your mother died, overwhelmed with grief, Pu Cheng became a monk and took you to Ping'an Temple. As for why Sheng Yue did not join you in becoming monks, based on the information I

have now, it is possible that he harbored hatred, intent on avenging your mother, so he went to Xingluo Island in his youth. Now, Sheng Yue has lost a hand due to Gu Ling and no longer has any subordinates. He went to Pu Cheng for help to catch me. This is my conjecture. It may not be entirely correct, but I feel like I should tell you.”

“Impossible...” Cheng Yun shook his head repeatedly. “He... how could he be my... No! There must be some misunderstanding!” He couldn’t understand what Su Liang was saying at all.

“I know it’s hard for you to accept, but what I want to say is that even if my conjecture is true, it doesn’t mean anything. Who you are, as a son or a brother, has nothing to do with who you are as a person. You are Cheng Yun, a monk who grew up in Ping’an Temple, with a pure heart. We are your family. Just remember that.” Su Liang looked serious.

“I’ve studied Buddhist Dharma for many years, yet I don’t understand people’s hearts at all.” Cheng Yun’s face was filled with bitterness.

“As for the people who let you down, it doesn’t matter if you don’t understand.” Su Liang said, “Pu Cheng deceived you and lied to me. He is our enemy. What we need to do now is to deal with them and not let them threaten our home.”

Cheng Yun slowly nodded, “Yes, our home... we will not let them do as they please! I will protect you, Nuannuan, and Zhengzheng, and Xiaoshu...”

“You said before that if Pu Cheng comes again, and if he dares to act recklessly, you would take your own life. That’s correct, it’s a strategy.” Su Liang was explaining to Cheng Yun and also teaching him. “Last night, Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue captured Jingyun to force me to meet their demands. Perhaps they wanted to take me away or kill me on the spot. Even if Jingyun is not my child, even if they caught an unknown child in the city last night, they can still threaten me. Do you know why?”

Cheng Yun nodded, “Because you are kind.”

Su Liang scoffed, “Their tactics are called moral kidnapping. They think I am a good person, so they can use just anyone to threaten me, relying on the fact that I won’t stand idly by while they hurt innocent people.”

“It’s despicable, utterly shameless!” Cheng Yun clenched his fists.

“So, you can also use this tactic against Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue.” Su Liang said.

“You mean...” Cheng Yun looked confused. “Use my own life to... morally... no, they have no morals! To ‘kidnap’ them?”

“Yes.” Su Liang nodded, “Without Gu Ling here, I would have a hard time dealing with them. I know you are determined and can really give up your life. But don’t do that,

we want you alive. Nuannuan needs you, and so do Zhengzheng and Xiaoshu. So, it's just a threat. As long as they care about you, your threat will work. Don't feel burdened, this is called tit-for-tat, and our means do not involve hurting others."

"What you say makes sense." Cheng Yun's eyes narrowed, "Then let's do it! The next time I see them, I'll tell them, if they dare to hurt you or any innocent person I know about, I'll kill myself!"

"Pu Cheng may believe you, but Sheng Yue may not, and he may suspect that this is my plan, betting that I would never let you die." Su Liang said, "So, this must be your own plan, very determined, so much so that I can't persuade you otherwise. Just like when you first told me that you wanted to take your own life, it has to look like that to them. Do you understand?"

Cheng Yun got it, "I understand!"

"Alright, the details will be told to you later. First, go change your clothes and eat something, then check Zhengzheng and Xiaoshu's homework, and see where Nuannuan is, and bring her to me." Su Liang quickly arranged everything for Cheng Yun.

Cheng Yun, hearing of so many tasks, had no time to feel sad or conflicted, and quickly left the pavilion to get to work.

Watching his retreating figure, Su Liang let out a long sigh of relief. In a way, Cheng Yun was her lucky star, always appearing when she needed him the most and being very obedient.

Su Liang sat alone in the pavilion, recalling what happened between Nian Ruxue's disappearance and her appearance in Su Family Village as Nian Ruxue had explained not long ago.

Once upon a time, Nian Ruting had a mysterious and little-known master, from whom she secretly learned her martial arts. He was an elder on Xingluo Island, and his purpose of accepting Nian Ruting as a disciple was to secretly cultivate her. He planned to take her to Xingluo Island when she came of age and have her marry his grandson.

It was an outrageous story, but it was probably true.

Nian Ruxue said that the descendants of those old people on Xingluo Island all found their wives in this way, and there were even quite a few young men like Sheng Yue who were recruited to Xingluo Island and had marriage needs. There was not a single female martial arts master among those recruited to Xingluo Island.

There were more men than women on the island, and most marriages within the island were among relatives, so they had to go outside to find women to bring back. Nian Ruting was chosen because she was clean, talented, beautiful, and had a good martial arts aptitude. Bringing such a granddaughter-in-law back would be very prestigious, and if Nian Ruting's martial arts could be perfected, she would bring value to her master's family beyond carrying on the bloodline.

Nian Ruting wasn't taken back to the island early on by her master because he feared she would be snatched away by others once she was on the island before coming of age. After all, there were different classes on the island, and he wasn't someone with a high status.

On the day of the Military Exam, when Nian Ruting's identity as Nian Ruxue was exposed by Su Liang in public, Nian Ruting's master happened to arrive in the capital city, wanting to take her away.

That old man always had a mission when he left the island, and the secret mission of choosing a wife for his grandson was unknown to others on the island. Therefore, they dared not make a fuss. Knowing that Nian Ruting was in trouble, he could have saved his disciple with his strength, but he resolutely gave up, not wanting to cause trouble. Instead, he chose a substitute immediately, which was Nian Ruxue.

Looking back, this was indeed incredibly ironic.

Nian Ruting competed in the martial arts competition on behalf of Nian Ruxue and got caught. At the same time, Nian Ruxue became her stand-in and was taken to Xingluo Island. Fate had come full circle, and the proverb, "retribution will not be delayed," held true.

From Su Liang and Gu Ling's perspective, Nian Ruxue's disappearance was due to her being kidnapped by a master, not because she had the ability to escape without a trace on her own.

While Nian Ruting suffered on behalf of Nian Ruxue, the calamity originally intended for Nian Ruting fell on Nian Ruxue instead. The night after arriving on Xingluo Island, she was forced to "consummate" her marriage with the old man's grandson. For her, those days were unbearable, living without dignity or freedom; it was a fate worse than death.

Women's status on Xingluo Island was very low, only the descendants of important figures like He Qianqian and Min Rou could have comfortable lives. Min Rou was well-protected, hardly seeing the ugly side of Xingluo Island. Other women brought from outside were just tools for men to vent their desires and bear them children, constantly beaten, humiliated, and even degraded by multiple men at once.

Nian Ruxue experienced all of this. She was humiliated in secret by her so-called husband's brothers and could only endure it silently. If she revealed it, those beasts would not face any consequences, but her life would become even more difficult.

Nian Ruxue indeed had a son, who was now on Xingluo Island.

Nian Ruxue said she was saved by Sheng Yue. On a certain night, Sheng Yue made arrangements for her to escape Xingluo Island, and someone sent her to a place in Yin Country. Three months later, Nian Ruxue saw Sheng Yue again, and from that time on, Sheng Yue became her master.

Nian Ruxue admitted that she tried to seduce Sheng Yue, but he was unmoved, so she had no choice but to give up and let Sheng Yue manipulate her. That led to today's events.

Nian Ruxue was initially unwilling to reveal her experiences because they were too shameful. Yet from the moment she met Su Liang, she had always harbored jealousy toward her, which persisted and even intensified, fueled by resentment and unwillingness. Therefore, she was reluctant to divulge her "dark history" to Su Liang.

However, Su Liang did not give her any room to refuse.

In the end, Nian Ruxue with tears streaming down her face, pleaded for Su Liang to show her some pity, to forgive her mistakes and give her a chance to live.

Though Su Liang sympathized with Nian Ruxue's past experiences, she ultimately believed it was Nian Ruxue's own karma that led to her misery. If Nian Ruxue hadn't taken advantage of Nian Ruting in the first place, these events might have never involved her.

Furthermore, Su Liang could have forgiven Nian Ruxue if she confessed everything when they first met at the Su Mansion and genuinely repented. However, not only did she refrain from doing so, but she also spoke about how to deal with Su Liang in front of "Sheng Yue" today, even regretting not killing Su Liang sooner.

Su Liang felt pity but not sympathy for Nian Ruxue. Before Nian Ruxue confessed, she had shown her fickle, dark side to Su Liang – that was the real Nian Ruxue.

Su Liang was quite sure that her bitter experiences had not made Nian Ruxue reflect on her past mistakes but only twisted her mind even more. Given the opportunity, Nian Ruxue would still do everything in her power to kill Su Liang and take everything from her.

However, Su Liang didn't kill Nian Ruxue just yet; she still had use for her in tonight's plan.

A while later, Cheng Yun, who had changed his clothes, came over while holding Gu Xiaonuan. In front of the child, Cheng Yun's eyes were always gentle, filled with a touch of warmth.

"Mom!" Gu Xiaonuan called out loudly, then giggled and shouted, "Dad!" She seemed to know that Su Liang enjoyed hearing her call for her dad, even though he wasn't there.

Su Liang took her daughter and heard Cheng Yun say, "We have the same jade pendant. No matter what, I hope I can be your brother. Do you accept?"

Su Liang looked at Cheng Yun's nervous yet hopeful gaze and smiled, "Of course. But I actually think you are more like a younger brother."

Cheng Yun shook his head, "No, I'm older than you."

Su Liang raised Gu Xiaonuan's little hand and shook it, "Call him uncle."

Gu Xiaonuan nodded her little head, "Uncle! Uncle!"

Cheng Yun's eyes were warm, "Alright, I've made up my mind. I want to leave the monastery and make this place my home. Before Gu...my brother-in-law returns, I will protect all of you."

Chapter 433: Divide and Conquer Strategy

The capital city was already in winter, but Jiaye City in the south was still warm like spring.

Gu Ling and Cen Man traveled swiftly across the sea, taking turns steering the boat and barely stopping. Finally, at dusk, they landed ashore near Nanshan City and returned to land once more.

Although eager to return home, Gu Ling went to Jiaye City first.

When he saw Lian Shun, it was already night.

The Lin Family had already relocated to the capital city, and previously Nian Jincheng and his wife Yang Yu were living there. Now, because Yang Yu was pregnant, Nian Jincheng took her back to the capital.

In the vast Lian Mansion, only Lian Shun and a few servants were left.

Lian Shun was eating dinner alone. The large round table, which was once lively with family, was now particularly desolate.

Seeing Gu Ling suddenly appear before him, Lian Shun blinked, "Am I hallucinating because of loneliness? Why do I see Gu Xiaoling? I was thinking about Su Xiaoliang..."

Gu Ling's expression was indifferent as he walked over and sat down. There was no empty bowl on the table, so he took the soup bowl directly and drank the soup with a spoon.

The smile on Lian Shun's face instantly grew bigger, "Gu Xiaoling, you really came back! That's great! I missed you so much! How come it's just you? What happened to Qiao Xiaojing? Weren't you going to save Ying Ying?"

Not Ying Xiaoying, because when Lian Shun mentioned her last, he suddenly became nervous. There had been no news of Ying Ying all along, and he was worried that something had happened, even though he always reassured himself that Ying Ying would be fine.

"Alive." Gu Ling said succinctly.

Lian Shun instantly came alive, feeling completely relaxed, the heavy stone weighing on his heart turned into smoke and disappeared. His eyes sparkled, "Where are they?"

"Behind me." Gu Ling said.

"Everyone is alright, right?" Lian Shun couldn't help but confirm again.

Gu Ling nodded slightly, giving him some peace of mind.

Lian Shun stood up happily, "That's great! I knew that if you went personally, there wouldn't be any problems!" Even though he said this and sincerely believed in Gu Ling's abilities, it didn't conflict with his concern and confusion.

Lian Shun had only eaten a few bites of his dinner, but wasn't hungry, so he gave his bowl and chopsticks to Gu Ling. Then he stood behind Gu Ling and massaged his shoulders, "Gu Xiaoling, you've worked hard!"

Lian Shun's technique wasn't very good, but Gu Ling didn't mind, knowing that he was just too excited.

After eating his fill, Gu Ling put down his chopsticks and briefly told Lian Shun what had happened.

Lian Shun listened quietly until he heard that Gu Ling rescued Old Uncle Mu and the two of them escaped successfully. Lian Shun let out a long sigh of relief, "That was so thrilling! Gu Xiaoling, you are amazing! No wonder Su Xiaoliang always calls you a Great God, you truly deserve the title."

Then Gu Ling mentioned the situation with Ying Ying and her brother.

Lian Shun froze, "She...lost her memory?"

Gu Ling nodded, "She was drugged and lost her memory. For now, we haven't found a way to restore it." He was referring to himself and Su Liang. They had researched solutions for Lian Shan's amnesia before but to no avail. He believed that Su Liang would not give up.

Lian Shun also recalled his sister's memory loss, sighed, and then smiled again, "It's okay, as long as she's safe."

"Qiao Jing has already told her a lot of things." Gu Ling said.

Lian Shun had an indescribable expression, "Qiao Jing..."

Gu Ling knew what he was thinking, "Don't worry, what you're worried about will not happen. Qiao Jing has his eyes on another girl."

Lian Shun looked surprised, "Who?"

"Min Rou." Gu Ling said. For matters of the heart, getting along is the foundation. Lian Shun and Ying Ying had spent time together, and feelings of love had grown. Qiao Jing met Min Rou first, and coupled with Qiao Cong's constant nagging, he had developed feelings for her.

"I see." Lian Shun chuckled, "Very good, very good!"

"Sheng Yue may have gone to the capital. I will leave tonight. Qiao Jing will probably arrive in three to five days. I've told him what to do. You can prepare first." Gu Ling repeated what he had told Qiao Jing to Lian Shun.

Lian Shun's face turned serious, "I understand. Don't worry, I'll arrange everything right after you leave tonight. I've been worried about not having anything to do lately, and no matter how high those scum's martial arts are, as long as we don't let them get ashore, let's see what they can do!"

Cen Man entered from outside, she had just gone somewhere to wash up.

Lian Shun quickly ordered a servant to prepare hot soup and rice for her. After Cen Man had finished eating, she and Gu Ling left Jiaye City to continue their journey back to the capital city.

That night, Lian Shun didn't sleep and started arranging the matters Gu Ling had entrusted to him.

The capital city, Su Mansion.

As night fell, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu took Gu Xiaonuan to the underground secret chamber after dinner.

"Don't worry, Master, we'll take good care of our little sister! Master and Uncle Cheng Yun, please take care!" Ji Xiaoshu was always well-behaved in front of Su Liang.

Su Liang smiled, "Go ahead. We'll be fine." She then watched the three children enter the secret chamber.

After a while, Nangong Qian and Qiuyue also entered the secret chamber.

Nian Ruxue's hands were tied with ropes and dragged over by Ren Dong. Only simple hemostasis was done on the wound on her face. It was still bright red. As soon as she entered, her eyes turned to Su Liang with deep hatred, but the next moment, she put on a pitiful look again.

Su Liang looked away. Nian Ruxue bore Yan Shiba's face, which she hadn't known before. Now, looking at it again, it felt very strange.

"What are you going to do?" Nian Ruxue asked.

With a glance from Su Liang, Ren Dong raised her hand and knocked Nian Ruxue unconscious. The following matter didn't require her knowledge. Originally, they wanted to make use of her, but she was replaceable in Su Liang's plan. They couldn't let her stay by herself to prevent Sheng Yue from taking her away again.

"Can he handle it?" Qiao Cong asked, looking at Cheng Yun.

Cheng Yun frowned at his words, but didn't say anything. Indeed, he was a little uneasy in his heart because he had never done the things to be done next. It was also very different from his nature, and it would be a challenge.

Su Liang smiled and said just two words, "Of course."

Cheng Yun's confidence instantly doubled. Su Liang trusted him so much, he couldn't let her down.

"Master, let me pretend to be you. I know what to do," Ren Dong said seriously. It was the third time she had mentioned it that day.

Qi Jun nodded, "That would be more secure. Even if they find out later, they shouldn't do anything to Ren Dong. If they don't find out, then everything will be perfect."

Qiao Cong agreed, "Xiaoliang, you should hide. We will protect Ren Dong."

As Qi Jun had said, it wasn't about making Ren Dong take the bullet for Su Liang. It was just a strategy to gain more initiative.

When Su Liang first met Ren Dong, it was Duanmu Yi who had arranged for Ren Dong to be a body double. Their figures were very similar.

However, Su Liang still refused, "There's no need for tonight. I have it under control."

Seeing her insistence, Ren Dong and the others had to give up.

Close to midnight, Su Liang's room was lit, and so was Cheng Yun's. One was reading a medical book, and the other was reading a Buddhist scripture.

Although Gu Xiaonuan usually fell asleep around this time, she wasn't there now, which made Su Liang feel unaccustomed. In the days when Gu Ling was not by her side, Su Liang shifted part of her longing for him onto Gu Xiaonuan. Seeing her daughter's face every day was like seeing Gu Ling.

Su Liang looked at the note on her desk, which was counting time. According to her estimation, Gu Ling should already be on his way back to the capital from Jiaye City. If Gu Ling went to Xingluo Island and found that Sheng Yue was not there, he would definitely guess that Sheng Yue had come to the capital.

Cheng Yun held the Buddhist scripture, but was actually mumbling to himself with low voice. Occasionally, his gaze would suddenly turn cold, and he would look at himself in the mirror. He was practicing acting and reviewing the words Su Liang had taught him.

Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue came out of the woods again, and were immediately spotted by Qi Jun. Qi Jun shook the wind chime hanging outside Yuanming Pavilion as an alarm.

Su Liang put down her medical book, and Cheng Yun stood up with a stern expression, took a deep breath, clenched his fists, and then quickly let go.

However, Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue didn't approach Yuanming Pavilion, they stopped by the lake. After last night's incident, there had already been some "tacit understanding" between the two sides. It didn't take long for Su Liang to walk out of Yuanming Pavilion, appearing in the sight of Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue, with Qiao Cong by his side.

Seeing Sheng Yue holding something in his arms, Su Liang's eyes grew cold, as expected, they had captured another child.

Sheng Yue seemed to know what Su Liang would ask. Seeing Su Liang stopping five meters away, he simply said three words, "Duanmu Zhen, your adoptive daughter."

Duanmu Chen and Situ Yao's daughter, the only little princess in the royal family today, had been raised in the palace of Empress Dowager Xiao.

Su Liang thought that Sheng Yue had captured Duanmu Zhen tonight to let her know that they could freely enter and exit the Imperial Palace, and it would be easy to kill Duanmu Chen.

Duanmu Zhen did not make any sound in Sheng Yue's arms; she should be asleep.

Su Liang's face was calm, "What do you want? Just say it."

"You come with us. I won't hurt anyone else." Sheng Yue's tone was also very calm.

"Why?" Su Liang asked.

"You'll find out, but not now." Sheng Yue said, "For now, you just need to make the right choice."

"Really? Why is going with you the correct choice?" Su Liang retorted.

"Because you are a good person." Sheng Yue replied directly.

"Would you really kill an innocent child?" Su Liang asked.

Sheng Yue didn't hesitate, "This is a world where the strong prey on the weak. I'm not a good person, I have things I need to do, and I'm willing to pay any price for it."

"Including your father's life?" Su Liang scoffed, "If I say, you kill Pu Cheng, and I'll go with you, how about that?"

Wearing a wig and a mask, Pu Cheng's face stiffened, not expecting that Su Liang had already recognized him and said it so calmly! Then, did Cheng Yun know?

Su Liang didn't wait for Sheng Yue to answer, looking at Pu Cheng, "Yes, I guessed it was you last night because there were too many coincidences. You shouldn't have let Cheng Yun come to my house yesterday."

At this point, it was pointless for Pu Cheng to deny it. He gave a bitter smile, "I'm sorry, I thought you might understand me, after all, Ayue is my child."

"I can understand, but I can't accept it." Su Liang said coldly, "I guess Cheng Yun is also your child, right? As for your deceased friend, that friend should be yourself."

Pu Cheng's eyes changed abruptly, and Sheng Yue narrowed his eyes. Su Liang guessed that it was Pu Cheng last night, which didn't surprise him that much, but Su Liang had even guessed Cheng Yun's origin!

"You... He's not..." Pu Cheng's tone already indicated that Su Liang had guessed correctly.

"Dare to give birth, but not admit it?" Su Liang sneered, "Sending your own son to Xingluo Island, and another to become a monk, then you travel all around the world. I really can't understand your deep love for your late wife. If she has a spirit in heaven and sees the state of her two sons now, she would probably regret marrying you. Neglecting their upbringing and not disciplining them when they do wrong but instead helping the wicked! A husband and father who doesn't take responsibility, pretending to be a love sage? Ridiculous!"

"Shut up!" Pu Cheng threw off his mask, revealing his disguised face, looking agitated, "You know nothing! What right do you have to say that?"

"Just because yesterday you planned to entrust your younger son to my care during the day, and help your elder son harm me at night!" Su Liang said coldly, "You've lost face already, can't you even bear me telling the truth? Pu Cheng, what do I owe you to be treated like this? Sheng Yue is your son, you have your difficulties, and you want to help him, saying that I should understand you? Do I need to dig up the graves of your ancestors from eighteen generations before I can know such a disgusting and shameless person like you in this life?"

"Your grandfather killed my mother." Sheng Yue spoke, seemingly explaining the legitimacy of Pu Cheng's actions against Su Liang.

Su Liang laughed coldly, "That's really hilarious! Mo Yan killed your mother, so you serve Mo Yan and help him kill me? I have to doubt that I'm not his granddaughter, and you are his biological grandson!"

Sheng Yue frowned, somewhat regretting what he had said just now. However, he didn't let it disturb his composure, looking at Pu Cheng, he saw his chest heaving, apparently having been provoked by Su Liang's words.

“Father, calm down a bit.” Sheng Yue reminded Pu Cheng.

Pu Cheng took a deep breath, and at this moment, a bald head rushed out of Yuanming Pavilion.

Cheng Yun quickly reached Su Liang’s side at an incredibly fast speed, looking at her in disbelief, “What did you just say? I’m his son? This is impossible!”

Su Liang frowned, “Since you heard it, it is as you heard. They didn’t deny it, and I guessed right. I wanted to tell you in the daytime, but you locked yourself up today, and I didn’t want to provoke you...”

Cheng Yun turned his head to look at Pu Cheng and asked in the most furious tone of his life so far, “Why?”

Pu Cheng was just trying to calm his emotions down, but when he saw Cheng Yun, he couldn’t hold back any longer, “Yunyun, I’m sorry... I’ll explain things to you, you’ve got to believe, I care about you... I swear!”

Cheng Yun trembled with rage, “You care for me? You let me join Su Liang, and then you came to harm her? How can I face myself? How ridiculous... Everything is so ridiculous!”

Su Liang grabbed Cheng Yun’s shoulder, “Calm down. Get in there first, it has nothing to do with you.”

“No, it does have something to do with me!” Cheng Yun, while pushing Su Liang away, drew the long sword from his waist and held it against his own neck, staring coldly at Pu Cheng, “I am your son, you said you cared for me, right? Let that child go, or I’ll kill myself! I once thought you were the most important person in my life, just like my father. I never thought that you would actually be my father! But this kind of father and brother is the greatest disgrace for me!”

“Don’t, Yunyun!” Pu Cheng’s face changed drastically, “Don’t hurt yourself, speak well, and I will explain everything to you!”

Su Liang tried to snatch the sword from Cheng Yun’s hand, “Stop messing around! I told you it has nothing to do with you!”

But Cheng Yun avoided Su Liang, walking towards Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue with a determined expression, “I’m saying it one more time, let that child go immediately, or I will kill myself!”

“Alright, alright!” Pu Cheng became nervous, “Ayue, quickly put that child down, let’s go!”

Sheng Yue didn’t move, staring at Cheng Yun, “Father, this is Su Liang’s trap, he’s using my brother.”

“Yunyun would really commit suicide!” Pu Cheng said, reaching out to take Duanmu Zhen immediately.

Sheng Yue dodged to the side, but Pu Cheng accidentally ripped off his fake hand and snatched the child away!

“Yunyun! Yunyun, look, I let the child go, quickly put the sword down! Don’t be impulsive!” Pu Cheng hugged Duanmu Zhen and took two steps forward.

At the moment when Sheng Yue’s fake hand fell off and the child was taken away, he immediately turned around and rushed into the woods with the fastest speed.

Qi Yan and Qi Jun, who were ambushing nearby, shot Sheng Yue, but he was immune to poison and still managed to escape.

Su Liang didn’t tell them to chase him. She admired Sheng Yue’s extreme calmness and analysis of the situation. Pu Cheng fell into Su Liang’s trap, but Sheng Yue quickly realized that this was a trap that Su Liang had prepared for them, and decisively abandoned Pu Cheng when he saw that he had lost control, running away by himself.

At this moment, Pu Cheng hadn’t realized that Sheng Yue had left. He was still persuading Cheng Yun to put down the sword and not do anything stupid.

As they approached, Cheng Yun caught the Duanmu Zhen handed over by Pu Cheng with one hand, while the long sword in his other hand switched direction and held it against Pu Cheng’s neck instead.

Pu Cheng’s face stiffened, “Yunyun... what are you doing?”

Cheng Yun, who was resolute just now, appeared very calm at this moment, “As you wish, I have left the monastic life. Su Liang is my sister, but you are not my father, and I don’t need a father like that.”

“Was it all... an act just now?” Pu Cheng looked as if struck by lightning, never expecting his innocent and somewhat naive son to change so dramatically overnight.

“All thanks to you.” Su Liang walked over, took Duanmu Zhen, pulled the blanket away, and saw the little girl sleeping soundly.

“You...” Pu Cheng clenched his teeth, “Ayue!” When he turned around, he found there was nothing behind him, and Sheng Yue’s figure had disappeared.

“Your eldest son is not like you, who want to play the victim while still acting like a scoundrel. He is much more awake than you and knows that you are useless, so he just ran away.” Su Liang said, “With one hand gone and no other help, he can’t hurt me for the time being.”

This is Su Liang’s strategy tonight: using Cheng Yun to drive a wedge between Pu Cheng and Sheng Yue.

With Sheng Yue’s strength, it would be very difficult to take him down. The biggest problem for Sheng Yue now is that the severed hand has reduced his strength and made him inconvenient to act. With Sheng Yue’s caution, he won’t show up easily before there is new help. It can be said that the crisis has been temporarily resolved.

Moreover, leaving Pu Cheng behind, Su Liang can now try to learn from him about his deceased wife's affairs and the goals of Sheng Yue and Mo Yan. That way, she and Gu Ling can finally solve their biggest question: What does Mo Yan want with the transmigrators?'

"Yunyun..." Pu Cheng looked at Cheng Yun, his eyes filled with tears.

Cheng Yun didn't put away his sword just yet, but Qiao Cong came over and took it from him.

Cheng Yun turned away, his expression indifferent, "I'll go get the kids out."

Chapter 434: 434. Wild Imagination

As the dark clouds dispersed, the moonlight shone brightly.

Supported by the sword at his neck, Pu Cheng stared at Su Liang, his eyes ice cold.

Yet, Su Liang smiled, "What's the matter? Are you blaming me for leading Cheng Yun astray, or mad at me for not surrendering easily? Don't look at me like that. You don't actually think I'm as naive as Cheng Yun used to be, do you? Oh, wait, Cheng Yun isn't like that anymore."

Finishing her words, Su Liang turned around, "If you truly care about Cheng Yun, choose to work with us and do the right thing. There's still hope for your son, Sheng Yue, to see the error of his ways."

Pu Cheng's eyes narrowed as he watched Su Liang carry Duanmu Zhen into Yuanming Pavilion.

After thoroughly examining Duanmu Zhen and confirming she was unharmed, Su Liang instructed Ren Dong and Qi Jun to enter the palace and return the child. If they encountered Duanmu Chen, they would inform him of the situation. Since no one had come to the palace to search for her, Su Liang suspected that Sheng Yue had used sedatives, and Duanmu Zhen's disappearance remained undiscovered.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu hadn't slept, but Gu Xiaonuan slumbered soundly, unaware of the events taking place outside.

When the children returned to their room upstairs, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu, learning that the crisis had been averted, could not help but surrender to sleepiness and fell asleep soon afterward.

After settling Gu Xiaonuan, Su Liang stepped out to find Cheng Yun again sitting between the two rooms in the small hall, facing the window. No one was by the lake below, as Qiao Cong had taken Pu Cheng inside after the children and Nangong Qian Qiuyue emerged from the secret chamber.

"Do you like it here?" Su Liang asked.

Cheng Yun nodded, "Sitting here makes me feel...at peace." It was a position from which he could protect his family, and the children were not far away.

"Go to sleep now, we can discuss other matters tomorrow," Su Liang gently patted Cheng Yun's shoulder.

"I'm not tired," he shook his head slightly, "You should go."

“Alright,” Su Liang nodded, returning to her room. She was indeed somewhat tired and needed to rest before considering how to pry open Pu Cheng’s mouth.

Su Liang wanted to praise Cheng Yun for his excellent acting, but the timing wasn’t right. He chose to confront reality and look forward, but he still needed time to digest the shock and pressure from the harsh truths.

Before she fell asleep, Su Liang calculated the days, figuring that Gu Ling would likely return within the next few days, and she could truly rest. To be honest, she felt immense pressure in Gu Ling’s absence.

Though Su Liang claimed the crisis had been temporarily resolved, Cheng Yun remained seated in the small hall, staring out of the open window. He didn’t relax until dawn approached, rubbing his weary eyes without returning to his room, afraid of disturbing the children. He finally fell asleep, laying his head on the table.

When Cheng Yun awoke the next day, he found a blanket laid over him. Folding it neatly, he carried it back to his room, where Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu had just woken up and were getting dressed.

Seeing Cheng Yun, the children both beamed, calling him “Uncle Cheng Yun.”

Cheng Yun loved the title. To the children, any older male could be called “uncle,” but “Uncle Cheng Yun” felt more personal and intimate.

After breakfast, Cheng Yun went to exercise with the children, without asking Su Liang how she planned to deal with Pu Cheng.

Chang’an was sent to Su Mansion to summon Su Liang to the palace.

“Sheng Yue is still waiting for a chance to capture me, so it’s inconvenient for me to go out now. It’s just as Ren Dong said last night, please tell His Majesty to strengthen precautions.” Su Liang said. If she left without Cheng Yun or Pu Cheng, it would be an opportune moment for Sheng Yue to strike. Although Su Liang would be on guard, she would not underestimate Sheng Yue’s cunning. After consecutive failures, his next move wouldn’t be simple.

Chang’an didn’t say anything more and went back to deliver his orders.

Learning that Su Liang would not come, Duanmu Chen sighed, “It’s for the best. With that man targeting her, she should be cautious. If she’s captured, it would be disastrous. I intended to discuss placing the children under her care, but considering the circumstances, it’s not appropriate. Gu Ling’s absence is already hard on her.”

Su Liang brought a pot of hot tea and entered the secret chamber.

Having been given soft muscle powder, Pu Cheng could now eat on his own and move slowly without being tied up.

Su Liang placed the teapot on the table and poured Pu Cheng a cup of tea. With his disguise removed, his bald head and real appearance were revealed. Regaining his calm, he held the teacup and said to Su Liang, “I know what you want to get from me. There’s no need to waste your energy.”

Su Liang took her seat, her expression indifferent. “You think I couldn’t possibly harm Cheng Yun, so you’re set on protecting Sheng Yue?”

Pu Cheng snorted lightly. “I admit, I underestimated you before. Ayue saw clearly last night that everything was a trap you set, and Yunyun was used by you. I fell for it because I believed in Yunyun. But I didn’t realize that you could change him so much in just two days.”

Su Liang shook her head. “It wasn’t me who truly changed him. It was you.”

Pu Cheng’s eyes narrowed slightly. “It doesn’t matter now. I know what you think of me, but that’s my child. Now that Yunyun is safe, I won’t let Ayue fall into your hands.”

Hearing this, Su Liang’s face showed a trace of ridicule. “If that’s the case, I can only guess that you two have already committed some evil deeds that led to irreparable consequences. You know that even if you and Sheng Yue choose to turn over a new leaf, you won’t be accepted by us because of your past mistakes. Am I wrong in my guess?”

Pu Cheng’s face stiffened for a moment before he concealed his gaze. “You seem to like guessing, but I don’t want to comment on your speculation.”

“Alright, let’s not talk about Sheng Yue for now.” Su Liang took out her jade pendant. “Do you recognize this?”

Pu Cheng’s gaze focused, “This is Yunyun’s jade pendant. How did you get it?”

“This one is actually his.” Su Liang took out another one. “Why do we have two identical jade pendants? I’m sure you must know something about it.”

Pu Cheng’s gaze lingered on the two violet jade pendants for a moment before he shook his head and said, “I have nothing to say.”

It seemed he really did know the origins of these two jade pendants... But Su Liang didn’t press him and instead continued with another question, “Last night, Sheng Yue said his mother, your late wife, was killed by Mo Yan. So his trip to Xingluo Island was for revenge?”

As Su Liang spoke, Pu Cheng closed his eyes. “I have nothing to say about this either.”

“Mo Yan is your enemy. Why did you help him make trouble for us? Or, maybe you and your son are not helping Mo Yan, but are trying to achieve your own ends relating to us?” Su Liang continued asking.

Pu Cheng remained silent with his eyes closed.

Su Liang changed the topic, “If I’m not wrong, your late wife was a transmigrator from another world, right?”

Upon hearing this, Pu Cheng’s eyes twitched involuntarily.

“You shouldn’t be surprised that I know certain things. This is the very reason Sheng Yue sought us out, isn’t it? What was your late wife’s profession in her previous life? Plastic Surgeon? And she taught her skills to Sheng Yue? Or did she teach you first, and then you passed it on to Sheng Yue?”

“You think Cheng Yun is safe because you believe Sheng Yue will definitely fail? Or will it be when Sheng Yue succeeds in capturing me or killing me or Gu Ling that you wonder what Cheng Yun will do? He won’t kill himself, but he will definitely fight Sheng Yue to the death. Last night was arranged by me, but him holding the sword to his own throat was not my original idea. That was what he really wanted to do, but I managed to persuade him against it. If any of you hurt anyone in this family, it will cause double the pain for Cheng Yun, and he will never let you go. You think you can protect both of your sons, but when you should have raised them properly, you didn’t fulfill your responsibility as a father. Now both of your sons have taken two opposite paths, and you can only choose one and abandon the other.”

“Ayue won’t kill you. He promised me.” Pu Cheng’s expression turned complicated as he spoke to Su Liang.

Su Liang scoffed, “So he might have wanted to kill me but you stopped him? Then you were going to help him capture me? Do I have to thank you for that?”

Pu Cheng’s face darkened, and he closed his eyes once more.

