

Es. Benefits 541

Chapter 541: Yue Emperor's Plan_1

Hearing the Yue Emperor's words, Murong Xue'er was slightly taken aback. She hadn't expected the Yue Emperor to require her to intentionally disclose her own purpose.

At this time, the Yue Emperor continued, "If you do not reveal your purpose, how can you gain the North Prince's trust?"

Murong Xue'er instantly realized that from the beginning, the Yue Emperor was not worried about her purpose in going to the North Country being exposed, because only if her purpose was disclosed could she use her background to gain pity, creating a portrayal of herself as being coerced by the Yue Emperor, with no choice but to offer her body in exchange for intelligence.

The Yue Emperor then asked, "Furthermore, how is your investigation into the mysterious weapon going?"

Murong Xue'er regained her composure and hurriedly answered, "Your Majesty, the North Country does indeed possess a special weapon, and they are manufacturing it in large quantities. However, since I have not yet obtained the North Prince's approval, I am still unaware of the extent of those mysterious weapons' power."

Just as Murong Xue'er finished speaking, the red curtains were torn open by a wild gust of wind, revealing the Yue Emperor's breathtakingly beautiful visage to Murong Xue'er.

The next moment, Murong Xue'er involuntarily flew towards the Yue Emperor. Just as she was about to speak, the Yue Emperor clasped her throat in one hand.

The Yue Emperor coldly said, "How long have you been in the North Country, and you can't even find out this bit of information?"

Murong Xue'er was gasping for air, unable to speak, her face turning red.

"Your... Your Majesty, I... I..."

Before Murong Xue'er could finish her words, the Yue Emperor continued, "Are you afraid of losing your virginity, and that's why you haven't approached the North Prince?"

At this, Murong Xue'er's clothes were suddenly torn to shreds by a force, and the Virgin Mark on her lower abdomen was revealed.

Seeing that Murong Xue'er's Virgin Mark was still intact, the Yue Emperor hurled Murong Xue'er to the ground, making her cough involuntarily.

The Yue Emperor continued, "You've been in the North Country for so long and yet the Virgin Mark is still present – it seems you have not focused on the task at all."

Murong Xue'er quickly said, "Your Majesty, I know my mistake. Please give me another chance!"

The Yue Emperor then turned and walked towards her phoenix bed, saying as she walked, "Return to the North Country in a few days. I need you to find out why the North Prince would disclose that Zhuge Zhongguang is not from the Heavenly Human Realm."

Murong Xue'er said, "I will certainly complete the mission."

Just then, the Yue Emperor stopped in her tracks, without turning her head, and said, "I hope you remember that your life was saved by me."

Murong Xue'er immediately knelt on the ground and said, "I have always remembered, and I am willing to do anything for Your Majesty in this life."

The Yue Emperor said indifferently, "You may leave."

As the Yue Emperor's words fell, the blankets on the Empress' bed flew up and came to rest on Murong Xue'er's body, after which she turned and left the Yue Emperor's Palace.

After Murong Xue'er left the Imperial Palace, she sighed deeply, suddenly feeling uncertain about the future. She had initially planned to tell the Yue Emperor everything about her experience in the North Country, but when it came time to speak, she was unable to say anything.

Furthermore, the Yue Emperor wanted her to intentionally disclose her purpose of approaching the North Prince, then use this to gain the North Prince's trust.

If she truly pretended to defect to the North Prince, would the Yue Emperor still trust and employ her upon her eventual return to the Da Yue Dynasty? Most likely not.

No one could say for sure whether she truly defected to the North Prince or if her act turned genuine. She didn't believe the Yue Emperor would trust her that much.

Although she was full of worries about the future, Murong Xue'er ultimately decided to do as the Yue Emperor said. The words the Yue Emperor spoke before she left the palace bedroom were true—had it not been for the Yue Emperor, she might have already been dead by now.

Over the years, actually, many people had wished for the death of this daughter of a condemned official, but under the protection of the Yue Emperor, not only did she survive, but her status grew increasingly higher.

Even though the Yue Emperor was harsh with her, without the Yue Emperor, she wouldn't have achieved what she had today.

Political struggles are extremely complex matters. Although the Murong family was exterminated for opposing the Yue Emperor, in reality, it wasn't the Yue Emperor who took action but the officers who supported her. That's also why those officers wanted this daughter of a criminal so eagerly dead.

The higher her status became, the greater the threat to those who had harmed her family in the past. The reason why there were many rumors about her indecent conduct among the people was because some did not wish the Empress to value her so highly.

As for the Yue Emperor asking her to willingly offer herself to the North Prince, Murong Xue'er actually didn't care—compared to the things she desired, her chastity seemed insignificant in her eyes. The only trouble was that after losing her virginity, it was possible that the Yue Emperor might no longer be as close to her as before.

In the past, she was the bed-warming maid of the Yue Emperor. If she were to lose her virginity, given the character of the Yue Emperor, she would most likely no longer be allowed to serve.

Her present status, it was all because she was by the side of the Yue Emperor—should the Yue Emperor no longer allow her to be by her side, Murong Xue'er doubted her continued favor.

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Shortly after Murong Xue'er left the Yue Emperor's palace, some ministers appeared outside the curtains of the Yue Emperor's palace, discussing matters concerning the Black Dragon Country.

At that moment, a minister spoke up, "Your Majesty, I believe that the threat from the Black Dragon Country is substantial and we should dispatch troops to annihilate it."

No sooner had this officer finished speaking than another minister said, "The Black Dragon Country has at most a population of two million; what threat could they pose? In my view, the real threat now comes from the North Country. There are rumors in the North Country that Zhuge Zhongguang hasn't broken through to the Celestial Realm.

I think that since the North Country lacks a Celestial presence, Great Jue should eliminate this great threat of the North Country ahead of time."

"If we wait until Zhuge Zhongguang truly breaks through to the Celestial, then it won't be so easy to obliterate the North Country anymore."

At this juncture, the Yue Emperor, half-reclining on a phoenix bed, spoke up, "Hasn't there been word that many merchant caravans from the Black Dragon Country have entered Great Jue?"

Upon hearing this, a minister outside the red curtains said, "Yes, Your Majesty."

The Yue Emperor said indifferently, "Has it been made clear what they've come to Great Jue to do?"

A martial officer dressed in black and red spoke up, "It's been made clear. Their primary motive for entering Great Jue is to purchase goods from the North Country."

The Yue Emperor thought for a moment, then said, "The Black Dragon Country likely harbors Celestial Realm powerhouses. The Barbarian Tribe has been defeated multiple times in their attacks on the Black Dragon Country—it is indeed a substantial threat.

However, compared to a small country like the Black Dragon Country, which maintains its existence on the fringes, I am more concerned about the North Country."

Hearing this, everyone understood at once that the Yue Emperor's focus was still on the North Country.

Although the Black Dragon Country had long been established, it hadn't made much noise since its establishment, unlike the North Prince who caused so much upheaval upon arriving in his domain and even proclaimed plans to extend the railways across the entire world.

Then, a minister said, "Your Majesty, since you too see the North Country as a great threat, why don't we agree to form an alliance with Great Sum to first extinguish the North Country?"

"Given the internal turmoil in Great Sum, even if we extinguish the North Country, Great Sum would hardly dare to complain."

The Yue Emperor said dispassionately, "There's no rush. Greater than our desire to eliminate the North Country is that of Great Wu. The Martial Emperor is highly likely unable to sit still. Let them test the strength of the North Country first."

Although Wu Junwan was the good friend of the Yue Emperor, friends were friends, and countries were countries. She would not consider Great Wu a natural ally simply because of Wu Junwan.

She would prefer Great Wu to take the initiative in dispatching troops, ideally to ascertain the true strength of the North Country.

Chapter 542: Martial Emperor: Send Troops to Attack North Country in Two Months!_1

Just as the Yue Emperor had thought, upon learning that Zhuge Zhongguang was not a Celestial, every official in the court of Great Wu could no longer sit idly by. One after another, they advised the Martial Emperor to eliminate the North Country and eradicate the threat of the North Prince.

The ambition of the North Country had become a serious threat to Great Wu, especially since the North Country's Heavy Cavalry was stationed in Yong'an County, which made the people of Great Wu always feel like there was a sword hanging over their heads.

Great Wu Dynasty.

In the court session, emotions were running high as ministers argued to send troops against the North Country immediately to prevent it from growing stronger.

Now that the North Country already possessed such formidable strength, if they were allowed to continue growing, Great Wu might not stand a chance against them in a few years' time.

Listening to the words of the ministers in the great hall, the Martial Emperor did not immediately respond. He watched quietly, eager to see who would be the first to stand up and advise him not to send troops against the North Country.

After a while, the Martial Emperor's gaze fell on Chai Jiliang, and he said with a smile, "Chai, do you think we should take advantage of the chaos in Great Sum and destroy the North Country?"

Hearing this question, Chai Jiliang replied, "Your subject believes we should be more cautious. The North Prince has concealed the fact that Zhuge Zhongguang is not of the Heavenly Human Realm for so long. Now that it's suddenly made public, I believe he must have some ulterior motive."

