

Es. Benefits 251

Chapter 251: Come in, let's have a good talk 2

Hearing Lu Chen's voice, Chu Yuqin's hand poised to push the door stopped mid-air. She felt a touch of curiosity, wondering what kind of matter could necessitate an entire evening of discussion.

Could it be...

The Immortal?

Had Lu Chen's Immortal Master come?

The thought made Chu Yuqin increasingly nervous inside.

It must be so.

Otherwise, why would Lu Chen stay in the study all night without returning?

Chu Yuqin then said, "Chen'er, then I won't disturb you, take your time chatting."

After saying this, Chu Yuqin turned to leave.

Upon hearing Chu Yuqin's words, Chu Qingli and Lu Chen finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Perhaps because Chu Yuqin had startled them earlier, Lu Chen was now filled with negative emotions and immediately transferred all his negative feelings onto Chu Qingli.

Chu Yuqin had just stepped out of the courtyard when she heard a woman's voice coming from the study. As she was wondering what Lu Chen's master looked like, her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the voice coming from inside the room.

Chu Yuqin's mind stalled, and a trace of bitterness crossed her face. She then huffed lightly and muttered, "I thought his Immortal Master had come. Turns out he's doing something shady in there, no wonder he didn't go back to his room all night."

After she spoke, Chu Yuqin's cheeks flushed slightly.

She suddenly realized that the study seemed like quite the appropriate place.

The study wasn't part of the inner courtyard, and although Chu Qingli would patrol the inner courtyard, she typically just glanced at the study before leaving.

The guard duties for the outer courtyard and the study were now primarily Bai Qingqing's responsibility, so Chu Qingli didn't pay excessive attention to the study.

Moreover, it wasn't impossible for Lu Chen to stay in the study all night without returning.

Didn't Lu Chen just spend the previous night in the study?

With this thought, Chu Yuqin's heart suddenly became frantically unsettled.

How could she think about such things? She truly was shameless.

Immediately, Chu Yuqin shook her head and hurriedly tried to stop herself from continuing down this train of thought.

The best way to avoid being discovered by her own sister was to send her sister away. It wouldn't be right to sneak around in the study doing that sort of thing, making it seem like they were stealing away for something indecent.

Thinking of her stubborn little sister, Chu Yuqin sighed.

Right then, Chu Yuqin heard the sounds in the study getting louder, which added to her confusion.

Why did that voice sound somewhat like Qing Li's?

Chu Yuqin rubbed her temples, convincing herself that it must be an auditory hallucination.

Having been thinking of ways to send her sister away these past few days, even reaching her dreams, it was normal to experience auditory hallucinations.

It was highly probable that it was that shameless vixen with the surname Wang in the study.

Only she would behave so disgracefully.

Every time she came to report intelligence to the study, she'd end up doing something unsavory with Lu Chen.

This thought stirred a sour feeling in Chu Yuqin's heart.

Looking at the study once more, she snorted coldly and muttered, "Damn bitch, so shameless!"

The study was clearly a place for Chen'er to deal with government affairs, and that woman would always come to do such indecent things, making it lose its sanctity.

Although she felt uncomfortable, Chu Yuqin didn't rush to the study to drag out the woman inside and instead left the courtyard fuming.

Chu Yuqin had left, but Lu Chen's work in the study was far from done, and he continued to be busy for an unknown amount of time.

Winter was about to pass, and the snow on the rooftops began to gradually thaw and drip down.

The weather today was pleasant, with bright sunshine.

At this moment, a beautiful woman adorned in a pink and turquoise Lotus Cloud Dress was heading toward the study.

Lin Wanyun and Chen Wanrong had discussed throughout the previous night.

Chen Wanrong believed that now, with Great Sum dealt a heavy blow by Great Wu, drastically reducing its strength, and with the destruction of the North Prince's Black Cavalry, it was the perfect opportunity to close ranks with Lu Chen. Meanwhile, by employing the Love Worm on Lu Chen to control him, they could then concoct the Subtle Dragon Spell.

Of course, the Subtle Dragon Spell was just one aspect. Besides that, controlling Lu Chen had another significant upside—Mysterious Moon Palace would then become the de facto ruler of North City.

Although North City was still quite destitute, it had great potential, especially the money-making schemes of the North Prince Mansion, which could rapidly accumulate a substantial amount of silver for Mysterious Moon Palace.

Restoration of the state required silver. With silver, they could easily smooth things out, buy people's loyalty, and likewise, manufacturing weapons also required silver.

Therefore, Chen Wanrong decided to take action against Lu Chen; she wanted to have him completely under her control, at her service.

Lin Wanyun's task for today was to serve as the intermediary. She was now Lu Chen's Madam Lin, and she also had a position as a Guard Commander in the Prince's Mansion, which allowed her to approach Lu Chen readily, making her the perfect connector.

Just as Lin Wanyun was about to reach the study, she suddenly caught sight of a figure swiftly passing by right in front of her.

Lin Wanyun focused her eyes.

It was Chu Qingli.

Chu Qingli's clothes were torn, as if she had been through a fierce battle, and she used her Qinggong skills to quickly flee back to her room.

Lin Wanyun was startled by the sight.

As they brushed past each other, a breeze came through, and soon Lin Wanyun smelled a strange scent.

Lin Wanyun was puzzled, what was this smell? Why did it seem so odd?

Lin Wanyun didn't dwell on it, as now was not the time to ponder such matters. She had a more important task ahead of her today: to have a straightforward discussion with Lu Chen.

Chapter 252: Come in, let's have a good talk_3

Afterwards, Lin Wanyun turned her head and continued to walk towards the study.

Meanwhile.

Lu Chen was checking the system prompts from last night.

He had not expected that after taking down Chu Qingli, the system would reward him with such a great set of things.

The Paper-making Technique and Printing Technique were too important for the future education of North City; with these two capabilities, his educational plans could finally be fully rolled out.

Albeit the current era had its own Paper-making Technique and Printing Technique, the efficiency was very low. Especially for white paper, only the wealthy could afford it, and ordinary people could not afford to use white paper at all.

Once these two techniques were improved, the prices of white paper and books would be driven down in the future. By then, the poor could also afford to use white paper and buy books.

As for the Simple Pen-making Technique, this tool could be considered dispensable. Of course, if pens could be widely promoted, there would no longer be a need for pages and maids to grind ink in the future, and writing with a pen might be faster than with a brush, which could also potentially enhance cultural transmission efficiency.

At this moment, Lu Chen's gaze fell on the third row of system prompts.

“The hearts and minds of wives and concubines are in alignment?”

Hadn’t this notification not appeared for quite some time?

He remembered that on the night he slept with Dazhou and Xiaozhou in the Capital city, it was the first time the system prompted him that his heart and mind were in alignment with his wives and concubines, and then it rewarded him with a Barrett and twenty bullets.

He had not thought it would appear again after more than a year.

Lu Chen was curious about how this notion of heart and mind alignment actually emerged, and what constituted as being in alignment?

With this thought, Lu Chen directly asked, “System, how is the alignment of hearts and minds with one’s wives and concubines determined?”

Since being in alignment could also earn system rewards, Lu Chen planned to strive for heart-mind alignment with his wives and concubines in the future.

[Both parties entering into the same state at the same time is considered alignment of hearts and minds.]

This...

Hearing the system’s explanation, Lu Chen was somewhat speechless.

Is this how heart-mind alignment comes about?

Not thinking too much of it, he then opened the details of the Absorption Technique.

What truly caught his interest was this particular ability.

[Absorption Technique: After cultivation, one can absorb another's skill and convert it into one's own. This Absorption Technique is the complete version, converting all absorbed skill into a power that the host can assimilate without conflict within the body.]

Upon reading the introduction to the Absorption Technique, Lu Chen was momentarily stunned.

This Cultivation Technique...

Was somewhat terrifying...

Not long after.

Lin Wanyun arrived at the entrance of the study.

Just as she reached the entrance of the study, she found Lu Chen coming out with a contented look. Seeing the buxom beauty before him, Lu Chen smiled and proactively asked, "Madam Lin, is there something you need me for?"

Lin Wanyun said, "Chen... Chen'er, the Palace Master sent me to discuss something with you."

Lin Wanyun still felt somewhat guilty inside, after all, the young man before her was Yue's son. If something really happened to him, how could she face her sister Yue in the afterlife?

Hearing Lin Wanyun's words, Lu Chen was inwardly startled.

Discuss something?

Chen Wanrong must be getting impatient.

Good, he was also getting impatient.

Having devoured Chu Qingli clean last night, Lu Chen's inner desires were once again magnified.

Having received so many rewards so suddenly last night, Lu Chen's eagerness to procreate had been spurred into action.

Then Lu Chen said with a smile, "Madam Lin, come in, let's have a good talk."

