

## Finest 346

### Chapter 346 Borrowing the Cannon

Xu Zhiqing was momentarily stunned. Lin San, who was usually all smiles and never serious, looked today as wilted as an eggplant hit by frost. Could he really be injured?

Qiaoqiao's face turned red as she stole a glance at Madam Xiao and Xu Zhiqing. She gently opened her heart and embraced Lin Wanrong, her adorable little head resting against her big brother's chin, and said softly, "Big brother, are you scared? If we have to, we can start all over again. We originally had nothing anyway."

Lin Wanrong nestled his head into her chest twice, the soft and delicate honeyed touch calming him down. The faint fragrance entered his nostrils, and he inhaled deeply, lifting his head to say, "Little treasure, I know. Rest assured, if it really comes to that, your big brother would rather have nothing but you and my other wives, alright?"

"No ambition!" Xu Zhiqing, hearing his words, couldn't help but frown slightly, snorting in a voice that was neither loud nor soft, but fell into Lin San's ears.

Lin Wanrong looked up at her and snapped, "Can ambition be eaten like a meal? Miss Xu, you need to understand the difference between grains before you talk to me about ambition."

"How can I not distinguish the difference between grains? Don't demean all women like that! Qiaoqiao, your big brother, aside from showing off in front of you, is otherwise quite ordinary. You must not spoil him." Earlier, Lin San had gone to see the Emperor, and Madam Xiao had already introduced Qiaoqiao to Xu Zhiqing. Women naturally become familiar quickly, and after chatting for a while, they began to call each other sisters.

Qiaoqiao shook her head, saying, "Sister Xu, you are wrong. My big brother is the most unique man in the world, unmatched by anyone. You need to interact with him more, and you will understand."

Madam Xiao curiously looked at Xu Zhiqing and Lin San, shaking her head and sighing, "Zhiqing, you are very much like the old Yuruo." Miss Xu did not understand her meaning, and the Madam just smiled, shaking her head, and refused to elaborate.

Regardless, the old Emperor did treat Lin San fairly well. The house he bestowed was certainly large, giving him plenty of face. Lin Wanrong inspected it back and forth, but his brow never relaxed. Seeing her big brother's unhappy expression, Qiaoqiao obediently followed him, not daring to make a sound.

Lin Wanrong suddenly stopped, sighing, "Little treasure, I will find some people for you later. You direct them to clean this house."

Qiaoqiao hesitated for a moment, asking, "Big brother, are we really going to live here?"

Lin Wanrong looked surprised, "Why, don't you want to?"

Qiaoqiao gently shook her head, "That's not it. If we all move here, what will happen to Miss Xiao and Madam Xiao? We are all one family!"

Lin Wanrong laughed, knowing her heart so well, "Don't worry, as you said, we are all one family! We can move them here as well when the time comes. The yard is so big, it can accommodate hundreds of people. If need be, I will work harder and earn more money."

Qiaoqiao smiled radiantly and tightly hugged his arm, saying, "Big brother, you're so good. Actually, you don't have to work so hard. I've already planned everything. When we get to the capital this time, I want to open 'Food for Immortals' there. Since you know the Emperor, when we open, you can invite His Majesty as well, to add prestige to our establishment."

Lin Wanrong inhaled sharply, thinking to himself, 'This girl dares to dream bigger than I do. Do you think inviting the Emperor is as simple as chopping cabbage or grabbing a radish, one after the other with precision?' He playfully touched Qiaoqiao's little face, nodding and smiling, "Invite the Emperor? We can try. Little darling, let's settle on that then. Your big brother is now an official of some rank. Not engaging in some enterprise would be unworthy of the Emperor's trust. You find Eldest Miss to help, and together, go scout a location. Once you've found a good spot, let me know. I know many in the military. We can put on our armor, bring a few squads of soldiers, and even the most stubborn squatters will surely give way to me. Darling, isn't your big brother clever?"

Qiaoqiao giggled melodiously, remembering the day in Jinling when he cleverly obtained what he wanted, her heart filled with warmth. Madam Xiao, listening from behind, shook her head, thinking, fortunately, this Lin San is part of her Xiao family; if he were to oppose them, no one would truly be able to deal with him.

Impatient as Qiaoqiao was, she immediately began to organize the cleaning of the large, dust-filled mansion. Xu Zhiqing was quite supportive of her, deploying over twenty strong men from her household, personally leading them to help Qiaoqiao. The two women chattered away, and Madam Xiao also became interested, instructing how to arrange things here and there. The three women made such a spectacle that Lin Wanrong was left aside.

As eager as Qiaoqiao was, someone was even more impatient. Lin Wanrong, thinking about what the old Emperor had said, was feeling annoyed. Just as he was about to step out for a walk, he spotted a tall-nosed foreigner at the door. Lin Wanrong recognized him; he was the one who had delivered the blood-sweat treasure horse from Ashile the day before.

"Alibaba, what are you doing here?" Lord Lin called out with a smile, pondering to himself that he had never tried the Turkic blood-sweat treasure horse. He should find a time to ride it; it might come in handy if he ever had to flee from the old Emperor.

"Sir, my name is not Alibaba, it's Hanibal!" the tall-nosed Turk corrected.

Lin Wanrong laughed, "It's all the same, all the same. Hanibal is your Turkic name, translated into our Great Hua language; your name would be Alibaba. You know, Alibaba is a very famous wise character in the Arabian Nights. You, with your thick eyebrows and grand appearance, must be as wise as him. Tell me, Alibaba Hanibal, what are you doing here?"

Hanibal was left somewhat dizzy by Master Lin's words, wondering how, in just a few sentences, his name had been altered to "Alibaba Hanibal."

"Sir, the National Master Lu Dongzan and Lord Ashile have instructed me to invite you to a feast tonight. I have come specifically to escort you!" Hanibal said, appearing respectful.

Lin Wanrong looked up at the sky and noticed the sun was directly overhead, then exclaimed in surprise, "I say, Alibaba, it's only noon, isn't it? If you want to invite me to dine, there's really no need to be this early!"

Hanibal shook his head, saying, "Sir, it is imperative to be early. Lord Ashile heard that you have accepted invitations from both the Goryeo Prince and Prince Cheng for tonight, and it's uncertain where you will go. He's extremely anxious and specifically instructed me to come here early. I set out this morning, went to your shop, and people there told me you had gone out to look at a house, so I've been searching for you all the way here."

"You set out this morning?" Lin Wanrong suppressed a laugh. "You're fortunate I didn't make you search all the way to Tongzhou. I guess that's enough trouble for you." He nodded and asked, "Alibaba, your Mandarin is quite good. Who taught you?"

Hanibal lifted his head, proudly stating, "My tribe has often traded with the Great Hua, so learning your language wasn't difficult. But your Mandarin is too coarse and cannot compare to my Turkic script."

"You must be joking," Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Your so-called script, coarse as an undeveloped fertilized egg, dares to compare with my square characters?" He grinned slyly and said, "Hui hua fei fa hei, hei hua fei fa hui! Alibaba, repeat that after me."

Hanibal's mouth opened and closed, unable to replicate the phrase, as Lin Wanrong laughed heartily and started to walk away. Hanibal hurriedly followed, calling, "Sir, Sir. Lord Ashile is still waiting for you!"

'What could these Turkic people want with me, to invite me so eagerly? Could they really want to give me two foreign beauties? With their curly hair, high noses, blue eyes, and thick lips, the girls might be suitable for pole dancing,' Lin Wanrong thought, suddenly intrigued. He smiled and said, "Since your lord is so respectful, I'll go see him. Alibaba, you don't understand the meaning of 'respectful,' do you?"

Hanibal shook his head, and Lin Wanrong waved his hand, saying, "Then quickly prepare a palanquin! I'm waiting for you to honor me!"

Hanibal hastily shook his head, "Sir. I don't have a palanquin. We Turkic people are born on horseback, and we travel by horse. I've prepared swift horses for you—look."

He whistled sharply, and the clear sound of hooves could be heard. Two strong Turkic horses galloped towards them from a distance. Although not as majestic as the fabled blood-sweat horses, they were large and robust, clearly built for running.

"Sir, please mount the horse!" Hanibal said, handing over the reins with a respectful bow.

"Alibaba, don't you have blood-sweat horses? Bring a couple of those for me to ride!" Lin Wanrong said, his mind on the blood-sweat horses. Seeing Hanibal trying to fob him off with ordinary horses, he was quite unwilling and spoke directly.

"About that..." Hanibal said, somewhat awkwardly, "To tell you the truth, Sir. Although we Turkic people breed blood-sweat horses, they are extremely precious and not available to just anyone. Lord Ashile brought ten of them this time. Two were given to you, Sir, and the rest were given to—oh, our lord no longer has any left!"

"You rascal, only two were given and then none left? I have so many wives; if I were to ever take to the road, wouldn't I need one for each hand?" He snorted from his nose, saying, "Alibaba, you are quite filial, aren't you? You Turks are skilled in horsemanship and have fought with our Great Hua for years. Do you mean to say you don't ride the blood-sweat treasure horses?"

Hanibal burst into laughter, responding, "From your words, Master, I can tell that you've never been to the northern lands. We Turks are indeed skilled in horsemanship, but blood-sweat treasure horses are gifts from Tengri, precious beyond measure. How could they possibly be used as war horses? Our battle horses are bred from the inferior blood-sweat horses crossed with common ones, like the two you see here. Though they've been bred through many years and their lineage has grown distant from the blood-sweat horses, they still cannot be compared to the stunted ponies of your Great Hua."

'Damn, so they've been riding mongrel horses all along.' Master Lin chuckled and mounted the horse, giving it a hearty pat, and the two large horses galloped towards the city outskirts.

Turks were indeed natural horsemen. Though Master Lin had fought on horseback and was by no means deficient in his riding skills, Hanibal's galloping demonstrated an even more exquisite mastery.

"Alibaba, these Turkish horses of yours are indeed excellent," Lin Wanrong praised as they rode side by side.

"Of course! Our strength as Turks comes from these fleet-footed steeds," Hanibal proclaimed proudly.

"What do these Turkish horses fear?" Lin Wanrong asked casually.

"They fear fire, smoke, and are not good with endurance. Turkish horses are great for running but not for stamina," Hanibal explained.

