

## Finest 361

### Chapter 361 Refusal

"What?" Lin Wanrong leaped up, hastily rolling up the scroll in his hand. He shouted loudly, "Impossible, this is absolutely impossible! Xian'er is my wife, not some sister."

"Impossible? In this world, there is no such thing as impossible," the elderly Emperor's expression turned cold, his voice sinister, "Xian'er's identity may be enticing to the ordinary person, but to you, it is a massive obstruction. Those who aim to accomplish great things mustn't sweat the small stuff; you must learn to let go, only then can you achieve the true result."

"True result? What is this true result? Old man, you have cultivated all your life, is this the 'true result' you desired?" Lin Wanrong laughed, devoid of anger, his fists clenched tightly. Just a moment ago, he was considering treating Xian'er well, yet in the blink of an eye, her father hit him with this sledgehammer of a revelation. How could he not be frustrated?

"I've said my piece, the choice of good or bad is yours, don't say I didn't give you a chance." The elderly Emperor smirked ominously, a chilling light shot out from his eyes. Compared to his previously gentle and amiable demeanor, he now seemed like a completely different person.

A cold sweat trickled down Lin Wanrong's spine, involuntarily stepping back twice, he gritted his teeth, "Old man, does this mean I can't leave this room unless I agree?"

"Lin San, I won't deny, you are talented. But imperial affairs are known to the imperial family. I've told you these things, do you think it's a tale? Secrets that are not transmitted, once they have entered your ears, you either agree to what I said, or—" the elderly Emperor's eyes slightly closed, he didn't continue, but a thick killing intent surfaced on his face.

Thinking about the words of the old Emperor today, every word and every sentence held profound implications, secrets that absolutely cannot be known to a third party. It seemed this time was no joke, it was a matter of life and death. Silence pervaded the room. The sands of the hourglass slowly flowed down, the old Emperor closed his eyes, silent and seemingly asleep.

Lin Wanrong stood there, dazed, he hadn't expected the situation to evolve to this point. Thinking about Xian'er's helpless, heartbroken demeanor, he felt as though a knife was twisting in his heart, his breathing gradually hastened.

Time ticked away second by second, the elderly Emperor silent as if hibernating, the room filled with deathly silence. Lin Wanrong could only hear his own heavy breathing, each breath heavier than the last.

‘Xian'er, what should I do?’ His hands clenched, he remained silent, his brain spinning rapidly. After considering for a long time, he finally gritted his teeth, turned around, and headed towards the door.

The elderly Emperor did not stop him. One step, two steps, three steps, Lin Wanrong kept the count in his mind. Each step forward was heavier than the last. Just as his hand reached the door latch, the faint voice of the elderly Emperor resounded behind him, "Have you made up your mind? Do you know what your next step is?"

Lin Wanrong, with his hand on the door, halted his steps. Without turning back, he replied, "Your Majesty, I've thought it through clearly. No matter what the next step is, even if it costs my life, I will live happily. As for you, Your Majesty, although you are the supreme sovereign, majestic to the world, your life has been muddled. You have never truly experienced happiness. It's not worth it."

"Are you admonishing me?" The elderly Emperor's eyes snapped open, a glimmer of light shooting out, as if it physically pierced through his chest.

Lin Wanrong smiled lightly and said, "When it comes to resilience, resolve, and matters of state, surely you, Old man, should be the one instructing me. However, when it comes to enjoying life, perhaps I could teach you a thing or two. Your Majesty, you have spent your entire life calculating and being calculated upon. Even though you have enjoyed wealth and power, loneliness has always been your only companion. Even with a daughter by your side, there is no one to truly converse with. Your Majesty, you defeated Prince Cheng, and you were victorious. However, you lost to yourself."

With these words, he unhesitatingly opened the door and stepped out, only to be met by hundreds of soldiers from the Divine Machine Unit with their crossbows drawn, targeting him alone. The slightest movement, and he would be turned into a porcupine.

Lin Wanrong gave a helpless, bitter smile. He stood at the doorway, not daring to make a move, while the room behind him remained silent, the person inside a mystery.

A suffocating silence stretched out as neither of them spoke. It was like a still pool, incapable of stirring a ripple. After an unknown amount of time, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but turn around, only

to see the Emperor's expression as cold and deep as a lake, watching him with ever-changing eyes that alternated between fury and calm, evoking fear.

"You may leave," the Emperor finally spoke, his tone laced with a sorrow and desolation words couldn't capture.

Looking at the suddenly aged Emperor, Lin Wanrong hesitated for a moment before cautiously asking, "Old man, are you serious?"

The Emperor waved his hand to signal him to leave quickly. Lin Wanrong felt a surge of joy in his heart and was about to step out, but a sense of indescribable loss washed over him when his eyes rested on the Emperor's aged face. If he really left, what would become of the Emperor? The Great Hua was about to wage war against the Turks, the Kingdom of Dongyin was about to invade Goryeo, and Prince Cheng was eager to take control of the military. With the Emperor just recovering from an assassination attempt, what if he couldn't hold on? Their entire Empire would be in jeopardy.

The resolve he had just moments ago wavered, he opened his mouth wanting to say something, but didn't know how to start.

"Why aren't you leaving?!" the Emperor roared, "Do you really think I wouldn't dare to kill you? Come--"

Lin Wanrong quickly waved his hands and said, "Hold on, hold on, Old man. That's not what I meant. I was wondering, isn't there another way? Preferably one that is beneficial to both?"

"Beneficial to both?" The Emperor glanced at him, silent for a while, and then suddenly started laughing, "You're really hoping for the best, aren't you? Do you want to have all the good things in this world for yourself?"

Seeing the Emperor laugh, Lin Wanrong heaved a sigh of relief. As long as he was laughing, at least his life was safe. He brazenly smiled and said, "Old man, consider the fact that Xian'er and I have that sort of relationship. We are all one family. As the saying goes, 'one shouldn't let the water of one's own mill flow into others' fields.' Any benefits should also be left for your son-in-law, right? How about it, Old man? Think about it and come up with a solution that benefits us both--"

"Take him out," the Emperor grumbled, and dozens of guards rushed over, holding onto Lin Wanrong and dragging him outside.

The old Emperor let out a soft sigh, audible enough for Lin Wanrong to hear, "Consort Qin is buried behind the Grand Prime Minister Temple, where Xian'er has made her hut. Find her and treat her well; don't make her sad."

When Lin Wanrong had vanished from sight, the old Emperor fell into deep contemplation before slowly struggling to sit up. A figure emerged hastily from the inner room to assist him, the Emperor sighed, "Little Wei, this Lin San is rather stubborn."

The blind old man fell to his knees in fear, "Master, I am incapable, and I have disappointed you."

The old Emperor shook his head, "I am not disappointed. On the contrary, I am pleasantly surprised."

The old man named Wei was puzzled, "I don't understand what you mean."

"Little Wei, you have been with me for many years. Tell me, what's most important when choosing people?" the Emperor asked in a deep voice.

"Resilience and loyalty!" Little Wei responded without hesitation.

"You are right. Lin San might seem cunning and deceitful on the surface, but when faced with temptation, he held his ground, undeterred by external influences. This trait is rare and is much stronger than the fair-weather, fence-sitters. He would not abandon Xian'er today, and he will not abandon me tomorrow. For this, I have faith in him," the Emperor affirmed.

"But, he doesn't seem too interested in these matters," Little Wei glanced at his master and cautiously stated.

The Emperor chuckled, which resulted in a fit of violent coughing. Little Wei quickly helped soothe his back. Once the Emperor's cough had calmed, he continued, "He is not disinterested – no one in this world could resist such a temptation. He is just unhappy with the way I handled it. Without Xian'er, today's incident might have ended differently."

"But the Princess holds deep affection for Lin Wanrong, it's impossible for them to separate. Forcibly separating them might backfire," Little Wei furrowed his brow.

"Patience is required. All good things come to those who wait," the Emperor coughed again, then sighed slowly, "Unfortunately, I only have five months left... the heavens have only given me five months..."

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Upon leaving the back gate of the Grand Prime Minister Temple, Lin Wanrong was completely drenched. His conversation with the old Emperor had drained him of all his energy. Wiping the cold sweat from his forehead, he carefully mulled over the Emperor's words. The underlying threats and stimulations were the most thrilling experiences of his life. The feeling of almost stepping into heaven was exciting just to think about.

After resting a bit at the back door, he followed a path up the mountain. He had been to the back mountain of the Grand Prime Minister Temple before when Sister An had mysteriously invited him to meet her at the celestial pond. The events seemed to have occurred only yesterday.

