

Es. Benefits 471

Chapter 471: Lu Chen's Mother and Grandmother_1

Great Sum, Capital city.

After nightfall, the streets of the capital city had lost the bustle of the daytime.

Because it was a special period, the capital city had implemented a curfew policy. If it had been before, the nightlife in the Great Sum's capital city would have still been quite rich.

Just when everyone was getting ready to sleep, suddenly a golden light burst forth from the Imperial Palace, piercing straight into the sky.

At this moment inside the Imperial Palace, a man dressed in white undergarments excitedly exclaimed, "So that's how it is, that's how it is!!!"

Seeing a golden light from the direction of the Imperial Palace shooting into the sky and illuminating the entire capital city, the officials in the capital instantly thought of the incident that had occurred in the North Country not long ago.

Instantly, the hearts of the officials in the capital filled with immense anxiety.

Although the golden light signified that the royal family might now have a Celestial of the Heavenly Human Realm among them, it also meant that the Sum Emperor would continue to strengthen his control over the court.

It must be known that the Sum Emperor had not yet finished clearing out the Ancient Families within the Great Sum's territory, and the officials from the Ancient Families still in the capital felt disaster looming over them.

The family of the South was such a huge interest group, and the Sum Emperor had taken action against them as he pleased. Now, the remaining Ancient Families were like scattered sand; if another Celestial emerged from the royal family, what could they use to contest the Sum Emperor?

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North Country, North Prince Mansion.

Inside the room, the candlelight flickered.

Chu Yuqin, standing to the side, watched the scene in front of her, slightly entranced, her cheeks somewhat flushed. Although she felt that such things were normal, to witness Lu Chen assault Chu Qingli still shocked her.

Mu Zixuan had actually mentioned to her before to convince Lu Chen to increase the number of women attending the Prince in his chamber during the night.

The reason Mu Zixuan asked Chu Yuqin to speak to Lu Chen was mainly due to Chu Yuqin's special status; she was the only person with a senior identity. If she were to speak to Lu Chen, he would probably listen to her advice.

However, Chu Yuqin had always felt too embarrassed to speak to Lu Chen about it; she had not yet mentioned it to Lu Chen when he directly pulled Chu Qingli into doing bad things in his own room.

To avoid disturbing Lu Chen, Chu Yuqin then stood up and sat down on a stool by the bed.

After an unknown amount of time had passed, Lu Chen finally raised his upper body and then asked, "Madam Chu, how much do you understand about my mother?"

Initially, Chu Qingli saw Lu Chen raise his upper body and was ready to continue struggling, but when she heard Lu Chen asking her sister about serious matters, she paused for a moment then let Lu Chen have his way with her.

Chu Yuqin felt odd watching Lu Chen doing bad things while asking about Chu Yue; nevertheless, she replied, "I have been following your mother since I was young; perhaps there is no one in this world who understands your mother better than I do."

Lu Chen suppressed Chu Qingli while saying, "Madam Chu, do you know how my mother died?"

Upon hearing this question, Chu Yuqin was startled; she had not expected Lu Chen to inquire about the cause of Chu Yue's death.

After a moment of silence, Chu Yuqin said, "Your mother's death was greatly related to your father the Emperor. At that time, he forced your mother to go to the Mysterious Moon Palace to borrow the Divine Artifact. On her way back, she was surrounded and attacked by assassins.

With her last breath, your mother managed to eliminate all those assassins, but by the time she returned to the Imperial Palace, she was beyond help."

"Perhaps your mother had sensed that she would encounter danger when she went to the Mysterious Moon Palace, which is why she didn't take me with her that time."

Hearing this, Lu Chen took a deep breath and continued to ask, "Did my mother bring back that Mysterious Moon Palace Divine Artifact to the capital city?"

Chu Yuqin answered, "No."

Lu Chen continued, "How did the Sacred Artifact from the Mysterious Moon Palace end up in my father the Emperor's hands?"

Chu Yuqin replied, "On her way back to the capital city, your mother discovered that someone wanted to snatch the Sacred Artifact, so she hid it. After your mother's death, the Sum Emperor's people found that Sacred Artifact."

After hearing Chu Yuqin's words, Lu Chen took another deep breath and then suddenly turned fierce. After a moment, he asked again, "Madam Chu, I have one last question; since you were always by my mother's side, you should know the answer to this next question."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Chu Yuqin glanced at him as he was assaulting Chu Qingli. She vaguely felt that Lu Chen's mood seemed somewhat off.

Chu Yuqin then said, "Ask away, I will tell you everything I know."

Lu Chen directly asked, "Am I the biological child of the Sum Emperor?"

Upon hearing this question, Chu Yuqin froze.

Seeing that Chu Yuqin did not answer immediately, Lu Chen knew she must know something about this.

At this moment, Lu Chen flipped Chu Qingli over and pressed down on her again, then said, "Madam Chu, just tell me the truth; I can accept whatever the result is."

Chu Yuqin sighed and said, "Your mother once warned me, under no circumstances was I to reveal your origins to you."

"However, your mother did so only to ensure that you could live your life in peace, which is why she did not want you to know."

"Now that you have found your immortal fate and are no longer a commoner, I think it shouldn't matter if I tell you now."

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"When your mother was in her teens, she obtained a bead that emitted a green light. I have no idea where she got that bead from. Afterward, she married the Sum Emperor, and every time the Sum Emperor visited her room, she used his essence blood to nourish the bead until one day, she implanted the bead into her own body. A few months later, you were conceived in her womb."

Upon hearing Chu Yuqin's answer, Lu Chen was taken aback for a moment and stopped his movements.

He had thought his biological father was someone else. Who would have imagined he came to be in such a manner?

It was all too fantastical.

Chu Qingli was feeling very uncomfortable at the moment, but she overheard the conversation between Lu Chen and her sister and knew they were discussing something very important, so she didn't dare to move a muscle.

She also hadn't expected the origin of this scoundrel to be so special. No wonder her sister was unwilling to leave Lu Chen no matter what. It seemed her sister had promised Chu Yue to always protect this scoundrel.

After a while, Lu Chen resumed his activity and said while he busied himself, "So does that mean I'm truly the Sum Emperor's flesh and blood? After all, that green bead absorbed my father's essence blood."

Chu Yuqin responded, "I'm not sure about that."

At this moment, Chu Yuqin suddenly remembered something and continued, "By the way, while your mother was pregnant, she would sometimes say some strange things to her belly, like how she often mumbled to herself that it would be great if you were really her child."

Hearing this, Lu Chen couldn't help but think. From the sound of it, could it be that in his mother's eyes, he wasn't her real child?

Although he wasn't conceived through normal means, he did, after all, come from his mother's womb. How could his mother think that he wasn't her child?

Lu Chen then caught his breath and asked, "Huff... huff... Did she say anything else strange?"

Chu Yuqin answered, "She also said she truly wished to see you grow up, hoping you could live like an ordinary person."

