

Es. Benefits 531

Chapter 531: Prince, Please Trouble Yourself_1

Murong Xue'er had no idea what Lu Chen was thinking; she even assumed that Lu Chen was merely taking her to some pavilion to enjoy tea.

However, it didn't take long for Murong Xue'er to realize that something was amiss, after all, they hadn't left the study but had moved from the study to another room.

After Murong Xue'er followed Lu Chen into the resting room, she glanced around the entire space, noting that the layout of this resting room was no different from a bedroom.

Curious, Murong Xue'er asked, "Prince, do you usually sleep in this room?"

Lu Chen replied, "Not really, this is just a resting room adjacent to the study. When I feel tired from dealing with official documents, I would take a short rest here."

Having said that, Lu Chen walked up to the round tea table, picked up the teapot from the table, poured a cup of tea for Murong Xue'er, and then asked, "Miss Murong, I wonder if you have tried the tea I sent you?"

Upon hearing this question, Murong Xue'er immediately said, "I've tried it, thank you, Prince, for giving me such precious tea."

Lu Chen said with a smile, "I injured Miss Murong last time at the Hundred Flowers Tower, so this tea serves as my compensation."

As he spoke, Lu Chen picked up the tea cup from the table and placed it in front of Murong Xue'er, then carefully lifted his own cup and took a delicate sip of the tea.

After taking a sip, Lu Chen spoke again, "Miss Murong, may I ask what brings you to see me this time?"

Upon hearing this question, Murong Xue'er smiled wryly, then asked, "Must I have serious business to come see the Prince?"

Lu Chen gazed into Murong Xue'er's clear eyes and said with a smile, "Of course not. Miss Murong is welcome in the Prince's Mansion at any time, however..."

At this point, Lu Chen paused, then continued, "However, as an emissary of Great Jue, being too close to me may affect your reputation if word of it gets back to Great Jue."

Murong Xue'er said, "I didn't realize the Prince cared for me so much."

"But rest assured, Prince, I wore a veil when I came to the North Prince Mansion, and very few people know about it."

Lu Chen said, "Then I am relieved."

At this time, Murong Xue'er took the initiative to say, "Prince, I came to see you because the Empress has summoned me to return for a debriefing. Therefore, I wanted to admire your calligraphy once more before I leave North Country. Is that possible?"

Hearing Murong Xue'er's words, Lu Chen was momentarily startled, then he asked, "Return to Great Yue for debriefing?"

"Will you come back to North Country?"

Lu Chen thought, this woman had finally gotten close to him, and without obtaining any secrets of the North Prince Mansion, was she willing to leave just like that?

Murong Xue'er answered, "I am not sure about that; it will depend on Her Majesty's wishes."

Lu Chen continued to inquire, "Now that your Virgin Mark is gone, if you go back and the Yue Emperor inspects you, won't she find out that you lost your virginity in North Country?"

As soon as Lu Chen finished speaking, Murong Xue'er immediately sighed and pretended to worry, "I have also been concerned about this matter for the past few days."

"If the Empress finds out I've lost my virginity, she might never let me return to North Country or might even dispose of me. The Empress detests impurity the most."

Lu Chen said with a laugh, "Actually, I have an idea that might help you deceive the Yue Emperor."

Murong Xue'er said, "Please tell me, Prince, what is it?"

Lu Chen replied, "It's quite simple. Since the Virgin Mark is gone, why not just paint another one?"

"This..." Murong Xue'er hesitated to say more.

It must be said, Lu Chen's imagination was quite rich. The Virgin Mark wasn't something simply painted on; if it were, a bath would wash it away. Could it be that she hadn't bathed since returning to Great Jue?

Murong Xue'er said, "Prince really has a way with words. A painted Virgin Mark cannot even touch water. Does the Prince expect me not to bathe for the entire time I am back in Great Jue?"

Lu Chen said, "Miss Murong misunderstands, although the Virgin Mark is painted on, I have special ways to ensure it does not fade easily."

"Does Miss Murong remember when at Hundred Flowers Tower last time, the words I wrote on Miss Murong's body didn't blur despite Miss Murong being drenched in sweat?"

Upon hearing this, Murong Xue'er realized what he meant. After Lu Chen left the Hundred Flowers Tower last time, she immediately asked her maidservant to bring hot water for bathing, yet the words Lu Chen wrote on her body took great effort to wash off.

At this moment, Lu Chen said, "Although I can paint the Virgin Mark, I have forgotten what it looks like; does Miss Murong still remember it?"

"If Miss Murong has also forgotten, then this matter becomes troublesome."

Murong Xue'er said, "I naturally remember the Virgin Mark. Please provide me with paper and brush, and I can draw it right now."

No sooner had Murong Xue'er finished speaking than Lu Chen raised his hand and performed an act of telekinesis, and in the next moment, a full set of paper, ink, brush, and inkstone flew to the table in front of them from inside the study.

Murong Xue'er did not hesitate and picked up the brush to begin drawing the Virgin Mark on the pure white paper.

Murong Xue'er was very aware that, although the Yue Emperor meant for her to seduce the North Prince with her body and tease out the secrets of the North Prince Mansion, she knew if she lost her virginity, the Yue Emperor would certainly feel disgust towards her.

Having been with the Yue Emperor since she was young, how could she not know what kind of person the Yue Emperor was.

Therefore, she truly hoped that Lu Chen could paint a convincing Virgin Mark, one that could deceive the Yue Emperor. In doing so, she could use her beauty to tempt Lu Chen to complete her mission without alienating the Yue Emperor.

In the future, when she returned to Great Yue, she would still be able to receive the Emperor's favor.

It just wasn't certain if the Virgin Mark Lu Chen painted could fool the Yue Emperor.

Murong Xue'er quickly finished drawing the Virgin Mark on paper.

Seeing the Virgin Mark on the paper, Lu Chen said with a smile to Murong Xue'er, "Miss Murong, please disrobe, and I will paint the Virgin Mark on you now."

Murong Xue'er did not hesitate either, starting to undress in front of Lu Chen, as they had already been intimate before, and he had seen all of her; she felt indifferent about it now.

She came today intending to use her body to extract information about the North Prince Mansion from Lu Chen. It wasn't just a matter of him looking; before long, Lu Chen would also be getting hands-on.

She was a woman of awareness, so she undressed with resolve and as Murong Xue'er's gown slipped from her shoulders, revealing her white undergarments gradually parting, her flat and fair belly appeared before Lu Chen.

Seeing Murong Xue'er's jade-like body, Lu Chen, who was originally calm, instantly stirred.

At this moment, Murong Xue'er made her way to the bed and slowly lay down, "Prince, you have the trouble now."

Lu Chen immediately said, "It's no trouble at all."

As the words fell, Lu Chen picked up the brush, dipped it in ink, and after scanning the exquisite view before him, he began to move the brush infused with his spiritual power slowly across Murong Xue'er's belly.

Lu Chen was earnest with every stroke, and it wasn't long before Murong Xue'er's Virgin Mark reappeared on her belly—albeit a painted one, serving no real purpose.

Chapter 532: Are You Ready with the Reward_1

After finishing the Virgin Mark, Lu Chen's hand gently caressed the snow-white and smooth skin in front of him, and Murong Xue'er suddenly felt a warm current enter her body, causing her heart to feel incredibly agitated.

When Lu Chen was using the brush to paint the Virgin Mark, her body had already been stimulated, but she had been holding herself together. She hadn't expected that just having Lu Chen paint on her flesh would provoke such a strange reaction.

At this moment, Lu Chen spoke up, "Miss Murong, it's finished. Take a look and see if it resembles the original. If it doesn't, I can redraw it."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Murong Xue'er slowly propped herself up and looked towards her abdomen.

The moment she looked, her gaze didn't fall on her lower abdomen but instead lingered on Lu Chen. Seeing something unusual about Lu Chen, Murong Xue'er chuckled softly and then teased, "Prince, it seems your mind wasn't fully on the painting just now, was it?"

Hearing this, Lu Chen replied indifferently, "Regardless of whether my mind was on the painting or not, I have finished. You should check if it resembles the original first."

Murong Xue'er then redirected her gaze back to her lower abdomen, and at that moment, she saw that the Virgin Mark had been completely restored, looking no different from the original one.

However, there was one significant problem...

Murong Xue'er then said, "Your painting is very similar indeed, Prince, it's just..."

Lu Chen asked, "Just what?"

Murong Xue'er continued, "The Virgin Mark is supposed to be red, but the one drawn with ink is black."

Lu Chen said with a smile, "That's simple. The day before you return to the Great Jue Dynasty, I'll have someone prepare some red pigment, and then I can repaint it for you."

Hearing this, Murong Xue'er said, "Then I'll have to trouble you, Prince."

As she spoke, Murong Xue'er's gaze once again swept across Lu Chen's form. "Prince, I would like to admire your calligraphy again. I wonder..."