Since Xian'er was living in a hut by the tomb, she would not be on the top of the mountain. The back mountain of the Grand Prime Minister Temple was vast. He searched for a long time, but he couldn't see any huts. He had no choice but to continue onward.

The further he walked, the more secluded it became. Climbing a large rock and looking back at the Grand Prime Minister Temple, he realized he had already traveled ten miles. The ornate buildings were barely visible in the distance. Just as he was wondering, he heard a murmur from the valley below.

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'What kind of gibberish is that?' It sounded familiar yet strangely unfamiliar. Doubt filled his heart. He quickly concealed himself behind a large boulder and peered toward the valley below.

The valley was filled with oddly shaped rocks, some round and some flat, protruding in strange ways. He couldn't see the individuals speaking from his vantage point. Their voices were soft, and by the time he strained his ears to listen more closely, the valley had fallen silent, all signs of movement undetectable.

This was the back mountain of Grand Prime Minister Temple, a remote place where even rabbits wouldn't leave their droppings. Who would come here? He pondered briefly, recalling the

assassination attempt on the old Emperor earlier that day. Instantly on high alert, he took cover behind the boulder, motionless.

The valley remained silent, not a sound to be heard. Lin Wanrong waited impatiently for what felt like an eternity, but no sign of movement reached him. Just as he was about to get up and look around, he heard a faint rustling, suggesting someone was on the move.

Stretching his neck to see, he caught sight of several figures cautiously surveying their surroundings in the valley. They were dressed in black robes, and their waists were adorned with knives and swords. They looked very capable. The leader had a peculiar sword hanging by his waist, different from the typical Great Hua's two edges sword. It was slim and curved upwards at the tip. With his keen eyesight, Lin Wanrong instantly recognized it as a katana from Dongyin.

Dongyin? Lin Wanrong's heart tightened. Why would they be here? Were they the culprits behind today's assassination attempt? "Soga, modaiwashi." The leader scanned his surroundings with a cunning gleam in his eyes. With a slight wave of his hand, his men began to tread softly, slowly searching the area.

Lin Wanrong rolled his eyes. Damn, these fellows have learned half a tune of the Great Hua language, taking half or even a quarter of the Great Hua words to construct the language of Dongyin. It was a marvel they managed to come up with it.

Unable to understand the Dongyin warriors, he scratched his head in frustration. Recalling the military tally Li Tai had given him, he remembered he had tens of thousands of troops available at the base of the mountain. He hesitated, considering whether he should call them. Just as he was mulling over the decision, a gentle fragrance wafted into his nostrils, accompanied by a soft breeze from behind. Startled, he spun around, exclaiming, "Who's there?!"

A woman in white seemed to have descended from the heavens, standing quietly behind him. The gentle wind ruffled her long dress, making her appear as if she was a celestial being, pure and regal.

Upon recognizing her, joy filled Lin Wanrong's heart. Damn, how could he have forgotten her? With Ning Yuxi by his side, a hundred warriors from Dongyin wouldn't stand a chance. However, Fairy Ning moved as quietly as a cat. Her sudden appearance would surely have scared him to death had his heart not been so sturdy.

"All of them," Lin Wanrong gestured grandly, full of pride and bravado, "dead, all of them!" Feeling quite charismatic, he readied himself to command Fairy Ning to dispatch the group of Dongyin warriors.

Was that a brief glance? Ning Yuxi looked at him sideways, then turned her head away, acting as if he were nothing more than air. Lin Wanrong felt a bit embarrassed, irritation building up inside. 'Does she think she can act so high and mighty in front of me?' he thought. Just as he was about to speak, Ning Yuxi frowned slightly, saying calmly, "Don't push your luck. My duty at the 'Jade Virtue Fairy Hall' is to protect you, not to fight your battles. If you wish to fight, do it yourself."

'Seriously? Do you think I'm a fool? I have tens of thousands of elite soldiers at my disposal. Just give me the word, and I can wipe out all those Dongyin invaders. Do you really expect me to get my hands dirty?' He snorted in annoyance and looked down to see the Dongyin leader, along with a group of men, searching the valley. Their whispers grew softer, and they seemed increasingly on edge.

'Have they discovered something?' Lin Wanrong felt a rush of anxiety and was about to summon his troops when a sweet scent wafted by. In the blink of an eye, Ning Yuxi appeared beside him, leaning against the other side of the large stone, listening intently.

'Trying to show off, are you?' Lin Wanrong chuckled softly. 'I can't understand their gibberish. Do you think you can do better than me?' However, as he observed her focused expression, her slightly furrowed brow reminiscent of a delicate portrait, and the gentle breeze tousling the hair by her ears, revealing her immaculate, jade-like skin, he found himself entranced. 'This Ning Yuxi... she's not just beautiful; she's breathtaking,' he thought.

"These men are from Dongyin," Ning Yuxi remarked, glancing at him.

Lin Wanrong gave her a thumbs up. "Fairy, you're sharp! Recognizing them as Dongyin people with just one look, I'm truly impressed."

Ning Yuxi detected the sarcasm in his voice, but chose to ignore it. After another moment of listening, she said, "They've spotted you."

'No kidding! I noticed them first!' Lin Wanrong chuckled, but then realized something. "Wait... you can understand Dongyin language?"

She replied nonchalantly, "Dongyin lies to the east of the vast ocean. It's said that the descendants of the 500 boys and girls led by Xu Fu during the Qin Dynasty settled there, living on the islands ever since. Their script evolved from ours with minor modifications. My late master traveled far and wide, even crossing the sea to Dongyin, interacting with its people. It's not that surprising for me to understand their language."

"So, your master was a 'returnee from overseas'? No wonder you can understand Dongyin language. Impressive, truly impressive." Lin Wanrong laughed, "But I've no interest in such a derivative language. Not understanding it is completely justified."

"Returnee?" Ning Yuxi's brow furrowed, a flash of anger on her face. "How dare you insult my esteemed master!"

"I never insulted her. Isn't 'returnee from overseas' literally translated as 'sea turtle'?" Lin Wanrong laughed, "Fairy Sister, actually, I've also returned from abroad. I once roamed both France and England, shook hands with Napoleon, and had lunch with Elizabeth. Oh, these two, one's the Emperor of France, the other the Queen of England, and both treated me quite well." Knowing Fairy Ning wouldn't understand anyway, Master Lin bluffed and boasted as much as he could, trying to impress whoever he could.

"You're utterly unbelievable," Fairy Ning countered, "The West is so far from our Great Hua, separated by vast mountains and endless seas. It would take several years even by ship. Given your young age, no more than in your twenties, even if you'd started your journey while still in your mother's womb, I doubt you'd have returned by now."

"Sister, there's a thing called an airplane. Ah, even if I told you, you wouldn't understand." Lin Wanrong shook his head and chuckled, "Believe it or not, my reputation for honesty and integrity is renowned. I don't need to boast. I've strolled through Buckingham Palace, flirted on Tulip Street, bungee jumped from the Eiffel Tower, and even have a pleasant English name. Heh, being as learned as you are, you must've heard of it."

"England?" Fairy Ning raised an eyebrow, "I've heard of that place. Can a person really have two names? That's peculiar."

"Why can't someone have two names?" Lin Wanrong persuasively said, "For instance, Fairy Sister, your given name is Ning Yuxi, but your nickname could be Honey or Sweetheart. Both are commonly used terms in the West and sound quite lovely. Let me call you by them: Honey, Sweetheart, Little Honey, Little Sweetheart."

His shamelessness knew no bounds. Ning Yuxi shivered slightly. She felt uncomfortable hearing him use those names for her. Hastily, she interrupted him, "So, what's your English name?"



"Oh, my English name sounds great: the surname is 'Love,' and the first name is 'Tiger Oil,'" Lin Wanrong said with a lascivious smile.

"Love Tiger Oil (TL: The pronunciation is Ai Laohu i.e., I love You)?! " Ning Yuxi muttered, then frowned, "What sort of name is that? It's bizarre."

"It's not odd; you'll get used to it. In private, Fairy Sister, you can call me 'I Love You,' and I'll call you Honey. It makes us seem closer, doesn't it?" Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, his words dripping with audacity. Seeing the contemplative look on Fairy Ning's face, he felt elated.