As she spoke, Chu Yuqin's emotions dipped slightly. She sighed and said, "Thinking about it now, your mother probably said those words because she had already anticipated her own fate."

Hearing this, Lu Chen thought to himself that his mother must not have been simple; she probably knew something about him.

It was a pity that his mother was no longer in this world. He couldn't ask her about his origins. It seemed he would need to find an opportunity to ask his maternal grandfather, maybe he knew something about his mother.

With this in mind, Lu Chen started to vigorously attend to Chu Qingli.

At this time, Chu Yuqin, who was beside them, glanced at Lu Chen and Chu Qingli and thought to herself that Chen'er must have been stirred by what she had said, which caused him to vent his negative emotions on Qing Li.

That might be for the best. Once Lu Chen had released all his negative emotions, he wouldn't feel so distressed anymore.

Time passed, and eventually, Chu Qingli lay limp on the couch. Lu Chen then turned his head to look at Chu Yuqin and smiled, saying, "My dear, it's so late, why aren't you coming to bed?"

Hearing this, Chu Yuqin's face turned red. The scene that had just occurred was still echoing in her mind. Sadly, she was already with child and couldn't engage in such activities.

Chu Yuqin gave Lu Chen a reproachful look and then said, "If I didn't make room for you, would you have been able to stretch out?"

As she spoke, Chu Yuqin's face became incredibly hot, as if she wished she could vanish into a crack in the ground.

Lu Chen said, "Alright, it's so late, come and get some rest."

Since Lu Chen had said so, Chu Yuqin didn't say anything more. She slowly approached the bed, then untied her robe, revealing the white undergarment beneath.

Lu Chen didn't hesitate, he pushed Chu Qingli aside, then drew Chu Yuqin into his arms and kissed her.

Although they couldn't do anything too naughty, hugging and kissing were still fine.

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The next morning.

When Lu Chen woke up, he saw Chu Qingli looking at him with a resentful expression, her eyes like those of a scorned woman.

Lu Chen, holding Chu Yuqin's soft body, then asked, "What's with that look?"

Chu Qingli huffed but said nothing.

The little rascal had made her lose face in front of her sister. He was utterly despicable.

What would her sister think of her now? She would surely see her as a shameless woman!

Detestable Lu Chen!

If it hadn't been for Lu Chen bullying her while talking to her sister about Chu Yue yesterday, she would have certainly fought back with all her might.

Then, Chu Yuqin, who was tightly held in Lu Chen's embrace, spoke up, "Chen'er, if you want to know more about your mother, go ask your maternal grandfather. He has always doted on your mother since she was a child, and he probably knows a lot that I'm unaware of."

Lu Chen said, "Mm, I will go later."

As they spoke, Lu Chen's hands began to gently roam over Chu Yuqin's body, and then he whispered in her ear, "My dear wife, your body is so soft and warm, it feels so nice to hold you."

Hearing this, Chu Yuqin's face turned red once again. This little rascal, always teasing her, knowing full well that she was with child and couldn't share pleasures with him, yet still arousing her like this.

Seeing Chu Yuqin's face flush and her eyes misting, Lu Chen stopped teasing her and got up.

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Chu Yuqin immediately got up to help him get dressed.

An hour later, Lu Chen appeared at the Chu Family residence.

When he arrived at the Chu Family, he found the door covered in white paper with black characters, as if a funeral was being prepared.

Seeing this scene, Lu Chen immediately asked the Chu Family's servant, "What's going on here? Who has died?"

The servant replied, "Your Highness, the Family Head is holding a funeral for the young master."

After Liang Zong returned, he informed Lu Chen of Chu Hongfei's death, but Lu Chen had not immediately told Chu Xiong about it.

However, a few days ago, Lu Chen found out that Chu Xiong had been sending people to the South to look for Chu Hongfei.

Lu Chen thought for a moment, although the rebels in the South had already been wiped out, and Aristocratic Families there had been ransacked and exterminated, many of their members had still managed to escape. Perhaps in Chu Xiong's eyes, Chu Hongfei had also taken the opportunity to flee.

But instead of letting Chu Xiong wait for a person who would never return, it would be better to tell him directly, so Lu Chen had Liang Zong inform Chu Xiong of how Prince Lu Shuyun had kicked Chu Hongfei into the sea.

No matter how rebellious Chu Hongfei had been, he was still Chu Xiong's son. Chu Xiong had already lost his daughter, and now his son as well, leaving him looking rather lonely.

Soon, the Chu Family's servant led Lu Chen to the Chu Family's drawing-room, where at the moment Chu Xiong appeared particularly haggard. Lu Chen said, "Grandfather, please accept my condolences. I also blame myself for not having Liang Zong save my uncle at the time."

Chu Xiong sighed and said, "Ah, it's not Your Highness's fault. It is all Hongfei's own doing. I had long told him not to stay in the South, but he wouldn't listen and insisted on following those madmen."

"Enough, it's useless to talk about it now."

At this point, Chu Xiong looked at Lu Chen and asked, "May I know the reason for Your Highness's visit today?"

Lu Chen replied, "I want to know some things about my mother."

Hearing this, Chu Xiong appeared a bit stunned.

Seeing Chu Xiong's momentary lapse, Lu Chen thought that perhaps, considering his grandfather was grieving over the loss of his son, it might not be appropriate to ask about his mother and stir up more pain?

With this thought, Lu Chen stood up and said, "Grandfather, if it's not convenient today, I can come back another time."

Chu Xiong came back to his senses and quickly replied, "It's fine, go ahead and ask whatever you want to know."

Encouraged by Chu Xiong's words, Lu Chen sat back down and asked directly, "I want to know if my mother is really your birth daughter?"

Hearing this, Chu Xiong was stunned again, not expecting Lu Chen to ask such a question.

Chu Xiong asked with curiosity, "Why would Your Highness ask such a question?"

Lu Chen said, "I feel that my mother might not be an ordinary person, so I want to know if she was really born into the Chu family."

Chu Xiong fell silent and did not immediately answer; after a while, he finally said, "Your mother is indeed my child, but when her mother conceived her, it wasn't through ordinary means."

Hearing this, Lu Chen immediately remembered what Chu Yuqin had said the night before—that his birth had a lot to do with that green pearl.

Could it be that his mother was also conceived in the same way?

Then, Chu Xiong continued, "Years ago, when I went hunting in the mountains, I encountered an injured girl. I fell for her at first sight, so I brought her back to the Chu Family and healed her wounds."

"Eventually, that girl married me and became my first wife, your grandmother. On our wedding night, your grandmother told me she was not an ordinary person and did not possess the normal reproductive capabilities of a woman, requiring a special method to become pregnant. She asked me if I was willing to have a child that way."

"I didn't think too much and agreed to your grandmother. Then she took out a yellow pearl, nourished it with my essence, and finally implanted it into her body, and then she conceived your mother."