Chapter 253: Madam Lin, You're Not Fooling Me, Are You?_1

Upon hearing Lu Chen's words, Lin Wanyun didn't think much and with a slight wriggle of her hips, she entered the study.

As soon as she entered the study, she smelled an odd odor.

This odor was the same as the one she had just smelled by Chu Qingli.

The scent was somewhat pungent, making it a bit uncomfortable to smell.

Moreover, this smell was strange, as the more she sniffed, the more an uncontrollable blush appeared on her face. Not only that, her heartbeat began to inexplicably quicken, and her body became restless.

What was going on?

While Lin Wanyun was puzzled about the smell, Lu Chen's words brought her back to her senses, "Madam Lin, what did Miss Chen ask you to tell me?"

Lin Wanyun no longer paid attention to the strange smell and turned her head towards Lu Chen, saying, "The Heavy Cavalry of North City has been annihilated; rebuilding it will take a long time. And with the North Fre King Tribe threatening North City at all times, the Palace Master has sent me to tell you that she is willing to dispatch disciples from the Mysterious Moon Palace to help stabilize the current situation in North City."

Hearing Lin Wanyun's words, Lu Chen smiled faintly.

Then, Lu Chen spoke directly, "Madam Lin, at this point, let's lay our cards on the table. What is the Mysterious Moon Palace's real purpose in coming to North City?"

“You are the sworn sister of my mother; I believe you won’t deceive me.”

Seeing that Lu Chen was so straightforward, Lin Wanyun also felt there was no need to continue probing. Since they would have to confront the truth sooner or later, she simply said, “Chen’er, actually...”

Though she had resolved to be upfront, Lin Wanyun still hesitated for a moment, but after a brief pause, she continued, “The Palace Master believes you are a descendant of the Goddess, the God’s Son, so you are naturally different from ordinary people. You have a grand destiny, an emperor’s fate, so she wants to collaborate with you from now on and help you seize that position.”

“Great Sum has been targeting the Mysterious Moon Palace in various ways for years, and the Palace Master is already very displeased with your father, the Sum Emperor.”

Hearing Lin Wanyun’s words, Lu Chen smiled faintly; of course, he knew that what Lin Wanyun had said was false.

When he first met Chen Wanrong, he had looked into her background; Chen Wanrong planned to plant a Love Worm in him and then use his blood to concoct something called the Subtle Dragon Spell.

To Chen Wanrong, he was nothing more than a tool; how could she ever recognize him as God’s Son?

At that moment, Lu Chen said, “I see, my grandfather told me yesterday when he arrived in North City that my mother was once a Goddess of the Mysterious Moon Palace. I was somewhat surprised, so my mother really was a Goddess of the Mysterious Moon Palace.”

Having said this, Lu Chen looked into Lin Wanyun’s eyes, pretending to be unaware, and continued, “Does this mean that as God’s Son, I hold a fairly high status in the Mysterious Moon Palace?”

Seeing Lu Chen as if believing her lie, Lin Wanyun continued, “Your mother was a disciple of an Honorable of the Mysterious Moon Palace, with a status even above the Palace Master’s. As her child, you naturally hold a certain standing within the Mysterious Moon Palace.”

Lu Chen then said, "If the Mysterious Moon Palace helps me take that position, will they demand anything of me?"

Lin Wanyun replied, "They won't ask you to do anything specific, just to allow the Mysterious Moon Palace to recruit disciples within Great Sum's territory in the future. The Mysterious Moon Palace values its lineage and actually has little interest in worldly affairs."

Lu Chen said, "Oh, I see."

"It seems I misunderstood Miss Chen."

Hearing this, Lin Wanyun tentatively asked, "Does Chen'er think the Palace Master has other intentions for coming to North City?"

Lu Chen smiled faintly and replied, "I had thought she came to North City because she was interested in my body."

This-

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Lin Wanyun suddenly did not know what to say.

But if she thought about it carefully, what Lu Chen said was actually true.

Chen Wanrong's primary objective in coming to North City was to plant a Love Worm in Lu Chen, turning him into her puppet, who would then willingly bleed for her to create the Subtle Dragon Spell.

In another sense, this also could be considered showing an interest in Lu Chen's body.

Yet clearly, that was not what Lu Chen meant.

Lin Wanyun wasn't sure whether to call him narcissistic or just too self-assured.

Lu Chen then lowered his voice, whispering, "Madam Lin, may I ask you a question?"

Seeing Lu Chen suddenly speak in a hushed, secretive manner, Lin Wanyun asked curiously, “What question?”

Lu Chen inquired, “Does Miss Chen fancy any man?”

Stunned by the question, Lin Wanyun’s mind went blank. Asked in this way, was Lu Chen implying…?

He’s taken an interest in Chen Wanrong?

This was great news for Chen Wanrong. Once Lu Chen took an interest in her, especially if he fell for her, then Chen Wanrong would have the chance to plant the Love Worm in him.

Previously, Lu Chen had kept his distance; Chen Wanrong had been in the North Prince Mansion so long without any opportunity to get close to him.

Now that Lu Chen was inquiring about Chen Wanrong’s romantic interests, it meant that he wanted to try and pursue her.

Lin Wanyun then said, “The Palace Master has always been focused on her cultivation. To my knowledge, she has never taken a liking to that man.”

“However…”

Lin Wanyun trailed off, then looked into Lu Chen’s eyes and said, “But she seems to have some interest in you, Chen’er.”

Lin Wanyun was here today to play matchmaker, so she had to find a way to get Lu Chen to take an interest in Chen Wanrong.

Hearing Lin Wanyun’s words, Lu Chen laughed and said, “Madam Lin, you must be joking with me. How could a fairy like Miss Chen take an interest in a mundane man like me?”

Lin Wanyun replied, “Chen’er, don’t sell yourself short. Although you are a man of the mortal world, your spirit is something she greatly admires, especially the spirit you showed when you chose to defend Yan County despite knowing that a three hundred thousand-strong Barbarian Army was advancing south. The Palace Master really admires that.”

“Moreover, the Palace Master has mentioned more than once in front of me that you are very handsome. I feel that she does harbor some feelings for you.”

Lu Chen feigned a skeptical look, staring into Lin Wanyun’s eyes and asking, “Really? Madam Lin, you’re not trying to deceive me, are you?”

Lin Wanyun responded, “Why would I deceive you? Think about it, if the Palace Master had no interest in you, she might not have returned to North City after returning to Mysterious Moon Palace. Yet, she came back to North City shortly after her return. What does this tell you? It shows that she values you greatly.”

“Of course, I’m only guessing. What she really thinks, probably only she knows. But I do think she might have taken a liking to you.”

Lu Chen feigned curiosity as he probed, “Madam Lin, can disciples of Mysterious Moon Palace marry?”

Lin Wanyun answered, “Mysterious Moon Palace doesn’t forbid male and female disciples from being together, nor has it ever opposed disciples finding partners. They just can’t have children.”

Hearing Lin Wanyun’s words, Lu Chen said softly, “So you’re saying that if Miss Chen is willing, I could marry her? As long as she doesn’t bear my children, that’s fine?”

Lin Wanyun replied, “That’s correct.”

Lu Chen didn’t say anything more; he pretended to be lost in a dreamy imagination.

Seeing Lu Chen lost in thought, Lin Wanyun felt hopeful. It looked like Lu Chen was interested, and with a little more guiding, they might meet the conditions for planting the Love Worm.

With that in mind, Lin Wanyun hinted, “Chen’er, although the Palace Master can have a partner too, she is different from ordinary women. She’s not the kind that can be approached casually.”

Lu Chen laughed and said, “Madam Lin, I understand what you mean. You mean I shouldn’t be too crude or too eager in front of her, right?”

Lin Wanyun said, “That’s more or less it.”

Lu Chen replied, “Don’t worry, Madam Lin. Although I have a good impression of Miss Chen, I will definitely not be reckless with her as I would with my other wives and concubines.”

Hearing this, Lin Wanyun sighed internally; it seemed they had managed to make a connection. She hoped the Palace Master would spare the North Prince’s life for Yue’s sake.

The North Prince, though the child of the Sum Emperor and somewhat licentious, had proven to be a ruler who loved his people as his children over time.

Such rulers were rare in the world today.

At that moment, Lu Chen whispered, “Madam Lin, you wouldn’t object to me pursuing Miss Chen, would you?”

A slight smile graced Lin Wanyun’s exquisite cheeks. “Why would I object? In fact, I’d like to see the Palace Master with a partner. Most Mysterious Moon Palace disciples eventually find partners. The path of cultivation is too lonely. I don’t want to see the Palace Master continue to be so alone.”

Lu Chen asked with a smile, “And what about you, Madam Lin? When do you plan to find a partner?”

Caught by the question, Lin Wanyun was stunned for a moment.