"'I Love You,' such a name... it's truly unpleasant. 'Lin San' suits our Great Hua's character better. I Love You Lin San, a fusion of Chinese and Western names, is an ultimate monstrosity of sounds," Fairy Ning remarked, yet she couldn't help but cover her mouth with a delicate laugh. Her radiant cheeks sparkled, making her irresistibly captivating.

Lin Wanrong's heart surged with joy. 'She's so clever! Even sharper than me!' He nodded so eagerly his head resembled a chicken pecking grain. "That's right, that's right! Combine both names and say them aloud, that's what I love to hear. Sister, say it again."

Ning Yuxi glanced at him and was about to speak when a flurry of chattering voices rose from below. Fairy Ning's brow furrowed, "The Dongyin people have come searching."

At the very moment when Master Lin was playfully teasing Sister Ning, he was interrupted by the Dongyin people, which greatly irritated him. He exclaimed angrily, "How dare they interrupt my conversation with the Fairy? Dead men, all of them! Fairy Sister, can you understand Dongyin language? Who are these fellows? Were they behind the assassination of the Emperor today?"

Ning Yuxi shook her head, "They're very cautious in their conversation. I could only make out that they're from Dongyin. Why they came here and what their intentions are, I'm not certain."

Lin Wanrong pondered. Regardless of whether they were involved or not, the appearance of the Dongyin people at such a critical and sensitive time after the Emperor's assassination was highly suspicious. No one would believe they weren't involved. They might still be here because the area around Grand Prime Minister Temple had been tightly surrounded and sealed off by General Li Tai's army and the palace guards. They couldn't escape. But why would the Dongyin people want to assassinate the Emperor? With their capabilities, to venture so deep into Great Hua without internal support, they wouldn't even know of the old Emperor's whereabouts, let alone orchestrate an assassination.

"Fairy Sister, what should we do? Do we capture them, or..." Lin Wanrong's voice trailed off, and he gave a mysterious smile, leaving his sentence unfinished. Fairy Ning merely looked at him impassively, not responding.

This divine sister truly was unpredictable, changing moods as one might flip the pages of a book. Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile. Peering down, he noticed the Dongyin warriors cautiously approaching their location.

Lin Wanrong quickly took out a pen and paper from his pocket, scribbled a few words, and along with a military seal, handed them to Ning Yuxi. "Sister, with this token, go down to the camp and look for someone named Du Xiuyuan. Tell him that General Lin has a task for him. Show him this letter, and he'll understand."

Fairy Ning pushed the seal and the letter back into his hand, saying softly, "I promised to ensure your safety and nothing more. I won't involve myself in other matters."

"But how can you not be involved? You're my 'Honey', and if you won't help, then who will? I understand you're worried about leaving me here alone. But who am I? I'm your 'I Love You', full of tricks from head to toe. No one can lay a finger on me." Lin Wanrong chuckled and shoved the items back into her hand without waiting for a reply.

Ning Yuxi was both amused and exasperated by his overconfidence. As she was about to object, Master Lin's expression turned serious. "Fairy Sister, if you manage to do this, it's as if you've saved my life. If it fails, you needn't trouble yourself to protect me. I'll take my own life. The choice is yours."

Master Lin's demeanor shifted entirely, no longer jesting. He turned to watch the Dongyin warriors scaling the rocks, his gaze sharp and his face solemn.

Ning Yuxi paused momentarily, standing in a daze for a while. Several times she tried to hand back the letter, and several times she withdrew her hand. Lin Wanrong waited for what felt like an eternity without any reaction from her. Suddenly sensing a stillness behind him, he turned around to find emptiness. Ning Yuxi had vanished without a trace at some unknown moment.

"This 'Honey' of mine, she arrives quickly and leaves just as swiftly," Lin Wanrong muttered with a dry chuckle. A realization suddenly struck him, and he slapped his forehead, exclaiming, 'Ah, how could I have been so foolish? I was having such a delightful conversation with Fairy Sister, why

didn't I seize the opportunity to inquire about Qingxuan? Perhaps in her good mood, she might have let something slip. Even if she wasn't willing to reveal information about Qingxuan, I could've asked about something else. An Biru and Fairy Ning are disciples from the same master, having grown up and trained together since childhood. With Sister An gone, Fairy Ning surely would know the location of Sister An's village. It'd be better than me aimlessly searching everywhere like a blind man on a stray horse.'

However, regretting now was too late. Noticing the Dongyin warriors cautiously climbing the rocks and getting closer to his location, he clenched his fist, feigning a punch in the air. With a disdainful snort, he patted his behind and turned away, striding off.

### Chapter 363 Comfort

As he wandered through the rear hills, he couldn't locate the place where Xian'er had built a hut to watch over her mother's grave. Doubts crept in, making him wonder if the old Emperor had deceived him. But then, from a distance on the hillside, a wisp of green smoke rose with the wind, clearly visible. A surge of joy filled his heart, and he quickened his pace, heading straight for the source of the smoke.

As he approached, about several dozen yards away, a vast bamboo grove came into view, lush and verdant. Young bamboo shoots were just beginning to sprout, displaying their vigor. Within the bamboo grove stood a small house made entirely of hollow bamboo – simple, yet cleverly constructed. He was reminded of a scene outside Hangzhou in Longquan village. Xian'er's mother had a fondness for green bamboo; he was certain Xian'er was here.

Taking two steps forward, he softly called, "Xian'er, Xian'er..." The bamboo forest echoed his voice, silent and devoid of response.

Reaching the bamboo house, he gently pushed the bamboo door. It creaked softly, revealing an interior with a table, two chairs, and an embroidered bed. Beyond that, there was nothing else. The room was immaculately clean, free from any dust, and the air was infused with the rich scent of premium sandalwood. This elegant place, he thought, must have been specially prepared by Xian'er in memory of her mother. Lin Wanrong nodded in approval and looked around the room, but there was no sign of Xian'er.

The lingering scent in the room indicated someone lived here, but where had she gone? Exiting the house, he ventured deeper into the woods. After a short while, the delicate sound of flowing water reached his ears. Before him lay a clear, shallow stream, originating from higher up the mountain.

Following the stream uphill, the first thing to catch his eye was a green tomb covered in moss, nestled beside the stream and the bamboo grove. A woman, dressed entirely in white, knelt with her back to him. Her shoulders trembled lightly, as if she were crying. Beside her were the remnants of recently burned joss paper, still warm.

"Xian'er..." he called softly. The kneeling woman trembled at the sound and quickly turned to face him. A beautiful, serene face met his gaze: delicate eyebrows, clear eyes, and quivering lips. Tear tracks glistened on her cheeks. If it wasn't Xian'er, who else could it be?

"Husband..." Xian'er's voice, filled with anguish, called out and she threw herself into his arms, holding him tightly as she sobbed uncontrollably.

"Cry, let it all out," Lin Wanrong whispered, patting her back with deep affection. "It's okay to cry." Xian'er lay in his embrace, her body shaking with sobs, her tears soaking the front of his shirt.

Holding her close, Lin Wanrong sighed deeply. Here was a woman of incredible beauty and high status, the Princess of Great Hua, who had witnessed tragic family strife, becoming estranged from her own father. She had endured hardships and loneliness for so many years outside her homeland. How she managed to persevere through all the pain and heartache was beyond him. Poor girl. In many ways, the experiences of Sister An and Xian'er were strikingly similar, both wandering the world and finding home wherever they went. It was no wonder the bond between the master and disciple was so close, even rivaling his own relationship with them.

"Eh? Why is there another stream?" Lin Wanrong whispered into Xian'er's ear, a note of surprise evident in his tone.

Qin Xian'er looked around, her beautiful eyes swollen from crying. "Husband, what are you talking about? What stream?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, brushing the tears off her rosy cheeks. "If you keep crying like this, not just a stream, but even the Yangtze and Yellow River would overflow."

Blushing, Xian'er huffed and pulled away from his embrace. She pouted and turned her head, murmuring, "Why did you come here? Why aren't you with your Qingxuan?"

'This girl still remembers that day?' He marveled at her memory. Grasping her hand, Lin Wanrong smiled, "Today, I only wish to be with my dear Xian'er. Just a few days apart, and you've become

even more beautiful. Those clear eyes, those rosy lips... in a few days, you'll be the world's most beautiful woman. And I'll be the world's luckiest husband."

Xian'er, being a clever and astute girl, wouldn't have entertained flattery from anyone else. But Lin Wanrong wasn't just anyone; he was her chosen partner. His words warmed her heart and made her face flush with heat. But she retorted stubbornly, "With all these sweet words, did you face rejection from Qingxuan and come to me for comfort? If I'm the most beautiful, where does she stand?"