"However, not long after your grandmother gave birth to your mother, she passed away."

At this point, Chu Xiong's mood became incredibly low and filled with sorrow.

Hearing Chu Xiong say this, Lu Chen thought to himself that, indeed, his birth method was the same as his mother's. His mother was indeed not an ordinary person, and neither was his grandmother.

Lu Chen then asked, "What illness led to my grandmother's death?"

Chu Xiong tried to compose himself and, after a long pause, replied, "I do not know what illness she had. One morning she suddenly told me that she was leaving. Afterward, she lay in bed and never got up again. I called for almost every doctor in Sufeng City to the Chu home, but not one could diagnose her illness. A few days later, she died."

As his words fell, the drawing-room fell silent. Lu Chen was lost in thought, and Chu Xiong in silence; neither spoke for a long while.

Lu Chen wondered if his mother had indeed anticipated that she would die before he grew up?

Although her death seemed to be connected to the Sum Emperor, it might also be because her life had reached its natural end.

Could it be that the mission of both his grandmother and his mother was to breed a descendant through that special pearl, and once the descendant was born, their mission was accomplished, and their deaths were not far behind?

But how did his mother know her mission? Since his grandmother died shortly after his mother's birth, presumably, no one told his mother what she was supposed to do?

Suddenly, Lu Chen felt that his existence in this world was probably not just a simple matter of soul transmigration; if it were only that, there wouldn't be such a thing as a system.

It was as if everything in this world had been prearranged.

After some contemplation, Lu Chen felt that pondering further was useless at the moment. Better to have more children, obtain more rewards, and continue to increase his strength.

No matter what conspiracy lay behind the system, once he grew to a certain point, the mastermind behind it would inevitably come forward. Worrying so much now was pointless.

After all, he had enjoyed his life; even if he were to die, he would have no regrets.

Chapter 474: It seems that the North Prince is destined for unrequited love_1

Ever since returning from the Chu Family, Lu Chen would spend his time nurturing relationships with his wives and concubines in his inner courtyard after handling his daily government affairs.

On one hand, he wanted to see if he could directly promote his Realm to the Heavenly Human Realm through the system; on the other, he feared he was merely a puppet in someone else's scheme, so he sought to enjoy life while he could.

Never mind whether he's a puppet or not, he thought, I might as well enjoy what I can now and worry about the rest later.

Although that's what he thought, Lu Chen didn't let this mindset completely derail him. He still reviewed official documents as necessary, and lately, they had been negotiating terms of a trade agreement with envoys from Great Wu.

Perhaps because Lu Chen had not agreed to cooperate with Wu Junwan, the conditions she proposed were mostly quite stringent, hardly appearing to be intended for partnership.

North Country, Hall of Political Affairs.

Today marked another round of negotiation. The trade agreement had been discussed for over ten days, but neither party was satisfied with the terms proposed by the other.

Lu Chen sat on his throne, looking at Wu Junwan in the grand hall, and said with a smile, "Princess Junwan, after all, it was you who came to my feudal state of your own accord. Shouldn't you make some concessions? Wanting to have it all seems rather excessive, doesn't it?"

Hearing this, Wu Junwan's expression did not change as she responded indifferently, "It is true that Great Wu proposed the cooperation, but as it involves the interests of Great Wu, I naturally cannot make concessions lightly. If I were to do so easily wouldn't that amount to betraying Great Wu?"

Wu Ming, sitting to the side, looked somewhat displeased. He had thought the terms proposed by North Country were fairly reasonable and entirely sufficient for a signature, but Wu Junwan staunchly disagreed.

Wu Ming had considered bypassing Wu Junwan by simply reaching an agreement with Lu Chen on his own since it was his signature on the trade agreement. However, at that moment, Wu Ming realized his words carried no weight within the delegation as the entire party from Great Wu was loyal to Wu Junwan.

As long as Wu Junwan did not yield, no one else in the delegation would either. If Wu Ming were to agree to Lu Chen's terms behind the backs of the entire delegation, he would be betraying Great Wu, and Wu Ming certainly dared not take such action.

He also understood why Wu Junwan insisted on dragging things out, always dissatisfied with the terms proposed by North Country. It was clear that Wu Junwan didn't want to concede the credit for this mission to him, thus she kept finding faults.

With this in mind, Wu Ming clenched his fists. Then he spoke up, "Why don't we each make a concession? The trading caravans of North Country can pass through Great Wu unhindered, and similarly, Great Wu's trading caravans can also conduct business in North Country."

Hearing this, Wu Junwan said, "The matter of the caravans is a trivial one, the crux of the issue is the trade tax and business scope."

"I have heard that although commerce is rather developed in North Country, many goods are under direct price control by the North Prince Mansion, and there are also things that cannot be sold at all."

"I believe this is unfair to the trading caravans of Great Wu. The caravans of North Country can operate any business in Great Wu, but when Great Wu's trading caravans come to North Country, they face various restrictions. This is obviously unfair. Since we are to sign a trade agreement, certain commercial projects in North Country should also be opened up to Great Wu."

Hearing this, Lu Chen smiled. It seemed that if Wu Junwan couldn't achieve the merit from this mission, then she didn't want Wu Ming to have it either. Wu Junwan must be well aware that some of the conditions North Country would not concede to.

North Country was currently undergoing reforms and development and therefore naturally had stricter management; not everything could be opened up.

Wu Junwan was banking on him not agreeing to those terms, so she deliberately proposed to incorporate them into the trade agreement.

Just as everyone was at an impasse, a Jinyiwei Guard entered the grand hall. Today was the day for receiving the Great Wu delegation, and the Jinyiwei Guards would not intrude upon the grand hall without important cause.

Coming before Lu Chen, the Jinyiwei Guard whispered in his ear, "Prince, urgent news from the Capital City. Both Commanders are waiting in your study!"

Hearing this, Lu Chen furrowed his brow. Liang Zong and Qin Yushan would not be unaware that he was currently discussing the trade agreement with the Great Wu delegation. For them to send a Jinyiwei Guard to fetch him now, it must mean something significant had occurred, likely stirring in the direction of the Capital City.

With that thought, Lu Chen immediately stood up and said to Wu Junwan, "Princess Junwan, I sincerely apologize, but I must attend to an urgent matter. Let us conclude today's discussions here."

As soon as he finished speaking, Lu Chen flung his sleeves and turned to leave the Hall of Political Affairs. Witnessing this, Wu Ming thought Lu Chen was acting out of anger, and he said to the side, "Junwan, our father sent you on this mission to North Country not to rile up the North Prince."

"You say you're doing this for the sake of North Country, but why do I feel like you have other motives?"

Upon hearing Wu Ming's words, Wu Junwan's face remained expressionless as she coolly replied, "Little brother, some interests cannot be compromised so easily. As a Prince and a contender for the position of Crown Prince, if you so readily betray the interests of Great Wu, what right do you have to vie for that seat?"

