

Es. Benefits 331

Chapter 331: The Birth of the Fifth Child_2

[Dongfang Family: Great Shang adherents, with a population of forty thousand, the family is located in Sufeng City of the Great Xia Dynasty. The current family head is Dongfang Yi. They secretly reached a cooperative agreement with the Great Xia Emperor, planning to eliminate the aristocratic families of the South, and thereafter, pledge loyalty to the Sum Emperor. However, in reality, they only serve the Son of Destiny.]

[The heads of the two major families as well as their clan members have all received information that you are the Son of Destiny. You have one opportunity to issue a direct command to them. What command would you like to issue?]

Seeing the system prompt before him, Lu Chen was barely able to suppress a smirk. After all, the Dongfang and Qian families were his own people; it was likely that neither Wu Junwan nor his own father had anticipated this.

What surprised him the most was actually the Dongfang Family. The Dongfang Family had truly reached an agreement with his father, the Emperor. Although he had guessed that there were traitors among the aristocratic families of the South following reminders from Zhuge Zhongguang, and he had also sensed it might be the Dongfang Clan, he could not be certain it was them.

Now, with the system prompt out, he could be almost one hundred percent certain. Unfortunately for the Dongfang Family, they were not his father's people, but his.

He wondered what expression his father would have if he knew the Dongfang Family was on his side.

With this in mind, Lu Chen said to the system, "Have them hold their positions, and tell the people from both major families to contact me as soon as possible."

As Lu Chen's voice fell, the system prompt sounded again.

[The Dongfang Family and the Qian Family have received your command.]

Meanwhile.

Rain-Listening Pavilion.

On the loft above, Wang Qingci, dressed in a red gown, was gazing at the distant scenery, with a portly middle-aged man seated in front of her.

Wang Qingci said, “President Qian, I’m somewhat curious. Since you are interested in the North Prince Mansion, why not make direct contact with them? Why seek out Mr. Wang to inquire about the affairs of the North Prince Mansion instead?”

Hearing Wang Qingci’s words, just as Qian Dahai was about to reply, a surge of information flooded into his brain.

Qian Dahai was taken aback, then a smile appeared on his face. He had long suspected it might be the North Prince, which is why he had been actively inquiring about him. To his surprise, it was indeed the North Prince.

Now that he was certain of who his master was, there was no need to continue dragging out discussions with the Rain-Listening Pavilion. Qian Dahai got up and said, “Mr. Wang, I suddenly remembered I have urgent matters today, so I’ll take my leave. As for what I just mentioned, please pretend you never heard it.”

With that, Qian Dahai walked directly down from the loft.

Seeing Qian Dahai hastily leaving, Wang Qingci paused, puzzled. What was going on?

She didn’t recall saying anything that could have made him sensitive. Why did he suddenly leave? She had been planning to learn more about the Great Wu Dynasty from Qian Dahai by reversing the flow of the conversation. But their talk had only just started, and he was already on his way out.

Wang Qingci frowned slightly; Qian Dahai’s rush to leave the Rain-Listening Pavilion must be due to some extremely important matter. She needed to relay this information to Lu Chen without delay.

Thinking this, Wang Qingci also promptly got up, preparing to return to the Prince’s Mansion.

At this very moment.

With a courtyard.

Dongfang Longyue was in a pavilion painting. Suddenly, her mind went blank and her hand trembled, ruining the painting with a stroke of her brush.

If anyone were here, they would surely recognize the person in the painting as the North Prince.

Dongfang Longyue remained frozen in place for a long time, not snapping back to reality. She never imagined that simply to avoid the Crown Prince and casually expand the Dongfang Family business, she would actually encounter the Son of Destiny.

The Son of Destiny turned out to be the North Prince?

This...

Didn't seem all that surprising, actually.

Since arriving in the North Country, the North Prince not only defeated the barbarians of the North Land but also brought so many novel and strange things to the North Country. Most importantly, the reforms in the North Country were out of sync with this world.

As Dongfang Longyue came back to her senses, she glanced at the portrait before her.

She had simply felt like painting today, and it was just a casual attempt, yet the man she ended up painting was none other than the North Prince.

It seemed that the heavens indeed had their own intentions.

Dongfang Longyue told her maid, "Get ready, I'm going to the North Prince's Mansion."

"Yes, Miss."

Lu Chen had been in the study for only a short while when the maid's voice rang out at the door of the study, "Prince, the President of the Qianhai Commercial Association wishes to visit you."

Hearing this, Lu Chen indifferently said, "Bring him to the study."

Not long after, Qian Dahai appeared in Lu Chen's study. Upon seeing Lu Chen, Qian Dahai quickly knelt down and greeted him, "Lowly merchant Qian Dahai pays homage to the Prince, may the Prince live for ten thousand years, ten thousand ten thousand years!"

Lu Chen said, "Stand up."

Qian Dahai then stood up and said, "Thank you, Prince."

Lu Chen did not intend to waste time and directly said, "President Qian, I've heard that you are particularly skilled in commerce. I have a government position here, and I wonder if you might be interested?"

Upon hearing this, Qian Dahai said with a smile, "Prince, you are our Qian Family's master. Whatever you ask me to do, that I shall do."

Lu Chen said, "Alright, then the position of Minister of Commerce will be yours in the future. However, how do you plan to resolve the situation with Great Wu?"

Qian Dahai replied, "Your Highness, you might not be aware that Princess Wu has actually been very keen for the Qianhai Commercial Association to infiltrate the North Country and gather intelligence."

"If You want me to be the Minister of Commerce, I just have to mention it to Princess Wu, and she is probably more than eager for me to join the small court of the North Country."

"Moreover, the Qian Family is still in Great Wu, so she should not suspect me."

After thinking for a moment, Lu Chen then said, "That's still not safe. Your Qian Family should still find a way to relocate to the North Country first, and after that, I will hand over the position of Minister of Commerce to you."

Lu Chen worried that in time, Wu Junwan would sense something and directly take action against the Qian Family.

At this time, Lu Chen asked, "Is there any difficulty for the Qian Family to move to the North Country?"

Qian Dahai continued, "Prince, there is not the slightest difficulty for the Qian Family to leave Great Wu. Princess Wu, in order to earn the North Country's trust in the Qianhai Commercial Association, has actually been wanting the Qian Family to move to the North Country for a long time."

Lu Chen, with a smile, said, "She has such confidence in you, isn't she afraid that you will betray her?"

Qian Dahai replied, "Although she will agree to the Qian Family's relocation to the North Country, it's likely that my two sons will still remain as hostages at the Qianhai Commercial Association in Great Wu. Moreover, Princess Wu has an extremely formidable assassination organization at her disposal, so she is not worried at all that we will betray her."

Although the Qianhai Commercial Association appears to belong to the Qian Family, in reality, the person in control is Wu Junwan, and the headquarters of the Qianhai Commercial Association is also in Great Wu. Most importantly, the Qianhai Commercial Association controls the Qian Family's wealth, so even if the entire Qian Family relocates to another dynasty, Wu Junwan is not afraid that the Qian Family will betray.

She does not believe that the wealth-loving Qian Dahai will abandon his riches in the Qianhai Commercial Association. Furthermore, with his two sons kept as hostages by the Qianhai Commercial Association in Great Wu, she is very confident in Qian Dahai and the Qian Family.

Lu Chen said, "Then go back and hasten the Qian Family's relocation here."

