

Finest 351

Chapter 351 Teasing the Beauty

Su Mubai pondered for a moment, then said, "If a man encounters a mad dog, the man naturally shouldn't fear the dog. He should kick it away."

"Quite brave, truly worthy of being the Top Scholar!" Lin Wanrong gave a thumbs-up in praise, "What the Top Scholar Su said is right. When encountering a dog on the road, one shouldn't panic, but bravely fight it. There can be only three outcomes. Top Scholar brother, could you please explain it to everyone."

"The three outcomes are nothing more than I win, it wins, or both of us get injured." Su Mubai said solemnly. Seeing Lin San's sinister smile, he had an eerie feeling. He had just criticized Lin San, could it be that Lin San understood his hidden meaning? Knowing Lin San's cunning, he was vindictive, could there be some hidden trap in this conversation?

"Wonderful, wonderful!" Lin Wanrong clapped and laughed, "Such a comprehensive and profound understanding, it seems that the Top Scholar brother must have fought with a wild dog before. The three outcomes are also very well analyzed: First, if you lose, you're even inferior to a dog; second, if it's a tie, you are on the same level as a dog; third, if you win, congratulations, you finally surpassed a dog!!!"

"You—" Su Mubai's face changed, looking at the smiling Lin San, but he couldn't utter a word. The words were his, Lin San merely rephrased them. His worries had become a reality, any words that reached Lin San's mouth immediately took on a different meaning.

Everyone in the hall burst into laughter. This Lin San was simply a rascal, even daring to ridicule Top Scholar Su, and doing so with such wit, impressive, indeed impressive. The silent woman glanced at Lin Wanrong and a faint smile appeared in her eyes, letting out a soft groan.

The man sitting next to Lin Wanrong, Yan Daoji, had been fixated on the woman the entire time. Hearing her soft laughter, he immediately opened his mouth wide and exclaimed, "She's laughing, she's laughing!"

Lin Wanrong turned his head curiously and asked, "Brother Yan, who are you saying is laughing?"

"It's her, it's her, it's the young lady who's laughing," Yan Daoji excitedly said, as if he himself had made the young lady burst into laughter. Upon hearing the young lady was laughing, everyone's attention immediately shifted back from the verbal spat between Master Lin and Top Scholar Su.

"Laugh? I didn't hear anything!" The rotund official, Master Ye, shook his head, "Master Yan, could you have heard wrong? I am extremely close to the beauty, and I didn't hear her speak. How could there be laughter?"

"Yes, yes, you must have heard wrong!" The crowd joined in teasing, some of it certainly stemming from a hint of male jealousy.

Those who spoke up were high-ranking officials, either high ministers or great scholars. Although Yan Daoji ranked first among the second-rank officials, he didn't dare to argue with so many high-ranking officials. He could only smile awkwardly and cast a remorseful glance at Master Lin.

‘This Yan Daoji has some spirit!’ Lin Wanrong nodded secretly to himself. He casually moved closer to the lady, chuckling lightly, "Young lady, I'm the hunter, you're the fox. I'm the boiling water, you're the tea leaves. I'm the carriage, you're the reins. I'm the banknote, you're the silver."

The crowd was left befuddled. They couldn't decipher the meaning behind Lin San's pair of metaphors; they were too covert. The lady glanced at him and asked softly, "What do you mean?"

It was the first time she had spoken. Her voice was as delicate and clear as pearls dropping onto a jade plate, inducing endless musings.

"Isn't it simple?" Lin San looked at her and chuckled,

"If you're a fox, I'm the hunter, I would certainly chase you.

If you're tea leaves, I'm hot water, I'd certainly brew (spend time with) you.

If I'm a carriage, you're the carriage handle, you'd certainly take (marry) me home.

If I'm a silver note, you're the silver, I'd definitely, definitely take (marry) you." He grinned lecherously, his face emanating an indescribable sleazy demeanor.

"Pfft." A soft giggle resonated clearly among the crowd. They heard it clearly. She had laughed, she had really laughed.

"Shameless, utterly shameless!" The men present were fuming, incensed to the point of smoke billowing from all seven orifices. How shameless could Lin San be? How could he utter such disgraceful words in public? What sort of image was he creating for a man?

"His skin is so thick!" the lady whispered. Her voice was just loud enough for the two of them to hear.

"Likewise," Lin San replied, opening his mouth wide to leer at the lady.

A flicker of pain crossed Prince Cheng's eyes, instantly replaced by resolution. He gently clapped his hands and laughed, "Alright, alright, congratulations, Lin San! I'm so happy for you. You've finally won the lady's heart!"

"Sorry, just lucky," Lin San responded modestly with a fist and palm salute, inciting hidden resentment from the men around him.

"Spring mornings are short and time is precious. Lin San, please enjoy yourself!" Prince Cheng laughed heartily. The veiled lady gave a little cry, looking unbearably shy as she turned and ran inside.

"Am I really supposed to enjoy myself?" Lin Wanrong looked at Prince Cheng dubiously. "Everyone else is suffering here while I go enjoy myself. Doesn't that seem a bit unfair?"

Prince Cheng laughed, "Rest assured, Master Lin, our colleagues have their own companions. Please feel free to go."

"Ah, I've always been too eager to help others," Lin San chuckled with a fist and palm salute, then headed toward the inner chamber. A servant was already standing guard at the door. Bowing respectfully, he said, "Sir, this way please—" He led Lin San to a neat and bright room, then gave him a suggestive smile, "Sir, the lady is already waiting for you inside."

Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled, then pushed the door open. Two red candles were burning brightly, and the lady who had just entered the room was sitting quietly by the bed, waiting.

The door closed behind Lin Wanrong with a soft thud. His heart skipped a beat. Was this for real?! He tiptoed over and sat beside the lady, then smiled, "May I ask for your surname, miss?"

The lady cast a charming glance at him, then lowered her head shyly. "I am surnamed An," she replied.

With one swift motion, Lin San pulled off her veil, revealing a face of captivating beauty. He paused in surprise, then exclaimed with delight, "Sister An—"

"Hush—" Sister An raised a slender finger to her lips and glanced outside, silently stopping him. She then gave a soft whimper, her coyness limitless. "Sir, you are so naughty, touching me there—"

Master Lin was taken aback. 'I haven't even laid a hand on her, and she's already moaning,' he thought. 'If word of this gets out, how am I supposed to show my face again as Lin San?' "Miss, I haven't even—" Master Lin said hurriedly.

"Haven't taken off your clothes yet? Don't worry, I'll help you," Sister An cooed, her eyes darting toward the door. With a flourish of her sleeve, she extinguished the room's light. There was a rustling sound as she tugged at her own clothing. She then let out a cry of faux pain. "Sir, you're so impatient. You blew out the candle so quickly, and I haven't even helped you change yet."

What was going on? Master Lin thought, confused. However, the scent of a woman drifted into his nose. A mature, voluptuous body slowly pressed against him. Her hot breath trembled slightly as Sister An clung tightly to him, whispering, "Hold me—"

It was hard to resist such a request. Master Lin was delighted, and with a strong embrace, he encircled Sister An's slender waist from behind. His touch was smooth and tender, like a freshly woven silk satin.