After Wu Junwan finished speaking, Wu Ming snorted coldly and said no more. He rose to his feet, his sleeves swished as he, too, left the grand hall.

Chapter 475: It seems that the North Prince is destined for unrequited love_2

Meanwhile, Lu Chen had arrived at the study.

At this moment, Liang Zong and Qin Yushan were standing at the entrance to the study. Upon seeing Lu Chen, the two of them bowed and said in unison, "We pay respects to Your Highness!"

Lu Chen continued walking into the study, saying as he moved, "Dispense with the formalities, come in and speak, what's the matter?"

The two of them followed him into the study.

Once inside, Liang Zong handed an envelope to Lu Chen and began, "An omen has appeared in the Capital city, and it is very similar to the one that appeared at the North Prince Mansion before. It is also a beam of golden light piercing the sky, followed by clouds gathering densely, and thunder and lightning roaring."

Hearing Liang Zong's words, Lu Chen's eyebrows instantly furrowed. No wonder the two of them were in such a hurry; such a thing had actually occurred in the Capital city.

Lu Chen quickly opened the envelope and carefully read the intelligence mentioned within the letter.

Qin Yushan continued, "Recently, there has been a rumor in the Capital city that a Celestial Being has emerged within the royal family. However, there is another rumor claiming that Zhuge Zhongguang is not a true Celestial Being but a Pseudo Celestial, far from reaching the true Heavenly Human Realm."

Listening to Qin Yushan and reviewing the intelligence in his hands, Lu Chen fell into deep thought.

Unexpectedly, in such a short amount of time, someone within the Imperial Palace had touched upon the threshold of the Heavenly Human Realm.

It was unknown who caused the omen, or if that person had truly broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm, or were they, like Zhuge Zhongguang, only one foot into the realm?

If the rumors among the common folk were to be believed, the person in the palace who caused the omen had probably also only stepped one foot into the Heavenly Human Realm. This rumor likely came from within the Imperial Palace itself.

If they knew that Zhuge Zhongguang had not broken through into the Celestial Realm, then it indicated the possibility that person was in a similar situation as Zhuge Zhongguang, not having truly united with the Dao.

Who could it be?

Could it be the State Preceptor, Situ Ce, or his own imperial father?

His father had the Sacred Artifact from the Mysterious Moon Palace, making him the most likely candidate to have broken through to the Celestial Realm.

Seeing Lu Chen remain silent, Liang Zong added, "The elite troops that the Imperial Court had initially dispatched to pacify the south have already been moved to the Qi Country border and are about to enter Qi Country. The number is roughly four hundred thousand."

"However, though the Imperial Court has been frequently moving troops, His Majesty has not been holding court for a long time. Rumors say that His Majesty has fallen seriously ill, teetering on the edge of death. Now, the power struggles among the princes in the Capital city are growing more intense, and their conflicts have come to the surface.

Yet, His Majesty has not intervened at all, making it seem as if something has indeed happened to him."

Hearing Liang Zong's words, Lu Chen, who had been in deep thought, couldn't help but chuckle before replying, "My imperial father is not so easily troubled."

Lu Chen did not believe for a second that the Sum Emperor was on the brink of death; he was a Grandmaster, not so easily felled.

His father must be plotting something again.

Since rumors had spread about Zhuge Zhongguang not being of the Celestial Realm, then it was very likely that the Sum Emperor had become aware of Zhuge's situation. Knowing this, the Emperor would not remain inactive.

So, what would the Sum Emperor do next?

Would he order the Imperial Army to attack the North Country, or would he send a Grandmaster first to assassinate Zhuge Zhongguang?

However, thinking back, the Emperor pretending to be ill did leave Lu Chen somewhat puzzled, unsure of what the Emperor was up to.

Could it be that he thought Lu Chen would believe him to be dying soon and then capitalize on this moment to rebel?

Regaining his composure, Lu Chen said to Liang Zong and Qin Yushan, "Keep the spies focused on the Capital city and the court's movements. Notify me immediately if there is any news."

Liang Zong and Qin Yushan said in unison, "As you command, Your Highness!"

Just then, a servant at the door said, "Your Highness, Princess Wu seeks an audience."

Lu Chen responded, "Let her wait for me in the pavilion of the outer court. I will be there shortly."

As he finished speaking, Lu Chen added to Liang Zong and Qin Yushan, "You may go attend to your duties."

"We take our leave," the two said, and turned to leave the study.

Lu Chen did not head immediately to the pavilion in the outer court. He looked over the intelligence in his hands, pondered for a while longer, and ultimately decided to find Zhuge Zhongguang for a discussion after meeting with Wu Junwan, to see what Zhuge had in mind.

With this thought, Lu Chen promptly went to the outer court.

Dressed in a violet gown, Wu Junwan was already seated in the pavilion, savoring the Prince's Mansion's Dragon and Phoenix Tea. Upon seeing Lu Chen, she smiled slightly and then said, "I did not expect the North Prince Mansion to have such unique tea. I wonder if the North Prince Mansion sells this kind of tea?"

At this moment, Lu Chen glanced at the maid Xiao Rou, who was serving tea to Wu Junwan, and instantly understood what was happening. This must be Mu Zixuan's doing.

Lu Chen was not upset. As his queen, Mu Zixuan probably realized that he was coveting Princess Wu's body.

Moreover, by getting Wu Junwan to take a liking to him—even though there was no real marital relationship between them—he could still gain some benefits through Wu Junwan, so offering her Dragon and Phoenix Tea was not an issue.

Coming back to his senses, Lu Chen said with a smile, "If the Princess likes the tea, I will have someone send a pound of it to you later."

Wu Junwan replied, "How could that be proper? Your tea is obviously no ordinary tea, and as Imperial Highness, how could I drink your tea for free?"

Chapter 476: It seems that the North Prince is destined for unrequited love_3

Lu Chen said, "If Princess Junwan feels compelled by courtesy, then why not agree to the terms proposed by the North Country?"

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Wu Junwan immediately responded, "No wonder the North Prince was willing to share such precious tea with me, it turns out this was his intention. I'm afraid that's not possible; the tea may be delicious, but there are some principles on which I will not compromise."

Lu Chen said indifferently, "Since Princess Junwan has no intention of yielding, then why bother meeting with me alone? Could it be that Princess Junwan has had a change of heart and intends to send Miss Qian to be my concubine?"

Hearing this, Wu Junwan scoffed coldly, then responded, "To make Miss Qian your concubine, the North Prince would need the capability to do so."

Seeing Wu Junwan seemingly angered, Lu Chen said with a smile, "Whether I have that capability, Princess Junwan will come to know in time."

Just as Wu Junwan was about to continue, Lu Chen suddenly interjected, "I can agree to sign the trade agreement, but Princess Junwan must consent to the terms we initially proposed."