“It’s clear that you’re good at avoiding reality. Your late wife really had poor judgment in men.” Su Liang said, “I find it laughable that two days ago I actually believed you were a carefree monk. I won’t use Cheng Yun to threaten you because he’s my family. I won’t use a knife to force you either, because I know it’s useless against you. I’ll give you one more day. If you choose differently tomorrow, I’ll give you another chance.”

With that, Su Liang got up and left.

Pu Cheng opened his eyes after hearing the door close, looking at the cold tea with a bitter expression, and drank it all in one gulp.

“How did it go?” Qiao Cong asked as soon as Su Liang came out.

Su Liang shook his head, “He won’t confess.”

Qiao Cong snorted coldly, “Torture him!”

“Such methods won’t work on him. There’s no need to waste our energy,” Su Liang shook her head.

“Then that’s it?” Qiao Cong felt that it was not easy to capture an enemy and confirm that he knew some key secrets, so it was essential to get the information out as soon as possible.

“We can’t act too hastily,” Su Liang said, “I’ll think some more about what to do.”

That night, Su Liang came to the underground secret chamber again.

The chanting Pu Cheng, who was sitting cross-legged on the ground, stood up, “You should know my stance by now.”

"I suddenly remembered something I asked you about during the day, whether your late wife was a plastic surgeon in her past life. You should know that Nian Ruxue's impersonation of Yan Shiba has been exposed," Su Liang said.

Pu Cheng showed no reaction.

"Today, I interrogated Nian Ruxue again. She's different from you; she's afraid of death and revealed some important information. She said that she was arranged by Mo Yan to follow Sheng Yue and even bore him a son. That child is now on Xingluo Island," Su Liang looked at Pu Cheng and asked, "Are you and your son being controlled by Mo Yan because of the child that Nian Ruxue gave birth to?"

Pu Cheng was silent for a moment, then nodded slightly, "Yes. My grandson is in Mo Yan's hands."

Su Liang: ...Pu Cheng's mind really isn't as sharp as Sheng Yue's, has he never thought that she might be lying to deceive him?

But even though it was a lie, it was still something that Nian Ruxue had said in person. And if Nian Ruxue's relationship with Sheng Yue was as described, she would not change her story as it would make her even more valuable.

"The grandson of your dreams?" Su Liang sneered, "Nian Ruxue never said she had an affair with Sheng Yue; I made that up just now."

Pu Cheng's expression stiffened, then his eyes filled with rage, "Enough! I never thought you could be so cunning and deceitful! If you're going to kill me, just do it and cut the crap!"

Being labelled "cunning and deceitful" by someone with no moral bottom line didn't make Su Liang angry; on the contrary, she felt it was a compliment: synonyms for it were resourceful and intelligent, which, when put more nicely, meant exceptionally smart.

Dealing with someone like Pu Cheng, who has brains but not enough, conscience but not much, and has a face but can't always show it, was easy, because Pu Cheng's weaknesses had already been exposed.

At this moment, hurried footsteps sounded outside, "Xiaoliang, Sheng Yue is here again!"

Pu Cheng frowned, and Su Liang cursed, "Seeking death!" As she spoke, she stared into Pu Cheng's eyes, "I wonder who your son caught today to threaten me. I think with his intelligence, he'll aim for me, not really caring about your life or death, but it's not certain." After saying so, she knocked Pu Cheng unconscious.

Qiao Cong opened the door, grabbed Pu Cheng and dragged him out.

As daybreak neared, Pu Cheng slowly came to, feeling a pain in the back of his neck and weakness in his limbs. He pushed himself up with his arms and found himself in a forest.

Morning fog blurred his vision, and all he could see were the trees seemingly floating in the sea of mist.

“Ayue.” Pu Cheng looked at Sheng Yue, who was sitting with his back facing him by a tree not far away. Sheng Yue’s black cape hung on the ground, and there were two blood-stained nails beside him.

“Hm.” Sheng Yue replied without looking back.

“I’m sorry...” Pu Cheng sighed deeply. “You were injured trying to save me again. I should have listened to you the night before.”

“It’s not fatal.” Sheng Yue said in a low tone.

Pu Cheng sat down cross-legged and took a deep breath of the cool air. “Nian Ruxue is useless, and Su Liang has already found out about her. Don’t ever go looking for her again.”

Sheng Yue responded again.

“Su Liang... she’s infuriating! Before you went last night, she actually told me that Nian Ruxue claimed to be arranged by Mo Yan to follow you and even gave birth to a son for you on Xingluo Island. She asked if it was because that child was controlled by Mo Yan that we were working for him!” Pu Cheng said coldly.

Sheng Yue spoke calmly, “Did Father admit it at the time?”

Pu Cheng frowned, “I thought Nian Ruxue really said that, and admitting it could confuse Su Liang, which would benefit you. I didn’t expect it to be all made up by Su Liang. She is too cunning!”

“I’m not surprised,” Sheng Yue said.

The atmosphere fell silent, and only the sound of the cool wind blowing through the trees could be heard. The thick fog flowed and surged like water with the wind.

“Lately, I’ve been thinking about what our family would look like if Mother were still alive.” Sheng Yue’s tone floated with the morning mist, light and faint, but it draped a heavy sadness over Pu Cheng’s expression.

After a while, Pu Cheng finally spoke, his voice heavy. “Su Liang has guessed that your mother is a transmigrator. Even because of Nian Ruxue, Su Liang guessed what your mother did in her past life, and it seems that she knows everything about Gu Ling. If your mother were still alive...” Pu Cheng looked lost and sighed, “Then our family would have been able to live happily together for the past twenty years, instead of not even having a home like we are now.”

“Is that so?” Sheng Yue asked quietly.

Pu Cheng’s face turned ugly, “What do you mean? I know that when your mother died, you were already not young and knew a lot. Your mother used to be set on going back, but it doesn’t mean she didn’t love me or you and Yunyun. She just couldn’t let go of her family there. She said as long as she could find a way back, she could always come back! She could even take us to her world to start a new life together! Haven’t you been following Mo Yan all these years to find that way, to go to the world your mother was talking about?”

Sheng Yue was silent for a moment and then sighed softly, “Is there really such a way...”

“Who knows... Mo Yan came from Xingluo Island, and he’s been guarding the place he came from his whole life, longing to return, but he’s too afraid of death to take the gamble.” Pu Cheng’s tone was icy as he mentioned Mo Yan, “He used people from this side to explore, and they all died, but he’s been looking for his kind to help him explore the road. After your mother died, it took him so many years to find just one Gu Ling. Even if Mo Yan knew that Gu Ling was his grandson-in-law, he wouldn’t give up. But Gu Ling is too troublesome. It’s impossible for him to abandon everything here, and the biggest obstacle is Su Liang. Mo Yan originally wanted to kill Su Liang and sever Gu Ling’s ties, but it all failed. In my opinion, you should stay away for now. Some things Mo Yan will do himself, and when the time is right, you can intervene.”

Sheng Yue fell silent once more. After a long while, he spoke, “Father hopes that I will leave and find the place where my mother came from, doesn’t he?”

Pu Cheng looked up at the sky, his eyes distant. “Now that things have come to this, I will tell you honestly. I haven’t stopped you all these years or even secretly helped you because what you want to do is what I’ve always wanted but never dared to do... Su Liang was right, I’m the best at escaping. You’re not like me. You’re like your mother, not afraid of taking risks and sacrificing everything for what you want.”

As Pu Cheng finished speaking, he stood up from the ground. The effect of the sedatives hadn’t worn off yet, and he walked unsteadily toward Sheng Yue. “You...”

“Sheng Yue”, with both hands intact, choked Pu Cheng’s neck!

Pu Cheng’s face turned ashen, and he saw a familiar slender figure emerge from the thick fog, accompanied by Su Liang’s cold, misty voice. “Uncle Pu Cheng, I told you last night, your eldest son doesn’t care about you. How can you not believe it? Ajun, you did well. I have to find some more treasures to give you as wedding gifts.”

Qi Jun, who had perfectly impersonated Sheng Yue once again, smiled faintly, “It’s all thanks to my master’s teachings.” In fact, he was still shocked by the secrets Su Liang had shared with him the night before and the words Pu Cheng had just said. However, it didn’t affect his perfect performance under Su Liang’s guidance, trapping Pu Cheng into revealing important information before being exposed.

Su Liang looked at Pu Cheng, who was almost vomiting blood from anger, her expression indifferent. “A way back? What a wild dream. But now I know that the woman you’ve been so devoted to all these years, even though she followed you and gave birth to two sons for you, still wanted to return with all her heart. Pu Cheng, every time I see you, you become even more ridiculous. Ajun, bring him with us. Let’s go.”

Chapter 435: 435. On the way home

Su Liang and Qi Jun were in the Marquis Changxin Mansion, which was previously granted to Gu Ling and is now the Regent King Mansion. However, Gu Ling only lived here for a short time before “marrying” into the Su Mansion. The place was the couple’s garden and also Gu Ling’s

weapon-making workshop, usually deserted, making it a suitable place to set up the trap for Pu Cheng as it resembled an outdoor environment.

Su Liang and Qi Jun took Pu Cheng back to the Su Mansion, entering through the back door, which led to the garden.

As they were about to leave the forest, Qi Jun said, "Master, I won't tell anyone about those things, not even Ren Dong."

Su Liang nodded, "Hmm. Knowing such things is not necessarily a good thing. I had no choice but to tell you this time, and I only told you what you needed to know. You did a good job, and what Pu Cheng confessed is what I wanted to know. Gu Ling should be back soon, and we can still make it to your wedding with Ren Dong."

Qi Jun laughed, "I hope Uncle will have a smooth journey."

However, Qi Jun didn't know that the Gu Ling he thought was a transmigrator was actually fake. The real transmigrator was Su Liang.

Su Liang didn't intend to mislead Qi Jun. She only told him the necessary information to fulfill their current needs. The rest was not necessary for Qi Jun to know at the moment.

By the time the two reached the lakeside, the thick fog had cleared, and the sky was bright.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu came running out of Yuanming Pavilion, followed by Cheng Yun. All three of them were dressed in their exercise clothes, ready for morning practice.

"Master's wife is back!" Ji Xiaoshu rushed over, followed closely by Zhengzheng, and Cheng Yun also ran over.

"How did it go?" Cheng Yun's gaze turned to Pu Cheng, who was carried by Qi Jun unconscious, his expression much calmer than the day before.

Su Liang smiled, "It worked."

Ji Xiaoshu gave a thumbs up, "With Master's wife taking action, there's no room for failure!"

Su Liang ruffled the heads of the two children, "Go practice your skills."

Seeing that Su Liang had no intention of sharing the information she had obtained from Pu Cheng, Cheng Yun didn't ask and went to train with the two children.

Qiao Cong did ask, but Su Liang didn't say anything for the time being as it involved matters of transmigration. Other than her, only Qi Jun knew and just a rough idea.

Whether to share their biggest secret with the others at home, and who to tell and who not to tell, Su Liang decided to discuss with Gu Ling after his return. The more people who knew, the greater the uncontrollable risk. Some things are better kept secret.

If Gu Ling had been home last night, Su Liang wouldn't have needed to tell Qi Jun about it, but would have had Gu Ling do it instead. Waiting a few more days might have been fine, but the sooner it was known, the better the precautions could be made, especially against Sheng Yue. Even though Su Liang predicted that he wouldn't show up easily again, she feared any potential risk. And Gu Ling's return was also just an estimate by Su Liang, not a guarantee.

After a while, Cheng Yun said he wanted to go back to Huguo Temple as he still had some belongings there and needed to inform Master Pu Hui about his return to secular life. He had lived at the Huguo Temple once, and Master Pu Hui had taken good care of him.

Ji Xiaoshu said he wanted to go with Cheng Yun to Huguo Temple, but was immediately stopped by Zhengzheng, “No, there’s a bad guy who escaped, and he might catch us and threaten Master’s wife!” Zhengzheng had experience with such things.

“Oh, well, then.” Ji Xiaoshu was naughty but never reckless, blinked and said, “Will the bad guy catch my dad as a hostage? Or is my dad no longer important?”

Su Liang smiled, “Not as important as you.”

Ji Xiaoshu was delighted, “When my dad comes back, I need to tell him that I’m the important one!”

Qiao Cong accompanied Cheng Yun to the Huguo Temple, returning near noon with Huguo Temple vegetarian dishes.

“Senior Pu Hui asked if I had made up my mind, and I said yes.” Cheng Yun sighed softly, “I thought he would persuade me not to return to secular life, but surprisingly he didn’t object.”

Su Liang wasn’t surprised. Cheng Yun hadn’t experienced the secular world, and becoming a monk was not his choice. The real monks should have a tolerant heart, not thinking that becoming a monk is the best and returning to secular life the wrong.

“You can grow your hair now.” Su Liang said, “Should I find you a hat? Or a wig?”

“No need to disguise.” Cheng Yun shook his head, “Let nature take its course.”

Su Liang chuckled softly, “True, real beauty doesn’t fear a hairstyle.”

Cheng Yun’s face turned slightly embarrassed, “My appearance is far inferior to Sister Gu’s.”

“Not much difference.” Su Liang teased, “Once your hair grows out, you’ll definitely be a handsome young man.”

Cheng Yun silently drifted away, physically stopping the embarrassing topic.

In the afternoon, while the children were sleeping, Su Liang sat by the window, taking out the papers she had recorded information on when Min Rou had first briefed her on the situation at Xingluo Island. Looking at the “forbidden area” in the City Lord Mansion’s layout, she could now be sure that it was the place where Mo Yan had transmigrated and had guarded for many years as the way back home, or so he thought.

Not only Mo Yan, but it was also discovered from Pu Cheng’s mouth that even his late wife was bent on returning. This brought new ideas to Su Liang: Could it be that only she was a soul transmigrator, while Mo Yan and Pu Cheng’s late wife were both physical transmigrators? Was that possible?

Su Liang pondered and thought, since soul transmigration exists, body transmigration should also be possible. Including Gu Ling's special ability, these are mysterious phenomena that cannot be explained by science.

If so, Su Liang felt that Mo Yan and Pu Cheng's deceased wife's desire to return could also be somewhat understood. However, she still believed that she could not return, as she had settled down here and did not want to return.

Su Liang picked up a pen, wrote the word "road" in the forbidden area of Xingluo Island on the paper, and drew a big question mark. Then she put away everything, put it aside for the time being, and waited for Gu Ling to come back to discuss.

In the afternoon, Su Liang went to the underground secret chamber to see Pu Cheng again.

This time, Pu Cheng lost his calm when he saw Su Liang, because at dawn today, his true face was completely exposed to Su Liang. Putting on a fake mask would not only be meaningless, but would also make him appear even more ridiculous.

"What are you doing here?" Pu Cheng snorted.

Su Liang sat down with a faint expression, "It's much better like this, there's no need to pretend, it's so tiring. Did Yan Shiba really say that Yan Shiba is alive and in Sheng Yue's hands?"

"False!" Pu Cheng blurted out.

Su Liang nodded, "In that case, when your son uses Yan Shiba as a hostage to threaten me, I will know that the hostage in his hands is just like Nian Ruxue's substitute, and I don't need to worry about it."

Pu Cheng's face stiffened. Su Liang had got the answer she wanted from his reaction without him saying anything else.

"Where is she?" Su Liang asked, "Nian Ruxue has already confessed a location, whether you say it or not, I'll send someone to look for her. If you tell me, things will be better for you."

Pu Cheng sneered, "What, do you still want to torture me?"

Su Liang shook her head, "No, you're mistaken. As you know, I have few people in my family, and Ajun and Ren Dong are about to start preparing for their wedding. We also need to arrange someone to bring you food and water, which is very troublesome, and no one has time to torture you. If you don't cooperate, I'll only be able to meet the minimum standard for your food, which means that I won't let you starve to death or die of thirst. That's the easiest way. You can't be shameless enough to ask me to provide you with good food and drink, can you?"

"You!" Pu Cheng's face was full of anger.

Su Liang shrugged, "Do you want to say that I'm cunning and not kind-hearted? Please reflect on yourself first. What have you done? And you still expect me to return kindness for evil? I've seen a lot of people like you, who have excuses for doing evil things. In the end, you're just selfish. You're not as good as Sheng Yue, who is at least open and aboveboard, not as pretentious as you. Alright,

let's stop talking nonsense. Since I know that your son will not come to save you, I have the leisure to talk to you today. Have you thought about how to answer my question?"

"I want to see Yunyun." Pu Cheng's face darkened.

Su Liang got up and left, "It seems like you've chosen 'living is enough'."

Just as Su Liang was about to disappear from Pu Cheng's sight, he called out to her, "I can tell you where Yan Shiba is."

Su Liang turned around, her face calm, and saw Pu Cheng looking a little unnatural, as if expecting a new round of ridicule.

But Su Liang had already seen through Pu Cheng's nature. He was so selfish that he couldn't even bear to suffer a little bit, and at this moment, he didn't even care about protecting his son. No wonder he hadn't taken on the responsibility of being a father in all these years and only cared about himself. Su Liang didn't bother to comment, and directly asked him, "Where?"

Pu Cheng glanced away, "Liang Country, in Wolong Mountain."

This was consistent with what Nian Ruxue had confessed. Su Liang believed it to be true. Yan Shiba was still alive and being held captive in Wolong Mountain. Now, the territory of the former Liang Country was a land of ice and snow, and it was a perfect hiding place.

Su Liang suspected that Sheng Yue had his own secret force outside Xingluo Island, and Wolong Mountain might be one of his strongholds. At the very least, Yan Shiba would have to be kept alive and fed to stay alive.

Su Liang didn't say anything further, but simply left.

Yao City was too far away, and Su Liang didn't have any manpower available at the moment. She decided to wait for Gu Ling to return before acting.