Sister An shivered and leaned gently into his embrace, murmuring, "In times of urgency, you can't do anything rash. You must think of Xian'er—"

They were so close now, Sister An's soft body pressed tight against him. Each word she spoke blew a hot breath onto his skin. Her warm, rounded belly and smooth, tense thighs rubbed against him

subtly. Master Lin could feel a powerful heat rise from his lower abdomen. His body filled with a masculine energy, like a stampede of horses. His lower body stood proudly, pressing against Sister An's belly.

Sister An, mature and alluring with extensive knowledge, of course, knew what the burning object was. Her face flushed with heat, and she couldn't help but twist his arm hard. "You're terrible, do you think I'm Xian'er? Do you think I'm as easy to deceive as her?"

Looking at Sister An's flushed cheeks, close enough to touch, Lin Wanrong sighed softly, whispering, "Sister, this isn't my doing, it's you who's tempting me."

"Don't call me Sister." An Biru blushed, turning her face away. "What happened today was merely a momentary necessity. You mustn't take it seriously and absolutely cannot mention it to Xian'er. Otherwise, I won't forgive you." She glanced outside, then whispered in his ear, "This is all for show. Don't take it seriously. There are people listening outside." Her eyes flickered as she slowly rubbed her body against his, her full breasts pressing against his chest, soft as cream. An Biru's words flowed like honey, releasing a sultry voice that was enough to melt bones. "Oh, sir, slow down. You're going to tear me apart—"

She was moaning so provocatively it was unbearable. Master Lin felt his mouth dry and a fiery urge rising within him. The heat between them became more intense. "Sister," Master Lin pleaded, "Could you be a little more innocent with your words, please? Are you not purposely seducing me?"

"Do you think I'm willing?" An Biru gave him a seductive smile. "It was Prince Cheng who put up a big bet, demanding that I successfully seduce you. How could people outside know that the seduction was successful if I didn't make some noise?"

'Prince Cheng sent Sister An to seduce me? Goodness, he sent the Holy Mother of the White Lotus Sect to seduce me, I'm quite honored. It's clear that this move is meant to drive a wedge between me and the Old Emperor. Prince Cheng's trick is ruthless indeed.' Unfortunately for him, man's plans fall short of heaven's; no matter how cruel Prince Cheng was, he didn't know that the Old Emperor was even more cunning, having long investigated the relationship between An Biru and Lin San.

Thinking about this, Lin Wanrong felt a mischievous itch. His large hand slowly kneaded Sister An's smooth and perky buttocks, absentmindedly saying, "Seducing me? Sister, is this how you seduced others in the past?"

An Biru's body stiffened, her eyes instantly turning icy cold. The passionate body against him suddenly felt like a block of ice.

Chapter 352 Damned Tenderness

As he felt the frail body in his embrace gradually growing cold, and An Biru's expression as calm as an ancient well, Lin Wanrong knew something was off. A sudden lamentation struck his heart. 'Did I overindulge in lamb this afternoon, that I've begun to talk such nonsense?' The previously warm and intimate atmosphere vanished in an instant. It was a classic case of joy turning into sorrow. Regret swelled within Lin Wanrong's heart.

"Get up. The people outside are gone," An Biru said quietly. Her face was devoid of any emotional ripple, her gaze toward him indifferent as though looking at a stranger. They were still pressed close together, but compared to the fervor from earlier, it now felt as if one was fire and the other was seawater.

"I won't get up!" Lin Wanrong, his mind whirring with ideas, managed a laugh. "So Master Sister is mad. I won't rise until you smile. Oh, how about I tell you a joke? Two dumplings got married. After sending off their guests, the groom returned to the bedroom only to find a meatball lying on the bed. Shocked, he asked where his bride was. The meatball shyly responded: 'How embarrassing, don't you recognize me once I've undressed?' Hahaha— Hahaha— Please, Sister, could you laugh? I'm really trying here."

An Biru looked at him silently, her eyes sparkling, not saying a word.

Toward this outwardly debauched Sister An, Lin Wanrong had always felt a peculiar sensation as if in this world, they were the two most similar people. Both were cunning and ruthless, sensitive yet melancholic, indifferent to societal norms, and unbridled. The previous frivolous and ambiguous interactions between them didn't invoke any feelings. But now that she suddenly began ignoring him, it felt as if Lin Wanrong had lost his best friend, leaving his heart desolate.

"You could tell a hundred jokes and it wouldn't matter. Did you really think I laughed because of your jokes? I've dealt with Prince Cheng for over twenty years, yet I've never let him take advantage of me. If it weren't for him threatening the safety of my village, forcing me to spend the night with you, not even the men of the entire world could coax a laugh from me," An Biru said, a hint of pride flashing across her face. As she gazed at him, her eyes gradually misted over.

A pang of fear hit Lin Wanrong, and he held her tighter. Grinding his teeth, he said, "That damned old turtle threatened the safety of your village? Damn it, I'll hack him to pieces, and his son, and his grandson, and his entire lineage for eighteen generations— Sister, please laugh. You're scaring me. I'm really timid. Please laugh, and I'll teach you how to pole dance."

An Biru shook her head slightly, "And what if you kill him? Kill one Prince Cheng, and ten, a hundred, a thousand more will rise in his place. Can you kill them all? As for laughing..." She wore a faint, dismal smile on her face, whispering, "Haven't I laughed enough at you in the past? Now, please let me go—"

Upon hearing this, Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Yes, Sister An had always been cheery around him before, always plotting against him, but it was fulfilling and sweet. Now that she wasn't smiling anymore, he felt increasingly suffocated.

"Release me." The grip around her arm was just as forceful as before, but An Biru looked at Lin Wanrong and said softly yet firmly.

"No!" Lin Wanrong loudly retorted, "If I let you go, you'll run away. Where else am I supposed to find a second White Lotus to capture you?"

Like magic, An Biru pulled out a silver needle from somewhere. "You know my capabilities, do you really think you can stop me like this?" she challenged.

"Well—" Lin Wanrong let out a helpless chuckle. Sister An's weapons were always so elusive, and the two guns he carried with him were useless; one he wouldn't dare use on Sister An, and the other she wouldn't let him use. Since coming to this world, he had always been successful with women, flirting and seducing without any significant setbacks. But Sister An, seemingly so unrestrained before, had suddenly transformed into someone else, leaving him at a loss for words. His frustration was understandable.

An Biru, having never seen him in such a crestfallen state, surmised he had been hit hard. Taking a determined look at him, she said, "Not all of life is joyous. When it's time to come together, we come together, and when it's time to part, we part. The time I spent with you was delightful and happy, tonight being the only exception."