Seeing Lu Chen agree so readily, Wu Junwan was momentarily stunned. Her main purpose for coming today was related to this matter, and she had thought Lu Chen would put forward some conditions before agreeing. But before she even spoke, Lu Chen had already consented.

From the outset, her plan had been to use the treaty of the trade agreement as leverage to exchange for her signature. On this diplomatic mission to the North Country, the entire delegation was her people, and they would only agree to the terms proposed by the North Country if she nodded in approval. If the delegation did not agree, then any conditions the North Country offered would be in vain.

Noticing Wu Junwan seemed not to have fully grasped the situation, Lu Chen said with a smile, "Didn't Princess Junwan come to seek an audience for this very matter? Why do you seem so surprised?"

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Wu Junwan regained her composure and smiled, then said, "I'm curious, why didn't the North Prince simply ask me to sign the trade agreement from the start instead of wasting over ten days?"

Lu Chen, gazing into Wu Junwan's beautiful eyes and smiling, said, "Who said I've wasted these past ten days?"

"If I had asked Princess Junwan to sign the trade agreement from the start, wouldn't Miss Qian, whom I admire, have left the North Country promptly? I was hoping Miss Qian could stay in the North Country a little longer."

At these words from Lu Chen, the smile on Wu Junwan's face instantly froze, and she promptly retorted, "North Prince, that joke isn't funny at all."

Lu Chen said plainly, "The most significant trait of mine is that I don't like to joke."

Hearing this, and looking into Lu Chen's eyes that were fixed on her, Wu Junwan seemed to truly feel Lu Chen's naked love for her. However, she didn't grow angry but rather smiled again.

"It seems the North Prince is doomed to unrequited love. Miss Qian will never marry you."

Lu Chen, unconcerned, said, "Princess Junwan, some words shouldn't be said so prematurely."

Wu Junwan said, "I am curious, where does the North Prince find such confidence? Does the North Prince believe that one day the North Country could bring down the entire Great Wu Dynasty?"

Lu Chen's lips lifted slightly as he replied, "It might not be necessary to conquer the entire Great Wu. Once the North Country's strength reaches a certain level, naturally someone from the Great Wu Dynasty will bring Miss Qian to the North Country."

Wu Junwan said, "Oh? Is that so? Well, let's see just how strong the North Prince can make the North Country."

With that, Wu Junwan rose from the stone bench and said, "If the North Prince has nothing else, I shall take my leave."

Lu Chen said, "Very well, Princess Junwan, please take care."

Wu Junwan then left the Prince's Mansion.

As Wu Junwan sat in the carriage on her way back, her heart rate quickened as Lu Chen's earlier words echoed in her ears.

Wu Junwan couldn't help but wonder, could it be that the North Prince wasn't joking, and his intentions were truly set on her?

After all, the Seignior was a man who had managed to strengthen the North Country to such an extent in a short amount of time; would he resort to petty schemes for a woman?

Or was he keeping her waiting for another reason?

Wu Junwan pondered for a long while but still couldn't understand why Lu Chen had stalled her for more than ten days.

Upon arriving back at her lodging, just as Wu Junwan stepped into the courtyard, a member of the delegation came in and said, "Princess Junwan, the North Prince has sent a pound of tea leaves."

Hearing this, Wu Junwan was taken aback, suddenly recalling the tea she had drunk at the North Prince Mansion.

Wu Junwan then commanded, "Bring it in."

The next moment, the delegation member brought in the tea leaves sent from the North Prince Mansion. Wu Junwan took the tea leaves and opened them to take a whiff.

Even without being steeped in hot water, the leaves exuded a subtle fragrance that made her feel entirely relaxed. Her realm also felt slightly loosened.

Wu Junwan was well aware that these tea leaves were extremely precious. Still, to be on the safe side, she said to Pei Hong, "Pei, check these tea leaves for me and see if there's anything amiss with them."

Hearing this, Pei Hong approached her, picked up a bit of tea leaves, smelled them, and said, "Princess Junwan, there's nothing wrong with these tea leaves. But why would the North Prince send you such precious tea leaves?"

Wu Junwan said, "The tea I just drank at the North Prince Mansion was made from these leaves. As soon as the tea touched my lips, I felt a sense of relaxation wash over me, my entire body lightened, the flow of True Qi within me became much smoother, and I even vaguely felt on the cusp of a breakthrough."

Startled by her account, Pei Hong was amazed that there could be tea leaves with such effects; the leaves were indeed exceedingly valuable.

Curious, Pei Hong inquired, "Princess Junwan, why would the North Prince give you such precious tea leaves?"

Hearing Pei Hong's question, Wu Junwan fell silent for a moment, once again recalling Lu Chen's words from before.

Wu Junwan couldn't help but think again, could it be that this young man from the North Palace really wanted her? Otherwise, why would he send her such a precious gift?

However, it was unfortunate for him; she was destined to never marry such a young man. She was someone who would walk the path of an empress, how could she possibly marry the North Prince.

Not only would she not marry the North Prince, but she would even become his enemy in the future.

Chapter 477: North Prince, What Do You Mean?_1

Ever since the Sum Emperor fell ill, the struggle among the Princes had intensified. Although the Sum Emperor temporarily ceased to attend court sessions, officials were still obligated to attend the regular Great Court Assembly.

The Great Court Assembly was usually presided over by Zhao Wenhan and Lin Gaoyuan. In the absence of the Sum Emperor's oversight, the Assembly had become a battleground for the factions of various Princes to launch attacks against each other.

Whenever the Great Court Assembly convened, the court officials would argue from the beginning until the end of the session.

Even though the factions had reached a point where they were incompatible as fire and water, the Sum Emperor still did not appear in court. Now, apart from the State Preceptor and those who served the Sum Emperor personally, only the Left and Right Prime Ministers were able to see the Sum Emperor after the court was dismissed.

Very few knew the exact condition of the Sum Emperor's health; the only thing people were aware of was that his illness had become more severe and that he was near the end.

Xuanzheng Hall.

The morning court session today was as chaotic as always until an official from Prince Lu Yi's faction stepped forward and addressed Lin Gaoyuan and Zhao Wenhan, "Prime Minister Zhao, Prime Minister Lin, now that His Majesty is bedridden and state affairs are piling up like a mountain, it is time to persuade His Majesty to establish a Crown Prince."

Upon hearing this statement, the previously noisy crowd in the great hall instantly fell silent, their gazes unanimously turning towards Lin Gaoyuan and Zhao Wenhan.

As the only ones with access to the Sum Emperor at the moment, only these two knew the Sum Emperor's exact condition. Even the Princes were kept in the dark about how their father's health was faring, especially since the Sum Emperor had explicitly forbidden any Prince from visiting him.

To establish a Crown Prince at such a time, it could only be done by persuading the Sum Emperor through Lin Gaoyuan and Zhao Wenhan, the Left and Right Prime Ministers.