At this moment, Gu Ling and Cen Man were traveling day and night to return home. According to their speed, they could return to the capital city within three days.

With his heart set on returning, Gu Ling kept an eye on rumors about Su Liang in the capital city while on the road. If Sheng Yue had gone to the capital, he would have acted by now. No news was good news.

That evening, Cen Man said she was a little tired and wanted to rest. Gu Ling found an inn with a restaurant across the street. After booking a room, they went to have dinner.

Although Cen Man was older, her body was still healthy. In fact, she said she was tired to let Gu Ling rest a bit. Since leaving Xingluo Island, Gu Ling had never had a good night's sleep.

Both of them had disguised themselves, and their dress was ordinary, looking like a mother and son. They ordered dishes and sat in the main hall on the first floor while eating, listening to the conversations around them.

After finishing the meal, Gu Ling was about to call the waiter to pay the bill when he saw an elderly man with white hair enter the restaurant, followed by a young girl carrying a basket. The girl had a large black spot on her face, and even though she had pretty features, Gu Ling heard someone mutter "ugly girl" as soon as he saw her.

The old man and the girl were both dressed plainly, with some mud on their pants and shoes. The girl didn't seem to care about the disdainful looks people were giving her. They entered and called out, "Order the signature dishes, and a jar of the best wine!"

The waiter promptly responded but soon realized there were no empty tables left.

The restaurant was crowded that day, and there were no vacancies upstairs either. There was space for only two more people at the table where Gu Ling and Cen Man were sitting.

"Let's go," Cen Man put down her chopsticks and got up.

"Hmm." Gu Ling picked up the package, brushed past the old man who followed her, and settled the bill at the counter before leaving the restaurant with Cen Man.

When they returned to the inn, Gu Ling asked Cen Man to rest first, saying that he had something to take care of outside.

"What's the matter?" Cen Man frowned. She intended to let Gu Ling rest before continuing on their journey.

"The last two people who entered the restaurant earlier, there's something off about them," Gu Ling said. He had noticed the black mist on the old man's forehead.

Cen Man was puzzled, but she knew Gu Ling had a secret, so she offered to go with him. She had accompanied Gu Ling back in case he needed help while alone.

"No need. You rest for a while, Master. I'll take care of it discreetly," Gu Ling decided to go alone.

"Alright then. I'll wait for you here," Cen Man reluctantly agreed, "Be very careful."

After leaving the inn, Gu Ling walked a long way around before seeing the old man and the young girl leaving the restaurant and entering the same inn across the street.

So Gu Ling went back to the inn, confirmed the room the old man and young girl were staying in, and booked the room next to them to keep an ear on their movements while leaning against the wall.

Gu Ling's hearing was excellent, and soon he heard the girl talking.

"Grandpa, is it worth running so far just to gather herbs? We've been searching the mountains for two days without finding anything. Let's just go home tomorrow morning!"

"Why the rush? We've only been looking for two days, let's keep searching," the old man laughed.

"Grandpa, you're not a Great Immortal. We're looking for medicinal materials for an unrelated person. I don't think it's worth crossing mountains and rivers at your age. We have only a slight connection with this person through our ancestors, which dates back so many years. Can't you just refuse him? I'd tell him to go to the capital city to

find that Divine Doctor Su instead! I'm even afraid that he'll spread the word about your residence and we won't have any peace!"

"When you promise someone something, you have to see it through, even if your abilities are limited, you have to do your best," the old man said.

"Fine, fine. The way you say it, I sound like a villain. Let's look for one more day tomorrow, and if we still can't find it, we'll go home, alright?" The young girl seemed to be trying to coax the old man.

"Hmm, we'll see, we'll see." The old man laughed, "Go wash up and sleep."

Gu Ling initially determined that the old man was a doctor and a decent person. The black mist on his forehead was not for killing, but rather someone wanted to harm him.

The neighboring room quieted down; the occupant must have been asleep.

However, Gu Ling dared not sleep and had to keep watch. In fact, he hoped that the "assassin" would come quickly so that after saving the person, he could rest a bit and then continue on his way home.

Unfortunately, Gu Ling waited until dawn, and everything at the inn was calm. He even sneaked into the old man's room and confirmed that he was alright, but the black mist on the old man's forehead still remained.

Cen Man packed up the package and relaxed when she saw Gu Ling appear, "Did you handle that matter? Do you want to sleep more? Or do you want us to eat something and leave?" She had already rested, and Gu Ling must have been unwilling to delay their departure due to his own rest.

Gu Ling shook his head, "Not yet, we can't leave for now." The black mist lasted for three days, and he had hesitated whether to wait or give up. However, the final answer was not difficult: wait.

All along, Gu Ling and Su Liang believed that Gu Ling's special ability to see the will of heaven was correct, and Gu Ling had always been conscientious in doing what the will of heaven allowed him to do.

At the moment, they didn't know the situation in the capital city, if Su Liang was in danger, but if they didn't save the old man, the consequences would be hard to predict.

Gu Ling wanted to go home immediately, but he knew that if Su Liang found out, she would definitely ask him to save the old man first.

Gu Ling suggested that Cen Man go ahead and report their safety at home, but after considering it, Cen Man decided to wait and accompany Gu Ling. Reporting safety wasn't so urgent for one or two days, and she was more worried about losing Gu Ling.

So, Gu Ling and Cen Man "accidentally" met the old man and the young girl at the breakfast shop again.

The girl recognized them, and upon seeing Cen Man's smile, she waved and laughed, "We meet again."

At this point, Gu Ling had a backpack on his back that he had just found. He had heard that there was a mountain called Medicine King Mountain outside the city. The mountain was tall and said to have many rare medicinal materials. Many people would specifically enter the mountain to gather medicine. However, due to its treacherous topography, accidents often happened to those who ventured in to collect medicine.

“Are you also going to Medicine King Mountain to gather herbs, senior?” Gu Ling asked the old man.

The old man raised an eyebrow, looked at Gu Ling, and then glanced at Cen Man, “Which of you is the doctor?”

“I am,” Gu Ling nodded slightly.

With a mixture of surprise and delight at meeting a fellow professional, the old man laughed and said he was going to look for a rare herb. He might not be able to find it, but he wanted to give it a try while the weather was still nice.

“I’m also going to try my luck,” Gu Ling said.

The old man looked at Cen Man, who smiled, “I am his adoptive mother.”

After breakfast, the old man took the initiative to invite Gu Ling and Cen Man to join them, saying he knew the way.

The young girl furrowed her brow, pulling on the old man’s sleeve and whispering, “Grandpa, be careful, they might be herb robbers.” The Medicine King Mountain produced highly valuable rare medicinal herbs, and there were often bandits intercepting and robbing the herb collectors at the foot of the mountain.

The old man shook his head. “That young man’s eyes are very clean, he must be a good person, I can’t be wrong about that.”

As the young girl tried to persuade him further, the old man shook his head with a smile, “Just wait, let me test him.”

The young girl didn’t say anything else. Since Gu Ling claimed to be a doctor, the test would reveal everything.

On their way out of town, the old man and Gu Ling started discussing medical skills, while the young girl and Cen Man followed behind them. They seemed to get along well. Gu Ling seemed calm, but the old man was very happy. While talking, the old man grabbed Gu Ling’s arm, “Young man, who did you learn your medical skills from?”

The young girl realized that she had been overthinking it. Judging by their interaction, Gu Ling’s medical skills must be very impressive.

Gu Ling shook his head, indicating that it was not convenient to say. The old man smiled and didn’t press further.

If it had been any other time, Gu Ling would have been happy to make friends with this skilled old doctor. He also enjoyed collecting herbs. However, at this moment, he hoped that those who wanted

to cause trouble for the old man would hurry up and show themselves so he could kill them and go home. Although he had decided to wait, the three days felt very difficult for him to endure.

The old man introduced himself with the last name Wen, while Gu Ling introduced himself with the last name Gu.

When they arrived at the foot of the mountain, the distant, fog-shrouded peak looked far away as they looked up at it.

However, perhaps the heavens were listening to Gu Ling's heartfelt wish. As soon as they entered the mountain, trouble arose.

Two masked men descended from the sky, drawing their swords and blocking their way.

One of the men's gaze swept over Gu Ling and Cen Man, settling on the old Wen man, "I've long heard of the great name of the Divine Doctor Wen. Our master invites you over, please come with us!"

Old Wen pulled his granddaughter behind him protectively, his face calm, "I'm not a divine doctor, just an ordinary doctor. If your master is sick, he can go to the capital city to find the famous Divine Doctor Su."

"Divine Doctor Wen is too modest. You don't like fame and fortune, and you've been living in seclusion for so many years. It's not easy to find you. If you don't want your granddaughter to get hurt, please don't make things difficult for us."

"These two just happened to be passing by. Please don't trouble them." Old Wen looked apologetically at Gu Ling, "This has nothing to do with you. You should get going!"

"I'm in a hurry to get home." Gu Ling nodded.

The next moment, Old Wen only felt a cold flash in front of his eyes. Gu Ling pulled a hoe from his back and rushed towards the black-clothed men blocking their path.

The two black-clothed men didn't expect such a change. Their eyes were full of contempt and didn't take Gu Ling seriously.

One of them had just said, "Looking for death," when his head fell off before he could finish his sentence.

Old Wen and his granddaughter were both stunned!

Another black-clothed man began fighting with Gu Ling. His strength was much stronger than the one who had just died, but there was still a gap between him and Gu Ling. Moreover, Gu Ling was in a bad mood and showed no mercy towards the person who had prevented him from returning home to reunite with Su Liang>.

It didn't take long for the black-clothed man to fall to the ground severely injured, but he was still alive.

Still carrying the basket on his back, Gu Ling threw the bloodstained hoe into it, bent down to remove the black cloth covering the man's face, and asked coldly, "Who sent you?"

The black-clothed man spat out blood, his face pale, and didn't answer Gu Ling's question.

"Mo Yan? Did he order you to capture the Divine Doctor and bring him back to Xingluo Island?" Gu Ling asked.

The black-clothed man's momentary shock did not escape Gu Ling's eyes.

No need to ask more, Gu Ling reached out and twisted the black-clothed man's neck, turning around to face Old Wen, his expression indifferent, "The medicinal herbs that Elder Wen is looking for, I have them at home. If it's convenient, please give me an address, and I'll have someone send them over after I get back."

Old Wen was dumbfounded, "Who... who are you exactly?"

"Su Liang's husband. My medical skills were taught by her." Gu Ling revealed his identity directly.

The young girl's eyes widened, "The legendary Gu Ling?"

"I just happened to pass through this area and accidentally learned that a scumbag was leading a group of people to capture skilled doctors and turn them into slaves. I just helped out along the way, no need to pay too much attention to it." Gu Ling's expression was indifferent.

"I was originally planning to find an opportunity to visit the capital city and pay my respects to Divine Doctor Su..."

Old Wen still seemed shell-shocked.

"Alright then, I'll wait for you at home. Goodbye." Gu Ling bowed his hand.

By the time Old Wen and his granddaughter came to their senses, Gu Ling and Cen Man had already disappeared.

Chapter 436: 436. What are you to me?

"Thank God, thank the heavens and earth, and thank Divine Doctor Su and her husband." Holding onto her weak legs, Weng Ran leaned against a big tree, muttering to herself. Upon looking back at the dead bodies on the ground and the withered grass stained with blood, she regained a sense of reality. The events that had just happened were too shocking for her sheltered life.

Weng Ran's grandfather sighed repeatedly, "We shouldn't have come out!"

Weng Ran immediately nodded and then frowned, clutching her grandfather's hand tightly.

"Grandpa, something's not right! How did those two bad guys know we were coming here to gather herbs? Nobody has known your identity all these years, except for that person recently..."

Her grandfather's face stiffened, "You mean..."

“Damn it! It must be the son of Grandpa’s old friend who betrayed Grandpa! Otherwise, no one would know Grandpa’s whereabouts!” Weng Ran’s voice was full of anger, “We might not be able to go back home!”

Her grandfather was silent for a long time before his gaze fell on the severed head cut off by Gu Ling’s medicinal hoe. He turned his head slowly to face his enraged granddaughter, “Let it be, it’s fate. We won’t return home but will go to the capital city to seek refuge with Divine Doctor Su. I am old and unable to protect you, so it’s time for me to find you a good place to stay.”

Weng Ran frowned, “What do you mean by a good place to stay? Divine Doctor Su isn’t a man, it sounds like you want to marry me off to her.”

Her grandfather’s eyes softened, “I do hope she will like you. Let’s go, we’ll gather our things and head to the capital city.”

Before, Cen Man suspected that Gu Ling had some kind of foresight ability, and this time it further confirmed her guess. But she didn’t reveal it or ask about it. Such a skill was a good thing, and Gu Ling had always been doing the right things.

After the two returned to the inn, they took their belongings and left.

With a strong desire to return home, Gu Ling had been calculating when he could go back. Fortunately, the unplanned events had not delayed him for too long.

Capital city.

Only three days were left before Qi Jun and Ren Dong’s wedding. Su Liang was making a big red Chinese knot to hang in their new room as a gift. Ren Dong had previously mentioned that she liked the knot in Su Liang’s room, which was made by Gu Ling. There were already many other dowries and gifts prepared for Ren Dong and Qi Jun.

Originally, if Gu Ling were home, Su Liang wouldn’t have had to do it herself since she wasn’t very skilled at it. This was her first time making one, and she had already had to redo it once due to mistakes. At first, she had only described the Chinese knot she had seen in her previous life to Gu Ling, who then figured out how to make it on his own.

Qiao Cong knocked on the door, “Xiaoliang, are you busy?”

“Not busy, Master, please come in.” Su Liang tightened a section of the rope she had just woven.

Qiao Cong entered the room with a strange expression, sat down, poured himself a cup of tea, and didn’t speak immediately.

“What’s the matter?” Su Liang was curious. Surely nothing bad had happened.

“I suspect...” Qiao Cong began, then suddenly lowered his voice, “Qi Yan and Qianqian seem to be...”

Su Liang raised her eyebrows, were Qi Yan and Nangong Qian getting too close? She had been too busy lately to pay much attention.

“Master, did you discover that Qi Yan was showing affection to Qianqian?” Su Liang asked. Judging from Qiao Cong’s unhappiness, could it be that he thought Qi Yan wasn’t good enough for Nangong Qian and was deluding himself? Surely not?

Qiao Cong shook his head and sighed, “No!”

“What is it then?” Su Liang didn’t quite understand Qiao Cong’s complicated expression.

“I found Qianqian sneaking a peek at Qi Yan practicing martial arts!” Qiao Cong finally revealed it.

Su Liang couldn’t help but laugh, “Sneaking a peek? They live in the same mansion and see each other every day, there’s no need to sneak a peek. Master, are you overthinking it?”

“I didn’t think much!” Qiao Cong frowned, “Qianqian looks clearly interested in Qi Yan!”

Su Liang raised an eyebrow, not too surprised if that were the case. There weren’t many people in the mansion, and the only young, single man who Nangong Qian had contact with before was Qi Yan before Cheng Yun appeared. Cheng Yun still had a shaved head, although he was even more handsome now, but Nangong Qian wasn’t familiar with him yet. She was very familiar with Qi Yan, though.

Qi Yan and Qi Jun, the Qi brothers, were once regarded as servants of the Xing family by outsiders, but they actually weren’t. They had grown up together with Xing Yusheng, practicing martial arts and studying just like him. Their looks and talents were far superior to many of the noble sons in the capital city, and they had good morals and character as well.

Su Liang always thought that the Qi brothers were very outstanding, each with their own strengths. Qi Jun’s mind was very sharp, and he was Su Liang’s most capable subordinate. Qi Yan, on the other hand, was coarse but with finer aspects and had grown a lot over the years. By comparison, Qi Yan was more cheerful and open-minded, and if Nangong Qian liked him, Su Liang thought her taste was not bad.

“Why is Master so bothered? Do you think they are not suitable?” Su Liang asked with a smile. Qiao Cong had always liked the Qi brothers and had even praised their temperament as better than his own grandson, Qiao Jing.

Upon hearing this, Qiao Cong immediately shook his head, “I think they are very suitable. In fact, I had my eye on Qi Yan early on, but because there were always things going on at home and you were very busy, I never mentioned it. If Qianqian likes Qi Yan, that’s good. I’m just worried that his feelings might not be reciprocated, and what if he doesn’t like Qianqian?”

Su Liang:…all right, she thought too much.

“Xiaoliang, you have to think of a way. I really haven’t noticed any special feelings from Qi Yan towards Qianqian. Does he have another girl he likes? If there is, he should clarify it early, and I’ll have Qianqian give up!” Qiao Cong had come to Su

Liang for help. Although he was skilled in martial arts, he was really not good at handling such matters and was very worried.

“He shouldn’t have any other girls he likes. Otherwise, he would have said so earlier and not let his brother get married before him,” Su Liang said.

Qiao Cong’s eyes lit up, “That’s true! You make a lot of sense! Then you be the matchmaker for Qi Yan and Qianqian! Qianqian’s health is better now, and she’s also changed for the better, as you know!”

Considering their past experiences, Qiao Cong was somewhat self-conscious about his granddaughter’s marriage. Nangong Qian had a dark past, and although Qiao Cong loved her very much, he had to admit that among Su Liang’s female friends, his own granddaughter was really quite ordinary, with nothing outstanding when compared to others.

“Master, don’t be so nervous. I’ll ask Qi Yan.” Su Liang thought there was a chance.

After a while, hearing footsteps coming up the stairs, Qiao Cong didn’t leave but hid behind a screen, wanting to listen to Qi Yan’s answer.