The tinge of jealousy made Lin Wanrong laugh heartily. "Of course, you're first... and she's right alongside you. Xian'er, it's been days since we last met. I've missed you so much. Don't be upset. Come, let me see if you've grown taller or shorter, or if you've gained or lost weight."

With a playful yelp, Xian'er was suddenly swept off her feet as Lin Wanrong twirled her around. Though she had been upset with him for days, restraining herself from seeking him out, seeing him now brought both shock and elation. She let out a soft whimper and buried her face into his chest, letting him carry on with his antics.

After setting her down, Lin Wanrong buried his face into her fragrant hair, taking a deep breath. He sighed, "You smell even better now. But, little darling, why do some parts of you seem plumper while others appear thinner?"

"Where have I gained weight?" Xian'er huffed, wrinkling her nose, "Every day I think of you. But when I finally saw you, you mentioned the name of the woman I despise the most. How could I possibly gain weight?"

"It was a misunderstanding, definitely a misunderstanding," Lin Wanrong laughed awkwardly, shamelessly adding, "How about this? Whenever I see her, I'll call out your name. Then we're even."

"You wish! I don't want you seeing her at all," Xian'er pouted, pressing on, "Tell me, where have I gained weight?"

"Of course you have," Lin Wanrong replied cheekily, his eyes lingering on her full chest. He gulped, "Right here... it's grown! My little darling is maturing so perfectly."

Qin Xian'er softly huffed, her jade-like face flushing red with embarrassment. Her heart throbbed with shyness, yet a sense of pride surged through her as she arched her chest forward, challenging him to take a longer look.

Lin Wanrong, mischief evident in his eyes, was about to make a teasing gesture when he saw tears forming in Qin Xian'er's eyes, slowly trickling down her cheeks.

"What's wrong, Xian'er?" he asked hurriedly, changing his playful demeanor. Grasping her delicate hand, he asked, "Aren't you happy to see me?"

Looking into his eyes, Qin Xian'er suddenly wrapped her arms tightly around him, her tears flowing freely. "Husband, have you forgotten about me?"

"How could that be possible? Xian'er, you must not misunderstand. Even if I forgot the sky, the earth, even the very air I breathe, I could never forget my beloved Xian'er," Lin Wanrong declared with utmost sincerity, as if swearing to the heavens.

"But you knew I was waiting for you in the palace. Why didn't you come to see me?" Qin Xian'er lamented, "I know, with the two temptresses from the Xiao family by your side, you must have forgotten about me."

Lin Wanrong responded without missing a beat, "Ah, Xian'er, you know I can't just waltz into the palace. The Emperor and I aren't exactly close. If he knew I was pursuing you, wouldn't he do everything to keep me away? These past days, you've been on my mind, day and night. Finally, when the Emperor summoned me today, I found an opportunity to learn of your whereabouts and hurried here," he spoke smoothly, silently apologizing to his father-in-law in his heart.

"He dare?!" Qin Xian'er's voice was fiery. "He promised me that if I returned to the palace, he would grant you—" She abruptly stopped, seeming to remember something.

"Grant me? Grant me what?" Lin Wanrong's curiosity piqued, "Xian'er, there's something I've always wanted to ask you."

"I know what you're thinking. You want to know why I suddenly returned to the palace, right?" She glanced at him cautiously before lowering her gaze and murmured, "Husband, please don't be upset. I didn't intentionally keep it from you. When my master urgently summoned me to the capital, I had no idea what her intentions were. She told me that someone with your talents shouldn't be wasted among the common folk. She wanted to help you rise in status, so she instructed me to return to the palace. On one hand, it was to get closer to a certain individual to further your interests, but on the other hand, it was to assassinate him—"

"Assassinate?!" Lin Wanrong gasped in surprise, finding it hard to believe that her master could concoct such a scheme - to have her own disciple assassinate her own father. Considering An Biru's cunning nature, he deduced her true intentions: she wanted him to capture the Emperor's attention, thereby getting closer to Ning Yuxi. Damn that cunning woman, keeping so much from him. Fortunately, she had a knack for evading trouble, or he'd have given her a good thrashing.

"Xian'er, did you really try to assassinate the Emperor? Could today's event be your doing?" Lin Wanrong's eyes widened in shock as he carefully inquired, his mind racing with thoughts of the dire consequences.

"Don't interrupt! Just listen to me," Qin Xian'er shot him a fleeting glare, her voice softening. Her eyes shimmered with tenderness, making her look irresistibly charming.

"Alright, alright, go on." Lin Wanrong collected himself, listening intently to Qin Xian'er continue her tale.

"My master persuaded me for several days. I had you on my mind, as well as the thought of avenging my mother. Finally, I agreed. Master told me that my mother was buried behind Grand Prime Minister Temple in the bamboo forest. That man visited her grave every spring, so I waited for him there. As you know, I bear a striking resemblance to my mother. The moment he saw me, he recognized me. Overwhelmed with joy, he wanted to take me back to the palace." Qin Xian'er glanced around, seemingly reliving that day. The 'man' she referred to was evidently the reigning Emperor of Great Hua, but their father-daughter relationship seemed to remain estranged.

Lin Wanrong sighed internally. Sister An had clearly underestimated the Emperor. She thought he was unaware of Xian'er's existence. However, the Emperor had known everything about Xian'er, even going so far as to secretly ensure her protection. If not for the fear of Xian'er being used against him by Prince Cheng, he would have brought her into the palace much earlier.

"So you made him promote me in exchange for your return to the palace?" Lin Wanrong asked with a wry smile. No wonder the Emperor's attitude changed so rapidly. It was all because of Xian'er. However, considering the Emperor's cunning, promoting him alone wouldn't warrant such lavish gifts. He reassured himself, thinking his true talents must have played a part.

Noticing his dejected expression, Qin Xian'er hurriedly said, "Husband, I just wanted to help you. By your own abilities, you are infinitely superior to those corrupt and inept officials. Becoming a prince or a minister was just a matter of time."

But it wasn't as simple as she made it out to be, Lin Wanrong thought, forcing a smile. He gently caressed Xian'er's hair, "What happened next? Did you try to assassinate him?"

Xian'er nodded slowly, lowering her head. "After I returned to the palace, I lived in the residence once occupied by my mother. I had planned to strike when the opportunity presented itself. Everything was set, but one day, while sorting through my mother's belongings, I unexpectedly found a letter penned by her. It revealed that she had..."

She glanced at the green tombstone, too choked up to continue. Lin Wanrong sighed softly. He knew that Xian'er's discovery was no accident. It was the Emperor's doing. He had carefully orchestrated it to prevent a tragic confrontation between father and daughter. This allowed Xian'er to discover the truth on her own, preserving her dignity while mending their relationship—a masterful double play.

"Do you still harbor resentment towards your father?" Lin Wanrong embraced her tightly, whispering the question.

Burrowing into his embrace like a kitten, Qin Xian'er clung to his broad shoulders, her voice quivering, "Hate him? Of course I do! If he hadn't wanted to be the Emperor, who would have tried to assassinate him? And if no one wanted him dead, why would my mother willingly sacrifice herself to save him? How could I have been displaced, waiting for years to mourn my mother? I despise him. Husband, he's not my father. I detest him!"

Qin Xian'er became emotional, embracing him as she cried uncontrollably. Her deep sorrow was so palpable that it tugged at the heartstrings of anyone who saw her.

Lin Wanrong gently patted her delicate shoulders, at a loss for words. The complicated history between the Emperor and his daughter was convoluted. Though the Emperor's pursuit of the throne wasn't inherently wrong, he likely never expected that his ambition would become a reason for his own daughter to resent him. Life was truly unpredictable.

After a while, Qin Xian'er gradually composed herself. Resting in his embrace, she softly said, "Husband, only a handful of people know my mother is buried here. Was it he who told you to find me here?"

"We'll talk about that later," Lin Wanrong replied, gently stroking her silky hair. He sighed and asked, "You mentioned earlier that the Emperor visits Grand Prime Minister Temple's back mountain every year. What does he come here for? Did he build this bamboo house?"



Qin Xian'er snorted, "My mother is already gone. Even if he visited for a hundred years, building a hundred houses, what good would it do? Can it atone for his sins?"

Lin Wanrong smiled and shook his head, kissing her gently on the cheek, "Silly girl, if love is a sin, then we are deeply guilty."

Qin Xian'er looked taken aback, shaking her head in disbelief, "Husband, are you suggesting he had feelings for my mother? Back in Jiangnan, he merely treated her as a plaything. I don't believe he would have missed her."