This lad was indeed filial, Lin Wanrong thought, patting him on the shoulder and laughing heartily. The two men and their horses continued on toward the outskirts of the city. The Turkish envoy, consisting of over a hundred people, had mostly set up camp outside the city, which was more suitable for their lifestyle.

As they rode northward, they beheld the towering beauty of a green mountain, its pines standing tall and springs flowing, painting an exquisite landscape. At the foot of the mountain, a large grassy area was tinged with the faint green of new growth. Dozens of white tents were erected, resembling patches of pure white clouds amid the green, striking to the eye.

This place, with its clear mountains and beautiful scenery, was well-chosen by the Turks, Lin Wanrong thought, humming in appreciation.

From afar, two spirited horses sprang from the encirclement of white tents, rushing towards them. Hanibal let out a long cry and pulled the reins, his horse rearing and neighing.

"Master, State Teacher Lu Dongzan and Master Ashile are coming to welcome you," Hanibal quickly informed. Lin Wanrong looked up to see the two figures riding towards them; it was indeed Ashile and Lu Dongzan.

The two arrived, and Lu Dongzan placed one hand on his chest, bowing respectfully, "Master Lin, your presence graces us. Lu Dongzan is honored!"

Lin Wanrong returned the greeting with a fist, smiling warmly, "Brother Lu, it's good to see you. Brother A, you as well!"

The two of them noticed that Master Lin's way of addressing them was unconventional, and they couldn't help but glance at each other, a smile playing on their faces. The four men and four horses proceeded directly toward the camp tents. In the camp, several tall wooden racks were set up, with a few freshly caught wild sheep bound to them. The bonfire roared, roasting the wild sheep to a golden hue, and droplets of oil slowly fell. When they splashed onto the flames, sparks flew, and a sound of crackling filled the air. Nearby, three wooden sticks supported large iron pots filled with steaming hot food, the aroma of wild vegetables carried by the wind.

‘The Turks live such healthy lives,’ Master Lin mused. ‘They eat organic food and enjoy extreme sports; no wonder they are so strong.’

Ashile noticed that Master Lin's eyes were fixed on the food all along and gave him a meaningful glance, saying with a grin, "Master Lin, we Turks have been riding horses and shooting arrows since we were children. We may not be skilled in poetry or embroidery, but when it comes to horsemanship and swordsmanship, no one in the world can surpass us."

Ashile's Chinese was somewhat awkward, but the implied meaning of his words was clear to Lin San, who chuckled and replied, "Brother A, you are mistaken. Our Great Hua has vast territories and numerous ethnicities, encompassing all kinds of talents and skills. We have poets, embroiderers, and even more who ride horses and cut down enemies. Our two countries have fought for years, and Great Hua has always been patient. But if you think Great Hua is afraid of the Turks, you are gravely mistaken. An ancient poem says: 'Desert sands white as snow, Yan Mountain's moon shaped like a hook. If I wish to fight, what are the barbarians but a ball?'"

Lu Dongzan, as the Turks' national teacher and someone familiar with Chinese culture, furrowed his brow and said, "Is there such a poem? I've never heard of it."

"Not having heard of it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. This is the profundity of Great Hua's culture, Brother Lu. You still have much to learn," Lin Wanrong laughed.

Lu Dongzan was no ordinary person and nodded in agreement, saying, "What Master Lin says is true. Among our people, if one were to talk about the most learned and the one who understands Great Hua the deepest, it's not me, Lu Dongzan, but another."

'Lu Dongzan is already impressive, and the Turks have someone even more extraordinary?' Lin Wanrong was taken aback. This unfamiliar world was entirely different from his past life. The Turks had not only survived through the centuries but had grown stronger, nearly on par with Great Hua. Whether Great Hua would annihilate the Turks or be defeated by them remained an unknown variable. Should he help Li Sheng invent something useful, like airplanes or cannons? He chuckled to himself, feeling a growing sense of patriotism.

His mind wandered for a moment, and the three men had already stepped into the tent, which seemed to be Ashile's main quarters. The interior was adorned with a red carpet and decorated with pearl milk tea, exuding an exotic flavor.

Ashile proudly pointed to the carpet and said, "Master Lin, please look at this carpet. It's called the Tear Carpet, a spoil of war I obtained from subduing the Tiele tribe. It's said to have been embroidered by the Tiele Dada through generations, accumulating over time to this grand scale. The tears of Tiele Dada were said to have fallen upon it, hence its name, the Tear Carpet."

Lu Dongzan explained, "Dada refers to the sister or daughter of the Tiele Khan, equivalent to a princess in the Great Hua."

Lin Wanrong chuckled and pulled out a firearm from his bosom. "Gentlemen, please take a look; this object is called a handgun, colloquially known as the handheld cannon. Heh heh, the might of a cannon; Brother Ashile, you've seen it with your own eyes. In years past, my grandfather's grandfather's great-grandfather took it with him as he conquered the south and the north, subduing Goryeo and Dongyin, vanquishing Persia and Arabia, sweeping across the Mongolian steppes, fighting from Asia to Europe, fishing in the Amazon, drinking from the Danube, ruling all under heaven—who dared to disobey? Every time they killed a man, they took a strand of hair, later gathering all the hair to make a carpet buried underground. Ah, that's the very grassland where you live today."

The audacity of this man! Where in your Great Hua Dynasty's history is such an act recorded? He boasts so outrageously. Both Lu Dongzan and Ashile looked at him with simultaneous disdain. But when they saw the gun in his hand, they couldn't help but pause, exchanging a glance and nodding slightly.

"Don't just talk, Master Lin; please, take a seat," Lu Dongzan said with a smile, diverting the topic and guiding Lin Wanrong to sit cross-legged.

Master Lin sat on the carpet, his legs going numb, feeling quite awkward. No wonder the Turkic people loved riding horses; it seemed there was no alternative. Sitting cross-legged like this for a few days would surely result in sciatica.

In the midst of their conversation, attendants had already brought in a whole roasted fat lamb, glittering golden, dripping with oil, and temptingly delicious. Ashile lifted his cup and said, "Master Lin, I'm truly grateful that you could attend my banquet today. Come, let's drink this cup together to welcome your arrival."

Ashile and Lu Dongzan drained their cups in one gulp, wiping their mouths with great satisfaction. Master Lin had just raised it to his lips when a pungent smell assaulted his nose. What on earth was this? Horse urine?

Ashile laughed heartily, "Master Lin has never tasted this fine wine, has he? This is our Turkic specialty, mare's milk wine, squeezed from the teats of pregnant mares. It's incredibly satisfying, even more so than milking a woman!"



‘Crude! Did he really call them teats? More like breasts!’ Master Lin thought, despising Ashile. He closed his eyes and took a sip of the mare's milk, finding it fishy, foul, bitter, and indescribably unpalatable. He wondered how those two large-nosed fellows managed to drink it. Fortunately, roasting a whole lamb was a specialty of the nomads—spicy, pungent, yet tender and delicious, a pure and natural green food. Master Lin stuffed his mouth with several bites, finally managing to forget the taste of the mare's milk.

Seeing Master Lin wolfing down his food, both men smiled slightly. Ashile clapped his hands, and there was a rustling sound outside the door. A few exotic women entered, their entire bodies draped in thin yellow silk, except for openings at their navels and foreheads, revealing white bellies and a pair of enchanting eyes.

These foreign women were taller than the women of the Great Hua, with more pronounced figures. Their breasts were full and firm, like rolling mountains; their hips round and sturdy, like resilient millstones; protruding at the front and tilting at the back, alluringly inviting.

‘My word,’ thought Lin Wanrong, ‘the women who ride horses really have it all—large and round buttocks, perky and firm breasts. They're fiery! Should I install a steel pole in the tent and give Ashile and Lu Dongzan a show?’

As he gazed at the women, filled with exotic charm, Lin Wanrong felt a pang of desire. Ashile's eyes roamed over them, and he swallowed hard, clapping his hands lightly. A melody of stringed instruments began to play, and the voluptuous foreign women slowly swayed to the music.

Their thin silk garments could not contain their rounded breasts and perky hips. In time with the music, the graceful foreign women swung their waists freely, their beautiful eyes expressing a hint of flirtation, their bosoms and hips moving together. Suddenly, with a swishing sound, the silk was all thrown off. The women, now in short skirts, revealed their slender, white jade legs. Their hips lightly twisted, their legs slightly parted, glimpses of hidden allure peeked out from under their skirts, an indescribable enchantment.

Powerful indeed, thought Lin Wanrong, entranced. They must feel very powerful when clenched. Just as he was enjoying the spectacle, he heard Ashile's voice beside his ear: "Master Lin, if you like them, these women are yours."

"This... isn't it inappropriate? Can they dance with a pole? Let's see it, quickly show me," Lin Wanrong said, wiping his mouth.

Ashile and Lu Dongzan exchanged a smile, and Lu Dongzan said, "Master Lin, we'd like to borrow something from you."

"Borrow what?" Lin Wanrong replied without turning his head.

"Borrow the cannon!" Ashile said with a smile.

## Chapter 347 Big Trouble

"Borrow the cannon? Sure!" Master Lin exclaimed with great excitement, "I carry two with me, one big and one small. Which one would you like?!"

"Carry them with you?!" Lu Dongzan and Ashile looked at each other, perplexed. Can cannons really be carried around? How advanced has the technology in Great Hua become?

"Master Lin, may we see the cannon that you carry with you?" Lu Dongzan scrutinized Lin Wanrong, carefully asking.

"The small cannon? Here it is, you've both seen it," Master Lin proudly raised his musket, "This is called a hand-held cannon. It's a collaboration between Great Hua and the West, and will likely be equipped for our cavalry and infantry in just a few years."

Lu Dongzan and Ashile had dealt with Master Lin a few times before. His words often sounded as elusive as clouds drifting across the sky, with no way of telling what was true and what was false. However, this musket was exquisitely crafted and finely made, clearly no ordinary piece. Had Great Hua truly developed the latest handheld firearms as Master Lin claimed?

"Master Lin, what about the other cannon? Is it also with you?" Ashile hastily asked.