Hearing his words, the Minister of War stood up and intervened, "Mr. Chai, aren't you being overly sensitive? Could it not simply be that a few Pseudo Celestials have emerged within Great Sum's territory, and the North Prince could no longer hide the truth, thus was forced to reveal Zhuge Zhongguang's real status? Why do you think the North Prince has some other scheme or trick up his sleeve?"

"You haven't been bribed by the North Prince, have you?"

The Minister of War was the one who hoped most for war; only through war could the Ministry of War have things to do, through which they could gain more benefits.

Moreover, it was not just the Ministry of War that wanted conflict—almost every official in the court wanted to eradicate the North Country.

The North Country had many unique treasures. If they could conquer the North Country, they could plunder all those fine things.

Of course, aside from the North Country's treasures, as people of Great Wu, they naturally did not want to see such a significant threat looming over them.

Now that Great Sum was in turmoil and could not spare attention for the North Country, even if the North Country were attacked, Great Sum would not send troops to help. This created the best opportunity for Great Wu to destroy the North Country, and they certainly could not let such a chance slip away.

Moreover, there was another point—if the North Country were not extinguished, when they later attacked Great Sum, it was very likely that the North Country would send troops.

The North Country had already positioned their Heavy Cavalry right over Great Wu's head, clearly indicating they would not allow Great Wu to attack Great Sum. Therefore, if Great Wu wanted to conquer Great Sum, they had to first eliminate the North Country as a potential threat.

Chai Jiliang ignored the Minister of War's comment and said, "In my view, even though people now know that Zhuge Zhongguang is not a Celestial, the North Prince still had no need to voluntarily reveal it. He could have continued to deny it, leaving other powers to speculate."

"In doing so, he would still possess a deterrence factor. No one would dare to take the gamble on whether Zhuge Zhongguang truly hadn't made a breakthrough. Yet now that they have suddenly made it public that he is not a Celestial, they have completely lost that deterrence."

The Martial Emperor laughed heartily and said, "How is there no deterrence? Hasn't it deterred you, Chai? It scared you into not daring to speak in favor of sending troops against the North Country."

The Martial Emperor then glanced around the great hall and declared loudly, "I have decided—in two months' time, we will send our troops to attack the North Country!"

Upon hearing this, before Chai Jiliang could say anything, with the exception of Princess Junwan's faction, all the civil and military officials in the great hall knelt down in unison and exclaimed, "Your Majesty is wise!!!"

As the Martial Emperor scanned the great hall once again, he noticed that many ministers had not knelt down, and those ministers were mostly closely associated with Chai Jiliang and Wu Junwan. The Martial Emperor's brow furrowed.

He also felt that continuing like this was definitely not sustainable. He had to seize this opportunity to increase his other sons' merits.

His daughter's growing prestige in the court was getting higher, and she could potentially cause significant trouble for the crown prince in the future.

Seeing that the Martial Emperor had already made a decision, Chai Jiliang dared not further advise against it. However, at this moment, he said, "Since Your Majesty has decided to attack the North Country, this subject suggests sending Princess Junwan to Great Jue once more to continue discussing the alliance with Great Jue."

"Great Jue shares a vast border with the North Country. The threat from the North Country is the greatest for Great Jue; hence, they are the most eager to annihilate it. Furthermore, it is now almost certain that Zhuge Zhongguang is not a Celestial. If Great Wu were to proactively propose an alliance at this time, this subject believes Great Jue should agree to it."

The Martial Emperor said indifferently, "I will discuss this matter with Junwan. Now, let's discuss the matter of sending troops..."

The North Country is no ordinary feudal state. The fact that they could annihilate the barbarians of the North Land and defeat the Tianqi King shows their strength.

Therefore, before attacking the North Country, it is imperative to be fully prepared. Even the Martial Emperor, who favored solving problems through military might, was considerably more cautious when it came to the matter of attacking the North Country.

After the imperial court meeting ended, Chai Jiliang immediately headed to Wu Junwan's Green Cloud Palace.

At that moment, Wu Junwan was leaning on a luxurious chair, one hand supporting her head and the other holding a piece of paper, which she was earnestly examining.

"Your Highness, Mr. Chai requests an audience," someone said.

Wu Junwan said languidly, "Let him in."

As the words fell, Chai Jiliang entered the Green Cloud Palace.

Upon entering the great hall, Chai Jiliang said, "This subject greets Princess Junwan."

Wu Junwan's posture remained unchanged, and her gaze stayed fixed on the intelligence in her hands. However, a red curtain separated them, and Chai Jiliang was unable to see the situation inside.

At that time, Wu Junwan said indifferently, "What brings Mr. Chai here?"

Chai Jiliang straightforwardly said, "His Majesty plans to send troops against the North Country in two months to annihilate it."

Upon hearing this, Wu Junwan was taken aback, and her brows slightly furrowed.

With control over a vast intelligence network, she naturally knew the news that Zhuge Zhongguang was not a Celestial. However, she did not believe the North Prince's disclosure of Zhuge Zhongguang not being a Celestial meant that there were no Celestials in the North Country.

During her mission to the North Country, her Protector, Pei Hong, had distinctly felt a terrifying presence at the North Prince Mansion, and that oppressive feeling even posed a death threat to Pei Hong.

Even if Zhuge Zhongguang were not a Celestial, it was very possible that another powerful being had already broken through to the Heavenly Human Realm within the North Prince Mansion. Moreover, the fact that the North Country dared to openly reveal that Zhuge was not a Celestial showed that they were already prepared, and they were no longer afraid of any power.

Great Wu attacking the North Country at this time?

Seeing that Wu Junwan had not spoken, Chai Jiliang continued, "His Majesty's word is as precious as gold, and I'm afraid it is difficult to change this decision. This subject hopes Princess Junwan can persuade the Yue Emperor to form an alliance with Great Wu and seize this opportunity to eliminate the threat of the North Country."

Wu Junwan pondered for a moment, her thoughts eventually turning to the North Country's secret weapon. She was, of course, aware of the North Country's secret weapon, but her knowledge about it was not extensive.

Wu Junwan then asked, "Does Mr. Chai know about the mysterious weapon the North Country possesses?"

Chai Jiliang countered, "Is Your Highness referring to the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrow?"

"The power of such a weapon is indeed terrifying, but to use the Piercing Cloud Bow requires high-quality warriors; not just anyone can wield it."

Chapter 543: Wu Junwan's Second Mission to Great Jue_1

Upon hearing Chai Jiliang's words, Wu Junwan did not immediately respond.

Seeing that Wu Junwan remained silent, Chai Jiliang thought she was worried about the Piercing Cloud Bow and continued, "Your Highness, although the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrow are powerful, the materials required to make these two weapons are extremely scarce, and the North Country's army cannot equip them on a large scale."

At that moment, Wu Junwan came back to her senses and said with concern, "If it were only the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrow, this palace would not be worried. From what I understand, the mysterious weapons possessed by the North Country are not just the so-called Piercing Cloud Bow and Arrow."

"The Piercing Cloud Bow and Arrow are weapons manufactured by the Aristocratic Families of the South of Great Su, and while they are very powerful, they are not easy to use."

"But the rumored weapons of the North Country are different; it seems that even ordinary people can use them, and their power is not much less than that of the so-called Piercing Cloud Bow."

Hearing Wu Junwan say this, Chai Jiliang's mind went blank for a moment, and then he frowned, "This would mean that the North Country poses an even greater threat than we had anticipated."

"Indeed, His Majesty should completely eradicate the North Country before it has a chance to grow. Otherwise, once the North Country has developed, it is likely to turn around and attack other dynasties."

Originally, Chai Jiliang was opposed to attacking the North Country because he always felt that the North Country had some conspiracy afoot. But upon hearing that even the common people of the North Country have weapons as powerful as the Piercing Cloud Bow, he felt a great sense of crisis.

Recently, an agent from Great Wu had obtained a Piercing Cloud Bow and several Piercing Cloud Arrows from Great Su, and Chai Jiliang personally tested the power of these weapons.

An arrow shot from the Piercing Cloud Bow could easily kill a Grandmaster, and if the common people of the North Country possessed the strength to kill Grandmasters, once the North Country's arsenal grew, Great Wu's situation would become very dangerous.

Moreover, the North Prince had long exposed his ambition to conquer the world. With such grand ambitions, and possessing such terrifying weapons, once the North Country grew in power, it would certainly not hesitate to wage war.

Therefore, it would be best for Great Wu to eliminate this threat at all costs. If it cannot be eliminated now, Great Wu might never again have the chance to do so.

Just as Wu Junwan was about to speak, suddenly, a maid's voice rang out at the entrance, "Your Highness, His Majesty invites you to visit his study."

Seeing that Wu Junwan had matters to attend to, Chai Jiliang immediately said, "Since Your Highness has business to attend to, then this servant shall not intrude any further. I shall take my leave."

As his voice fell, Chai Jiliang turned and left the Green Cloud Palace.

After Chai Jiliang left, Wu Junwan slowly rose from her chair. She had the maid tidy her clothes, and then she headed to the Martial Emperor's study.

Wu Junwan had pretty much guessed why her father had summoned her at this time. Clearly, her father wanted her to make another trip to Da Yue and continue to seek an alliance with Great Jue.

When Wu Junwan arrived at the study, the Martial Emperor cut straight to the point. He spoke of attacking the North Country and expressed his hope that she would once again go on a diplomatic mission to Great Jue to join forces with them to annihilate the North Country.

