

My System 33

Chapter 33: With the Moon as the Theme

Cheng Guang heard Qiao Songshan's voice and looked somewhat astonished.

Wen Qinghe?

He had run into him again??

A year ago, the person who had a conflict with the Princely Heir and Qiao Songshan was none other than Wen Qinghe, leading several disciples from noble families.

They had argued over an oiran, as the Princely Heir had already paid to make a reservation, but Wen Qinghe and his group forcefully offered more money to take the oiran away.

Others might have given way, seeing that Wen Qinghe was the son of the Minister of Rites, but neither the Princely Heir nor Qiao Songshan had yielded.

What followed was a one-sided beating.

Afterwards, the Princely Heir was grounded, and for a time he couldn't understand what had gotten into Wen Qinghe—how dare he cause trouble for him?

According to what Cheng Guang knew, at that time Cheng Zhihai's Bureau of the Lamp had arrested several officials from the Ministry of Rites, and not a few families were ransacked and annihilated. Most of them were detained in the Heavenly Prison and subjected to harsh interrogations.

Though he did not know the reason, it seemed likely that this incident was why Wen Qinghe had sought trouble with the Princely Heir.

Because the Princely Heir, along with Qiao Songshan, had almost beaten Wen Qinghe and several others to death, the Minister of Rites Wen Shouren and several other ministers had tearfully presented a pitiful petition, taking their grievance to the imperial court.

As events escalated to this point, even Cheng Zhihai had to compromise, releasing some of the lesser-accused Ministry of Rites officials from the Heavenly Prison to quell the anger of those ministers.

All Cheng Guang could do was exclaim, Good gracious.

Could it be that the last time Wen Qinghe and others came looking for trouble, it was merely a ploy, a feigned retreat, aiming to be beaten by the Princely Heir and his company to force Cheng Zhihai to give in?

At first glance, everyone would think such a thing to be fantastical, but upon reflection, it was not impossible.

The Minister of Rites Wen Shouren and the other ministers behind Wen Qinghe wanted to downplay the matter to protect their own people.

But those ministers had no means against Cheng Zhihai, who was known to be incorruptible and impervious to bribery.

Unable to deal with Cheng Zhihai, they could only exploit the vulnerability of the Princely Heir.

The Princely Heir's status was esteemed, the only successor to Duke Zhen's Mansion, the new nephew of the current Emperor, and also the most beloved grandson of the present Empress Dowager.

Combining these titles, even the Grand Secretary would have to be polite in the presence of the Princely Heir.

How much more so for them?

Minister of Rites Wen Shouren, after all, did not dare to go too far, and after much deliberation, he came up with the scheme of sacrificing his own flesh—having his colleagues' sons start a quarrel with the Princely Heir and then getting beaten for it.

Depending on how it was handled, this incident could be blown wide open; once they insisted on pursuing it, Cheng Zhihai would be faced with an endless headache.

Under the exchange of interests, Cheng Zhihai had no choice but to compromise.

Afterwards, to ensure the safety of the Princely Heir and to have him behave, so as not to cause any more trouble, he was confined within the mansion.

In fact, it was this incident that became the catalyst for the Princely Heir being confined to the mansion, where unable to bear the monotony, he had captured Cheng Guang to serve as his body double.

Thinking about this, Cheng Guang felt somewhat screwed over.

He got up and walked to the railing. Following the direction Qiao Songshan was pointing in, he looked down from the balcony.

He saw a few young men toasting each other beside a table on the third floor of the Jade Pavilion.

One of them, a handsome man with fine clothes and a folding fan in hand, was the picture of a graceful gentleman.

Seeing him, Cheng Guang immediately realized that this was Wen Qinghe, the man Qiao Songshan had mentioned.

As for this Wen Qinghe, Cheng Guang was neither angry nor especially moved; first of all, he was not the Princely Heir, and even if he were, he hadn't suffered any loss.

To have beaten several scions of influential families within the court to a pulp, and to only end up confined to his home—this was unthinkable for ordinary families.

Qiao Songshan's animosity towards Wen Qinghe was easy to understand.