At that moment, an official from the faction of the third Prince stood up as well, "Indeed, the court cannot go a single day without someone to direct the grand affairs. If the current situation continues, it could very likely lead to unrest. The Seigniors throughout the land are already restless. Establishing a Crown Prince early would help to stabilize the foundation of the state."

After this person finished speaking, other officials also stood up one after another. Regardless of which Prince's faction they belonged to, they all hoped to establish the Crown Prince as soon as possible.

Of course, the Crown Prince they had in mind was the Prince they supported, signifying that the battle for succession had reached its most intense stage.

If the Sum Emperor's illness continued to deteriorate and the Crown Prince's seat did not go to the Prince they supported, then they could overturn the table.

At this moment, Lin Gaoyuan spoke to the restless crowd, "His Majesty has his own plans; there is no need for everyone to be so anxious."

Zhao Wenhan then added, "Prime Minister Lin and I have discussed this matter, and we will bring up the issue of establishing a Crown Prince to His Majesty shortly."

It was at this moment that Prince Lu Yi asked, "Prime Minister Zhao, Prime Minister Lin, may I know how my father's health is faring?"

Zhao Wenhan replied, "Prince Lu Yi need not worry. His Majesty has simply caught a cold, and should recover after some time."

Upon hearing Zhao Wenhan's statement, the Princes and court officials' first reaction was to think he was lying, even suspecting the Sum Emperor's illness had grown worse.

If it were merely a common cold, how could it be that he had not attended court for so long? He might have already recovered by now.

Zhao Wenhan and Lin Gaoyuan had both met with the Sum Emperor, and as Left and Right Prime Ministers, it was natural for them to stabilize the court. Thus, even if the Sum Emperor were truly on his deathbed, they would only say that his health was not of concern.

The more they insisted the Sum Emperor's health posed no issue, the more it indicated that the situation was pessimistic. Instantly, people at court began to ponder their next steps, especially the Princes, who could scarcely contain their inner turmoil.

Originally, they had thought the Sum Emperor was in good health and in his prime, believing that it would be decades before it was their turn to ascend to power, at most jockeying for the position of Crown Prince.

Even as Crown Prince, they would have to tread carefully, for a single misstep could lead to attacks from officials of other Princes' factions. Lu Shuyun served as an example of this.

But if the Sum Emperor were indeed not long for this world, they would only need to become Crown Prince, and soon after, they could ascend as Emperor. Once enthroned as the supreme ruler, they could leverage the royal family's power to purge the other Princes and secure their position.

At this time, Lin Gaoyuan said, "If there is nothing else to report today, then we shall adjourn. Prime Minister Zhao and I will go and inform His Majesty of recent developments."

As his words fell, Lin Gaoyuan scanned the people in the great hall. Seeing that no one continued to speak, Lin Gaoyuan said, "Let it be so."

After that, Lin Gaoyuan turned and headed towards a side hall, with Zhao Wenhan following closely behind.

Seeing both Prime Ministers leaving, the officials in the great hall looked at each other and departed one after another. However, as the officials left, they tended to group together, with the officials of each Prince's faction following their respective Prince.

At this time, Lin Xiuming felt somewhat awkward. Looking around, he noticed that nearly all the courtiers had chosen their sides, even the Military Generals, leaving him, a Military General, walking alone at the rear.

As the commander of the Qilin Army, Princes had indeed tried to win him over.

Being the son of Lin Gaoyuan, winning him over would essentially be like securing the entire Lin Family, and consequently, the support of Lin Gaoyuan, the Left Minister.

Chapter 478: North Prince, What Do You Mean?_2

Lin Xiuming thought to himself that even the military generals had chosen sides; it was likely that the Capital city would fall into internal strife.

Military generals generally refrained from taking sides easily. If they expressed a political stance, it indicated that the Princes had obtained military power. If every Prince controlled military forces, a bloody power struggle for the throne would be inevitable in the end.

Just at that moment, an official from the faction of the eldest Prince approached Lin Xiuming, "Prince Qin invites you to a banquet at the Spring Moon Restaurant at noon today and hopes that General Lin will attend."

Upon hearing this, Lin Xiuming smiled. Nowadays, drawing people over had become brazen. In the past, Princes would never dare to invite a general with troops under his command to a banquet, as it would make people suspect they harbored thoughts of rebellion.

Lin Xiuming then said, "I appreciate Prince Qin's kind invitation, but I have other engagements at noon today and must decline."

Hearing this, the official wasn't surprised. Lin Xiuming's status was rather special; attracting him was not an easy task to begin with.

Afterward, the official returned to the Crown Prince's side, "Your Highness, General Lin says he has engagements at noon and won't make it."

The Crown Prince said indifferently, "It's already come to this point, and we haven't seen the Lin Family take a stand. Could it be that Prime Minister Lin is waiting for a result before making a choice?"

At this remark, the Crown Prince chuckled, "Quite the crafty old fox, but fence-sitters ultimately won't be entrusted with important tasks."

The Crown Prince didn't dwell on it further. He regarded the Lin Family as fence-sitters, not committed to supporting any Prince.

It was somewhat advantageous for him if Lin Gaoyuan remained neutral. It meant Lin Gaoyuan would not side with him but also would not support other Princes, preventing them from growing stronger.

As Left Minister, Lin Gaoyuan held significant prestige in the court and led his own faction. If he explicitly aligned with a Prince, officials from his faction were likely to follow suit and support that Prince.

Now that Lin Gaoyuan hadn't explicitly indicated his support for anyone, the Crown Prince saw an opportunity to win over officials from Lin Gaoyuan's faction.

Meanwhile.

Nurturing Heart Hall.

The Sum Emperor lay on his bed, pallid, his complexion bloodless, looking as though he was on his deathbed.

Lin Gaoyuan and Zhao Wenhan stood outside the dragon bed, reporting the latest developments.

At that moment, the Sum Emperor asked, "Any news from the North?"

Upon hearing this question, Zhao Wenhan and Lin Gaoyuan understood the Sum Emperor was inquiring about the North Prince's actions. Zhao Wenhan answered, "Your Majesty, it has been reported that the North Country has been discussing trade cooperation agreements with the Great Wu dynasty recently."

Hearing this, the Sum Emperor suddenly coughed violently, as if angered by the news.

Seeing this, Zhao Wenhan and Lin Gaoyuan exclaimed in unison, "Your Majesty, please take care of your health!"

After coughing twice, the Sum Emperor said, "I am fine."

Continuing, the Sum Emperor snorted coldly and added, "Signing a trade cooperation agreement, what's the difference between that and establishing independent relations with Great Wu? That unfilial son is increasingly disregarding me!"

The Sum Emperor then asked again, "Have the troops from the South been moved to Qi Country?"

Zhao Wenhan answered, "They've been moved to the border of Qi Country and will enter its territory in a few days."