As Great Wu's Princess Junwan, Wu Junwan of course had to partake in important matters concerning Great Wu. Without hesitation, she agreed to his request.

If she could facilitate an alliance between Great Jue and Great Wu this time, it would certainly elevate her prestige further.

However, Wu Junwan was somewhat worried. Even though she and the Yue Emperor were good friends, the Yue Emperor of today was no longer the same as before. The Yue Emperor's most important identity was still that of the ruler of Great Jue.

The current Yue Emperor surely viewed issues not just in terms of personal relationships. Judging from the last time the Yue Emperor refused to form an alliance with her and Great Wu, it was clear that for the current Yue Emperor, their friendship was obviously not as important as the national interests of Great Jue.

Wu Junwan was not certain that this mission to Great Jue would definitely result in an alliance.

But even if she could not forge an alliance with Great Jue, she would still find a way to negotiate for Great Wu's troops to pass through Great Jue's territory.

The Da Yue Dynasty and the North Country shared an extensive border. If they wanted to attack the North Country, it wouldn't be sufficient to only advance from Yongan County. Yongan County was too small and guarded by the North Country's Heavy Cavalry. If war broke out, the North Country would surely send reinforcements to Yongan County to reinforce their defenses there.

The best strategy to defeat the North Country would be to bypass Yongan County, pass through Great Jue's territory, and then directly invade the North Country's homeland.

Since Yongan County was heavily defended, they should deploy troops to hold off these soldiers and prevent them from reinforcing their positions.

Therefore, the mission to Great Jue this time was quite important for Wu Junwan, no matter what, she had to secure the support of Great Jue.

Several days later, Wu Junwan set out on a mission to Great Jue once again.

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North Country.

Today, Lu Chen had finished dealing with the official documents early. The documents sent to him now were all quite significant, and most of the other matters had been delegated to Zhuge Zhongguang. Lu Chen wasn't as busy as before.

After handling the documents, Lu Chen went straight to Wang Qingci's courtyard.

He hadn't even entered the courtyard when he heard Wang Qingci's voice, cooing at the child held in her arms.

Upon entering the courtyard, it seemed Wang Qingci didn't notice his arrival, as she continued to soothe the child in the pavilion.

At that moment, Wang Qingci said to the child in her arms, "Zhi'er, when you grow up, you must behave properly. Don't be like your daddy, flirting and causing trouble everywhere."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen chuckled and said, "When have I ever flirted and caused trouble everywhere? Lady Wang, you're tarnishing my reputation in front of the child!"

Only after hearing Lu Chen's voice did Wang Qingci's maids snap back to reality, promptly curtsying and saying, "Greetings to the Prince!"

Wang Qingci also hurriedly held the child and said, "This servant pays respects to the Prince."

Wang Qingci didn't seem to care at all about the words she had just spoken. If Lu Chen heard them, so be it.

While holding the child, Wang Qingci said, "The Prince must have misheard. I was just telling Zhi'er to learn more from the Prince in the future."

Lu Chen smiled and then approached Wang Qingci, wrapping an arm around her waist, he said, "Really? So I must have heard things?"

As he spoke, Lu Chen's hand began to wander over Wang Qingci's body.

"Mr. Wang has been resting for quite some time. I wonder how well you have recovered? There is a lot of work I intend to hand over to Mr. Wang."

Hearing Lu Chen's question, Wang Qingci knew what this rascal was hinting at, and quickly said, "Thank you for your concern, my Prince. This servant has almost fully recovered."

With Lu Chen's help, Wang Qingci had recovered her health almost to what it was before childbirth. Lu Chen considered that the child was still young and needed Wang Qingci's care, so he had not sought her out.

But now the child was being looked after by a wet nurse, and Wang Qingci had some free time.

At this time, Lu Chen said, "Is that so? Then I shall have to inspect thoroughly."

With that, Lu Chen said to the wet nurse in the pavilion, "Take good care of the child. The Prince and Mr. Wang need to have a talk."

Upon hearing this, the wet nurse immediately stepped forward to Wang Qingci, ready to take the child.

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Wang Qingci sighed inwardly, and, feeling helpless, still handed the child over to the wet nurse.

No sooner had she passed the child to the wet nurse than Lu Chen swept up Wang Qingci's soft, delicate figure with a princess carry and headed straight for the room.

This caused the cheeks of the maids in the pavilion to turn red, and the wet nurse laughed softly to herself. In their eyes, this was a display of the deep affection between the Prince and his lady.

Chapter 544: You Can't Say Things Like This Anymore_1

After Lu Chen carried Wang Qingci to the room, he placed Wang Qingci on the bed and then hovered over her, looking down at her from above.

Lu Chen didn't immediately start to caress her; instead, he gazed into Wang Qingci's eyes, a slight smile curling up at the corners of his mouth as he teased, "Who would have thought that after giving birth, Mr. Wang would become even more mature and alluring."

Hearing this, Wang Qingci raised her jade hand to her mouth and with a smile said, "Your servant seems to have discovered one of the Prince's peculiar inclinations. It seems that the Prince has a special fondness for women who have given birth."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen was taken aback, then he said, "Oh? Why would you think that? Even before you gave birth, I invested quite a bit of energy on you."

Wang Qingci said, "Your servant recently heard that the Prince seems to be neglecting Sister Nanyan and Yaoyao, often visiting the chambers of concubines who have children."

"It hasn't been long since your servant gave birth, yet the Wang Family came looking for your servant. Doesn't this prove the Prince's predilection?"

Lu Chen laughed. Indeed, he had been frequently visiting Mu Zixuan and both Xiaozhou and Dazhou lately, but not because they had children. He was doing so to use the Dragon-Phoenix Yin-Yang Spell to enhance their strength.

However, in Wang Qingci's view, it seemed he preferred the company of mothers, hence his frequent visits to the three of them.

At this point, Lu Chen said, "If you put it that way, wouldn't it cause the women who have not conceived my children to feel anxious and sad?"

In this era, the concept of valuing a mother for her child was deeply ingrained, and it was also rather difficult for martial artists to become pregnant. If such rumors reached Xiao Wenyao and Yelv Nanyan, as well as other concubines who had not yet conceived, what would they think?

They would surely feel that because they had not yet borne the Prince's children, they had not provided heirs and thus he had developed an aversion to them, to the extent of not seeking their company in bed anymore.

Then, Lu Chen seriously said to Wang Qingci, "Qingci, you must not speak such words in the future."

Seeing how serious Lu Chen looked, Wang Qingci immediately realized the potential consequences of her earlier words and quickly said, "Your servant realizes her mistake and is willing to accept the punishment."

With that, Wang Qingci's peach blossom eyes looked up at him with a hint of playfulness.

Upon hearing her words, Lu Chen promptly turned Wang Qingci's body over and then slapped her buttocks with a smack.

The next moment, Wang Qingci's delicate body trembled, she let out a whimper, her face flushing red, her body growing restless.

Lu Chen said, "I think you've been pregnant for too long, and without proper discipline from me, you seem a bit too self-satisfied, which led you to speak carelessly."

"It would be fitting to properly punish you."

At this moment, Wang Qingci, lying on the bed, said, "Although what your servant said earlier was inappropriate, the Prince indeed did as mentioned. Lately, your servant often hears such talk around the Prince's Mansion."

Lu Chen, puzzled, asked, "What talk?"

With boldness, Wang Qingci said, "Your servant heard that the Prince is like a child who hasn't grown up, snagging food from his own children, leaving them unable to eat their fill."

Uh...

This...

Lu Chen immediately fell silent and did not continue to speak.

Seeing Lu Chen suddenly fall silent, Wang Qingci on the bed let out a soft laugh and then said, "Hehehe, Prince, it seems your servant has spoken truly, otherwise why would the Prince suddenly fall silent?"

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Lu Chen came back to his senses at that moment, and he lifted his palm again and smacked it hard on Wang Qingci's buttocks, then he said furiously, as if "flustered and exasperated," "How dare you frame me, I think you're just asking to be put in your place."

"Fine, since in your eyes I'm already that kind of person, if I don't commit that kind of act today, wouldn't I have been wronged for nothing!"

Wang Qingci slightly turned her head to look at Lu Chen behind her and said softly, "Prince, remember to hire a few more wet nurses for Zhi'er tomorrow."

Lu Chen responded indifferently, "I know."

As soon as he finished speaking, Lu Chen flipped Wang Qingci's body over again, and before Wang Qingci could say anything more, he bent down and sealed her red lips with his own.

In the end, Wang Qingci paid a heavy price for her slip of the tongue.

After an unknown amount of time, Lu Chen finally ceased his harsh punishment of Wang Qingci. He then lay beside her ear and asked, "Qingci, do you plan to continue managing the Rain-listening Pavilion?"

Upon hearing this question from Lu Chen, Wang Qingci's consciousness instantly sharpened, and she promptly replied, "Does the Prince wish for me to stay at home and take care of the children forever?"

Lu Chen said with a smile, "That's not it."

"I was just asking; the workload of Rain-listening Pavilion might increase significantly. You've just had a child, and you need to manage the Rain-listening Pavilion affairs and spend time with the child, which might take up more of your time and energy."