She had come today purely to help Chen Wanrong and Lu Chen connect, never considering her own matters.

After coming back to her senses, Lin Wanyun sighed and said, "I'm already in my thirties; nobody wants me anymore."

Lu Chen, gazing at Lin Wanyun's mature and beautiful visage, said, "How is that possible? Any man would be moved by a beautiful woman like Madam Lin."

"If you weren't my aunt, I would have married you already."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Lin Wanyun's brain paused briefly, then her heart began to race uncontrollably.

Chapter 254: North Prince Must Not Stay i

Lin Wanyun had not anticipated that Lu Chen would say such things, which brought to her mind the words her sworn younger brother had said to her not long ago.

Her adoptive father wanted her to marry this young man before her and become his woman.

Once Lin Wanyun recovered, she hastily said, "Chen'er, such words must not be spoken recklessly."

Seeing Lin Wanyun's body tremble slightly, as if she had been startled, Lu Chen continued, "Madam Lin, you have been at the North Prince Mansion for a while now and should know me quite well. I have often visited Spring Sound Court recently, favoring Yelv Nanyan far more than my other wives and concubines."

"This is because I prefer mature women with charm, just like Yelv Nanyan."

"And Madam Lin, you are precisely such a woman."

Upon hearing Lu Chen's blatant words, Lin Wanyun felt as if her heart was ready to leap out of her chest, and she even began to suspect that Lu Chen might have already started to take an interest in her.

Lin Wanyun was somewhat relieved that she had become sworn sisters with Yue, or else Lu Chen might really have harbored intentions towards her.

Lin Wanyun then said, “Chen’er, let’s not talk about this. Let’s discuss the cooperation between North City and the Mysterious Moon Palace.”

Lu Chen said with a smile, “Alright.”

Lin Wanyun asked, “What kind of people do you need? You can tell me, and I will convey it to the Palace Master later so that she can send some disciples down the mountain.”

After thinking for a moment, Lu Chen replied, “I need some people who can read. Do Mysterious Moon Palace’s disciples know how to read?”

Lin Wanyun was slightly taken aback upon hearing this.

Read and write?

Why does Lu Chen need literate people?

Now that North City had lost its Heavy Cavalry, and with Lu Chen radically reforming the region, his measures had already affected the interests of many.

His current situation was extremely perilous, and yet the first thing he asked for from the Mysterious Moon Palace was not powerful disciples but literate ones.

Literate people could not protect him.

Curious, Lin Wanyun said, “The majority of disciples at the Mysterious Moon Palace can read and write, but what do you need literate people for?”

Lu Chen sighed and said, “I’ve discovered that the commoners of North City are mostly uneducated, barely able to read or write. They can’t even understand public notices without someone to explain them to them.”

“That’s why I’ve decided to find some people to specifically teach them to read and write.”

This...

Lin Wanyun was somewhat speechless.

Do ordinary commoners need to read and write?

Of course, they don't.

She always felt that Lu Chen might be taking on a bit too much.

Although she could see that Lu Chen was quite kind to the commoners, going so far as to abolish all farm taxes, his benevolence seemed excessive; he was even planning to hire someone to teach the commoners to read and write.

Lin Wanyun, like others of her time, believed it unnecessary for ordinary commoners to be literate. Not everyone could achieve scholarly honors; it was enough for them to live quietly as commoners all their lives.

Although she thought this way, Lin Wanyun still responded, "Then all right, I will speak to the Palace Master later and ask her to send some disciples down the mountain who can read and write."

This was the first collaboration with North City, and also the closest she had come to Lu Chen, so the Mysterious Moon Palace must seize this opportunity, no matter how peculiar Lu Chen's request, they ought to agree.

Still, Lin Wanyun felt that Lu Chen's request was too modest for the Mysterious Moon Palace, so she probed further, "Chen'er, is there anything else you need?"

"Perhaps intelligence or something of the sort?"

Lu Chen said with a smile, "I don't need that for now, I have my own network of informants."

Even though the resources of the Mysterious Moon Palace were considerable, Lu Chen had no plans to truly rely on them at this stage, not until he had won over Chen Wanrong.

Then, Lu Chen whispered, “Madam Lin, I wish to pursue Miss Chen, and I certainly need your help in this matter.”

Lin Wanyun smiled slightly, “Don’t worry, I will definitely put in a good word for you in front of her.”

Lu Chen said, “Then I shall trouble Madam Lin.”

At this point, Lu Chen started to feel drowsy. Having practiced with his spear all through the previous night, even he, a Grandmaster, felt a bit overwhelmed. He then continued, “Madam Lin, if there is nothing else, I will go back to sleep now. I did not sleep last night as I was busy in the study.”

Lin Wanyun said, “Go ahead, Chen’er, you should rest.”

Without further comment, Lu Chen returned straight to the main compound. On his way back, he noticed that all his wives and concubines were sitting in the main hall of the compound, sipping tea. Upon Lu Chen’s return, he saw Chu Yuqin looking at him with a look of silent reproach.

Seeing Chu Yuqin’s expression, Lu Chen felt puzzled; could it be that she had discovered something?

At that moment, Mu Zixuan said with a beaming smile, “Prince, I had the servants prepare some porridge. Would you like to have it now?”

Lu Chen replied, “Yes.”

He then took a seat to the side. No sooner had he sat down than he noticed his women gazing intently at him.

Chu Yuqin then remarked, “Chen’er, the study can be quite cold at night. If you have matters to attend to, it’s better to return to your bedroom. Spending a whole night in the study could expose you to the cold, which might adversely affect your cultivation.”

Lu Chen replied with a smile, “Madam Chu, you’re right. I’ll be more careful next time.”

Chapter 255: North Prince Must Not Stay_2

At the same time.

In Chu Qingli’s room.

Chu Qingli sat in the bathtub, scrubbing her body over and over again.

Every time she thought about what had happened last night, her delicate body couldn’t help but tremble involuntarily.

She had actually made such shameful noises and even hugged Lu Chen on her own initiative—how could she have behaved like that!

All that was merely a transaction, and yet she had actually taken pleasure in it.

Chu Qingli couldn’t forgive herself.

At this moment, Chu Qingli’s eyebrows lifted as if she had realized something.

Hypnosis! It must have been hypnosis!

If it weren’t for hypnosis, how could she have become such a shameless woman?

It must have been Lu Chen who hypnotized her.

This devil, always resorting to despicable means.

Sooner or later, she would take her revenge on him.

Although she was no match for him now, the future was uncertain; she must work hard to become stronger and one day make Lu Chen pay a heavy price.

With this thought, Chu Qingli felt much better in her heart.

Even though she had lost her virginity, it was all for the sake of her sister.

As long as she served Lu Chen ninety-nine more times, her sister could regain her freedom.

If she served Lu Chen once a day, then in just three months at most, Lu Chen would have to remove the hypnosis from her sister.

It was just three months; she could grit her teeth and get through it.

Thinking of her sister regaining her freedom made Chu Qingli feel that everything she was doing was worth it.

So what if she was bedded by Lu Chen? There was nothing she couldn't accept. Although her body would feel strange, she didn't feel any pain.

Moreover, she found that her skills would return as soon as she left Lu Chen. With this in mind, even though she had lost her virginity, there weren't too

many other losses.

With these thoughts, Chu Qingli murmured, "Ninety-nine more times, Sister, I will definitely free you as soon as I can!"

The reforms in North City were extensive, and the news quickly spread to the Capital city.

Lu Chen was the first Seignior to stipulate through law that the land ownership rights in his fief belonged to him alone.

Land was already a sensitive topic; as soon as he touched on land ownership rights, the news became known to all.

One stone stirred up a thousand waves; when the news reached the Capital city, the discussions about the war between Great Wu and Great Sum died down, and the topics among the common folk were almost all about the reforms in North

City.

At Prince Lu Shuyun's residence.

Many representatives from the Aristocratic Family had arrived today, among them the disgraceful Chu Hongfei from the Chu Family. He was representing the entire Chu Family this time.

Although Chu Xiong had lost his position as the Family Head, because of his alliance with Prince Lu Shuyun, Chu Hongfei retained a status within the Chu Family that was not much different from before.

This time, they had gathered at Prince Lu Shuyun's residence mainly to discuss the war between Great Wu and Great Sum.

The Sum Emperor was already considering compromises; the war was nearing its end. Now was the time to discuss the terms.

First, Great Wu needed the Chu Family's mediation to end the war, and Great

Sum would also have to pay a hefty price.

If Great Wu agreed to end the war, what would follow was a process of bargaining between the Aristocratic Family and the Sum Emperor. This time, it was clear that the Aristocratic Family had instigated the war, and if the Sum Emperor wanted to end it, he naturally had to show some sincerity.