Before Murong Xue'er could finish, Lu Chen directly tossed the brush aside and then pressed down on her, looming over her formidably.

The corners of Lu Chen's mouth curved slightly, revealing a hint of a wicked smile, "Miss Murong, to see my writing, you need to provide some compensation. I wonder if you are ready to offer it."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, how could Murong Xue'er not understand what he was implying? She raised her delicate hand to cover her mouth, smiling playfully, "Since I've come to the Prince myself, naturally I am prepared with compensation. Please, take whatever you desire as payment."

Murong Xue'er thought to herself that she would first accommodate Lu Chen, and when he was completely spent, she would then start asking him some questions, seeking to draw some information out of him.

If she were to ask directly now, it would easily arouse Lu Chen's suspicions, and it was unlikely to yield any crucial information either.

When Lu Chen was spent, his vigilance would diminish, and that would be the time to ask him questions, which he might not notice then.

It was clear that Murong Xue'er had yet to realize the true extent of Lu Chen's power. Although she had felt a portion of his strength during their last encounter at the Hundred Flowers Tower, she thought that was his limit and she was still underestimating him.

Seeing Murong Xue'er still smiling, completely unaware of the gravity of the situation, Lu Chen slowly undressed while saying with a laugh, "Since Miss Murong has prepared the compensation, I won't be courteous. I just hope you won't regret it later."

Murong Xue'er replied, "Having the chance to observe the Prince's writing is an honor for me. How could I feel at a loss?"

As Murong Xue'er's voice faded, Lu Chen bent down and captured her red lips with his own.

Unlike last time at the Hundred Flowers Tower, this time Lu Chen used the Rejuvenating Skill to help heal Murong Xue'er, planning to foster a deep relationship with her, ideally until the next morning.

He had not healed Murong Xue'er at the Hundred Flowers Tower previously because he was afraid she would reveal his abilities. Now that Murong Xue'er had drunk the Dragon and Phoenix Tea, he no longer feared her intentionally exposing his powers, and this time he used the Rejuvenating Skill right from the start.

With the continuous use of the Rejuvenating Skill, the healing wasn't particularly noticeable. Murong Xue'er might even be unaware of her body being healed throughout the process, so she would feel no discomfort afterward.

As Lu Chen's kisses persisted, Murong Xue'er was becoming somewhat dazed. She enjoyed the sensation and thought to herself that since she had already lost her virginity, she might as well relax and enjoy it as long as she could awaken quickly afterward.

With this thought in mind, Murong Xue'er began to actively reciprocate Lu Chen's kisses, raising her long jade arms to wrap around his sturdy waist.

Both had now completely let go of any thoughts, pursuing only the purest of pleasures.

After an unknown length of time, Murong Xue'er was thoroughly lost, completely forgetting the purpose of her visit.

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Meanwhile.

Within Great Sum territory.

Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain almost simultaneously experienced odd phenomena, two beams of light shooting from these mighty forces into the sky, followed by billowing dark clouds, as if the heavens were about to collapse.

Witnessing this scene, the disciples of Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain were ecstatic, believing it was their ancient ancestor breaking through to the Heavenly Human Realm.

Although Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain had kept a low profile recently, their disciples were often seen traversing the Great Sum territory, well aware of events occurring within it.

According to their intelligence, the appearance of light pillars and strange occurrences typically signified the birth of a Celestial Realm powerhouse.

After the phenomenon in the North Country, Zhuge Zhongguang had his breakthrough to the Celestial Realm.

Following the odd occurrence at the Imperial Palace, it was rumored in the Capital City that someone from the Sum Emperor's royal family had reached the Celestial Realm.

Now, the same phenomena have appeared on their own turf, meaning that they, too, supposedly had a Celestial Realm powerhouse to preside over them.

The idea that their Sect Forces had a Celestial Realm powerhouse at their helm made the disciples restless, having held back for far too long.

Ever since the Mysterious Moon Palace boasted a Celestial Realm powerhouse, all the Sect Forces within the Great Sum territory had been incredibly cautious, fearing to provoke Mysterious Moon Palace. For years, their secular forces had been oppressed by Mysterious Moon Palace, and in the end, they could only suffer in silence.

But now, with a Celestial Realm powerhouse of their own, they would no longer fear the disciples of Mysterious Moon Palace.

The news of phenomena at Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain spread to many forces overnight. Not only the disciples from these two mountains, but other forces as well, mistakenly thought that these two Sect Forces now simultaneously possessed Celestial Realm powerhouses.

People couldn't help but be curious. It had been years since the Celestial Realm powerhouse of Mysterious Moon Palace had appeared, with no others emerging in the meantime. How come since Zhuge Zhongguang attained Celestial Realm status, so many others had suddenly become Celestial Realm powerhouses?

Chapter 533: North Prince, that bastard, is a real beast!_1

Lu Chen still had no idea what had happened on Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain, as all his focus was now on Murong Xue'er, trying to make her fall into his trap.

At this point, Murong Xue'er had completely fallen from grace. Her mind was a blank slate, having given up even the thought of thinking.

It wasn't until the next morning when she came to her senses that she realized it was already the next day and she had not completed her mission.

Originally, she had intended to seduce Lu Chen in order to probe into the secrets of the North Prince Mansion, but she had spent all night immersed in that matter.

No... that wasn't it.

It wasn't because she had been immersed in that matter all night, but because she simply had no opportunity to ask Lu Chen about the secrets of the North Prince Mansion.

That guy, Lu Chen, had not given her any time to breathe, her mind was always in a haze; she was in no state to think about probing the secrets of the North Prince Mansion.

At this thought, Murong Xue'er clenched her teeth. The North Prince was such a bastard, a real beast!

After cursing Lu Chen in her heart, Murong Xue'er looked down at her body and saw, just like that last time at the Hundred Flowers Tower, it was covered in writing.

Murong Xue'er was somewhat taken aback; the beast had managed to do those things to her while also covering her body with so much writing. She seemed completely oblivious when he was writing on her.

She wasn't sure if he wrote all that while he was misbehaving last night or after she had fallen asleep.

But none of that mattered now.

Murong Xue'er scanned the room, Lu Chen was nowhere to be seen, and she was alone in the resting room.

Murong Xue'er felt a small surge of emotion. It seemed that in the eyes of the North Prince, she had truly become nothing more than a concubine for him to vent his desires on.

Used and discarded, he had vanished without a trace.

Murong Xue'er sighed. She would have to return to report for her duty soon and wondered if she could complete part of her mission before going back to Great Jue.

If she could not unearth anything before her return, she would likely be punished by the Empress. After all, she had been in the North Country for so long without bringing back any information, the Empress would surely consider her incompetent.

While Murong Xue'er was sighing, a figure suddenly appeared in the room. Seeing Lu Chen reappear, Murong Xue'er finally relaxed, thinking this asshole at least knew to come back; she had thought he had left for good after taking advantage of her.

Lu Chen gave Murong Xue'er a quick glance and with a smile said, "Miss Murong, what do you think of my handwriting?"

Hearing this question, Murong Xue'er was irritated, but she still smiled at Lu Chen, "Your Highness, your words are as majestic as a dragon, strong and upright."

Lu Chen said, "Thank you for the compliment, Miss Murong."

At this, Lu Chen asked, "Miss Murong must be hungry by now. I have had some food prepared. Why not eat something before you go?"

Go? Hearing these words from Lu Chen, a surge of anger welled up inside Murong Xue'er.

She had come to uncover the secrets of the North Prince Mansion and instead, had been consumed by Lu Chen for a whole day and night without finding out anything, and now she was just supposed to leave?

She suddenly felt incredibly shortchanged.

Murong Xue'er quickly replied, "No need, I still have important matters to attend to, thank you for your kindness, Your Highness."

As she spoke, Murong Xue'er got up to get dressed. Right now, she felt particularly dirty and needed to hurry back for a bath to wash away all the filth from her body.

Seeing Murong Xue'er getting dressed, Lu Chen didn't try to keep her. Instead, he reminded her, "Before Miss Murong returns to Great Jue to report for duty, come to the Prince's Mansion once more. I will make sure to restore your Virgin Mark."

Murong Xue'er replied indifferently, "Then I shall trouble you, Your Highness."

With that, Murong Xue'er fastened her sash and then walked towards the door of the resting room, saying, "Your Highness, unless there is anything else, I will be leaving for today."

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Lu Chen said, "Good, I will have someone take you there."

Afterward, Lu Chen ordered the maids to prepare a carriage and used it to send Murong Xue'er back to the Great Jue Mansion.

Upon returning to the mansion, Murong Xue'er quickly had someone bring hot water for a bath. As she scrubbed her body, she exercised her internal energy to expel the impurities from within.

At this moment, her mind replayed the events of the previous night. Although she had been almost incapable of coherent thought then, the memories of those sensations lingered in her mind.

Murong Xue'er felt puzzled. As a grandmaster, how could she lack all self-control, completely led by Lu Chen's whims?