Wang Qingci replied with a smile, "Then from now on, I'll spend the time I used to accompany the Prince with the child... Ouch..."

Before Wang Qingci could finish speaking, the smile on her face disappeared instantaneously, and she faced Lu Chen's stern punishment once again.

Lu Chen then said, "As my consort, attending to me is your duty. You actually consider not attending to me; you're becoming bolder and bolder."

At that moment, Wang Qingci turned her head, her eyes misty, and she pleaded pitifully, "I know I was wrong, Prince, please forgive me."

Lu Chen chuckled inwardly at the thought. What a sly fox. Then he set aside the matter he had been discussing earlier and continued to punish Wang Qingci.

A good while later, Lu Chen resumed speaking, "Now that the news that Zhuge the Great Scholar is not a Celestial has spread throughout the major dynasties, there is sure to be major moves from them. The Rain-listening Pavilion's trade caravans need to pull out of the dynasties before they take action against the North Country."

Although Rain-listening Pavilion was originally established to gather intelligence on the major dynasties, it has now become a massive commercial entity.

If Rain-listening Pavilion does not withdraw in time from the dynasties, once a dynasty declares war on the North Country, they'll surely target Rain-listening Pavilion first, which would lead to significant financial losses for the North Prince Mansion.

Wang Qingci had been paying close attention to outside affairs during her pregnancy, so she was very clear about the current situation. After catching her breath, she said, "Prince, rest assured, I will ensure that the Rain-listening Pavilion's influences withdraw from the hostile dynasties as soon as possible."

Relieved by her words, Lu Chen took a deep breath as if he had relaxed completely.

At that moment, Wang Qingci asked, "Prince, is there anything else?"

Holding Wang Qingci's waist tightly, Lu Chen replied, "No, this was the only matter I came to discuss with you."

"Alright, let's drop this topic. Let's first consider the matter of giving Zhi'er a brother or sister."

Hearing this, Wang Qingci cursed inwardly. This bad egg used tricks last time to get her pregnant; now he planned to use the same tactic again, and she was not about to let this man have his way.

One child was enough for her; there was no need to have another. Whether she could even protect her current child in the future was uncertain; having another would make it even harder to protect them.

However, it was clear that this was not for Wang Qingci to decide. In the end, she still succumbed to the various tricks of Lu Chen.

Chapter 545: Murong Xue'er Returns to the North Country_1

Early in the morning, Lu Chen got up from the gentle jade fragrance of Qingci and found that she was giving him a resentful look.

Lu Chen smiled and said, "Mr. Wang, why are you looking at me with those eyes?"

Qingci said gloomily, "No wonder the princess told me to be wary of the Prince a bit, lest my own child goes hungry."

Lu Chen, thick-faced, said, "I still know my limits, and I will find a few more nannies for Zhi'er later."

Qingci gave Lu Chen a glare, but said nothing more.

At this time, Lu Chen got up and stretched leisurely. Qingci also hurriedly got up, picked up Lu Chen's clothes, and prepared to dress him.

Lu Chen grabbed Qingci's wrist and wouldn't let her continue, "I'll dress later, I want to take a bath first."

Upon hearing Lu Chen's words, Qingci stopped what she was doing. At that moment, Lu Chen glanced at Qingci's snowy white body and said with a smile, "Madam sweated quite a bit yesterday, you should also take a bath."

Qingci said gloomily, "Prince, you go wash first."

Qingci immediately saw through Lu Chen's little scheme; she suspected Lu Chen intended to drag her into bathing together, but she didn't want to join Lu Chen in the bath, who knows what else he might do while washing.

At this moment, Lu Chen asked the maidservants in the room, "Go check if the hot water is ready."

"Yes, Prince."

The maidservant entered the shower room afterward.

Soon, the maidservant returned from the shower room, "Prince, the hot water is ready."

Hearing this, Lu Chen scooped Qingci up into a princess carry and headed straight toward the bathroom, walking and laughing as he went, "We've been husband and wife for so long, there's nothing to be shy about."

Seeing that Lu Chen had lifted her up, Qingci quickly wrapped her arms around Lu Chen's neck and said no more, resigning to her fate that the bath was inevitable.

Shortly after, the sound of splashing water echoed from the bathroom, and when Qingci came out, she was completely drained of energy, lying on the bed with no desire to get up.

With the assistance of a maidservant, Lu Chen dressed himself and glanced at Qingci on the bed, chuckling, "Mr. Wang, you've become even more tempting after having a child."

Hearing this, Qingci, who was lying on the bed, turned her head to look at Lu Chen and then said, "Prince, you should spend more time in the room next door, these days Nanyan and Yaoyao have been missing you."

Lu Chen replied, "Don't worry, I understand the concept of 'impartial favor'. I've been visiting them these past days to help Zixuan and the others improve their skill."

"Now that Zixuan and the others have officially started on their path of cultivation, I don't need to go there every day anymore."

"You rest well, I'll take my leave for today."

As soon as he finished speaking, Lu Chen walked out of the room. Qingci just lay on the bed, watching Lu Chen's figure from the side without getting up to see him off, "Have a safe journey, Prince."

After leaving Qingci's courtyard, Lu Chen planned to return to Wind Cloud Court for breakfast when a maidservant hurriedly came before him, "Prince, Commander Qin seeks an audience."

Hearing this, without a word, Lu Chen directly headed to the study.

Upon reaching the door of the study, he saw Qin Yushan and Liang Zong standing there. The simultaneous presence of both suggested they had very important intelligence to report.

As they saw Lu Chen approaching, they promptly bowed and said, "Subordinates greet the Prince!"

Lu Chen didn't stop but continued toward the study, saying as he walked, "Come in and we'll talk."

The two immediately followed Lu Chen into the study.

Upon entering the study, Qin Yushan took out a report that had just arrived in Yan County that morning and handed it to Lu Chen.

After receiving the report, Lu Chen opened it and glanced over it. At this moment, Qin Yushan spoke, "News from the Imperial Palace suggests that only a Celestial can now possibly heal His Majesty.

To treat His Majesty's illness, the State Preceptor has invited the old ancestors from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain to the Capital city to discuss how to break through to the Heavenly Human Realm."

Hearing this, Lu Chen chuckled and then said, "This is probably a trap set for them."

Lu Chen also realized that the Sum Emperor did not wish for other Celestials to appear within Great Sum's borders. The two old ancestors from Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain

had already reached the Unity Realm, which is the Pseudo-Celestial Realm. Once their cultivation in the Unity Realm concluded, they could become true Celestials.

At that time, Great Sum would face two more powerful adversaries.

His father most likely wanted to invite them to the Imperial Palace and then set up an ambush to eliminate them.

As Lu Chen was looking at the report in his hands, he said, "The two old ancestors from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain shouldn't be foolish enough to go to the Capital city at this time..."

Lu Chen hadn't finished his sentence when he noticed that the report stated that the two old ancestors from Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain had immediately accepted the invitation from the Imperial Palace upon receiving it.

Seeing this, Lu Chen frowned.

Those two old guys shouldn't be fools. Can't they see that this is a trap?

Or did his own father use some tactic to make them unable to refuse the invitation to the Capital city?

Qin Yushan continued, "According to our investigation, the State Preceptor must have promised some conditions to the two old ancestors from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain, which is why they agreed without hesitation. However, our people have not yet been able to discover what those specific conditions are."

Lu Chen fell silent, laying down the report in his hand and slowly tapping his fingers on the desk.

After a while, Lu Chen's gaze fell on Liang Zong, "Commander Liang, do you have something to report?"

It was then that Liang Zong finally spoke up, "A spy from the Great Wu dynasty has sent a message. Great Wu has decided to send troops to attack North Country two months from now. Princess Wu has once again been dispatched to Great Jue, apparently in an attempt to persuade Great Jue to join forces in attacking North Country."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen was not surprised. Great Wu and North Country shared only a small border at Yongan County. If Great Wu wanted to annihilate North Country, they would need to pass through Great Jue.

Moreover, for Great Jue, North Country was also a threat, so it wasn't surprising that Great Wu sent Wu Junwan as an envoy to Great Jue.

Furthermore, it was highly probable that they would come to some kind of cooperation this time. Even if they did not form an alliance, Great Jue would certainly agree to let their troops pass through.

Now it all depended on whether Murong Xue'er would return or not. If Murong Xue'er still planned to return to North Country, it would indicate that the Yue Emperor was not very keen on military action against North Country at this time.

While Lu Chen was thinking this, a soldier at the door said, "Prince, Miss Murong has returned to the mansion!"

Hearing this, the corners of Lu Chen's mouth slightly curved upward. It seemed that the Yue Emperor still harbored some fear of North Country. In this case, Great Yue probably would not join Great Wu in sending troops but would at most agree to let them pass.

After musing for a while, Lu Chen first addressed Qin Yushan, "Commander Qin, have someone keep a close watch on every move in the Imperial Palace. Inform me immediately of any news."

Qin Yushan replied, "Yes, Prince."

Lu Chen then turned to look at Liang Zong, "Commander Liang, activate the spies from Great Wu. Use silver to bribe their ministers, and get them to impeach their Princess more in court."

Liang Zong replied, "Yes, Prince."

