

Es. Benefits 481

Chapter 481: Hope We Never Meet on the Battlefield_2

At this point, Lu Chen glanced at Wu Junwan's personal profile.

[Name: Wu Junwan]

[Identity: Princess Wu of Great Wu, daughter of the Martial Emperor, friend of the Empress of Great Jue, target of the North Prince's interest from North Country. She is 30 years old this year and has reached the Master Realm.

Her visit to North Country is to stir up trouble between North Country and the Great Sum court, but deep down she also wants to see the North Prince, to find out what is so special about him that attracts so many people to North Country. Now she is even more interested in the North Prince.]

[Rating: 98]

[Favorability: 85]

Seeing Wu Junwan's favorability towards him, Lu Chen thought that it wouldn't be long before her favorability could be raised to 100.

At this moment, Wu Junwan, upon hearing what Lu Chen had said, responded indifferently, "The North Prince really knows how to joke. I don't think the North Prince would meet with me alone for that reason."

What Wu Junwan was thinking was that with so many women in Lu Chen's harem, even if he found her beautiful, he wouldn't just straightforwardly ask to meet her. After all, she was the esteemed Princess of Great Wu, and she also held actual power. Lu Chen should know that it was impossible for them to be together.

Lu Chen said with a smile, "The Princess might be overthinking it. The reason I asked to meet with the Princess is indeed because I'm afraid that if too much time passes without seeing the Princess, I will miss you terribly, which is why I wanted to meet the Princess for one last time."

As his words fell, Lu Chen's deep eyes stared intently at Wu Junwan.

Hearing Lu Chen's words and seeing the affectionate look in his eyes, Wu Junwan was immediately stunned.

Is this for real?

Does this young man truly have feelings for her?

Wu Junwan bluntly said, "Unfortunately, the Princess and the North Prince are doomed not to be involved. Not only are we not involved, but we may also end up as enemies. I hope that one day we will not meet on the battlefield."

Lu Chen said with a smile, "Indeed, we will not meet on the battlefield because the Princess will sooner or later get married into the North Prince Mansion. I hope the Princess can wait for me for a few more years after returning to Great Wu."

Seeing Lu Chen's confidence, Wu Junwan not only was not angry but actually scoffed, "Hmph, the North Prince is really confident. Does the North Prince really think my father, the Emperor, would marry me off to someone who poses such a great threat to Great Wu?"

Lu Chen said nonchalantly, "Nothing is impossible. As long as North Country is strong enough, all is possible."

Wu Junwan said, "Then I will wait in Great Wu. If one day my father really does such a thing, I will have no objections and will come straight to North Country to be your woman."

"It's just that by that time, I'm afraid I will have grown old and lost my looks, and the North Prince won't care for me anymore."

Lu Chen said, "That will not happen. With the Princess's martial arts talent, you might be able to break through to the Grandmaster Realm soon, and the Princess's beauty will remain for decades."

"And what I like the most is a mature and dignified woman like the Princess. The older the age, the more charming they are."

Upon hearing these words from Lu Chen, Wu Junwan understood that this young man was indeed not joking with her; he was blatantly making a move on her, wanting her as a person.

Wu Junwan didn't plan on wasting any more words with Lu Chen. In her heart, she acknowledged that Lu Chen was indeed very handsome and to her liking, but she was very clear about their stances.

She is someone who aspires to be Empress like her good friend, how could she let such a romance hinder her path? Her stance determined that she and Lu Chen would likely only become enemies in the future, and they would probably only meet on the battlefield, at last.

Moreover, she had great confidence in herself. With the power she held in the Great Wu dynasty, the Martial Emperor would simply not consider marrying her off to the North Prince.

This young man is somewhat delusional.

Then, Wu Junwan stood up and said directly, "The North Prince will need to put in a lot more effort if you want me to be your woman."

"Since the North Prince has nothing else, I will be returning to Great Wu. I just hope the next time we meet, it won't be on the battlefield."

Immediately, Wu Junwan turned and walked towards the entrance of the courtyard. Watching her swaying hips, Lu Chen smiled lightly, thinking that of course, it wouldn't be on the battlefield. The next time they met, it could only be in bed.

To make the Martial Emperor willingly marry off Wu Junwan to him, Lu Chen thought it was not difficult at all. The Emperor was a rather traditional ruler, and Great Wu was a traditional dynasty. In time, the Emperor would naturally look for ways to clip Wu Junwan's wings.

If one day North Country grows strong enough to intimidate the major dynasties, then Lu Chen could directly propose a marriage alliance to Great Wu. By then, those in Great Wu who opposed Wu Junwan would do everything to send her to North Country, and the Emperor might use this opportunity to completely erase Wu Junwan's aspiration to become Empress.

Of course, North Country could not remain idle. Now that the trade agreement has been signed, North Country's merchants would be able to enter Great Wu. North Country could then make good use of the power of money to turn Great Wu's officials against Wu Junwan's administration.

At that moment, Lu Chen murmured to himself, "It's so simple to be an Empress. Just come to my room, and I'll let you be Empress every day."

Lu Chen's voice was quite low, and Wu Junwan, who was already far away, naturally could not hear it anymore.

Chapter 482: Hope We Never Meet on the Battlefield_3

Lu Chen also rose from the stone bench at this time, preparing to leave the pavilion. Just then, Liang Zong entered the courtyard and came straight to Lu Chen, "Greetings, Prince!"

Before Lu Chen could speak, Liang Zong handed him a letter, "Prince, urgent news from the Capital City!"

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen, without a word, took the envelope from Liang Zong's hand and began to read it intently.

As he read the contents of the letter, Lu Chen's face instantly turned immensely serious.

At that moment, Liang Zong added, "After the third Prince was assassinated and died, Prince Lu Yi also encountered an assassin late that night. Now the whole Capital City is in a state of panic, and Seigniors from all over are frantically expanding their armies, yet the court has made no move."

Lu Chen fell into deep thought. He had actually guessed that Sum Emperor was feigning illness, and the Capital City could very well descend into chaos, but he did not expect the disorder to come so swiftly.

Another Prince had been assassinated so quickly; had the final stage of the struggle for the succession finally begun?

Previously, between the Princes, direct assassinations of other Princes were rare—it was only Prince Lu Shuyun who had once sent an assassin in order to extinguish the hopes of the Aristocratic Families from the South, hence he targeted Lu Chen, the supposedly unimportant ninth Prince.

The reason the Princes dared not act was mainly for fear that their father, the Emperor, would find out and strip them of their eligibility. The one thing most taboo to the royal family was fratricide.

Yet now, in the Royal Capital of Great Sum, a Prince had been assassinated, and not somewhere else, but right in the Capital City. The dead Prince was one of the most competitive for the throne. This indicated that those Princes were no longer worried about being discovered by their father, the Emperor; they believed it was the final moment.

As long as they eliminated all those who threatened them, they could ascend to that supreme position.

The most brutal moment of the succession struggle had arrived.

After pondering for a moment, Lu Chen asked, "My father, the Emperor, hasn't shown any sign at all?"

Liang Zong answered, "No orders have been issued from the palace, only Lin Gaoyuan ordered the Dali Temple and the Ministry of Criminal Justice to investigate the assassination attempts on the third Prince and Prince Lu Yi."

Lu Chen thought, his father, the Emperor, was indeed ruthless—he allowed one of his sons to be killed and still feigned illness, not coming out to take charge. Could it be that he was waiting for his sons to kill each other off before stepping in?

Moreover, with Seigniors from every corner expanding their armies, if things continued this way, it wouldn't be long before an internal war broke out within Great Sum, followed by Seigniors marching to the Royal Capital to vie for the throne.

What exactly was his father, the Emperor, planning?

While Lu Chen was deep in thought, Qin Yushan rushed in with a slip of paper, "Prince, this just arrived from the Capital City by Pigeon Letter!"

Lu Chen immediately asked, "What has happened now?"

Qin Yushan replied directly, "A message from the palace states that His Majesty has appointed Prince Lu Yi to temporarily take on the Crown Prince's position and to handle all national affairs for the time being."

Hearing this, Lu Chen asked, "What about military affairs?"

Qin Yushan replied, "It wasn't mentioned; we have to wait for detailed reports from the Capital City in a few days to know."

