

## Finest 376

### Chapter 376 Accompanied by Beauty

That night, Master Lin slept in a half-drunken, half-awake state. At one moment, he dreamed of having a son with Qingxuan; at another, he dreamed of Eldest Miss stabbing him with several holes. When he awoke, he was drenched in cold sweat. 'Damn it, why would I dream such a thing? Am I really meant to play the part of Chen Shimei?' he thought.

He wiped away the sweat and saw the charming girl beside him still fast asleep, her red face bearing a sweet smile as if she had dreamt something pleasant. Her tender arms, like lotus roots, extended outside the blanket, vaguely revealing her fragrant shoulders and soft chest, a sight that was infinitely beautiful. A gentle affection rose in Lin Wanrong's heart, and he kissed the girl's delicate nose and playfully patted her plump buttocks before getting up with a lecherous laugh.

The time was only the second watch of the night, but he could no longer fall asleep. He thought about Shandong and wondered how the Luo family was doing now, feeling anxious. What was even more annoying was that since entering the palace, old Xu had not sent any news. He seemed to have evaporated from the earth, without even a peep. Master Lin didn't know what the Emperor's decision was. However, the trip to Shandong was undoubtedly necessary. Wanting to avoid seeing the tears of the Eldest Miss and Qiaoqiao, he thought to leave while they were still asleep.

He took out the small package Eldest Miss had given him from Qiaoqiao's prepared luggage. Although it was only a few thin sheets of paper, it felt as heavy as a thousand pounds. Eldest Miss was indeed a character that brought him joy and sorrow. Thinking of her secretive laughter the night before, his heart felt waves of warmth.

To travel from the capital to Shandong, riding hard, it would take a day and a night to arrive. Fortunately, he had the blood-sweat treasure horse given by the Turks. 'I'll try its taste today,' Master Lin thought, happily sizing up the tall Turkic horse and patting its backside firmly.

At the second watch, the sky was dim and without light. The sporadic lights on the long street were like bright lamps in the dark night, giving him warmth and guiding his direction. He looked back longingly at the familiar house, where Eldest Miss, Qiaoqiao, and Madam Xiao were still in their dreams, hoping they would have pleasant ones.

He stretched and was about to mount his horse when he suddenly heard the sound of wheels in front. In the silence of the early morning, it was quite piercing.

"Halt—" After a soft command, a carriage stopped before Lin Wanrong, and Xu Wei hurriedly jumped down: "Little brother Lin, little brother Lin, oh, thank heavens. This old man has not come too late."

'Isn't this too late? Are you playing with me, old fellow?' Master Lin replied with a forced smile, "Ah, isn't this old brother Xu? What, did Sister Su not take good care of you? Out wandering so early in the morning."

Xu Wei waved his hand with a bitter smile, "Don't blame me, little brother, this old man has been in the palace since yesterday and just came out now. It has been quite tough."

Listening to old Xu's words, it seemed that things hadn't gone smoothly. Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat, and he couldn't help but become serious, hurriedly asking, "Brother Xu, what did the Emperor say? Did he agree?"

Xu Wei sighed and said, "Little brother, you know that the Emperor just encountered an incident yesterday, and his mood was already extremely bad. Then this old man brought him this news; how could the Emperor be pleased? He nearly had me executed!"

'Execute you? What a joke. The old man isn't so foolish. You and Li Tai are the pillars of the Great Hua; he wouldn't execute either of you. This is clearly an opportunity to claim merit.' Lin Wanrong chuckled and said, "Brother Xu, I know your hard work, and you won't be treated unfairly after this is over. Feel free to make any requests."

Xu Wei's face lit up with joy. "This is what you said. I have only one small request, and you can agree to it later. Yesterday, after I reported the news to the Emperor, his Majesty was furious and immediately wanted to issue an edict to execute the entire Luo Min family. This old man pleaded strenuously, and the Emperor punished me by making me kneel outside the Imperial Study for three hours. It wasn't until last night that I was allowed in to speak."

'Emperors are known for their ruthlessness, and even with Xu Wei's unwavering loyalty, the old Emperor would still do such a thing,' Lin Wanrong nodded and asked, "What happened then?"

"After presenting myself before the Emperor, I pleaded earnestly, and told him that you, little brother, were willing to personally retrieve the salary silver. The Emperor's face finally eased a bit," Xu Wei looked at him and cautiously said, "However, the Emperor has shortened the deadline to seven days. Little brother, are you alright?!"

‘Seven days? Damn it, is this not a death sentence? The old man's move is really merciless.’ Lin Wanrong gritted his teeth and said, "I'm fine, Brother Xu, continue."

"The Emperor said that you may command the military officials within Shandong's territory. If you can help Luo Min recover the silver within seven days, he will not only pardon Luo Min but also reappoint him. If you fail to retrieve the silver, then all officials in Shandong, and the entire Luo Min family, will be executed!" Xu Wei took a letter from his sleeve and handed it to him, saying, "This is the Emperor's handwritten order and the military token, keep it well. The Emperor has learned that you are going to Shandong, so he let Li Tai choose Hu Bugui, who is most familiar with Jining's terrain, to assist you. He set off last night and rushed back to Jining."

"Brother Hu is going too?" Lin Wanrong said joyfully. ‘Finally, the Emperor shows some kindness, thinking of his son-in-law.’

Xu Wei nodded and said, "Little brother Lin, I can see that the Emperor's favor towards you is extraordinary; you must do your utmost for him."

‘Nonsense, we are all family; can I not do my best?’ Lin Wanrong nodded and said, "Brother Xu, there's one more thing I need to trouble you with. Later, when you return to the palace, report to the Emperor that I have captured all the assassins from yesterday, killed twelve, and caught three alive. They are all imprisoned in Du Xiuyuan's army."