Master Lin chuckled, "The other one is called the 'big cannon,' and of course, it's with me. This cannon is a divine artifact, with an imposing appearance and boundless power. It once bombarded twelve maidens in a single night, and its firepower is still undiminished. How about that, impressive, right?" Master Lin lasciviously glanced at the scantily clad and seductive nomad women, nodding, "But your Turkic women are big and have been riding horses since childhood, so this cannon might have some difficulty taking down twelve. Ten would be no problem."

The two became more and more confused. Master Lin's cannon was going to attack maidens, then nomad women. What on earth was this formidable thing?

Seeing their bewildered expressions, Lin Wanrong burst into laughter and gave them a lecherous look, "Brother A, Brother Lu, speaking of this cannon, you both have one too. Only a smaller caliber, that's all. Mine is an enlarged caliber that makes women around the world tremble in fear and is invincible."

The two Turkic men finally understood what Master Lin was referring to. He was nothing but a degenerate, lower even than a beast. That such a man could become the Vice Minister of Personnel in Great Hua showed how far the nation had declined.

Their hearts filled with both joy and sorrow, Ashile laughed, "Master Lin, you truly have remarkable ideas. We admire you greatly. However, what I wanted to borrow was the type of cannon you displayed at the martial arts demonstration that day. The one with tremendous power and a compact structure."

Master Lin turned his cheek, not speaking. Ashile continued, "Master Lin, you are young and vigorous, full of fiery energy. These beautiful Turkic women here can help you cool down a bit. You few—" He pointed at several dancing Turkic women in the field, chattering in a foreign language, leaving Master Lin fuming. 'Damn it, what kind of bird language is this? It doesn't sound like English, nor French.'

Lu Dongzan knew that he couldn't understand, so he automatically translated, "Ashile says, 'Let them serve Master Lin well. Once Master Lin is comfortable, he will report back to Khan upon returning home, and promote their parents and siblings.'"

As soon as the words were spoken, the effect was immediate. A few Turkic women clung to Master Lin like unshakeable sticky candy. They twisted their waists next to Master Lin, rubbing their full breasts and round buttocks against his body. Ashile and Lu Dongzan also watched, secretly swallowing their saliva. For a moment, the tent was incredibly sultry, and the temperature instantly rose by several degrees.

'Turkic women really have great figures. If I were to receive a chest push... ah, I'd be in heaven,' Master Lin thought. His hands were vigorously exploring the Turkic woman's body, reaching down under the smooth satin and into her robe, grasping her snowy thigh, giving it a strong squeeze. The Turkic woman moaned, just like a sleepy Persian cat, utterly enchanting.

Seeing Master Lin so bold, yet in control, Ashile and Lu Dongzan sighed at their own inadequacy. Ashile swallowed and said, "Master Lin, about the matter of borrowing the cannon we mentioned earlier, what do you think?"

Master Lin's eyes narrowed as he touched a Turkic woman's chest, smiling, "Brother A, I'm afraid you've found the wrong person. I'm just a Vice Minister of the Ministry of Personnel who hasn't taken office yet, a small official as insignificant as sesame seeds. Borrowing a cannon is a military affair; you should go to the barracks. Don't you know anyone there? Here's what I'll do: I'll introduce you to someone, General Li Tai of Great Hua. You know him, right?! He controls the frontier army, and he has plenty of the cannons you want. Just go directly to him. Offering some fine horses and beautiful women should smooth the way."

Ashile forced a smile, "Master Lin is joking. How could we not know General Li Tai? He has fought with us Turks for many years. If we could go through him, we wouldn't need to come to you."

Lin Wanrong snorted in his heart. These Turkic people were no fools; they knew that Great Hua's biggest threat to them was the cannons. The old cannons were bulky and cumbersome, posing limited threats to the Turks. But now things were different. Xu Wei, under Lin Wanrong's guidance, had sent people to study cannon technology on French armored ships. With improvements by Xu Zhiqing's skilled hands, the cannons not only shot farther and more accurately but also became more powerful and much smaller. Now, just two warhorses could easily pull one. The Turks recognized the value and were trying to get their hands on one for study. But the newly improved cannons were scarce and tightly controlled by Li Tai, prohibiting any leakage, so they had been unable to acquire one.

"Brother A, what do you want the cannon for? Aren't you Turks known for conquering the world on horseback? Those heavy cannons that even two horses can't pull will be of no use to you!" Lin Wanrong laughed.

Lu Dongzan's eyes flashed, and he nodded, saying, "What Master Lin says is correct. We Turks are a horse-riding people, so the cannons indeed don't have much use for us. But these past few days, as we have been strolling around the capital with time to spare, it just so happened that Ashile mentioned to me that Master Lin had invited him to watch a cannon demonstration. My brothers and I were somewhat interested, so we wanted to obtain a cannon to play with. Besides, there are many rabbits and wolves in the mountains, and it would be perfect for us to hunt a few for fun. As Master Lin has said, the cannons are extremely heavy, so heavy that even two horses cannot pull them, so you don't have to worry about us taking them away. After we've had our fun for a few days, we'll return it to you. To show our sincerity, Ashile has specially prepared four beautiful Turkish women to present to you."

Lin Wanrong, a master of intrigue and cunning, could see through Ashile's flickering eyes and knew that he must have ulterior motives. Master Lin laughed heartily and said, "So, the two of you want to borrow the cannon for hunting? Truly a novel idea! But as I have already said, I am of little importance and have no means to help."

Lu Dongzan shook his head and said, "Master Lin, you are being too modest. When you led troops to wipe out the White Lotus sect in Shandong, the cannons played a significant role, and your reputation in the army was extraordinary. If you give the word, there's nothing that can't be done."

'Damn it, these Turks have really done their homework, even uncovering these matters,' thought Lin Wanrong. Seeing Ashile and Lu Dongzan's eager eyes and their desperate desire to obtain the cannons, Lin Wanrong sighed with difficulty and said, "My brothers, you may not know this, but although I have many good friends in the army, the cannons of the Divine Machine Unit are all controlled by Li Tai. You know what the old man is like, careful and meticulous, personally counting the number of cannons every day before he can sleep. Even if I want to help, I can't."

Ashile and Lu Dongzan looked at each other, not expecting that this Master Lin, who appeared greedy and lustful on the surface, would suddenly become principled at this critical moment. They exchanged glances, and Ashile, gritting his teeth, pulled out a small cloth bag from his pocket, saying, "Master Lin, I would like you to look at something."

The small bag was not big and very light, so it was unclear what was inside. However, Ashile handled it as if it were a cherished treasure, carefully revealing it in front of Lin Wanrong.

A faint, pungent odor came forth, bitter with a peculiar refreshing fragrance that was invigorating. Lin Wanrong closed his eyes, inhaling deeply, finding the scent both familiar and foreign.

"My Lord, this is something precious," Ashile said, licking his lips, his eyes flashing with avarice, as if he was holding a handful of bright gold. Even the composed Lu Dongzan's eyes sparkled, staring fixedly at the small bag without moving.

Ashile took an empty small pot and slowly poured the contents of the bag into it. Lin Wanrong saw clearly that it was a bunch of withered yellow leaves, cut into thin strips, and the faint, pungent aroma became even more intense.

Without giving Lin Wanrong a chance to examine closely, Ashile quickly covered the pot with its lid, and with a mysterious smile towards Lin Wanrong, took a spark from the torch beside him, ignited a piece of dry grass, and swiftly threw it into the pot. In no time at all, a faint wisp of smoke slowly emerged from the slender mouth of the pot, and a familiar scent rushed forth.

What on earth was this? Lin Wanrong deeply inhaled the fragrance, his face gradually becoming serious.

Seeing the smoke rising, Ashile and Lu Dongzan's faces immediately brightened, their noses eagerly pressed to the mouth of the pot as they deeply inhaled the scent. Then, they both looked up, exhaling a breath, their expressions utterly carefree and transcendent, as if they had become celestial beings.

"Master Lin, come and take a puff," Ashile urged, hastily passing the small pot to him.

Lin Wanrong took the pot, his face as still as water, squeezing the pot tightly, not even feeling the heat burning his hand. Strange things had been happening often that year, and now here was something not even found in the Great Huá. How could it appear in the hands of the Turks?

He inhaled deeply from the pot's mouth, and a fiery, intense sensation choked his nose, causing him to cough twice. Ashile and Lu Dongzan burst into hearty laughter, looking at him with pride, saying, "Master Lin, what do you think?"

Holding the small pot, Lin Wanrong was silent for a moment before asking solemnly, "Ashile, Lu Dongzan, where did this thing come from?!"

Seeing that he was asking about its origin rather than its name, both men were slightly taken aback. Could this mysterious Vice Minister Lin have seen this object before? That would be truly miraculous!

The two exchanged glances, and Lu Dongzan asked, "Master Lin, have you seen this 'Nose-piercing Grass' before?"

"What grass?!" Master Lin exclaimed, eyes wide.

"Nose-piercing Grass!" Lu Dongzan, noticing Master Lin's expression, chuckled and explained, "Oh, you must not have heard of Nose-piercing Grass. This is a term in our Turkic language. Great Huá surely doesn't have this Nose-piercing Grass. It grows south of our lands, near the desert edge bordering Great Hua. It's naturally formed but rare, only producing a few pounds a year. If our warriors or horses are injured or ill, sometimes severely, we blow the smoke of Nose-piercing Grass into their nostrils, and the ailment is cured. Over time, people become addicted and love its scent

more and more. Since it's hard to find, our entire nation can only gather two or three pounds a year. It is indeed invaluable. These are war spoils awarded to me by the Khan after defeating the Tiele five years ago, cherished ever since. Master Lin, try it again; I guarantee you'll fall in love with Nose-piercing Grass."

"Nose-piercing Grass, Nose-piercing Grass," Master Lin muttered to himself and then burst into laughter, exclaiming, "Good, good, excellent Nose-piercing Grass. You Turks indeed have rich resources. But remember, from now on, you can only call it Nose-piercing Grass, not tobacco, and definitely not 'smoking tobacco.' Otherwise, I won't let you off."

"Master Lin, what does 'smoking tobacco' mean?" Lu Dongzan asked, puzzled.

"Tobacco is a grass that produces smoke, but it's not as good-sounding as your Nose-piercing Grass," Master Lin chuckled and said, "Brother A, don't you think you're being a bit stingy? This small amount of Nose-piercing Grass will be gone in two or three puffs. Bring more; I want to take some back for my main wife, my concubines, my father-in-law, and my mother-in-law to taste."