Hearing the hint of world-weariness in her words, Lin Wanrong was startled. He hastily gripped her tighter. "Sister, you're not considering becoming a nun, are you? Please don't scare me. This boiling water of mine has never steeped tea leaves that don't grow hair

"I'm not becoming a nun," An Biru shook her head, "Prince Cheng promised me that after tonight, he will guarantee the safety of my tribe for a hundred years. I've drifted outside for so many years, I'm tired and want to go back and see my tribe."

"Back to the tribe?!" Lin Wanrong's eyes widened, "Sister, let me go with you. It's been a while since I've visited an ethnic minority. I'll ride a horse and kidnap a bride there, then kidnap you back."

Hearing this, An Biru wanted to laugh but held it in. She gave him a stare, "What do you think my tribe is? Both men and women freely choose to be together. There is no such thing as kidnapping a bride."

Lin Wanrong sighed, regretfully saying, "Ah, I remembered incorrectly. It must be the Mongolians who kidnap brides. Your tribe values mutual affection between men and women. It seems that you and I are not exactly mutually affectionate."

An Biru gave him a cold glance, grinding her teeth, "You are Xian'er's husband, and I am Xian'er's master. How can I be affectionate with you?"

'The fact that you are Xian'er's master makes it all the more exciting.' But he couldn't say that at this juncture. "Oh, also, Master Sister, you asked me to deal with Fairy Ning. Our game just started, and now you're leaving, how should I cope?" As he said this, he glanced around. Theoretically, Ning Yuxi should have been close by.

An Biru shook her head, "Don't worry. She's smart enough to know when to show up. Given her ability, she probably already figured out that you and I were in cahoots. But it doesn't matter. As long as you use the same tactics on her that you used on me, you'll defeat her without a problem. I have faith in you."

An Biru had planned everything, clearly prepared to retreat long ago. Recalling the day she had bravely stormed the Heavenly Prison to save him, it seemed she was ready to lay down her life. Lin Wanrong was deeply moved and hurriedly searched for an excuse, pleading, "Sister, Prince Cheng said he sent you to seduce me. If you just leave like this, wouldn't he suspect something if he doesn't see you tomorrow?"

Sister An said softly, "Rest assured. Tonight, I will remain in the room meditating. You should get some good rest."

Lin Wanrong promptly jumped up, "Sister, you sleep in the bed, and I will meditate. Alas, it's been several months since I practiced kung fu. If I don't put in more effort, you will surpass me."

An Biru turned around, "You are always running around, unwilling to settle down. Even if you practice for a hundred years, you won't surpass me. Why should you meditate?"

Lin Wanrong had already climbed onto the chair, nodding in distress, "I also want to share the bed with Sister. But, given the propriety between men and women, with you looking like a fairy and me having weak self-control, if we accidentally cross the line, that wouldn't be good. So, let's sleep in separate beds. We can share one later."

Engaging in conversation with this youngster truly disrupted her tranquillity. An Biru took several deep breaths, calming her heart and mind. Her breathing gradually evened out, and she slowly fell asleep.

This was supposed to be a beautiful night of introduction. Even if they couldn't make love, a little touching here and there was inevitable. But he ruined everything with a single sentence. How careless! Lin Wanrong regretted so much, dozing off in the chair. After a while, he heard Sister An whisper, "Come over here and sleep beside me."

"Well, isn't it inappropriate? We agreed to sleep separately." Although he said this, he scurried over faster than a monkey, snuggling into the bed and inhaling An Biru's faint fragrance.

An Biru's slender hand extended, slightly trembling, gently stroking his hair. "Lin San, this world is complex, and people's minds are hard to predict. While I can't say human nature is evil, there are many who do evil. You've done many wrongs, but your heart is not evil, far better than countless hypocrites."

"Yes, yes," Feeling Sister An gently stroking his hair, he felt incredibly calm. He nodded hastily, "I am a genuine villain, never pretending to be a gentleman, either true or false."

An Biru faintly nodded, "Since meeting you, two things have moved me the most. Do you know which two?"

Seeing Lin San shake his head, An Biru sighed softly, "One was the night before we rushed back to Jinling when you were recovering at Weishan Lake. You sang that dreadful song."

"Sister, although I said something wrong tonight, you shouldn't criticize me like that. My singing is commendable; how can you call it dreadful?" Lin Wanrong said, feeling wronged.

"Only a mother is good in the world, a child with a mother is like a treasure. Embrace your mother, never exhausting the happiness." Sister An shook her head with a smile, "When I first heard you singing this song, I thought you were foolish. Now, I suppose I was the fool."

"Sister, actually, my singing of that song was indeed terrible, my mother used to say so," Lin Wanrong admitted in a rare moment of sincerity, lowering his head and speaking softly.

Sister An laughed heartily, but as she laughed, tears began to fall. "The second thing," she said, "is how you were willing to give up your life for me. When I broke into the Heavenly Prison, I had only one thought: to die with you. If I had known it would come to this, I would have killed you then and slit my own throat. It would have been better than having a dead heart now."

Lin Wanrong was shocked and quickly exclaimed, "Master Sister, I didn't mean to, don't scare me."

"If there is no Xian'er, if it wasn't for what you said tonight, we could have actually been happy together." An Biru suddenly smiled at him charmingly, her face full of brilliant tear drops that shone like a hillside of blooming pear flowers. Lin Wanrong fell into a deep sleep...

When he awoke early the next morning, he found himself alone. Sister An had disappeared without a trace, like a migratory goose that had flown away. Only the tear stains on the pillow remained, as if telling a story.

Lin Wanrong wiped the corner of his eyes, blaming the dew for falling into them due to the bad weather. He stared blankly at the damp silk pillow, recalling Sister An's soft whisperings from the night before. He was lost in thought for a while before he sighed softly, "Your damned tenderness..."

Chapter 353 The Performance

In terms of their acquaintance, Sister An and Lin Wanrong had not spent much time together. Their encounters on Weishan Lake, a mixture of animosity and friendliness, were some of the most intimate moments they had shared. Beyond that, their time together was often brief and fleeting. Even the most suggestive instance they had been caught in by the Eldest Miss, was a deliberate provocation by Sister An, and it did not compare to the genuine emotions of last night. This independent and unique woman had left an indelible impression on Lin Wanrong. She was sensitive, proud, and lonely. Outsiders only saw her flirtatious, unruly side, but few could understand the solitude and loneliness within her heart.

'Damn it,' Lin Wanrong thought, 'I've let my lust overrule my mind, messing things up at a critical moment. What a lesson!' He smacked his forehead in frustration.

As he reluctantly left his quarters, a sudden thought struck him. Sister An had mentioned the Miao Village, but he didn't even know where it was. Where should he go to find her? Sichuan, Guizhou, or Yunnan? He shook his head with a bitter smile, 'I'll just have to search place by place. I refuse to believe that I can't find her.'

When he emerged from his room, Prince Cheng had been waiting for him in the hall. "Master Lin, how was last night?" he asked.

'How was last night, my ass,' Lin Wanrong thought, feeling irritated. If it weren't for Prince Cheng pressuring Sister An, would she have left him? He grew even more disdainful of the Prince. He gave a fake laugh and replied, "It was alright. But where is the young lady this morning? Your Highness, do you know where she lives? I would like to see her."