No sooner had Lu Chen's words fallen when once again the voice of the maid came from the doorway of the study, "Prince, Lady Wang is looking for you."

Lu Chen directly said, "Let her in."

The next moment, Wang Qingci pushed the door open and entered. As soon as she walked in, she immediately prepared to inform Lu Chen about Qian Dahai looking for her, "Prince, Qian Dahai just now..."

Wang Qingci's words were not finished when she froze in place.

For she saw Qian Dahai himself in front of her.

With a smile, Qian Dahai said, "So Mr. Wang is also the Prince's person. I was wondering how Rain-listening Pavilion could have developed so quickly."

Wang Qingci was somewhat bewildered.

From what Qian Dahai implied, was he also Lu Chen's person?

For months, Rain-listening Pavilion and Qianhai Commercial Association had been at each other's throats, only to discover they were all on the same side?

Wang Qingci then turned to Lu Chen and said, "Prince, are you making fun of your servant like this?"

Chapter 332: The Storm that Swept Over Great Xia Arrives_1

Wang Qingci felt a sense of grievance in her heart, having led the Rain-listening Pavilion in a constant struggle against the Qianhai Commercial Association, tirelessly contriving to extract their intelligence, only to discover that the President of the Qianhai Commercial Association was one of Lu Chen's people.

Why didn't Lu Chen tell her sooner? She suddenly felt that Lu Chen didn't trust her, which was why he didn't share this information with her.

It was even possible that Lu Chen had deliberately sent Qian Dahai to test her.

Seeing Wang Qingci seemed somewhat unhappy, Lu Chen said with a smile, “Mr. Wang, I myself only learned today that President Qian is one of my people.”

This...

Hearing Lu Chen’s words, Wang Qingci was taken aback for a moment.

Learned only today?

Was he trying to fool a fool? Qian Dahai was his man; how could he have possibly only learned of that today?

At that moment, Qian Dahai said to Wang Qingci, “Mr. Wang, the Prince is correct. I too found out only today that the Prince is my master.”

“Previously, when I sought information about the North Prince Mansion from you, it was mainly to verify my own suspicions.”

Wang Qingci looked at Lu Chen doubtfully. Lu Chen claimed Qian Dahai was his man but then said he only found out that day? Did that not imply that there had been no prior contact between Lu Chen and the Qianhai Commercial Association? So how did Qian Dahai become Lu Chen’s man?

Wang Qingci felt a bit muddled in her thoughts, but ultimately, she chose to believe what Lu Chen had said. She felt that there really was no need for him to send someone to test her, considering that the Rain-listening Pavilion was filled with Brocade Guards watching her every move.

At that moment, Qian Dahai tactfully said, “Prince, if there’s nothing else, I shall take my leave.”

Lu Chen replied, “Yes, go attend to your affairs.”

After Qian Dahai left the study, Lu Chen, his face full of smiles, stared at Wang Qingci and said, “So, you thought I had sent Qian Dahai as a spy to test you after hearing he was my man?”

Wang Qingci pursed her lips and said nothing. She had indeed thought so at first, but after a moment, she realized that Lu Chen really had no reason to test her.

Her entire being belonged to Lu Chen, both body and spirit molded into his shape. There was nothing left to test.

At that moment, Lu Chen explained, "The situation with the Qianhai Commercial Association is a bit peculiar. Indeed, I only found out today that Qian Dahai is my man. He was not sent to test you, you can be assured of that."

Filled with curiosity, Wang Qingci asked, "Why did the Prince only find out today that Qian Dahai is your man?"

Lu Chen said with a smile, "Having spent so much time in the Prince's Mansion, you must know about my Immortal Master."

Practically all the women in the inner court of the Prince's Mansion knew that Lu Chen was a man blessed with an immortal fate, having experienced the so-called fairy skill treatments after sharing his bed. They were thoroughly convinced of his destined connection with immortality.

Not only the women of the inner court but also the soldiers of the North Country's army firmly believed that Lu Chen was a Son of Destiny, protected by an Immortal.

After hearing Lu Chen's words, Wang Qingci's mind froze for a moment, then swiftly concocted an explanation, "So it turns out that Qian Dahai was a man prepared by the Prince's Immortal Master for him."

Wang Qingci thought to herself, it made sense why Lu Chen had only now learned of Qian Dahai as one of his own. It appeared that Qian Dahai had not previously made any contact with Lu Chen, hence neither knew of their connection. If Qian Dahai was indeed a man prepared by Lu Chen's Immortal Master, everything fell into place.

After hearing Wang Qingci's words, Lu Chen said with a smile, "You are correct, Qian Dahai is indeed a talent prepared by my Master. There are many more like him."

Wang Qingci said, "This servant thought it odd that Qian Dahai has been inquiring about Your Highness recently. I feared he sought to gather intelligence on the North Prince Mansion. Now it seems he was confirming whether his master was indeed Your Highness."

With that, Wang Qingci felt much more at ease, so long as it was clear that Lu Chen had no suspicions about her. He still trusted her.

Then, Wang Qingci said, "If there's nothing else, this servant will take her leave."

Lu Chen replied indifferently, "Yes, you may go."

Today, Lu Chen was much more behaved and had no intention of doing anything inappropriate in the study. Another person was expected to visit him soon, so he continued to sit in the study, waiting.

Sure enough, it didn't take long before he heard a maid's voice once again at the door of the study, "Prince, the young miss from the Dongfang Family wishes to see you privately."

Lu Chen said coolly, "Bring her to the study."

"As you wish, Prince."

Soon enough, a maid from the Prince's Mansion led a woman dressed in a simple white garment into the study.

Upon seeing the woman before him, Lu Chen felt as if dazzling rays of light were shining on him. The woman was extremely beautiful, seemingly radiating specks of starlight, stirring something inside Lu Chen with just a glance.

Dongfang Longyue greeted Lu Chen with a bow and said, "This commoner Dongfang Longyue pays her respects to the Prince. May the Prince have a long life of a thousand, thousand years!"

Snapped back to reality by Dongfang Longyue's voice, Lu Chen responded, "Rise."

Then Lu Chen recognized Dongfang Longyue's personal details through the system.

[Name: Dongfang Longyue]

[Identity: Daughter of Dongfang Yi, the Family Head of the Dongfang Family, 26 years old, Master Realm.]

[Rating: 98]

[Favorability: 50]

[Loyalty: 100]

Seeing Dongfang Longyue's details, Lu Chen was once again stunned. He did not anticipate that Dongfang Longyue's displayed information would be similar to that of Xuanyuan Yunqi, with favorability and loyalty being separate.

Chapter 333: The Storm that Swept Over Great Xia Arrives_2

Having come back to his senses, Lu Chen took another look at Dongfang Longyue.

Dongfang Longyue wore a white belt around her waist, perfectly accentuating her curvaceous figure. Her temperament was very similar to that of Chen Wanrong, both of whom were the epitome of women with an Immortal Aura.

However, she gave Lu Chen a different feeling. When he was in front of Chen Wanrong without having made any physical contact with her, it was difficult for Lu Chen to harbor even the slightest inappropriate thought about her.

But the moment Lu Chen saw Dongfang Longyue, he conceived the desire to have relations with her, to have her bear his children, and he felt an incomparable restlessness within him.

With a smile on her lips and peerlessly beautiful features, Dongfang Longyue seemed like an intelligent elder sister, which reminded Lu Chen of the neighbor's elder sister from his previous life.