As soon as the door opened, Su Liang saw Qi Yan’s bright smile, “What can I do for you, Master?”

Su Liang thought to herself that once Gu Ling returned, she would ask him to learn from Qi Yan how to smile with such “sunshine.” Seeing such a smile would surely lift anyone’s spirits, and her Great God would undoubtedly be the best-looking when he smiled.

“Sit.” Su Liang pointed to the seat Qiao Cong had just sat in, “I want to ask you something.”

Qi Yan sat down and, seeing the unfinished Chinese knot that Su Liang had been working on, smiled, “Is this for Ajun? When I get married, Master, you have to give me one.”

Qiao Cong, hiding behind the screen, felt half-cold when he heard this. Was the young man already thinking about getting married? Did he have someone in mind?

Half-jokingly, Su Liang asked, “When do you plan to get married?”

Qi Yan chuckled, “Maybe next year, but I don’t know if it’ll work out.”

Su Liang was a bit surprised, “So you have a girl you like? Which lady is it? How come I don’t know?”

Qi Yan coughed lightly, “I haven’t dared to mention it lately since there have been so many things going on. Master has been busy with important matters. I plan to wait a while longer, at least until the Prince returns.”

“Tell me who it is first,” Su Liang asked.

Qiao Cong shook his head in silence, thinking there really was no hope.

“It’s Miss Qian from our mansion,” Qi Yan suddenly looked a little embarrassed, scratching his head and saying, “Earlier, my clothes were torn, and she helped sew them.”

As the words fell, Qi Yan saw someone suddenly come out from behind the screen, and he was startled, immediately standing up, "Senior Qiao!"

Qiao Cong came out with a straight face, patted Qi Yan on the shoulder, "You brat, why didn't you say it earlier? You gave me an unnecessary scare!"

Qi Yan was a bit confused, as Su Liang laughed and said, "You can go back and have your father invite someone to propose marriage."

Qiao Cong laughed loudly, "Those formalities are not important! If you want to get married before Qi Jun, it's not impossible!"

Qi Yan wanted to say something to Su Liang, but he didn't get the chance, as he was taken downstairs by Qiao Cong.

Su Liang picked up the bright red Chinese knot and sighed, "Great God, there will be another couple showing off their love in front of me at home, please come back soon."

Qi Yan and Nangong Qian's matters were quickly settled. Both sides were willing, both families were simple, and they were already very close to each other, so it was a perfect match, and everyone was delighted.

After consulting with Qi Jun and Ren Dong, Qi Jiang suggested postponing their wedding and proceeding with Qi Yan and Nangong Qian's marriage first.

Qi Yan opposed it. Although he had said that Qi Jun was not enough of a brother for not waiting for him to get married first, it was actually just a joke, and he didn't care about it. They were twin brothers, and he was just a little bit older than Qi Jun.

Qiao Cong also thought it was unnecessary. He was relieved now that the marriage was settled, and there was no need to rush to get married. He hoped to wait until Gu Ling and Qiao Jing returned safely.

That night, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu were playing with Gu Xiaonuan in Su Liang's room, while Su Liang was still working on the Chinese knot.

Ji Xiaoshu suddenly ran to Su Liang, "Master, who fell in love first between you and Teacher?"

Su Liang laughed gently, "What do you think?"

"I guess... it must be the teacher who fell in love with Master first!" Ji Xiaoshu said.

Su Liang smiled, "Wrong."

"Could it be that Master fell in love with Teacher first? Then it must be that Teacher used his charm!" Ji Xiaoshu deduced.

"Indeed." Su Liang smiled. Between her and Gu Ling, Gu Ling was the one who fell in love first, but she felt that she had fallen for Gu Ling subconsciously long ago. It was just that their relationship was rather peculiar, and they both showed their calm and rational sides. The initial rules they set didn't change as their relationship grew.

Looking back now, they were somewhat childish in deciding their love. The so-called "Su Liang would only come of age at eighteen" was like drawing a boundary between them, with Gu Ling not

wanting to break Su Liang's rules, and Su Liang thinking it was Gu Ling who insisted on it, until Gu Ling couldn't help but break the boundary. To be honest, they wasted some time, and perhaps they could have been together much earlier. But no matter what, it was a beautiful and interesting experience.

"When the teacher comes back, I have to ask him and see what he says!" Ji Xiaoshu said, then ran back to Zhengzheng's side, and the two of them whispered to each other, plotting something.

With each passing day since Su Liang arranged for Pu Cheng to divulge important information, her timetable showed Gu Ling's return was approaching.

Su Liang believed Sheng Yue would not reappear easily, and indeed, she never saw Sheng Yue again. Nian Ruxue and Pu Cheng were locked in the dungeon, and Pu Cheng had traded Yan Shiba's whereabouts for food and clothing, but he didn't expect Su Liang to cripple his martial arts skills.

Su Liang didn't hesitate at all when deciding to make a move. Pu Cheng was not someone who would do anything for his son; he was extremely selfish and would prioritize his own life and important interests. Such a man would be very troublesome when out of control, as he could do anything.

Although Sheng Yue hadn't come to save Pu Cheng for the time being, it didn't mean Pu Cheng had lost all his value. He still had irreplaceable uses in dealing with Sheng Yue, which was the reason Su Liang didn't kill him.

As for Nian Ruxue, there seemed to be no use in keeping her for now, but there was no harm in doing so. Su Liang always believed that living people had value.

Soon, it was time for Qi Jun and Ren Dong's big celebration.

Just yesterday, Su Liang finally finished the Chinese knot she was going to give them. Although Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu both praised it as beautiful, and Ren Dong liked it, Su Liang thought it was still not as pretty as the one Gu Ling made. There was no way around it; her Great God was the best in her eyes.

Ren Dong was an orphan and didn't know who her parents were. As Su Liang's adopted sister, she married and took Su Liang's last name. Bai Yang, as Ren Dong's brother, sent her off.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu, along with a group of children, blocked the door, asked Qi Jun to recite poetry, and then handed him a big riddle that Su Liang had gotten for him to guess.

Though it was not easy, after the children got the word puzzles from Su Liang, Qi Jun also received the answer secretly given to him by Su Liang.

Qi Jun pretended to be stumped by two puzzles, but eventually guessed them and smoothly took the bride away, creating a lively scene.

As a member of Ren Dong's maternal family, Su Liang didn't go to the Qi mansion for the wedding banquet. Qiao Cong took the children with him, and even Cheng Yun was dragged along. Cheng Yun originally wanted to stay behind out of concern for Su Liang's safety, but Su Liang assured her that she had a hand grenade and there was no need to worry.

The sun was warm, and Su Liang walked alone by the lakeside. It had been a long time since her home had been this quiet, reminding her of the days when only she and Gu Ling had lived there.

In fact, Su Liang had another reason for not going to the wedding banquet today. Her heart was restless, because according to the timeline she had calculated for a long time, if everything went smoothly, Gu Ling should have returned by now, but there was still no news.

On the one hand, Su Liang comforted herself, thinking that Gu Ling would not have any accidents; he was so powerful and never let her down. But on the other hand, it was hard not to think about the consequences if things did not go well.

The pressure was great, but her only fear was that something would happen to Gu Ling. After all, they had learned from Pu Cheng that there was a “Transmigration Road” on Xingluo Island that had been guarded by Mo Yan for many years. Mo Yan had captured Gu Ling for the purpose of making him an experimental subject, which was very dangerous.

It was noon. Su Liang insisted on letting Nangong Qian and Qiuyue go to the banquet, and there was no one else in the house except the prisoners in the dungeon. She said she would cook lunch herself, but she didn’t end up doing so.

Su Liang just walked around the lakeside, looping around and around while thinking about what she might have to deal with if Gu Ling failed to save the people or was caught. She would often suddenly blank out because her subconscious was rejecting such things, but she had to force herself to calm down and continue thinking.

“Su Liang.”

A very close yet seemingly distant voice sounded in her ear. It was so familiar that Su Liang doubted whether her yearning for Gu Ling had caused her to hallucinate.

“Su Liang.” Another time.

It was then that Su Liang stopped and turned her head. The man she had been dreaming about appeared in her sight and reached her in the blink of an eye.

Su Liang subconsciously raised her hand, rubbing Gu Ling’s tired but still beautiful face, and asked him a question, “What are you to me?”

Gu Ling looked at Su Liang’s reddened eyes and felt heartache. He was about to hug her when he heard her question. The question felt strange, but he answered seriously, “Great God, I am your Great God.”

Not far away, Cen Man heard the reunion conversation between the two and the corners of her mouth twitched. She wondered how such embarrassing words could be spoken by people like them.

The next moment, Su Liang tightly embraced Gu Ling, taking a long breath, “It’s really you, my Great God, you’re finally back.”

Gu Ling gently patted Su Liang’s back, “I’m sorry for being away for so long. Everyone is fine; the others are on their way back.”

Su Liang felt a heavy stone drop from her heart and laughed, “You must have found my question strange just now.”

"Yes, it was a bit strange." Gu Ling admitted that he didn't understand why Su Liang had asked the question like that. Calling him Great God was one thing, but using it in a conversation made it somewhat cheesy.

"It's because Yan Shiba, who came back before, was an imposter. Sheng Yue had Nian Ruxue undergo plastic surgery to look like Yan Shiba and deceive everyone," explained Su Liang. "I was looking forward to your return, but when you actually appeared, I was a bit hesitant, doubting whether you were another imposter created by Sheng Yue."

Gu Ling's eyes showed understanding, "I see."

"Great God, Gu Xiaonuan can call 'Daddy' now." Su Liang shared her daughter's growth with Gu Ling.

"I know she's fine. I have something to do." Gu Ling immediately held Su Liang and flew up, entering their room through the second-floor window.

Once they landed, Su Liang frowned and began unbuttoning Gu Ling's clothes, "Are you injured?"

"No, I just missed you so much that my heart aches." After saying that, Gu Ling lowered his head and kissed Su Liang.

Chapter 437: 437. Just pamper him then

After coming back from the wedding celebration, the children were in high spirits.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu started racing as soon as they entered Su Mansion's main gate: whoever reached Su Liang first would win. The competitive nature of boys was always so strong.

Gu Xiaonuan was wearing a red dress with silver fox fur trim, and a cute little hat on her head. The fluffy ball on top of her hat swung back and forth because she was sitting on Cheng Yun's shoulder, one small hand holding onto Cheng Yun's bald head—it was a perfect fit.

Qiao Cong and Nangong Qian were walking behind them. He said to Nangong Qian with a chuckle, "You better hurry up and finish your wedding dress embroidery. As soon as Xiaogu and your brother return, we'll arrange your marriage with Qi Yan."

Nangong Qian nodded with a blush on her face. Ren Dong's wedding dress wasn't embroidered by herself, as she didn't know how and didn't have time. The wedding clothes were given by Yang Yu. But Nangong Qian enjoyed embroidery and wanted to get married wearing a wedding dress she had embroidered herself, so she started working on it since the day they got engaged.

"I just don't know when Xiaogu and Jingjing will be able to come back!" Qiao Cong sighed softly. At that moment, Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu had already disappeared from sight.

"Mother!"

“Mother!”

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu burst into Yuanming Pavilion together, shouting for Su Liang as they ran up the stairs.

Seeing the door closed and everything quiet, the two exchanged a glance.

“Is Mother taking a nap?”

“I don’t know. Let’s try knocking on the door gently.”

As Ji Xiaoshu raised his hand to knock, the door suddenly opened, and his small hand landed on someone.

Ji Xiaoshu looked up, blinked, and Zhengzheng had already jumped up and pounced into Gu Ling’s arms. “Master! Master, you’re finally back!”

Ji Xiaoshu decisively climbed onto Gu Ling’s back, hugging his neck while grinning with his teeth showing but not his eyes. However, he asked, “Senior Brother, is Master real? He isn’t an imposter, right?”

Zhengzheng giggled, “He might be fake. If he were the real master, he would’ve thrown you off already.”

“Right!” Ji Xiaoshu just nodded his little head when Gu Ling stretched out his hand to pull him off his back and throw him out of the window.

“Ah!” Ji Xiaoshu screamed, “Mother, save me!”

Su Liang walked out from behind the screen, having changed her clothes and still with a faint flush on her face. She saw Ji Xiaoshu flying back in through the window, saying, “Mother, I have verified that he’s the real master. The way he threw me was too skillful—it felt familiar!”

Zhengzheng also got down from Gu Ling. He was just overcome with missing him and excited to see Gu Ling return suddenly. Usually, he felt that he was too old to be held.

Gu Ling had already taken a bath, changed his clothes, and exchanged his feelings with Su Liang. He originally wanted to continue sleeping but got up when he heard the children’s voices.

Gu Ling sat down by the window, and the two children snuggled up to him.

“Master, I have a question for you!” Ji Xiaoshu grabbed Gu Ling seriously.

Gu Ling nodded slightly and pinched Ji Xiaoshu’s little face, “Go ahead.”

“Between you and Mother, who fell in love with whom first?” Ji Xiaoshu still remembered the question he had asked Su Liang a few days ago.

Su Liang looked out the window, where Cheng Yun was bringing Gu Xiaonuan over in his arms.

Meeting the curious eyes of the two children, Gu Ling calmly replied, “I fell in love with your mother first.”

Zhengzheng laughed, looking as if he knew that it was the case.

Ji Xiaoshu blinked, “That’s not what Mother said!”

Gu Ling looked at Su Liang, who happened to turn her head to look at him. Their eyes met, and Gu Ling slowly smiled, "Oh, your mother is right."

"Master, are you feeling very proud?" Ji Xiaoshu asked.

Gu Ling countered, "Can't I?"

Ji Xiaoshu nodded, "Of course you can. Mother spoils you too much, and there's nothing we can do about it." He then turned to Su Liang, "Mother, if Master and I fell into the water at the same time, who would you save first?"

Su Liang laughed lightly, "Whoever catches a fish first, I'll save that one first."

Ji Xiaoshu held his forehead, "Alright, Mother wants to eat fish. Master, let's go fishing this afternoon!"

Su Liang shook her head, "Your master is tired and needs to rest this afternoon. You guys go fishing."

Ji Xiaoshu pulled Zhengzheng to the window, "Senior Brother, now that Master is back, Mother only has eyes for him. Let's jump off the building."

Gu Ling reached out and pulled the two children back, "Go get your schoolwork, and let me take a look."

Ji Xiaoshu immediately behaved, "Master is so tired, it's too much work to check our schoolwork now. Let's do it tomorrow."

Gu Ling shook his head, "No, I'll check it now."

Just as Ji Xiaoshu was regretting not doing more work yesterday and trying to figure out how to stall so that he could catch up, he heard Gu Xiaonuan's voice and instantly brightened up, "Master, sister is back!" He dashed out, "Sister! Sister! Look who's back!"

When Cheng Yun brought Gu Xiaonuan up, Gu Ling stood up and looked at his beloved daughter, wanting to hug her right away but worried that she might not recognize him anymore.

Without anyone prompting her, Gu Xiaonuan saw Su Liang first and then turned her eyes to Gu Ling. She seemed a bit puzzled, tilting her little head and blinking her big, round eyes for a while before a big smile appeared on her little face, and she called out clearly and loudly, "Daddy!"

Gu Ling held Gu Xiaonuan and kissed her forehead. Gu Xiaonuan then took the initiative to move closer and kiss Gu Ling's face, giggling while calling out "Daddy" one after another.

Ji Xiaoshu dragged Zhengzheng out of the room, and Zhengzheng, who knew what was going on, didn't make a fuss. The two closed the door, Zhengzheng stood guard, and Ji Xiaoshu hurried to finish the last bit of his homework.

Cen Man met Qiao Cong and came to see Gu Xiaonuan, she was delighted to hear Gu Xiaonuan call her "Grandma".

Gu Xiaonuan was tired from playing outside and soon became drowsy, her little head gradually drooping.

Su Liang prepared the bed and told the father-daughter duo to sleep.

Gu Ling lay down with his daughter in his arms. Gu Xiaonuan snuggled against him, resting her small foot on him, and soon fell asleep.

Gu Ling's eyes were tender as he asked Su Liang to join them.

"I'm not sleepy. I'll go make a nourishing soup for you." Su Liang covered them with the blanket, bent down to kiss Gu Ling, then kissed their daughter, and finally lowered the bed curtain.

Cheng Yun was sitting in the living room, seeing the door open, he stood up. Su Liang asked him why he hadn't gone back to his room, and Cheng Yun said softly, "Xiaoshu is doing his makeup homework and asked me to help him stand guard, not to let Xiaogu go in."

"He's asleep. If you're not busy, go help me with the fire." Su Liang said.

Cheng Yun nodded, "Alright."

Although Cheng Yun still refused to eat meat temporarily, he had come to accept sitting at the table with everyone, watching others eat meat.

As Su Liang was preparing the ginseng chicken soup, Cheng Yun added firewood to the hearth.

"How long will it take for my hair to grow long?" Cheng Yun suddenly asked.

Su Liang was a little surprised, "In a hurry?"

"No." Cheng Yun shook his head, "Xiaoshu asked me today, but I don't know."

Su Liang thought about it, "Not necessarily, generally speaking, it can grow to a length that can be tied up in a year and a half. There may be a period of time before that when it's neither long nor short, and it looks a bit strange." She imagined Cheng Yun with shoulder-length hair. It wouldn't look bad on her face, but it would seem very unconventional.

But Cheng Yun had no concept of this, so she simply asked Su Liang for the time, so as to answer Ji Xiaoshu.

Gu Ling was awakened by Gu Xiaonuan. Since Gu Xiaonuan was only taking a nap, he woke up to find Gu Ling still asleep and climbed onto his body and poked his face with his little hands.