Pigeon Letters can only carry a small slip of paper, conveying very limited information. Typically, they carry particularly important intelligence. However, within a few days after a Pigeon Letter, the Brocade Guard usually sends detailed reports. Just a few days' wait will clarify the situation in the Capital City,

At this time, Lu Chen thought that his father, the Emperor, was also concerned that the situation would continue to escalate. But the decision to let Prince Lu Yi temporarily take on the Crown Prince's duties without making him the actual Crown Prince seemed likely to intensify the struggle for succession.

This way, Prince Lu Yi would become the target of many arrows, and eventually, all the Princes would turn against him. Prince Lu Yi's position was not an easy one to hold.

For now, he would wait for the detailed report from the Capital City to see if his father, the Emperor, would grant Prince Lu Yi control over military affairs. If he was only to handle national affairs, that wouldn't be much of an issue since Sum Emperor hadn't attended court for a long time, and there was indeed a backlog of state affairs needing someone to address.

But military affairs were different—if they involved military matters, Prince Lu Yi would have the opportunity to take command of the military forces. Once he held military power, it would be much easier for him to rebel. His father, the Emperor, was not likely to hand over military affairs to Prince Lu Yi so readily.

No matter what, the upcoming storm would be more intense than the rebellion of the Aristocratic Families from the South. After all, the Seigniors were already restless. If these matters weren't dealt with by Sum Emperor, Great Sum might just fall apart.

Lu Chen then said to Qin Yushan and Liang Zong, "Continue to monitor the movements of the Capital City and the various Seigniors."

"Yes, Prince!"

At that moment, Lu Chen turned and headed toward the residence of Zhuge Zhongguang.

Zhuge Zhongguang lived next to North Prince Mansion. Lu Chen, using his Qinggong, arrived in Zhuge Zhongguang's courtyard within a minute.

Seeing Lu Chen's arrival, Zhuge Zhongguang, seated on a stone bench, quickly rose and said, "Greetings, Prince, may I know what brings you here to see this old subject?"

Lu Chen rarely sought out Zhuge Zhongguang, it was usually Zhuge Zhongguang who came to him, after all, Lu Chen was the sovereign, and Zhuge Zhongguang was the subject.

If Lu Chen had taken the initiative to find him, it meant that there must be some grave matter.

Lu Chen replied, "I just received intelligence that the third Prince has been assassinated and died, and Prince Lu Yi was also targeted by an assassin. Subsequently, my father, the Emperor, appointed Prince Lu Yi to temporarily take on the position of the Crown Prince and oversee all national affairs."

"I truly cannot fathom what my father, the Emperor, is scheming. Now, with Seigniors in various places expanding their armies and a civil war imminent, if things continue this way, Great Sum might very well splinter."

"I do not believe my father, the Emperor, would like to see Great Sum fragment."

"So I wish to ask the Great Scholar, how do you view the recent events in Great Sum?"

Chapter 483: Beauty Trap_1

Hearing Lu Chen's question, Zhuge Zhongguang smiled slightly, stroked his beard, and then said, "According to this old minister, there are three possibilities."

"The first possibility is that His Majesty feels that after the elimination of the Aristocratic Families in the South, the Ancient Families no longer pose much of a threat. The greatest threat is from the various Seigniors across the lands, so he wants to use this opportunity to eradicate all the Seigniors within the Great Sum territory in one fell swoop."

Upon hearing the first possibility, Lu Chen said with confusion, "Since ancient times, emperors have weakened the Seigniors gradually. My father has enticed all the Seigniors to expand their forces, and when the time comes, the Imperial Army may not be a match for those Seigniors."

There are more than a dozen Seigniors in Great Sum. If all the Seigniors were to expand their troops, their soldiers added together would definitely outnumber the Imperial Army's. At that time, the Imperial Army might be unable to suppress the rebellion, and the Sum Emperor's actions might misfire disastrously.

Zhuge Zhongguang said, "Just like how His Majesty forced Prince Lu Shuyun to rebel by heading south, since His Majesty dares to arrange such a scheme, he must have already made the necessary preparations. Perhaps in his view, those Seigniors are not to be feared."

Lu Chen thought about it and felt there was some reason to that; perhaps his father had already figured out how to deal with those Seigniors.

Lu Chen continued to ask, "What about the second possibility?"

Zhuge Zhongguang replied, "The second possibility is that His Majesty might indeed be sick."

Lu Chen said with a smile, "I'm afraid that's the least likely."

Zhuge Zhongguang said, "This old minister thinks so too."

Lu Chen asked again, "What is the third possibility?"

Zhuge Zhongguang answered, "The third possibility is that His Majesty's real intention might be to lure North Country into launching an attack, and then eliminate North Country, this significant concern."

"The Imperial Army has already been deployed to the Qi Country border, clearly ready for a conflict with North Country. From the rumors in the Capital city, it's likely that His Majesty has guessed that this old minister hasn't broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm."

"Perhaps in his view, Prince, you sending out a hundred thousand troops non-stop to probe the Imperial Army actually signifies that you have the intention to rebel, lacking only a good opportunity. Therefore, by deliberately falling ill, His Majesty is giving Prince a chance to rebel."

Hearing this, Lu Chen fell into contemplation. After pondering for a moment, he then said, "If my father really thinks this way, then he greatly misunderstands me."

At this point, Zhuge Zhongguang mentioned, "In fact, this old minister has thought of another possibility, although it's even less likely."

Lu Chen asked, "Great Scholar, please share your thoughts."

Zhuge Zhongguang said, "Does Prince remember the abnormal phenomena that appeared in the Capital city?"

Lu Chen replied, "Of course."

Zhuge Zhongguang continued, "This old minister suspects that His Majesty has also entered the state of Pseudo-Celestial Realm. According to Senior Xuanyuan, this means that His Majesty is very likely already at the Unity Realm."

"Considering His Majesty's life experiences, he is a monarch with immense ambition. The trials His Majesty faces in achieving Unity might likely involve gaining complete control over all of Great Sum. For this, he must eliminate all the Seigniors. By enticing the Seigniors to grow their forces and rebel, His Majesty then has the justification for weakening them."

"Perhaps His Majesty can't wait any longer, and that's why he's pretending to be ill now, tempting those Seigniors to break the rules and expand their forces on their own. This old minister even believes that the very first Seignior to expand his troops might also be His Majesty's man, helping in stirring the other Seigniors."

Lu Chen was stunned by Zhuge Zhongguang's speculation.

Had Zhuge thought so far ahead?

He had never considered these points. He thought that Zhao King's initiative in expanding his troops was merely because he saw the Sum Emperor's critical illness and hence wanted to rebel, that's why he was frantically expanding his troops. But in Zhuge Zhongguang's view, could Zhao King possibly be the Sum Emperor's man?

Zhuce Zhongguang continued, "His Majesty had previously cooperated secretly with the Dongfang Family well in advance in order to eliminate the Aristocratic Families in the South. If His Majesty is really pretending to be ill and ignoring the Seigniors' expansion, then there must be allies among the Seigniors who are His Majesty's supporters."

After listening to Zhuge Zhongguang's words, Lu Chen sorted out his thoughts and then asked, "According to the Great Scholar, what should I do, and what should North Country do next?"

Zhuce Zhongguang replied, "According to this old minister, Prince now only needs to manage North Country well and pay no attention to the events happening in Great Sum."

"Once Great Sum truly falls into civil unrest, North Country will welcome a new period of development."

Every time Great Sum experiences war, a great number of refugees will flee to North Country for asylum. Now, North Country has a population of just a few million, too few to support the development of North Country. If North Country wants to grow stronger, it needs a larger workforce."

Zhuce Zhongguang then cautioned, "Moreover, Prince should take the initiative to guard against the Great Wu dynasty. This old minister suggests that during Great Sum's internal chaos, Prince should

actively seek to exchange or purchase territory bordering Great Wu from Qi Prince, enabling North Country to swiftly deploy troops against Great Wu."

Currently, North Country's southwest borders Great Yue, the south borders Qi Country, and western Qi Country borders Great Wu.

If North Country were to launch an attack on Great Wu, it would have to go through either Great Yue or Qi Country. If it could swap for a piece of land from Qi Country that borders Great Wu directly, North Country's army could then directly head south and attack the Great Wu dynasty.