"People have emotions; they aren't emotionless like plants," Lin Wanrong said, holding her hand. "The Emperor is human too. He spent countless days and nights with your mother and fathered you, a bond that can never be severed. To say he had no feelings for her, I would never believe that. But being the supreme ruler, he hides his feelings well, and seldom shows them. It's the price he pays for being an Emperor."

Lost in thought, Qin Xian'er stared intently, processing his words.

"Your mother might have died because of him, but it wasn't something he wished for. His consistent visits here over the decades are proof of his profound feelings for her. He might be the ruler of all, but he was also a husband, a father. You lost a mother and father in one night. But think about it, didn't he lose a wife and a child too? He feels the same pain as you, but while you can cry out loud, he can't express his grief. Xian'er, unless one becomes a parent, one won't understand the depth of a parent's feelings. As an Emperor, he might have made mistakes, but as a father, he hasn't wronged you," Lin Wanrong sighed deeply, his thoughts drifting to his own parents whom he'd never see again, feeling a surge of sorrow.

"Husband, Husband," after what felt like an eternity, Qin Xian'er nudged him, her voice gentle by his ear. Wiping the corner of his eye, Lin Wanrong smiled, "What is it? Was I wrong?"

She shook her head, gazing at him with tender, shimmering eyes, "Husband, did you cry?"

"Was I crying? No, it was just the wind," Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, then gently advised, "Xian'er, taking a step back, have you ever considered why your mother left a letter to guide you? She didn't want you to harbor resentment towards your father because of this matter. If she were still alive, do you think she'd be happy seeing the strained relationship between you two?"

"Husband, give me a moment to think. My mind is in turmoil," Qin Xian'er whispered, "Hold me tight, and don't let go."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I can hold you tight, but since we are in front of your mother's grave, I should pay my respects, shouldn't I?"

A blush tinged Qin Xian'er's face, a mixture of shyness and delight. She quickly sat upright from his embrace. Lin Wanrong knelt before Qin Xianling's grave, showing deep reverence. Following him, Qin Xian'er also knelt down, tears streaming down her face as she said, "Mother, Xian'er and Husband are here to pay our respects."

A faint sigh echoed from a distance. An elderly man in elaborate robes, his face bearing the signs of illness, stood unnoticed in a secluded corner. He watched the two kneeling figures, a mistiness forming in his eyes.

"Master, it's getting late. We should return," the blind old Wei whispered, supporting the elderly man.

"Consort Qin, Nishang..." the old Emperor murmured, his voice so soft that even old Wei, standing close by, couldn't make out his words.

"Master, with Lin San guiding Princess Nishang, there shouldn't be any problems. It would be best if you returned and rested," Old Wei respectfully said.

"Let me stand here a little longer, to be with Consort Qin, to be with Nishang," the old Emperor sighed, his gaze fixed on the happy Princess Nishang nestled in Lin San's embrace, his eyes full of love and tenderness. After a moment, he asked, "Little Wei, what do you think Lin San cherishes most?"

"What does he cherish?" Old Wei hesitated. Whether it was money or beautiful women, Lin San seemed to have it all. "This servant does not know," he bowed as he replied.

"What he cherishes most is freedom, the ability to roam unhindered," the old Emperor said with a smile on his face. "Then I will grant him that freedom. The north, with its vast deserts and grasslands, should be spacious enough for his adventures."

"Your Majesty, are you referring to the nomads?! Are you suggesting he lead an army?" Old Wei exclaimed in shock.

...

After their tribute at the grave, Xian'er felt content. She had paid respects to her master and now to her mother. She and her Husband had honored them both. Lin Wanrong found some tools to maintain Qini Xianling's tomb. Although Qin Xian'er was dressed simply, being by Husband's side filled her with joy, and she wore a much brighter smile.

By the time they had finished their tasks, the sun was setting. Lin Wanrong recalled the task he had entrusted to Ning Yuxi and wondered how it had gone. Had the girl possibly run off?

Seeing Lin Wanrong lost in thought, Qin Xian'er curiously asked, "Husband, what's bothering you?"

With a tense expression, Lin Wanrong grasped her hand, "Xian'er, there's something I need to tell you. Please, don't panic."

Qin Xian'er hummed in acknowledgment and nodded, "Husband, please speak. I promise not to panic."

Lin Wanrong stared intently at Xian'er's beautiful face, speaking slowly, "This morning, the Emperor was attacked!"

Xian'er's expression shifted dramatically, alternating between shock and anger. Her delicate hand turned icy cold. Closing her beautiful eyes, two tears slipped out, "Husband, is he gravely injured?"

Recalling what he had witnessed that day, Lin Wanrong felt it wouldn't be right to withhold the truth from Xian'er. He nodded solemnly, "From what I saw, his injuries seemed severe. I fear—"

Abruptly, Qin Xian'er stood up, wiping away her tears, her voice soft yet determined, "Husband, we must go!"

Chapter 364 The Flirtatious Husband

"Leaving? Where to? It's late now. Can't we go tomorrow?" Lin Wanrong asked with puzzlement.

Qin Xian'er shook her head slightly, her lips moving a few times before she whispered, "I want to see if that man is dead. If he is, I will set off fireworks in celebration."

Lin Wanrong silently chuckled. This young woman's stubbornness was evident. Even though she cared deeply for her father, she wouldn't express it directly. He laughed lightly and nodded, "Exactly, exactly. When the time comes, I will buy the fireworks for you, and we can set them off for days on end. Isn't your husband very considerate of you?"

A blush tinted Qin Xian'er's fair face, knowing she couldn't hide her feelings from him. Her gaze, full of affection, turned to him, an unspeakable sweetness in her eyes. Naturally beautiful, she was unparalleled in her beauty. Today, as she had been paying respects to her deceased mother, her plain attire added a unique charm that left Lin Wanrong with an itch in his heart. If not for the respect due at the grave of his mother-in-law, he might have taken advantage of the situation.

As dusk settled, Qin Xian'er, with matters weighing on her heart, hurriedly made her way down the mountain. Lin Wanrong followed her lead. Upon returning to the monastery's meditation chamber, they noticed the guards had dispersed. There was no sign of the old Emperor, who presumably had returned to the palace. Recalling the frail figure of the Emperor he'd seen earlier that day, Lin Wanrong sighed softly. It was fortunate he had arrived when he did; otherwise, misunderstandings between Xian'er and her father might have led to another tragedy.

Whether she acknowledged it or not, Qin Xian'er had become the esteemed Princess of Great Hua, a title of great prestige. As she had been on the mountain paying her respects, the imperial entourage waited for her return. Countless court ladies and eunuchs awaited her descent. When they saw the princess come down, they hastily knelt in salutation.

A serious expression crossed Qin Xian'er's beautiful face. Though dressed in plain robes, she exuded an air of grace and nobility. With a slight wave of her hand, she calmly said, "Everyone, please rise. I have urgent matters in the palace. Please hurry."

"Yes," the crowd promptly replied, and quietly got up, preparing to return to the palace.

"The title of princess really suits you. Xian'er, you are growing more and more regal," Lin Wanrong remarked with a grin. "Compared to you, I feel utterly old-fashioned."

"Stop talking nonsense," Qin Xian'er interrupted, lifting the curtain of the carriage. Without waiting for the eunuch to set up the steps, Qin Xian'er, with a delicate step, gracefully mounted the carriage.

As she adjusted the curtain, she turned and smiled, resembling a pristine pear blossom tree that blossomed alongside the road.

Good heavens, becoming a princess had truly enhanced her allure. Her charm now rivaled that of Fairy Ning and Sister An. Truly, she had captivated Lin Wanrong's soul. He stood, momentarily dumbstruck. Seeing this, a joyous thrill filled Qin Xian'er's heart. With a coy voice, she teased, "Husband, what are you waiting for? Come on."

"Come on? Alright, alright, I'm coming," Lin Wanrong, both aroused and enthralled, took Xian'er's delicate hand and swiftly climbed into the carriage. The two fell together onto the soft cushions.

The maidservants below the carriage were surprised when they heard the princess address this man as 'husband'. How could it be that in just a blink of an eye, the princess had acquired a prince consort? However, they understood the principle not to ask unnecessary questions, an unspoken rule in palace service. Gently, they lowered the carriage curtain with their bare hands. The warm interior of the carriage then became a private world for the princess and her consort.