He felt that if Wen Qinghe hadn't been looking for trouble himself, he and his lord wouldn't have come to blows, and then he wouldn't have been posted to the battlefield by his old man for a whole year with death almost certain.

All of this was Wen Qinghe's fault.

"Boss, we've run into that bastard Wen Qinghe again; such bad luck. If it wasn't for him looking for trouble in the first place, why would we have been punished?"

Qiao Songshan said indignantly, clenching his fists as if ready to teach Wen Qinghe a lesson should he cause any trouble again.

Cheng Guang just glanced at Wen Qinghe and then looked away.

"Enough, Wen Qinghe isn't some lowlife. If there wasn't a reason, he wouldn't dare to mess with you and me."

After hearing Cheng Guang's words, Qiao Songshan looked confused, scratching his head in doubt, "Boss, didn't they trouble us just over the oiran? There's also the oiran like Bai Shuxuan today; they'll surely bother us again. Could there be any other reason?"

"What else?" Cheng Guang glanced at Qiao Songshan and then picked up his teacup, blew on the steam, and slowly took a sip.

Qiao Songshan's rugged face showed a childlike bewilderment.

Clearly, what Cheng Guang had said nearly fried his CPU.

For a moment, he couldn't think of any other reason Wen Qinghe would dare to trouble them.

Cheng Guang chuckled and shook his head, "Forget it, stop thinking; it seems like there's some movement over at Bai Shuxuan's."

After hearing Cheng Guang's words, Qiao Songshan came back to his senses and quickly stuck out his head, staring wide-eyed towards the center of the room.

At the central part of the Jade Pavilion, a silhouette slowly emerged from a room with a basket-like ceiling, walked through the screens, and appeared before everyone.

The woman was dressed in red, her looks identical to the red-robed maid who had greeted Cheng Guang, clearly the same person.

Cheng Guang realized upon seeing her that the red-robed maid's master seemed to be Bai Shuxuan?

Had Bai Shuxuan been watching him since he stepped into the Jade Pavilion?

Cheng Guang's eyes narrowed, finding the situation interesting. He remained silent, watching the red-robed maid with a calm demeanor.

The red-robed maid first bowed respectfully to everyone around, then began to speak.

"Gathered here in the Jade Pavilion, you must all be here for Miss Bai."

"Since Miss Bai's debut over a month ago, many have wished to become her distinguished guest. Everyone here is excellent, and Miss Bai is in a quandary over whom to choose, so she has set a challenge."

"Whoever passes the challenge will have the opportunity to converse face-to-face with Miss Bai, and if she finds them to her liking, they may become her distinguished guest."

With that, she took out a big red scroll and tossed it into the air, revealing several bold and flamboyant characters written upon it.

“Compose a poem on the theme of the moon.”

The room fell silent.

Everyone stared at the challenge in shock, and after a moment, an uproar ensued.

“To compose a poem??”

“This business of poetry is trivial; it’s nowhere near as exhilarating as a martial contest.”

“I’m done for; I have no chance. If I knew that this would be Miss Bai’s challenge today, I would have prepared in advance and found some scholars to craft a few poems for me.”

“Aren’t there many scholars from the Great Zhou Academy here today? Composing poetry is their strong suit. How can a martial artist like me compete with them in this?”

Many of the warriors present were mentally defeated.

However, many from the Great Zhou Academy, or scholars from other academies, smiled broadly upon hearing the challenge, for they were not surprised.

After all, everyone knows that courtesans love romantic scholars, and capturing a famous poem might allow them to be remembered along with it for centuries, gaining them lasting fame.

“On the theme of the moon, I just happened to compose a poem a few days ago. I haven’t revealed it yet, and now it’s the perfect opportunity to present it to Miss Bai,” someone whispered, elated.

“Brother, you’re really lucky. The poems we come up with on the spot will inevitably have flaws, but you have a chance to be Miss Bai’s distinguished guest.”

“That’s just talk. Everyone has a chance. I just got lucky and happened to compose such a poem a few days ago, hahaha.”

The people inside the Jade Pavilion had different reactions to the challenge, some happy, some sad, but most did not leave immediately.