At this moment, Chu Hongfei felt a surge of pride. Back when his father was the Family Head, he hadn't been given much responsibility, but now that his father had been stripped of the position, he, as the former Family Head's son, had ironically become more valued.

This time he was representing the entire Chu Family; if they didn't value him, they wouldn't have sent him.

In the past, his father always criticized him for being indulgent and ignorant, so he was never allowed to get involved in the family's major affairs, which had long caused him to feel dissatisfied.

After all, he was the son of the Family Head, yet he held less power than the side branches of the Chu Family.

Now, things were different. Since his father stepped down, he had been involved in virtually all major affairs of the Chu Family.

It was evident that the Chu Family valued him greatly, and just thinking about the possibility of becoming the next Family Head filled Chu Hongfei's heart with immense excitement.

Wanting to strengthen his ties with Prince Lu Shuyun, Chu Hongfei suggested, "Your Highness, I think this is an excellent opportunity for you. Now that His Majesty has already shown signs of compromise, our Aristocratic Families from the South should push further and force His Majesty to appoint you as the

Crown Prince."

"Once you become the Crown Prince, you will have greater authority, and none of the other princes will be able to contend with you."

Hearing Chu Hongfei's words, Lu Shuyun smiled lightly and then said, "Brother Chu's idea certainly sounds pleasant, but the position of Crown Prince is not a desirable one, especially at this moment in time."

Lu Shuyun also coveted the position of Crown Prince, but after some thought, he realized that if he were to force his father the Emperor to appoint him as the Crown Prince now, it would place him not only against his own father but against all his brothers as well.

The seat of the Crown Prince would likely prove too hot to hold; it was doubtful he could secure it firmly.

Speaking on behalf of the Wang Family, Wang Yong said, “Your Highness is right. It is absolutely the wrong time to discuss the position of Crown Prince with His Majesty. If His Majesty were to name Your Highness as the Crown Prince now, it would basically be telling everyone that our Aristocratic Families from the South have instigated the conflict between Great Wu and Great Sum, and that the Emperor is compromising with us, hence the reason why Your Highness would be appointed as the Crown Prince.

The Assistant Minister of the Ministry of War, Wang Chengshuo, then spoke with a smile, “It’s not entirely impossible to bring it up.”

Upon hearing this, everyone turned to Wang Chengshuo. Wang Yong asked, “Cousin, what are your thoughts?”

Wang Chengshuo said, “Right now, His Highness has no notable achievements. If suddenly he becomes the Crown Prince for no apparent reason, it will surely provoke dissatisfaction among many.”

“However, the conflict between Great Wu and Great Sum has not yet ended. If His Highness can earn distinguished merit in this war, then his ascension to Crown Prince would be justified.”

As Wang Chengshuo spoke, everyone quickly grasped the point.

Indeed, the war is not over, and Prince Lu Shuyun still has the chance to earn military honors.

If Prince Lu Shuyun becomes the pivotal figure in changing the course of the war between Great Wu and Great Sum, that would amount to a tremendous service, silencing other powers within the court when suggesting him for the Crown Prince.

Now that the Sum Emperor was ready to compromise with the Aristocratic Families from the South, as long as they suggested dispatching Prince Lu Shuyun to the frontlines, the Emperor would understand their intentions and have no choice but to agree to their conditions.

Hearing Wang Chengshuo's words, Lu Shuyun felt a stir of excitement within him – how had he not thought of this himself?

If he became the one to turn the tide of the conflict, his path to becoming the Crown Prince would naturally unfold.

The mere thought of that long-coveted position filled Lu Shuyun with sheer exhilaration.

Just then,

Lu Shuyun's trusted aide suddenly approached him, whispered something in his ear, and then handed him a piece of intelligence.

Lu Shuyun opened the report, skimmed through its contents, and his expression shifted from curiosity to a frown before revealing a trace of a smile. He then passed the report to Wang Yong standing beside him.

Wang Yong was curious about what intelligence had made Lu Shuyun so happy. When he opened the report, he found it concerned the reform issues in North City.

After reading the content, Wang Yong scoffed and said, "Under all the heavens, is the land not the king's land? On its shores, are the people not the king's subjects? The North Prince is indeed audacious! Isn't he afraid that biting off more than he can chew will lead to his own demise?"

With that said, Wang Yong handed the report to the others in the hall.

All those in the hall were members of Aristocratic Families, and their faces turned sour at the North Prince's intentions to reclaim all land ownership rights.

This wasn't merely reclaiming land ownership; this was threatening the very lives of their Aristocratic Families.

Although Chu Hongfei didn't understand politics very well, when he saw the reforms proposed in North City as outlined in the report, he couldn't help but say, "The North Prince is courting death, boldly trying to reclaim the land ownership!"

At that moment, Wang Yong added, “Your Highness, the North Prince must not be left alive. If this precedent is set, it will surely spell disaster for the Aristocratic Families.”

Even though the North Prince’s reforms were localized to his dominion and the policies of North Country were unlikely to immediately affect the rest of Great Sum, it was like a small flame that could ignite a great disaster for the Aristocratic Families if allowed to spread.

Almost simultaneously, all members of the Aristocratic Families developed a deep desire to kill Lu Chen.

Anyone who dares touch the right to land ownership must die!

Chapter 256: Admire His Courage 1

Upon hearing Wang Yong’s words, Lu Shuyun said with a smile, “It seems my ninth brother really dares to touch anything, but then again, this might well be the intention of our father, the Sum Emperor.”

Lu Chen is merely a Seignior after all.

Lu Shuyun didn’t quite believe that Lu Chen could have said such things as “Under the heavens, all land belongs to the King; along the edge of the land, all are subjects of the King.”

Wang Yong said, “Your Highness, regardless of whether this is the North Prince’s own idea or His Majesty’s wish, as long as anyone dares to initiate this precedent, we Aristocratic Families will never let them off easily.”

“The person who came up with this reform measure is malicious in intent; they are aiming to completely eradicate our Aristocratic Families.”

It’s no wonder Wang Yong reacted so fiercely, for the land reform measures in North City had clearly touched the most sensitive nerve of the Aristocratic Families.

The current Aristocratic Families are all beneficiaries of land accumulation, and suddenly someone had the idea to reclaim the ownership of the land to the supreme ruler, or to turn it over to the state, and to even prohibit future land trades— isn't this digging at the roots of their Aristocratic Families?

Although this is still just a spark, the Aristocratic Families would absolutely not allow such a trend to emerge.

At this moment, Lu Shuyun said, "Since I have already received the news, I estimate that others have too. It seems that tomorrow's imperial court will be extremely lively."

The powerholders of land do not only include those Aristocratic Families but also the Scholar Official class, those officials' families, not one without tens of thousands of acres of fertile fields.

The North Prince openly reclaims the land ownership of his fief to himself, a Seignior—and if he dares to do so, might the Sum Emperor also follow suit in the future? Therefore, the officials will inevitably oppose the North Prince's actions, even if the North Prince only does this within his own fief.

Lu Shuyun seemed to have already foreseen the scene of the entire court condemning Lu Chen.

At the same time.

In the Great Xia Imperial Palace, within the Royal Garden.

The Sum Emperor looked over the report in his hands again and again, his gaze not moving from the report for a long while.

Murmuring to himself, the Sum Emperor said, "Under the heavens, all land belongs to the King; along the edge of the land, all are subjects of the King..."

"Domineering... quite domineering..."

"Could this really be something Chen could say?"

At this point, the Sum Emperor threw the report in his hand toward Situ Ce in the pavilion, who casually caught the report thrown by the Sum Emperor and then glanced over it.

After seeing the contents of the report, Situ Ce understood why the Sum Emperor had stood in place after reading the report and why his gaze kept sweeping over it.

Undoubtedly, the North Prince's sentence "Under the heavens, all land belongs to the King; along the edge of the land, all are subjects of the King" would definitely cause a stir in Great Sum.

Although nominally the Great Xia Dynasty was founded by the royal house of Great Sum and all land under heaven belongs to the Emperor, it is only in name.

Not a single emperor has dared to directly legislate that all land in Great Sum belongs to the Emperor, because if anyone dared to act on this, their imperial throne would likely come to an end.

No one in this world, no King, has ever said, "Under the heavens, all land belongs to the King; along the edge of the land, all are subjects of the King."

The general meaning of this sentence is that all the land under heaven belongs to the King, and all commoners are subjects of the King.

While this principle holds, you, as a King, as the ruler, must never utter this sentence.

If all the land under heaven belonged to the royal family, those who had fought alongside Sum Ancestor to establish the dynasty would have labored in vain.

It is precisely because this sentence has never been uttered that the Sum Emperor felt such an immense shock upon seeing it.

Especially after reading about the reform measures in North City in the report, he found the North Prince to be a thousand times more radical than himself as the father.

Although he is still not sure whether Lu Chen is his own biological son, the sentence instantly filled him with a favorable impression of Lu Chen.