Of course, this doesn't mean that North Country really intends to attack Great Wu. By doing so, North Country is simply deterring Great Wu. If Great Wu dares to send troops against Great Sum during its internal strife, North Country can seize the opportunity to launch an offensive against Great Wu.

Chapter 484: Beauty Trap_2

After hearing Zhuge Zhongguang's suggestion, Lu Chen pondered for a moment before saying, "All right, I will send someone to Qi Country to buy a piece of land from my uncle, the prince. However, the imperial army has already been stationed in Qi Country, so the Qi Prince might not be in a position to decide."

Zhuge Zhongguang replied, "Your Highness can try first, and if it doesn't work out, we can think of another solution."

Lu Chen said, "That works."

"Then I shall not disturb you, Great Scholar," said Lu Chen.

With that, Lu Chen turned and left.

"Prince, take care," Zhuge Zhongguang called after him.

In a little while, Lu Chen used his qinggong to return to the Prince's Mansion. Just as he was about to head to the study, he saw Wu Yuan and Wang Qingci on his way there.

Upon seeing Lu Chen descend from the rooftop, Wu Yuan quickly greeted, "Your Highness, I pay my respects!"

Lu Chen nodded his head and then turned to Wang Qingci, who said directly, "Your Highness, there is intelligence from Great Yue."

Lu Chen continued toward the study, saying as he walked, "Everyone, come to the study."

The two followed behind Lu Chen to the study.

Once inside the study, Lu Chen looked at Wu Yuan, "Wu Yuan, you speak first. What is it?"

Wu Yuan replied, "Lord Xuanyuan has sent word that the steam engine and train have been built and successfully tested. Next, they plan to construct rail tracks directly from Great Yu City to Yan County and hope for Your Highness's support."

Surprised by the news, Lu Chen couldn't help exclaiming, "So soon?"

He had initially thought it would take a long time to build the train and steam engine. Unexpectedly, Mo Xing and his team had achieved it in less than half a year since their arrival in Great Yu City.

This was the advantage of Great Yu City having a large number of craftsmen.

Regaining his composure, Lu Chen told Wu Yuan, "Go and tell Lord Xuanyuan that the rail tracks from Great Yu City to Yan County will be funded by the Prince's Mansion. I will also send a batch of barbarian slaves to assist them."

"Yes, Your Highness," Wu Yuan responded.

Lu Chen continued, "Very well, if there's nothing else, go and relay the message to Lord Xuanyuan now."

Wu Yuan bowed and said, "Your servant takes his leave."

With that, Wu Yuan turned and left the study, thoughtfully closing the door behind him.

Once Wu Yuan had gone, Lu Chen's gaze swept over Wang Qingci.

Wang Qingci was wearing a red chiffon long dress, with her fair skin faintly visible beneath the fabric. Her hair was piled high, revealing a snowy white neck and delicate collarbones, oozing allure.

Since becoming Lu Chen's woman, Wang Qingci had blossomed like a nourished flower, becoming increasingly beautiful and charming.

At this point, Lu Chen asked Wang Qingci, "What is the movement in Great Yue?"

Wang Qingci replied, "The Empress of Da Yue has sent Murong Xue'er to the North Country. It is said that Murong Xue'er offended the Empress and has been sent to the North Country as a trade envoy."

Lu Chen smiled faintly, then said, "It seems the Empress of Da Yue is also very wary of the North Country!"

Murong Xue'er was a favored person by the Empress's side and was also known as the Inner Palace Prime Minister. To be dispatched to the North Country by the Empress was slightly surprising to Lu Chen.

However, Lu Chen felt that Murong Xue'er's posting to the North Country wasn't because she had offended the Empress, but rather, the Empress wanted to monitor the North Country to prevent it from taking actions unfavorable to Great Yue or to gauge the North Country's real strength. That's why such an important figure like Murong Xue'er was sent here.

Lu Chen then inquired, "Have you found out why Murong Xue'er offended the Empress of Da Yue?"

Wang Qingci answered, "It is said that Murong Xue'er was found by the Empress to have a lover outside the palace, and in a fit of anger, the Empress banished her to the North Country."

Lu Chen was taken aback at this revelation.

A lover? High-status women with power often couldn't stand being alone and would nourish pretty boys.

If this was true, it would indicate that Murong Xue'er was promiscuous.

Lu Chen felt a sudden regret. Murong Xue'er was a woman who scored over ninety points, and her beauty met Lu Chen's tastes perfectly.

It was a pity, though, for if Murong Xue'er had already had relations with other men, he would lose interest in her. Lu Chen was a man with a love for purity, favoring women who were unblemished.

Seeing that Lu Chen had fallen silent, Wang Qingci spoke with a playful smile, "Is Your Highness very disappointed?"

At that, Lu Chen chuckled lightly, then replied, "Disappointed about what?"

Wang Qingci remarked, "Such a beautiful and enchanting woman has already been with other men. Are you not disappointed, Your Highness?"

With a smile, Lu Chen said, "Mr. Wang, teasing me comes with a price, are you prepared to pay it?"

Wang Qingci quickly replied, "How dare I tease Your Highness."

But Lu Chen paid no heed to what Wang Qingci was saying. Raising his hand, in the next moment, Wang Qingci's body uncontrollably flew into Lu Chen's embrace.

Without struggle, Wang Qingci looked up into Lu Chen's eyes and pleaded with a pitiful demeanor, "Your Highness, I have not been feeling well lately, please spare me."

Lu Chen laughed softly. This bitch was claiming to be unwell but was actually trying to seduce him.

Chapter 485: Beauty Trap_3

Lu Chen immediately placed his large hand on top of her buttocks and gave her a smack, "Not feeling comfortable, are you? Then this Prince shall give Mr. Wang a proper treatment."

Having said that, Lu Chen scooped Wang Qingci up into a princess carry and walked toward the bookshelf.

Seeing Lu Chen carrying her towards the bookshelf, Wang Qingci felt somewhat perplexed. What was Lu Chen doing taking her to the bookshelf?

Previously, whenever Lu Chen wanted to do naughty things to her, he'd simply press her against the desk, tear off her clothes, or lift her skirt.

While Wang Qingci was curiously pondering, she noticed Lu Chen lift his hand. The next moment, the bookshelf in the study slowly moved aside, revealing another room in front of them.

Carrying Wang Qingci, Lu Chen entered the room directly and, as soon as they were inside, the bookshelf closed slowly on its own.

Upon seeing the secret chamber before her, Wang Qingci was momentarily stunned.

At this moment, Lu Chen said with a smile, "Madam Chu kept saying it was indecent for me to engage in such activities in the study, so I had someone specially construct this secret chamber. What do you think of it?"

Hearing Lu Chen's question, Wang Qingci glanced around the chamber. It contained a large bed, some racks, and a few peculiar tables and chairs.

Swallowing, Wang Qingci carefully asked, "Your Highness, why do I feel like this is more of a prison cell?"

Lu Chen chuckled, "What prison cell? This is where I rest."

"However, I've been too busy recently and didn't have the opportunity to use this place. Since you're here today, let's together experience the comfort of this room."

Wang Qingci said meekly, "Your Highness, let's go back to the study instead. It's too dark in here, and I'm a little scared."

Lu Chen then laid Wang Qingci down on the big bed and leaned over, saying, "You have nothing to fear with me here."

Wang Qingci pursed her lips, thinking to herself that it was precisely because of this bad egg that she was scared.

In such a pitch-dark place, who knew what this bad thing, Lu Chen, might do to her.

Without wasting any more time, Lu Chen immediately sealed Wang Qingci's lips with his own.

Left without a choice, Wang Qingci could only share the experience of the chamber's comfort with Lu Chen.

...

A few days later, Murong Xue'er arrived in Yan County with some companions.

Murong Xue'er was a trade envoy sent by Great Jue to reside in North Country. As an external official, her first duty upon arriving in North Country was to meet with Lu Chen, the ruler of this feudal state.

When Lu Chen heard that Murong Xue'er was coming to see him early in the morning, he made sure to get up early as well.

Inside the Hall of Political Affairs.

As Lu Chen slowly made his way to the throne, he glanced at the great hall and noticed that Murong Xue'er and the delegates from Great Jue had already arrived.

At that moment, Murong Xue'er stood up and said, "Subordinate Murong Xue'er pays her respects to the North Prince!"