Seeing that Master Lin's enthusiasm was even greater than when fondling a woman's thigh, the two men instantly sensed an opportunity. Ashile gritted his teeth, and as he was about to prepare more Nose-piercing Grass, Master Lin reached out and grabbed the small bag. He laughed and said, "Why be so formal? Just give it all to me. I'll find some people to divide it up when I get back."

They had seen shameless people before, but never someone so shameless. It was a wonder that such a person had been appointed as an official. Watching Master Lin stuff the Nose-piercing Grass into his clothing without a second thought, Ashile felt like his heart was bleeding, and his facial muscles twitched a few times. Still, he managed to force a smile and said, "Though this Nose-piercing Grass is invaluable, since you like it, Ashile will gladly present it with both hands. Now, about the matter of borrowing the cannons—"

Lin Wanrong, having received the generous gift, pounded his chest, laughing heartily and said, "No problem. Never mind cannons; I could even get you airplanes. Brother Lu, there is something else I need to ask you."

Seeing Master Lin readily agree, the two were overjoyed, and Lu Dongzan hurriedly said, "Speak your mind, Master Lin. Lu Dongzan will spare no detail."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Brother Lu, you are well-learned. You can write, can't you?"

"That goes without saying," Lu Dongzan smiled, "I won't mention the Turkic script, but I can even write quite a bit in the language of the Great Hua."

"Wow, I didn't expect Brother Lu to be so capable, even knowing how to write in the script of my Great Hua!" Master Lin clapped his hands and laughed, "Could you then draw the boundary between our two nations for me? Alas, I've read so many books lately that I've even forgotten where the border is. How embarrassing, how embarrassing!"

What a shameless man! Ashile was so displeased with Master Lin, especially after he had taken the Nose-piercing Grass, it felt like Master Lin had cut off a piece of his flesh.

"That's simple!" Lu Dongzan said, laughing, as he picked up a charred piece of charcoal and began to draw on the tent's carpet.

"Please look, Master Lin. Here is Ulan Ude, here is Irkutsk, and between them is Lake Baikal. This area originally belonged to the Tiele and the Khitan, but after we destroyed those two tribes, this region became ours. To the south, you have the Selenga River, Tsetserleg, which we acquired after defeating the Karluk. Along the Altai Mountains that stretch east and west, all the way to Ust-Kut, is Turkic territory. If we were to talk about a border between our two nations, it is temporarily located here. We call it Barkul, and you call it Yiwu," Lu Dongzan, indeed the Turkic National Scholar, skillfully sketched the regions of the Turkic and Great Hua territory on the map in just a few short minutes.

Lin Wanrong listened with bewilderment, shaking his head and saying, "What names, such as 'lecherous wolf,' 'cart,' and 'pants'! Excellent choices. Brother Lu, your Turkic people are truly cultured."

Lu Dongzan nodded and laughed, "Naturally. Our Turkic lands span both the desert and grassland extremes, home to various nomadic tribes. The Tiele and the Khitan alone were once mightier than us. How could we Turkics have conquered such a vast area and made these nations submit if we didn't have real skills?"

'Submit? Submit, my foot! Who are you trying to fool? The issue of ethnic minorities is the most troublesome. If they rebel, you'll suffer.' Master Lin nodded in approval and said, "Impressive, truly impressive. Brother Lu, is this the Mountain of Gold you're talking about?"

"It's not the Mountain of Gold, but the Gold Mountain," Lu Dongzan corrected.



"Brother Lu, you're so knowledgeable. If I remember correctly, this Gold Mountain belongs to my Great Hua, doesn't it?" Master Lin chuckled mischievously. 'How dare this hawk-nosed man bluff me? I've sung "On Beijing's Gold Mountain" since I was a child. When did it become the Turkics' turn to claim Gold Mountain?'

Lu Dongzan saw Master Lin's complete confusion about the geographical positions of Great Hua and the Turks. Initially, he scorned Master Lin, thinking him ignorant. But hearing him claim Gold Mountain as part of Great Hua, he couldn't help but feel a chill. The Turks had battled with Great Hua for years, mostly contending over the Gold Mountain range, until the Turks recently overpowered other northern forces and broke through Gold Mountain, invading Yiwu and Ejina. This young man's mention of Gold Mountain belonging to Great Hua suggested he wasn't entirely clueless.

[In modern time, Yiwu is a county in northern Xinjiang, bordering directly with Mongolia, while Ejina or Ejin is a banner in the far west of Inner Mongolia, also directly bordering with Mongolia.]

"Well, disputes between countries, each having its own claims, are common," said Lu Dongzan.

"Each having its own claims?!" Master Lin smirked, "Oh, right, Brother Lu, where does that spicy nose-grass of yours grow?"

"Between Khovd and Altai, right here!" Lu Dongzan pointed at the map, curiously asking, "Master Lin, why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing much. Perhaps one day, I might visit Khovd and 'have dealings' with you there," Master Lin said with a mischievous grin.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome Master Lin to our Khovd as a guest," Ashile said through gritted teeth, smiling, "Master Lin, what about the matter of the cannon?"

"That? Leave it to me. I'll notify you once it's ready. Li Sheng and the others are developing it, so it will take some time—" Master Lin mumbled to himself.

"Master Lin, what development?" Ashile asked, confused.

"Oh, I mean, we'll get the latest cannons for you so that you can enjoy your hunting. Just make sure not to aim them at our palace," Master Lin said with a forced smile, his words startling the two Turkic emissaries.

Ashile and Lu Dongzan both had a strange feeling about Master Lin. Upon entering the Turkic camp, he acted as if he were at home, completely at ease. He ate what was to be eaten, touched what was to be touched, and took what was to be taken without the slightest courtesy. He seemed to take all the advantages, but regarding the promises he had made, neither of them could pin him down. Who was playing whom? The two were left thoroughly perplexed.

As the sun set in the west, Lin Wanrong, letting out a satisfied belch, touched the chest of a charming Turkic woman and then, grasping Ashile's cherished "spicy nose-grass," galloped away on his horse.

"Shameless! Disgraceful! Filthy rabbit droppings!" Watching Master Lin's dashing figure, Ashile could no longer contain his rage. With a swoosh, he drew his saber and roared, "Lu Dongzan, I wish to cut him down with one stroke!"

Lu Dongzan replied solemnly, "Ashile, don't be impulsive. The woman you offered him, he did not take her, did he?"

Ashile snorted, "He didn't take her, true, but he kissed and touched her, taking every advantage! These are the concubines of my tent!"

"This man is no simpleton! Ashile, I hope we haven't misjudged him!" Lu Dongzan said quietly.

"Simpleton, my foot! If we ever meet on the battlefield, I will behead him first," Ashile grumbled, then asked, "Lu Dongzan, should we continue to engage with the other side?"

"Yes! And we must hurry! We must be quick!" Watching Master Lin's retreating figure, Lu Dongzan sighed softly, "I have an ominous premonition that this Lin San will be a great trouble for us!"

## Chapter 348 Returning the Goods

After leaving the camp of the Turkic people, Lin Wanrong spurred his horse into a wild gallop, quickly leaving behind the tents of the nomads. It was only after he had put some distance between them that he slowed his pace, and the tall Turkic horse leisurely trotted along.

Seeing that there was no one around, Lin Wanrong took out the "Nose-piercing Grass" that he had snatched from Ashile and began to carefully observe it. This "Nose-piercing Grass" that grew in the Turkic lands had rough leaves, far from the delicate tobacco leaves he had seen in his previous life. The cutting was also quite arbitrary, as the Turkic people rarely used paper, let alone rolled cigarettes. They would simply inhale the "Nose-piercing Grass" through their noses. If this thing were introduced to Great Hua, it would likely have become popular already.

He brought the leaf to his nose and took a deep sniff. Although the tobacco leaf was rough and came with a choking smell, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but sigh with satisfaction. This stuff was a real treasure. If it could be grown in large quantities in Great Hua and then sold to Goryeo, Dongying, or even Europe, Great Hua would make a fortune. He wondered if the people of Great Hua had started growing tobacco yet. If not, he would have to go to the Turks to get it. Lu Dongzan had said that this tobacco leaf grew north of the Altai Mountains. He would have to study the map with Old Xu sometime and send some people to take control of it.

He daydreamed for a while and then made his way to the old training ground where he had once fought against Su Mubai. The sound of drums and gongs filled the air, and the shouts of battle rang out as tens of thousands of warhorses galloped forth, apparently practicing a cavalry battle. Hu Bugui and others had already been incorporated into the army, and before the great army set out, Li Tai's elite troops would practice here every day. Focusing on the nomads' expertise in cavalry warfare, Li Tai had placed special emphasis on cavalry confrontations. Hu Bugui, Du Xiuyuan, Xu Zhen, and others had been highly regarded for this.

"General Lin, what brings you here?" Seeing Lin Wanrong riding his tall horse, leisurely approaching the camp, Li Sheng and Hu Bugui, who had already been informed, hurriedly came out to greet him.

Lin Wanrong dismounted, patting the back of the large Turkic horse, and smiled, saying, "Brother Hu, do you recognize what kind of horse this is?"

Hu Bugui disdainfully snorted, "A Turkic horse, large and powerful, excels in sprinting and thrusting. Its weakness is endurance. I saw countless Turkic horses when I was on the northern front line. It's not anything special. General Lin, where did you get this?"

Lin Wanrong gave a mysterious smile, "These mixed-breed Turkic horses are of course nothing special. But what about purebred blood-sweat treasure horses, Brother Hu, Brother Li? You both are well-traveled; have you ever seen one?"

"Blood-sweat treasure horses?" Hu Bugui was astonished, "The blood-sweat treasure horses is a Turkic specialty. Legend has it as a descendant of the heavenly horse, tall and majestic, capable of traveling a thousand miles a day. Even in the Turkic lands, they are extremely rare. I saw one when I fought with the barbarians on the grasslands. General Lin, why do you mention the blood-sweat treasure horses? Could it be that you have seen one?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "A blood-sweat treasure horse is quite ordinary indeed. Eats grass and defecates just like any other. Just yesterday, I imported two of them into my home. Perhaps I'll let you brothers take them for a stroll sometime."