Of course, Dongfang Longyue was not the neighbor's elder sister from his previous life, although they bore a striking resemblance.

He remembered that the first time he ever felt an urge toward a woman in his previous life was because of his neighbor's elder sister, wanting to engage in certain activities with her—a phase every man goes through.

Lu Chen couldn't help but think that, despite already being a father of several children, he could still feel such a stirring in his heart.

It seemed that the pressure he had been under recently was too great, and he hadn't taken the time to relax properly. If he had relaxed, he probably wouldn't feel such impulses.

After regaining his composure, Lu Chen coughed and said, "My Prince has heard that the Dongfang Family has cooperated with my father, the Sum Emperor, recently. Is it true or not?"

Dongfang Longyue answered calmly, "Replying to the Prince, my father plans to bring the Dongfang Family into the imperial court. Therefore, he has chosen to pledge allegiance to His Majesty actively, preparing to cooperate with His Majesty in eradicating other Aristocratic Families."

Hearing this, Lu Chen laughed and said, "Isn't your father afraid that my father, the Sum Emperor, will turn against him once his purpose is served?"

Dongfang Longyue responded, "The Dongfang Clan has a Grandmaster, as well as numerous merchant ships. Furthermore, the Dongfang Clan does not own much fixed land in Great Sum, and can leave the Great Xia Dynasty at any time. From my father's perspective, it wouldn't be difficult for the Dongfang Family to break away from the Great Xia Dynasty."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen was briefly taken aback.

The system had not told him just now about the existence of a Grandmaster within the Dongfang Family. If he included himself, wouldn't that mean that the North Country already had three Grandmasters? Some dynasties didn't even have three Grandmasters openly, and he hadn't expected his own feudal state to have acquired three Grandmasters so quickly.

At this moment, Dongfang Longyue asked, “Prince, does the Dongfang Family need to relocate to the North Country?”

Since the Son of Destiny had already appeared, their family should follow their mission and assist the Son of Destiny.

Currently, the Dongfang Family resided in Sufeng City, which was quite distant from the North Country. If Lu Chen needed anything, they could not mobilize the full strength of the family to assist him in a timely manner, so it would be better to move the entire family to the North Country.

Of course, if they truly made such a move, they were likely to offend many people, including several Aristocratic Families and the Sum Emperor.

After thinking for a moment, Lu Chen then said, “There’s no need for now. By the way, since the Dongfang Family is cooperating with my father, you should have a rough idea of when he plans to make his move, right?”

Dongfang Longyue replied, “Yes, it is scheduled for the early part of next month. His Majesty plans to force the Crown Prince and others to retreat to Sufeng City, to coerce them into rebelling, and then take action against them.”

“His Majesty has long used the Dongfang Clan’s merchant ships to transfer tens of thousands of elite soldiers to the southeastern coast. Once the Aristocratic Families of the South and the Crown Prince rebel, His Majesty will send troops immediately. With a pincer attack from both sides, the Southern Aristocratic Families will likely not last half a year without the support of other Seigniors.”

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen chuckled. He truly had not expected his father, the Sum Emperor, to be so well-prepared. It appeared he had underestimated his father’s capabilities.

Lu Chen glanced at Dongfang Longyue’s flawless face and then continued to ask, “Is it possible that those Aristocratic Families might also have a Grandmaster? If a Grandmaster appears, what does my father intend to do?”

“I am not certain,” Dongfang Longyue replied, “but I have heard that in order to completely eliminate the major Southern Aristocratic Families, His Majesty has sent envoys not only to Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain but even to Peach Blossom Valley.”

Hearing Dongfang Longyue mention these three places, Lu Chen pretty much guessed what his father intended to do.

It was rumored that a Grandmaster existed in each of these places. His father sending people there clearly meant he sought to collaborate with the Grandmasters from these locations. If these Grandmasters supported his father, it would be much easier for his father to annihilate the Southern Aristocratic Families.

Of course, if the Grandmasters from these places chose to remain neutral, it would still be a good outcome for his father.

At that moment, Lu Chen fell into deep thought. Once rebellion occurred in the South, if the other Seigniors took no action, then his father should have no problem in eradicating the Southern Aristocratic Families.

But the key issue was that some Seigniors had been suppressed too harshly and had long been considering rebellion. If the Southern Aristocratic Families and the Crown Prince rebelled, then it was possible that other Seigniors might also leap into action. If these two forces were to converge, his father's well-laid plans might come to naught.

While Lu Chen pondered this, his gaze swept back and forth across Dongfang Longyue.

Being stared at so intently by Lu Chen, Dongfang Longyue felt an unusual sensation stir within her.

Chapter 334: The Storm that Swept Over Great Xia Arrives_3

Her loyalty to Lu Chen was naturally one hundred percent, but that did not mean she particularly liked Lu Chen, she had long heard that Lu Chen was a rake, fond of beautiful women, not even sparing his own aunts.

Even though Lu Chen was no longer the waste of rumors, it did not mean he was not lecherous anymore, Dongfang Longyue couldn't help but wonder if Lu Chen was staring at her so intently because he was taken by her body.

When she was in Sufeng City, that was how those men were, just a few glances at her, and they wanted to marry her.

At this moment, Dongfang Longyue thought to herself that Lu Chen was the Son of Destiny, and if Lu Chen truly desired her body, it was likely that the entire Dongfang Family would approve, so was she going to be married off to the North Prince Mansion to become one of Lu Chen's concubines?

Although she could not say she disliked Lu Chen very much, such an arranged marriage still made her somewhat uncomfortable.

At this time, Dongfang Longyue sized up Lu Chen, his cheekbones were very handsome, sharp, and distinct, and between his eyebrows seemed to emanate an imperial aura that involuntarily made one want to submit.

If it were only about appearance, marrying him wouldn't be so bad, it was just that she was used to being free, and did not particularly want to marry into an imperial family.

Someone like Lu Chen, destined to become the Emperor, and not just any Emperor at that, if she became his woman, not to mention the harem's scheming and strife, she feared she would only be confined to the Imperial Palace until her death.

After pondering for a while, Lu Chen spoke up, "Miss Dongfang, I heard you are engaged to the Crown Prince?"

Dongfang Longyue answered, "Yes, my primary reason for coming to the North Country was to escape the engagement to the Crown Prince."

Seeing Lu Chen bring up the matter of the engagement made Dongfang Longyue even more certain that Lu Chen was interested in her.

Lu Chen continued to ask, "Miss Dongfang does not wish to marry the Crown Prince, is it because you have someone else in your heart?"

Dongfang Longyue responded, "I have no favored suitors at the moment."

Having said this, Dongfang Longyue continued, "Prince, just calling me Longyue is fine."

Now that the entire Dongfang Family was a vassal of the North Prince Mansion, Lu Chen had no need to be so respectful to her; his excessive courtesy only added to her pressure.

Lu Chen said, "Very well, from now on I will call you Longyue."

"Longyue, when you go back later, write a letter to your father, telling him that I have placed Brocade Guards in Sufeng City. If you need anything, you can directly contact the Brocade Guard, or through them, keep in contact with me."

Having said this, Lu Chen took out a Brocade Guard token and placed it on the desk, "This is the identity token used by the Brocade Guard, deliver it to Sufeng City along with your letter."

Hearing this, Dongfang Longyue glanced at the identity token on the desk, then stepped forward and picked up the Brocade Guard's token.