Since the very beginning of the Great Xia Dynasty, many Emperors ascended the throne full of ambition, planning to emulate the Sum Ancestor in expanding the empire's territory and achieving greatness, thereby making the Great Xia the most powerful dynasty in the world.

However, they all ended up constrained by various powers, obstructed by the Aristocratic Families, and eventually, the court was controlled by these families, leaving the Emperors with no outlet for their talents and ambitions. They could only indulge in the pleasures of the Imperial Palace and finally die of old age.

When Lu Xingqiu took the throne, he too was full of passion, believing he would surely become another Emperor like the Sum Ancestor who expanded the empire's borders.

He managed to expand the territory indeed, having wiped out the Chen Nation, but afterward, he realized that his orders were increasingly disregarded. Whatever he wanted to do would constantly be met with resistance from the Aristocratic Families in the court.

As an Emperor, to actually be unable to control the entire court was an immense humiliation for him, and he finally understood one thing: as long as the Aristocratic Families weren't eliminated, the Great Xia would never truly be his; he was merely a puppet they had elevated to power.

Seeing his Princes mingle with those Aristocratic Families, Lu Xingqiu was deeply disappointed in them. He also thought that if this continued, it was likely that the next Sum Emperor, and the one after that, generation after generation, would still be puppets of the Aristocratic Families.

At this moment, the Sum Emperor had some complex emotions. He never expected that the first Prince who dared to openly confront the Aristocratic Families would be the one he had the least faith in, the one he disliked the most.

After reviewing the intelligence in his hands, Situ Ce put it down on his desk and then asked, "This old servant once said that the North Prince has the ambition of the Sum Ancestor, Your Majesty did not believe it; do you now believe what this old servant said before?"

Hearing Situ Ce's words, the Sum Emperor scoffed, "He dares to say this, and I admire his courage, but exposing his intentions without having the strength is a foolish act. Next, he will not only face collective impeachment from the Aristocratic Officials and Scholar Officials but also endless assassination attempts."

Lu Chen's reform measures in North Country had already aggravated the Aristocratic Families and the Scholar Official class; they would not let him continue to live, even if the Sum Emperor might be behind him.

Land interests are their fundamental interests; they would not allow anyone to touch their core interests, not even the Seignior, let alone the Sum Emperor himself.

It is for this very reason that the Sum Emperor greatly admired Lu Chen.

Lu Chen stepping forward to raise the issue of land ownership was almost akin to disregarding his own life and death.

At the same time, the Sum Emperor was also curious; with the destruction of the Heavy Cavalry of North City, why would Lu Chen dare to reform North City at this time, and not only reform, but even address land ownership rights.

Did the mysterious force behind Lu Chen not fear him being killed? Or did they have such confidence in their strength that they believed they could protect him? Hence, they let him act recklessly?

At that moment, the Sum Emperor looked at Situ Ce and asked, "State Preceptor, what do you think I should do about the impeachment of Chen by the Aristocratic Officials tomorrow? Should I order a halt to the reforms in North City, or should I directly strip him of his Seignior title?"

Lu Chen had touched on a taboo, and impeachment was inevitable; the key was how he, the Emperor, should respond.

If there were no punishment for Lu Chen's actions, the officials would certainly think he shared the same ideas as Lu Chen. He had already offended the Aristocratic Families; if he further angered the Scholar Official class, it would not bode well for his reign as Emperor.

Hearing the Sum Emperor's question, Situ Ce smiled faintly, and then said, "The Seignior is reforming within his own fiefdom, which is legitimate and proper."

Dissatisfied with Situ Ce's response, the Sum Emperor said, "State Preceptor, you're pretending to be confused while understanding the situation perfectly."

“It’s not a problem for him to reform within his own fiefdom, but he has touched upon the issue of land ownership. If we do not provide an explanation to the Aristocratic Families and Scholar Officials, I fear it might cause instability in the Great Xia.”

Situ Ce replied, “Then Your Majesty can recall back the twenty thousand Imperial Army from North City, leaving the North Prince to defend the north alone, and declare that no further aid or supplies will be given to the North Prince. Without a secure environment, his reforms will naturally be unable to proceed.”

While he said this, Situ Ce did not actually believe it. In his view, since the North Prince had already raised the issue of land, he must have prepared to deal with the Aristocratic Families and Scholar Officials.

This also indirectly suggested that the Heavy Cavalry of North City was very likely unharmed, and all of this was a smokescreen released by the North Prince; otherwise, he would not dare to take such action. Thus, even if the Imperial Army was recalled, it would not affect North City in any way.

In his heart, Situ Ce greatly approved of Lu Chen’s actions. He believed that not only were Lu Chen’s reform measures without fault, but they were also introduced at just the right time, because the court simply didn’t have the resources to concern itself with whatever he was stirring up in North City.

Of course, in the coming period, it was likely that a lot of assassins would head to North City to cause trouble for Lu Chen.

However, Situ Ce believed that Lu Chen, the young Grandmaster, should have no problem coping with the assassination attempts by the Aristocratic Families.

The Sum Emperor thought over Situ Ce’s words and agreed that this method could indeed be a temporary solution.

Being in a war period with two great dynasties, if the Seignior’s title were stripped, it might very well push the Seignior to rebel. Using the war as a pretext, a slight punishment for the North Prince would suffice, just to make a show of it.

With the war serving as an excuse, those Aristocratic Families and Scholar Officials, uncomfortable as they might be, would not complain. If they forced the Seignior into rebellion and caused a greater crisis for the Great Xia, those officials would not be able to bear the responsibility.

Chapter 257: You will soon hear the news of the North Prince's sudden death 1

Early morning.

Xuanzheng Hall.

Today, the officials arrived here early, and as soon as they reached Xuanzheng Hall, they began discussing the North City reforms, no longer caring about the war between Great Sum and Great Wu.

Even though the war between Great Sum and Great Wu was related to them, there were soldiers holding the front lines, and Great Wu's military might, no matter how strong, could not possibly reach the Capital city in a short period of time.

However, the reforms in North City were different, as land issues were closely related to each and every one of them. Even though the North Prince was only carrying out the reforms within his fiefdom, appearing not to affect them, his ideas were perceived as extremely dangerous by them.

Such ideas absolutely must not arise within Great Sum, for once these ideas spread, the interests of everyone present would be affected. They could not allow for the Sum Emperor to entertain such thoughts either, so they had to nip this ideology in the bud.

As Lin Gaoyuan observed the officials fervently discussing the North City reforms in the great hall, he felt a mix of emotions.

It was only now that he had decided to side with the North Prince and support him henceforth when the North Prince had caused such a stir in North City.

To enact legislation declaring land ownership rights fall under the Prince, the North Prince dared to do such a thing. Didn't the North Prince have any officials or strategists by his side to prevent him from doing so?

The audacity of the North Prince truly knew no bounds.

Even Lin Gaoyuan began to waver internally.

He began to doubt if the North Prince would survive through the next year.

Even if the Sum Emperor didn't punish the North Prince, the Aristocratic Families and the Scholar Officials would likely send people to assassinate the North Prince in secret.

Thinking of this, Lin Gaoyuan sighed.

Originally, he had thought the North Prince was someone capable of biding his time, destined for greatness and bound to accomplish significant feats.

But it turned out the North Prince was rash beyond belief.

He also was uncertain whether the Heavy Cavalry of North City had indeed been wiped out. It seemed that he would have to thoroughly inquire about the North City situation once his son returned.

As Lin Gaoyuan was lost in thought, the voice of a eunuch echoed through the great hall.

"His Majesty arrives!"

At these words, the hall that had been as noisy as a marketplace instantly quieted down.

Soon, the Sum Emperor arrived atop the Dragon Throne, dressed in a yellow robe embroidered with the Golden Dragon.

After seating himself on the Dragon Throne, he spoke indifferently, "My loving officials, what were you discussing just now with such fervor? Could it be that there's been some major change on the front lines that I am unaware of?"

Seeing the Sum Emperor feigning ignorance, an Aristocratic Family's official could no longer hold back and stood up to speak, "Your Majesty, I impeach the North Prince for disregarding laws and rituals, oppressing the people, and acting despotically within his fiefdom. I suggest revoking the North Prince's title and having him seized and brought back to the Royal Capital for punishment."

Hearing this, the Sum Emperor appeared puzzled and then said, "North Prince? Weren't you discussing the front-line warfare just now? How did it turn to the North Prince? Has the North Prince done something unknown to Us that warrants an official's impeachment?"

Seeing the Sum Emperor acting completely uninformed, a tremor of surprise ran through the ministers in the hall—could it be that the actions taken by the North Prince in North City were actually instigated by the Sum Emperor?

Could it be that the Sum Emperor was considering legislating to reclaim land ownership rights?