"Two?" Hu Bugui's eyes widened in disbelief, his face filled with incredulity. "General Lin, you must be joking. A single one of these blood-sweat horses is worth a fortune; how did you manage to acquire two? Where did you import them from?"

"They were bribed gifts given to me," General Lin mysteriously said.

Hu Bugui and Li Sheng were both stunned. General Lin was indeed extraordinary, even discussing bribery so openly.

"Cough, cough," Hu Bugui forced a laugh: "So they were gifts from friends, General Lin. I, Hu Bugui, have never even touched a blood-sweat horse in my life. When can I visit your mansion to see them?"

"No problem," Lin Wanrong gave a sly smile. "Brother Hu is truly an expert. Those blood-sweat horses have soft golden manes, even more comfortable to touch than a woman's thigh. Once we finish this matter, you can call up your brothers to my house. We'll have a horse meeting, strip those blood-sweat horses bare, touch them, and work up a sweat. Hahaha!"

‘What a lecherous man, but I like it!’ Hu Bugui and Li Sheng joined General Lin in raucous laughter. After exchanging a few words, Hu Bugui said, "General Lin, what brings you here today? Is there something you want us to do?"

Having spent considerable time with Lin Wanrong, Hu Bugui had a clear understanding of his personality. General Lin never visited the military camp without reason; if he showed up, it usually meant trouble.

Lin Wanrong saluted Li Sheng and chuckled, "For this, I need to trouble Brother Li. Brother Li, how is the improvement of our Divine Machine Unit's cannon coming along?"

Li Sheng glanced around and whispered, "We just tested it a few days ago. The improved cannon can shoot up to a mile without losing much power. At the same time, Xu Zhiqing came up with a way to add a base, making it more flexible and lighter."

'Xu Zhiqing, that girl is interested in everything, be it astronomy, mathematics, or even bows and cannons.' Lin Wanrong nodded, "Brother Li, do me a favor. Find the heaviest and oldest cannon, carefully adjust it, repaint it, and make it look like our new cannon. Write some characters on it, attach it to a carriage, and send it to me; I have a use for it."

Li Sheng looked puzzled, "General Lin, what do you need this for? We've already discarded the old and cumbersome cannons. If you want to play with cannons, I can get you the latest one that two horses can pull and can be adjusted in any direction."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Brother Li, I want the old cannon. Remember, the exterior must look brand new, just like the new ones, but the inside must be filled with scrap metal, utterly unshootable! Then paint some foreign text on it that they won't understand. The more foreign and trendy it looks, the better."

Li Sheng, baffled but trusting General Lin's crafty wisdom, said, "General Lin, according to your idea, there will be no problem. But what is this foreign text you want on the cannon? I'm rather uneducated, what is foreign text, and what kind should we paint?"

Lin Wanrong took out paper and a brush from his bosom, quickly wrote down a few strokes, and handed it to Li Sheng, saying, "Write these characters. Remember, the color must be bright and eye-catching!"

Li Sheng stared at the twisted letters, dumbfounded, and Hu Bugui's eyes were also wide open, "General, is this foreign writing? You are truly skilled! How do you pronounce this? What does it mean?"

Lin Wanrong took the paper, pointed at the letters, and said, "Everyone, follow me. F—U—C—K, 'f\*ck,' 'f\*ck,' it must be 'f\*ck.'"

"F\*ck, f\*ck, it must be f\*ck," Li Sheng and Hu Bugui, humble and eager to learn, repeated after General Lin. Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "F\*ck, it's refreshing! Remember this. Paint these characters on the cannon, I shall name it the 'F\*ck Cannon!'"

"General, what does 'F\*ck' really mean? I feel like you really enjoy 'F\*cking'?" Li Sheng asked curiously, with Hu Bugui nodding in agreement, equally puzzled.

General Lin rolled his eyes, "Ah, my brothers, I am a civilized man and did not want to use vulgar language, but you insist. The meaning of 'F\*ck' is, well, Brother Hu, I heard you have a lover in the Eight Great Alleys, what's the scholarly term for what you two do at night?"

Hu Bugui's face turned red, too embarrassed to speak. Li Sheng quickly answered with a smile, "Brother Hu, that's called making love, isn't it?!"

Master Lin shook his head, "The word 'making love' is too civilized, but it's rare for you to be so cultured, so let it be. The meaning of 'F\*ck' is making love, making love vigorously!"

"F\*ck Cannon? Making Love Cannon?" Hu Bugui and Li Sheng looked at each other, struggling to suppress their laughter. Truly, General Lin was an extraordinary genius, and the name he had chosen for this cannon was incredible!

With the "Making Love Cannon" matter settled, Lin Wanrong humbly began to consult Hu Bugui about geographical knowledge, most concerned with the Khovd where tobacco grew. According to his thoughts, resources were dead, people were alive. If the Turks had not realized how much change tobacco would bring to society, then Master Lin would reluctantly help them out, invading the Turks, seizing their women, their treasured horses, and their tobacco. Since ancient times, it was the Turks who had plundered Great Hua, so why couldn't Great Hua plunder the Turks? As the saying goes, a step back reveals a boundless sky and ocean, a step forward brings endless joy!

Hu Bugui listened to Master Lin's endless chatter about places like Ulan Ude, Irkutsk, the Selenga River, Tsetserleg, Ust-Kut, and even knew in detail which land the Turks had seized from whom. Hu Bugui became excited, tightly grasping General Lin's hand and said, "General, you truly are a divine being. I have been fighting the Turks for years, and only knew the area around Barkol You have never been to the battlefield, yet you understand their history and Khanates so clearly. Heaven blesses our great Great Hua by sending us General Lin. When we are on the battlefield, with the General's strategical acumen, victory can be planned from within the tent and won from a thousand miles away."

Old Hu's ability to flatter had indeed greatly improved. Lin Wanrong shyly said, "Brother Hu, you flatter me. I merely enjoy studying and have read but a million scrolls."

Li Sheng and Hu Bugui had grown accustomed to Lin Wanrong's shamelessness; it would have been abnormal if he hadn't bragged. At that moment, Lin Wanrong sketched out a rough map

according to what he had learned from Lu Dongzan, and Hu Bugui supplemented it, marking out the specific location of Khovd. Although they did not know why General Lin was so interested in Khovd, seeing his attitude now greatly different from before—shifting from "they want me to fight" to "I want to fight"—Hu Bugui was naturally thrilled. He held nothing back from him, sharing everything he knew.

When they returned to the city from the drill ground, it was already evening. Lin Wanrong remembered that there were banquets with Goryeo and Prince Cheng. For a moment, he was hesitant and unsure whether or not to go. The banquet with Goryeo was one thing, but since he had always been at odds with Prince Cheng, Lin Wanrong was curious about the old fellow's sudden invitation and what he was up to.

Walking around the city for a while, he reached a quiet spot and suddenly stopped, sneakily looking around before softly calling out, "Fairy, Fairy—"

He called out a few times, but all around was silent, with no response. Lin Wanrong was puzzled; according to their agreement, the fairy was supposed to follow him and protect him at all times. He wondered where she had been hiding when he was in the Turkic camp that day.

"Fairy Ning—Yuxi, Yuxi—" Lin Wanrong shouted twice, then felt a gentle breeze and a faint fragrance passing by. Turning his head, he saw Ning Yuxi standing beside him, her face as calm as water.

"Eh, Fairy Sister, where did you fly in from?" Lin Wanrong curiously eyed her. "I looked for you for quite a while and didn't see your shadow!"

Ning Yuxi's face showed no emotion as she flatly asked, "What did you call me just now?"

"Fairy Ning!" Lin Wanrong answered immediately.

"What did you call after that?"

"Yuxi—"

With a soft "snap," a sword scabbard flew out, its force formidable, and embedded itself three inches into a nearby tree. Ning Yuxi looked at him, her face like still water, but the corners of her eyes betrayed a hint of anger.

"Yuxi, what's the matter with you? The scabbard and the sword are a pair; how could you bear to separate them?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, showing no shame.

"The name 'Yuxi' is not for you to call." Ning Yuxi composed herself and calmly said, "You can call me Daoist Ning. I promised to guard your life, but I didn't promise not to maim you. If something were to be missing from your body but your life was spared, I wouldn't have violated our agreement. Think it over."

"Yuxi, have you become a nun? I can't tell! Alas, what a waste of good food!" Lin Wanrong shook his head in regret, his face full of pity.

With a swish, Ning Yuxi's long sword flew out and passed by his ear. Lin Wanrong felt a chill by his ear, and a few strands of protruding hair fell silently.

'Damn it, threatening me with a flying sword? I'm not easily scared,' he thought, wiping a bead of cold sweat from his forehead. He sighed lightly and said, "That was a really precise throw. Yuxi, when will you teach me? I've always been interested in throwing knives!"

Ning Yuxi's composure was indeed well-practiced. She calmly said, "This time is only a warning. You may not be so lucky next time—what do you really want to say?"

Lin Wanrong sighed, "I just want to talk to you for a while. Why is it so difficult? Were you following me all day today?"

Ning Yuxi's eyes slightly closed in response, and Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Fairy Sister, your skin is really nice, and your figure is even better—oh, oh, never mind, can you please move the sword away? I'm a person who likes to joke a lot!"

Ning Yuxi pressed the long sword against his neck and slowly said, "You should cherish the opportunity to speak now. You might not be able to talk very soon."

"Fairy Sister, what do you think about the Turks wanting to borrow the cannon?" Feeling the icy sword blade against his neck, Lin Wanrong dared not take advantage anymore and earnestly asked.

"I don't know!" Ning Yuxi answered succinctly. "I never ask about things that are not my concern."



"What about Prince Cheng? Is his matter something you would care about?" Lin Wanrong seized the opportunity to ask, "He invited me to a banquet tonight. Should I go? What should I wear? Fairy Sister, will you help me decide?"

"You want to ask about Prince Cheng?" A glimmer of amusement flashed in the fairy's eyes. "You should not be asking me. There's someone who knows better."

"Who?" Lin Wanrong asked, confused.

"Have you forgotten? That night, she even came to kill you," Ning Yuxi said, smiling like a peony blooming in the cold winter, extraordinarily enchanting. Lin Wanrong felt a chill in his heart but forced himself to say, "Sister, who are you talking about? I've been studying so hard lately; I've broken my brain. Can you be more specific?"