This token was a blank identity token, mainly so that Dongfang Yi could identify the Brocade Guard, without any other purpose.

"I understand," she acknowledged.

Lu Chen nodded and said, "Well, if there is nothing else, you may go back."

"Yes, Prince, I shall take my leave," she said.

Once again, Dongfang Longyue gave her respects and turned to leave; seeing her graceful figure as she departed, Lu Chen scoffed at himself with a self-deprecating laugh.

He had become debased, desiring any beautiful woman he saw, was this the change that came with power?

Lu Chen rubbed his temples and tried to think no more of it.

Meanwhile.

In Great Sum, the Capital city.

The East Palace.

Today, the East Palace was not as lively as usual, many officials had come to the East Palace before, but now far fewer.

On one hand, it was because the court officials had realized the Sum Emperor's intent to depose the Crown Prince, and on the other, Lu Shuyun had sensed the impending events, thus advising officials close to him to visit less.

At this moment, inside the great hall, it was mostly people from the aristocratic families of the South.

Sitting atop the hall, Lu Shuyun glanced at everyone when the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of War, Wang Chengshuo, spoke, "Your Highness, the Emperor's decision to deploy troops is final, no matter how we try to stop it, it is futile."

"Recently, the Universal Academy and some citizens of Great Qian entered Great Sum, bringing with them the plague from Great Qian, regardless of whether the plague spreads, the Emperor will use this as an excuse to send out troops."

"We must prepare in advance," he said.

After hearing Wang Chengshuo's words, Lu Shuyun fell silent.

Of course, he understood that his father, the Emperor, had decided to act against the southern aristocratic families, but his position was rather awkward. Firstly, he was the Sum Emperor's son, and secondly, his ties with the southern aristocratic families were extremely close.

If he did not rebel with the southern aristocratic families, once they were destroyed, his position as the Crown Prince would undoubtedly be revoked without question.

Initially, he became the Crown Prince purely because his father had compromised with the southern aristocratic families, without their support, how could he possibly keep his position?

But if he rebelled with the southern aristocratic families, setting aside how his disloyal act would be despised, the possibility of their success was very slim, and if they failed in the end, his fate would be no better.

After much deliberation, Lu Shuyun finally made a decision. The southern aristocratic families were irrevocably tied to him, so he could not back down now. If he could not ascend, his fate would be even worse in the end.

Chapter 335: The Storm that Swept Over Great Xia Arrives_4

Seeing that Lu Shuyun remained silent for a long time without speaking, Wang Yong said at his side, "Crown Prince, His Majesty is forcing you to rebel. We have no way out. If the Aristocratic Families of the South are gone, your position as Crown Prince will also be abolished."

The Sum Emperor did not directly send troops south, but continuously applied pressure. His aim was to force Lu Shuyun to go south. Anyone with clear eyes could see that the Sum Emperor wanted to find a justified reason to eradicate the Aristocratic Families of the South.

Now the conflict between the Sum Emperor and the Aristocratic Families of the South had been laid bare. War was bound to break out. Even if the Aristocratic Families didn't rebel, what awaited them was only the slaughter.

The plague in Great Qian was the perfect excuse. The Sum Emperor could use the plague of Great Qian as a reason to send troops south and also use the infection to eradicate the Aristocratic Families of the South. By then, the Sum Emperor could simply claim that those Aristocratic Families had been wiped out by the plague.

Even if people knew that the plague was just an excuse, it wouldn't have any effect, since the Aristocratic Families would already be gone. It would serve as a stark warning to any others, making it uncertain whether any Aristocratic Families would dare oppose the Sum Emperor in the future.

If any Aristocratic Families did come forward, the Sum Emperor could just as easily wield the sharp blade he had prepared. Now that the several empires each had their own issues to resolve, with Great Sum free of external strife, the Sum Emperor could do whatever he wished.

After hearing what Wang Yong said, Lu Shuyun stood up from his seat and said, “Tomorrow morning at the imperial court, I will ask Father Emperor to allow me to lead troops south to control the plague.”

Upon hearing Lu Shuyun’s words, everyone finally breathed a sigh of relief. The Crown Prince had finally made up his mind. Their biggest worry was that Lu Shuyun would back down at this time.

Lu Shuyun was the Sum Emperor’s son. He naturally still had a way out. If he did not rebel, at most he would lose his position as Crown Prince and then be put under house arrest.

But it was different for the Aristocratic Families of the South. Without the backbone of the Crown Prince, they wouldn’t be able to rally support even if they wanted to rebel.

With the Crown Prince, they could march north under the banner of “rid the emperor of ‘evil’ ministers,” pull the Sum Emperor from his throne, and then install Lu Shuyun to the position.

The next morning at the imperial court, Lu Shuyun took the initiative to propose to the Sum Emperor that he wanted to lead troops south to help the people of the South resist the plague.

The Sum Emperor agreed without even thinking about it.

Most officials already knew what was going to happen next. Many officials connected to the Aristocratic Families of the South handed in their resignations and left their posts for various reasons.

These officials were merely the spokespersons for the Aristocratic Families. The Sum Emperor did not deal with them directly. They were minor characters. What the Sum Emperor was waiting for was Lu Shuyun to start a rebellion.

Once Lu Shuyun started a rebellion, there would be plenty of justification. As for how much suffering the war would bring to people and how many homes it would destroy, these were not considerations for the Sum Emperor.

At this time, the Sum Emperor could not wait for Lu Shuyun to drag a few more Aristocratic Families down with him, so he could then deal with them all at once.

The situation now was that Lu Shuyun knew that his father emperor sending troops south was pressuring them to rebel, and the Sum Emperor also knew that Lu Shuyun and the Aristocratic Families of the South had guessed that him sending troops south was to force them into rebellion. But still, Lu Shuyun and the Aristocratic Families of the South had no choice but to rebel.

If they did not rebel, the Sum Emperor's blade would fall directly on them.

As officials from the Aristocratic Families of the South one by one left the imperial court, the storm that had been sweeping across Great Sum finally arrived.

The Sum Emperor had no way out; neither did Lu Shuyun nor the Aristocratic Families of the South.

Most officials remaining in the imperial court did not rush to take sides. For them, it did not matter whether it was Lu Shuyun or Lu Xingqiu who was the Sum Emperor.

Chapter 336: Crown Prince's Rebellion_1

Conspiracies often can only target an individual or a small group; to conspire against a massive collective, to destroy a formidable power, simple scheming is insufficient.

Since the Sum Emperor ascended the throne, he had been plotting, constantly calculating against those Aristocratic Families, sowing discord among them. However, despite all the plotting, those families remained tightly knit, with none being outmaneuvered by him.

For Ancient Families like the Wang Family, without using physical extermination, they simply cannot be eradicated. Any policy suppressing the Aristocratic Families is just a minor annoyance to them; they not only can distort the Emperor's policies but can also use new policies to seek even more benefits for themselves.

The Sum Emperor had long seen through the tactics of the Aristocratic Families, and he was very clear in his mind that none of the measures were as effective as directly chopping off those people's heads.

Years of contending with the Aristocratic Families in the imperial court had cemented a notion in the Sum Emperor's heart, that is, only military force could resolve everything.

As the Crown Prince Lu Shuyun headed to the South, the imperial army also made preparations to move southward. Though it was claimed to be a measure to contain the spread of plague, those Military Generals knew their southward march was certainly not about controlling the epidemic; or perhaps, in the eyes of the Sum Emperor, those Aristocratic Families were the epidemic itself.