Prince Cheng roared with laughter. "Master Lin, you are indeed a passionate man, I admire that. But this young lady, she is proud and pure, always different from others. She only wishes to spend one night with the man she likes. When the night ends, she leaves. She is a free spirit, even I don't know where she went."

Lin Wanrong quietly acknowledged with a 'hmm', sighed and said, "What a pity, such a pity." He couldn't ask Prince Cheng about the Miao Village; doing so would only put Sister An and her people in danger.

Prince Cheng moved closer and patted his shoulder. "Master Lin, you should be content to have spent a night with such a heavenly beauty. There are countless men in this world who would spend all their fortune just for a glimpse of her."

That was true. With Sister An's stunning beauty, she was undoubtedly the dream woman of countless men. The line of men who wished to see her could probably wrap around from the capital to Jinling twice.

"Well, in that case, thank you for your gracious hospitality, Your Highness. I shall take my leave." Lin Wanrong bowed respectfully.

Prince Cheng's eyes flashed. This man truly had thick skin, acting as if nothing had happened and trying to slip away after having his fun. He laughed heartily and grabbed Lin Wanrong. "Hold on, Master Lin. I have a matter to discuss with you."

"A discussion with me?" Lin Wanrong asked, surprised. "Your Highness, you are of royal blood, with wealth rivaling nations. What could I possibly assist you with? Your Highness is too kind."

Prince Cheng gave a small smile. "Master Lin, do you know the true identity of the lady from last night?"

"I don't," Lin Wanrong feigned ignorance, "Does Your Highness know? Please tell me."

Prince Cheng leisurely took two steps forward, offering a smile, "I suppose I know a bit. Master Lin, I heard you once assisted Xu Wei in Shandong to suppress the White Lotus Sect, even personally eliminating the Holy Mother of White Lotus and capturing Jining City. The Emperor thus holds you in particularly high regard. Is this true?"

"That's true," Lin Wanrong honestly answered, "In the past, I served as a military advisor in General Xu's army, and we did attack the White Lotus Sect."

Prince Cheng narrowed his eyes and smiled, "So, one could say that your fortune was made due to the White Lotus Sect. Is my understanding correct?"

Upon seeing Lin Wanrong nod in agreement, Prince Cheng sighed wistfully, "Master Lin, you are currently enjoying the Emperor's favor, at the zenith of your career. However, you and the White Lotus Sect hold deep-seated grudges against each other. It seems like your rise and potential fall are both due to the White Lotus Sect."

"Your Majesty, what do you mean by that?" Lin Wanrong asked, his innocent eyes wide with incomprehension.

Shaking his head with a bitter smile, Prince Cheng began, "It's due to my oversight. The lady you spent last night with is someone I met in Shandong. At the time, I wasn't aware of her true identity and had people investigating. Only this morning did I get a report back. Unexpectedly, she is..."

"She is what..." Lin Wanrong said in a fearful tone, "Your Majesty, could she be a remnant of the White Lotus..."

"Sigh, indeed, she is a remnant of the White Lotus. Master Lin, I'm afraid I have caused you trouble," Prince Cheng said sincerely, a flicker in his eyes.

Lin Wanrong's face turned ashen, collapsing into a chair, muttering under his breath, "A remnant of the White Lotus... she's actually from the White Lotus Sect. It's over... how could this happen?"

With a mysterious smile, Prince Cheng said, "Master Lin, you initially rose to prominence by crushing the White Lotus Sect, but now you are entangled with one of their remnants. If the Emperor hears of this, not to mention your promising future, you would be lucky to keep your head. Such a pity for a hero like you."

"Your Majesty, what should I do? You must testify for me. I didn't do this on purpose. I had no idea she was a remnant of the White Lotus," Lin Wanrong said, his face deathly pale as he grabbed Prince Cheng's hand.

"Do you think the Emperor would believe you? A ruler only believes in himself," Prince Cheng replied coldly, "Master Lin, you have only recently joined the court and are unaware of its dangerous intrigues. You've received the Emperor's favor at a young age, seemingly glowing with success, but in reality, danger lurks everywhere. Do you know how many people envy you, how many want to bring you down? Not to mention the newly crowned Top Scholar, Su Mubai. Before you appeared, he was the one the Emperor trusted the most. However, everything changed when you arrived. This rise and fall, how could he bear it? And you, at this crucial moment, stumbled in such a way. What would happen if he were to learn of this huge news?"

Lin Wanrong's face turned white, his eyes empty, sweat dripping down his forehead; he looked completely stunned. Prince Cheng was satisfied with this effect. He slowly walked over, patting Lin Wanrong on the shoulder with an amiable smile, "Actually, things aren't as bad as they seem. Since this happened in my mansion, as long as I don't say anything, who else would know? Master Lin, don't you agree?"

"Yes, yes!" Master Lin hastened to nod, a playful twinkle in his eyes. "Your Highness, you mustn't reveal this matter, otherwise my life would be forfeit."

"Of course." Prince Cheng laughed heartily. "You are a talent I value, how could I allow you to be framed so easily? Master Lin, I heard that Xu Wei treats you very well and even recommended you to General Li Tai. Is this true?"

'Here it comes, the main point at last.' Lin Wanrong chuckled inwardly. Prince Cheng had been defeated by the seemingly weak and incompetent Old Emperor years ago. People had felt it was

unjust, yet who knew how much the Old Emperor had done to ascend the throne smoothly? His cunning was unrivaled in the world and his methods were boundless. As for the relationship between Sister An and himself, only a few people knew, all of them close to him, yet the Old Emperor had managed to verify everything clearly. In this respect, Prince Cheng was far inferior to him.

"Yes, there seems to be such a matter." Lin Wanrong nodded. "General Li has invited me to help him in his camp several times, but I have always been busy with other matters and have declined."

"Master Lin, I don't mean to lecture you, but the position to assist Li Tai is something many people couldn't vie for, how could you refuse? General Li is advanced in years and is about to lead a campaign against the Turkic tribes. Who knows what might happen on the battlefield? With your standing in the Emperor's heart and with the esteem that Xu Wei and Li Tai have for you, as long as you handle matters appropriately, it's not impossible for you to become the Commander of the three armies." Prince Cheng suggested casually, yet every word was as sharp as a bead, shocking the senses.

'Commander of the three armies?! Prince Cheng wants me to be the Commander of the three armies?!' Lin Wanrong was startled and immediately understood Prince Cheng's intentions. This old fox was planning to control military power through him. When he said that it was uncertain what could happen to Li Tai on the battlefield, was he implying something? If something happened to Li Tai, it would be a major blow to the Empire. Who else would have Li Tai's prestige and experience to command the troops? Who else would have the ability to lead troops against the Turkic cavalry? The more he thought about it, the more fearful he became. This time, he didn't have to act; cold sweat was already pouring from his body.

"I don't quite understand what Your Highness means." He laughed nervously, feigning confusion.