"You haven't broken your brain; your mind is thoroughly corrupted." Ning Yuxi's beautiful smile gradually faded, and her slender finger pressed on the sword hilt.

"Ah, I remember now." Lin Wanrong's face lit up with joy. "Sister, you're talking about the black-clad woman who came to kill me that night, your junior sister, right? Ah, my brain is not broken after all."

"Do you know her?" Ning Yuxi asked indifferently.

"I don't know her. How could I know her? She's an assassin, and I'm the target; we're complete opposites. Fairy Sister, you saw it that day too, didn't you? Speaking of which, I haven't thanked you for saving my life yet." Lin Wanrong grinned and bowed three times, secretly chanting thanks for heaven, earth, and parents.

"Really? You really don't know her?" Ning Yuxi's eyes flashed with a teasing look as she gazed at him.

Only a very few people knew about his relationship with An Biru. The old Emperor was suspicious of Ning Yuxi and would never tell her about An Biru and himself. Lin Wanrong laughed, "I really don't know her, but since she's your junior sister, why don't you introduce us sometime? We can all get along and make a fortune together. That would be great!"

"What do you think this is?" Ning Yuxi asked, holding a bee needle in her hand, speaking softly.

"Eh, isn't this our keepsake of acquaintance? I didn't expect that Fairy Sister has been keeping it all this time, such deep affection and loyalty indeed," Lin Wanrong said with a quick smile.

"The bee sting, Five Poisons! Only one person in this world can concoct it." Ning Yuxi shook her head and chuckled lightly, "To say you don't know her, do you even believe that yourself? You two really put on a fine show of assassination!"

Lin Wanrong's heart broke into a cold sweat. This Fairy Ning was indeed profound. She had already realized that he knew Sister An, but she never exposed it. What could be her intention? Could she have taken a liking to him? Being handsome was indeed troublesome!

"Fairy Sister, I just asked about your opinion on Prince Cheng; how did it lead to all these complaints? Could it be that you usually have no one to talk to, feeling empty and lonely?" Lin Wanrong said with an embarrassed smile.

Ning Yuxi let out a soft snort, "There are more than just you who are clever in this world. Don't think everyone else is a fool. How Junior Sister An got involved with you is not my concern, but when you're in front of me, it's best not to play any tricks, otherwise—"

"Otherwise, my head will fall, right?" Master Lin snorted, pointing to his head and loudly declaring, "Go ahead and chop it off, if you dare! Let's see if your treasured sword is sharp, or my neck is harder? Calling you 'Fairy,' do you think you're really a fairy? If it weren't for the fact that you and Qingxuan are relatives, I would have shot you long ago. Shot you, do you understand?" Lin Wanrong made a gun gesture at his temple, looking so ferocious as if Fairy Ning owed him five hundred taels of silver.

Seeing him all puffed up, Ning Yuxi found it amusing, saying calmly, "Have you finished?"

Lin Wanrong abruptly turned to face her, staring intently, "Give me that gold medal!"

"What gold medal?" Fairy Ning was momentarily stunned but quickly understood, shaking her head, "What do you want with that gold medal?"

Lord Lin, looking ferocious, replied, "I, your Master, bought something and am not satisfied, so now I want to return it! What, no warranty?! What kind of service attitude is this! Give the gold medal back to me, and go back to play in your Fairy Hall."

Ning Yuxi, both angry and amused, wondered how this man could have all sorts of ideas. She shook her head and replied, "What I've promised to do, I will certainly accomplish. The gold medal will never be returned."

Lin Wanrong, furious, retorted, "Have you gone mad? Who is the Master, and who is the servant? Do you have it clear? No professionalism, unprofessional, unskilled! Is that the talent your fish-selling Fairy Hall cultivates? Give the gold medal back to me, and you, go play somewhere else!"

Ning Yuxi's name was known throughout the land, and her status was incredibly noble. Who had ever dared to shout at her in such a manner? Even with her outstanding self-restraint, she couldn't help but become angered at the sight of Lin San's arrogant and overbearing demeanor, as though he considered no one else to be of any importance. The long sword in her hand quivered slightly, and she couldn't help but wish she could stab a few holes in him.

"You want to kill me, don't you?" Master Lin puffed out his chest and sneered coldly, "Well then, come on! If you don't dare to kill me, you'll be my wife! If I get killed by you, then I won't be your husband! Heh heh, your fish-selling Fairy Hall has such a good reputation, always ready to kill their employer. I, your Master, cannot afford to employ you. You might as well take my life; then everyone will be at peace!"

Fairy Ning, in her daily interactions, had always dealt with courteous and virtuous individuals. Never before had she encountered such a ruffian and rogue. She was so angry that her fair face turned red. Her long sword rose and fell a few times, but in the end, she set it down.

"I have never broken a promise in my 'Jade Virtue Fairy Hall.' What would you like me to do?" Fairy Ning suppressed her inner rage and spoke calmly.

"What to do? Haven't you ever served anyone before? I, your master, am tired from walking, so go and call for a carriage! And also, stop wearing that bitter melon face; smile more!" Master Lin snorted, giving his orders.

"You—" Fairy Ning was so angry that she trembled all over. After a long silence, she finally stamped her small foot and turned to leave.

## Chapter 349 Guest of Honor

'She's gone just like that? I didn't get any advantage out of it!' Master Lin felt waves of disappointment inside. Standing for a moment, he was just about to move forward when suddenly he heard the noise of carriage wheels. A horse carriage slowly approached. The coachman jumped down and asked, "My Lord, did you call for a carriage?"

Lin Wanrong was overjoyed and nodded hurriedly, "Yes, yes, it's me! Uncle, where is the person who went to call you earlier?"

"You mean the young lady?" The coachman took out a silver ingot from his pocket. "She's really a good person. She gave me this large ingot and asked me to come pick you up. Aren't you with her?"

Master Lin secretly nodded. His tantrum had worked. Regardless of whether she was a fairy or goddess, he couldn't show her a friendly face. As the saying goes, "Spare the rod, spoil the child." Women must not be indulged; they must be both scolded and loved at the same time.

"Oh, she is a servant girl in my house. Maybe she has gone on an errand for my wife," Master Lin chuckled, looking around. He didn't see Ning Yuxi hiding anywhere, so he climbed into the carriage and settled in the compartment. "Uncle, you know Prince Cheng's residence, right? Let's take a stroll there!"

Seeing that the young master was kind and approachable, the coachman grew bolder. He gently lowered the curtain and said, "Prince Cheng, yes, I know him. He is a renowned virtuous prince, benevolent, and good to the surrounding people. Everyone says that if he becomes the Emperor, the people will be blessed—" He suddenly stopped, clearly realizing that he had spoken out of turn, and embarrassedly laughed, "I'm just babbling nonsense, my lord. Please don't take it seriously."

"What did you say?" Lin Wanrong asked curiously, "My ears didn't catch that, I didn't hear anything. Can you say it again?" The coachman gratefully smiled and quickly urged the carriage to move on.

Prince Cheng's mansion was situated across from the imperial palace, in a north-south alignment, covering an extremely vast area, perhaps dozens of acres. From a distance, one could see the red tiles and high walls, pavilions and towers, all looking very magnificent. The house granted to Lin Wanrong by the Emperor was already considered large, but compared to this prince's mansion, it was not even in the same league. The only thing that could probably compare was the imperial palace itself.

In front of Prince Cheng's gate hung two huge lanterns, and on the tall vermilion door were a pair of purple-gold rings, with a glittering golden plaque inscribed—Prince Cheng's Mansion!

When Lin Wanrong got out of the carriage, Prince Cheng had already been waiting at the entrance. He looked at Lin Wanrong and greeted him with a fist and a smile, "Master Lin, welcome to my humble abode. I'm sorry for not greeting you sooner. Please excuse my manners."

"Oh, where are you coming from with this, Prince!" Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I'm the one who should apologize for intruding on your noble house. Oh, Young Prince, it's been a while. You look more and more handsome and suave, almost surpassing me."

Zhao Kangning's handsome face twitched for a moment, and he forced a smile, "Master Lin is our honored guest. My father has personally come to the door to greet you. It's only right that Kangning waits here."

Lin Wanrong walked up to him, cheerfully patting his shoulder, "Young Prince, you're being too formal. We've known each other since Jinling; we're old acquaintances. Why be so distant? Old Prince, Young Prince, please—" He took charge, humbly urging Prince Cheng and his son to proceed, and the three entered the mansion.

Prince Cheng was the current Emperor's only legitimate brother, so his status was obviously distinguished. The corridor was brightly lit, decorated with lanterns and colorful festoons. Every three steps, there was a gold silk lantern, and every five steps, a colored glass lamp. Everywhere was adorned with brilliant flowers, and servants were all around, making the place bustling with activity!

Seeing Lin Wanrong looking around curiously as he walked, as if he had never seen anything like this before, Zhao Kangning sneered, and Prince Cheng gave him a faint glance without saying anything.

"Hmm, Old Prince, what's that?" Lin Wanrong pointed to a peculiar sight in the distance, curiously asking.

Prince Cheng and his son looked up and saw a huge pond not far away. A massive wooden windmill was slowly turning, drawing water from the pond, flinging it high, and then letting it fall back into the pond, creating beautiful splashes. The windmill was driven by human power, with three sturdy men continuously pushing the rod, sweeping the water into the sky.

"Oh, I saw a water wheel like this when I was stationed at the border in Yunnan years ago. I liked it very much, so when I returned to the capital, I had craftsmen build one. When there's wind, it will slowly turn, casting the water out; it's extraordinarily beautiful. I named it 'Wind Gives Birth to Water,'" Prince Cheng said with a smile.

"Wind Gives Birth to Water?" Lin Wanrong nodded and gave a thumbs-up. "Old Prince, you're indeed knowledgeable, far better than me. If I were to name it, I would probably just call it 'Old Cow Sucks Water,' or something like that."

Zhao Kangning gave a cold laugh, thinking to himself, who do you think you are? You're just a lowly servant, even unworthy of carrying my shoes in the past, and yet you dare to compare yourself to my father.