Lu Chen smiled slightly and then said, "You may dispense with the formalities."

Gazing at the chilly yet breathtakingly beautiful Murong Xue'er, Lu Chen couldn't help but feel regretful. Such a lovely woman, how could she raise male pets? It was such a waste. The first time he had met Murong Xue'er, he had wanted to claim her for himself.

He should have made his move then. Now it was too late.

As these thoughts passed through Lu Chen's mind, he subconsciously used his system to identify Murong Xue'er's personal details, wanting to see if she had other motives for coming to North Country.

[Name: Murong Xue'er]

[Identity: A female officer by the side of the Empress of Da Yue, the only daughter of the Murong Family, a Master Realm practitioner, twenty-four years old. In the year the Empress of Da Yue ascended to the throne, the Murong family was executed for opposing her, leaving only Murong Xue'er behind. The Empress of Da Yue took her into the palace and nurtured her into a close confidante.

This time, Murong Xue'er's mission to North Country was to carry out an order from the Empress of Da Yue, to use a beauty strategy to approach the North Prince and take the opportunity to steal North Country's secrets. Murong Xue'er likes the appearance of the North Prince and believes that offering her virginity to the North Prince is not a loss.]

[Rating: 95]

[Favorability: 70]

Upon seeing Murong Xue'er's personal information, Lu Chen was taken aback.

Wasn't it said that Murong Xue'er kept male pets?

How was she still a virgin?

Does that mean the information that Wang Qingci had collected about Murong Xue'er's male pets was merely a rumor among the people of Da Yue and not true?

At this thought, Lu Chen's lips curved into a slight smile. A beauty strategy, was it?

He quite enjoyed when his enemies used a beauty strategy against him, especially if it meant more women with ratings above ninety being sent his way.

Lu Chen took another look at Murong Xue'er, dressed in black-trimmed white clothes, exuding the temperament of a learned woman as if she had always been immersed in a sea of books.

Lu Chen thought to himself, this woman was no good woman, lusting after his body.

He didn't remember ever having served Dragon and Phoenix Tea to Murong Xue'er, yet her favorability towards him had already reached seventy.

At that moment, Lu Chen spoke, "Miss Murong, long time no see!"

Murong Xue'er showed a slight smile on her cool face, "During my tenure in North Country, I hope for the North Prince's continued support."

Lu Chen said with a smile, "Of course."

Murong Xue'er continued, "Then I shall thank the North Prince in advance!"

Lu Chen replied, "No need to thank me. It's only right."

At this, Lu Chen feigned curiosity and asked, "But tell me, aren't you from the Empress's inner circle? How could the Empress bear to send you to North Country as an envoy?"

Murong Xue'er responded, "I made a mistake in Da Yue and angered the Empress. She doesn't wish to see me temporarily and has hence dispatched me to North Country."

Lu Chen said, "I see."

"Miss Murong need not worry. You are the Empress's right-hand woman. It's likely just a fit of anger. Maybe after a while, she will call you back."

Murong Xue'er responded, "I hope your words prove true, Your Highness."

Lu Chen smiled slightly and then said, "Miss Murong, should you encounter any troubles in Yan County, or if you need anything, feel free to come to the North Prince Mansion to find me."

Murong Xue'er replied, "Thank you for your concern, Your Highness."

Chapter 486: Yongan County Can Be Sold, But Not Sold in Entirety_1

The situation in Great Sum deteriorated very quickly. In less than a month, voices emerged suggesting Seigniors wanted to visit Sum Emperor in the Capital city.

Clear-sighted people could all see that those Seigniors were not only expanding their armies but also stockpiling food and forage. They weren't planning to visit Sum Emperor; they were clearly aiming to compete for that position.

In fact, most Seigniors temporarily harbored no intentions of becoming Emperor themselves, especially those whose blood ties to the royal family were separated by several generations. They were well aware that lacking legitimacy would hinder their aspirations to become Emperor.

Therefore, a portion of the Seigniors proactively contacted the princes in Capital city, secretly forming collaborative relationships with them. In their fight for succession, the princes agreed to the Seigniors' terms, further complicating Great Sum's already chaotic situation.

As Great Sum plunged into disarray, Great Wu wasn't idle either. After Wu Junwan returned from North Country, Great Wu began to deploy troops and commanders, shifting elite soldiers to the borders adjoining Great Sum, ready to seize the opportunity to act.

...

Qi Country.

Meeting Hall.

A corpulent man sat on the throne. The throne was spacious, but due to the man's size, it seemed quite cramped in his presence.

Qi Prince swept a look over the envoy from North Country in the hall and said with a smile, "What a rarity. I didn't expect my nephew to send someone to my feudal state."

Continuing, Qi Prince asked, "Speak, what purpose does my nephew have in sending you to Qi Country?"

North Country's envoy Zhou Tongguang answered unassumingly, "Qi Prince, my king wishes to purchase the entirety of Yong'an County."

Upon hearing this, Qi Prince and the chancellors in the hall were all taken aback; they had not anticipated that North Country's envoy came to Qi Country with the intention of buying land, let alone an entire county.

Qi Prince's expression grew a few shades more serious as he studied Zhou Tongguang in the hall for a long while before speaking, "North Prince isn't joking with me, is he?"

Zhou Tongguang responded, "My king indeed intends to purchase the entirety of Yongan County. If Qi Prince finds a transaction with silver unsatisfactory, we can also exchange land for land. If there is any land in North Country that catches Qi Prince's eye, feel free to name it."

Hearing this, Qi Prince snorted internally. He was no fool; how could he possibly exchange Qi Country's land for North Country's, especially when North Country was so impoverished compared to the wealth of Qi Country? Such an exchange would surely be a loss.

Nevertheless, why did North Prince think of buying Yongan County at this time?

Qi Prince was puzzled and called to the soldiers in the hall, "Bring the map."

As he spoke, a large map held up by bamboo rods was brought into the middle of the hall, allowing a clear view of the entire map at a glance.

Qi Prince glanced at the location of Yongan County and found that it lay on the western border adjacent to the Great Wu dynasty, not only abutting Great Wu but also the territories controlled by the Great Sum royal family.

This meant that as long as North Country acquired Yongan County, its army could bypass Qi Country via this corridor and directly access the realms controlled by the Great Sum royal family.

After locating Yongan County, Qi Prince asked with a smile, "I am curious as to why North Prince would wish to purchase Yongan County. This position seems rather sensitive."

Zhou Tongguang replied with a smile, "I believe Qi Prince must have heard of the trade agreement signed between North Country and the Great Wu Dynasty. From now on, North Country will be able to do business with Great Wu. However, the lands of Great Jue and Qi Country lie between North Country and Great Wu, making it somewhat troublesome for goods from North Country to reach Great Wu.

Therefore, my king thought of acquiring Yongan County, to border directly with Great Wu."

"This way, whether it's goods from North Country going into Great Wu, or goods from Great Wu being transported to North Country, it will be much more convenient."

Qi Prince laughed and said, "The reasoning seems quite sound. However, I'm afraid North Prince's intentions are not limited to simply doing business with Great Wu, are they?"

Zhou Tongguang countered, "Then what does Qi Prince think my king is purchasing Yongan County for?"

Faced with Zhou Tongguang's question, Qi Prince was momentarily stumped.

Inside, Qi Prince mused, for what reason?

Wasn't it simple?

It was to bypass Qi Country at an opportune moment, then dispatch a large army to attack the cities controlled by the royal family, wasn't it?

Qi Prince then spoke up, "If Yongan County were sold to North Prince, then North Country's land would border the territory controlled by the Great Sum court. If anything were to happen at that time, should North Country send troops directly into the cities under the court's control, I'm afraid I would have to bear the responsibility."

"Moreover, land transactions between Seigniors require approval from the court; even if I agree, it's useless without the court's consent."

Zhou Tongguang maintained a pleasant smile as he spoke, "Qi Prince worries too much. My king is a prince of the Emperor, and North Country would never dispatch troops into the domains controlled by the court without explicit orders. Moreover, with several hundred thousand soldiers stationed by the court in Qi Country, any movements by North Country can be immediately responded to by the court.

And since Yongan County is merely a passageway, Qi Prince always has the power to shut it down."