Prince Cheng smiled faintly. "Master Lin is being too modest. With your intelligence, you can grasp anything at a glance. I won't say more. Go back and think it over, and when you've decided, let me know. I will definitely support you fully."

'Support me to become the Grand Marshal of the three armies? Come to think of it, with the trust of the Old Emperor, plus Prince Cheng's covert backing, becoming a Grand Marshal might indeed be possible.' But Lin Wanrong knew his own capabilities. Although he had some prestige in the army, he could not compare with the decades of accomplishments of the old General Li, not to mention military tactics. For the sake of the people of Great Hua and the brothers in the army, it would be better for old Li to remain the commander. Besides, leading troops in battle, such strenuous work, was not suitable for someone who enjoyed comfort like Master Lin.

Prince Cheng, seeing him in deep thought, had a hint of satisfaction in his eyes. He nodded slightly. "Take your time to think, Master Lin. There's no rush." He looked confident as he picked up his teacup and took a small sip.

Joy swelled in Lin Wanrong's heart. This old fox had not finished his words yet wanted to send the guest away. 'Good, I will make you lose more than you gained. I should catch you off guard and vent Sister An's anger. After this, Sister An and her tribe will be under the protection of me, Lin San, Master Lin, to ensure their safety for a thousand years.'

Chapter 354 The True Hero

Upon stepping out of the Prince's mansion, he looked back to see the grand, vermillion doors emblazoned with the golden characters, "Prince Cheng's Mansion," shimmering with a light that was hard to ignore. He held no fondness for the mansion, but the memories of his times with Sister An were impossible to erase. Thinking back to Sister An's tender tears from the previous night, and An Biru's enchanting yet tragically heartbroken eyes floated before him. He let out a loud cry, his heart filling with anxious confusion. 'The Miao Village, where exactly is the Miao Village?!'

Considering that Sister An had dealt with Prince Cheng for twenty years while maintaining her innocence, he realized how incredibly rare her integrity was. In the past, she had the White Lotus Sect to rely on, providing her with the strength to negotiate with Prince Cheng, who dared not push her too far. But now, with the White Lotus Sect destroyed by his own hands, Sister An had lost her leverage, her ability to bargain with Prince Cheng. She was now threatened by Prince Cheng with the safety of her clan. Thinking about it, he had unintentionally implicated her, complicating matters even more.

Whenever he thought of An Biru, his mind would drift to Xian Er. Ever since she became Princess Nishang, she had stayed quiet. Had she given up on her husband? She and Sister An were master and student, their relationship extremely close. If Sister An was to return to the Miao Village, she would certainly bid Xian Er farewell. Xian Er must know where the Miao Village was.

With this thought, a burst of hope ignited within him, and he started to run toward the Imperial Palace. The mansion of Prince Cheng was quite far from the Imperial Palace. Upon reaching the moat, he saw Xu Wei exiting the palace.

"Old Xu, Old Xu, is the Emperor in?" Panting heavily, he rushed over, shouting. Due to the urgency of the matter, he dropped formalities and addressed Xu Wei directly.

"Ah, Little brother Lin," Xu Wei said with a smile, "What are you doing here? Yesterday, Zhiqing told me that the mansion the Emperor bestowed upon you happens to be next door to my humble dwelling. I was so delighted that I visited your mansion, but I didn't find you there. Instead, I ran into Miss Qiaoqiao. She and Zhiqing were busy sprucing up your place. Have you seen it yet?"

Impatient, Lin Wanrong interrupted Xu Wei's lengthy ramble: "Brother Xu, let's cut to the chase. Is the Emperor in? I want to see Princess Nishang."

Xu Wei shook his head, "Little brother Lin, you're out of luck. The Emperor went to pray at the Grand Prime Minister Temple today. He was supposed to go yesterday but had to turn back."

'Of course, he couldn't go. He was at my mansion giving me a lesson.' Hearing that the Emperor was not in the palace, Lin Wanrong felt a pang of disappointment. It was troublesome to enter the Imperial Palace inner court without the Emperor's order. If only he could make the rules in the palace.

Thinking Lin San was still contemplating the matter of the marriage proposal, Xu Wei patted him on the shoulder, "Little brother Lin, it's unfortunate that your efforts fell short, but forcing things wouldn't be right either. If you and Princess Nishang are meant to be, you'll meet again."

Lin Wanrong didn't know whether to laugh or cry. There was no need to force anything. He and Xian Er had already performed the formal wedding rituals in front of Sister An; she was his true and legitimate wife. Why would a husband need to report to his father-in-law before seeing his wife? Marrying a princess was indeed troublesome.

In truth, even if he had found Xian'er now, he feared it would be to no avail. Sister An had deliberately avoided him, had even gone as far as drugging him to ensure he slept through the night. By this point, she must have been gone for quite a while. Catching up with her would be impossible. He shook his head with a bitter smile, coming to a deeper understanding of An Biru's obstinate and firm character. An Biru, born a Miao girl, was of a universally acknowledged low status, yet she was stunningly beautiful. Her sensitivity and pride made her heart as fragile as a crystal, easily shattered. He had indeed made a foolish mistake the night before, one he couldn't possibly make again.

The Miao village!!! He must go to the Miao village!!! He must get Sister An back!!! Regret was useless, it would be better to put more effort into action. After all, he had plenty of time. His belief grew stronger, his mood suddenly brightened. Thinking about the surprise and joy on Sister An's face the day she saw him again, he could almost envision her running towards him like a charming fox, a gleam in his eyes, a smirk on his face.

Xu Wei was left dumbstruck, wondering what Lin San was thinking. His eyes were moist, yet his laughter was inexplicably lewd and lascivious. Truly a strange man!

"Mr. Xu, when is General Li Tai's army leaving?" His heart felt lighter, much more relaxed. Remembering what Prince Cheng had told him that morning, Lin Wanrong asked with concern for Li Tai.

"The grain and payment for the troops are not yet ready. Gathering the provisions from various places would take about a month. Why do you suddenly ask about this?" Xu Wei asked, curious.

"I worry that someone might be plotting against General Li. Please advise him to stay vigilant. He must not only watch out for the Turks, but also for traitors within." Lin Wanrong's brows furrowed as he spoke seriously. Prince Cheng had been vague, the scheming behind his back wouldn't be explained to him clearly, he had no way to guard against it, he could only warn Li Tai to be careful.

Xu Wei nodded, smiling. "Of course. General Li is a pillar of our Great Hua, a stalwart figure in our military. He has long been a thorn in the side of the northern nomads. Attempts on his life have never ceased. Over the years, we've become used to it. Little brother Lin, why not speak to General Li about this matter yourself? After all, you two are now neighbors."

"My neighbor?" Lin Wanrong was taken aback, then remembered seeing two large mansions on either side of his own the day before. One belonged to a Xu, and the other to a Li. So, that was Li Tai's mansion. Xu Wei and Li Tai, one in charge of civil affairs and the other the military, were the nation's arm and leg, two pillars of Great Hua. The Emperor had given him a mansion situated between these two important ministers, which seemed to carry a significant implication.