After arriving at Sufeng City, with the help of the families of the South, Lu Shuyun quickly took control of the counties in the region.

The South had always been the territory of its local Aristocratic Families. There were no Seigniors appointed by the court in this area, and with surrounding counties all staffed by officials from Aristocratic Families, it was very easy for Lu Shuyun to take control; it hardly required much effort.

Of course, controlling the counties was one thing, but having command over the local troops was the main aspect. Without an army to resist the imperial forces, mere control over the local counties would be futile.

On one hand, Lu Shuyun was integrating the private armies of the local Aristocratic Families in the South, and on the other hand, he sent people to win over those Generals of the court. To launch a rebellion, relying solely on these Aristocratic Families was not enough.

Only with the support of more people, more forces, would they have the possibility of success.

The seventh day of the sixth month.

News of the Crown Prince's rebellion spread throughout the Great Sum, with Lu Shuyun gathering several hundred thousand troops to march northward, claiming to rid the emperor of "evil" ministers.

Lu Shuyun pointed the finger at Lin Gaoyuan, accusing him of being a treacherous official that had led to the Great Xia Dynasty's defeat to the Great Wu Dynasty, and was also responsible for the loss of territory and reparations paid by the Great Sum.

The Capital city, Great Sum.

Lin Mansion.

Lin Gaoyuan was in his study, sipping tea while busy writing a letter to Lu Chen, when Lin Xiuming burst in without even knocking, rushing directly into the study, “Father, disaster has struck!!!”

Seeing Lin Xiuming’s agitated state, Lin Gaoyuan furrowed his brows and paused his writing, “You’re an adult, how can you still be so flustered.”

Lin Xiuming ignored Lin Gaoyuan’s reprimand and handed him a sheet of yellow paper, “Father, the Crown Prince has rebelled. He has issued a proclamation to hunt down the traitors, claiming he wants to rid the emperor of ‘evil’ ministers and has named you as the main culprit behind Great Sum’s defeat.”

Upon hearing this, not a trace of surprise appeared on Lin Gaoyuan’s face. Smiling, he stroked his beard and then said, “Just as I thought. I knew the Crown Prince would choose me as their ostensible target.”

Most officials at the court were those that Lu Shuyun could pull to his side, and if Lu Shuyun indeed succeeded in the end, he would still be able to employ those officials.

But Lin Gaoyuan was different. Since Lu Shuyun became the Crown Prince, Lin Gaoyuan had opposed him multiple times. He was clearly not on the same side as Lu Shuyun; most importantly, Lu Shuyun needed to pick an official who was well-known to the common people.

Ordinary officials, people had hardly ever heard of them, even those at the level of high-ranking ministers were almost unrecognizable to the average citizen.

But it was different for the Prime Minister.

Lin Gaoyuan and Zhao Wenhan had been Prime Ministers for so many years that the common people were already familiar with their names.

Moreover, Zhao Wenhan himself leaned towards Lu Shuyun, so it was certain that Lu Shuyun would not choose Zhao Wenhan as the “treacherous official” to denounce; that left only Lin Gaoyuan.

From the moment Lu Shuyun left the Capital city, Lin Gaoyuan had been prepared to be labeled as the “treacherous official” by him.

Seeing Lin Gaoyuan unmoved and even smiling, Lin Xiuming said, “Father, how can you still smile at a time like this? What if the Emperor decides to hand you over later on?”

Lin Gaoyuan chuckled and then said, “Hand me over? I tell you to read more books, but you don’t listen. How could the Emperor possibly hand me over? Just think about it.”

“You can’t possibly believe that the Crown Prince’s so-called campaign to rid the emperor of ‘evil’ ministers truly means to eliminate our Lin Family, do you? The Crown Prince’s intention to purge is directed at the Emperor himself; he’s simply using me as a target.”

“If the Crown Prince claimed to purge the Emperor, wouldn’t that be tantamount to a son rebelling against his father? Even if he succeeded, he would surely be scorned by the people. And if he dared to target the Emperor directly, how could he rally the support of the people at that time?”

Lin Xiuming then said, “Father, of course I know the Crown Prince’s rebellion is not simply about purging the Emperor. I’m just worried that if the imperial army can’t hold on, the Emperor might use our Lin Family to buy time.”

Chapter 337: Crown Prince’s Rebellion_2

“A few months ago, the East Palace came up with the Piercing Cloud Bow, and the Crown Prince must have had similar weapons quietly manufactured in abundance around the South by now. When the Imperial Army faces those rebels, it’s not guaranteed that they will have the upper hand,” he said.

Lin Xiuming, after all, was the son of Lin Gaoyuan; having been exposed to political matters, he had some sensitivity in this regard. Of course, he was clear that ‘rid the emperor of evil ministers’ was not as simple as just removing so-called treacherous officials.

His real worry was about what fate would befall their Lin Family if the Imperial Army were to suffer a defeat.

Hearing Lin Xiuming's words, Lin Gaoyuan spoke sternly, "You are, after all, a commander of the Qilin Army, a general. How can you have such little faith in the imperial military?"

Lin Xiuming said, "I have used the Piercing Cloud Bow and I know its terrifying power. The Piercing Cloud Arrow can easily penetrate the armor of the Heavy Cavalry. By then, the deployment of the Imperial Army's twenty thousand Heavy Cavalry might not be very effective."

Lin Gaoyuan said indifferently, "The outcome of a war is not determined solely by the power of the weapons but also by various other factors. The power of the Piercing Cloud Bow is indeed great, but not every soldier is capable of using it. Moreover, His Majesty has been planning for so long, he must have placed his pieces among the aristocratic families in the South. The likely outcome of this war is His Majesty's victory. You needn't worry excessively."

With that, Lin Gaoyuan picked up his pen again and continued to write the letter, speaking as he wrote, "The North Prince has recently written to me. He plans to marry your sister, and your sister has agreed."

At these words, Lin Xiuming's heart jolted.

His sworn sister had agreed?

Really?

He remembered when he spoke to her about that matter in the North Country, she had been very resistant, so how could she have suddenly agreed?

While Lin Xiuming was lost in thought, Lin Gaoyuan abruptly added another statement.

"If His Majesty does indeed suffer a defeat, we'll head directly to the North Country."

This...

Lin Xiuming was stunned, now understanding why his father wasn't worrying at all—it seemed he had long considered a way out for the Lin Family.

However...

If the Imperial Army truly suffered defeat, could their Lin Family really escape the Capital City so easily and make their way to the North Country?

Lin Xiuming remained skeptical about that.

...

Meanwhile.

North Country, Hall of Political Affairs.

Li Rui was presenting the current situation of land reclamation in the North Country to the court. The North Country had vast lands but fewer people, with many areas still uncultivated.

Ever since the reforms in the North Country began, there had been continuous encouragement for the citizens to reclaim land. Despite Lu Chen reclaiming all land ownership rights in the North Country, the locals remained enthusiastic about land reclamation.

They were grateful for Lu Chen's policy of abolishing the agricultural tax; such a policy was simply too progressive for that era. The locals had never before experienced reaping exactly what they sowed.

Although they did not own the land, the thought of being able to cultivate it for many years without paying an agricultural tax motivated them. They knew that after several years of extra planting, the labor they invested in reclamation would be insignificant.

Under the land policy of the North Country, many citizens volunteered to reclaim land, and in addition, many refugees from the three counties ceded by Great Sum settled in the North Country. These landless refugees, eager for stability, also joined the efforts to reclaim land.