"Should a day come when it's necessary for the armies of North Country to head south, my king would directly request passage from Qi Prince, not through occupancy of Yongan County."

Hearing this, Qi Prince's expression darkened instantly.

He was no fool; how could he fail to understand Zhou Tongguang's implication?

Zhou Tongguang meant that if North Country truly intended to move south, Qi Country would be the first to be attacked.

Yongan County is a passageway, should North Country truly send troops from Yongan County, Qi Country's soldiers could at any time cut off the supply lines of North Country's troops. Therefore, if North Country wishes to send troops south, they must first occupy Qi Country to prevent Qi Country from causing trouble from behind.

Of course, to the ears of Qi Prince, Zhou Tongguang's words were nothing but a threat to Qi Country. If Qi Country does not sell Yongan County to North Country, when North Country raises troops to march south, they will inevitably attack Qi Country.

Qi Prince snorted coldly, then said, "Are you threatening me?"

Zhou Tongguang replied, "I dare not, I am merely stating the facts."

Qi Prince then said, "If North Country truly wishes to purchase Yongan County, it is not impossible. However, you must first speak with the imperial court. Once the imperial court agrees, then you may come to me to discuss the price for the purchase of Yongan County."

Feudal states generally have the obligation to defend the frontier. Qi Country borders the Great Wu dynasty to the west, and when the Great Wu dynasty invades Great Sum, Qi Country must bear the burden of repelling the invasion by Great Wu.

If they sell Yongan County, which borders Great Wu, to North Country, then it will be North Country that borders Great Wu, and the duty to defend against foreign enemies will fall upon North Country. Qi Prince is more than willing to offload Yongan County to North Country.

The last time Great Wu and Great Sum went to war, and the imperial court requested that the various seigniors send troops, Qi Country lost many soldiers. This led to a situation where, later, when the imperial court said they would station troops in Qi Country, Qi Prince had no choice but to agree.

If Qi Country still had a standing army of fifty thousand soldiers at that time, the court's decision to garrison troops in Qi Country would have been met with more resistance from Qi Prince; he wouldn't have agreed to the court's request so easily.

Hearing Qi Prince's words, Zhou Tongguang instantaneously understood the implication. Qi Prince was shifting all responsibility to the imperial court. By doing so, he neither offended North Country nor could be blamed by the imperial court if North Country actually sent troops from Yongan County to march south.

Of course, the most important point was that Qi Country currently had hundreds of thousands of the imperial court's troops stationed there. They truly dared not make any rash moves. Although it was said that Sum Emperor was gravely ill and various seigniors were frantically increasing their troops, only Qi Country dared not make any moves.

With tigers to the north and dragons to the south, Qi Country, sandwiched between the two, could only tremble in fear. Any rash action could mean the instantaneous disappearance of Qi Country.

Zhou Tongguang said, "If that's the case, then I will write to my king immediately and have him report this matter to the court forthwith."

"If Qi Prince has no other issues, I will take my leave."

As soon as these words fell, Zhou Tongguang turned and left directly.

After Zhou Tongguang had walked out of the Meeting Hall, Qi Prince, who had been suppressing his emotions, could no longer hold back. He swept everything off the table in front of him with one swipe of his hand, scattering it all onto the floor, then roared, "This is simply outrageous! One after another, they treat Qi Country as if it were nothing!"

At that moment, a minister stepped forward and said, "Prince, are we really going to sell Yongan County to North Country? If we sell Yongan County, we may no longer be able to have direct dealings with Great Wu, right?"

Hearing this, Qi Prince fell into silence.

Indeed, although Yongan County borders Great Wu, and Qi Country has to share part of the duty to repel Great Wu's invasions in times of war, if they lose Yongan County, it would be difficult for Qi Country's merchant caravans to directly interact with Great Wu during peacetime.

In the future, they would have to pass through areas controlled by the imperial court, which wouldn't be advantageous for Qi Country.

Some of Qi Country's business dealings with Great Wu aren't exactly legal; if they had to go through areas controlled by the imperial court, it would be easy for others to detect something suspicious.

But if they don't sell Yongan County, North Country's envoy had just now issued a threatening declaration. If they do not sell, and one day North Country marches south, they will surely move against Qi Country. With their conventional army strength not even amounting to fifty thousand, Qi Country is now fundamentally incapable of resisting North Country's southward advance.

After a moment, Qi Prince thought of a good solution and said, "Yongan County can be sold, but not in its entirety, only half of it to North Country. That way, not only will North Country be unable to directly reach the areas controlled by the imperial court, but Qi Country's own merchant caravans will also be able to continue trade with Great Wu."

Hearing this, a sigh of relief went through the ministers in the Meeting Hall. The ministers present were mostly from Qi Country's Aristocratic Families, and nearly every one of them had some form of trade with the Great Wu dynasty. If the trade routes to Great Wu were truly cut off, it would certainly not be a favorable outcome for them.

Half a month later, news of North Prince's intent to purchase Yongan County reached the ears of the officials of the Great Sum court.

In the court, officials buzzed with discussions about the matter.

At this time, Prince Lu Yi, sitting on a chair beside the Dragon Throne, asked, "Gentlemen, you must have all heard about North Country's intention to buy Yongan County from Qi Country, right?"

With Prince Lu Yi temporarily assuming the Crown Prince's position and managing the affairs of the nation, it was up to him to make a decision on this matter.

No sooner had Prince Lu Yi finished speaking than an official stood up and said, "Your Highness, this matter must not be agreed to!"

"If we approve Qi Country selling Yongan County to North Country, then North Country will directly border the lands controlled by the imperial court. If North Prince harbors ulterior motives, North Country's troops could drive straight through Yongan County and attack the Capital City!"

As these words fell, another minister also spoke up, saying, "North Prince's actions reveal his cunning and ambitious nature; we must stop North Prince and prevent Qi Country from selling Yongan County to North Country!"

Prince Lu Yi then said, "Qi Prince has submitted a memorial stating that if Qi Country does not sell Yongan County to North Prince, North Country might very well send troops south and conquer Qi Country."

Hearing this, the great hall instantly erupted into chaos.

"North Prince is completely lawless now, how dare he!"

"This is troublesome. With various seigniors expanding their forces, now North Country is also preparing to march south."

"North Prince really does not take the court's four hundred thousand troops seriously. If you ask me, we should send our troops directly to quell the rebellion."

"Send troops? Are you mad? If we send troops now, the seigniors from the southern regions will definitely lead their armies northward, directly threatening the Capital City!"

Chapter 487: Busy and Fulfilling Lu Chen_1

Seeing that the officials had been engaged in intense discussion in the grand hall for half a day without reaching any conclusion, Prince Lu Yi directly looked at Zhao Wenhan and asked, "Mr. Zhao, what is your opinion?"

Ever since Prince Lu Shuyun started a rebellion in the South, Zhao Wenhan had sided with Prince Lu Yi.

It has always been the system for the eldest legitimate son to inherit the throne; however, the struggle for the Sum Emperor's throne had been fierce for several generations, and it had been a long time since an eldest legitimate son became Emperor, so Zhao Wenhan was not initially optimistic about Prince Lu Yi's prospects.

But now, with the Aristocratic Families of the South having been eliminated, only Prince Lu Yi's power remained the strongest. Also, the majority of those who supported Prince Lu Yi belonged to the Scholar Officials class, not the traditional Ancient Families. With this class's support, it was not impossible for Prince Lu Yi to become the Crown Prince and eventually ascend the throne.

Prince Lu Yi first asked Zhao Wenhan for his opinion because Zhao Wenhan was currently aligned with his faction.

At this moment, Zhao Wenhan spoke up, "Your Highness, in my view, whether or not Yongan County is sold to North Country, it won't have much impact on Great Sum."

Upon hearing Zhao Wenhan's words, the grand hall instantly fell quiet. Most officials thought Zhao Wenhan would object, but unexpectedly, Zhao Wenhan didn't seem to care at all.

Prince Lu Yi inquired, "Oh? Why is that?"

Zhao Wenhan continued, "Yongan County is situated in the northwest. If North Prince intends to march his troops southward from the northwest, it would require a significant detour, with the constant risk of supply lines being cut off.

If North Prince truly harbors rebellious intentions, instead of taking such a roundabout path, it would be better to directly attack Qi Country and then head south after occupying it."

Prince Lu Yi thought for a moment and felt there was some truth to this.