The princess's carriage was unique, with eight horses pulling it together, and an extraordinarily spacious compartment, encompassing dozens of square meters. Inside, a red carpet was spread on the floor, gold and silver embellishments were scattered everywhere, a symbol of absolute prestige. Before the phoenix couch hung yellow draperies, and atop it, there was a small pot and four tiny cups, the finest porcelain from the official kiln. Neatly placed on the couch was a bright yellow brocade quilt, emitting a faint, mysterious fragrance that symbolized the honor and wealth of the owner. Qin Xian'er, a true princess, had been accustomed to such grandeur since childhood. After years of braving the world alone, she had seen the dangers and fickleness of the world, and was indifferent to these external matters. However, Minister Lin was quite a common man, who could only stare at the wealth of gold, silver, and jade in the carriage and gasp in admiration. "Such luxury, I absolutely love it."

Qin Xian'er smiled gently, "Husband, what are you looking at? You seem so entranced!"

Lin Wanrong nodded, "Xian'er, this carriage is truly worth a fortune. If it were in the past, I'd have certainly swindled it and sold it."

Xian'er laughed lightly, nestled in his arms, and whispered, "You can do as you wish, as long as you don't sell me."

Feeling the warmth and fragrance of Qin Xian'er, Lin Wanrong embraced her delicate, boneless figure, and slowly caressed her waist. He sighed in admiration, "How could I do that? I can barely

bear to let you out of my sight. My dear Xian'er, your skin is so smooth, just like washed milk, no worse than Dae Jang Geum."

"Who is Dae Jang Geum?" Qin Xian'er asked softly, twisting his ear gently.

"Oh, Dae Jang Geum? She's a woman I read about in a book. She was knowledgeable about medicine and agriculture. Other than that, there's not much else to say." Minister Lin blinked and chuckled.

"Really?" Qin Xian'er laughed, a glint of mischief in her eyes. "So, this Dae Jang Geum has nothing to do with the beautiful palace girl from Goryeo? In that case, I will send a notice to the Goryeo envoy tomorrow to return to Korea early, lest someone harbors ulterior motives towards her."

'This little minx, speaking obliquely. But the one with ulterior motives isn't your husband, me. Even when the Goryeo prince Yi Seung-Jae wanted to give me Jang Geum, I refused. I'm quite resolute.' Lin Wanrong chuckled, and slowly caressed her round and plump buttocks, with an extremely lascivious voice, "I have no designs on others, just on my dear princess. Xian'er, tonight, surrender to me."

Listening to his words, Qin Xian'er blushed hotly, her body limp, and with a soft moan, she fell into his arms, whispering softly, "Husband, wait for my master to return, then I will be all yours."

Master? Speaking of Sister An, the fire of desire in Master Lin's heart suddenly vanished, and a bitter smile crept upon his lips, "Has your master come to see you?"

"Hmm." Xian'er nodded. "Master said she was going back to the Miao village. She also mentioned that once she returned, she would find a way to lift the love bug in me, so that we could be a true married couple."

"Would Sister An return? By the time she comes back, it would probably be ages." Lin Wanrong kissed Xian'er's delicate face gently and asked, "When your master left, did she mention anything? For instance, did she mention me?"

Xian'er gave him a curious glance. "Why would she mention you? Ah, I get it. You must've gotten into trouble again and she reprimanded you. That's why you're so fearful of her. If you ever bully me in the future, I'll tell her. Let's see if you dare then!"

Xian'er's words, though not entirely accurate, weren't too far from the truth. Yet, when she discovered the intricate and tangled affairs between Sister An and her husband, how would she react? With a touch of regret, Lin Wanrong asked, "Didn't she leave anything behind? A letter, embroidery, or perhaps a blood-written note?"

Xian'er giggled and tapped him on the forehead. "You're so mischievous. Don't you know Master's temperament? She comes and goes as she pleases, never dilly-dallying. Why would she leave such items? Are they for a lover? Even if she had one, with her unparalleled beauty, which man in this world would be worthy of her? They can only dream."

Sister An's departure was decisive. Like a fleeting bird, she came without a trace and left without one, never leaving any sign behind – a true testament to her character. Lin Wanrong, with a pang of disappointment, held onto Xian'er's hand and chuckled, "You speak of your master as if no man is her match. Look at me, tall and handsome, suave and debonair. Wouldn't I be more than a match for her?"

Hearing this, Xian'er laughed playfully. "No matter how good you are, you're my husband. How could you be suited for Master?" Her eyes twinkled mischievously, then she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh! Are you harboring some intentions towards my master? I'll hit you—"

"No, no, absolutely not!" Seeing Xian'er's tiny fist about to strike, Lin Wanrong quickly said, "Xian'er, believe in me. Look at my upright demeanor. Anyone can tell I'm an honest man. How could I ever harbor such thoughts? Though, I can't speak for others if they entertain such fantasies."

Qin Xian'er, suppressing her laughter, pouted, "If everyone in the world were as 'honest' as you, we'd be doomed. I think you're the one with the wandering mind. You lustful, lecherous husband, if you dare entertain ideas about my master, I'll tell her and have her deal with you."

Lin Wanrong was momentarily stunned, then burst into hearty laughter, embracing Xian'er's slender waist. He planted a passionate kiss on her rosy lips, lingering with a teasing lick of his tongue, and said with a merry gleam in his eyes, "Yes, yes, tell Sister An and have her punish me. Oh, it's been days since she last reprimanded me. I'm starting to miss it a little."

Xian'er gave him an exasperated glance. Being stuck with a husband as shameless as him left her truly without recourse. However, she secretly delighted in the sense of unpredictability and constant surprises they shared.

"Oh, by the way, Xian'er," Lin Wanrong remembered something that had been on his mind for a long time and seized the opportunity to ask, "You mentioned Sister An went back to the Miao village. Where exactly is this village?"

Xian'er, suddenly alert, shot him a cautious look, her lips pouting slightly. "I won't tell you," she teased, "so you can just keep guessing."

‘This girl is really vigilant,’ Lin Wanrong thought, grinning. He pulled her into his embrace, his hands daringly exploring her curves. The softness beneath his fingers sent thrilling sensations through him, prompting him to become more intimate with her.

Xian'er's entire body shivered, she murmured in a tremulous voice, "You rascal... don't..."

Lin Wanrong whispered into her ear, his warm breath tickling her, "It's such a pity for Sister An. All alone out there for so many years, and she's only now managed to return home. Xian'er, why didn't you go with her?"

Feeling quite vulnerable under his teasing, her face burning, Xian'er softly replied, "I... I did express my wish to accompany my master, but she deemed the journey to Sichuan too tedious and long, hence she refused. Stop it, you devil, I hate you so much right now!"

Sichuan? Lin Wanrong thought, mentally noting the information. He kissed her fair skin, as Xian'er, her eyes slightly dazed, clung to him. She whispered, "Once Master returns and lifts our curse, we can finally be a proper married couple. If you take a fancy to that girl, Seo Jang Geum, I'll bring her from Goryeo to serve you. Let's experience foreign delights together. My master taught me many things... Oh, I can't... it's too embarrassing."

Her face flushed like she was on fire, Xian'er hastily covered her cheeks, not wanting him to see her deep blush.

It was the first time anyone had broached such intimate topics with him, and that too, his own beloved wife. Thanks to a rather passionate master, Lin Wanrong thought playfully. He quickly asked, "So, what kind of techniques did Sister An teach you? Does she know them too? The Old Man Pushing the Cart, Dripping Wax, Drawing Water from the Opposite Shore, Poisonous Dragon's Tongue... Xian'er, why are you looking at me like that? I'm innocent! All the terms I just mentioned, they're martial arts moves. Clearly, you're thinking of something else entirely."



Hearing his teasing, Xian'er's face turned a deeper shade of red. She covered her face, too embarrassed to look at him. "Horrible man! I always knew you were a complete rogue. Master told me to truly win your heart; I had to take good care of you and show you what a real woman is like. She said once you've experienced my love, you won't think of any other woman. I swallowed my pride to learn all that, and you dare make fun of me!"

Wonderful! Lin Wanrong's heart swelled with elation upon hearing this. Sister An's teachings were quite something. What was a true woman? One who could manage the kitchen, grace the hall, and charm the bedroom! Indeed, Miao women were known for their bold love and fearless demeanor. Sister An dared to teach anything, truly fiery.