"Alright, if there's nothing else, you may all leave."

Qin Yushan and Liang Zong said in unison, "This subordinate takes their leave."

Chapter 546: Let Her Come to the Study_1

Lu Chen was particularly concerned about the State Preceptor's invitation to the two elders from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain to the Capital city, and what was most important was that those two old fellows had actually agreed to it.

Lu Chen couldn't figure out what his father, the Sum Emperor, was planning next. He then summoned Zhuge Zhongguang, intending to ask him what he thought.

After Zhuge Zhongguang arrived at the study, Lu Chen passed him the piece of intelligence Qin Yushan had just given him, and asked Zhuge Zhongguang to read it first.

Zhug Zhongguang's gaze fell on the intelligence in his hands, and he did not move his eyes away for a long time.

At that moment, Lu Chen asked, "Great Scholar, what do you think my father, the Emperor, is going to do next?"

Zhug Zhongguang didn't answer immediately. After pondering for a moment, he said, "Being able to make the two elders from Four Directions Mountain and Fixed Wind Mountain agree to the State Preceptor's invitation without hesitation must involve Mysterious Moon Palace."

Lu Chen's mind went blank for a moment, and he instantly understood the implication of Zhuge Zhongguang's words.

The Mysterious Moon Palace was also within the territories of Great Sum, and it posed a significant threat to all the major forces. Over the years, Mysterious Moon Palace had been suppressing other powers because they had a Celestial being and everyone from the major forces was angry but dared not speak out.

Now, the two elders from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain both had hopes of breaking through to the Heavenly Human Realm.

Coupled with the deep-seated contradictions between the Great Sum royal family and Mysterious Moon Palace – a Celestial being of the Mysterious Moon Palace had killed many Grandmasters of the Great Sum royal family – this further weakened the power of the royal family, and the power of the Aristocratic Families greatly increased.

For a long time, the Sum Emperor found himself in a somewhat hollowed-out position.

Now, someone in the Imperial Palace had entered the Unity Realm, and the two elders from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain had also reached the Unity Realm. If they could break through to the Heavenly Human Realm together, they might well hope to annihilate the Mysterious Moon Palace in the future.

Lu Chen then said, "So, according to you, my father, the Emperor, is planning to unite with Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain to annihilate the Mysterious Moon Palace?"

Lu Chen thought for a moment and then continued, "With the current chaotic situation in Great Sum, isn't my father, the Emperor, being a bit too hasty?"

In the Capital city, the struggle for succession was becoming more intense. When the Princes heard that Zhuge Zhongguang was not a Celestial, they became restless again. The Seigniors were also constantly recruiting troops and buying horses.

The situation in Great Sum was chaos in the Capital city, chaos in the localities, almost a complete mess. And yet, his father, the Emperor, was still thinking about dealing with the Mysterious Moon Palace?

Zhug Zhongguang then said, "Prince, in the view of this old servant, His Majesty is not in a hurry to deal with the Mysterious Moon Palace, but to break through to the Heavenly Human Realm as soon as possible."

"The arrival of the two elders from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain in the Capital city at this time should only be to assist His Majesty's smooth breakthrough."

Lu Chen instantly reacted, "This Prince understands now."

What Zhuge Zhongguang meant was that although his own father, the Emperor, and those from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain all intended to deal with the Mysterious Moon Palace, with their current strength, they naturally were not a match for the Mysterious Moon Palace.

Therefore, Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain would first help the Sum Emperor settle the chaos within Great Sum, aid the Emperor in breaking through to the Heavenly Human Realm, and then they would deal with the Mysterious Moon Palace.

Recalling that Zhuge Zhongguang had previously speculated that the condition for the Sum Emperor to break through the Heavenly Human Realm was to eliminate all the Seigniors of Great Sum, Lu Chen connected everything that happened in the Capital city in his mind.

The Sum Emperor most likely believed that Zhuge Zhongguang was not a Celestial and that North Country had no Celestial. Hence, he wanted to utilize the power of Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain to eliminate Zhuge Zhongguang, then destroy all the Seigniors of Great Sum, ultimately making himself a Celestial.

Once he became a Celestial, he would then help the two elders from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain become Celestials, and the three of them would join forces to eliminate the Mysterious Moon Palace.

Of course, whether his own father, the Emperor, would honor his promise and sincerely cooperate with the two elders from Fixed Wind Mountain and Four Directions Mountain was a matter for later.

Lu Chen, in any case, felt that given his father, the Emperor's character, he probably would not truly cooperate with the two. It was possible that the two were also well aware of this and that they were only cooperating on the surface while having their own schemes behind the scenes.

At that time, Lu Chen said, "Let's set aside the matters of the Capital city for now. This Prince has summoned the State Preceptor here for another reason. According to our spies, in two months, Great Wu will send troops to attack North Country, and they have also dispatched Wu Junwan on a diplomatic mission to Great Jue, intending to ally with them and jointly send troops."

Hearing this, Zhuge Zhongguang pondered for a while and then asked, "Prince, this old servant heard earlier that the envoy of Great Jue had returned to their residence. If Great Jue also plans to send troops against North Country, they should not continue to send envoys here."

Lu Chen said, "That's what this Prince was thinking as well. I'm just puzzled as to why the Yue Emperor doesn't plan to form an alliance with Great Wu to deal with North Country together."

Zhuge Zhongguang continued, "The Yue Emperor is a cautious person. In the view of this old servant, she wants Great Wu to test the strength of North Country first. If North Country is not as formidable as she has anticipated, she will likely still deploy troops to attack North Country."

"If the Prince wishes for North Country to have a lengthy period of peaceful development in the future, the best course of action would be to completely crush the armies of Great Wu."

Although Lu Chen also wanted to show off his muscles, the purpose of doing so was to ensure a period of peaceful development for the North Country, not just to show off for the sake of it.

Any military action is backed by political motives.

Lu Chen pondered for a bit before discussing some matters about the upcoming war with Zhuge Zhongguang.

Two hours later, Zhuge Zhongguang left the study, and just as Lu Chen was about to leave as well, a soldier at the door said, "Prince, the envoy from Great Wu said they are returning to Great Wu to report and have already left the North Country."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen smiled faintly. The envoy from Great Wu really fled quickly; it seemed they already knew about Great Wu's plans to deploy troops against the North Country and were afraid of what the North Country might do to them, so they hurriedly made their escape.

Lu Chen said, "If they want to go, let them go. Don't bother with them."

Although the North Country and Great Wu were set to go to war in two months, Lu Chen was not about to do something like killing another country's envoy. He was no longer a political novice; he had a clear grasp of what should and should not be done.

Upon receiving Lu Chen's command, the soldier at the door immediately replied, "Yes, Prince."

The soldier then turned and left the entrance of the study. At that moment, Lu Chen walked to the doorway and glanced outside, just as a maid from the Prince's Mansion hurriedly approached the study.

Seeing Lu Chen standing at the doorway, the maid quickly bowed and said:

"This servant greets the Prince!"

Lu Chen nodded, "What's the matter?"

The maid answered, "Prince, Miss Murong seeks an audience."

Lu Chen was not too surprised and said, "Let her come to the study."

The corners of Lu Chen's mouth lifted slightly. He had been planning to go back to the main courtyard for something to eat, but now it seemed he could only "eat" her.

During the time Murong Xue'er was away, he had been constantly thinking about her.

...

Meanwhile.

At the southern gate of Yan County, a woman dressed in white riding her horse was rapidly approaching the city gate.

The woman was stunningly beautiful, with long black hair fluttering in the wind and an air of immortal aura enveloping her, drawing the gazes of all those she passed by.

"Who is this woman? So... so beautiful..."

"Could she be one of the Prince's consorts?"

"How have I never seen her before?"

...

While everyone on the road was captivated by her, the soldiers at the city gate decisively blocked the woman's path.

"Miss, please dismount and register!"

The woman paid no attention to the several soldiers at the city gate; at that moment, a chill emanated from her body.

In the next instant, the soldiers who had blocked her path seemed to be controlled, their eyes lifeless as they consciously made way for her, then said with expressionless faces, "Miss, please come in."

Chapter 547: Once the Door and Window are Closed, You Are My Woman_1

North Prince Mansion, main gate.

After alighting from the carriage, Murong Xue'er gazed at the plaque of the North Prince Mansion, her thoughts swirling.

She had believed that in this lifetime, she might never return to North Country, to Yan County, or see the North Prince again.

Yet, unexpectedly, not much time had passed before she was sent back by the Yue Emperor.

Murong Xue'er sighed softly.

Merely thinking about the incidents that had occurred in the Prince's Mansion with the North Prince some time ago made her delicate body involuntarily tremble slightly.

After returning to Great Jue, she had someone investigate the average prowess of men in bed, and the final result of the investigation showed that none were as fierce as the North Prince.

Her actions, including such an investigation, led to impeachment by certain officials at Great Jue's imperial court who looked down on her, accusing her of promiscuity and a lack of propriety in her private life.

Of course, with the Yue Emperor's protection, even if she faced impeachment, nothing would happen.

When Murong Xue'er left Great Jue for North Country, those ministers of Great Jue still thought their impeachment had taken effect, that the Yue Emperor had distanced himself from Murong Xue'er once more, sending her to North Country.