This simply wouldn't do. If she were to lose control like this each time she visited the North Prince, how would she gather intelligence? How could she fulfill her mission?

Yet, judging from last night's events, as soon as she was in Lu Chen's bed, she completely lost the initiative, her actions no longer her own to decide.

That beast of a North Prince, so adept at handling women—she had already experienced it once at the Hundred Flowers Tower, and now again last night, she would no longer underestimate the North Prince.

Murong Xue'er fell into deep thought, planning that the next time she saw Lu Chen, she would try to obtain the information she wanted while still clear-minded and not so easily give her body away again. She had to find a way to keep Lu Chen on the hook.

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Half a month later.

In the North Country, Hall of Political Affairs.

The atmosphere in the hall today was tense. The officials had been silent for a long time, and even Lu Chen, the Prince, sat on his throne in contemplation.

After a while, Lu Chen finally broke the silence, "It seems it's time for me to tell you all the truth."

At these words, the officials were momentarily startled.

The truth? What truth?

Had the Prince deceived them about something?

Why would the Prince need to deceive them without cause?

As the court officials puzzled over the meaning of Lu Chen's words, he continued, "Just as the recent rumors among the populace, Zhuge Zhongguang has indeed not achieved a breakthrough into the Heavenly Human Realm. His current realm is that of the Pseudo-Celestial Realm."

As soon as this was said, everyone in the hall was stunned.

Zhuge Zhongguang hadn't broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm?

So the rumors outside were true. No wonder the North Prince had not marched south to vie for the throne; the North Country did not, in fact, have a Celestial-level expert in residence.

Does this mean that when the North Prince announced Zhuge Zhongguang's alleged breakthrough, it was simply a ruse to intimidate Great Sum?

Recently, news of individuals breaking through to the Heavenly Human Realm in Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain had spread throughout Great Sum and several other empires.

But soon, there were messages claiming that the elders of Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain had not achieved a breakthrough to the Heavenly Human Realm at all. They merely possessed the opportunity to make the breakthrough and still needed to pass the trials of the Heavenly Dao.

Once this news was disseminated, people quickly associated it with the anomalies observed in the North Country and the Imperial Palace of Great Sum.

If the elders from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain hadn't broken through, could it be that neither had Zhuge Zhongguang of the North Country nor that member of the Great Sum imperial family?

This news spread rapidly; in just a few days, it was common talk among the people of the North Country that Zhuge Zhongguang had not truly reached the Heavenly Human Realm.

Lu Chen was no fool; he had already guessed who was behind the spread of this information.

Seeing that the officials of the North Country were doubting the authenticity of the news, Lu Chen decided not to pretend any longer and directly disclosed that Zhuge Zhongguang had not achieved the breakthrough.

Chapter 534: Time to Show Off Muscles_1

Since Lu Chen dared to speak out, he obviously wasn't afraid of the consequences that the news might bring; after all, the North Country now truly had a Celestial Boundary Powerhouse in residence.

More and more people now had the opportunity to break through to the Heavenly Human Realm, and it was obvious that Zhuge Zhongguang's situation could no longer be concealed. Someone in the Great Sum Imperial Palace had embarked on the Path of Unity, and the old ancestors from both Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain had also begun this path.

Unless they were fools, there was no way they couldn't guess what Zhuge Zhongguang's current situation was.

Continuing to hide it was nothing more than deceiving their own people.

Lu Chen initially claimed that Zhuge Zhongguang had broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm in order to strategically deceive potential enemies, not their own people.

Now that Zhuge Zhongguang's situation was about to be exposed, there was no further need for secrecy.

After hearing Lu Chen's words, it took a while for the officials in the great hall to recover their senses.

If North Country were to lose a Celestial Boundary Powerhouse, it would no longer be able to deter Great Sum, nor the Seigniors within its borders; maybe it wouldn't be long before a civil war would erupt in Great Sum.

Not to mention, North Country could likely fall into crisis itself.

During this period, other dynasties had already perceived the threat that a future North Country could pose. The main reason they had not dared to do anything against North Country was because they believed it had a Celestial Boundary Powerhouse in place.

If they were to learn that North Country didn't have a Celestial Boundary Powerhouse, they would probably think of eliminating the major threat of North Country immediately.

At this point, Li Rui stood up and said, "Prince, we cannot let the other dynasties, especially Great Wu Kingdom, know about this."

Lu Chen indifferently said, "It can no longer be concealed. Now that Grandmasters who have stepped onto the Path of Unity appear in Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain, other dynasties will sooner or later guess that North Country is bluffing."

"Instead of thinking about how to continue hiding it, we might as well start preparing early for the trouble that is likely to come."

Hearing this, Zhuge Zhongguang, who was seated in front of the officials, spoke up, "The Prince is right, venerable one; there is indeed no need to continue hiding the fact that I have not broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm."

"If we keep hiding it, it might lead some forces to believe that today's North Country is strong on the outside but weak on the inside, and can only deter other forces with lies."

In Zhuge Zhongguang's view, North Country had already passed its most difficult time.

The reason they had gone to great lengths to hint that Zhuge Zhongguang had broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm was mainly out of fear that, after dealing with the Aristocratic Families, the Sum Emperor would immediately lead his army north to attack North Country; at that time, North Country was not ready for a war with the court, so they had to resort to this method to deter the Great Sum court.

Now with the various Seigniors in the Great Sum court getting restless, and the succession crisis reaching a fever pitch, the Sum Emperor, before thinking of attacking North Country, had first to subdue the other Seigniors within Great Sum, and then suppress the succession crisis.

With so much on the Sum Emperor's plate, there was no time to deal with North Country; as for whether the other dynasties would take action against North Country at this time, Zhuge Zhongguang wasn't worried at all.

On the contrary, Zhuge Zhongguang believed that during this time when the Sum Emperor was too preoccupied to handle North Country, North Country should have a few confrontations with potential hostile forces.

Only by truly drawing one's sword could they let the others realize what North Country's strength really entailed.

North Country has developed so rapidly that it can no longer be concealed; it is impossible to continue living in a corner of the world, so the best approach is to show off muscle, to display one's own strength.

Moreover, even though he had not managed to break through the Heavenly Human Realm, North Country still had a Celestial Boundary Powerhouse in presence, so there was no need to worry about North Country not being able to match these hostile forces.

After hearing Zhuge Zhongguang's words, Lu Chen pondered for a moment, when Mu Changtian also stood up and said, "Prince, I believe the Great Scholar makes a lot of sense. Great Wu Kingdom was already planning to join forces with Great Jue to oppose Great Sum.

Once Great Wu finds out North Country doesn't have a Celestial Boundary Powerhouse in command, they might take the initiative to attack North Country, wishing to eliminate it directly, to prevent North Country from becoming a threat to Great Wu in the future."

"Even if we do not initiate the war, Great Wu is quite likely to wage war. Since this is the case, we should make preparations in advance."

Mu Changtian represented the soldiers from the North Country who had later joined the army. These soldiers were thirsty for achievements and honors, longing for military glory; hence, they were the faction most supportive of waging war.

The current military was also divided into two factions. One faction consisted of soldiers systematically summoned, who staunchly supported all of Lu Chen's decisions. The other faction was the radical group represented by Mu Changtian.

Upon hearing that the Great Scholar, Zhuge Zhongguang, intended to go to war, Mu Changtian was the happiest, because only then could they prove their worth and verify the combat capabilities of their army.

In the past, they had always been the defenders. For them, defending was much easier compared to taking the offensive.

Although they had defeated the Tianqi King's army last time, the soldiers from Mu Changtian's faction felt that their true fighting power had not been fully utilized. Therefore, they were eager for the North Country to wage war once again.

Lu Chen was clearly aware of this situation but was not concerned about the consequences this group of soldiers might bring; an army needed to have fiery blood with a majority of hawks. If all the soldiers in an army were doves, then what was the point of battling at all?

At that moment, Lu Chen said, "Starting today, the North Country enters a state of martial readiness. The border troops must stay alert to the situations at the Great Jue and the Great Wu borders at all times."

"If Great Wu and Great Jue decide to make a move against the North Country, then indeed, it's time for us to flex our muscles."

Upon hearing Lu Chen's declaration, the pro-war faction within the hall was extremely excited.

After the small morning court session ended, Lu Chen returned to his study and summoned all the generals of the North Country to further discuss military deployment.

By the time the military conference concluded, it was already midday.

It was then that a maid guarding the door entered the study and said to Lu Chen, "Prince, Miss Murong has visited."

Hearing this, Lu Chen was taken aback before asking, "Where is she now?"

The maid answered, "Miss Murong has already left. She said she would visit you when you are free, but she left a message for you. She said she would be returning to Great Jue in a few days to report back on her duties."

Lu Chen thought to himself that it seemed Murong Xue'er had come to bid him farewell and, incidentally, to gather some intelligence from him.