After hearing Li Rui's report, Lu Chen said, "Continue to encourage the citizens to reclaim land and tell them that the North Prince Mansion will distribute high-yield crop seeds regularly for the next three years. They needn't worry about lacking crops to plant after reclaiming the land."

Li Rui replied, "Yes, Prince."

At this time, Lu Chen continued, "Additionally, I plan to incorporate the North Land into the North Country. Starting today, the map of the North Country needs to be revised."

Upon hearing these words, everyone in the great hall was momentarily stunned.

Annexing the North Land into the North Country?

Although Lu Chen had mentioned this idea before, at that time he had merely been thinking about it and had not taken any concrete action.

The North Land no longer had large tribes like the Sky Wolf King's, but was made up of smaller tribes, which could easily be driven out of the North Country by a slight show of military force.

At this moment, Xiao Pengthian stood up and asked, "May I know how the Prince plans to deal with the Barbarian Tribe on the grasslands?"

Lu Chen said indifferently, "On my land, naturally, they are my subjects. After the North Land is incorporated into the North Country, these Barbarian Tribes must all register, and every member of the tribes must obtain a North Country identity card. They can continue their nomadic life on the grasslands of the North Land or give up nomadism and settle down in the South."

"For those Barbarian Tribes who choose to settle in the South, the North Prince Mansion will allocate some land to them and send people to teach them how to farm."

As for dealing with the Barbarian Tribes, Lu Chen already had experience: after moving the Sky Wolf King and the North Fre King's tribes into the North Country, he had sent people to teach them farming.

Moreover, Lu Chen had specially hired people who could speak both Great Sum and the Barbarian languages to teach the Barbarians to speak the language of Great Sum.

In the Barbarian community, the Sky Wolf King's tribe had initially integrated well with Great Sum, so they assimilated into Great Sum faster than those from the North Fre King's tribe.

Now the people of the Sky Wolf King's tribe had become a bond of integration for the Barbarians into the North Country. The captured Barbarian soldiers from before were now thoroughly loyal to Lu Chen, so much so that they would return on their own even if they were released without anyone to watch over them.

Furthermore, many men in Great Sum had married Barbarian widows, and now the integration between the Barbarians and the common folk of the North Country was relatively good.

After listening to Lu Chen's words, Xiao Pengthian immediately knelt halfway and said, "Thank you, Prince, for your mercy."

Lu Chen continued, "I will set up a Barbarian Management Bureau specifically to deal with matters related to the Barbarian Tribes."

"Alright, General Xiao, rise. Let's leave this matter here. Next, you all should consider how many districts should be created in the North Land after its annexation into the North Country."

Upon hearing this, the hall erupted into discussions.

The North Land was truly vast; setting aside the extent of it that they were unaware of, even the known area of the North Land would likely surpass Great Sum in size were it to be incorporated into the North Country.

If a feudal state were to exceed the size of its suzerain, it might invite apprehension from the Imperial Court, and the North Prince might even be wrongly accused of rebellion.

As for how many districts the North Country should be divided into, it was not an easy decision; the majority of the North Land were grasslands with few people. If the divisions were made according to Great Sum's districting, some districts might have no inhabitants at all, making it tricky for the appointed officials to even find a place to reside.

While the officials were fiercely debating in the great hall, a Brocade Guard Commander entered the hall, approaching Lu Chen from a side hall, and whispered, “Prince, Prince Lu Shuyun has rebelled.”

As these words fell, the Brocade Guard Commander handed over the intelligence report to Lu Chen. Lu Chen opened it and read it carefully.

The noise of discussion inside the hall gradually subsided, and the attention of the officials turned to Lu Chen’s face, which showed varying expressions. Generally, the Brocade Guards would only enter the Hall of Political Affairs during a minor court session for significant intelligence, and if it was not of utmost importance, the Brocade Guards would deliver the intelligence directly to Lu Chen’s study.

Therefore, seeing the Brocade Guard Commander enter the Hall of Political Affairs, the officials knew that a significant event must have occurred in Great Sum.

After reading the intelligence in his hands, Lu Chen addressed the officials in the great hall, “I have received news that Prince Lu Shuyun, under the pretense of moving South to combat the epidemic, has conspired with the Aristocratic Families of the South and raised an army in rebellion.”

At these words, the hall fell into absolute silence.

The people had long speculated there would come such a day. They had recently heard frequent news of the Sum Emperor purging the court and planning to dispatch troops to the South, which was obviously forcing Prince Lu Shuyun and the Aristocratic Families of the South into rebellion.

Now Prince Lu Shuyun and the Southern Aristocratic Families had indeed rebelled.

With their rebellion, the opportunity for the North Country had arrived.

At this time, if the North Country were to annex the North Land, the Imperial Court officials would definitely not object. With the main focus being on quelling the rebellion, they would have no capacity to intervene in the affairs of the North Country. This presented a significant opportunity for the development of the North Country.

Seeing that the officials were not at all surprised by the news of Lu Shuyun's rebellion, Lu Chen continued, "Prince Lu Shuyun is using the slogan of 'rid the emperor of evil ministers,' claiming that the Left Prime Minister Lin Gaoyuan is a traitorous official who has deceived my father the Sum Emperor, leading to Great Sum's defeat in the war, the ceding of territory and payment of indemnities, and finally bringing the people of Great Sum to the brink of destitution."

Upon hearing Lu Chen's words, the officials from the North Country also remained calm and were similarly unsurprised.

Throughout history, most rebellions have used the slogan of 'rid the emperor of evil ministers,' of course, even though it's about 'cleansing the court,' it's always that 'emperor' who ends up being cleansed.

Lu Chen spoke again, "What do you think, if the royal court calls upon me to enter the capital and support the emperor, should I go or not?"

Hearing this, Zhuge Zhongguang, who had remained silent during the small court meeting today, stood up.

For a Grandmaster like Zhuge Zhongguang, in other dynasties, even in Great Sum, there would be no need to attend court meetings, but this is the North Country. Though he is a Grandmaster, in the presence of Lu Chen, the Son of Destiny, his status as a Grandmaster isn't considered all that significant.

Court meetings must be attended when required, even though he is 150 years old this year.

Of course, a person of his level usually wouldn't get involved in discussing trivial matters; he would only speak up when it's a matter of great importance.

And what constitutes a matter of great importance? The question now asked by Lu Chen is such a matter.

Zhuce Zhongguang said, "Your Highness has been planning for many years. Prince Lu Shuyun's move to the South and the rebellion of the aristocratic families in the South were both caused by Your Highness's coercion. Therefore, this old official believes that Your Highness's preparations are

quite sufficient. If no other forces interfere, the royal court is very likely to win the civil war without the need for seigniors from other regions to enter the capital and support the emperor.”

“If one day the royal court asks your highness to enter the capital and support the emperor, then your highness should be more cautious.”

Hearing Zhuge Zhongguang’s words, Lu Chen curiously asked, “Why is that?”

Zhuge Zhongguang replied, “According to Your Highness’s strategy, dealing with the rebel forces in the South isn’t a major problem. However, if under these circumstances, Your Highness still calls upon the seigniors to support the emperor in the capital, it would mean that Your Highness’s initial target was not the aristocratic families in the South.”