It was at this moment that Zhao Wenhan stepped forward, "Your Majesty, I've heard that the North Prince is reforming North City and aims to enact laws stipulating that all land ownership rights in North City are to be vested solely in him. No one can buy or sell land at will. Such blatant seizure by the North Prince will severely endanger the state of Great Sum, hence I believe we need to stop the North Prince's reform immediately, or Great Sum will find itself in jeopardy."

The Sum Emperor's brows furrowed, and then he said, "Zhao, you are truly well-informed. You know of matters even We were oblivious to."

"However, if we may speak candidly, a Seignior reforming his own fiefdom and establishing decrees seems to bear little relation to the imperial court."

"If the court were to meddle in the affairs of a Seignior's fiefdom arbitrarily, it might provoke the dissatisfaction of the Seigniors."

Zhao Wenhan hastily said, "Your Majesty, the North Prince's reform has already incited public outrage. Everywhere you go, commoners are discussing the North City affairs, with few remaining concerned about the warfare at the front."

"If we don't halt the North Prince's reforms and fail to punish him, the common people might assume that it was Your Majesty who instructed the North Prince to act thus, and it's even possible that they fear Your Majesty will eventually legislate to reclaim all the lands within Great Sum."

“Right now, as the warfare on the front intensifies, if the soldiers come to know that the lands they’ve earned through military service could be taken back, how could they have the heart to fight for Great Sum or Your Majesty?”

“Therefore, I earnestly beseech Your Majesty to severely punish the North Prince!”

With that, Zhao Wenhan knelt down.

Seeing Zhao Wenhan kneeling, officials from his faction knelt down one after another, raising their voices in unison, “We beseech Your Majesty to severely punish the North Prince!”

As more than half of the officials in the court knelt down, the Sum Emperor’s heart was unmoved. He had anticipated that today’s court session would turn out this way.

In fact, what these ministers feared the most was the Emperor himself reclaiming land ownership rights. The earlier words of Zhao Wenhan were both a probe and a warning, reminding him not to entertain such thoughts, or his reign would be over.

The Emperor then said calmly, “If what you say is true, and the North Prince in North City legislates to retake land ownership rights, then indeed he has overstepped his bounds.”

Chapter 258: You will soon hear the news of the North Prince’s sudden death_2

“Although the land I granted him was originally supposed to be his, if we take all the land back, how will the common people survive?”

“Hmm, indeed, punishment is necessary!”

At this point, Sum Emperor’s gaze fell on Lin Gaoyuan.

Sum Emperor asked, “Lin, what do you think should be the punishment for the North Prince? Should his title be stripped, or what should be done?”

Lin Gaoyuan was stunned for a moment.

This was a scorching hot question—if his answer was not well considered, it would not only offend the Sum Emperor but also the entire court of civil and military officials.

After thinking for a while, Lin Gaoyuan finally said, “The North Prince has tyrannized the common people, indifferent to their lives and deaths; naturally, he should be punished. However...”

“The war between Great Sum and Great Wu is not over yet. If a Seignior’s title is stripped at this time, it is very likely to drive the North Prince into rebellion.”

“Although I have heard that the Heavy Cavalry of North City has been annihilated, we must not forget that the North Prince has led the soldiers of North City to exterminate the Sky Wolf King’s tribes, which suffices to show the abundant martial virtue of North City.”

“Even without the Heavy Cavalry, the North Prince could still quickly recruit a group of soldiers with formidable combat ability. If the North Prince were to rebel, Great Sum would fall into a pincer attack situation.”

Lin Gaoyuan had not yet finished speaking when he was about to continue, but the Sum Emperor interrupted him.

“Lin’s words make a lot of sense; it is indeed unwise to depose a Seignior’s title while the battle at the front has not yet ended.”

“However, we cannot leave the offense unpunished. I should give the people of Great Sum an explanation. Therefore, let us recall all the soldiers sent by the court to aid North City, no longer helping to defend Tianguang City.”

“From today, the court will not provide any support to North City, even if the Barbarian Tribes move southward, North City must fend off their attacks alone.”

Upon hearing the words of the Sum Emperor, Zhao Wenhan furrowed his brows.

What sort of punishment was this?

This punishment was likely to be inconsequential to the North Prince.

But then again, the North Prince chose his timing perfectly by making reforms during wartime. Given the overall situation, the court indeed cannot just depose a Seignior on a whim.

If the North Prince were driven into rebellion, whoever had first proposed deposing the North Prince would have to take the blame.

At this time, the Sum Emperor said, “All right, my dear courtiers, please stand up; I understand what you are worried about.”

“However, you can rest assured. Everything that happened in North City was just Chen causing trouble without any link to me, and there is no way I would legislate to reclaim the land from all over the world.”

“Although the reign of the Great Xia Dynasty was founded by the Ancestor, and all the land nominally belongs to the royal family, belongs to me, now that I have already granted these lands out, how could I possibly take them back?”

Hearing the Sum Emperor’s words, the ministers in the court felt something was off, like the Sum Emperor was reminding them that Great Sum belongs to him and advising them to be cautious.

Zhao Wenhan felt that continued kneeling was useless, so he stood up, and after Zhao Wenhan stood, the other officials in the court followed suit.

At this time, Zhao Wenhan said, “What Prime Minister Lin and Your Majesty said is rational. It was my recklessness for not considering the potential harm that deposing a Seignior at this time might bring to Great Sum.”

Seeing Zhao Wenhan didn’t continue to insist, most of the officials in the court were uncomfortable, not because they were dissatisfied with Zhao Wenhan, but because they thought it was a pity to let the North Prince get away with it like this.

If it were not for the ongoing war between the two great dynasties, the actions of the North Prince would definitely be met with severe punishment, as his ideas are too dangerous for the court ministers to allow.

Even if the North Prince's actions might have been instigated by the Sum Emperor, it would still not be acceptable.

Just at that moment, the voice of the Red Ribbon Messenger came from outside the main hall.

“Urgent news from Xiwu County! Great Wu has amassed an army of a million soldiers and launched a full-scale attack!”

After hearing what the Red Ribbon Messenger said, the ministers had to shift their discussion back to the war at the front, and they began to discuss how to deal with Great Wu's full-scale offensive.

At this time, the Minister of War, Chu Qinwu, stepped forward and said, “Your Majesty, we have already sent envoys to Great Wu to express our desire for peace talks, but Great Wu continues to amass a large army to attack Xiwu County. This proves that in the eyes of Great Wu, the strength of Great Xia has significantly weakened, which is why they are entertaining the idea of peace talks.”

“I believe that in order to negotiate peace, we must first repel the advance of Great Wu's forces and also counterattack to some extent. Only then can we deter Great Wu and let them know that Great Xia is not weak and not to be trifled with.”

“To boost the morale of the soldiers at the front, I suggest allowing Prince Lu Shuyun to take command, leading the three armies to counterattack Great Wu.”

Hearing Chu Qinwu's words, the Sum Emperor's eyes narrowed slightly.

He had almost guessed the intentions of the aristocratic families from the South; they wanted Prince Lu Shuyun to establish military merit to pave the way for his position as Crown Prince.

However, since he had already decided to compromise, he might as well fulfill their wishes—as for commanding the three armies, that was certainly impossible.

The Sum Emperor then said, “Although the Qii Prince is both scholarly and militaristic, he lacks the experience of commanding a large army. He may go to the front to inspire the soldiers, but he must not interfere with the decisions of the frontline commanders arbitrarily.”

The one thing the Sum Emperor valued most was military power; how could he easily hand it over to someone else? If he truly allowed Prince Lu Shuyun to command the three armies, it would be easy to give the power away, but reclaiming it would not be nearly so easy.

Hearing the words of the Sum Emperor, Prince Lu Shuyun immediately stood up and said, “Thank you, Father Emperor, for giving your son this opportunity!”

Seeing that the Sum Emperor so readily agreed to Prince Lu Shuyun’s visit to the front, the other princes were immediately discontent.

If Prince Lu Shuyun was allowed to go to the front, they also had the qualifications. Consequently, various princes stood up one after another, requesting the Sum Emperor to allow them to go to the front and fight against Great Wu.

However, the Sum Emperor did not agree. The war was likely to end, and he would not allow the other princes to go to the front and cause trouble.

The Sum Emperor was extending goodwill to the aristocratic families of the South by giving Prince Lu Shuyun an opportunity; there was no way he would let other princes run to the front to meddle as well.

What followed in court was a tug-of-war between different factions. Originally, today’s agenda was meant to cause trouble for the North Prince, but now all the ministers had shifted their focus to the warfront.

This was almost exactly what Lu Chen had anticipated. Even if the court ministers knew of the reforms he was carrying out in North City, because of the war between Great Wu and Great Xia, the court could not afford to spare the energy to trouble him.