Gu Ling hadn't opened his eyes yet and lifted the corner of his mouth, hugged Gu Xiaonuan, "Let daddy sleep a little more, please."

Gu Xiaonuan thought Gu Ling was playing a game with him and began to struggle even more vigorously.

Gu Ling was very tired and hadn't rested enough, so he got up first and carried Gu Xiaonuan out, intending to settle her down and then go back to sleep.

He knocked on the door of the room next door, and Zhengzheng quickly opened it. Seeing Gu Ling, he shouted, "Xiaoshu!"

Ji Xiaoshu, who was about to finish his makeup assignment, saw Gu Ling entering the door and quickly covered the paper he was writing on, "Master, why don't you sleep more?"

Gu Ling handed Gu Xiaonuan to Zhengzheng and turned to walk out, leaving a sentence for Ji Xiaoshu, "Wait for me to finish sleeping and then beat you."

Ji Xiaoshu rushed to close the door and ran back to finish writing the last line of words. He put down his pen and laughed, "Master, you want to beat me? No way, you don't have any evidence! Haha!"

When Gu Ling woke up again, it was already nighttime. Cen Man had already drunk the ginseng chicken soup Su Liang had cooked, and the children had all had a little taste as well.

There were no lights in the room, and Gu Ling was the only one upstairs. He could hear the children laughing downstairs.

Gu Ling sat up on the bed, took a deep breath, and got up, walked over to the window, and opened it. Moonlight streamed in, and Qi Yan and Nangong Qian, who had finished dinner, were walking hand in hand by the lake, their shadows stretched out very long.

Gu Ling didn't go downstairs immediately but found the jade bells that Duanmu Chen had given to Gu Xiaonuan and jingled them.

Soon, Su Liang came up when she heard the sound, and as soon as she entered, Gu Ling hugged her tightly.

Gu Ling leaned his head on Su Liang's neck, his voice lazy, "I missed you so much."

There was laughter in Su Liang's eyes, as she gently patted Gu Ling's back, "Great God, you are even more childish than Gu Xiaonuan now. But you're very cute, and I like it."

Gu Ling sat by the window, holding Su Liang on his lap, his head resting on her, as they quietly watched the scene outside and talked about their own experiences during their separation. Gu Ling had done everything he needed to do when he returned home, but he hadn't had the chance to have a good talk with Su Liang.

After speaking, the two said in unison, "You've worked hard."

Then they looked at each other and laughed, Gu Ling nodded, "Yes, I missed you so much."

"Me too." Su Liang sighed softly. It sounded a bit cheesy, but that was the truth. She always felt self-sufficient, and she had indeed taken good care of the home without any problems, but the pressure in her heart and her desire for Gu Ling to be by her side were real as well.

"Transmigration Road? Do you think it really exists?" Gu Ling asked Su Liang.

"Anything is possible." Su Liang initially thought it was too bizarre, but she herself was a bizarre existence. She couldn't limit her own imagination just because she had integrated herself into the life of this world.

Gu Ling's imagination had always been bolder and more open compared to Su Liang.

"If there really is such a thing, and it can really be done, and we can travel together, would you like to try it, Great God?" Su Liang asked.

Without thinking or hesitating, Gu Ling shook his head and said, "No, I wouldn't. Even if we witnessed someone going back and then coming back, it doesn't mean anyone else can do the same. I wouldn't take any risks."

Gu Ling had once expressed his longing for Su Liang's previous world, but that was just because he enjoyed experiencing different lives and was unafraid of adventure. However, that was before he realized he had fallen in love with Su Liang.

Now, Gu Ling had found his home in this life, a home that he cherished, and would gladly spend his life unable to leave, as long as he was together with Su Liang and their child. He didn't find it boring.

Love of adventure often comes from a restless heart, content with whatever comes its way. That was Gu Ling in the past. Currently, he was Su Liang's husband and Gu Xiaonuan's father. He enjoyed the responsibilities that came with being a husband and father, as it was not a burden but a divine blessing.

As a result, anything that might lead to the separation of their family and the harm of Su Liang and Gu Xiaonuan was unacceptable to Gu Ling.

Moreover, although Su Liang asked this question, they both believed that at most, Mo Yan's body had traveled here and might eventually return. It was impossible for him to come and go freely, causing chaos in the space-time continuum. Even Mo Yan's possible return was a subject of skepticism for Gu Ling and Su Liang. Though they thought it might be possible, the chance was very slim.

Of course, Su Liang supported Gu Ling's rescue of the Weng family patriarch and his grandson on his way back. Upon learning that the old man might come to the capital city, Su Liang looked forward to it. She had always self-studied and learned about medical skills from books and exchanges with Imperial Physician Gao, but she didn't have a master to teach her new things. She hoped that the old man could surprise her.

Su Liang shared many funny anecdotes about the children with Gu Ling.

Gu Ling regretted missing several months of Gu Xiaonuan's growth but was pleased that she hadn't forgotten him. When he learned that Gu Xiaonuan's first word was "Daddy," he asked Su Liang if she was making it up. After Su Liang recounted the details of that day, Gu Ling said, "Her first word was 'Mommy,' you just misheard."

The couple disagreed on this issue, just like their opinions on who fell in love with the other first. Their differing viewpoints didn't matter, as they cherished each other's opinions, making it a delightful disagreement.

"Let's go eat; you must be hungry," Su Liang said as she pulled Gu Ling up.

Before they left the room, Gu Ling hugged Su Liang again. She chuckled, "Yes, I know you missed me a lot."

Upon descending the stairs, they saw Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu carrying a palanquin with their hands crossed, and Gu Xiaonuan sitting on it, beaming.

"Mom! Dad!" Gu Xiaonuan waved her little hands.

“See, she called ‘Mom’ first,” Gu Ling whispered to Su Liang.

Su Liang smiled, “It’s just because you weren’t here, and she’s used to calling me like this. When you weren’t around, she would call ‘Dad’ after saying ‘Mom.’

Gu Ling’s eyes twinkled with laughter as he took Gu Xiaonuan off the “palanquin” and heard Ji Xiaoshu ask, “Why did Master say he’d hit me earlier today?”

“You didn’t finish your homework,” Gu Ling replied, holding Xiaonuan as he walked to the table while Su Liang went to fetch their food.

Ji Xiaoshu held his head high, “I finished it! Master didn’t even check before making such a conclusion; it’s unreasonable!”

“Hmm,” Gu Ling nodded, “Where’s your dad?”

Ji Xiaoshu was stumped, “I don’t know!”

“Well, that’s why I want to hit you,” Gu Ling said calmly.

Everyone laughed, and Gu Xiaonuan clapped her hands, even though she didn’t understand the joke.

Ji Xiaoshu: ... This is simply outrageous!

Su Liang brought over some ginseng chicken soup, and while Gu Ling was eating, Ji Xiaoshu complained to her.

After listening, Su Liang laughed, “Your master is so adorable.”

Ji Xiaoshu sighed, “Master, you just spoil him!”

Chapter 438: 438. Reunion Time

On the day following Gu Ling’s return home, Su Liang woke up the latest.

When she opened her eyes and lifted the curtain of her bed, she saw the warm sunlight streaming through the window, casting splendid patches of light on the floor.

The room was quiet. Gu Ling was not there, and Gu Xiaonuan’s little bed was empty too.

It had been a long time since Su Liang had slept so soundly and peacefully. A feeling of relaxation from deep within made her feel comfortable in body and mind.

She lazily got out of the bed and dressed more slowly than usual. After tidying up, she went to the window, opened it, and saw the winter scenery by the lake. It had once seemed desolate and bleak, but now she found it simple and elegant, like an ink painting.

Gu Ling and the children were the most lively elements within the painting.

Gu Ling held Gu Xiaonuan in one hand and a wooden sword in the other, assessing Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu’s swordsmanship. The two children were very serious and coordinated well, their movements already quite stylish.

Gu Ling, with only one hand, displayed casual elegance, while Gu Xiaonuan was very excited, cheering for her brothers all the time. Su Liang heard her crisp voice and happy laughter.

Without a doubt, when Gu Xiaonuan grew up a bit more, she would surely love martial arts. Now, Su Liang's several masters all asserted that Gu Xiaonuan had extraordinary talent for martial arts. Su Liang felt that this was entirely based on their deep "beloved disciple" filter when observing Gu Xiaonuan.

Upon seeing Su Liang, Gu Ling raised Gu Xiaonuan high while fending off the two children and greeted her.

Laughter spread in Su Liang's eyes as she leaned against the window, waving at Gu Ling and blowing a kiss.

Then, Zhengzheng's little wooden sword poked Gu Ling's leg.

Of course, it couldn't cause any injury, but both children were surprised and stopped.

Disbelieving, Zhengzheng looked at his wooden sword and then at Gu Ling. "I actually poked my master!" he said excitedly.

Ji Xiaoshu cheered, "Big Brother is so powerful! Today, we won! Master, you can't say we slack off in martial arts anymore, haha!"

As Gu Xiaonuan chimed in with a loud "Mom", the two children who had been focusing on their swordplay turned their heads to see Su Liang and waved at her.

"I see, Master was distracted just now," Zhengzheng said.

Ji Xiaoshu grinned, "This is Master Mom helping us with her beauty! In any case, we won! Master can't hit me anymore!"

As soon as Ji Xiaoshu finished speaking, Gu Ling picked him up and tossed him aside... As Ji Xiaoshu landed skillfully, he protested against Gu Ling's retreating figure, "Master, why did you throw me again? Give me a reason!"

"You were in my way," Gu Ling replied, soaring towards Su Liang, leaving a cold silhouette for the children.

Ji Xiaoshu looked around at the flat, empty space and stared speechlessly at the sky.

Zhengzheng, holding Gu Xiaonuan, called Ji Xiaoshu over, "Xiao Shu, come on! Let's teach our sister how to walk!"

Ji Xiaoshu walked over, put down his wooden sword, and held Gu Xiaonuan, "Little sister, only you and Master Mom can beat Master, but Master Mom has been bewitched by Master's beauty. Hurry up and grow up, and help us defeat Master together!"

Zhengzheng couldn't stop laughing, "Xiao Shu, Master likes you especially, that's why he plays with you."

Ji Xiaoshu raised his chin slightly and grinned, "Of course I know that!"

After returning to the room, Gu Ling closed the window and embraced Su Liang quietly for a while. Then he let her go, "You wash up first, and I'll get breakfast."

“The weather is nice, let’s have it in the pavilion outside,” Su Liang suggested.

Gu Ling nodded and went downstairs.

When Su Liang finished washing and changing and went out, Gu Ling had already set up breakfast in the pavilion.

Seeing two sets of bowls and chopsticks, Su Liang thought Gu Ling was waiting for her and hadn’t eaten yet. However, Gu Ling said that he had eaten with everyone else and would accompany Su Liang for another meal. “My stomach has suffered from the food outside, and I need compensation.”

Trying not to laugh, Su Liang said, “Indeed, you need a good compensation.”

The two sat opposite each other and ate breakfast. The porridge, vegetables, and stuffed pastries were all made by Gu Ling. Su Liang tasted a bite and exclaimed, “Great God Gu Ling, your cooking is the most delicious!”

“What do you want for lunch?” Gu Ling asked.

“I’ll make dried green bean meat buns for you,” Su Liang suggested. “It’s the dried green beans given by Old Lady Bai when you brought the fake Yan Shiba back. Half of them are left, and I made meat buns once in the middle. Everyone liked them a lot.”

After learning the recipe, Gu Ling decided to make them himself. Although he had been away, he knew that Su Liang had also been tired.

As soon as they finished breakfast, Su Liang heard Zhengzheng’s excited shout, “Little sister can walk!”

She saw Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu lifting Gu Xiaonuan with their hands like a stretcher, placing her on the ground and holding onto her hands to make sure she didn’t fall. They encouraged her to take a few steps.

“She’s wearing so much padding. She’ll be fine even if she falls,” Su Liang said with a smile.

“No way!” Gu Ling, Zhengzheng, and Ji Xiaoshu unanimously objected.

Unconvinced, Su Liang conceded, acting as if she hadn’t said anything.

Gu Ling’s eyes filled with gentle laughter as he stretched his hand out towards his daughter, beckoning her to come closer.

“Daddy~” Gu Xiaonuan stood steadily and reached out her little hand, asking Gu Ling to come and pick her up.

“Come on, Nuannuan,” Gu Ling said softly.

“Daddy~” Gu Xiaonuan called out again.

“Master, don’t go over there! Little sister can walk!” Zhengzheng thought Gu Ling was going to cave and quickly stopped him. He coaxed Gu Xiaonuan, “If you want Master

to hold you, just walk over there! It's just two steps! Weren't you able to walk just now?"

Gu Xiaonuan lifted her foot and took a step.

"Wow! Little sister is amazing!" Zhengzheng immediately praised her.

Ji Xiaoshu also praised her, "Little sister, one more! Come on, walk forward!"

Gu Ling looked at his lovely and powerful daughter with an admiring expression, waiting for her to come to his side.

Su Liang suspected that Gu Xiaonuan had probably been able to walk for a while, but she was lazy because so many people liked to hold her.

Under the vigilant protection of her two brothers, Gu Xiaonuan successfully walked to Gu Ling's side, where he picked her up and placed her on his lap.

Qiao Cong's excited voice sounded not far away, "Nuannuan can walk?"

Approaching noon, Duanmu Chen, wearing casual clothes, came to Su Mansion with Chang'an.

Having heard that Gu Ling had returned, Duanmu Chen came to see him but didn't find him in Yuanming Pavilion.

Ji Xiaoshu, who was reading a book on medicinal herbs, looked up, "Emperor Uncle, are you looking for my master? He's steaming buns in the kitchen with Master Mom!"

Upon hearing this, Chang'an saw Duanmu Chen's eyes light up. He had chosen this time to come, intending to freeload a meal. He wanted to bring the two children with him originally, but the weather outside was cold, and Empress Dowager Xiao was afraid that the children would catch a cold, so she did not allow them to come.

When Duanmu Chen approached the kitchen door, he saw Su Liang sitting on a small stool, kindling a fire, and Gu Ling was kneading the dough. The steamed bun filling was already prepared.

"Cough, cough!" Duanmu Chen made a sound to announce his arrival.

"Your Majesty is here." Su Liang casually greeted him without getting up.

Duanmu Chen smiled, "Are you steaming buns? Let's discuss the matter after you finish cooking."

"Your Majesty can speak directly and return to the palace to handle the government affairs early after that," Gu Ling said with a light tone.

Duanmu Chen shook his head, "No hurry." He joked, "I have come all this way, and it would be too much of a loss not to eat. Lately, I've found the palace too cold and desolate, the Su Mansion is more lively."

As a result, Duanmu Chen returned to Yuanming Pavilion, sitting next to Ji Xiaoshu, and was surprised to find him reading a book on medicinal herbs, "Xiaoshu, do you want to learn medical skills?"

Ji Xiaoshu didn't look up, "I am my master's disciple, of course, I have to learn medical skills."

Duanmu Chen looked approvingly, "Very good. I hope that one day you will become as famous as your master and be known as a Divine Doctor."

"Definitely!" Ji Xiaoshu was very smart, but he was not particularly interested in studying and martial arts, although he learned them well. He was truly passionate about medical skills taught by Su Liang. That's where his interest lied, and he was especially serious about it.

Duanmu Chen looked at Ji Xiaoshu, wishing that his own children would quickly grow up and start studying with Su Liang and Gu Ling, so they wouldn't leave once their troubles were resolved.

The steamed buns made by Gu Ling were brought to Yuanming Pavilion. Duanmu Chen washed his hands and started eating with the children. He couldn't help but exclaim, "Your master's steamed bun-making skills are truly unparalleled." From the time of Su Family Village to now, he had been craving them. At first, Su Liang made them, but now Gu Ling made them even better. Prior to this, Duanmu Chen had asked Su Liang for the bun recipe and the other home-cooked dishes, and while the imperial chefs made them more exquisite in the palace, it still felt like something was missing.

Emperor Uncle, have you heard any news about my father?" Ji Xiaoshu asked after finishing a steamed bun, suddenly thinking of Ji Yuebai.

Duanmu Chen shook his head, "I have already told you the last time there was news about him, and there is no new information for now. Don't worry, your father said he would be back before the end of the year, so it should be soon."

"I hope so," Ji Xiaoshu nodded, "Aunt Yue and Uncle Baiyang are waiting to get married, and all that's left is for my father to come back."

Duanmu Chen's mouth twitched, "Xiaoshu is really a good child."

After lunch, Gu Ling first coaxed Gu Xiaonuan to sleep, and then went to the lakeside pavilion to talk to Duanmu Chen.

Skiping the part about time-traveling, Gu Ling briefly recounted his previous adventures to Duanmu Chen. The shocks and dangers made Duanmu Chen frown.

"What are they trying to do? Since they know the island has been exposed, why don't they leave and hide somewhere else?" Duanmu Chen was a smart man and quickly caught the key points.

Gu Ling's expression was calm, "There is a forbidden area on the island, and I don't know what's inside it yet, but there must be a mystery." This was the complete truth.

"And I've been wanting to ask you, how did the people from Xingluo Island manage to evade us and get the grain and fodder to Liang Country so quickly?" Duanmu Chen asked.

"Su Liang and I suspect they have some sort of magic treasure," Gu Ling said.

Duanmu Chen was stunned for a moment, "What did you say?"

“Magic treasure.” Gu Ling repeated the last two words.

Duanmu Chen widened his eyes, “You mean the kind of treasure that only gods in the sky would have?”

Gu Ling nodded, “It’s a guess.”