With that in mind, Lu Chen immediately said, "Send someone to the Great Jue Mansion. Tell Miss Murong that I will be free this afternoon and, if possible, she can come to see me then."

The maid said, "Yes, Prince."

After the maid had left, Lu Chen did not stay in the study any longer as it was time for lunch.

The afternoon.

The Eastern Newspaper Agency published an article about the Martial Arts Realm. For the first time, the article introduced the realm of Grandmaster at the Zenith, a realm lying below the Heavenly Human Realm but above that of a Grandmaster.

The news that Zhuge Zhongguang had not broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm spread rapidly in Yan County, and it was only now that people realized the Eastern Newspaper Agency and the official newspaper of the North Country had played a trick on the populace.

Both newspapers had announced Zhuge Zhongguang's breakthrough, but they never specified that he had reached the Heavenly Human Realm. Now, people suddenly discovered the existence of the Zenith Realm above the Grandmaster, feeling as though they had been hoodwinked.

Chapter 535: From now on, treat the Prince's Mansion as your own home_1

Following the Eastern Newspaper Agency's article on the Martial Arts Realm distinctions, nearly everyone in Yan County came to believe that the North Country didn't have anyone in the Celestial Realm and had always been bluffing.

For a time, spies from various countries were overjoyed, and they immediately relayed the news that Zhuge Zhongguang had not broken through to the Celestial Realm back to their respective forces or nations.

Murong Xue'er also read the article published by the Eastern Times at the first opportunity. Although she too felt that it might be true that the North Country lacked a Celestial Realm powerhouse, she couldn't shake the feeling that something was amiss.

Lately, indeed, many in the Great Xia Dynasty had been spreading the word that Zhuge Zhongguang had failed to break into the Celestial Realm and had only entered the Pseudo Celestial state, needing to pass some Heavenly Dao test to become a true Celestial.

Their evidence was that neither of the two old ancestors from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain had managed the breakthrough either.

It appeared that nobody from the Great Sum royal family had reached the Celestial Realm as well.

Facing the same phenomenon, and with three of them failing to break through to the Celestial Realm, by what reasoning could Zhuge Zhongguang have succeeded? Thus, more and more people doubted the authenticity of Zhuge Zhongguang's realm.

But those were still just rumors, and whether Zhuge Zhongguang had broken through was something people could only guess at.

Now the Eastern Times from the North Country had suddenly published an article on the classification of the Martial Arts Realm. Wasn't it telling the people that the previous report from the Eastern Times about Zhuge Zhongguang's breakthrough was just because he reached the Zenith Realm of a Grandmaster, and not the Celestial Realm?

Murong Xue'er was puzzled, for articles in the Eastern Times had to be reviewed by the North Prince Mansion, and the fact that this piece on the Martial Arts Realm distinctions was published meant it had been approved by the North Prince Mansion. Why would the North Prince Mansion release such material that seemed disadvantageous to the North Country?

Even if people harbored doubts about Zhuge Zhongguang's breakthrough to the Celestial Realm, as long as the North Prince Mansion didn't officially clarify the matter, people wouldn't dare to bet on it.

But now that the North Prince Mansion had allowed the Eastern Times to release the article on realm distinctions, weren't they indirectly telling people that Zhuge Zhongguang indeed hadn't become a true Celestial?

The North Prince couldn't be unaware of the impact this would have. For a country like the North Country, with its rapid growth, enormous potential, and immense threat, the moment it was without a Celestial to stand guard, other dynasties would never tolerate its continued existence.

For these reasons, Murong Xue'er felt even more that something was amiss. In her view, this article on the Martial Arts Realm distinctions shouldn't have appeared in the newspaper at all; the North Prince Mansion wouldn't have allowed the Eastern Newspaper Agency to publish such a thing.

For a moment, Murong Xue'er sensed the aroma of conspiracy.

Luckily, Lu Chen had asked her to come see him in the afternoon, which would provide her with an excellent opportunity to inquire. Perhaps she might uncover some intelligence about Zhuge Zhongguang.

The afternoon arrived.

Lu Chen was busy in his study, handling official documents. Since the news about Zhuge Zhongguang not being a Celestial was out, the North Country would soon face various challenges, so Lu Chen had to prepare in advance. The next few days were bound to be hectic for him.

As Lu Chen was immersed in his paperwork, the voice of a maid came through, "Prince, Miss Murong requests an audience."

Lu Chen put down his pen and stretched lazily before responding, "Let her in."

The next moment, the door to the study opened, and Murong Xue'er entered. Seeing her cool and stunningly beautiful face, the corners of Lu Chen's mouth lifted slightly.

In the past, whenever he was tired from dealing with documents in the study, it had been Wang Qingci who would come to ease his fatigue and help him relax.

Now that Wang Qingci was pregnant, she rarely visited the study, and it seemed that Murong Xue'er was the one who relieved his stress.

Whenever Lu Chen considered that Murong Xue'er was a high-ranking minister next to the Empress and was known as the Inner Palace Prime Minister, a conquering desire stirred in his heart.

To Lu Chen, identity was an asset. For instance, the identity of Chen Wanrong as Princess of the Defeated Country, the status of Wang Qingci as a Female Slave, or the title of Yelv Nanyan as a Prince's wife—all these identities were thrilling to him.

Upon seeing Lu Chen, Murong Xue'er greeted him politely, "This commoner pays respect to the North Prince!"

Lu Chen immediately walked over to her, took her arm, and said, "Miss Murong need not be so formal. In the future, when you come to the Prince's Mansion, consider it as your own home."

Upon hearing this, Murong Xue'er inwardly sneered. The North Prince truly regarded her as his concubine.

At this moment, Lu Chen asked, "Miss Murong has come to the Prince's Mansion this time, surely to have me restore the Virgin Mark, right?"

Murong Xue'er replied, "Indeed, I wonder if the Prince has prepared the pigment? I must return to Great Jue to report in a few days."

Lu Chen said, "I have had it prepared long ago. Rest assured, Miss Murong. Today I will fully restore your Virgin Mark, ensuring that once you return, the Yue Emperor will not detect anything."

Having said this, Lu Chen headed toward the rest area beside the study, speaking as he walked, "Please follow me, Miss Murong."

Watching the broad back of Lu Chen, Murong Xue'er hesitated for a moment, her mind instantly recalling what had happened in that rest area some time before.

Apprehension began to grow in Murong Xue'er's heart. She feared that in a moment's time, she might again forget her true concerns; this man was very skilled in dealing with women. Once she fell into his hands, it wasn't certain that she could remain lucid.

She had to find out the information she was seeking before Lu Chen did that sort of thing with her. With this thought, Murong Xue'er made up her mind that before she obtained the intelligence she sought, she absolutely could not let the North Prince touch her.

Afterward, Murong Xue'er followed Lu Chen into the rest area.

Entering the rest area, Lu Chen picked up the teapot from the table and poured Murong Xue'er a cup of tea, then asked, "Miss Murong, after you return this time, when will you come back to North Country again?"

Murong Xue'er answered, "I'm not certain; it depends on whether His Majesty is still angry with me."

Hearing Murong Xue'er's reply, Lu Chen said with a smile, "I would rather hope that the Yue Emperor continues to be angry with you; that way, you would return to North Country once more."

Murong Xue'er grinned and then said, "It seems the North Prince really does consider me your concubine."

Looking into Murong Xue'er's eyes, Lu Chen said, "Concubine? Miss Murong misunderstands; I have never regarded you as a concubine. In my eyes, Miss Murong can now be counted as my wife."

These words stunned Murong Xue'er.

Wife?

Did this man really think this way?

Laughing, Murong Xue'er said, "That may not be the case. If the Prince truly considered me your wife, why then would you have anything to hide from me?"

Murong Xue'er saw an opportunity; she could continue along this line of conversation and meanwhile take the chance to gather some information about Zhuge Zhongguang from Lu Chen.

Lu Chen asked, "Hide? Miss Murong, what do you believe I have concealed from you?"

At this, Lu Chen approached Murong Xue'er, and she immediately felt the pressure. She was very worried that Lu Chen would suddenly make a move on her.

If she didn't acquire the information she sought before Lu Chen made any moves, there was a high chance that she would, like last time, lose herself and then be unable to stay lucid afterward.

Just then, Lu Chen suddenly whispered into Murong Xue'er's ear, "Miss Murong, I know that you were sent by the Yue Emperor to approach me on purpose."

"Speak, whatever you want to know, I can tell you."

Chapter 536: Why is the Prince So Confident?_1

Murong Xue'er was about to return to the Great Jue, and Lu Chen had also decided to stop performing this charade with Murong Xue'er. When Murong Xue'er entered the study, he glanced at her favorability.

The favorability of Murong Xue'er towards him had already reached ninety-five; continuing the act was meaningless. It was better to be straightforward and lay his cards on the table.