Prince Lu Yi then looked towards Lin Gaoyuan and asked, "Mr. Lin, what do you think is North Country's purpose in buying Yongan County?"

Lin Gaoyuan answered, "Not long ago, North Country signed a trade cooperation agreement with Great Wu Dynasty, and there is no direct border between North Country and Great Wu Dynasty. To transport goods from North Country to Great Wu, the route must pass through Qi Country or Great Jue, which is disadvantageous to the trade between North Country and Great Wu.

Therefore, I believe that North Country's purchase of Yongan County is likely meant to establish a direct border with Great Wu to facilitate smoother movements for trading caravans."

Prince Lu Yi asked, "Then, in Mr. Zhao and Mr. Lin's view, should the Court approve this land transaction between Qi Country and North Country?"

Lin Gaoyuan and Zhao Wenhan simultaneously said, "It should be approved."

Seeing both men agreed with the land transaction, Prince Lu Yi's gaze fell on Zhao Wenhan, who continued, "Your Highness, at this moment, the Princes in the South are already restless. Under no circumstances can we afford to offend North Prince. If North Prince initiates a rebellion, it will certainly incite the Princes in the South to follow suit.

Should the Court's troops be occupied in the north battling North Country, with the South Princes taking advantage of the situation, the Capital City might face the risk of falling."

"Therefore, I believe it's best to stabilize North Prince for now."

It wasn't that Zhao Wenhan was taking sides with North Prince; he genuinely felt that a direct conflict with North Country should be avoided at this time. If the Court engaged in war with North Country, the Princes led by Zhao King would surely raise their armies.

In Zhao Wenhan's view, stabilizing North Prince was the most crucial task at the moment. Once the Sum Emperor passed away and Prince Lu Yi ascended the throne, they would have many previously unavailable tactics at their disposal.

After listening to Zhao Wenhan's argument, Prince Lu Yi's attention turned to Lin Gaoyuan, who said, "I agree with Mr. Zhao's statement. Indeed, it's not suitable to provoke conflict with North Country at this time. Stabilizing North Country is most important."

Prince Lu Yi then said, "Qi Prince mentioned in his memorial that, to avoid North Prince from directly sending troops southward through Yongan County, Qi Country only plans to sell a part of it to North Country. This way, the area controlled by North Country and the Court will still not border each other."

"Moreover, I will station troops in the southern part of Yongan County to be on alert for North Country's army."

After hearing Prince Lu Yi's words, the ministers in the grand hall ceased to speak, for not getting into a conflict with North Country was indeed the best strategy.

Prince Lu Yi scanned the officials in the grand hall and then said, "Does anyone have other opinions on this matter? Feel free to express them."

"If there is no objection, I will approve this land transaction."

At that moment, the grand hall was silent, with no one speaking. The ministers understood that the current situation was severe, and the priority was to stabilize North Prince.

Seeing no one voiced an opinion, Prince Lu Yi said, "Since no one has spoken against it, then it is settled. We will now discuss the issue of Princes arbitrarily expanding their forces."

Upon hearing this, the grand hall became even quieter. The bureaucrats of the Court, including the Princes, had ties to some of the Princes, so nobody wanted to express too much on this topic.

Besides, if the question was raised about who expanded their forces first, it was North Prince of North Country who expanded his army first. North Country was initially only permitted to maintain a force of one hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, but during the military parade, two hundred thousand soldiers appeared.

Although the Sum Emperor did not pursue North Prince's responsibility at the time, simply offsetting it with his merits, the Emperor, by doing so, set a bad precedent. If North Prince went unpunished, the other Princes expanding their forces was not an issue.

If the discussion on how to deal with those Princes who expanded their forces were to take place now, it should start with how to deal with North Prince. If North Prince was unpunished, it would certainly not be convincing.

Ultimately, the issue of how to deal with Princes who expanded their forces without permission also came to nothing.

Soon, the Imperial edict reached Qi Country. Once Qi Prince learned of the Court's approval for North Country to purchase land from Qi Country, he immediately summoned the North Country envoy Zhou Tongguang.

The negotiation over the price of Yongan County was not protracted. Qi Prince had no intention of exploiting the situation at this time. North Country had ten thousand soldiers at the border of Qi Country, and North Country's military had defeated the Barbarian Army three times. Qi Prince dared not make exorbitant demands in the face of North Country.

Eventually, Qi Country sold the northern part of Yongan County to North Country at a very low price.

After the transaction was completed, Zhou Tongguang quickly returned to North Country to report back.

North Country.

Inside Lu Chen's study at the North Prince Mansion.

After listening to Zhou Tongguang's report on his mission to North Country, Lu Chen smiled at Zhou Tongguang and said, "You've done well. You have been in Qi Country for a long time; it's been hard work. I will give you five days off. Spend some quality time with your family."

Zhou Tongguang immediately replied, "Thank you, Prince!"

"If there is nothing else from the Prince, your subordinate will take his leave," Zhou Tongguang said.

Lu Chen responded indifferently, "Very well."

After Zhou Tongguang paid his respects, he left Lu Chen's study.

Once Zhou Tongguang had left, Wu Yuan entered the study, "Greetings, Prince!"

...

Lu Chen directly asked, "Have the slaves from the Barbarian Tribe already been allocated to Lord Xuanyuan?"

Wu Yuan answered, "They have already been allocated to Lord Xuanyuan."

Lu Chen did not continue this topic and said to the maid at the door, "Xiao Huan, have someone call for General Wenren."

"Yes, Prince."

After saying this, Lu Chen's gaze fell upon Wu Yuan as he continued, "Commander Wu, I intend to give you a task."

Wu Yuan immediately said, "Please tell me, Prince. Your subordinate would die a thousand times before failing to complete the Prince's task."

Lu Chen said, "Starting today, you'll be working with Lord Xuanyuan on the railway construction. If Lord Xuanyuan needs anything, you must inform me at once."

Hearing this, Wu Yuan was startled. He had not expected Lu Chen to assign him this task.

The task was not especially difficult; in fact, it seemed too easy, with hardly anything to do. As a member of the Brocade Guard, he was usually responsible for gathering intelligence. Now he was being asked to work on infrastructure, and Wu Yuan couldn't help feeling he might have done something to displease the North Prince.

Lu Chen seemed to see what Wu Yuan was thinking and continued, "The railway is extremely important to the North Country, and I am concerned that some ill-intentioned individuals may sabotage its construction. In addition to assisting Lord Xuanyuan in building the railway, you must also prevent those wishing to destroy it, particularly spies from other dynasties."

After some thought, Wu Yuan grasped that if the train really started operating, Yan County would have an even tighter grip over the entire North Country. Their soldiers could also reach the frontiers more quickly, so indeed, the railway was critical for the North Country.

It seemed he had misunderstood the North Prince. By entrusting him with such a crucial task, the Prince was clearly showing his trust in him.

Wu Yuan then said, "Your subordinate will perfectly complete the task given by the Prince."

At this time, Lu Chen asked, "Anything else?"

Upon hearing this, Wu Yuan recalled the purpose of his visit to the study. He quickly took out a piece of intelligence from his sleeve and said, "Prince, this is intelligence gathered by the Brocade Guard about the collusion between various princes and the seigniors."

Hearing this, Lu Chen took the intelligence from Wu Yuan's hand and glanced at it.

Lu Chen chuckled, surprised to find that apart from Prince Lu Yi, all princes in the Capital city with the right of inheritance had secretly colluded with seigniors from outside territories, with Prince Wu Ming even garnering the support of two seigniors.

It appeared these seigniors understood that even if they invaded the Capital city, they had no chance to ascend to the supreme throne. There were still some old members of the royal family, and unless they had the power to kill all those old members or gained their recognition, all their scheming would be in vain.

Since securing that position was unlikely, it was better to support a puppet monarch to ascend the throne. With a puppet emperor, they could manipulate many things, and perhaps, in the future, they could even coax the puppet emperor to abdicate in their favor.

At that moment, Wu Yuan said, "If the Prince has no other matters, your subordinate will take his leave."

Lu Chen uttered a sound of acknowledgment, his eyes on the intelligence in his hand, and said no more.

Wu Yuan then left the study.