Moreover, the court did not dare to cause trouble with a Seignior at this time. With the external enemy not yet repelled, if internal strife were provoked now, Great Xia would become even more dangerous.

Of course, this made the ministers of the court very uncomfortable. Now that they couldn’t move against the North Prince and were unable to stop his reforms in his fiefdom, were they really just supposed to watch him run amok in North City?

This was certainly not acceptable.

Since the reform measures concerning land in North City were openly proposed by the North Prince, the solution was to deal with the North Prince, the proposer. In this way, the reforms in North City would naturally come to a halt as well.

Meanwhile,

In a loft where weapons were traded, Wang Yong was communicating something with a middle-aged man.

The middle-aged man's body was covered in robust muscles, with each muscle strand very distinct. His face bore a long scar from a knife wound, giving him a fearsome and ferocious appearance; one could tell at a glance that he was a martial artist.

After listening to Wang Yong's words, the middle-aged man laughed heartily and then said, "Brother Wang, if you had come to us earlier, perhaps that scourge in the north wouldn't have caused all this trouble!"

"Hmph, Blood Moon Tower really are a bunch of incompetents; they actually failed at the hands of the North Prince!"

Wang Yong said with a smile, "Master Su, what you said is true. We will trouble Spirit Martial Tower with this matter. Upon success, five million taels of silver will be offered."

Su Teng said confidently, "Brother Wang, rest assured, you will soon hear news of the North Prince meeting an untimely death."

"Apart from that one in the palace, there is no one whom Spirit Martial Tower wishes to kill that can be protected, not even a Grandmaster."

Seeing Su Teng's confidence, Wang Yong felt reassured.

Spirit Martial Tower was not a professional assassin organization, but the dirty work they carried out was not much less than that of professional assassination organizations like Blood Moon Tower.

The most important point was that Spirit Martial Tower, unlike Blood Moon Tower, did not have an infamous reputation. Spirit Martial Tower appeared to be only a shop selling weapons on the surface, but in reality, they had many ways of making money, including taking contracts to kill.

Chapter 259: Mu Changtian's Reminder i

After news that North City had reclaimed land ownership rights back to North Prince Mansion spread throughout Great Sum, Lu Chen suddenly acquired countless enemies. Many forces and organizations were already stirring, with some even offering a bounty for Lu Chen's head.

Lu Chen was after all a Seignior, a son of the Sum Emperor, and yet there were people daring to put a price on his head. This fully demonstrated how much Lu Chen's recent actions were hated and also indirectly proved how little deterrence the current Sum Emperor held anymore.

Most crucially, the imperial court had no reaction whatsoever to this, and the Sum Emperor showed no intention of protecting Lu Chen.

The trouble was caused by Lu Chen himself, and it was only right that he should solve it. As for any royal dignity, what dignity could they claim when even he, the Emperor, was forced to compromise by the Aristocratic Families?

Only by annihilating all the Aristocratic Families would those powers supported by them stop their arrogance.

One month later.

North City.

Lu Chen was dealing with government affairs in his study when Li Rui and Mu Changtian arrived to report on the recent reform situation in North City.

North City had a relatively small population, and through the propaganda of Brocade Guards and local soldiers, the common people were mostly reassured about the land issue.

Several commoners even obtained more arable land, leading them to believe that the North Prince was not deceiving them.

The reforms were also moving forward smoothly.

There were no significant issues with military reforms either. North Country's laws stipulated that every adult had the duty to serve in the military. However, they were conscripts, different from recruited professional soldiers.

After serving for a few years as conscripts, soldiers had the opportunity to become professional soldiers. The treatment for professional soldiers was very good, and now many former soldiers in North City had become professionals.

Now, professional soldiers not only received land, but also a substantial allowance from the North Prince Mansion the moment they became professionals. Lu Chen even decreed that the descendants of professional soldiers could attend school for free, which instantly elevated the status of soldiers.

At that moment, Mu Changtian said to Lu Chen, "Prince, I think the promotion channels from conscript to professional soldier are still too few. According to the current reform plan, conscripts must serve several years before they can become professional soldiers. This may have limited motivational effect on the ordinary conscripts, and in the future, some might just want to serve out their time."

"Therefore, I suggest that we increase the promotion channels, such as by improving their treatment based on military merits."

Lu Chen replied, "This Prince has also had such thoughts, but recently there have been too many things to attend to, and this Prince hasn't written detailed promotion rules yet. Since you have had the same thought, when you return, write down your ideas and submit a report. This Prince will take a look."

"Yes, Prince!"

Lu Chen had not overlooked the welfare of the conscripts. He intentionally created a disparity in treatment between conscripts and professional soldiers, mainly to motivate conscripts to strive to become professionals.

If there was only one promotion pathway, it was obvious it wouldn't be enough to extensively motivate the ordinary conscripts, so Lu Chen was also considering perfecting the system of military merit.

After finishing discussing the soldiers' promotion matters, Mu Changtian and Li Rui continued to report on some problems they encountered in the reforms recently.

About half an hour later, the voice of a maid sounded at the door of the study, interrupting their report.

"Prince, Commander Qin has arrived."

Qin Yushan was assigned to weapon manufacturing and had rarely come to report to Lu Chen personally lately. It was mainly the Commanders of the Brocade Guards who reported to Lu Chen about recent occurrences in Great Sum.

But since he came, it meant that there must be something important.

Li Rui and Mu Changtian immediately stood aside and stopped talking.

At this time, Lu Chen said to the maid at the door, "Let him in."

Qin Yushan then pushed the door and entered the study, "Greetings, Prince!"

Lu Chen grunted in acknowledgement, his gaze falling on the bamboo tube Qin Yushan was holding.

"Commander Qin, has something significant happened in Capital City?"

Qin Yushan approached Lu Chen, passed him the bamboo tube with the letter, and then said, "Prince, many Aristocratic Families have secretly sent numerous assassins to North City, intending to harm you."

“According to information from Commander Liang, just the ones they know of, there are three groups of assassins that have come to North City, and these assassins are all strong. Every group has Master Level Martial Artists, and there are even some who are at the Master Realm.”

Hearing Qin Yushan’s words, Lu Chen just smiled. He took out the letter from the bamboo tube and glanced over it seriously.

Lu Chen had basically anticipated the events that would unfold later. He had touched the nerves of the Aristocratic Families, who certainly did not want him alive. Although he was far in North City, the initiative he took was enough to incite the Aristocratic Families to wish for his death.

Upon hearing Qin Yushan’s report, Mu Changtian immediately stood up and said, “Prince, I will strengthen the guard in Yan County when I return and try my best to prevent those strong unfamiliar Martial Artists from entering Yan County.”

Lu Chen replied, “There’s no need.”

“They have countless methods to enter Yan County; walls cannot stop them.”

“Let all of them come. This Prince just happens to need some challenging Martial Artists to practice against.”

Lu Chen had already begun practicing the Absorption Technique. Since obtaining it, he had been going to Spring Sound Court every day. The Absorption Technique was now at the first level.

However, he had not yet used this technique. Staying within North Prince Mansion, he had no enemy contacts. Now that these assassins were showing up at his doorstep, it was the perfect opportunity for him to test the Absorption Technique’s power.

Hearing Lu Chen’s words, Mu Changtian thought for a moment, and it seemed true that Lu Chen didn’t need to fear those assassins. Lu Chen himself was a Grandmaster, and he also possessed many mysterious weapons. For those assassins to target Lu Chen would be suicidal.

However, although Lu Chen wasn’t afraid, other people were different.

With this thought, Mu Changtian said, “Prince, although you are now a Grandmaster, and ordinary martial artists naturally cannot harm you, your wives and children in North Prince Mansion are a different matter.”

“If those assassins find it difficult to assassinate you, they may turn to target those close to you instead.”

Hearing Mu Changtian’s words, Lu Chen fell into contemplation.

This indeed posed a problem.

Mu Zixuan and the boys from Great Wu and Xiaozhou were just ordinary people, and his children were ordinary as well, they would have no fighting power if faced with martial artists.

Lu Chen said, “I will have General Xuanyuan guard the Prince’s Mansion afterward to avoid assassins infiltrating the mansion.”

Seeing that Lu Chen had already considered a candidate to protect the people of North Prince Mansion, Mu Changtian didn’t say anything more.

Xuanyuan Chen and Wenren Lie were both immensely strong, as they both had achieved the Master Realm, which was no small feat. With them guarding North Prince Mansion, plus the mansion’s mysterious weapons, fending off assassin attacks would not be a problem.

Of course, it’s easier to dodge the clear spear than to guard against the hidden arrow. If the people from North Prince Mansion were to leave the mansion, then it would be a different story. However, Mu Changtian believed that for the next while, Lu Chen would likely ask the women from North Prince Mansion to refrain from leaving the premises as much as possible.