"Yes, neighbor. Both my family and Li's lack in number. Only your wife is plentiful. I'm sure you will have many children and grandchildren, which would make things lively. We should visit each other more often." Xu Wei said with a smile.

"Many children and grandchildren? I accept your kind words." Lin Wanrong chuckled, clapping his fist in response, "I also wish you, an old tree to blossom, and that Sister Su becomes a mother soon."

Xu Wei's face turned red, but he couldn't help but laugh heartily. To have a child in old age was a blessing in life, a testament to an old man's capability in every respect. Every time this lad Lin San spoke, he always made people feel comfortable.

Having bid farewell to Xu Wei, Lin Wanrong visited his new residence. The interior was spotless, radiating an inviting glow from the neatly arranged furnishings. However, Qiaoqiao wasn't in the house; presumably, she was with the Eldest Miss and Madam Xiao. As he rushed towards Xiao's residence, a galloping horse rushed towards him. From atop the horse, Li Sheng leaped down and said, "General Lin, I've finally found you."

A light sparked in Lin Wanrong's eyes, and he grinned, "Brother Li, do we have good news?"

Li Sheng nodded and said, "You will not be disappointed. The 'F*ck Cannon' you requested has been assembled by our joint efforts." Mentioning the 'F*ck Cannon', Li Sheng struggled to suppress a smile. Having understood the meaning of 'F*ck' through Lin Wanrong's explanation, it meant having a blast - a real blast!

Lin Wanrong suddenly remembered the scent of tobacco on Zhao Kangning from their close encounter the previous night. As Lu Dongzan had mentioned, this 'Nose-piercing Grass' could only be found among the Turks. Could this signify -

The efficiency of Li Sheng's men was impressive. They had completed the task he had given them just the day before. This showed that there were indeed many talented craftsmen in the Divine Machine Unit. Properly utilized, they could provide significant aid on the battlefield. Lin Wanrong felt this deeply, "Brother Li, send two trustworthy men to hide the 'F*ck Cannon' outside the city. Damn, such a useless toy that can't even fire, yet I must treat it as a treasure to deceive people."

Li Sheng laughed heartily. Listening to General Lin was always refreshing. Lin Wanrong waved his hand and added, "Another thing, whenever you and Brother Hu have time, come and check the blood-sweat treasure horse. Let's see if it can mate with our local horses and produce some baby blood-sweat treasures. If we succeed in this, our cavalry's combat capabilities will certainly improve. Of course, if it's not possible, I'll just ride it myself."

Li Sheng, who was still laughing heartily, instantly wore a serious look. Who said General Lin was just a player? Just by these words, he proved himself a true hero. Considering how precious blood-sweat treasure horses were, others would treat them like gold, but he generously offered it up. How many could match his spirit and boldness?

"On behalf of the cavalry, I thank you, General." Li Sheng gave a deep bow, giving a thumbs up, "General Lin, you are indeed a great man."

"I wouldn't say a great man. I just do some foolish things sometimes." Lin Wanrong said lightly, the meaning of his words known only to himself.

As they strolled and talked, Lin Wanrong arranged with Li Sheng a hidden location outside the city for the 'F*ck Cannon'. It would be delivered directly to Lu Dongzan and his men. Considering that these Turks probably had never operated a large cannon, even with ten times their courage, they wouldn't dare to fire it publicly. As long as they didn't test fire it, deceiving a few Turks with Li Sheng's craftsmanship would be a piece of cake. Lin Wanrong had complete confidence in his men.

By the time he returned to Xiao's residence, it was almost noon. Before he got close, he saw Qiaoqiao standing at the entrance, looking around as if searching for something.

"Little darling, are you coming out to welcome your husband with such enthusiasm?" Lin Wanrong approached with a beaming smile.

Qiaoqiao blushed, quickly grabbing his hand, "Big brother, you're finally back. There's a young lady in the shop who's been waiting for you since last night. She said she wouldn't leave until she sees you. She hasn't eaten or drunk anything for eight hours and is about to faint."

Chapter 355 The Boyfriend

A lady who didn't eat or sleep, waiting for him for seven or eight hours? Whose lady was sick with longing? Lin Wanrong was puzzled. Suddenly, a feeble voice rang in his ears, "Sir... sir... you're finally back."

Lin Wanrong looked up and saw a woman with skin as smooth as cream staring blankly at him. Her face was pale, and she suddenly collapsed into a soft heap.

Qiaoqiao's reflexes were quick, and she promptly supported her, calling out anxiously, "Miss Seo, Miss Seo, what happened to you?"

Lin Wanrong rolled up his sleeves enthusiastically, "Qiaoqiao, don't panic. Miss Seo is just too worried and exhausted, coupled with hunger and fatigue, that's why she lost her strength. I am strong, let me carry her in."

Qiaoqiao obediently hummed in agreement, intending to hand Miss Seo over to him. Miss Seo raised her head from Qiaoqiao's arms, weakly but firmly saying, "No need... don't bother... I can walk myself." She took two shaky steps, her legs giving out once again, but Qiaoqiao was there to catch her.

What a stubborn temperament Miss Seo had, thought Lin Wanrong. He forced a smile and let Qiaoqiao help her inside. Upon entering, he saw a teacup on the table, filled with tea that had long since gone cold. Qiaoqiao explained, "Big brother, Miss Seo came here yesterday to find you. She sat here quietly, not touching a drop of water or grain of rice, saying that she would keep waiting for you."

As Qiaoqiao spoke, she was about to help Seo Jang Geum sit down, but Jang Geum stubbornly shook her head. She stared resolutely at Lin Wanrong, her eyes seeming to accuse and yet also show heartbreak.

Lin Wanrong shook his head and sighed, "Miss Jang Geum, why are you doing this to yourself? Whatever the issue, it's not worth ruining your health. Seeing you like this... it makes me uncomfortable."

Seo Jang Geum looked at him seriously, "Would Sir really feel uncomfortable? If you do, then that is your punishment for breaking your promises. I intend to punish you with my actions, make you feel guilty and not break your word again."

He'd met strong women before, but none as strong as this! Lin Wanrong wanted to laugh, but seeing Seo Jang Geum's stern face, he held it back. Her logic was strange - she suffered to make him feel guilty? She wasn't his wife! But she was so earnest, probably thinking that everyone in the world was as upright and selfless as she imagined. Truly fitting for someone like Jang Geum, what a character!

"Miss Seo, when did I break my word?" Looking at Seo Jang Geum's clear eyes and selfless expression, Lin Wanrong had a strange feeling - if he stared at her for too long, he would believe he was a heinous criminal.