Duanmu Chen was silent for a long time before speaking again, lowering his voice, “Are you really able to predict the future? Are you a god in human form? Is Su Liang the same? Or do you know anything about the path of immortal cultivation?”

Gu Ling shook his head, “I am not. It’s just that the matter of grain and fodder cannot be explained by common sense, and coupled with the mystery of Xingluo Island, I made that guess.”

But Duanmu Chen raised his hand and patted Gu Ling’s shoulder, giving him a look—I understand, we can’t talk about it directly, I get it.

By now, Gu Ling and Su Liang had developed a considerable level of trust in Duanmu Chen. There were some things that Duanmu Chen could guess even if Gu Ling didn’t say them. However, with his imagination, he was still far from guessing the whole truth.

The grain and fodder issue could only be explained in this way, and it wasn’t a lie. Gu Ling and Su Liang still didn’t know what Mo Yan’s “portable space” was like, whether it existed in his mind or in an object, calling it a “magic treasure” was quite fitting.

However, Duanmu Chen didn’t ask further. He felt that Gu Ling and Su Liang were no ordinary people. Given their relationship and the help they’ve given him, Duanmu Chen completely trusted them and knew that they might be “higher” than himself, which made him feel more at ease.

In the end, when Duanmu Chen left, he took two steamed buns with him, saying they were for Empress Dowager Xiao. However, on the way back to the palace, he had already eaten one.

In the afternoon, Gu Ling took the children fishing and caught three fat fish. He made two of them into Fried Fish Nuggets and the remaining one was used for braised fish for dinner.

Gu Ling picked fish bones for Gu Xiaonuan, feeding her fish. The scene was very heartwarming.

Ji Xiaoshu asked Gu Ling if he could help him pick out the fish bones, but Gu Ling shook his head, “You have hands, you can use them.”

Ji Xiaoshu obediently nodded, “I can even help my master’s wife pick fish bones, but she won’t let me. Master, can we go mountain climbing tomorrow?”

Zhengzheng had an expectant look on his face. Gu Ling had taken them mountain climbing once, and they had had a great time and had always cherished the memory.

Gu Ling looked at Su Liang, and she nodded, “Let’s go then. Cheng Yun is coming too.” She and Gu Ling needed to think about how to deal with Xingluo Island next, and it didn’t necessarily need to be done sitting at home. Perhaps going out for a walk would bring unexpected gains.

The children cheered and said they would go and look for the tadpoles they had met before.

Cheng Yun looked serious as he said to Su Liang, “You should call me brother.”

Su Liang raised an eyebrow, “When Gu Ling calls you, I will.”

Cheng Yun looked at Gu Ling, "Little brother Gu."

Gu Ling's expression was indifferent, "Keep dreaming."

Cheng Yun: ... Anyway, the children called him Uncle, not bothered by this couple who always liked to tease him.

That night, after Gu Xiaonuan was asleep, Gu Ling and Su Liang leaned against each other in bed and brought up Yan Shiba.

"This season, Wolong Mountain is covered with heavy snow, and it's not only dangerous but also slim chance to find Yan Shiba inside." Su Liang sighed lightly, "Should we go looking for her? Or should we wait for Sheng Yue to bring her to us?"

"For now, let's not look for her." Gu Ling said, "If she's alive now, Sheng Yue won't kill her afterward."

"I was thinking, since there's a treasure protected by Mo Yan on Xingluo Island, why not just blow it up?" Su Liang suggested, "While Mo Yan doesn't have any other hostages in his hands, as long as we destroy the island, his delusional goal will no longer be possible. Originally, his coming and going had nothing to do with us, but since he's resorting to every means possible to harm us in order to achieve his goal, it's better to send him to the West sooner rather than later."

"It's possible." said Gu Ling, deep in thought, "I'm thinking of letting Pu Cheng go and find Sheng Yue and deliver a message to him."

Su Liang's expression changed, "Great God, are you thinking of cooperating with Sheng Yue?"

Gu Ling nodded, "According to Pu Cheng, Sheng Yue's goal is to go through a portal to see the world her mother came from. The test subject he needs can be me or Mo Yan, and Mo Yan is the better choice."

"I did think of that too, but I'm a little skeptical of whether what Pu Cheng thinks Sheng Yue's purpose is may just be him imagining things." Su Liang said, "What if Sheng Yue has other intentions? Of course, as long as he's willing to show up, it's a good thing for us. I just think it might be useless, but it's worth a try. In any case, Pu Cheng is already useless and can't cause any more trouble. It's even more impossible for anyone else to find Sheng Yue."

Of course, they could arrange for someone to follow Pu Cheng, but even if he wasn't detected by Pu Cheng, it would be very difficult to hide from Sheng Yue, which would be very dangerous.

So, after discussing it, Su Liang and Gu Ling decided to release Pu Cheng before dawn and let him carry a letter to Sheng Yue. The letter was sealed in a mechanism iron box by Gu Ling and tied to Pu Cheng's body with a complex method, which he couldn't untie. Of course, he might not go to find Sheng Yue. However, considering Pu Cheng's current situation, even if Sheng Yue abandoned him, he would still go find his capable son instead of going back to the temple and continuing to be a monk. Being a monk was not what he wanted in the first place.

Cheng Yun got up early, didn't wake Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu, and went out to buy steaming hot breakfast after tidying up. He arranged the food on the round table on the first floor where everyone usually ate. Although he didn't eat meat, he listened to Su Liang and bought both vegetarian and meat-filled steamed buns for the children's growth.

Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu knocked on the door of Gu Ling and Su Liang's room.

"Master, Mistress, get up quickly, we're going hiking!" Ji Xiaoshu's voice was lively, full of energy, and after speaking, she ran downstairs with Zhengzheng.

In fact, Gu Ling and Su Liang didn't sleep after letting Pu Cheng go. When Gu Xiaonuan woke up, the two of them got up as well.

After breakfast, the sun had just risen.

Madam Xing invited Nangong Qian to her house today. Qiao Cong and Cen Man were to accompany her to Marquis Zhong Xin's residence. Qi Yan naturally had to go because Madam Xing wanted to take a look at his fiancée.

They didn't take a carriage because the children wanted to ride horses.

Four horses left Su Mansion. Gu Xiaonuan stuck her little head out from Gu Ling's embrace, her eyes shining brightly. She pointed to a big tree not far away and said in a crisp voice, "Tree!"

Ji Xiaoshu felt quite proud, "That's my name, of course, my sister recognizes it! Master, my sister doesn't know your name yet, right?"

Zhengzheng smiled happily and asked Gu Xiaonuan, "Sister, what's my name?"

Gu Xiaonuan immediately replied, "Zheng!"

Gu Ling lowered his head and gently kissed his daughter's forehead, "So smart."

They dismounted at the foot of Wangxiang Mountain. Zhengzheng looked around and whispered to Su Liang, "Mistress, will there be any bad people?"

Su Liang smiled, "Don't worry, your master is here. But don't run too far."

Zhengzheng nodded, "I understand, I'll watch out for Xiaoshu."

The two children immediately started racing each other, while Gu Ling carried Gu Xiaonuan and walked behind with Su Liang, listening to their cheerful voices echoing through the mountains.

The winter mountain scenery was bleak and gray, even the occasional pines and cypresses growing in the cracks of the rocks were a dark, ink-like green.

After Gu Xiaonuan said "tree" several times, Gu Ling began to teach her other words, such as "grass," "rock," "road," "bird," "sparrow," and a "rabbit" that ran through the forest.

Gu Xiaonuan saw a gray rabbit dart by and turned her head, blinking her round black eyes at Gu Ling, "Rabbit! Gone!"

If their daughter liked rabbits, why not just catch one? Gu Ling instructed Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu to catch a rabbit for Gu Xiaonuan.

The two children were immediately enthusiastic. Ji Xiaoshu pulled out a slingshot from his pocket, picked up a few stones from the ground, and asked, "Master, do you want it dead or alive?"

The slingshot was given by Gu Ling, Zhengzheng had one too.

"Alive," Gu Ling said.

"Alright! Big brother, let's go hunting!" Ji Xiaoshu excitedly rushed into the forest.

Su Liang quickly followed, fearing that they might accidentally get hurt.

"Big tree!"

"Small tree!"

"Pine tree!"

"Bird!"

Gu Xiaonuan learned to speak very quickly and could call out the names of similar things she saw again. Gu Ling had no memory of his own childhood and found human babies to be adorable. He now understood the meaning of the phrase "the pearl in one's hand" from the books.

Before long, when Su Liang brought the two children out of the forest, she had a large gray rabbit in her hand.

"Sister, look! A rabbit!" Ji Xiaoshu held up the rabbit like a treasure for Gu Xiaonuan to see.

Gu Xiaonuan reached out her little hand, tentatively touching and grabbing the rabbit. She seemed to find the touch very peculiar and giggled.

"Master, let's roast this fat rabbit after we reach the top of the mountain!" Ji Xiaoshu suggested.

Zhengzheng disagreed, "Sister likes it, we can't kill it."

"Maybe sister likes to eat it too!" Ji Xiaoshu thought Gu Xiaonuan was very brave and wouldn't be afraid of this.

"We'll take it home first," Gu Ling thought it was too cold outside and planned to go back early.

"Take it home and roast it!" Ji Xiaoshu felt that since their master didn't object, it must mean he wanted to eat it as well.

When they reached the place where they had seen tadpoles the last time they visited Wangxiang Mountain, the two children eagerly hoped to see the grown-up frogs. But they found the waterfall and the water below had frozen.

“We can come back when spring blossoms and see the frogs by then,” Su Liang reassured the two children.

Ji Xiaoshu stood on the thick layer of ice and looked down, puzzled, “Where did the frogs go now? Won’t they freeze to death under there?”

Su Liang shook her head, explaining to the children that frogs were amphibious, also known as cold-blooded animals. Their body temperature changes with the environment, and low temperatures can threaten their lives. In addition, due to the lack of food in winter, they need to hibernate to save energy. They might not be in the water but in small holes near the water.

The two children listened intently and found it magical. As they continued to walk towards the summit, they didn’t run into the forest but instead walked along with Su Liang, asking all kinds of strange questions.

“Do frogs have parents?”

“Aren’t birds afraid of the cold?”

“How do bird eggs turn into baby birds?”

“Do fish hibernate too?”

Su Liang patiently answered each question, and Ji Xiaoshu exclaimed, “How does Mistress know everything? So amazing!”

“Your master knows as well,” Su Liang smiled lightly.

Then, Ji Xiaoshu turned around and asked Gu Ling a weird question, “Master, can birds and fish be together? If they were together, would they have winged little fish or swimming little birds?”

Gu Ling shook his head, “No.”

Ji Xiaoshu looked at Su Liang again, “Is that true?”

Seeing Su Liang nod, Ji Xiaoshu looked disappointed, “Well, I really want to know what a winged little fish looks like!”

Su Liang chuckled, “You can imagine it and draw it.”

Ji Xiaoshu nodded, “I will try when I get back.”

Zhengzheng said, “I will draw a swimming little bird, then!”

When they reached the top of the mountain, the two children sat in a tree, gazing into the distance and promising each other that when they grew up, they would take their sister on a journey to see the world.

When they returned home that day, the rabbit was slaughtered, skinned, and roasted until fragrant. Gu Xiaonuan seemed eager to try it, so Gu Ling fed her a small piece.

At dinner, Qiao Cong asked Gu Ling and Su Liang about their plans for the future, “You should stay home and take care of things here! Qianqian’s marriage is settled, Xiaogu is going home, and I have nothing to worry about here. I will go to Jiaye City tomorrow to see how Jingjing is doing.”

Jiaye City.

Three days after Qiao Jing and his team returned, they were busy setting up defenses along the coastline. Lin Shun had already started preparations before they came back, but there was still a lot to do.

Under Old Mu's reassurance, Old White calmed down from the initial panic when he was rescued. However, at his age, the unease of losing most of his life's memories lingered. He still wanted to regain his memory as soon as possible. Old Mu said that Su Liang had been studying this and might find a solution soon, so he should not be anxious.

Originally, Qiao Jing wanted to send someone to escort Old White and the Ying siblings to the capital city, but now, Old White trusted Old Mu the most and couldn't bear to leave him. Old Mu had to stay behind and follow Gu Ling's plan to make weapons. So Old White stayed as well.

Ying Ying, on the other hand, heard that there was much to be done and volunteered to help in Jiaye City though she longed to meet her legendary sister Su Liang.

Of course, Lin Shun was the happiest one.

On one hand, his beloved Ying Ying returned safely, and memory loss was not a major issue. On the other hand, after experiencing so much together, he finally reconciled with Qiao Jing and settled an unresolved issue.

Qiao Jing knew that Lin Shun had feelings for Ying Ying, so he advised him to take the initiative and talk to Ying Ying about their past experiences.

So, Lin Shun spent three days preparing, and finally, this day came. He found Ying Ying and planned to have a heart-to-heart conversation.

But just as he began, Ying Ye said he was hungry, and Ying Ying took her brother to eat.

When Ying Ye had finished eating and went to sleep, Lin Shun started again, only to hear a report from outside, "General Lin, we're in trouble!"

Lin Shun and Ying Ying's expressions changed in unison!

Qiao Jing hurried back from outside and saw Lin Shun preparing to check the situation with Ying Ying: three children disappeared in the city today.

"With Gu Ling just leaving Xingluo Island, those people must have been sent there earlier than you. The defense wasn't completed yet, so they could easily go ashore," Lin Shun analyzed.

The defense was almost complete now, but reinforcement and improvement were still needed. Besides, the fishermen along the coast had been notified to stop fishing, and their livelihood was assured. It was impossible for people from Xingluo Island to come ashore without being noticed.

Lin Shun's concern was already there. Assuming it was Xingluo Island's doing, it was because they temporarily had no other enemies. Moreover, they had set up defenses along the coastline to prevent such events.

Ying Ying frowned, "Why did they only act today after several days have passed?"

“They might have been looking for a way back before,” Qiao Jing said, his eyes focused.

Old Mu clenched his brow, “Damn it! Does that mean they’re going to make a move because they’ve found a way back?”

“Not necessarily,” Qiao Jing shook his head, “Maybe they didn’t find a way back after searching for a few days and decided to take hostages to force us to let them go. They attacked in broad daylight, which is a threat to us.”

“To hell with them!” Old Mu’s face darkened with anger, “I hate those bastards who use children as hostages the most!”

“If my guess is correct, we still have a chance to capture them,” Qiao Jing squinted, “But their opponents this time will undoubtedly be powerful masters from Xingluo Island. They also have hostages, which will be challenging.”

“I’ll send a message to the capital city!” Lin Shun went into the room, “Maybe Gu Ling and Su Liang have already caught Sheng Yue!”

With anger in his belly, Old Mu went on to make more explosives, vowing to level Xingluo Island someday.

Ying Ying stopped Qiao Jing, who was about to leave, “In case we have to let those people go with the hostages, I can go as a hostage and have them release the children.”

Qiao Jing frowned, “No! You’ve just managed to get out of there!”

“They won’t harm me,” Ying Ying shook her head, “I trust you to take care of Xiaoye, and you need to be in charge here. To get them to agree to exchange, the hostage must be valuable, and I’m barely qualified.”

Qiao Jing sighed, “We’ll discuss this with Lin Shun later.”

But just as Lin Shun sent the message to the capital city and received the news that trouble had broken out on the seashore, Qiao Jing and Ying Ying had already rushed there.

When Lin Shun and Old Mu arrived at the seashore with the fastest speed, they saw Qiao Jing and Ying Ying confronting three old men. Undoubtedly, they were masters from Xingluo Island. Each of them held a child they had captured from Jiaye City, using them as shields in front of them.

Not far away was a newly built defense work, and countless archers aimed at them. With their strength, they could force their way through, but it would be doubly difficult to do so with hostages. Furthermore, they needed a boat to return to Xingluo Island and ensure they wouldn’t be blown up once they boarded. That’s why they had to negotiate using hostages.

“If you take me instead, it will be more convenient for you.” Ying Ying raised her hands, “You know very well who I am, Su Liang is my sister, capturing me will be of higher value, right? Besides, kids are hard to control and have delicate bodies. If any

accidents happen, it will be difficult to handle. As long as you agree, I will surrender immediately and fulfill all your conditions. What do you say?"

Qiao Jing did not stop Ying Ying. This kidnapping is due to the time difference between the start of their vigilance and the arrival of people from Xingluo Island, which was an unavoidable consequence. It is not to say that the defense was useless. At least it was easy for the people from Xingluo Island to come, but difficult for them to leave and get back onshore.

But today's trouble must be resolved, and that is to save the three innocent children who have been kidnapped.

Qiao Jing is aware of the strength of those three men and knows that there is no bottom line for the people on Xingluo Island. He dares not take any risks and decides against taking a hard approach. If their conditions are not met, the consequences may be disastrous.

When Lian Shun heard what Ying Ying said, his face changed, but he didn't speak immediately.

The three men on Xingluo Island glanced at each other, and one of them finally said, "You can exchange her, but only one for one!"

Of course, this was not Ying Ying's goal. However, before she could say anything, the man who had just spoken threatened fiercely, "Stop talking nonsense, the exchange can only be one-for-one! There is no room for negotiation! Let us go immediately, provide us with a sturdy boat and enough food, or I will strangle this kid in my hands and show you I'm not joking!"

Old Mu gritted his teeth and clenched the gun in his sleeves. However, it was obvious that the three men were prepared for this. They chose an open space, making it almost impossible to capture them all at once. Taking a hasty action might lead to the death of the hostage.

Just as Qiao Jing was considering what to do, Lian Shun spoke, "Add one more – me! I am Gu Ling and Su Liang's best friend! I will go with Ying Ying and in exchange for the three children in your hands! If I am not mistaken, your mission is to capture at least two hostages! If you dare to hurt those three children, I guarantee I will tear you all to pieces! Within ten seconds, if you don't agree, there will be no such good condition!"