Remembering the information she had gathered in Great Jue about men, Murong Xue'er's cheeks flushed; it was at this moment that the voice of the servant girl from the Prince's Mansion came through, "Miss Murong, please follow me."

Upon hearing the servant girl's voice, Murong Xue'er snapped back to reality, quickly stopping her wild thoughts.

She would have to find a way to extract information from Lu Chen later; how could she indulge in such impure thoughts? If her mind were preoccupied with the matters of men and women, how would she gather intelligence from the North Prince?

Guided by the servant girl, Murong Xue'er quickly arrived at the study and came before Lu Chen.

Seeing Lu Chen, Murong Xue'er greeted him, saying, "This subordinate pays her respects to the North Prince."

Lu Chen glanced at Murong Xue'er, who was dressed, as always, in white clothes with black trim, exuding a cool and authoritative aura that was involuntarily heart-stirring.

Lu Chen smiled and said, "It hasn't been that long since we last saw each other, yet Xue'er seems so distant now."

Hearing this, Murong Xue'er responded expressionlessly, "Prince, I am an envoy of Great Jue, representing the entire Great Jue, so I kindly ask that the Prince show me some respect."

As soon as Murong Xue'er finished speaking, Lu Chen gestured with a wave of his hand, and in the next moment, all the doors and windows of the study closed.

Murong Xue'er was about to say something when she found herself enveloped in Lu Chen's arms. She tried to struggle, but realized she had no strength at all and was completely incapable of pushing Lu Chen away.

At that moment, Lu Chen said with a smile, "With the doors and windows open, you are an envoy of Great Yue; once closed, you are my woman."

Murong Xue'er didn't panic; after all, her body had long since been claimed by the man before her, one given to lascivious pursuits. She said expressionlessly, "Prince, you are perhaps being a bit too overbearing."

Lu Chen didn't respond to Murong Xue'er's remarks. Instead, he asked, "When you returned this time, did the Yue Emperor see through the Virgin Mark I drew for you?"

Murong Xue'er replied, "No."

Hearing this, Lu Chen said, "It seems my drawing skills are quite good after all, the Yue Emperor really didn't recognize it."

At this point, Lu Chen swept Murong Xue'er up in a princess carry, which took her by surprise. Before she could react, he headed straight for the resting area inside the study room.

Murong Xue'er felt somewhat helpless; she didn't know how to respond. She was a spy sent by the Yue Emperor, an agent under his command, supposed to keep a certain distance from Lu Chen. Yet Lu Chen didn't seem to care about any of that, acting as if she truly were his woman.

Of course, this arrangement did have its advantages. Her mission to the North Country was to get close to the North Prince, and now that he treated her as his woman, it would be even easier to extract information from him in the future.

However, there was a strange feeling in Murong Xue'er's heart; she felt completely incapable of refusing Lu Chen.

Within moments, Lu Chen had laid Murong Xue'er down on the bed in the resting room and loomed over her, gazing down at her stunning, delicate features.

Lu Chen continued to inquire, "What sort of information did the Yue Emperor send you back to gather? Ask me directly, and I might just give you the answers now."

Upon hearing this, Murong Xue'er peered into Lu Chen's eyes, as if trying to discern something from his gaze, but his eyes were so clear that it was impossible to tell if he was joking with her.

Then Murong Xue'er said, "His Majesty wants me to find out why you chose this time to reveal that Zhuge Zhongguang is not a Celestial. Announcing it now brings a lot of trouble to the North Country."

The trouble Murong Xue'er spoke of was clearly about Great Wu. On her way to the North Country, she had learned of Great Wu's movements. Great Wu was already mobilizing troops northward, and it wouldn't be long before they would likely wage war against the North Country.

This upcoming war had a very direct connection with Lu Chen's revelation about Zhuge Zhongguang not being a Celestial. If Lu Chen had not sent Zhuge Zhongguang out and about, maintaining an ambiguous status and leaving others to speculate, Great Wu would not have dared to dispatch troops so openly.

Lu Chen said, "So that's the issue. It's simple. Because the North Country's strength has grown formidable, we no longer fear any dynasty, so I see no need to continue hiding our power."

"If anyone wishes to attack the North Country, isn't the North Country also willing to use a war to deter those hostile forces?"

Hearing this, Murong Xue'er was momentarily taken aback, then she asked, "Does the Prince mean that the North Country no longer relies on a Celestial to deter hostile forces and can contend with the whole world on the strength of its military alone?"

Lu Chen lifted his hand, caressing Murong Xue'er's exquisite, snowy chin, "To contend with the entire world goes too far, but to withstand the assault of one or two dynasties is no problem at all."

Murong Xue'er quickly assessed the truthfulness of Lu Chen's words in her mind. Confirmed by his gaze, she felt that Lu Chen wouldn't lie to her.

Lu Chen went on, "For the North Country to develop peacefully, relying on the deterrence of a Celestial won't suffice. With more and more Grandmasters entering the Unity Realm, Zhuge Zhongguang's true nature not being a Celestial was bound to come out. Knowing this, it's better to just have a war and establish the North Country's position."

Murong Xue'er responded, "Doesn't the Prince think this is a bit too risky? After all, the Prince has only been in the North Country for a few years. If a dynasty were to attack the North Country with all its might, it's highly likely that the North Country wouldn't hold."

Murong Xue'er didn't directly mention the impending assault by the Great Wu dynasty on the North Country, believing that the North Prince must already be aware of it.

Lu Chen gazed into Murong Xue'er's gem-like eyes and asked with a smile, "Are you worried about me?"

Murong Xue'er replied indifferently, "The Prince is overthinking it."

With that, Murong Xue'er turned her gaze away, avoiding Lu Chen's direct look.

At that moment, Lu Chen's hand moved to Murong Xue'er's belt, speaking as he began to undo it, "High risk can lead to high return. Only those who dare to draw their swords can deter the enemy. Only after the sword is swung can some be deterred from drawing theirs."

Murong Xue'er was somewhat speechless. How could Lu Chen manage to speak so earnestly while his hands were undressing her?

Although she was aware of what might transpire next, she did not stop Lu Chen.

In her heart, Murong Xue'er thought of it as her recompense to Lu Chen for extracting information.

Chapter 548: How Naive!_1

Lu Chen had not been intimate with Murong Xue'er for far too long. Facing this serene and stunning older woman, Lu Chen found himself somewhat carried away.

At this moment, Murong Xue'er's mind was a bit muddled. She began to doubt herself. Was coming to the North Prince Mansion really about gathering intelligence?

Gently caressing the pattern on Murong Xue'er's abdomen, Lu Chen said, "I didn't expect the tattoo to still be there. Drawing it with my method, it seems to preserve for a longer time indeed."

Upon hearing Lu Chen's words, Murong Xue'er slowly came to her senses. Lying on the bed, her gaze lowered slightly, and the next moment, her eyes widened as if pricked by a needle, and she immediately lifted her gaze, staring intently at Lu Chen's handsome face.

Lu Chen continued, "However, the Virgin Mark crafted by the Yue Emperor is quite beautiful."

The pattern on Murong Xue'er's body consisted of a peach heart surrounded by some symmetrical designs, looking exceptionally exquisite.

Lu Chen was somewhat curious. Why would the Yue Emperor craft such a design as a Virgin Mark?

With the Virgin Mark already existing in this world as a means to discern if a woman had lost her virtue, there was no need to make it so complex.

The Virgin Mark took up a significant portion of Murong Xue'er's abdomen, and its creation must have taken a lot of effort. When Lu Chen was giving Murong Xue'er a Virgin Mark some time ago, it had already taken up much of his time, let alone the fact that his marking had no actual effect, purely being ornamental.

If a mere painting took up so much of Lu Chen's time, then the creation of a real Virgin Mark would definitely be more troublesome. Why would the Yue Emperor bother to do so?

Listening to Lu Chen, Murong Xue'er just looked at him quietly, without saying anything.

At this time, Lu Chen continued, "Does this Virgin Mark have any special meaning?"

Murong Xue'er took a deep breath and replied, "I... don't know..."

Lu Chen continued to inquire, "Does every woman beside the Yue Emperor have such a Virgin Mark?"

Hearing Lu Chen's question, Murong Xue'er instantly became vigilant. Although they were presently engaged in illicit activities, she wasn't so muddled as to casually divulge matters related to the Yue Emperor.

Murong Xue'er, looking into Lu Chen's eyes, said, "You wish to... Hmm... through me... to inquire... about His Majesty?"

Lu Chen smiled. He hadn't expected Murong Xue'er to be so sensitive. His question was merely casual. He spoke lightly, "I've said that I want to keep you in the North Country, not for any political purposes. I simply desire your body."

"I was just curious about anything special about the pattern. There's no need for you to be so sensitive."

"If you don't want to talk about it, then don't."

Murong Xue'er looked into Lu Chen's eyes, which were fervent at the moment, as though his mind indeed hadn't been on anything else just then.

After a while, Murong Xue'er finally said, "Only... only I have the Virgin Mark—other Palace Maids simply have the Virgin Mark sand."

Seeing that Murong Xue'er answered, Lu Chen smiled slightly and then said, "It seems you are quite special in the heart of the Yue Emperor. But I don't understand. If you are so special, why would she be willing to send you to be by my side?"