Seeing that Master Lin didn't even realize where he went wrong, Seo Jang Geum widened her beautiful eyes and softly said, "You don't even know how you broke your promise? Sir, you can't behave like this. You promised our Prince two days ago to attend a banquet at Mirror Lake. Last night the Prince sent me to invite you, but you didn't come back all night. Isn't this breaking a promise? Sir, how could you be like this? I, I——"

She spoke too hastily, her thoughts in a whirl. Her body swayed, threatening to topple over. Qiaoqiao, empathizing with this upright and obstinate woman, quickly helped her to sit down. "Miss Seo," she pleaded, "Don't be so anxious. Please, sit down and speak slowly. Big brother is a man of his word; he is not at all the person you describe."

This young lady was so fragile; Lin Wanrong hoped no serious harm would befall her. With a bitter smile, he asked, "Miss Seo, when did I agree to your invitation?" Considering the greater significance of the negotiations with Prince Cheng and the Turks over Goryeo, Lin Wanrong had prioritized those two over anything else. Moreover, he hadn't even promised Seo Jang Geum that he would attend the feast. Dealing with Sister An's departure the previous night, how could he find the mood to go and frolic at the Mirror Lake with Yi Seung-Jae?

Seo Jang Geum shook her head, maintaining her earnest tone. "When I invited you, you didn't express any refusal. That naturally means you accepted. Yet when I came to summon you last night, I was told that you had already left. How can you not fulfill a promise you made, Sir?"

Acceptance by default of not refusing? The logic of this young lady indeed astounded him. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Miss Seo, if I were to kiss you right now, would you object?"

"You - " Seo Jang Geum blushed furiously. "How could you say something like that?" she asked, staring at him with a stern expression.

With a cheeky smile, Lin Wanrong retorted, "You didn't object, so you must agree. Here goes - Qiaoqiao dear, there might be some scenes inappropriate for children, turn your head - Miss Seo, are you ready?"

Qiaoqiao couldn't help but laugh and obediently turned her head. Seo Jang Geum hurriedly intervened, "Sir, you cannot equate these two situations. I can outright reject you, but I was afraid it might hurt your ego."

"True enough," Lin Wanrong clapped his hands, laughing heartily, "Miss Seo, you've hit the nail on the head. Like you, I didn't explicitly refuse because I didn't want to hurt your feelings. Oh, Miss Seo, I'm glad you finally understand my dilemma. Qiaoqiao darling, quickly prepare some food for Miss Seo, something nourishing like lotus seed porridge, angelica ginseng bird's nest with saffron. Quickly, fetch the best ones! Ah, to think you've been without food for a day and a night, it pains my heart, poor child."

"Big brother, do we need the saffron too?" Qiaoqiao asked, confused. Her Big brother sure knew how to exaggerate; just look at what he's reduced Miss Seo to.

"Add a bit, women who stay up all night always seem to lose something," Lin Wanrong laughed, "Miss Seo, being the most celebrated medical practitioner of the Goryeo royal court, surely understands its use. Ah, I've considered everything thoroughly."

Lin Wanrong's thoughts jumped quickly. Even the self-proclaimed intelligent Seo Jang Geum couldn't keep up with his pace. Seeing Lin Wanrong's animated expressions, she couldn't help but sigh, "Even if you didn't say it, I understand. Our Goryeo Kingdom is weak, like a single hair amongst nine oxen compared to Great Hua. If you don't want to bother with us, it is understandable."

Lin Wanrong lazily sat down and yawned, "Miss Seo, we've clarified the banquet issue; it was a misunderstanding. I appreciate your sentiments, but the banquet is no longer necessary."

"Sir—" Seo Jang Geum was about to speak when Master Lin chuckled and interrupted, "Miss Seo, I have a personal question for you. You may choose not to answer—I won't force you—but if you don't answer, I can't guarantee I'll answer yours. Fair, isn't it?"

Seo Jang Geum sighed slightly. She prided herself on her superior intelligence and talent, yet all her cunning was shattered in front of this man. Master Lin's mind was as unfathomable as the waters around Jeju Island, making it difficult for her to grasp. "Whatever you wish to ask, Sir, I will answer truthfully."

Lin Wanrong nodded and asked, "Jang Geum, are you considered the most beautiful woman in Goryeo?"

Seo Jang Geum shook her head and responded, "Appearance is not everything for a woman. It's the inner character that plays a pivotal role in a woman's life. Beauty and ugliness lie in the soul, not in the physical appearance."

Master Lin smirked. Based on Miss Seo's promoted principle that "no rejection implies acceptance," coupled with her radiant, crystal-clear skin, it would be unthinkable to deny that she was the most beautiful woman in Korea. He laughed, "If you're the most beautiful, just admit it! Talking about inner beauty and appearance is superficial. If beauty is truly based on inner qualities, I should be the most handsome man in the world. Jang Geum, do you have a boyfriend?"

"What is a 'boyfriend'?" Seo Jang Geum asked, confused.

"Oh, someone handsome and intelligent like me, capable of having conversations with you! Do you have one?" Master Lin asked seriously.

Seo Jang Geum shook her head slightly, "Handsome and intelligent, Sir, you jest. However, I enjoy conversing with you. If that's what a boyfriend is, then you, sir, would be my boyfriend."

Playfully teased Jang Geum, Master Lin blushed and thought to himself, it was indeed delightful to flirt with her.

"Sir—" Seo Jang Geum noticed Master Lin had stopped asking questions and was about to continue talking about the banquet when Qiaoqiao came in with a bowl of delicious lotus seed porridge. "Big brother, the porridge is ready. Miss Seo, please have it while it's still warm. I've added ginseng—it's very nourishing."

"No need, Miss," Seo Jang Geum insisted firmly. "I won't eat until I've fulfilled the Prince's task. Sir, please listen to me—"

"Speak, speak, what do you want to speak?" Master Lin, who was gentle a moment ago, suddenly turned solemn. "Miss Seo, are you saying that if I don't listen, you won't eat?"

Seo Jang Geum nodded. Master Lin snorted, "Great! If you don't eat, I won't listen. We can stay this way and see who's more stubborn. You, with your stubborn temperament, or me, with my strong personality. Qiaoqiao darling, there's a play in the town square, let's go for a stroll."

Qiaoqiao quickly grabbed Seo Jang Geum's hand, "Miss Seo, please listen to big brother and eat the porridge first."

However, Seo Jang Geum was much more obstinate than they had imagined. Upon hearing this, she shook her head, gently closed her eyes, and remained silent, as if she intended to wait in silence for Master Lin's return from his stroll.

‘Hey, this young lady has spirit,’ Lin Wanrong, receiving the lotus seed porridge, chuckled lightly. "Miss Seo, are you waiting for me to feed you? Alright, I'll try my hand. Open your mouth, here comes the porridge."

Seo Jang Geum's lips remained tightly shut, her silence unyielding, the expression on her face obstinate. Lin Wanrong gave a frosty laugh, "Miss Seo, you indeed have a strong character! But, my poor people of Goryeo, just because you show your character in front of me, they will have to suffer so much more hardship. Alas, I should send a message to Yi Seung-Jae saying that Seo Jang Geum is here, locked in a standoff with me, and tell the Goryeo people to continue waiting."

A flicker crossed Seo Jang Geum's expression, "Sir, do you mean—"

"Open your mouth—" Lin Wanrong interrupted her with a subtle smile, his voice laced with seduction.