"Why would I mock you?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, "On the contrary, I hardly had time to welcome it. Discussing the intimate bond between a husband and wife should be natural. Only through open conversation can a couple's relationship and affection grow stronger. Alas, Sister An is quite selfish! She taught you these wonderful things but left me in the dark? That won't do. The next time I see her, I must ask for some lessons. The 'Old Tree Takes Root' technique is quite advanced; I've yet to grasp it fully. We must discuss it."

"You always spout such nonsense." Qin Xian'er, finally overcoming her shyness, nestled into his chest. "My master also said that if you were to fancy another woman, I shouldn't fear. I should welcome them into our room and show them how I serve you, make them so envious of my skills that they'd be beside themselves with frustration! That Seo Jang Geum girl, you know, she seems so prim and proper. But my master once read her fortune. Such outwardly innocent women are secretly seductive. Once you have her, she'd be even more bashful, but on the bed, she'd be passionate and accommodating. It's called a fierce allure. Do you like it? I can keep her for you!"

This topic was truly wicked, but... he liked it! Xian'er would never speak of such things. Apart from the tantalizing Sister An, who else could say something so astonishing? It seemed Xian'er might become the teacher for Qiaoqiao and Qingxuan in the future, instructing them on how to properly serve their husband. They would need training first, of course. He chuckled lewdly, pulling the blushing Xian'er into his embrace. But in his mind, he was thinking of discussing these salacious topics with the knowledgeable Sister An. The mere thought made him drool.

The carriage rattled on, heading straight to the palace. With Princess Nishang's protection, Master Lin no longer had worries about gaining entry to the palace. Hidden within the carriage, sharing secrets with Xian'er and learning what Sister An had taught her, he felt as though he was living a heavenly, carefree life. Upon arriving at their destination, Master Lin was so engrossed that he was reluctant to alight. Every moment in the carriage felt invaluable.

They stopped not far from the Palace of Heavenly Purity where the old Emperor resided. Passing palace maids and eunuchs saw Princess Nishang's arrival and hurriedly knelt to greet her.

Qin Xian'er took a few steps but gradually hesitated. A hint of uncertainty crept onto her face, and her pace slowed.

"What's wrong, Xian'er?" Lin Wanrong asked, holding onto her.

"Dear husband, I... I'm afraid..." Qin Xian'er murmured, her eyes cast down.

"There's nothing to fear. He's not a stranger; he's your kin, bound to you by blood," Lin Wanrong reassured her, holding her hand tightly. "Would you like me to accompany you?"

Qin Xian'er responded with a sweet smile, gripping his large hand, feeling a newfound sense of security and determination. As they approached the entrance to Palace of Heavenly Purity, Gao Ping emerged. Catching sight of Qin Xian'er, he was momentarily struck dumb.

"What's the matter, Eunuch Gao? Don't you recognize Princess Nishang?" Lin Wanrong asked with a gentle smile.

Gao Ping's lips trembled for a few moments, overcome by emotion. He quickly knelt and said, "This humble servant Gao Ping pays his respects to the Princess. Please wait a moment, Princess, I will immediately inform His Majesty." Before he could properly bow, he clumsily scrambled up from the ground. Ignoring the usual protocols, he rushed forward a few steps, shouting out loudly, "Emperor, Emperor, the Princess is here! Emperor, the Princess has arrived!"

Qin Xian'er's delicate hand tightly gripped Lin Wanrong's, causing him a tingling pain. Lin Wanrong shook his head with an affectionate smile, gently patting her fragrant shoulder, "My dear, let's go inside."

Xian'er hesitated for a moment, then softly murmured her agreement. She snuggled close to him, and the two entered the Palace of Heavenly Purity together. They had only taken a few steps when they saw the palace eunuchs and maids kneeling on the ground, not daring to raise their heads. Ahead, Gao Ping was supporting a frail Emperor of Great Hua, who slowly approached.

"Greetings to His Majesty," the crowd chanted in unison.

However, the old Emperor seemed not to hear their greetings. His eyes settled on Qin Xian'er, brimming with deep joy and affection. "Nishang, Nishang, is that really you?"

"My name isn't Nishang. It's Qin Xian'er. My mother gave me that name," Xian'er said coldly.

"Alright, alright, Xian'er, if that's the name your mother chose for you, then Xian'er it is. Whether you are called Nishang or Xian'er, you are still my most beloved daughter!" The old Emperor smiled kindly, which led to a fit of mild coughing. Gao Ping quickly patted his back, and the Emperor's pale face showed a hint of improvement. He instructed Gao Ping, "What are you waiting for? Prepare a seat for the Princess and for Master Lin."

Gao Ping hurriedly obeyed. Qin Xian'er held Lin Wanrong's hand even tighter, her palm damp with sweat. After a long hesitation, she finally mustered the courage to speak in a voice as faint as a mosquito's buzz, "How... how have you been?"

Though the old Emperor's body was frail, he heard that sentence loud and clear. A few tremors passed over his facial muscles, and his eyes misted up with tears. "Xian'er, you don't need to worry. Your father is in good health. Just seeing you is enough for me. I have finally found my lost daughter."

Qin Xian'er shook her head stubbornly, "I didn't come here for you. I came to the palace to gather my mother's belongings and just happened to pass by, so I..."

"Just happened to come and see your father. I understand, I understand!" A sincere smile flashed across the old Emperor's face. He glanced at Lin Wanrong and nodded in approval.

Gao Ping had already fetched the embroidered stools, inviting everyone to sit. Xian'er glanced at the Emperor's pale and bloodless face, remaining silent for a while before finally speaking, "Give me your hand."

The Emperor looked puzzled. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Your Majesty, Xian'er wishes to take your pulse." The old Emperor's face lit up with realization. A slight tremor went through him as he slowly extended his hand, smiling, "I had forgotten. Having studied under Master An Biru, Xian'er has mastered the Qi Huang technique. It's as good as the rejuvenating touch. I am truly pleased."

Xian'er didn't respond. She delicately placed her slender fingers on the Emperor's wrist. After a moment of taking his pulse, her expression changed drastically. "How can this be?" she exclaimed.

The old Emperor gazed at her deeply, his smile still in place. "My dear daughter, your father is in good health. You don't need to worry. My greatest wish now is to hear you call me 'Father' just once."

Tears welled up in Qin Xian'er's eyes, her grip on Lin Wanrong's wrist so tight that it drew blood. Her lips quivered, but she couldn't utter a word. Lin Wanrong sighed softly, murmuring, "The tree wishes for stillness, but the wind continues to blow. The child wishes to care, but the parent is no more."

"Father!" Qin Xian'er's voice broke with sorrow as she fell to her knees, burying her face in the Emperor's lap, her cries filling the room.

"My dear daughter, my dear daughter," the old Emperor laughed heartily. But amidst his laughter, a bout of coughing erupted, tears streaming down his face.

Lin Wanrong turned away, letting out a long sigh. He felt a hint of moisture at the corner of his eyes. Hastily, he signaled Gao Ping, and the two quickly withdrew from the room.

## Chapter 365 Accidental Discovery

Upon stepping outside, Eunuch Gao carefully closed the door behind him, fearful of disturbing the father and daughter who had reunited inside after untold trials and tribulations.

Lin Wanrong heard Qin Xian'er's soft sobs coming from within and couldn't help but shake his head. He thought to himself, 'I did right today. I hope the father and daughter can get along well. Then my efforts won't have been in vain.'

"Master Lin, Master Lin," Eunuch Gao's voice rang in his ear, "Someone wishes to see you."

"See me? Who is it?" Lin Wanrong asked in surprise. 'Someone wants to meet me in the Emperor's Palace of Heavenly Purity? Now, that's a rare occurrence.'

Gao Ping nodded slightly, speaking softly, "Please follow me." He took the lead and headed toward a side room in the outer hall. After passing through several rooms, he reached one, bowing respectfully and saying, "Here it is, my Lord. Please enter."

All the rooms in the hall were brightly lit except for this one, where total darkness prevailed. Lin Wanrong, feeling a sense of doubt, slowly pushed the door open to see an elderly shadow standing quietly by the window, hollow eye sockets gleaming faintly.

"Uncle Wei?!!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, rushing forward to grab his hand. "You, what are you doing here?"

Old Wei chuckled, "Why shouldn't I be here?"

Lin Wanrong was stunned for a moment. After a long pause, he heaved a sigh and nodded, saying, "I understand now. Uncle Wei, so you too are someone close to His Majesty."

Old Wei smiled slightly, his voice filled with sentiment, "You're right, I have indeed been managing things by His Majesty's side. Since the time when the Emperor was still residing in the secluded mansion, I have served him. Counting the years, it's been more than thirty now."