"Isn't she afraid of throwing meat buns to the dogs, never to return?"

Murong Xue'er didn't respond to Lu Chen's question. His query made her feel profoundly ashamed. She believed that the Yue Emperor had entrusted her with such an important task mainly due to trust.

Since she arrived in the North Country and slept with the North Prince a few times, her conviction started to falter. Now she even doubted whether she was inherently a promiscuous woman.

Seeing Murong Xue'er's silence, Lu Chen did not go on. His gaze fell once again on the Virgin Mark on Murong Xue'er's abdomen as he continued to study the pattern.

After a while, Lu Chen suddenly thought of something and curiously asked his system in his mind, "Can this pattern really determine whether a woman has lost her chastity?"

[Yes, the Curse Pattern is known as the Love-lock Mark. Once a man deflowers a woman with this Curse Pattern, the mark will enter the man's body. From that moment onwards, he will fall deeply in love with the woman, and the Curse Pattern will disappear from the woman's body.]

Seeing the system's explanation, Lu Chen was stunned, his actions coming to a standstill.

What?

The Love-lock Spell?

This is actually a curse?

Impossible to guard against indeed!

How could someone place a curse here?

When I deflowered Murong Xue'er, doesn't that mean I was already afflicted?

But I don't seem to have any anomalies, and there's nothing wrong with my body; could there be a time limit?

As Lu Chen was utterly puzzled, the system's notification sounded once again.

[The Love-lock Spell needs the substance from the Curse Pattern to be triggered, which is a poisonous material. However, it cannot harm the host with the Poison Immunity Body.]

Hearing the system's explanation, Lu Chen instantly understood what was going on.

At that moment, Lu Chen's lips couldn't help but curve upwards slightly; no wonder the Yue Emperor sent Murong Xue'er, a woman so important and valued, to his side. The Yue Emperor intended to use Murong Xue'er to control him.

Thinking this, the Yue Emperor must be a woman with great ambitions; otherwise, why would she send Murong Xue'er, who she has specially cultivated for so many years, to the North Country?

The Yue Emperor probably aims to turn me into her pawn and then achieve some unspeakable goals.

I just don't know what this woman wants to do.

Seeing Lu Chen suddenly stop and gaze at her, Murong Xue'er was slightly stunned, and the next moment her expression appeared rather urgent.

Murong Xue'er tried hard to control her emotions and asked, "What's wrong?"

Lu Chen said with a smile, "Nothing, I was just thinking that if your Emperor loses both the lady and the troops, I wonder if she will be very angry."

Murong Xue'er didn't understand the meaning of Lu Chen's "losing both the lady and the troops," and she looked at Lu Chen with a flush of red on her face, full of confusion.

Lu Chen said, "Alright, let's not talk about this. You've finally come back, let's catch up properly."

As he spoke, Lu Chen suddenly thought of something; his lips curled up, "This pattern is quite nice, how about I draw another one on your back as well?"

Without waiting for Murong Xue'er to respond, Lu Chen flipped her over; then he raised his hand, and the next moment, the pigments and brushes from the study flew to him. Lu Chen then drew a similar pattern on Murong Xue'er's buttocks.

Murong Xue'er didn't know what Lu Chen was up to, but it didn't harm her, so she did not stop him.

However, once Lu Chen finished the drawing, she distinctly felt him become much more irritable.

Murong Xue'er comforted herself inwardly; everything was for the Yue Emperor, all for extracting intelligence from the North Country.

Lu Chen and Murong Xue'er stayed in the resting room for a day. When Murong Xue'er left, she was in a daze, foreseeing the events upon entering the Prince's Mansion. Moreover, the Yue Emperor's intention was to have her approach the North Prince in this manner, and she had already fully accepted these facts.

It's just that she still didn't understand why Lu Chen was so trusting of her; could the North Prince truly believe that one could win a woman's heart in such a way?

Thinking of Lu Chen's confidently handsome smile, Murong Xue'er in the carriage couldn't help but snort softly.

"So naive!"

Chapter 549: I Still Need to Observe More_1

Murong Xue'er left when it was already time for dinner. Lu Chen stretched lazily in his study and thumped the sides of his lower back.

Lu Chen found that whenever he got intimate with a woman, his ambition would strengthen notably.

Murong Xue'er had just left, and he had felt somewhat hungry, but now he didn't feel like going back to the main courtyard for dinner at all. All he wanted to do was deal with the official correspondence piled up on his desk.

Just then, a maid at the door asked, "Prince, the princess consort sent me to ask if you're coming back for dinner tonight?"

Seeing someone had come to ask, Lu Chen finally decided to go back for dinner first and think about it after.

Then Lu Chen said, "This prince will be there shortly."

Afterward, Lu Chen walked towards the Wind Cloud Court. As he just arrived at Wind Cloud Court, and before he even entered the courtyard, a maid called out to him from behind, "Prince, Master Xuanyuan requests an audience!"

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen was momentarily stunned. He stopped in his tracks, turned his head to glance at the maid behind him, and asked with confusion, "What does he want with me so late at this hour?"

The maid answered, "This servant does not know."

Lu Chen continued, "Where is he now?"

The maid said, "He's already in the study, waiting for the prince."

Lu Chen felt somewhat helpless; he had just come from the study, and now he was to return there.

Lu Chen then said to the maid at the entrance of the courtyard, "Go and tell the princess consort that this prince has suddenly been called away on urgent matters. Have them start dinner without me; there's no need to wait."

As his words fell, Lu Chen returned again to the study. At this moment, Xuanyuan Chaoge was standing at the doorway of the study, appearing somewhat anxious and restless.

As soon as Xuanyuan Chaoge saw Lu Chen approaching, he immediately went up to greet him, "Greetings to the great king!"

Lu Chen asked curiously, "What brings Lord Xuanyuan here so late?"

Xuanyuan Chaoge said, "Great King, may I have a word in private?"

Lu Chen directly headed towards the study, "Follow me."

After entering the study, Xuanyuan Chaoge immediately closed the door and said straight away, "Great King, I suddenly felt a tremendous oppressive force earlier. It made me extremely anxious and uncomfortable, as if all the strength in my body was being restrained."

Hearing this, Lu Chen's brow immediately furrowed, and his expression turned extremely serious.

Xuanyuan Chaoge was a Celestial. If something could make a Celestial feel undue pressure and sensations of their power being restrained, that indicated the arrival in the North Country of an extremely powerful being.

Moreover, that person must be aware that Xuanyuan Chaoge was a Celestial and had intentionally tested him.

The sudden appearance in the North Country of a being capable of threatening a Celestial was troubling for Lu Chen.

Currently, the most powerful beings in the North Country were the Celestials. If someone stronger than a Celestial had arrived, they would have no way to confront them. Firearms might deal with Grandmasters, but even killing a Grandmaster was difficult, let alone confronting a being "Above Celestials."

Who could it be?

Lu Chen then asked, "In your opinion, why did you feel that way?"

Xuanyuan Chaoge answered, "I suspect a Celestial being has entered the North Country. That person must have detected my presence and deliberately tested my strength."

Hearing Xuanyuan Chaoge's answer, Lu Chen fell silent.

After a while, Lu Chen suddenly thought of something, and his lips involuntarily curled upwards as he was struck with a realization.

It seemed he needed to work diligently during the coming period and could no longer indulge in daily dalliances in bed with his women.

Only by performing well could he leave a good impression on that person.

With this in mind, Lu Chen said to Xuanyuan Chaoge, "Pay more attention to the surroundings of the Prince's Mansion in the coming period. I've already guessed who the visitor might be. As long as that person does not do anything harmful to the Mansion, you don't need to concern yourself with her."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, Xuanyuan Chaoge was slightly startled, realizing the visitor was someone the Prince knew, which meant there wasn't anything to worry about.

Xuanyuan Chaoge thought the visitor had a status similar to his and had come to seek allegiance to the future Human Emperor. If that was the case, the visitor should not pose a threat to the North Country, even if she were stronger than himself.

With this, the Prince had inadvertently gained yet another strong ally, once again bolstering the strength of the North Country.

Xuanyuan Chaoge immediately responded, "This old servant understands."

Lu Chen continued, "Alright, you may go back for today. If there's anything, I will summon you."

Xuanyuan Chaoge replied, "Yes, my lord. This old servant shall take his leave."

As his voice fell, Xuanyuan Chaoge turned and left the study.

After Xuanyuan Chaoge had left, Lu Chen sat in his study chair and fell into deep thought, pondering to himself.

If it really was her who had come, she would likely not appear immediately, but rather, observe him from the shadows. He wondered whether that woman would set some sort of test for him.

Enough of that for now. Better to go and have dinner. When the time comes, that woman will surely show herself.

With that thought, Lu Chen stood up and returned to the Wind Cloud Court. By this time, his concubines were already having their evening meal. Seeing him return, they all hurried to their feet, some carrying basins of water, others serving rice, and some pouring wine.

After Lu Chen took his seat, he chatted with his concubines about some affairs of the North Country while dining. The whole family sat in the grand hall, presenting a picture of happy harmony.

Meanwhile,

On a rooftop, a woman in flowing white garb watched the Wind Cloud Palace with an expressionless face.