Seo Jang Geum's lips moved slightly, a hint of blush painting her earlobes, her complexion was like blooming peach blossoms in March. After a long pause, she reluctantly opened her mouth, her eyelids falling bashfully.

"—open your mouth, my sweet little Qiaoqiao, you've been working hard these days, let big brother feed you porridge!" Lin Wanrong seemed to ignore Seo Jang Geum's actions and instead moved the spoon to Qiaoqiao's lips. The little maid was taken aback, "Big brother, this is for Miss Seo, uh—"

A mouthful of sweet porridge filled Qiaoqiao's mouth. Between the blush and the evident joy on her face, Seo Jang Geum waited for a moment, only to see him feeding Qiaoqiao. Her expression turned stunned, and then her eyes filled with unshed tears, and she quickly bowed her head in silence.

Lin Wanrong subtly smiled, took a handkerchief from Qiaoqiao and handed it to Seo Jang Geum, speaking softly, "Don't cry, dear Jang Geum. I want to tell you that when no one is pitying you, you have to learn to pity yourself."

Seo Jang Geum paused. Seizing the opportunity, Lin Wanrong handed the bowl of porridge to her. After pondering for a moment, she lowered her head, tears rolling down her cheeks, her voice as soft as a mosquito's whisper, "Sir, thank you, I understand now."

"Thank me for what? I'm your boyfriend, after all. Ah, international romance is the hardest. I'm stuck between the people of Goryeo and you, it's really killing me." Seeing Seo Jang Geum sip the porridge in small mouthfuls, Lin Wanrong chuckled, his expression becoming less serious.

Seo Jang Geum giggled, her face flushed as she lowered her head. The porridge tasted particularly sweet.

After waiting for what seemed like an eternity for Seo Jang Geum to finish her porridge, Lin Wanrong was drenched in cold sweat. This girl was too refined. Eating porridge was like doing embroidery for her. He estimated that she must have spent a fifth of her life eating.

Seeing Lin Wanrong stare at her, Seo Jang Geum bit her red lip and bashfully asked, "Sir, do I look awful when I eat porridge?"

"No, you don't look awful at all. You look too good," Lin Wanrong sighed, "Miss Seo, when you return to Goryeo, don't eat in front of other men. Otherwise, they'll be captivated by you."

Seo Jang Geum gave a small laugh and quietly said, "Sir, can I speak now?"

"I already said, forget about the banquet." Lin Wanrong waved his hand dismissively, which caused Seo Jang Geum to look disappointed. However, Lin Wanrong continued, "I don't like playing games, talking with Yi Seung-Jae is less straightforward than you telling me directly. What exactly does the Young Prince want with me?"

Seo Jang Geum brightened up and hastily asked, "Sir, may I really speak now?"

‘Alas, this lass is perfect in all aspects, except she’s overly polite,’ Lin Wanrong thought with a smirk. ‘Even after marriage, undressed in bed, would she still say, ‘Sir, please come in!’?’ His eyes, brimming with a lascivious gleam, fell upon Seo Jang Geum's immaculate face, savoring the sight.

Seeing Master Lin's lecherous expression, Seo Jang Geum felt at a loss. Where had the tender, considerate, and wise Lin Wanrong of a moment ago disappeared to? She couldn't withstand his gaze. Her usual calm wasn't enough, and a wave of panic washed over her. Hastily lowering her head, she said, "Sir, this matter isn't unrelated to Great Hua either. Do you know why we absolutely must marry Princess Nishang during our visit to Great Hua?"

‘Piffle. I'm not the King of Goryeo. How could I possibly know what you're thinking?’ Lin Wanrong thought. Remembering Miss Seo's omnipresent politeness, he managed to squeeze out a feigned smile, "Oh? And why is that? Ah, Jang Geum, you're so polite."

Seo Jang Geum failed to grasp the meaning behind his words, shaking her head, she sighed, "The reason we must marry Princess Nishang is that we wish to borrow troops from Great Hua."

"Borrow troops?!" Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Since when had the Goryeo become so self-aware, inviting their Great Hua to take action?

"Please don't misunderstand us, Sir," Seo Jang Geum quickly clarified. "We are not asking Great Hua to station troops in Goryeo, but rather we hope Great Hua could reinforce its troops in the southeast and northeast directions."

"Southeast and Northeast?" Lin Wanrong pondered before raising his head, "Miss Seo, are you referring to — Dongyin?"

"Sir is indeed intelligent," Seo Jang Geum nodded with a grave expression. "Before coming to Great Hua, both the Turks and Dongyin have sent envoys to Goryeo, wanting to form an alliance with us against Great Hua."

An alliance? One in the grasslands, the other on the seas, these two also wanted to conspire? The Turks were powerful, so their intentions were conceivable. But that tiny Dongyin daring to covet Great Hua's land? They couldn't possibly swallow that! No, Dongyin wanted to take Goryeo! Only by establishing a foothold on the land could they dream of Great Hua.

A realization dawned on Lin Wanrong, yet he remained silent, and after a moment's hesitation, he asked, "Oh, how does the King of Goryeo view this?"

"His Majesty was initially quite moved by the idea, but I believe the people of Dongyin are cunning and malicious. They would never dare to lightly touch the whiskers of the Great Hua tiger. Their intention, I fear, is not Great Hua but Goryeo," Seo Jang Geum confided. "I consulted with a military advisor, who then relayed my thoughts to His Majesty. He too realized the inappropriateness of the matter. However, Dongyin has been expanding and strengthening its military in recent years, and their forces have become formidable. Goryeo is no match for them. Thus, His Majesty sent the Prince here to request that Great Hua exert pressure on Dongyin from both the southeast and northeast, hoping to make them abandon their unrealistic ambitions. But the Emperor of Great Hua has consistently refused to see us, so the Prince wanted to convey our intentions through you, Sir. If Goryeo falls, Dongyin can nestle into our lands and join forces with the Turks to strike at Great Hua. By then, Great Hua's situation will be even more precarious than it is now." Seo Jang Geum finished her piece in one breath, letting out a long sigh as though unburdening herself, her gaze once again falling on Lin Wanrong.

Seo Jang Geum indeed had insight. Goryeo was fortunate to have her. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Miss Seo, telling me all this is of no use. I am but a minor official, as insignificant as a sesame seed or green bean. These matters of military and state are beyond my reach."

Seo Jang Geum glanced at him, saying softly, "Sir, there's no need for modesty. Even though I'm from Goryeo, I know that the Emperor's personal title of 'The First Talent Under Heaven' for you is

not an ordinary honor. A word from you to the Emperor is worth more than a hundred thousand soldiers. For the common safety of Goryeo and Great Hua, I beg you to relay this message to His Majesty, urging him to be on guard early. Please!"

Seo Jang Geum bent down in a deep bow. Her Goryeo long dress perfectly accentuated her slender figure. Following her smooth, white neck, her ample chest heaved upward, utterly enticing.