More than thirty years? A blind man serving by the Emperor's side for over three decades was indeed a marvel, and the loyalty between the master and servant was remarkable. Old Wei seemed to see through his thoughts and laughed, "You must be wondering, how a blind old man like me could serve by the Emperor's side for over thirty years, aren't you?"

Old Wei was Lin Wanrong's lifesaver, and he was like a second father to him. Lin Wanrong, who was exceptionally frank in his presence, didn't hide his thoughts and nodded, "I do have some questions."

"You need not doubt; it's quite simple, really. More than twenty years ago, like you, I too had a pair of healthy eyes," the old blind man sighed, his voice filled with profound resentment and regret. "Back then, when the late Emperor was gravely ill, His Majesty, being kind-hearted and diligent, cared for him day and night, exemplifying filial piety and benevolence, and his fame spread throughout the land. The late Emperor was deeply moved and intended to pass the throne to His Majesty before his burial. However, at that critical moment, a large group of assassins suddenly broke into the monastery where the late Emperor was recuperating. His Majesty was seriously injured while protecting the late Emperor, even the only prince was assassinated, and I lost my eyes in my attempt to protect His Majesty. At that dire moment, luckily, Li Tai's loyalty and integrity called upon tens of thousands of soldiers to quell the rebellion, ensuring His Majesty's safety."

Speaking of the past, Old Wei's voice was calm but tinged with excitement. Lin Wanrong listened with quiet astonishment. The last time the old emperor had spoken about the matter, his words were vague and sketchy, but now Old Wei had clarified many things with his recounting. It turned out that in that battle, not only had Uncle Wei been blinded in both eyes, but the old Emperor had been gravely injured, losing a son as well. It was likely that the injury from that time led to lasting health problems. After ascending to the throne, the old Emperor was unable to father any children, leaving the nation without an heir. It was no wonder that he harbored such deep resentment towards Prince Cheng.

"For the sake of preserving the Great Hua Dynasty, His Majesty began to select talents over ten years ago. As the only one privy to this matter, I took on this task that concerns the future of Great Hua for thousands of generations. I traveled everywhere, seeking potential talents until, at last, I met you," Old Wei paused, sighing deeply, and shook his head, "Wanrong, I truly don't know whether to praise you or to scold you."

"Uncle, if you want to scold, just scold me. To be honest, my philosophy of life is different from yours. I prioritize happiness first, then power and wealth. If there's no joy, I'd rather not have anything at all," Lin Wanrong replied honestly.

"I know that all too well," Old Wei said, "I chose you partly for this very reason. Your thinking is broad, you dare to dream and act, you're carefree, unconventional in your methods, and you combine compassion with ruthlessness. You are indeed a rare find. Initially, seeing your joyful demeanor, I thought you might change after learning the truth, so I paid no mind to it. But I never expected that even after understanding everything, you remained just as stubborn. His Majesty both admires you and is helpless with you. But I can't help feeling discontent!"

Lin Wanrong chuckled and said, "Uncle Wei, I told His Majesty last time that we should find a way that's acceptable to both sides, without putting either of us in a difficult position. You, wise and full of schemes, surely can come up with a good solution."

Old Wei gave a bitter smile and replied, "You're quite the expert at shirking responsibility, young man. It's not so easy to find a solution that pleases everyone. Although, I must thank you for allowing me to cling to life a few days longer."

"Cling to life? Uncle, I don't understand," Lin Wanrong said, perplexed.

"That's exactly it," Uncle Wei sighed. "I live to serve His Majesty loyally and find a suitable person for Great Hua. Once I find that person, it's time for me to meet my end—"

"You mean, silencing you?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, shocked.

"I'm willing," Uncle Wei said with a faint smile. "My lord has given me everything; serving him loyally has been my lifelong wish."

Lin Wanrong stared at blind Old Wei, at a loss for words for a long time. He didn't belong to this era and naturally found it difficult to understand Old Wei's mentality, but he respected Uncle Wei's choice. From the Emperor's perspective, for the sake of perpetuating the Great Hua Dynasty and forever keeping the secret, those who needed to die must die. Lin Wanrong shook his head helplessly. If he had agreed to the old Emperor today, he might never see Uncle Wei again, and he couldn't help but feel a pang of sorrow.

"The princess has returned, and it has been a long time since I have seen the Emperor so delighted," Old Wei remarked, standing by the window and letting out a sigh filled with emotion. "Wanrong, on behalf of my master, I thank you."

As he spoke, he attempted to kneel down and kowtow, but Lin Wanrong hurriedly lifted him up. "Uncle, aren't you shortening my lifespan with such a gesture? This life of mine was saved by you! Besides, Xian'er is my wife, and the old man is my father-in-law. Helping them clear up misunderstandings and reunite as soon as possible is something I should do."

"Your relationship with the princess might not go as smoothly as you think," Old Wei slowly said. "Had you agreed to the Emperor's request today, your status would change, and the Emperor would have you legitimately enter the palace. As for your matter with the princess, never mention it again."

Lin Wanrong's mouth fell open, suddenly realizing the complex layers behind the Emperor's request for him and Xian'er to become sworn siblings. What did Old Wei mean by "legitimate"? Even if he entered the court, gossip was inevitable. Who could handle those wily old ministers, or deal with Prince Cheng?

"No one in this world dares underestimate the Emperor. His control over the situation, his grasp and decisiveness in major affairs, are beyond the reach of Prince Cheng and his mediocre followers," Old Wei snorted, slowly continuing. "After you join the court, the Emperor will gradually put you in charge of the Ministry of Personnel, purging rebellious officials, promoting scholars throughout the land, and even giving you control over military power. With the authority of the office and the military, someone like Prince Cheng will be like meat on a chopping block. What could he do to you?"

Having served the Emperor closely, Old Wei was deeply familiar with his thoughts and was an expert in discussing political matters. Lin Wanrong listened, secretly amazed, finding Old Wei's words quite appealing. If only he could marry Xian'er and play the game of power, how wonderful it would be to live a carefree life!

"What's wrong? Regretting it?" Old Wei, though blind, had an Emperor's insight into human nature, and he smiled slightly.

"I wouldn't say I regret it," Lin Wanrong chuckled. "What's yours is yours; you don't need to fight to have it. Just like Xian'er and the old man, despite years of trials and tribulations, they finally reunited, didn't they?"

Old Wei nodded and sighed, a faint smile appearing on his face. "We truly owe this to you; the Emperor has not misjudged you."

Today, with Xian'er's reunion with the old Emperor and Lin Wanrong's reunion with Old Wei, it was indeed a double celebration. Xian'er and her father talked long into the night, and the lights in the Palace of Heavenly Purity remained bright until the deep night. Lin Wanrong also stayed in the palace, having a late-night conversation with Old Wei. Many previous questions gradually became clear, and his heart was filled with incomparable joy. Yet, watching Xian'er and the old Emperor happily reunited as a family, Lin Wanrong felt content but also slightly lost. Most people have parents and can enjoy their warmth, but he was an exception. On the surface, he seemed to enjoy a life of success, but he was like a rootless duckweed, drifting aimlessly, a loneliness a thousand or even ten thousand times greater than that of the Monkey King born from a stone.

He had something on his mind, and though he slept into the late night, he found himself unable to close his eyes. The spring chill and heavy dew had formed faint droplets outside the window, and a crescent moon hung in the sky, scattering a dim, firefly-like glow that created an indescribable feeling of cold serenity. He donned a long robe, pushed open the room door, and slowly stepped out, only to be met by a waft of mild cold air that instantly cleared his somewhat muddled head.

The light in the old Emperor's room had not yet been extinguished. From time to time, soft voices and sobbing sounds reached his ears, and Lin Wanrong could clearly hear that it was Xian'er's voice. He couldn't help but shake his head and chuckle. That girl, having reunited with her father, had cried from beginning to end; he didn't know if it was due to overwhelming sadness or joy.

Leaving the Palace of Heavenly Purity, he noticed some lights in a nearby courtyard and leisurely walked over. The courtyard was very close to the Palace of Heavenly Purity, and the lighting was dim, with only a few eunuchs and palace maids on duty, dozing off under an oil lamp.



Lin Wanrong stepped into the courtyard, and a faint, delicate fragrance greeted him. Like orchids, like musk, it was exceptionally fragrant. He felt a sense of awareness and looked up to see a long scroll hanging in the center of the main hall. A glance was all it took for him to feel as if he had been struck by lightning, and he stood there, frozen in astonishment.