About half an hour later, General Wenren arrived at the study, puzzled. Previously, if there was anything to discuss, Lu Chen would have both him and Xuanyuan Chen come together. Why had Lu Chen summoned only him today?

Could it be that Lu Chen had a task for him and him alone?

While General Wenren was pondering this, Lu Chen spoke up, "General Wenren, tomorrow you will take thirty thousand heavy cavalry to garrison in Yongan County."

Hearing this, General Wenren was taken aback and asked, "Prince, what should this subordinate do upon arriving in Yongan County?"

Lu Chen replied, "Just guard against spies from enemy countries. You don't need to do anything else."

General Wenren said, "This subordinate understands."

Lu Chen said, "Prepare and set out early tomorrow morning."

"Yes, your subordinate will take his leave."

After General Wenren left, Lu Chen leaned back in his wooden chair, eyes closed, massaging his temples.

As the Great Sum became increasingly chaotic, his responsibilities grew. He could entrust the domestic affairs of the North Country to Zhuge Zhongguang, but he had to handle matters concerning other dynasties personally.

At that moment, the red twilight light spilled over the windowsill, illuminating the room with a muddy yellow glow, and a familiar voice entered the room.

"Chen'er, it's time for dinner."

Chu Yuqin stood at the doorway, blocking the red twilight.

Seeing Chu Yuqin's dignified and graceful figure, the corners of Lu Chen's mouth lifted slightly. Though his days were busier, he felt quite fulfilled.

Then, Lu Chen rose from his chair and walked to the study door. Upon reaching it, he wrapped his arms around Chu Yuqin's slender waist. Blushing, she said, "Others are watching."

Hearing this, Lu Chen glanced at the maid beside them, and the maid quickly turned her face away.

With a shy expression, Chu Yuqin said, "Alright, we should head to the main courtyard. Zixuan has prepared many nourishing dishes for you tonight."

Lu Chen smiled faintly, "Alright."

The two spoke no further and went straight to the main courtyard.

Chapter 488: I am Willing to Give Up the Position of Prime Minister_1

Great Wu Dynasty.

Li Zheng Palace.

The Martial Emperor sat on the Dragon Throne, casting a glance over the ministers in the great hall.

At that moment, a eunuch beside the Martial Emperor spoke up,

"All those with memorials to present, step forward; all others, withdraw from the court."

As the eunuch's voice faded, a minister stepped forward and said, "Your Majesty, now that the southeast is pacified, seigniors in various parts of Great Sum are expanding their forces. Great Sum is on the eve of disintegration. I believe we should redeploy our troops eastward. Once Great Sum descends into civil war, we shall attack."

No sooner had this minister finished speaking than another one interjected, "Now is the best opportunity to eradicate Great Sum. Once Great Sum falls, Great Wu will become unprecedentedly powerful, and Your Majesty will be the most meritorious emperor since the founding of the Great Wu Dynasty."

Following that, even more ministers stood up, their ideas fundamentally the same: that Great Wu should launch an all-out war and directly annihilate Great Sum.

Hearing the ministers' suggestions, the Martial Emperor laughed without restraint. After chuckling for a while, he said, "I really didn't expect that you all would be even more anxious than I am!"

"However, putting that aside, Great Sum indeed should disappear from this world," he added with a sigh.

"How time flies! I still remember when Lu Xingqiu came to Great Wu, proclaiming his grand ambitions to me. Little did I expect that while I am still in my prime, Lu is nearly finished."

"Since he's scarcely capable now, I might as well do a good deed and help him achieve his once lofty aspirations, hahaha..."

While the Martial Emperor laughed heartily, suddenly, a soldier, specialized in relaying urgent military intelligence, entered the hall, "Your Majesty, the North Country is showing unusual activity!"

The laughter of the Martial Emperor came to an abrupt halt.

However, his face was soon filled with confusion—what did the North Country's movements have to do with them?

The North Country didn't share a border with Great Wu. Could it be that they were rebelling, ready to march south and attack Great Sum?

If that were the case, it would be more than welcome.

At this moment, the eunuch quickly went over to the soldier, took the intelligence report from his hands, and briskly walked to the Martial Emperor's side, handing him the report.

The Martial Emperor's expression darkened the instant he read the intelligence.

Originally, he assumed the North Country had already marched south to attack the Great Sum court. To his surprise, the North Country had actually purchased Yongan County from Qi Country, which meant its territory now bordered directly with the Great Wu Dynasty.

Moreover, it wasn't just simple border contact; the North Country immediately stationed thirty thousand Heavy Cavalry in Yongan County.

What was the North Country planning to do?

To station thirty thousand Heavy Cavalry in a mere Yongan County?

This was clearly aimed at the Great Wu Dynasty!

Seeing the Martial Emperor's distressed expression, the ministers inside the great hall grew curious. What had the North Country done to make the Martial Emperor look so troubled?

At that moment, the Martial Emperor said, "The North Country has purchased Yongan County from Qi Country and stationed thirty thousand Heavy Cavalry there."

Upon hearing this, the hall erupted with discussion.

"What? The North Country actually bought Yongan County from Qi Country—so they now border Great Wu?"

"What are their intentions?"

"The moment they acquired Yongan County, they immediately stationed thirty thousand Heavy Cavalry there. They must be targeting Great Wu!"

"Did not Princess Junwan just sign a trade cooperation agreement with the North Country? Why would they do something like this?"

...

Listening to the officials' discussions in the hall, the Martial Emperor said, "What do you all believe is the intention behind the North Prince's actions?"

Hearing this, a minister stood out and said, "Your Majesty, it is very possible that the North Prince wishes to purchase Yongan County and then march south directly from there, bypassing Qi Country to attack the Great Sum court."

Following the minister's speculation, the Martial Emperor continued, "I didn't explain fully just now: although the North Country purchased Yongan County, they only bought half of it, and the half they bought does not border the regions controlled by the Great Sum court."

This...

Hearing the Martial Emperor's words, the ministers were momentarily stunned.

Most had assumed that with the North Country buying Yongan County, they planned to target the cities controlled by the Great Sum court. Now, learning that the North Country only bought half of it and only bordered Great Wu, the implication was clear that they were truly targeting Great Wu.

That was thirty thousand Heavy Cavalry, and these were the North Country's Heavy Cavalry. Although they had not witnessed the might of the North Country's army firsthand, ever since the North Prince went to the North Country, the Barbarian Tribes had not fared well against the North Country's forces.

If the North Country's thirty thousand Heavy Cavalry entered the Great Wu Dynasty, Great Wu would need to deploy at least a hundred thousand soldiers just to cope.

At this moment, the Martial Emperor's gaze fell upon Chai Jiliang, "Chai, what is your view on this matter?"

Chai Jiliang pondered for a moment before responding, "Your Majesty, I believe that the North Country's purchase of Yongan County and the stationing of troops there is mainly to deter Great Wu and prevent us from attacking Great Sum amid its internal chaos."

The Martial Emperor said, "The Sum Emperor is already on his last legs, and the North Prince isn't thinking of seizing the throne. Why would he guard against Great Wu instead?"

Chai Jiliang replied, "Perhaps the North Prince does not plan to immediately vie for that position. Although the North Country has strong military capabilities, it isn't wealthy. When the North Prince arrived there, the North Country had nothing, not even the basics.

That the North Country has come this far is largely because the North Prince values commerce, using trade to alleviate the country's shortage of food and clothing."

Chapter 489: I am Willing to Give Up the Position of Prime Minister_2

"The North Country is still quite fragile at the moment, and if a large-scale war were to break out, with the North Country's material reserves, it would be very difficult to support the Northern army in conquering the entire Great Xia."

"So, for the North Prince, the best move is to wait and stabilize the development of the North Country, waiting until the various seigniors within Great Xia have fought amongst themselves and weakened each other, then the North Country can reap the benefits."

Hearing Chai Jiliang's words, the Martial Emperor spoke, "So you're saying that the North Prince's thoughts are actually the same as mine?"

Chai Jiliang replied, "Your servant believes so."

The Martial Emperor snorted coldly and said, "No wonder the North Prince had just acquired Yongan County and immediately dispatched thirty thousand heavy cavalry there."

"In this way, if we want to send troops to Great Xia, we have to get past the North Country first."

At this point, the Martial Emperor fell into deep thought, and the ministers who had just been advocating for sending troops to Great Xia also lapsed into contemplation.