The three men exchanged glances again. One of them threw a bottle of pills, "Both of you, come over here and take one pill each! It's just a sedative!"

Lian Shun took off his sword and handed it to Old Mu, then he and Ying Ying walked towards the three men.

Picking up the bottle of pills from the ground, Lian Shun opened it and poured out a pill and held it in his hand. He threw the bottle over to Ying Ying.

Ying Ying caught it and also poured out a pill.

"Take it!" A man was staring at each of them while the other one was staring at Qiao Jing.

Ying Ying and Lian Shun glanced at each other, she took the pill first and immediately collapsed in a coma.

Lian Shun said to Qiao Jing, "Tell my parents not to worry." He then put the pill in his mouth and collapsed to the ground.

The three men holding the children walked over to Lian Shun and Ying Ying and grabbed them both.

"The boat is prepared." Qiao Jing said with an icy expression, "You may leave now. If anything happens to them, I assure you that you will die a very ugly death!"

Soon after, a boat left the beach.

Qiao Jing stared solemnly at the departing boat, not allowing the archers who had drawn their bows to relax. But shooting the boat would also put Lian Shun and Ying Ying at risk, and blowing up the boat was not an option either.

However...thinking of the look Lian Shun gave him before taking the pill, Qiao Jing decided to wait a little longer.

A moment later, Lian Shun woke up on the boat and jumped into the sea with the unconscious Ying Ying in tow!

Qiao Jing immediately ordered the archers to shoot, while Old Mu personally threw a bundle of explosives with a catapult!

The boat was blown to pieces, killing one of the three kidnappers, severely injuring another, and the last one went missing.

Qiao Jing ordered his men to keep a close watch on the water and expand the search area. As soon as someone surfaced, they would be killed without mercy.

When Ying Ying regained consciousness, she was lying on the beach, with Lian Shun looking intently at her.

"What happened?" Ying Ying rubbed her forehead.

Lian Shun's lips curved into a warm smile, "Gu Xiaoling taught me a magic trick. Those scumbags didn't even realize that I switched the sedatives."

Ying Ying exclaimed in surprise, "That's amazing! I'm impressed."

Lian Shun pulled Ying Ying to her feet, silently chanting in his heart: Thank you, Gu Xiaoling!

Chapter 440: 440. The only sister

Qiao Jing decided to stay by the sea to search for the missing person from Xingluo Island, arranging for Lian Shun and Ying Ying to escort the three children who had been taken hostage back home.

Lian Shun knew Qiao Jing was deliberately setting him up with Ying Ying, so when he left, he made a gesture to Qiao Jing behind Ying Ying's back: Thanks, bro!

Qiao Jing gave a faint smile, watching Lian Shun and Ying Ying leaving. He turned his gaze back to the boundless ocean. Thanks to Lian Shun's quick thinking today, otherwise, the situation would have reverted to the state before he and Gu Ling went to Xingluo Island to rescue people—a total

mess. Whatever the case, he and Lian Shun had been good friends for many years, so the mutual understanding was still there.

They tightened their defenses along the coastline, expanding the search area, ready to terminate the person as soon as they reappeared. Despite them being very strong, they were still human. In the endless sea with no boat or even drifting wood to rest, and the nearest island far out of their reach, they would soon exhaust their strength. Either they would drown, or they would come ashore before their strength ran out.

Qiao Jing hoped the person was afraid of dying and would return to the shore. At that time, in order to survive, perhaps they could reveal some useful information.

But they waited until the setting sun stained the sea red, and there were still no signs of the person.

Qiao Jing dispatched ships to search and salvage in the nearby sea area. As he anticipated, a body floated to the surface by dusk.

Meanwhile, Lian Shun and Ying Ying took the three children home.

The children had been given sedatives earlier, and although they didn't know how perilous the escapade had been, they were still terrified. One was holding Ying Ying and crying for mom, one dived into Lian Shun's arms calling for dad, and one just sat blankly, with one hand held by each Lian Shun and Ying Ying.

Lian Shun and Ying Ying exchanged a look, both seeing the awkwardness in each other's eyes, inexplicably feeling like they were an old couple with three kids...

Ying Ying felt lost dealing with small children. Although her younger brother Ying Ye was a child in her eyes, he was not as small as the one she was currently holding due to his immaturity.

Lian Shun, on the other hand, was very good at handling this situation, and with his affable personality, he quickly pacified the child in his arms, before proceeding to comfort the other two.

Once all three children had calmed down and stopped crying, Lian Shun began performing magic tricks for the children.

The space in the carriage wasn't very large, Ying Ying was sitting on one side, holding the three children, and Lian Shun was on the other side, cheerfully saying, "Now, is the moment to witness a miracle."

Ying Ying chuckled and then immediately regained her serious expression, "I am looking forward to it."

Then, Lian Shun reached out a hand to Ying Ying. There was nothing in his hand.

All three children stared wide-eyed as Lian Shun's hand moved closer and closer to Ying Ying's face, one of them innocently asked, "Uncle Lian, are you going to touch aunty Ying?"

Seeing Ying Ying frown, Lian Shun maintained his smile, "Don't move."

Then, Lian Shun waved his hand behind Ying Ying's ear, and when he brought it back out, a copper coin had appeared between his index and middle finger.

Ying Ying was stunned, as were the children. They were all completely clueless as to where the copper coin had come from. One of the children even leaned closer to Ying Ying's ear to see if there were more copper coins hidden in her hair.

Ying Ying found nothing, but she knew that the copper coin must have been Lian Shun's own, always in his hand, just a little trick as a blindfold. Similar to the time by the sea where everyone saw Lian Shun take the enemy's sedatives, but he had secretly replaced the medicine where no one could see. Waiting till Ying Ying had fainted from the sedatives, only then did he imitate her reaction, without showing any flaws, breaking their scheme.

If Lian Shun had suddenly performed this little magic trick in front of Ying Ying for no reason, she might have found it boring and wanted to hit him. But today, this little trick had saved them, and so, Ying Ying found this skill of Lian Shun's quite practical and adorable.

The children loved it, all praising Uncle Lian for being amazing!

Seeing Ying Ying laugh, Lian Shun thanked Gu Xiaoling in his heart again.

Of course, Gu Ling didn't actively teach Lian Shun. It was after Gu Ling casually demonstrated a trick, Lian Shun became interested and learned after much persuasion. That phrase, "Next, is the moment to witness a miracle," was learned from Su Liang.

"Very impressive." Ying Ying gave a thumbs-up, "Teach me next time."

Lian Shun readily agreed, "No problem!"

The carriage arrived at the first child's house. Lian Shun got off the carriage and personally handed the child over to the parents. He also gave them a sum of money as consolation, telling them to buy some good food for the child to calm their nerves.

Soon, the second child was safely returned to home as well.

When delivering the third child, the father anxiously asked, "Such incidents won't occur in the future, will they?"

Lian Shun replied firmly, "Until those troublemakers hiding in the shadows are dealt with, I will not leave Jiaye City. I will do my best to protect our home." As a descendant of the Lin Family living in Jiaye City, Lian Shun had an irreplaceable credibility.

Once back in the carriage, only Lian Shun and Ying Ying were left, heading towards Lian Mansion.

"You're much more outgoing than Qiao Jing," Ying Ying assessed Lian Shun. She had lost her memory, and since Qiao Jing didn't know what kind of relationship she had had with Lian Shun, he didn't mention him much. Therefore, she didn't know much about Lian Shun.

Taking it as a compliment, Lian Shun began to recount his relationship with Qiao Jing, from their acquaintance to friendship, their fallout, and eventual reconciliation.

"I see." Ying Ying nodded.

Lian Shun joked, "In fact, you and I were the closest previously. I used to call you Ying Xiaoying, and we travelled together to the capital city to find Su Liang."

Ying Ying was surprised, "Is that so? Tell me about it. Qiao Jing told me I was Su Liang's close friend, but he had little to do with me before that."

Lian Shun began to reminisce about the past. But at that time, Ying Ying was injured and her brother Ying Ye was captured. She was in low spirits and only wanted to find her brother. Fortunately, Lian Shun had the opportunity to stay by her side, though nothing particularly interesting happened.

The plans he had made over the past three days weren't needed after all. He simply expressed everything in a few sentences, showing the utmost sincerity.

Knowing that Lian Shun had greatly helped her in the past, Ying Ying extended her hand and patted his shoulder, "Thank you!"

This gesture reminded Lian Shun of his "good brother" Su Liang, and suddenly realized that if Ying Ying's personality were straightforward, she might consider him a brother, which he found unacceptable.

Having an idea, Lian Shun shook his head, "It's not a big deal, we aren't strangers. My mother wrote before asking when I would return to the capital city to reunite, but now it seems to be indefinitely postponed." He laughed, "My mom often goes to Su Xiaoliang's house to see little Nuannuan, she loves him so much. Plus, many of our friends in the capital city have started families and have children, which make my parents envious. They always nag me for not being able to find a wife at this age."

Ying Ying was somewhat surprised, "You look good, come from a good family, and have a nice temperament. How can it be that you can't find a wife?"

Hearing Ying Ying's praise, Lian Shun was overjoyed, but he sighed, "The girl I love, lost her memory and forgot about me."

"You can tell her everything if she lost her memory." Ying Ying tried to comfort Lian Shun, "I think it's not a problem."

Lian Shun gazed deeply at Ying Ying. Ying Ying was taken aback for a moment, then pointed at herself, "I? The person you're in love with is me?"

Lian Shun nodded, "Yes." Although they didn't have a romantic history, the period they were apart made Lian Shun miss Ying Ying terribly. The longing and worry confirmed his feelings for her. He had decided that as soon as he saw Ying Ying, he would confess his feelings. The incidents of the day provided the perfect atmosphere for him to confess.

This was not the reaction Lian Shun expected from Ying Ying. She showed no sign of embarrassment, but pondered for a moment and asked Lian Shun, "Before I lost my memory, I didn't have any marriage arrangements or feelings for any man, did I?"

Lian Shun replied seriously, "I can affirm that you didn't."

Ying Ying frowned, "Oh? Really?"

Lian Shun blinked, "As far as I know, you didn't."

"Oh." Ying Ying laughed, "I thought I liked you before I lost my memory."

Lian Shun was stunned, "Ah....this...maybe, perhaps..."

At that moment, seeing Ying Ying's beautiful smile, Lian Shun realized that he might not have been the only one in love. Back then, it was not convenient to court each other and both sides didn't voice their feelings. He was unaware, and she had forgotten, but it seemed she hadn't completely forgotten. Feelings are mysterious sometimes. Just like Lian Shan, she ended up with Yuan Pei again after losing her memory and stated how doing certain things with him felt familiar.

"What you just said, you weren't joking, right?" Lian Shun couldn't help but confirm once again.

Ying Ying nodded, "It was a joke. Don't take it seriously."

Lian Shun: ...

Then Ying Ying reached out, tousled Lian Shun's hair, and greeted him with a radiant smile, "I'm just teasing you. Let's give it a try and see how we get along!"

Lian Shun's joy knew no bounds, yet at the same time, he understood something: that's why Su Liang had so many female friends, yet only Ying Ying was her only sister...Lian Shun also wanted to call her sister, and to be loved by her...

The three who came from Xingluo Island, including the one seriously injured, had died. Qiao Jing carried three corpses back to Lian Mansion; it was already midnight, and both Lian Shun and Ying Ying were still awake.

Upon entering the door, Qiao Jing said to Lian Shun, "Send another message to the capital city to tell them that the problem has been resolved, so as not to worry Gu Ling and Su Liang."

"Do we need to tell them anything else?" Lian Shun asked.

Qiao Jing shook his head, "No, they will inform us about their situation and make arrangements accordingly."

After Lian Shun sent the latest news, they all went to rest.

Just as Qiao Jing was about to blow out the lamp and go to sleep after lying down, he heard Lian Shun knocking on the door, calling out, "Qiao Xiaojing!"

Assuming something had happened, Qiao Jing quickly got up and opened the door, letting Lian Shun burst in.

"What's wrong?" Qiao Jing asked with a stern expression.

Lian Shun closed the door behind him, grinned and said, "I have good news to tell you."

Qiao Jing was startled, "Did they send a message from the capital, saying that Gu Ling and Su Liang caught Sheng Yue?" To him, this was the best news at the moment. Of course, it would be even better if Xingluo Island was struck by lightning and turned into scorched earth, but that was impractical; capturing Sheng Yue was indeed possible.

"Oh, there's no message from the capital." Lian Shun shook his head, his face beaming. "I confessed my feelings to Ying Xiaoying!"

Qiao Jing had the urge to slap Lian Shun away...

“You know what? Ying Xiaoying actually likes me too!” Lian Shun hugged Qiao Jing in jubilation.

Qiao Jing kicked Lian directly and then waved his hand dismissively, “Congratulations, now get lost.”

“Qiao Xiaojing, are you jealous of me?” Lian Shun asked.

Qiao Jing nodded, “Yes, I’m envious, bitter, and irritated by your presence. Go away before I throw you out!”

“Then I’m off to see if Ying Xiaoying has gone to bed!” And with that said, Lian Shun disappeared from sight.

Qiao Jing sat at the bedside, chuckling softly. He was genuinely happy for Lian Shun, and his envy was real too; the rest was merely joking. Lian Shun was his first real friend, and he felt Lian Shun and Ying Ying were perfect for each other, a match made in heaven, so it was fantastic that they ended up together.

As Qiao Jing thought about it, it seemed he was the only one left alone. If he returned to the capital only to find that Min Rou was engaged or had fallen for someone else, it would be a real pity...

He sighed. He felt it was inappropriate to write to Min Rou now, as there was nothing confirmed. Thinking that Qiao Cong might have set his eyes on Min Rou as his granddaughter-in-law, Qiao Jing felt that his grandfather could potentially meddle in Min Rou’s marriage.

As he lay down, Qiao Jing sighed, “I should have given him a beating. Only that can properly express my envy. I’ll do it tomorrow.”

Capital city.

Qiao Cong had already set off for Jiaye City three days ago.

They had not heard from Pu Cheng since his release, but this was within Gu Ling and Su Liang’s expectations. Even if their plan went smoothly, it would still take some time before they received any feedback.

That day, they received a message from Jiaye City saying that Qiao Jing and his party had returned safely without any trouble on the way. They would expedite the defense preparations.

Upon reading the news, Su Liang said, “Ying Ying is back. Lian Ershan must be very happy.”

“He might get beaten up.” Gu Ling speculated.

Su Liang laughed softly, “Not necessarily. Sister Ying is quite reasonable as long as Lian Ershan doesn’t make light of things.”

Gu Ling anticipated that Xingluo Island would send people to either Jiaye City or Nanshan City to capture some people and bring them back. If they moved fast, they may even arrive before Qiao Jing, so he was not entirely at ease. But he had also thought of the worst outcome, was prepared for it, and planned to wait and see.

“Master, Mistress, we’re all packed!” Zhengzheng knocked on the door from outside.

Gu Ling got up, "I'll go see them off."

Zhengzheng had stayed at the Su Mansion for a long period before, and Wan Hui wanted to bring him back home for a few days. Ji Xiaoshu wanted to go along too, and they had just finished packing their luggage.

As Gu Ling stepped out, he saw each of the two kids holding a cloth doll.

Ji Xiaoshu's doll was a flying little fish, with a fish head and bird wings. Zhengzheng's doll was a swimming bird, with a pointed beak and scales.

These were the result of the two kids each drawing a picture based on their imagination after returning from a recent mountain hike. And then Nangong Qian and Qiuyue made them into dolls according to the drawings.

In Su Liang's words, they were strange yet adorable.

"We want to bring them back to show our brother!" Zhengzheng cheerfully explained.

"Let's go." Gu Ling took the doll from Ji Xiaoshu, tapped his head with it, and then gave it back to him.

Ji Xiaoshu chased after Gu Ling, hitting him with the doll, "Master, don't run!"

Zhengzheng laughed while hugging his doll from behind.

Gu Ling brought the two bouncing, playful disciples to the front door, carrying their packages in his hand. The carriage was already ready, courtesy of Qi Yan.

The door opened, revealing two people standing outside.

"Who are you looking for?" Ji Xiaoshu asked.

"Senior Wen has arrived." Gu Ling announced.

As soon as he arrived, seeing that Gu Ling's face was just as stunning as when he saved them in the valley, the Wen family's grandfather and grandson confirmed that he was the young man who had saved them earlier and quickly bowed to show their respects.

"No need for formalities." Gu Ling said with a neutral expression. He instructed Qi Yan, "These two are our honoured guests, please invite them in." He then said to the old man, "I need to pop out; will have a detailed discussion with senior Wen when I return."

The old man complied right away, his eyes landing on Zhengzheng and Ji Xiaoshu, a kindly smile appearing on his face.

As he watched Gu Ling and the two kids mount their horses to leave, the old man and Wen Ran followed Qi Yan into the Su Mansion.

Once they had settled the guests on the first floor of the Yuanming Pavilion, Qi Yan went upstairs to inform Su Liang.

Looking out of the window, Wen Ran saw Nangong Qian leading Gu Xiaonuan towards them.

“What a beautiful child!” Wen Ran exclaimed. One look and it was obvious that he was Gu Ling’s child, they looked very alike.

The old man’s eyes lit up upon seeing Gu Xiaonuan, “She’s beautiful!”

As Su Liang came downstairs, her voice held a hint of amusement, “Senior Wen, you’ve arrived. I’ve been looking forward to it, as I have a question to ask.”