Upon hearing Lu Chen's words, a jolt went through Murong Xue'er's heart. She had not expected Lu Chen to have always been so aware of her true purpose.

But then again, she herself was a favorite of the Empress, and suddenly she was sent to the North Country. Moreover, she had found a way to get close to the North Prince, and had so easily given herself to him. It was only natural that the North Prince would harbor some suspicions.

Although she realized her purpose might have been perceived by Lu Chen, Murong Xue'er still wanted to continue the pretense. She wasn't certain if Lu Chen was attempting to deceive her.

What if Lu Chen was bluffing? If she simply admitted it, wouldn't she be falling for his trick?

Being a person close to the Empress, she was quick-minded. Besides, Murong Xue'er had an exceptionally strong mental fortitude. She quickly steadied her mind and didn't seem nervous at all.

When ordinary people are exposed, they would likely become extremely flustered, yet Murong Xue'er maintained a calm demeanor and said, "Prince, are you doubting me?"

Lu Chen said, "It is not doubt; I am quite certain you are a spy sent by the Yue Emperor."

With a smile, Murong Xue'er said, "Since the Prince believes I am sent by the Emperor, why didn't you refuse my invitation from that night at the Hundred Flowers Tower? Aren't you afraid of leaking the secrets of the North Prince Mansion?"

At that moment, Lu Chen lifted his hand, cupping Murong Xue'er's chin, and while looking into her eyes, said, "You all have used the beauty trap; do you not know that I am a lecherous man?"

"Since a beauty has presented herself at my doorstep, why would I refuse?"

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Murong Xue'er gradually realized that something was off. Lu Chen probably had indeed discovered the reason for her presence in the North Country.

Nevertheless, she could not admit it, even if Lu Chen had already guessed.

Soon after, Murong Xue'er let out a soft sigh and said, "I simply admire the Prince, attracted by your heroic stance, never expecting to be misunderstood by you as having ulterior motives. Prince, you truly hurt my feelings."

"Shouldn't the Prince consider that with my sensitive identity, if I truly were sent by the Emperor to get close to you, wouldn't it have been immediately obvious to you? How could I possibly carry out the task of stealing secrets from the North Prince Mansion?"

Lu Chen chuckled to himself; Murong Xue'er was trying to reverse the psychological warfare on him.

Then Lu Chen wrapped an arm around Murong Xue'er's waist, pulling her close from behind. Murong Xue'er's delicate body trembled slightly. Initially, she had wanted to keep her distance from Lu Chen, but now that he had guessed her purpose in the North Country, she could not afford to act rashly.

If she were to act rashly at this moment, it would confirm her ulterior motives for coming to the North Country.

During this time, Lu Chen continued to whisper in Murong Xue'er's ear, "Xue'er, regardless of whether the Yue Emperor sent you or if you offered yourself to me, it doesn't matter to me. I just want you to stay, to become my woman."

At the sound of Lu Chen's endearment, Murong Xue'er felt a tremble in her heart and an overwhelming sense of numbness throughout her body.

As Murong Xue'er came back to her senses and was about to keep up her deception, Lu Chen continued, "I have no intention of continuing this charade with you. Not only do I know you were sent by the Yue Emperor, but I am also aware that the Yue Emperor sent you to find out about North Country's secret weapons and to ascertain whether Zhuge Zhongguang has broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm.

And your visit today is mainly to verify if the rumors among the common folk are true."

Murong Xue'er's eyebrows knitted slightly; she had thought that Lu Chen might at most guess that she had approached him to spy on the secrets of the North Prince Mansion. She had not expected him to know not only the mission she carried but even the purpose of her visit that day.

Was the North Prince's intelligence network so effective?

This was troublesome.

Now that her purpose had been exposed, she feared that staying in North Country was meaningless. Once back in Great Jue, the Yue Emperor probably wouldn't allow her to return to North Country.

She had not expected that her visit to North Country would turn out to be such a loss, not only did she lose her body, but she failed to complete her mission as well.

At this point, Murong Xue'er no longer intended to keep up her act. With a smile on her face, she said, "Now that the Prince has uncovered my purpose, what does the Prince plan to do with me? Do you intend to treat me as a spy and kill me directly?"

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen chuckled, then wrapped his arm around Murong Xue'er's slender waist and slowly moved his hand upward. While caressing her body, he said, "Kill? Why would I kill you? You're my woman. The biggest trait about me is that I treat my women particularly well. I don't have enough time to pamper you, so how could I possibly kill you?"

Murong Xue'er said, "Does the Prince mean you do not intend to let me return to Great Jue?"

"I am an envoy sent by Great Jue. If the Prince does not let me go back, I'm afraid it would be difficult to explain to the Empress."

Lu Chen replied indifferently, "I never said I wouldn't let you go back. Where you wish to go is your freedom."

Hearing what Lu Chen said, Murong Xue'er was somewhat incredulous. She continued, "Prince, you need to think carefully. If I return to Great Jue this time, I might never come back again."

Lu Chen said, "No, you will definitely come back."

Murong Xue'er asked curiously, "Why is the Prince so confident?"

Just as Murong Xue'er's voice fell, Lu Chen's hand wandered to a certain spot, "Because you already have me in your heart, you can't leave me."

Murong Xue'er was taken aback for a moment, then said, "Doesn't the Prince think he's being a bit too confident?"

"I admit the Prince is indeed extraordinary and indeed the type I like. But does the Prince really think that just because we have slept together a few times, I would completely submit to you?"

Lu Chen tightened his embrace around Murong Xue'er's waist and whispered in her ear, "I know you are a very independent woman, who won't rely on anyone and it's difficult for you to develop feelings for someone, but making women like you fall for me is what I'm best at."

"You can't feel it now because you are still in North Country, but once you return to Great Jue, you will quickly understand how agonizing it is to be away from me."

"Alright, let's not talk about that for now."

"Since you came to North Country on a mission, naturally you have to take back some useful intelligence, otherwise you would have trouble explaining yourself to the Yue Emperor."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Murong Xue'er was momentarily stunned.

From the North Prince's implication, was he intending to proactively disclose some intelligence about North Country to her?

However, why would the North Prince be so kind as to reveal intelligence to her? It was very likely he was giving her false intelligence to deceive Great Jue and to distract its attention.

While Murong Xue'er was pondering this, Lu Chen openly stated, "The rumors outside are true; Zhuge Zhongguang indeed has not broken through to the true Celestial Realm."

Murong Xue'er's heart skipped a beat, not expecting Lu Chen to actually divulge information about Zhuge Zhongguang to her.

Lu Chen continued, "As for the secret weapons of North Country, I can only tell you that these weapons are all made by North Country. North Country can have as many as it wants, and if a war breaks out between Great Jue and North Country, without a Celestial on Great Jue's side, its troops will only be defeated."

At that moment, Murong Xue'er laughed softly, then said, "Does the Prince tell me these things because he wishes to use me to send false intelligence to the Empress and Great Jue?"

Chapter 537: Turncoat Murong Xue'er_1

Seeing Murong Xue'er's disbelief in his words, Lu Chen said indifferently, "In a few days, Zhuge Zhongguang will make a public appearance, and then you will be able to confirm whether this information is true or false."

Murong Xue'er's brows furrowed slightly. The North Prince was willing to let Zhuge Zhongguang make a public appearance?

Could it be that Zhuge Zhongguang really hadn't broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm? Then why would the North Prince reveal at this time that Zhuge Zhongguang hadn't made the breakthrough?

Considering the situation of North Country, the country should be trying to conceal this matter, allowing other forces or dynasties to speculate whether Zhuge Zhongguang had broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm or not. Only with ambiguous intelligence would no power dare to harm North Country.

How could North Country simply because of some rumors, be unable to withstand the pressure, and then take the initiative to publish the news that Zhuge Zhongguang hadn't broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm? This all seemed very wrong to Murong Xue'er.

Just as Murong Xue'er was pondering what exactly the North Prince was scheming, Lu Chen suddenly tightened his embrace around Murong Xue'er's body, and then, pushing her slowly towards the bedside, he said while walking, "My dear Xue'er, since you're going back, I don't know when we will meet again. I must make sure you leave satisfied today."

Upon hearing these words, Murong Xue'er's heart skipped a beat. She seemed to foresee the torment she would receive later on.

After all, the North Prince had laid his cards on the table with her. There was no need for him to be friendly towards her any longer. He could do as he pleased, considering she was nothing but a spy from Great Jue.

At this moment, Lu Chen slowly placed Murong Xue'er on the bed before he pressed down on her. Murong Xue'er was about to say something, but Lu Chen instantly sealed her lips with his.

Murong Xue'er eventually gave up struggling. She could feel the strength of Lu Chen was immense, and she clearly understood that at this moment, any attempt to resist him would be futile, so it was better to submit to him.