"Hey, Old Prince, what's this? Such a big snake!" Lin Wanrong pointed to a nearby sight, exclaiming. It was a tree trunk carved into a snake-like creature, coiled over a small stream. Its body was thick and long, horns on its head, whiskers by its mouth, eyes full of menace, teeth and claws bared, displaying extraordinary vigor. Shining golden scales were inlaid all over its body, making it look quite majestic.

"That's a small golden dragon that I had the craftsmen carve for decoration when I had some free time," Prince Cheng said, his eyes flashing as he smiled.

"Oh," Lin Wanrong nodded, "So you carved a small golden dragon for fun. Old Prince, you gave a great name to 'Wind Gives Birth to Water'; did you also name this little golden dragon?"

"This one, not yet," Prince Cheng laughed, "Since you're so interested, why don't you name it?"

Lin Wanrong shyly smiled, "Well, I'm not sure about that. My knowledge is limited, and my insights are shallow. If I name it, I might just scare everyone. There's water and fish in this small stream, and now a golden dragon. Why not call it 'Fish and Dragon Mixed Together'? It's quite fitting, hehe!"

Zhao Kangning couldn't bear it any longer and snorted, "What 'Fish and Dragon Mixed Together'? It's called 'Dragon Trapped in Shallow Water'. Father already named it."

"Oh—" Master Lin's eyes widened, his voice stretching in surprise, "So it's called 'Dragon Trapped in Shallow Water.' Truly scholarly! 'Wind Gives Birth to Water,' 'Dragon Trapped in Shallow Water,'

ah, what do these mean? Alas, I've read too much lately. My brain's gone bad, I can't recall at the moment."

Zhao Kangning impulsively opened his mouth, realizing his mistake only when Prince Cheng sternly glared at him. The young prince dared not speak again. Standing next to him, Lin Wanrong sniffed a faint smell of tobacco that wafted over. Lin Wanrong's heart gave a shudder, and he looked deeply at Zhao Kangning. No wonder those Turkic brats were so relaxed; there had been hidden hands at play! Sending them a f\*ck cannon hadn't been in vain.

Master Lin pondered for a long while before sighing, "Ah, speaking of which, the Emperor invited me to the inner palace garden a few days ago. But compared to Your Highness, that scene, that grandeur, ah—"

"How so?" Prince Cheng's eyes sparkled, softly inquiring.

"Besides the palace being a few inches bigger than here, everything else was far inferior. No golden silk lanterns, no glazed lamps, no 'Wind Gives Birth to Water,' and certainly no lively little golden dragon." Lin Wanrong shook his head and sighed, "'Dragon Trapped in Shallow Water,' 'Wind Gives Birth to Water'! Old Prince, it seems the Emperor's life is quite tense, isn't it?"

"Is it?" Prince Cheng laughed, "Master Lin, we shouldn't linger here; let's hurry inside. The others are waiting for us."

The three proceeded directly to the main hall, filled with sandalwood tables and chairs, red carpets, jade-carved railings, and opulently adorned surroundings. The hall was filled with fine wines and delicious dishes, served by dozens of beautiful maids, who were both charming and unique.

Several guests were already seated, and as Master Lin looked around, he recognized few familiar faces. In fact, although he held the title of Vice Minister of Personnel, it was an empty position, and he only knew Xu Wei and Li Tai among the entire court's officials.

"Eh, Top Scholar Su, you're here too?" Spotting a familiar face seated near the top, Lin Wanrong's face broke into a sincere and warm smile, enthusiastically greeting.

Su Mubai nodded slightly in acknowledgment. Prince Cheng smiled, "Master Lin, everyone I've invited today is a colleague from court; there's no need for formality. Come, come, come, sit here!"

As soon as he finished speaking, he personally guided Lin Wanrong to the most prominent seat at the head of the table. Master Lin was startled, 'Ah, the old fellow's being cunning; this hall is filled with ministers and high-ranking officials, and I'm just a deputy. He deliberately wants me to take the top seat; isn't this intentionally making me uncomfortable?' Master Lin laughed and said, "Your Highness, this top seat should be reserved for the most distinguished guest. I'd better not sit; my bottom might get sore!"

Prince Cheng laughed heartily and said, "Master Lin, you are too modest. You are indeed the most honored guest in my house. At such a young age, you have been favored by the Emperor, becoming the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Personnel, and even personally honored by His Majesty as 'The First Talent Under Heaven.' No one can compare to your imperial favor. In time, whether you're appointed a general, a prime minister, or even granted the title of a prince, none would find it strange. Let everyone say, if you do not take the seat of honor, who else should?"

"Yes, yes, Master Lin should take the seat of honor indeed!" The officials in the hall began to clamor, their eyes reflecting various emotions – some mocking, some contemptuous, some envious, and some jealous, emotions varied and complex. Prince Cheng glanced at Su Mubai, who was pouring wine into his cup and drinking it in one gulp without a sidelong glance.

"Ah, what I'm best at in my life is making love. Taking the seat of honor is really not my strong suit. However, since all of you esteemed gentlemen think highly of me, I will reluctantly take the seat. If the Emperor blames me in the future for not knowing my place and lacking in proper etiquette, you all must bear witness for me," Lin Wanrong said, looking troubled. The crowd roared in agreement, urging the modest Master Lin to sit at the head of the table.

Seeing Lin Wanrong take his seat, Prince Cheng and his son also sat down in their places, and exquisite dishes and fine wines were served. The atmosphere immediately became lively.

After three rounds of wine and five courses of dishes, Prince Cheng swept his tiger-like eyes across the room and laughed loudly, "This is the first time I have hosted my colleagues since the beginning of spring. Please, my lords, relax and enjoy yourselves. Come on now—"

With a clap of his hands, more than ten beautiful women gracefully entered from outside the door, each smiling and bowing in front of the guests. Several others held lutes and flutes, beginning to play music. Under the influence of the music, the ministers gradually loosened up, jesting with the beautiful women beside them. For a moment, laughter filled the air, and the atmosphere became extremely lively. Only the newly-acknowledged top scholar, Su Mubai, seemed out of place, not joking with the beauty beside him and drinking his wine alone.



Prince Cheng glanced at Su Mubai and then at Lin San, a cold smile playing at the corner of his mouth.

Minister Lin had already feasted on game in the afternoon with the Turks, and now, sitting in the seat of honor with everyone's eyes upon him, he felt uncomfortable. Although the girl beside him, who accompanied him in drinking, looked charming and delicate, he felt less interested than usual. However, seeing everyone having fun, he reached out and touched the girl's cheek, playfully asking, "Little sister, how old are you this year?"

"I'm sixteen, sir," the girl replied, blushing.

"Sixteen? I think you must be older!" Master Lin stared at her bosom and swallowed, "Sixteen, and this big already? I see others at twenty-six not growing as big as yours."

"Sir, you're so naughty!" The girl playfully pinched him a few times and cuddled into his arms, pretending to pout.

'Damn it, a twenty-six-year-old sister trying to act youthful with me? Does Prince Cheng think I'm a naive novice, inviting me to take the seat of honor but daring to skimp on quality? Trying to pass off old as young? Does he think this is my first time out and about?'

Lord Lin chuckled and drained the cup of fine wine. He allowed the "little sister" to rub and twist against him, but he remained majestic and unmoved.

Prince Cheng, with eyes and ears open to everything, saw that Lord Lin was chatting and laughing with the woman beside him, but had no intention of laying a hand on her. He laughed and said, "What's the matter, Master Lin? Is this girl not to your taste?"

"My taste is quite unique; ordinary people can't satisfy it," Lin Wanrong chuckled, raising his glass. "Old Prince, I toast you. Your 'Dragon Trapped in Shallow Water' and 'Wind Gives Birth to Water' have given me much insight."

Prince Cheng laughed and drained his cup, saying, "Don't worry, Master Lin, there's more excitement to come." He lightly clapped his hands, and the music in the hall suddenly stopped. Even the courtesans who were joking with the crowd fell silent. The hall became extremely quiet.

"Dong—" A soft sound of a stringed instrument resonated, like a small hammer striking everyone's soul. The sound of the strings grew louder, like pearls falling on a plate, clear and pleasing to the ear.

A woman's voice softly sang:

"People say the sea is deep, but it's nothing compared to half of longing.

The sea has an end, but longing is boundless.

Carrying a zither to the high tower, the tower is empty, and the moon is full.

Playing a song of longing, the strings break all at once."

Unbeknownst to anyone, a white screen had been added to the hall, and a curvaceous, alluring figure was seen through it, adding a touch of mystery. The woman's voice behind the screen was clear and penetrating, like striking jade or ringing a bell. Accompanied by the lingering sound of the zither, she portrayed the feelings of longing in a way that was touching and poignant.

The hall was filled with scholars, and just by hearing this song, they knew that this woman was no ordinary person. Looking at her graceful figure and captivating curves, they began to whisper to each other.

Prince Cheng smiled mysteriously and said, "Gentlemen, there's no need to guess. This lady is not a celebrity from the Eight Great Alleys. Those vulgar women from there cannot be compared to this beauty."

He waved his hand, and the screen automatically retracted, revealing a charming figure. The woman was dressed in a light purple gown, her face covered with a thin silk scarf, hiding her features. Her figure was like a gentle willow in the wind, swaying gracefully. Her slender waist, full chest, and curvy hips outlined a perfect silhouette. Just by looking at her figure, one knew that she had unparalleled beauty.

The woman stood calmly and elegantly, yet her voluptuous figure was indescribably tempting and enchanting.

Even Prince Cheng was stunned for a moment, a hint of infatuation flashing in his eyes. He quickly regained his composure and smiled, saying, "Today, the spring is warm, and the flowers are blooming. It's a perfect day for a wedding. Taking advantage of tonight's beautiful scenery, I will present a great gift to everyone. This lady is a fairy-like beauty, proficient in music, chess, calligraphy, and martial arts. Ordinary people are no match for her. Tonight, whoever can win her laugh may become her honored guest!"

Honored guest? The officials in the hall, who were usually arrogant, were now all eager and self-confident. Seeing this heavenly beauty so close, if they could spend a night with her, they would surely be happier than immortals.

"Your Highness, how can one win a laugh from the fair lady?" asked a portly old man.

Prince Cheng laughed and said, "That, my friends, depends on your abilities. Whether it's telling jokes, dancing, singing, or utilizing any of the eighteen martial arts, you must do whatever it takes to make her laugh. This young lady has said that the night is fleeting, and a thousand gold pieces can't buy a single laugh. Whoever can make her laugh sincerely will become her honored guest."