The Sum Emperor said, "I've heard rumors lately in the Capital city that Zhuge Zhongguang has not truly broken through the Heavenly Human Realm. Have you heard about this rumor?"

Hearing this, Zhao Wenhan and Lin Gaoyuan exchanged glances. They were uncertain why the Sum Emperor was raising this matter now. Could it be that he was planning to take action against the North Country?

Take action at this time?

The Sum Emperor himself was critically ill, his life hanging by a thread, and yet he still contemplated eliminating the North Country?

Zhao Wenhan immediately said, "I have indeed heard such rumors, but I believe they must have been deliberately spread to make the imperial court lower its guard."

The Sum Emperor commanded, "True or not, have the frontline troops ready to suppress a rebellion at any moment."

Zhao Wenhan and Lin Gaoyuan responded in unison, "Yes, Your Majesty."

At that moment, Zhao Wenhan spoke up, "Your Majesty, there is unrest in the court, and senior officials have suggested establishing the Crown Prince early to stabilize the court."

Upon hearing this, the Sum Emperor coughed violently again. As Zhao Wenhan was about to say something, the Sum Emperor fiercely retorted, "Establish the Crown Prince, always about establishing the Crown Prince. Shuyun has just rebelled, and now you prompt me to appoint a Crown Prince, as if you wish for my early demise!"

Zhao Wenhan hastily knelt down and said, "Your Majesty, I did not mean this. I am merely concerned that continued chaos in the court may lead to greater disasters."

After hearing Zhao Wenhan's words, the Sum Emperor snorted, "Disasters? What disasters? Is someone else planning to rebel?"

"Both of you go back and tell those ministers that I am not dead yet. I won't be establishing a Crown Prince so soon. Tell them to keep their petty thoughts to themselves."

Zhao Wenhan and Lin Gaoyuan said together, "As you command, Your Majesty."

The Sum Emperor waved them off, "If there's nothing else, you may leave."

"We take our leave!"

After Lin Gaoyuan and Zhao Wenhan spoke, they turned and left Nurturing Heart Hall.

Watching their departing figures, the Sum Emperor murmured coolly, "Finally, some can no longer sit still. I'm curious to see how many will show themselves at this time."

...

Within the realm of Great Sum, in the capital of Zhao Country.

A man sat upon the throne in the great hall, listening to a kneeling soldier's report, and then burst into a wild laugh.

Chapter 479: North Prince, What Do You Mean?_3

"Hahaha, my dear brother, the Emperor, is finally on his last legs. After sitting on that throne for so many years, it's time for him to step down."

"Send out the order for Qin Feng to immediately assemble the army. I'm going to the Capital to see my dear brother, the Emperor."

At this moment, one of the ministers in the hall hurriedly cautioned, "Your Highness, you must not. The current situation is still unclear. Whether His Majesty is truly near the end of his life, no one knows. If we send out troops now, we may very well fall into a trap set by the Imperial Court."

Hearing this, Zhao King dismissively said, "A trap? What kind of trap could there be? The elite soldiers of the court have all been dispatched to Qi Country to defend against the North Country. If we don't seize this opportunity to take down the Capital now, should other Seigniors take the lead, I fear that I will have no connection to that seat at all."

The minister continued, "Your Highness, there have been rumors circulating lately that phenomena identical to those observed in the North Country have appeared in the Imperial Palace, and a Celestial from the Heavenly Human Realm has emerged within. If this is true, and there is a Celestial from that Realm present, even if we enter the Capital, it will be very difficult to defeat that Celestial!"

Upon hearing this, Zhao King said with disbelief, "A Celestial from the Heavenly Human Realm? Ha! Don't tell me you actually believe that a Celestial has emerged in the Capital?"

"That is clearly fake news put out by my brother, the Emperor. He is on his deathbed and fears that the Seigniors of the world will raise an army and rebel, so naturally, he would fabricate lies about a Celestial emerging in the royal family to deter the feudal states."

"I know him too well!"

"The Heavenly Human Realm is not common cabbage; attaining it is not so easily achieved!"

"Moreover, if indeed someone from the royal family has broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm, it can only be one of the few old members of the royal family. Those old ones will not care who the next Sum Emperor is. As long as the kingdom of Great Sum retains the Lu surname, they will not intervene rashly.

Back when my brother fought for the throne, he killed many of his brothers and sisters, but none of those old immortals showed their faces."

Upon saying this, Zhao King spoke resolutely, "You need not say more. You only need to do as I say!"

Seeing how adamant Zhao King was, the other ministers in the hall no longer said anything.

Subsequently, Zhao Country began preparations, not only blatantly expanding their forces in defiance of the troop-limitation edict but also continuously amassing supplies and provisions.

The movements of Zhao Country were too significant; other feudal states noticed what they were doing, and upon seeing Zhao Country's troop build-up, it immediately dawned on them what Zhao Country intended to do.

Since Zhao Country was expanding its forces, if they did not follow suit, wouldn't they miss such an excellent opportunity? The Seigniors of the different countries believed that even if the Sum Emperor turned out to be fine, he would not punish them.

After all, the law does not punish the masses, and with so many Seigniors expanding their forces, surely the Sum Emperor couldn't dismiss them all, could he?

If the Sum Emperor really did that, then Great Sum might very well crumble into pieces.

Of course, the Seigniors' main goal in expanding their military was not just to increase their forces; they also wanted to try their hand at seizing the throne of the Capital. Who wouldn't want to be Emperor, the supreme position?

In a short time, the activities of the Seigniors throughout the land grew more extensive, and Great Sum was on the brink of turbulence. Yet, there was no sign from the Sum Emperor, who not only had yet to appoint a Crown Prince but had also not issued orders to stop the Seigniors from expanding their forces, as if his illness had become so severe that he could no longer give commands.

Some even started to doubt whether the Sum Emperor was already too ill to speak. Otherwise, it would be unlike his temper to let those Seigniors run rampant with such impunity.

...

North Country, Hall of Political Affairs.

Today was the day for North Country to sign the trade agreement with Great Wu. At this time, Wu Ming, who sat beside Wu Junwan, was somewhat excited. The delegation from Great Wu had finally agreed to North Country's terms, and he thought the credit for this diplomatic mission to North Country was slipping through his fingers.

Thinking this, Wu Ming turned his head slightly, glancing at Wu Junwan out of the corner of his eye. His lips curved slightly, showing a smug smile. However, just then, Lu Chen suddenly said, "Since Princess Junwan has no further objections to the treaty of the trade agreement, I would trouble the Princess to sign her name on it."

As these words fell, the soldiers in the hall placed the scroll of the trade agreement in front of Wu Junwan.

Seeing this scene, Wu Ming was momentarily stunned.

What was going on?

Hadn't the North Prince agreed to let him sign?

After snapping back to reality, Wu Ming burned with anger, immediately challenging, "North Prince, what are you trying to do? Didn't you say that I was to sign? Why the sudden change of mind?"