Perhaps after Lu Chen had his way, he would release her. Although she was dispatched to North Country to gather intelligence for Great Jue, her official identity was as an envoy for Great Jue. As long as North Country didn't intend to directly fall out with Great Jue, the North Prince wouldn't threaten her life, so her safety was not an issue.

However, she feared that she would have to suffer some hardship afterward.

Soon Murong Xue'er became dazed from Lu Chen's kisses, eventually letting him do as he pleased.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Lu Chen suddenly lifted her body. Murong Xue'er's consciousness regained some clarity. Fearing that she might fall, she hastened to wrap her legs around Lu Chen's body.

Lu Chen walked to the desk and placed her body on it. Then, raising his hand, he summoned items through the air. The next moment, red pigment and a brush flew onto the table from within the study.

At this time, Murong Xue'er was lying stiff on the table, her eyes hazy as she looked at Lu Chen. Then she asked, "Huh... Prince... what are you doing?"

Lu Chen smiled and said, "Of course, I'm drawing the Virgin Mark. Didn't I tell you? I will definitely restore the Virgin Mark onto your body."

Hearing this, Murong Xue'er let out a feeble snort of derision and then said, "We've already reached this point, does the Prince think whether or not there's a Virgin Mark important?"

Lu Chen had already seen through her intention to get close to him. After she returned to report to the Empress on North Country's situation, the Yue Emperor would most likely not let her come back to North Country again.

Furthermore, her failure in this mission might lead the Yue Emperor to stop trusting her in the future. She had been in North Country for so long, gathering only such scant intelligence, and yet she had been so easily uncovered by the North Prince. The Empress would probably be very disappointed in her.

In the future, she might no longer be trusted and favored by the Empress, so whether or not there was a Virgin Mark was already irrelevant.

No sooner had Murong Xue'er finished her sentence than Lu Chen pressed down firmly, causing Murong Xue'er to utter "uh-ah" twice. Lu Chen picked up the brush, then spoke, "I'm a bit curious. If I remember correctly, all your family members, including your parents, were executed for opposing the Yue Emperor, which implicated the entire clan."

"Logically, the Yue Emperor should be your greatest enemy. Yet, I'm curious why you seem so loyal to her?"

Upon hearing this question, Murong Xue'er took two deep breaths, and then said, "My... Although my parents died because of the Yue Emperor, I was still young at the time. If it weren't for the Yue Emperor taking me into the palace to raise and protect me tenderly, I would not have lived to see today, nor would I have my current power. So, I should thank the Yue Emperor."

Hearing her words, Lu Chen smiled and said, "You're treating a thief as your parent, oh no, it should be as your mother."

Murong Xue'er continued, "My family has long passed away, and whatever I do, they won't come back to life. Does the Prince think I should avenge my family, only to repeat their mistakes and lose everything I have now?"

Lu Chen said with a smile, "Unfortunately, even if you don't avenge your family, if you fail in your mission this time and return to Great Yue, I fear the Yue Emperor won't value you anymore."

Murong Xue'er fell silent after hearing Lu Chen's words, as she was indeed worried about this.

It was then that Lu Chen began to draw on Murong Xue'er's lower abdomen. As he drew, he said, "How about this? Let's cooperate. When you go back this time, don't tell the Yue Emperor that I've uncovered this matter. Just report normally the intelligence you've gathered in North Country. This way, you can still be held in high esteem by the Yue Emperor.

How about it?"

Murong Xue'er let out a light chuckle, then said, "Is the Prince trying to make me betray His Majesty?"

Lu Chen responded with a smile, "From the moment you climbed onto my bed, you had already betrayed your Emperor."

Murong Xue'er fell silent again, emitting only a humming sound from her throat.

After a while, Lu Chen continued, "It's not that I am making you betray your Emperor. It's that you have no choice but to be with me."

"Your failure in this mission will inevitably lead to the Empress's disappointment in you. Moreover, being the daughter of a criminal, do you think you will ever be valued again?"

"There is another thing. I think you might be misunderstanding something. I want you to be mine, not because I value your identity or plan to use it for any purpose. I merely want you as a person; I desire your heart."

Murong Xue'er let out a soft snort at this point, saying, "Does the Prince really think I am a naive girl who will believe his sweet nothings?"

Lu Chen said, "Sweet nothings? I am quite sincere with my words."

At this point, the two fell into a prolonged silence. The sensations in Murong Xue'er's body prevented her from thinking rationally. She didn't know what to do now; betraying the Yue Emperor was difficult for her, as she had been raised by the Emperor since she was a child. She had no memory of her parents, no emotional attachment.

In her eyes, the Yue Emperor seemed more like her mother. The thought of betraying her felt incredibly difficult.

But...

Should she really return and reveal that she had been exposed, perhaps she would no longer be valued. Moreover, now that North Prince had taken her virginity, without her pure reputation, she would find it hard to continue staying by the Yue Emperor's side.

At this moment, Murong Xue'er was anxious. In her anxiety, her consciousness became more and more blurred, until she gradually sank into certain matters.

Who knows how much time passed, but eventually, Lu Chen finished restoring Murong Xue'er's virgin mark. He then picked up the completely limp Murong Xue'er and returned to the bed.

He was still very confident in himself, and he believed that Murong Xue'er would ultimately choose to cooperate with him.

Chapter 538: Murong Xue'er Leaves_1

Early morning.

A sliver of sunlight filtered into the resting room, shining on the bed with a dazzling brightness as if bathed in a holy light.

As Murong Xue'er drifted in and out of consciousness, she felt as if she had completely become Lu Chen's wife, involuntarily calling him "darling" under her breath.

It was at that moment that Murong Xue'er suddenly awoke with a start.

The next moment, she found it somewhat difficult to breathe.

Feeling the weight of the "bad thing" atop her, Murong Xue'er's emotions became complicated.

Her purpose had been uncovered; if she reported back truthfully this time, she might never see the North Prince again. The thought of the events from the previous day caused a flicker of reluctance to arise within her.

This was her first man. Even though she had given herself to him for the sake of her mission, she still developed some strange feelings for him in her heart.

Murong Xue'er's mind blanked for a moment.

What on earth was she daydreaming about? She had actually thought of staying by this man's side forever. How could she entertain such thoughts!

With this in mind, Murong Xue'er glanced at Lu Chen's head.

At that moment, Lu Chen was sprawled on top of her, his head resting on her fragrant shoulder.

Murong Xue'er couldn't help but raise her hand, wishing she could smack the "bad thing's" pig-headedness and take the opportunity to get rid of him.

Although that's what she thought, when her hand came down, it merely stroked Lu Chen's black hair.

Murong Xue'er sighed inwardly, whispering softly, "Goodbye..."

She had decided in her heart, once back, she would tell the Yue Emperor everything that happened in the North Country and never return to the North Country again.

She was genuinely worried that if she came to the North Country again, she might truly be completely conquered by this "bad thing."

The North Prince met all her criteria for choosing a man. Most importantly, the North Prince was extraordinarily skilled at handling women. She found it overwhelming and feared that, if her heart softened one day, she might genuinely betray the Empress and become the North Prince's wife.

Lu Chen, deep in sleep, seemed to hear Murong Xue'er's voice and shifted his head slightly.

Seeing Lu Chen's movement, Murong Xue'er hurriedly moved her jade hand from his head, pretending as if nothing had happened.

Just then, Lu Chen slowly lifted his upper body, his eyes bleary as he gazed at Murong Xue'er.

Murong Xue'er looked straight at Lu Chen, who smiled and said, "Xue'er, what have you decided? Will you cooperate with me?"

Murong Xue'er replied emotionlessly, "I can cooperate with you."

Although she had already resolved to report truthfully to the Yue Emperor, she was still in Yan County, still in the North Country. She definitely couldn't outright refuse the North Prince. She would pretend to agree for now and wait until she was back in Great Yu to discuss further, to avoid the North Prince using any measures to forcibly keep her.

Something about the atmosphere in the North Country felt amiss; Murong Xue'er couldn't quite grasp what the North Country was planning next. Perhaps the North Prince would take a wild notion to become enemies with Great Yu and detain her, an emissary of significant status.

Stabilizing the North Prince first was always a no-fault approach.

Seeing Murong Xue'er's agreement, Lu Chen smiled slightly and then said, "Then I will wait for you here in the North Country for your return. I believe we will meet again soon."

Watching Lu Chen's smile, Murong Xue'er thought to herself, "Never again."

Murong Xue'er raised her hand and pushed against Lu Chen's chest, "Prince, it is time for you to get up."

Lu Chen said with a smile, "Thinking of you leaving the North Country makes it hard for me to let go. How about you stay with me for one more day?"

Upon hearing this, Murong Xue'er's complexion instantly turned pallid. Although she didn't feel any discomfort, she detested the thought of her body being under someone else's control.

Furthermore, if she continued like this, she might indeed fall from grace. Her willpower, she distinctly sensed, was faltering.

Murong Xue'er hastily said, "Prince, please show some self-respect!"