Mu Zixuan was Mu Changtian’s daughter, and now she was also the North Prince’s wife, so Mu Changtian, compared to Lu Chen, was even more concerned about the safety of North Prince Mansion.

If something happened to his daughter, the relationship between the Mu Family and North Prince would no longer be as close.

At this moment, Qin Yushan continued, "Prince, there's another piece of news."

Hearing Qin Yushan speak, Lu Chen realized that he held two sets of intelligence in his hand, with another one yet to be reviewed.

Lu Chen then unfolded the first piece of information to check the contents of the second report.

Qin Yushan continued, "Great Wu has rallied an army of a million and launched a full-scale attack on Xiwu County, and Prince Lu Shuyun has been dispatched by His Majesty to the front line to battle Great Wu's forces."

Lu Chen chuckled and then said, "It seems the war should be coming to an end, eh? My eighth brother has even gone to the front lines to gather military achievements. Is he planning for our father the Emperor to appoint him as the Crown Prince?"

Mu Changtian said, "Prince, I've heard that the Chu Family Master has come to North City. If you're willing, perhaps you could try to win over the Chu Family to prevent the aristocratic families of the South from uniting. That might be even more advantageous for you."

Lu Chen, setting aside the report, said indifferently, "It's useless. My maternal grandfather is no longer the Chu Family Master, and now only a small part of the Chu Family supports him. The Chu Family is essentially leaning toward my brother, Prince Lu Shuyun."

Just then, a maid's voice came from the doorway, "Prince, Commander Wu is here."

Lu Chen said, "Let him in."

Wu Yuan then entered the study, "I pay respect to the Prince!"

Lu Chen directly asked, "What's the matter?"

Wu Yuan responded, "Prince, General Lin has already led the court's twenty-thousand soldiers to withdraw to Yan County, and they should be leaving Yan County by sunset."

The punishment measures from the court against Lu Chen came to North City half a month ago, and that was the withdrawal of twenty-thousand court soldiers, leaving North Country to deal with the barbarian tribes from the steppes on their own.

To Lu Chen, the punishment from the court was trivial, and he hadn't taken it seriously.

Lu Chen said, "Let them leave; don't bother with them."

Wu Yuan said, "Prince, General Lin wishes to meet with you privately, if you would deem it convenient."

On hearing this, Lu Chen's interest was piqued, "Oh, a private meeting with me? That is quite interesting."

"Then arrange it, I'll meet him around dusk."

Wu Yuan immediately said, "Yes, Prince."

"I take my leave."

Lin Xiuming's father was the Left Prime Minister, and if Lin Xiuming wanted a private meeting, it indicated that Left Prime Minister Lin Gaoyuan was considering taking Lu Chen's side. Otherwise, Lin Xiuming would not seek a private meeting with Lu Chen on the eve of his departure from North City.

As a general of the court, meeting privately with a seignior was a major taboo. If the court were to find out, there would be trouble for both Lin Xiuming and Lin Gaoyuan.

After Wu Yuan left, Qin Yushan also soon exited the study, and Mu Changtian, along with Li Rui, continued to report on the reform situation in North City.

At dusk.

Arranged by the Brocade Guard, Lu Chen went to a restaurant. Since Lin Xiuming wanted to meet him, it was certainly inappropriate for Lin Xiuming to come to the North Prince Mansion. Therefore, they specifically arranged for a secluded room in Rain-listening Pavilion.

Upon seeing Lu Chen, Lin Xiuming felt an overwhelming pressure. He was taken aback. Indeed, as he had sensed previously, the North Prince was a martial artist, and no less skilled than himself, even possibly stronger.

Chapter 260: Let's see what this little man he's interested in really wants to do_i

After meeting with Lin Xiuming, Lu Chen said with a smile, "General Lin, why aren't you hurrying back to the Capital city with the court's soldiers? Why meet with me in private? Don't you know that I've offended quite a few people by now?"

"If someone finds out that General Lin has been in contact with me, I'm afraid you will have a hard time once you return to the Capital city."

Hearing this, Lin Xiuming quickly said, "Prince is joking. As long as the Prince doesn't speak out, no one will know that I have seen the Prince."

Lu Chen spoke directly, "I'll get straight to the point, then. Say, General Lin, what do you need from me?"

Lin Xiuming replied, "The reason I wanted to meet with the Prince mainly comes from my father's intentions."

"My father wants to know what the Prince's plans are for the future."

Hearing this, Lu Chen smiled slightly and then said, "Prime Minister Lin really doesn't consider me an outsider, sending you to ask about my future plans?"

"Could it be that Prime Minister Lin and the Lin Family plan to support me in the struggle for inheritance?"

Lin Xiuming did not hide anything. The tavern had been cleared out for this meeting, there were no outsiders, and he could speak his mind openly and boldly.

“Prince, indeed my father intends to support you in the struggle for inheritance. He believes that the Prince is good at biding his time and will certainly be able to achieve great things in the future.”

At that moment, Lu Chen said, “I have a question for General Lin.”

Lin Xiuming replied respectfully, “Please, Prince, speak.”

Lu Chen asked, “Did Prime Minister Lin tell you to relay this to me before you set off for North Country, or did he send you a letter afterwards, instructing you to see me privately when you leave North Country?”

There’s a big difference between the two.

If Lin Xiuming had been instructed by Lin Gaoyuan before his departure to meet privately and discuss these matters, it would only prove that Lin Gaoyuan was entertaining the idea of supporting the North Prince Mansion, but it wouldn’t necessarily indicate a strong commitment.

However, if Lin Gaoyuan had later sent a letter asking Lin Xiuming to approach the North Prince privately upon departing North Country to express their family’s support, it would mean that Lin Gaoyuan was seriously intending to back him.

After all, he had just offended all the Aristocratic Families in Great Sum and even angered the Scholar Officials class. If Lin Gaoyuan was still willing to support him under these circumstances, it would mean that Lin Gaoyuan truly valued him greatly.

Hearing Lu Chen’s question, Lin Xiuming immediately understood what he meant and promptly answered, “Prince, it was only after the reforms in North Country that I received a letter from my father. He is steadfast in standing by your side, regardless of the difficulties you face now, he continues to support you.”

Lu Chen said with a smile, “Oh? Does Prime Minister Lin really have that much faith that I will eventually take that position?”

Lin Xiuming said, “My father is always accurate in judging people. He believes that you, Prince, are a dragon lying in wait, destined to soar to great heights one day.”

At Lin Xiuming's words, Lu Chen smiled. Prime Minister Lin, who had always been non-committal and never openly supported any Prince in the court, unexpectedly decided to support him; he truly had a discerning eye.

Then, Lin Xiuming said tentatively, "Prince, my father also asked me to convey a message. He heard that my sworn sister is serving at the North Prince Mansion. My father wonders what you think of my sworn sister, and if the Prince is fond of her, the Lin Family is willing to form an alliance through marriage, giving my sworn sister's hand in marriage to you."

On hearing this, Lu Chen paused before asking, "Sworn sister? Are you talking about Lin Wanyun?"

Lin Xiuming confirmed, "Yes."

Lu Chen said with a smile, "As far as I am aware, Lin Wanyun is now part of the Mysterious Moon Palace and seems to have little to do with the Lin Family, doesn't she?"

Lin Xiuming replied, "Prince is jesting. She was sworn to my father as a daughter with the witness of your mother, and she grew up in the Lin Family. Even though she has now left the Lin Family, she is still a member of our family."

Lu Chen continued, "However, she seems to be in her thirties this year. Don't you think your sworn sister is a bit too old for me, General Lin?"

Lin Xiuming said with neither humble nor arrogant tone, "Prince, age is not an issue as long as the Prince likes her."

Lu Chen thought to himself that Lin Gaoyuan really intended to support him, even contemplating marrying Lin Wanyun to him.

In that case, Lin Wanyun would inevitably become his woman sooner or later.

Even without the Lin Family's support, one day Lin Wanyun would still become his woman. However, with her family's backing, her marriage to him would be more justified.

Then Lu Chen said, “General Lin, go back and tell Prime Minister Lin that I am grateful for his support at this time, but as for the struggle for inheritance, I will not be partaking in it. That position is too small to contain me.”

Upon hearing this, Lin Xiuming was taken aback.

What did the North Prince mean?

Too small a position? Was he saying that the place of the Crown Prince was too small for him? Could it be that the North Prince intended to bypass the role of Crown Prince and become the Emperor directly?

In other words, was he planning a direct rebellion?

The thought made Lin Xiuming’s forehead break out in beads of sweat.

Was this something he was supposed to hear?

Now that he knew the North Prince’s intentions, would he be silenced by the North Prince in the future?

Lu Chen then continued, “General Lin, if there’s nothing else, I shall take my leave. It’s risky for you to be away from the camp for too long; it could raise suspicions.”