Upon hearing Zhuge Zhongguang’s explanation, Lu Chen instantly understood his meaning. It seemed to Lu Chen that in Zhuge Zhongguang’s view, the Sum Emperor might be preparing a chain of schemes.

On the surface, he is targeting the aristocratic families in the South, but it is possible that he wants to coerce the seigniors into revealing themselves, and then solve them all in one go.

However...

Isn’t that a bit too ambitious?

Lu Chen asked, “Does the Great Scholar think that if His Majesty calls the seigniors to enter the capital and support the emperor, he is considering reducing their power? With the current military strength of the royal court, it seems impossible to reduce the seigniors’ power while quelling the rebellion, right?”

Zhuge Zhongguang said indifferently, “This old official has heard that His Majesty has sent people to Fixed Wind Mountain, Four Directions Mountain, and Peach Blossom Valley.”

“In the old official’s view, if His Majesty only wanted to eliminate the aristocratic families in the South, there would be no need to send people to these three places. His Majesty has hidden pieces in the South, and by using them, he could easily deal with the aristocratic families. Besides, the imperial Grandmasters of Great Sum would not consist of only the State Preceptor. Since His Majesty has been planning to eradicate the aristocratic families in the South for a long time, he

surely has made preparations for confronting their Grandmasters, and would not wait until the moment of action against the families to visit these three places.”

After listening to Zhuge Zhongguang’s analysis, Lu Chen immediately grasped the implication and slightly knitted his brows.

He had also recently heard from Dongfang Longyue that the Sum Emperor sent people to Fixed Wind Mountain, Four Directions Mountain, and Peach Blossom Valley. At that time, he thought his father was soliciting the help of the Grandmasters from those places to counter the Grandmasters of the aristocratic families.

But on further thought, was it not too late for his father to be seeking aid from those Grandmasters at this juncture? If he wanted their assistance, he should have sought it much earlier.

And Zhuge Zhongguang was right; it is improbable that there’s only one Grandmaster in the imperial family. Situ Ce, the State Preceptor, is merely the publicly known Grandmaster.

Reminded by Zhuge Zhongguang’s words, Lu Chen suddenly felt that his father intended to resolve the issue of the seigniors as well and that persuading the Grandmasters from those sects was probably the true reason for the outreach.

Going to several sects suspected of harboring Grandmasters, just to deal with the aristocratic families in the South, did indeed seem like overkill.

The more Lu Chen thought about it, the more something seemed amiss.

If the imperial family’s Grandmasters were to address any potential Grandmaster within the Southern aristocratic families, then whom were the Grandmasters that the Sum Emperor was inviting from those sects meant to confront?

Grandmasters generally do not take action lightly; when a Grandmaster takes action, they are likely to be challenging another Grandmaster.

Now, among the seigniors, only the North Country had a known Grandmaster taking a stand for it, and crucially, the timing of the Sum Emperor’s envoys to those sects seems to coincide with Zhuge Zhongguang’s arrival in the North Country.

This meant that the Grandmasters the Sum Emperor was inviting from those sects may very well be intended to confront Zhuge Zhongguang.

Zhug Zhongguang himself, being a Grandmaster, would thus be particularly sensitive about matters related to Grandmasters.

At this point, Lu Chen's expression grew even grimmer.

It couldn't be that his adoptive father really intended to act against him, could it?

Hopefully, he was just overthinking it.

Perhaps his father had sought the Grandmasters from those sects merely as a precaution.

With this thought in mind, Lu Chen said to the officials in the grand hall, "You all go back and think about how the prefectures and counties of the North Country should be divided. In tomorrow's small court meeting, we will finalize the regional divisions of the North Country."

Chapter 339: Anxious Lin Wanyun_2

"The small court meeting concludes here today. If there is anything important that still needs to be reported, come directly to my study,"

"Also, Commander Qin, come to my study."

Having said that, Lu Chen rose and left the Hall of Political Affairs, heading to his study.

The reminder from Zhuge Zhongguang made Lu Chen feel somewhat uneasy—those minor reports he hadn't paid much attention to until now. Unexpectedly, piecing together these details gave the impression of a grand conspiracy unfolding behind the scenes, something he had never considered his father, the Sum Emperor, would initiate against the North Country at this time.

After all, with the troubles the Aristocratic Family already causing the Sum Emperor such headaches, how could he possibly act against the Seignior, especially now when the North Country was a feudal state guarded by a Grandmaster?

To think about eliminating the Aristocratic Family and then immediately moving to curb the power of the Seignior, and specifically that of the North Country, represented a significant challenge to the national strength of Great Sum.

However, whether Zhuge Zhongguang's warning turned out to be true or not, Lu Chen decided to take precautions and thoroughly investigate the current situation in the Capital city. He was curious what his father was up to.

After reaching his study, Lu Chen ordered Qin Yushan to immediately dispatch assignments to all Brocade Guards throughout Great Sum, urging them to swiftly gather intelligence about troop movements within the realm.

...

At this very moment.

In the North Prince Mansion, within Yunrong Courtyard.

Chen Wanrong and Lin Wanyun had also received the report of Lu Shuyun's rebellion. As Chen Wanrong read the report, she felt a slight stir in her heart.

After all these years of waiting, the opportunity for her revenge and the restoration of her country had finally arrived.

After reviewing the intelligence in her hands, Chen Wanrong passed the report to Lin Wanyun and asked, "Madam Lin, how much powder of the Pair-Wing Butterfly have you used on him?"

Lin Wanyun took the report from Chen Wanrong and was taken aback for a moment. The outrageous things she had done with Lu Chen recently flashed through her mind.

Regaining her composure, Lin Wanyun lied, "Almost half of it is gone."

Lin Wanyun was well aware that the closer it got to crunch time, the less she could afford to let Chen Wanrong discover her affair with Lu Chen.

She knew she had to hurry to get the antidote from Lu Chen, but despite her many attempts recently, she hadn't found the antidote for the poison Lu Chen mentioned. She even began to suspect that Lu Chen hadn't poisoned them at all and was simply deceiving her.

However, she quickly dismissed the thought that Lu Chen was tricking her. She realized that whenever she was away from Lu Chen for too long, she would become agitated and restless. Each time she practiced her training, thoughts of Lu Chen would intrude, hinting at the danger of going mad from her infatuation. This suggested that Lu Chen had likely not lied, and indeed, they had been poisoned by him.

Chen Wanrong then said, "Madam Lin, find a way to add more Pair-Wing Butterfly powder to his food soon. The Love Worm has matured; we can't delay any longer. If we do, the Love Worm will turn into a butterfly."

The worm that Chen Wanrong had chosen was cultivated from the larva of the Pair-Wing Butterfly. She had been suppressing the growth of the worm because if it grew too quickly, it would turn into a butterfly, and then it would no longer be usable as a worm.

Feeling guilty, Lin Wanyun responded, "I understand. In the next few days, I'll find a way to add Pair-Wing Butterfly powder to his food."

With that said, Lin Wanyun thought to herself that she must either cling to Lu Chen in the following days, coaxing him to help her conceive a child quickly and thus obtain the antidote, or she must find a way to steal the antidote from him. Time was running out, and she could wait no longer.

...

“

Evening.

The study of Lu Chen was brightly lit, as he stood before his desk, examining the maps of the North Land drawn by the Brocade Guard. By now, the maps of the North Land had been essentially completed, though these were only rudimentary versions. Lu Chen was mainly interested in figuring out the appropriate divisions for counties and prefectures.