Under the current circumstances, if Great Wu sends troops to Great Xia, the North Country will surely send troops to attack Great Wu. The military strength of the North Country is not weak, and fighting on two fronts would be highly disadvantageous for Great Wu.

We must think of a solution, preferably one that could win over the Da Yue Dynasty.

After a long while, the Martial Emperor turned to a eunuch beside him and commanded, "Go inform Princess Junwan that after the court session, she is to come to the Imperial Study Room. I have matters to discuss with her."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Once the eunuch departed, the Martial Emperor spoke again, "To extinguish Great Xia, relying solely on Great Wu is somewhat difficult. I plan to align with Da Yue and form an alliance to jointly attack the Great Xia Dynasty."

Upon hearing the Martial Emperor's words, the Minister of Rites stood up and said, "Your Majesty, your plan is truly excellent! By having Da Yue hold back the North Country, then our Great Wu can attack Great Xia with ease. Since Da Yue has been able to withstand the southward advance of the Barbarian Tribe coalition, they surely can handle a small North Country without any problem."

After hearing this, the Martial Emperor said indifferently, "It's just uncertain whether Princess Junwan will be able to persuade Da Yue."

At this remark, the Martial Emperor glanced across the room at the officials present, "Do my esteemed subjects have any other matters to address? If there are none, then this morning's court session is concluded."

Upon these words, an official stood out and said, "Your Majesty, Princess Junwan has already reached the age suitable for marriage—it is time to select a noble consort for her."

As the words were spoken, the entire court turned silent, the sound of breathing audible, and all the ministers' gazes fell upon the Martial Emperor as if waiting for his response.

The marriage of Princess Junwan has always been a matter of great concern among the court ministers. Now that Princess Junwan remains single, many fear that the Martial Emperor plans to groom her as a successor and have her take a husband into the imperial family.

Now, quite a few ministers are thinking that if they can have the princess marry off early, they could use her married status as a reason to gradually chip away at her power.

To the imperial clan, it is abnormal that the princess, in her thirties, is still unwed, implying she must be plotting something. As long as she remains unwed, they feel uneasy, always fearing that she might become the next emperor of Great Wu.

Seeing someone raise the issue of Wu Junwan's marriage, the Martial Emperor said with a smile, "It seems that you all care about Junwan's lifelong happiness more than I do."

"However, I once promised her that only when she wishes to marry, will I help her select a husband."

"Since she is not keen on marriage now, let's drop this matter."

Hearing this, an elder member of the imperial family could no longer hold back; he immediately stood up and said, "Your Majesty, since ancient times, the women of Great Wu have wed by the age of sixteen. It is unheard of for a woman to remain unwed into her thirties."

"If the princess continues to refuse marriage, it will inevitably lead other women to follow suit. If the women of Great Wu no longer wish to marry, our population may significantly diminish, undermining the very foundations of our nation!"

"As a princess of the royal family, even if Your Majesty has appointed her as Princess Junwan, she should not have special privileges. Please, Your Majesty, find a noble consort for the princess at your earliest convenience."

Upon hearing these words, the Martial Emperor's expression darkened, for how could an emperor not know what these people were thinking?

They clearly feared that he would pass the throne to Wu Junwan.

The reason he had appointed Wu Junwan as Princess Junwan years ago was due to some special circumstances, but that did not mean he would go against the ancestral teachings and bequeath the throne to a woman.

The Martial Emperor then said, "We will discuss this matter with Junwan later. Do my subjects have any other matters? If not, you are dismissed from the court session."

Seeing that the Martial Emperor did not give a clear answer, the ministers understood that it was very likely he still had no intention of marrying her off.

Just then, Chai Jiliang suddenly stood up, boldly saying, "Your Majesty, I have long admired Princess Junwan. I humbly request that Your Majesty grant marriage between her and myself."

At these words, the entire hall fell into a deathly silence.

The relationship between Chai Jiliang and Princess Junwan was not ordinary, something already known by many. Yet, no one had expected that Chai Jiliang would dare to take the initiative to ask the Martial Emperor for Princess Junwan's hand in marriage.

The thought crossed the minds of the ministers: Had Chai Jiliang gone mad?

Instead of continuing his role as the Prime Minister, he actually desired to marry Princess Junwan!

Throughout history, the husbands of princesses in Great Wu were never entrusted with important duties; even those who held official positions were stripped of them after marrying into the royal family, as a measure to prevent them from seizing power.

Chapter 490: I am Willing to Give Up the Position of Prime Minister_3

Princesses' husbands generally can't be heavily relied upon, let alone the Princess Royal.

Given the Princess Royal's status and position, whoever marries her essentially signs the end of his official career.

Chai Jiliang, however, is the Prime Minister, and if he were to marry the Princess Royal and his post were not to be forfeited, the Princess Royal's strength in the court would be immense. Therefore, once Chai Jiliang truly married the Princess Royal, he would have to resign from his position as Prime Minister.

Some were puzzled, not understanding what had gotten into Chai Jiliang.

However, at this moment, the Martial Emperor revealed a trace of a smile, then he said, "Chai, you are my most esteemed minister. Think carefully, you are now the Prime Minister. If you really marry Junwan, you probably won't be able to enter the gates of Li Zheng Palace every day."

Chai Jiliang replied, "Your Majesty, I have considered it thoroughly. For the Princess Royal, I am willing to give up the position of Prime Minister."

Hearing Chai Jiliang's words, the ministers in the hall thought to themselves that this man must have a problem in his head, actually giving up his official career for a woman.

Although the position of Prime Minister is a high-risk occupation in the Great Wu dynasty, with nine out of ten meeting a bad end, the Prime Minister is still the Prime Minister, holding considerable power. And yet, this man speaks so lightly of giving it up.

Just then, a noble minister stepped forward and said, "Your Majesty, Mr. Chai is exceptionally talented and has dedicated himself to the service of Great Wu. He is certainly worthy of the Princess Royal. Since Mr. Chai is willing to give up his position as Prime Minister for the Princess Royal, I boldly request that Your Majesty grant him the marriage."

This time, the Martial Emperor was not angry. He then said, "Chai, I am aware of your intentions, but I have also said that Junwan's marriage is for her to decide. Let's do this; I will find an opportunity to ask her what she thinks."

"Alright, let's leave this matter here. My ministers, is there anything else? If there is nothing else, you may leave the court."

Hearing these words from the Martial Emperor, some ministers immediately realized they had been played.

It's true that Chai Jiliang is fond of the Princess Royal, and their relationship has always been good. Everyone knows that Chai Jiliang is a member of the Princess Royal's faction, so he would continue to stay in the court for her, and it's highly unlikely that he would bring up marrying the Princess Royal.

By raising this issue now, he was signaling to others that Chai Jiliang had his sights set on the Princess Royal, and the rest should step aside.

Knowing that Chai Jiliang is a trusted minister of the Martial Emperor, the emperor definitely would not agree to marry the Princess Royal to Chai Jiliang. The ultimate result would be that the marriage discussion continues indefinitely and comes to nothing.

Once the ministers understood why Chai Jiliang proposed to marry the Princess Royal, they immediately felt a burning hatred towards him.

This incident would undoubtedly spread quickly to the ears of the common people. Soon, they would all know that Chai Jiliang admires the Princess Royal. One being the emperor's crucial

minister, and the other the pearl in the emperor's palm, they are so well suited for each other, who would dare to interfere?

But if the Martial Emperor doesn't grant the marriage, their relationship will stay uncertain, with the Princess Royal remaining single and Chai Jiliang still the Prime Minister.

...

Meanwhile.

After leaving the Li Zheng Palace, the Martial Emperor went to the Imperial Study Room, where Wu Junwan was already waiting.

Seeing the Martial Emperor enter, Wu Junwan immediately saluted and said, "Greetings to Father Emperor."

The Martial Emperor spoke directly, "Junwan, I have a mission for you."

The Martial Emperor in fact did not wish to continue allowing Wu Junwan to accumulate too many merits, but sending an envoy to Great Jue to persuade the Yue Emperor to form an alliance to conquer Great Sum could only be done by Wu Junwan.

Wu Junwan's relationship with the Yue Emperor was very good, and only she might have a chance to persuade the Yue Emperor. Sending someone else to Great Jue might more likely end in failure.