Seeing Lu Chen laugh and chat with his women, the woman murmured to herself, "He truly is a fickle man. Yet, it seems he treats his women quite well."

"However, this alone is not enough to prove he is a good person. I still need to observe him more."

...

After dinner, Lu Chen went to Yelv Nanyan's chamber. As soon as he entered, Yelv Nanyan began to undress him.

Almost every night, Lu Chen engaged in that sort of activity, so it had become a habit for her. As soon as Lu Chen arrived, she would take the initiative to undress him and attend to him.

What Yelv Nanyan didn't expect was just as she began to undress Lu Chen, he took hold of her jade hand and said, "Nanyan, I'm going to take a bath first. Let's turn in early tonight."

At these words, Yelv Nanyan was slightly taken aback and didn't quite understand why Lu Chen was behaving this way today, but she didn't ask further and responded, "This concubine understands."

Lu Chen then took his clothes and went to the neighboring shower room. The servants had intended to enter the bath to help Lu Chen with his bath, but he stopped them.

For someone of Lu Chen's esteemed status, having maids assist him with his bath was the norm. Usually, when Lu Chen bathed, it was either the maids scrubbing his back or his concubines bathing him. Yet today, he acted out of character, choosing to bathe alone.

This left Yelv Nanyan even more puzzled—what was going on with Lu Chen today?

After bathing, Lu Chen went to sit on Yelv Nanyan's bed, then said to her, "Nanyan, it's your turn to take a bath."

Yelv Nanyan replied, "Yes, Prince."

Afterward, Yelv Nanyan went to the bathroom for a bath. When she came out, dressed only in a white undergarment, the sight of the gentle beauty before him still somehow stirred Lu Chen's heart.

However, he always felt as if a pair of eyes was watching him, which made him unusually well-behaved.

When Yelv Nanyan returned to the bed, Lu Chen simply embraced her soft body and then closed his eyes, falling asleep immediately.

Chapter 550 : Something Seems Off with You Lately_1

Seeing Lu Chen do nothing but hold onto the delicate body to sleep, Yelv Nanyan felt somewhat dazed inside.

Just sleeping?

Isn't it still quite early?

The long night stretches on, not doing a bit of something?

Yelv Nanyan didn't believe she had done anything to anger Lu Chen, which would cause him not to touch her. If Lu Chen truly had any complaints about her, he wouldn't have come directly to her bedroom to sleep.

Upon hearing Lu Chen's snoring, Yelv Nanyan was fairly certain that Lu Chen had indeed fallen asleep.

Soon, Yelv Nanyan realized that it must have been because Lu Chen had done something with some woman in the study today, which was why he wasn't in the mood at night.

Although most of the women of the Prince's Mansion were present in the main hall during the evening meal, Lu Chen had many women, and it wasn't only within the Prince's Mansion that he had women; there were women outside it too, and perhaps Lu Chen already had a new favorite.

Thinking this, Yelv Nanyan didn't continue to pursue the thought further and soon closed her eyes to sleep as well.

The next morning when Yelv Nanyan woke up, she saw a fuzzy figure standing by the bed.

She rubbed her eyes and discovered that it was Lu Chen.

Lu Chen getting up so early was truly surprising for Yelv Nanyan.

Previously, when Lu Chen visited her, nine out of ten times he would linger in bed, not getting up early, as Lu Chen loved to embrace her fervent body.

Why did he get up so early today?

While Yelv Nanyan was deeply puzzled, Lu Chen turned his head and looked at Yelv Nanyan, smiling as he said, "Nanyan, you're awake. It's still early, go back to sleep for a little while."

Having said this and dressed, Lu Chen didn't wait for Yelv Nanyan to get out of bed and left the room immediately. Yelv Nanyan quickly said in bed, "My respects as you depart, Prince."

Watching Lu Chen's retreating figure, a trace of worry flashed through Yelv Nanyan's beautiful eyes. There was something very strange about today's Lu Chen.

As for what was strange...

Too formal?

Yes, that was it, too formal.

The Lu Chen of the past was never this formal.

Lu Chen was naturally quite fond of beauty; as long as he held her, his hands would roam over her, and in the morning, they would always share kisses. But today, Lu Chen had simply left.

Definitely something was amiss...

After thinking for a while, Yelv Nanyan still couldn't figure out why Lu Chen had become so formal. Finally, she could only guess that he must have had a lot on his mind recently, so he had no inclination to indulge in matters between men and women.

Now that the news of Zhuge Zhongguang not being a Celestial had spread to all the major dynasties, it was normal for the North Country to face various troubles, and it was normal for Lu Chen to feel the pressure at such a time.

With this in mind, Yelv Nanyan stopped her wild speculations.

After getting out of bed at Yelv Nanyan's place, Lu Chen went to the main courtyard for breakfast. Even Mu Zixuan found it incredibly unbelievable to see Lu Chen up so early.

It was well-known that of all the people in the Prince's Mansion, Lu Chen had the greatest fondness for lounging in bed, preferring to nestle in a woman's embrace. No one had expected that today Lu Chen would get up so early, and even come on his own to have breakfast.

Most of the time, Mu Zixuan would have breakfast sent to the study by the maidservants.

...

Mu Zixuan didn't think too much, as she guessed that Lu Chen must have had something on his mind today, which was why he had gotten up so early.

After breakfast, Lu Chen headed to the study to deal with political affairs.

Basically, he spent the entire day in the study handling official documents, even eating lunch there, looking exceptionally serious.

At dusk, Lu Chen repeated the routine of the previous day, returning to the main hall for dinner, and then casually chose one of his wives or concubines to sleep with.

Lu Chen's life continued in this manner for the next few days.

He would get up very early in the morning, wash up, eat, and after breakfast, go to the study to handle political affairs. Occasionally, he would go out to inspect the housing construction around Yan County. Then every night, he would definitely have dinner with his wives and concubines. After dinner, he would choose one of them to go to bed with.

In choosing which wife or concubine to sleep with, Lu Chen did not show favoritism towards any woman, switching companions daily, appearing every bit the role of a good man.

At dawn.

Lu Chen woke up from Chu Yuqin's Gentle Jade Fragrance. Just as he was about to get out of bed, he noticed her eyes intently watching him.

With a smile, Lu Chen said, "My lady, why are you awake so early?"

With a suspicious look, Chu Yuqin said to Lu Chen, "Chen'er, you've been acting a bit off lately."

Hearing this, Lu Chen asked, "Off? In what way?"

Chu Yuqin replied, "I heard from Zixuan and the others that you've suddenly become a lot more subdued these past few days. You go to bed as soon as the night falls, and you get up at the crack of dawn."

Lu Chen, a man known for his lust, had suddenly become so subdued. It would be impossible for his women not to notice since they knew him through and through. The change in Lu Chen was too apparent to them, and it puzzled all of his wives and concubines.

At first, they thought Lu Chen might be growing weary, as he had hardly rested any day. No man in this world was as diligent as Lu Chen, which explained why there was so much harmony among the many women in his harem.

Mu Zixuan and the others thought that Lu Chen must be feeling aesthetic fatigue, doing the same things every night, hence his sudden turn towards a more subdued behavior, simply falling asleep as soon as he hit the bed.

Latterly, a few of the women gathered together to discuss their observations, only to realize that Lu Chen was treating all his women the same; over these past few days, he hadn't touched a single one of them.

They then suspected that perhaps Lu Chen was having an affair in the study, causing him to lose interest at night. However, when they summoned the maids from the study and inquired, they found out that no woman had entered Lu Chen's study recently, and he had been seriously dealing with political affairs the whole time.

This only deepened the bewilderment within Mu Zixuan and the others; they even began to worry whether Lu Chen was impotent or had fallen ill, and were quite concerned about his condition, eventually deciding that Chu Yuqin, the "senior" among Lu Chen's women, should ask Lu Chen directly.

Chu Yuqin had the closest relationship with Lu Chen; if she asked him, he was likely to answer.

After hearing Chu Yuqin's words, Lu Chen let out a sigh and said, "In two months, Great Wu will attack the North Country, and there will be a lot of matters to attend to in the coming days. I currently have no desire for those things."

Upon hearing this, Chu Yuqin also sighed. "I thought so. Zixuan and the others said you've been behaving oddly lately, and I suspected that something big was happening in the North Country, that you're under a lot of stress."

"Chen'er, I believe that the North Country can overcome this difficulty too. Don't put so much pressure on yourself, and the more stressed you are, the more you should let it out. Keeping it bottled up can lead to obsession, and it's very easy to harm yourself."

Continuing, Chu Yuqin sighed again, "As a woman, there's not much I can do about these things. If the pressure gets too much for you, then let me help you relax a bit."

As she spoke, her hand from under the covers began to move downwards.

Hastily, Lu Chen said, "There's no need for now. I have things to do today, so I need to get up early."

With that, Lu Chen quickly threw off the blanket, got out of bed, and then looking into Chu Yuqin's eyes, he said, "My lady, rest assured, if I truly can't bear the pressure anymore, I'll let you help me relax."

As his words fell, Lu Chen picked up his clothes and began dressing himself. Seeing that he had spoken so, Chu Yuqin no longer said anything. She too quickly got up from the bed and helped Lu Chen with his clothes and belt.