Just then, the voice of Lin Wanyun sounded at the door, “Chen’er, are you there?”

Hearing Lin Wanyun’s voice, Lu Chen said indifferently, “Come in.”

The next moment, Lin Wanyun pushed the door and entered.

At that time, Lu Chen raised his head and glanced at the dignified and elegant Lin Wanyun.

Seeing Lin Wanyun visit his study late at night, Lu Chen had guessed what she wanted to do— they had done plenty of mischievous things in the study before. However, Lu Chen now said with a smile, “Madam Lin, I still have government affairs to deal with tonight, I’m afraid I won’t have time for that sort of thing.”

Hearing this, Lin Wanyun was slightly stunned.

Then she said, “I can wait for you to finish.”

For her, time was of the essence, so she did not want to wait another day. If Lu Chen was occupied with government affairs tonight, he would certainly be busy tomorrow, and the day after he might be with his wives and concubines. If this went on, when would she be able to bear his child?

If she couldn’t bear his child, how could she obtain the antidote from him to save Chen Wanrong?

Seeing Lin Wanyun’s urgency, Lu Chen had basically guessed the reason. He teasingly asked, “Madam Lin, since when have you become so eager?”

Upon hearing this, Lin Wanyun’s pretty face turned incredibly hot, her cheeks flushing with red that quickly spread to her delicate collarbone.

She knew how shamelessly forward she appeared, but she was out of options. With the Crown Prince in rebellion and Great Sum in turmoil, her time was running out.

Lu Chen continued, “Madam Lin, you must have heard about the rebellion of my brother, Shuyun, by now, which is why you’re in such a rush.”

“But thinking about it, what good does your haste do? Even if Miss Chen leaves the North Prince Mansion, without the so-called Subtle Dragon Spell, she would likely still fail to kill my father, wouldn’t she?”

“You’ve been scheming and hiding out in the North Prince Mansion for so long just for the Subtle Dragon Spell—it must be very important to you.”

Hearing this, Lin Wanyun, with her face still red, said, “That’s none of your business.”

“You just need to keep your promise.”

Lu Chen smiled and started to tidy up the map on the desk. After rolling it up and putting it aside, he slowly walked towards Lin Wanyun.

When he reached Lin Wanyun, he wrapped his arms around her full figure from behind, and whispered in her ear, “Since you so desire to have my child, naturally, I should fulfill your wish.”

Lin Wanyun turned her head to look at Lu Chen, about to say something, when the next moment, Lu Chen sealed her lips with a kiss.

“Mmm mmm...”

After that, the room filled with sounds that were all too familiar to the maidservants of the North Prince Mansion’s inner court.

“~

In the cold moonlight, Chen Wanrong, dressed in a black long dress, sat in the pavilion. Even in the plain black garb, she radiated an otherworldly luminosity, like that of a fairy.

The moonlight shone upon her, accentuating her icy demeanor, and the temperature around her seemed to drop noticeably; a layer of frost appeared to coat the benches and stone table within the pavilion.

Chen Wanrong seldom wore black, but she had donned this particular dark outfit for her clandestine visit to the North Prince Mansion.

Her white garments were far too conspicuous, so she had someone tailor a black one especially for this occasion.

The worm of the Love Worm was close to hatching. Chen Wanrong decided to try bewitching Lu Chen in advance. Since Lu Chen had already ingested the powder of the Male Paired-wing Butterfly, his affection for her should have deepened.

If she could successfully infect Lu Chen with the Love Worm ahead of time, nothing would be better. If his feelings for her had not yet reached the necessary intensity for the influence of the Love Worm, allowing the worm to get accustomed to Lu Chen's scent now would also come at no loss.

As the moon reached the center of the sky, Chen Wanrong rose and headed towards where Lu Chen might be.

She had long since had Lin Wanyun scout the situation; recently, Lu Chen had been dealing with official matters in his study every night until late before going to sleep, so Chen Wanrong decided to check the study first.

Meanwhile.

Xiao Huan, the maid guarding the study, not wanting to disturb Lu Chen while keeping watch for him, was walking towards the courtyard entrance.

Maid Xiao Huan had noticed that Lu Chen's affair with Lin Wanyun was a secret to almost everyone in the inner court, and since they always sneaked around in the study, she believed that Lu Chen did not intend to let more people know about it.

As one of Lu Chen's personal maids, she naturally needed to keep his secret and keep watch for him.

However, just as Xiao Huan approached the entrance of the courtyard, darkness suddenly overwhelmed her vision. Her consciousness vanished in an instant, and she fainted.

After knocking out Xiao Huan, Chen Wanrong placed her against the wall inside the courtyard. She then activated the Cultivation Technique her master had taught her to conceal her presence, and in the next moment, it was as if she had merged into the courtyard itself.

Chen Wanrong then arrived at the study window and heard a woman's voice inside. Her brows lifted slightly.

If someone else was in the study, it would not be so easy to work her magic on Lu Chen.

Although it seemed unlikely to apply the Love Worm tonight, she could still let the worm she was cultivating become familiar with Lu Chen's scent. She could plan to lure Lu Chen to her own quarters in a few days and then use the Love Worm on him.

With that thought, Chen Wanrong raised her delicate hand and gently pricked a small hole in the papered window of the study, then peered inside with one eye.

What she saw inside the study caused her to freeze, her mind went blank, and a look of astonishment appeared on her normally expressionless face.

She had never imagined that Lin Wanyun would be inside the study, and moreover, that she had formed such a relationship with Lu Chen.

How could this be...

The cool composure on Chen Wanrong's face turned ugly; she could not accept what she had seen.

At this moment, the voices of two people talking came from inside the study.

“Wanyun, how could you become so shameless?”

“Do you really want to bear my child that much?”

“If Miss Chen saw you like this, I wonder what she would think. Should we just tell her about our relationship sooner?”

Hearing Lu Chen’s ridicule, Lin Wanyun, with a dazed look in her eyes, protested:

“Don’t... Please, no...”

Hearing the conversation between the two, Chen Wanrong’s face darkened, the air around her felt as if it dropped by a dozen degrees, and frost began to form on the window.

Chen Wanrong felt betrayed at this moment. The always dignified and elegant Lin Wanyun had changed into the person before her. She had never seen Lin Wanyun show such demeanor. She even doubted whether the woman in the room was really Lin Wanyun or some bitch in disguise.

Chen Wanrong was unaware that Lu Chen had already reached the Grandmaster Realm. Although she had learned the technique of concealing her presence from her master, the perceptiveness of a Grandmaster far exceeded that of an average martial artist.

The moment Chen Wanrong arrived in the courtyard of the study, Lu Chen had sensed her presence, but he did not care about her arrival. Instead, her presence stirred a beast within him, making him more ferocious.

Unlike Lu Chen, Lin Wanyun had no idea that Chen Wanrong had come. Her mind was blank, and she had long forgotten even her own family name.

Not knowing for how long, Chen Wanrong eventually left the study.

After returning to her own quarters, she couldn’t calm down. The scenes from the study kept replaying in her mind. She simply couldn’t make sense of why Lin Wanyun would betray her, become Lu Chen’s woman, and engage in such indecent acts with him in the study.

When Chen Nation had been destroyed, she had escaped the imperial city. If not for running into Lin Wanyun, she might well have died.

It was Lin Wanyun who took her to Mysterious Moon Palace and treated her like her own daughter. Her growth to this day, her current status, were all inseparable from Lin Wanyun.