Lu Chen, however, did not heed Murong Xue'er's words. He seized her wrists and pushed them to either side of her head before leaning down to capture her lips once more.

"Mmmmm..."

Murong Xue'er cursed inwardly, calling him a bastard and a beast!

...

After what seemed like ages, Lu Chen finally let Murong Xue'er leave the North Prince Mansion.

As Murong Xue'er returned, her steps felt weightless, her mind still hadn't cleared.

After stepping out of the North Prince Mansion, Murong Xue'er turned for another look at the mansion's plaque. With myriad thoughts racing through her mind, she could not bring herself to board the carriage that awaited her.

After a while, the coachman asked, "Lord Murong, is there something else you need?"

Only then did Murong Xue'er snap back to reality, and turning, she boarded the carriage, "Nothing, let's go."

On the way back to the estate, the recent events replayed incessantly in her mind, leaving a hollow sensation in her heart. She could not pinpoint the feeling, but it suffocated her, making her breaths come hard.

Unconsciously, her hand moved to her lower abdomen, gently caressing it.

In a mutter, she said, "North Prince, I will always remember you, you bastard..."

...

A few days later, Murong Xue'er left Yan County, left North Country, and set out on her journey back to Great Jue.

Murong Xue'er was merely returning to Great Jue to report on her duties, but to some, this signaled that Great Jue might be planning some special maneuvers. Thus, they called back the envoy stationed in North Country.

Soon after Murong Xue'er's departure, Zhuge Zhongguang made a public appearance at the newly constructed academy in North Country, presiding over the opening ceremony. His appearance immediately drew the attention of spies from all the major forces.

The spies quickly realized that while Zhuge Zhongguang's aura was indeed powerful, it could not match that of a Celestial.

Even though most of the spies had never seen a Celestial, they knew that a being of such stature would possess devastating powers beyond comprehension, hence their aura would naturally be formidable, unlike Zhuge Zhongguang's.

The aura that emanated from Zhuge Zhongguang aligned more with what the Eastern Times reported—the Zenith Realm of a Grandmaster.

This led the major forces to more or less confirm that Zhuge Zhongguang was indeed not a Celestial and that North Country truly lacked a practitioner of the Heavenly Human Realm.

Soon, this news spread to every dynasty and faction.

Once the news broke out, certain powers began to stir restlessly. The threat from North Country was simply too great; if not eliminated, nobody could predict whether North Country might one day pose a threat to them.

As days went by, Lu Chen kept a close eye on the happenings within the various dynasties.

One day, as Lu Chen was in his study receiving a report from Qin Yushan, a soldier suddenly announced at the door, "Prince, troops from Great Yu City have arrived at the old city with an army of two hundred thousand."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen immediately set aside the intelligence report, a smile spreading across his face, "It has finally arrived!"

Turning to Qin Yushan, he continued, "That will be all for today. The Brocade Guard must continue to closely watch the Capital city."

Qin Yushan replied, "Yes, Prince, I shall take my leave."

After Qin Yushan departed, Lu Chen too quickly headed to the old city, to see the polar regions' army of two hundred thousand.

Chapter 539: The Eighth Child is Born_1

Lu Chen arrived at the old city and met the two Grandmasters he had been longing to see.

These two Grandmasters were dressed in white fur coats, their muscles bulging beneath the fabric, giving off a powerful aura.

Upon seeing Lu Chen approaching from a distance, the two quickly advanced towards him and, arriving in front of Lu Chen, immediately knelt down and said, "Subordinate Dongmen Feiyue, subordinate Song Xuelin, pay respect to Your Majesty! Long live the King, long live, long live forever!"

Hearing this, Lu Chen was taken aback for a moment, then he hurriedly said, "I am currently merely a Seignior within Great Sum, entitled to 'thousand years' only. Do not chant 'long live forever' in front of others, lest it be heard by those with ulterior motives."

Song Xuelin and Dongmen Feiyue instantly realized their mistake, and Song Xuelin immediately said, "Your Majesty, it was our lack of consideration. We are willing to accept punishment."

Lu Chen walked up to the two men and, with one hand on Song Xuelin's shoulder and the other on Dongmen Feiyue's, he quickly said, "Generals, please rise. You have just come from the polar regions and are unfamiliar with the situation in Great Sum; it is understandable. However, do be careful not to speak carelessly next time."

Dongmen Feiyue and Song Xuelin said in unison, "Yes, Your Majesty."

Then the two robust men got up, and at that moment, Lu Chen glanced at the two hundred thousand troops standing behind Song Xuelin and Dongmen Feiyue.

Compared to the soldiers recruited locally in North Country, these troops were more robust, and even more so than those of Great Yu City.

Lu Chen revealed a trace of a smile. With these two hundred thousand troops, North Country's military strength would once again climb a notch.

Of course, compared to these two hundred thousand troops, Lu Chen was actually more concerned about the one million population of the polar regions.

Lu Chen was quite curious about how the polar regions could sustain one million people because it was cold year-round, with only a few months of direct sunlight, and hardly any crops could be grown.

With this in mind, Lu Chen turned his gaze back to Song Xuelin and Dongmen Feiyue. "The climate of the polar regions is cold, and the environment is harsh. I am quite curious as to how the polar regions manage to sustain a population of one million people."

Upon hearing this question, Song Xuelin immediately replied, "Your Majesty, the polar regions are near the sea, and the fishing industry is very developed there, with inexhaustible fishery resources."

Lu Chen said, "I see."

Lu Chen thought to himself, no wonder they are able to sustain one million people; it is by relying on the sea for their livelihood.

Lu Chen continued, "North Country is currently in a period of development and needs a large population. I wonder if the commoners of the polar regions are willing to move south?"

Song Xuelin replied, "Your Majesty, the majority of the commoners in the polar regions are willing to move south. Although in the north they do not need to worry about not having enough to eat, it is exceedingly cold. The people of the polar regions have long wished to relocate southward, but due to many concerns, they have never taken that step."

Hearing this, Lu Chen felt reassured. Once the railway between Great Yu City and the polar regions was completed, it would be much easier for the people of the polar regions to migrate south, and they wouldn't have to worry about losing the land they had lived on for generations.

With this in mind, Lu Chen once again looked over Song Xuelin and Dongmen Feiyue, the two Grandmaster Military Generals, and then said, "Generals, you have undertaken a long and arduous journey to Yan County. I have already arranged for a military camp for you and the two hundred thousand troops behind you. Go and get acquainted with the new environment."

Upon hearing this, both men saluted and said in unison, "Yes, Your Majesty!"

Then, led by North Country soldiers, Dongmen Feiyue and Song Xuelin, along with the two hundred thousand troops from the polar regions went to the military camp.

Just at that moment, a guard from the Prince's Mansion arrived on horseback in front of Lu Chen, "Prince, Lady Wang is about to give birth."

Hearing this, Lu Chen immediately entered the carriage he had arrived in, and then said to the driver of the Prince's Mansion, "Back to the Prince's Mansion."

For Lu Chen, his child was more important. He was very eager to know what kind of surprise this child would bring him.

Before long, Lu Chen returned to the North Prince Mansion. Just as he entered, he saw a maid waiting at the entrance. Upon seeing Lu Chen come in, the maid hurriedly said, "Prince, the situation with Lady Wang is not looking good."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen didn't say another word and leaped up immediately, using his Qinggong to swiftly jump into Wang Qingci's courtyard, which by then was already crowded with people.

Seeing Lu Chen arrive, the crowd didn't say much but quickly made way for him to enter.

When Lu Chen entered the room, Chu Yuqin was transferring her skill to Wang Qingci to alleviate her pain. Upon seeing Lu Chen, Chu Yuqin quickly said, "Chen'er, come over here and look; I don't know what happened, but her skill flow suddenly met with resistance. If this continues, both the child and the adult will be in danger."

Although Chu Yuqin usually disapproved of Wang Qingci, whom she saw as nothing but a bitch who did nothing but cling to and drain Lu Chen, Wang Qingci was still Lu Chen's wife and concubine, and moreover, she was carrying Lu Chen's child.

At this moment, Chu Yuqin put aside all grievances.

Lu Chen hurried to the bedside, glanced at Wang Qingci, who had her eyes closed, sweat beading and dripping unceasingly from her forehead, her appearance one of extreme pain.

She had her eyes closed, and although she vaguely knew Lu Chen had returned, she still couldn't open her eyes.

Without another word, Lu Chen immediately took Wang Qingci's jade-like hand and infused his spiritual power into her body, using the Rejuvenating Skill to check her condition.

Once the spiritual power entered Wang Qingci's body, she immediately felt much more comfortable, prompting Chu Yuqin to yield her position willingly.

Lu Chen then sat on the stool Chu Yuqin had just vacated, and while treating Wang Qingci, he checked on her condition.