The crowd immediately burst into a flurry of discussion. Making a lady laugh was not difficult if done among familiar people. But this suddenly appeared woman, whose background and personality were unknown, getting her to laugh might not be so simple.

'Good heavens, is this even possible?' Master Lin stared with wide eyes. Prince Cheng looked at him with a mysterious smile and whispered, "Master Lin, aren't you known for your unique taste? How about it, does this young lady suit your taste?"

"Ah!" Lin Wanrong sighed slightly, "Your Highness, I am truly a very serious person and never flirt with women. Oh, right, if I can make this young lady laugh, can I really become her honored guest? Your Highness, you're not deceiving me, are you?"

"My word is as solid as gold," Prince Cheng replied, his eyes flashing, his expression becoming somber. "If you can make her laugh, she will be yours!"

## Chapter 350 A Joke

"Old Prince, may I be so bold as to ask a question?" Master Lin asked with refined elegance.

Prince Cheng looked at him with a smile, "Master Lin, you are my honored guest today. There's no need for such formality. Feel free to speak your mind. I promise to answer everything I know."

Lin Wanrong nodded, pointing at the charming lady in the center of the hall, he whispered, "Prince, could you tell me why we're trying to make this miss laugh? Does she not laugh normally, or perhaps she laughs too much and has cramped her mouth?"

Prince Cheng was taken aback. Who could think of such a thing like laughing so much that it would cramp your mouth? Only Lin San could come up with such an idea. The Prince laughed heartily, patting Master Lin on the shoulder, "Master Lin, you are indeed witty and humorous. I like you. The guest of honor tonight seems to be none other than you. This miss does not lack the ability to laugh, but she has said her smile is reserved for those she favors. Perhaps it might be you, Master Lin!"

"Is that so?" Lin Wanrong squinted his eyes at the lady in the center, chuckling, "This miss indeed has personality. I like it. Actually, laughter is quite an important matter. Ah, Old Prince, what do you think constitutes success in life?" He voiced the last sentence loudly, making sure everyone in the hall could hear him clearly. Upon hearing Master Lin ready to share his wisdom, the buzzing conversations in the hall ceased, everyone perking up their ears to listen.

"I have yet to contemplate that," Prince Cheng responded with a smile, "I am eager to hear Master Lin's insights."

"Prince, of course, has no need to ponder over this. You were born into wealth and prosperity, a golden spoon at your birth. How can we ordinary folks compare to you?" Master Lin chuckled, "If you ask me, becoming successful is quite simple. Men should always strive for progress, and women should always be ready to laugh. Hehe, Prince, being a wise man, you certainly understand at once."

He was a witty man, and his words carried a flavor of playful banter. There were quite a few witty men in the hall who understood his hidden meaning and couldn't help but burst into laughter. It seemed that Master Lin was quite experienced in the world of high society, capable of delivering such subtle jokes.

Quick-witted or not, everyone understood his innuendo and turned away to hide their laughter. The miss in the center of the hall glanced at him, her thoughts unknown.

Prince Cheng roared with laughter, "Brilliant, just brilliant! Master Lin, you are indeed profound and unfathomable. I admire you, and I am growing fonder of you. However, the men here today are the best of our Great Hua. You have quite a few formidable competitors!" He said, his gaze nonchalantly sweeping over the crowd, but it rested on Su Mubai.

Being the guest of honor for this lady would surely be more delightful than being an immortal. Everyone was captivated by the beauty, their eyes fixated on her, racking their brains to think of a way to make her laugh.

Indeed, they were the best of Great Hua, agile in mind. Master Lin yawned lazily, just in time to see the large-bellied Master Ye, who had been speaking earlier, stand up, "If all my colleagues are so modest, then I, as an official, will break the ice and make a fool of myself first. Prince, let me tell a joke!"

Prince Cheng nodded and smiled, indicating for the man to continue. Lin Wanrong cast a scornful glance at him, an older, heavier man, who still fantasized about becoming the favored guest of a young lady—utterly shameless.

"Sir, may I ask what position this Master Ye holds in the court?" Lin Wanrong pulled the attention of an official seated behind him, "I observe his quick wit and flamboyant charm, and I suppose his official position is no lesser than mine."

The official almost sprayed his mouthful of wine at Lin Wanrong's inquiry. Lin Wanrong was indeed a favorite of the Emperor; he did not even consider Master Ye, which indicated that Master Lin could soon replace him. It seemed like it would be beneficial to ingratiate himself with this close minister to the Emperor. "Oh, are you speaking of Master Ye? He is indeed the current Minister of Personnel!"

‘Minister of Personnel? The bloody hell, wasn't that my boss?’ Lin Wanrong gave an embarrassed smile, "You are indeed honest. As a matter of fact, Master Ye is my superior, how could I be unaware of him? I merely asked to get to know you better. May I know your name, sir, and your position?"

The official hurriedly bowed, "I dare not, I dare not. I am Yan Daoji, a scholar at the Hall of Literary Brilliance, responsible for copying and recording various historical documents. Additionally, on major events such as worshipping heaven and imperial pardons, I draft the imperial edicts for the Emperor."

‘Ah, so he's a secretary, a good position indeed.’ Yan Daoji's position at the front of the back row implied that he was first among the second-tier officials. Lin Wanrong bowed, "So, it's Scholar Yan. I've heard much about you, my apologies for the oversight."

While Lin Wanrong was engaged in insincere pleasantries with Yan Daoji, Master Ye had begun to tell his joke. He swaggered over to the young lady, his belly wobbling with each step, and smirked, "Once, a scholar teased a stuttering child. He said, 'If you can quack like a duck, I'll buy you a bag of melon seeds!' The stuttering child responded, 'Even if you buy me ten bags of melon...melon...melon...melon seeds, I won't quack like a duck for you!!!"

As he told the joke, he imitated the quacking of a duck, his belly jiggling, which made everyone burst into laughter. Master Ye looked triumphantly at the young lady but found her expression cold and indifferent, with no sign of breaking into laughter.

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. The old man's joke was far from humorous. When men told jokes, they had to be a little risqué, without a hint of vulgarity, how could it be called a joke?

With the Minister of Personnel, Master Ye, taking the lead—although the effect was minimal—it set a good example. Immediately, several more men started telling jokes. However, the lady was like an ice cube, emotionless and unmoving, as if deaf to the laughter around her.

‘Pretentious,’ Lin Wanrong thought to himself. ‘If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes today, I wouldn't have known that you, a vixen, could also pretend to be a fairy. What an act of purity.’

Seeing the atmosphere in the hall growing lively, but no one could make the beautiful woman laugh, Prince Cheng looked around and his gaze fell on Su Mubai. He smiled, "Top Scholar Su, you are the top scorer of the recent imperial exam, your talent and knowledge must be profound. Come, give it a try."

Lin Wanrong and Su Mubai were old acquaintances, and upon hearing Prince Cheng's words, Lin Wanrong immediately led the applause. Su Mubai glanced at him, nodded, and got up, smiling, "All of us present today are Mubai's superiors. I shouldn't have stepped out of line. However, since His Highness has spoken, I have no choice but to embarrass myself. Let me tell a joke. Lin Xiaomao's parents have three children. The eldest son is called Big Egg, the second son is called Second Egg, what is the third son called?"

"This is simple, Big Egg, Second Egg, following that naturally, it's Third Egg!" A straightforward man hollered.

"Master Lin, what do you think?" Su Mubai asked with a slight smile.

‘Damn it, dare to mock me?’ Lin was extremely annoyed internally. He was an expert in banter, and although the joke was subtle, he understood the double entendre it contained. He laughed in a somewhat forced manner, and said, "Master Su, your erudition is impressive, you must know the answer better than anyone else."

Su Mubai laughed heartily, and proudly said, "Lin Xiaomao's parents have three children. The eldest is called Big Egg, the second is called Second Egg, and naturally, the third is Lin Xiaomao. Hahaha, thank you, thank you!"

It was a brain teaser, indeed interesting. Everyone present started laughing, and a few clever ones caught the underlying meaning. The third son was indeed called Lin Xiaomao, but following the order of his elder brothers, he was also called Lin Third Egg, which was not a lie!

Lin Third Egg?! The man looked at Lin in shock, only to see him smiling as if he hadn't caught the hidden meaning. The man felt relieved, thankful that Lin wasn't as clever as him.

[Lin Third Egg also means Lin San Dan, or Lin San Egg.]

The story of Third Egg was over, but the lady still sat quietly, not uttering a word. It seemed that no one could move her tonight. The audience was somewhat disappointed.

Seeing the flicker of flame in Su Mubai's eyes, Prince Cheng revealed a faint smile and stood up, "Top Scholar Su, your talent is truly delightful. But the purpose of tonight is to make the beautiful lady smile. She has been waiting for a while, but no one has succeeded. It makes me anxious. Master Lin, as you are close to the Emperor, your talent and abilities are undoubtedly top-notch. You should give it a try too. However--"

Prince Cheng paused slightly, looked at everyone in the hall, and said with a smile, "My colleagues have all tried to make the lady laugh with jokes. To be fair, Master Lin, you should also tell a joke. Does anyone have any objections?"

"Good!" The crowd erupted in cheers. They had long heard of the great name of Master Lin, who had triumphed over Goryeo and fought against the Turks. His exploits were numerous, yet they had never witnessed his talents in person. Today, they would finally have the chance.

"Ah, you flatter me, esteemed gentlemen. I, Lin San, am of modest learning and talent, and really don't know how to tell jokes," Master Lin modestly said with a shy smile as he rose to his feet.

"Brother Lin, you are being too modest," said Su Mubai, his eyes sparkling as he looked at Master Lin, "You have earned the Emperor's deep trust and are titled 'The First Talent Under Heaven' by His Majesty's own hand. The title 'First Talent' alone says it all. You must possess extraordinary abilities, far beyond us ordinary folks. What would telling a joke count for?"

"Yes, yes!" The crowd buzzed with excitement, their spirits high.

Lin Wanrong grinned, "Since Top Scholar Su values me so highly, I suppose I should give it a try. Top Scholar brother, what would you do if you encountered a mad dog on the street?"