Lu Chen replied with a smile, "I apologize, Prince Wu Ming, but the terms of this agreement were mainly negotiated between myself and Princess Junwan, and they don't concern you greatly. Considering this, I thought it would be more fitting for the Princess to sign to make it official."

Upon hearing this, Wu Ming immediately understood the situation. Obviously, Wu Junwan and the North Prince had reached some agreement in private, hence the last-minute change in the designated signatory.

Thinking this, Wu Ming turned to look at Wu Junwan, filled with fury.

This detestable woman! The credit for this diplomatic mission to North Country was supposed to be his, and now she had stolen it from him!

No, he couldn't just let it go!

If Wu Junwan could use various means to delay the signing of the trade agreement at first, why couldn't he do the same?

With this thought, Wu Ming then said, "I have objections to the terms of the trade agreement!"

"I believe some of the terms severely harm the interests of Great Wu, and they need further discussion."

As soon as Wu Ming finished speaking, Wu Junwan, who was reviewing the trade agreement, said expressionlessly, "Younger brother, don't make trouble!"

Just as Wu Ming was about to continue, an elder next to him spoke up, "Your Highness, since the trade agreement was jointly drafted by Princess Junwan and the North Prince, there surely can't be any issues with it. I trust that the Princess would not betray the interests of Great Wu."

Chapter 480: Hope We Never Meet on the Battlefield_1

Upon hearing the old man beside him, Wu Ming's entire demeanor sank, for this elder was sent by his father, the emperor, to protect him but also to watch over him.

The attitude of this elder represented his father's stance; since the elder said that Princess Wu, Wu Junwan, could not possibly betray the interests of Great Wu, it implied that in the elder's view, there was nothing wrong with the trade cooperation document.

The elder was clearly reminding him not to act rashly and to stop making a fuss.

Wu Ming also knew that if he continued making trouble and caused the trade agreement to not be signed, he would surely face trouble from his father upon his return to Great Wu.

With this thought, Wu Ming let out a cold snort and then said, "Fine, very well, this prince will remember this incident!"

Having said that, Wu Ming sat down abruptly and then fell silent, saying no more.

Seeing Wu Ming's anger, Lu Chen simply smiled faintly; this was precisely the effect he had wanted. He had never intended to let Wu Ming sign the trade cooperation document.

Lu Chen's suggestion that Wu Ming should sign was to make him believe that the credit he thought within easy reach had been snatched away by the despicable tactics of Princess Wu, Wu Junwan, thereby exacerbating the conflict between them and intensifying the infighting within Great Wu.

Great Sum was in a rather pessimistic situation, and Great Wu needed to be thrown into chaos as well. Only if Great Wu was in disarray would Great Sum, despite an internal war, face only internal strife without external threats.

Without external threats, even fierce internal conflicts within Great Sum would still be a matter among its own people.

If Great Wu had no issues internally when Great Sum was engulfed in civil war, then Great Wu would be likely to launch an attack against Great Sum, and the simultaneous internal and external pressures could potentially lead to Great Sum's downfall.

Although Lu Chen planned to continue keeping a low profile, he did not wish to see Great Sum be destroyed by Great Wu at this time.

At this moment, Princess Wu, Wu Junwan, had signed her name on the trade cooperation document and then stamped it with the seal of Princess Wu. On Lu Chen's side, the King Seal had already been affixed.

The two parties then exchanged scrolls; after both had signed and stamped the second document, they exchanged them again for safekeeping.

Lu Chen then smiled and said, "Princess, let's wish for a pleasant cooperation between Great Wu and the North Country!"

Princess Wu, Wu Junwan, smiled graciously and replied, "Yes, a pleasant cooperation."

Hearing their conversation, Wu Ming inwardly cursed, "Damn couple!"

Though he felt uncomfortable inside, Wu Ming did not cause trouble at this time.

Once the trade cooperation document was signed, Lu Chen held another banquet in the Hall of Political Affairs to entertain the members of the Great Wu delegation.

After the lunch banquet was over, Princess Wu, Wu Junwan, and her entourage prepared to return to Great Wu, having spent so long in the North Country, it was time to head back.

Just as Princess Wu was about to leave, a soldier approached her and said, "Princess, my lord, the Prince, wishes to meet with you alone."

At these words, Princess Wu was slightly taken aback.

The trade cooperation document was already signed; what was the point of meeting alone now?

Nevertheless, Princess Wu decided to give the North Prince this opportunity. She wanted to see what this young man intended to do.

Afterward, Princess Wu said, "Alright, lead the way."

The soldier from the Prince's Mansion then led Princess Wu to the outer courtyard of the mansion, with Pei Hong following closely behind her. As they were about to enter the courtyard, the Prince's Mansion soldier addressed Pei Hong, "Your Excellency, please wait at the entrance. The Prince intends to have a private conversation with the Princess."

At this, Pei Hong was momentarily stunned. He frowned and said, "I am the Princess's Protector. Wherever she goes, I naturally follow to ensure her safety."

The previous two times Lu Chen met with Princess Wu had been in private, and each time Pei Hong had been extremely anxious. But those times they hadn't signed the trade cooperation document yet, and now that they were about to return to the Great Wu Dynasty, who knew what the North Prince might do to Princess Wu.

At this point, Princess Wu said, "Protector Pei, don't worry. You just wait here for a while. The North Prince is unlikely to have anything important to discuss with me, I will come out shortly."

Seeing that Princess Wu had spoken, Pei Hong had no choice but to respond, "Alright, Your Highness, please be careful."

Princess Wu then proceeded directly into the courtyard.

At this time, Lu Chen was already seated in the pavilion.

Seeing Princess Wu enter the courtyard, Lu Chen smiled faintly and said, "I thought the Princess might not come."

With that, Lu Chen gave Princess Wu a once-over.

Like last time, Princess Wu donned a purple gown. The sheer fabric draped over her full figure, suggestive yet veiled, sparking infinite imaginings. Her entire presence exuded a mature and dignified air that attracted Lu Chen, just like Chu Yuqin, Lin Wanyun, and Yelv Nanyan—their aura was irresistibly appealing to him.

Feeling Lu Chen's gaze lingering on her, Princess Wu's brows knitted slightly.

She had always been held in high regard, later becoming a princess recognized by the Martial Emperor, and in this world, there were very few who dared to look at her the way the North Prince did, especially in the Great Wu Dynasty where those who dared to gaze at her so directly were even fewer, let alone with such suggestive eyes.

Princess Wu took a seat at the stone table, gracefully sitting down as her curves slightly sank into the seat. She then asked directly, "May I know why the North Prince has sought to meet with me?"

Lu Chen poured her a cup of tea and then said, "It's simply because the Princess is returning to Great Wu. I cannot bear the parting, so I wished to see the Princess one last time. I also wonder when I will have the chance to see the Princess again."