Soon, Lu Chen discovered why Wang Qingci was in such discomfort. It turned out that the skill within her body had been absorbed by the child in her womb. However, the child could not transform those skills; as they accumulated inside her belly and could not circulate, the buildup became more and more severe, affecting both child and mother.

Realizing the state of Wang Qingci, Lu Chen chuckled and then said to her belly, "You little rascal, you're thinking of becoming a peerless warrior even before you come out, huh? Even siphoning your mother's skill."

As he spoke, Lu Chen used the Rejuvenating Skill to unblock Wang Qingci's meridians, and before long, her skill flow was smooth once again.

Seeing Wang Qingci's brow seem to relax, Chu Yuqin asked curiously, "Chen'er, what happened to her just now?"

Lu Chen replied simply, "The child inside was absorbing her skill, causing her to almost lapse into demonic deviation."

Chu Yuqin was somewhat surprised. The child hadn't even been born yet and was already absorbing the mother's skill; could it be that the child would grow up to be a Martial Arts prodigy?

By then, Wang Qingci, who had been in too much pain to open her eyes, finally opened them. Her hair, wet from sweat, clung to her cheeks, and Lu Chen raised his other hand to help her push the strands aside.

Wang Qingci, with a smile, said, "Thank you, Prince. If it were not for your timely arrival, I might have already lost my life."

Although Wang Qingci appeared extremely weakened, her smile still managed to be incredibly enticing.

Lu Chen smiled back and then said, "Alright, don't talk now; prepare yourself, the child is about to be born."

Wang Qingci didn't speak anymore, and not long after, the cry of a child could be heard in the room.

While the midwives were cleaning the child, Lu Chen continued to treat Wang Qingci to help her recuperate.

Chu Yuqin reminded, "Chen'er, have you thought of a name for the child?"

Lu Chen replied, "Mm, I've thought about it for a long time, call him Lu Hongzhi."

Hearing Lu Chen's answer, Wang Qingci murmured, "Hongzhi...Hongzhi... what a pity... it's a boy..."

Chapter 540: Black Dragon Country_1

Although Lu Chen had previously told Wang Qingci that he treated all his children equally, regardless of whether they were his wife's or his concubine's children, they would all enjoy nearly the same resources, barring inheritance rights.

But in Wang Qingci's eyes, a girl would be better. Being in the royal family, there were many inevitable matters, and she didn't want her own child to get dragged into certain struggles.

To her dismay, Lu Chen even named their child Lu Hongzhi...

What if, when her child grew up, he started having some inappropriate thoughts because of the name his father had chosen for him?

At this thought, Wang Qingci became exceedingly worried.

While Wang Qingci was contemplating this, Lu Chen spoke up and continued, "Qingci, it seems you're not satisfied with the name? If you are not, just say it, and I will think of another."

Wang Qingci hurriedly replied, "No need, Prince, the name is quite good."

After all, Lu Chen was the Prince, and once the words had been spoken, how could he take them back?

At that moment, the midwife came over, holding the baby and handed him to Lu Chen.

After Lu Chen took the baby, he first used his spiritual power to enhance the child's resistance, wrapping the baby with spiritual power, and then placed him on the bed.

By now, Wang Qingci had mostly recovered, she propped herself up to take a glance at the child on the bed.

Wang Qingci sighed softly; truth be told, she still wasn't prepared to be a mother. It was all the fault of that scoundrel, the North Prince, who had insisted on getting her pregnant.

But the child had already been born, and it was no use regretting it now.

Wang Qingci reached out and gently touched Lu Hongzhi's little face, then she said, "Zhi'er, you have really put your mother through so much."

Although she said this, a smile appeared on Wang Qingci's face, her smile tinged with a touch of maternal warmth. Ever since she became pregnant, her personality had changed a lot; she was no longer as tumultuous as before.

At this time, Wang Qingci picked up Lu Hongzhi and then said to the Prince, "Prince, I am alright now, you should go attend to your matters."

Wang Qingci was also aware of the complicated situation in the North Country, and with Lu Chen as its leader, he had many matters to attend to; she didn't want to keep him for too long.

Lu Chen said, "Alright, rest well today."

"I will come to see you again tonight."

With these words, Lu Chen got up and left the birthing room.

Once Lu Chen had gone, Wang Qingci's gaze fell on Chu Yuqin, and she said with a smile, "Thank you, Madam Chu, for saving my life today."

Hearing this, Chu Yuqin huffed lightly and then said, "If it weren't for Chen'er's child in your belly, I wouldn't have bothered saving you, bitch."

"Now that you have a child too, take good care of the baby once you've recovered; try not to bother Chen'er too much."

With that, Chu Yuqin also turned and left the room, and after Chu Yuqin had departed, Lu Chen's other wives and concubines flocked in, greeting Wang Qingci with warmth and concern.

Meanwhile.

Lu Chen headed to the study.

The first thing he did upon entering the study was to open the system and check the rewards it had given.

Given the nature of the system, it usually awarded population and military forces for having a child, so Lu Chen guessed he probably received population and military forces this time as well.

Just as Lu Chen was thinking this, he suddenly froze.

[Congratulations to the host for having a child. You've been rewarded with one Celestial realm warrior, one hundred thousand Black Dragon Guards, and an additional two million people.]

[The Black Dragon Guards are currently located in the Black Dragon Country to the west of the Great Jue. The host can issue one command to the Black Dragon Country.]

"Heavenly... Heavenly Human Realm?"

Lu Chen felt somewhat incredulous. Although he knew that as his understanding of this world deepened, he would come into contact with increasingly powerful figures, and martial artists of the Master Realm would become less valuable.

After all, many strong individuals never left their seclusion in the deep mountains and ancient forests, so their existence was unknown to him.

Lu Chen had simply not anticipated that by receiving rewards, he could actually obtain the service of warriors from the Heavenly Human Realm—a realm of celestial beings.

The Heavenly Human Realm was the ultimate limit of Martial Arts in this world as far as he knew, and he hadn't expected to acquire two Heavenly Human Realm subjects so quickly.

Lu Chen did not immediately issue orders to Black Dragon Country. He checked the system's marked location of Black Dragon Country.

Black Dragon Country was to the west of Great Jue, nearing the territory of the Barbarian Tribe.

Lu Chen thought for a moment. It seemed unrealistic to have the Black Dragon Country's army cross Great Jue to reach North Country right now. If the Black Dragon Country's troops entered the territory of Great Jue, it would mean declaring war on them.

Considering the current circumstances, the one hundred thousand Black Dragon Guards of Black Dragon Country could not be mobilized. However, on second thought, with these one hundred thousand Black Dragon Guards, it might be possible to intimidate Great Jue should they send troops against North Country. Black Dragon Country could then stab them in the back.

With this in mind, Lu Chen said to the system, "Tell Black Dragon Country to refrain from hasty actions for the time being, and moreover, have them send someone to make contact with this prince and establish a channel for information exchange."

As Lu Chen's voice faded, the system's voice rang out.

[Black Dragon Country has received the host's command. The sovereign of Black Dragon Country is dispatching someone to North Country.]

After seeing the system's prompt, Lu Chen came to the desk, sat down, and opened the world map drawn by the Brocade Guard, examining it intently once again.

...

Murong Xue'er returned to Great Jue and went to see the Yue Emperor immediately.

At this moment, within the Empress's Bedchamber, only the cool voice of Murong Xue'er could be heard.

Outside the red curtains, Murong Xue'er was reporting the intelligence she had gathered in North Country.

Moments later, a gust of wind blew through from the inside, causing the red curtains to flap continuously.

The Yue Emperor asked, "So, has Zhuge Zhongguang truly not advanced to the Heavenly Human Realm?"

Murong Xue'er replied, "Indeed."

The Yue Emperor chuckled lightly, then spoke, "The North Prince is quite the deceiver. However, I'm curious, given that they have concealed this from the public for so long, why would they choose to reveal it now? Isn't it better to keep other forces guessing?"

Murong Xue'er replied, "This servant has yet to uncover the specific reason that prompted the North Prince to suddenly decide to disclose this matter."

Just then, Murong Xue'er suddenly thought of something else and quickly added, "This servant has another matter to report."

The emotionless voice of the Yue Emperor immediately conveyed, "Speak."

Murong Xue'er was about to reveal to the Yue Emperor that her purpose in North Country had been seen through by the North Prince, but she found herself inexplicably unable to speak.

The words were on the tip of her tongue, but they just wouldn't come out.

Seeing that Murong Xue'er did not continue, the Yue Emperor's displeased voice came through, "What is it? Do you have some unspeakable difficulty?"

After hesitating for a moment, Murong Xue'er clenched her teeth and said, "The North Prince is already on guard against this servant. This servant suspects that the prince might have already discovered the purpose behind this servant's approach."

Murong Xue'er ultimately could not bring herself to say it.

The Yue Emperor said indifferently, "That is exactly what you should let him know. You must not only let him be aware of your purpose, but also that I have lost trust in you."