"Is this true?" Xu Wei exclaimed in joy. "No wonder the Emperor values you so much. Little brother Lin, this old man is completely convinced by you."

Lin Wanrong recounted the events of the previous day. Xu Wei listened with furrowed brows, then said thoughtfully, "Now that our Great Hua is on the verge of war with the Turkic Khaganate, if Prince Cheng really colludes with Dongyin, that will be troublesome. The Dongyin people have been attacking our southeastern coast, killing fishermen, and becoming increasingly bold. Fujian's naval reports keep coming one after another, and the northern nomad people are threatening. If we add internal strife to this, the situation is greatly unfavorable."

"The wise and unwise, the old man knows best." Lin Wanrong said with a faint smile, "Do not think that he is confined to the palace, there is not a single matter outside that he does not know about. Who sent the assassins, he knows without having to investigate, and he understands it all too well. You simply have to tell him the truth. Oh, by the way, are the envoys from the Turks, Goryeo, and Dongyin still in the capital?"

Xu Wei clapped his hands, "Now that you mention it, I recall something. A few days ago, the Dongyin envoy Tsugumi Takeshita returned to his country. Now, it seems, he deliberately made us lower our guard to strike secretly. As for the envoys from Goryeo and the Turks, they have not returned home yet, and I don't know what they intend to do."

'Tsugumi Takeshita ran away? Damn, the day I beat him up, I didn't go far enough. If I had known, I would have cut off his little pecker, making him return as a capon. As for Goryeo, they stayed to find someone to deal with the Dongyin invaders. These matters I didn't care to handle; when I have free time, fondling Jang Geum's little hand is the real deal.'

"Brother Xu, these few days I won't be in the capital, so you help General Li and the others keep an eye on those big-nosed Ashile and his companions." Lin Wanrong laughed, "I've given them a big cannon that won't fire, don't let them dismantle it and run away with the parts."

Xu Wei laughed heartily, "I've heard about that from General Li Tai, Li Sheng and the others are keeping a close watch."

After finishing the instructions, Lin Wanrong was about to mount his horse and leave, but Xu Wei called out, "Hold on, hold on. Little brother Lin, have you forgotten the request you promised me earlier?"

Lin Wanrong looked puzzled, "What request? If you have something to ask, just wait until I return, I don't have time to do things for you now."

"This matter must be mentioned now," Xu Wei said with a smile, gesturing to the carriage, "Zhiqing, you tell Master Lin yourself."

The carriage curtain was lifted, and a vigorous young lady jumped out. Her face was as lovely as a lotus, eyebrows like willow leaves, with a slender and full figure, standing gracefully. It was Xu Wei's beloved daughter, Xu Zhiqing.

"Old Xu, what are you up to?" Master Lin grabbed his shoulder in alarm, "Don't you try to take advantage of the situation and play matchmaker! I'll have you know, I can't be corrupted by wealth and beauty, and I'll defend my innocence to the death."

"What are you babbling about?" Xu Zhiqing, her face flushed with anger, snapped, "I want to go with you to Shandong."

"You're going to Shandong?" Master Lin was taken aback, shaking his head like a rattle, "Miss, I'm going to war, not on vacation. Save your energy."

"War?!" Xu Zhiqing scoffed, "When I was on the battlefield fighting the nomads, you were still buying candied haws."

This was a naked provocation, and Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Sister, I know you're older, but you don't have to mention it all the time. You're pretty and have a hot figure, as long as you don't say it, no one would know you're thirty-five."

Seeing Xu Zhiqing about to explode, Xu Wei quickly jumped in to mediate, "Alright, alright, Little brother Lin, enough with the nonsense. Miss Luo was under Zhiqing's care when she was studying in the capital years ago, and they are close friends. It's only natural for her to go and assist. Moreover, Zhiqing has been to the front lines several times to fight the nomads, and even General Li Tai praises her for her wisdom and strategy. As long as you cooperate well, recovering the three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver will be a foregone conclusion."

"A lone man and a single woman, I'm afraid this journey won't be very convenient!" Master Lin winked and gestured, saying, "Besides, I have to travel day and night on this journey; I don't have time to wait for her."

Xu Zhiqing snorted and said, "On the northern front, I lived and fought against the nomads alongside tens of thousands of soldiers. Has anyone ever mentioned the issue of being alone with men? You're the only one who makes such a fuss."

"Alright, it's settled then," Xu Wei clapped his hands, laughing, "We are people of the Jianghu; why bother with all this idle chatter? As for the timing, it won't delay you. Didn't the nomads gift you two fine steeds? One for each of you, riding side by side; that will solve the issue, won't it?!"

Good heavens! It seemed that this father-daughter duo had planned everything in advance, even knowing his assets down to the last detail. Recalling the words he had said when he first met Miss Xu Zhiqing, and gazing at her perfectly contoured and attractive figure, Master Lin's smile gradually turned lascivious...

"Lin San, Lin San—" Eldest Miss woke up from her dream, quickly lifting her head to look out the window. A faint fish-belly white hue appeared; it wasn't even the third watch of the night. Thinking

of Lin San's departure, she was about to get up and pack when she saw a small package by her bedside with a thin piece of paper on top.

Upon unwrapping the package, the deed and the silver notes were left intact, none missing. A few simple lines of writing caught her eye: "Eat well, drink well, sleep well, don't think wild thoughts. I took the scissors for self-defense, and only at one moment will I think of you—when I breathe."

The unique simplified characters; only Lin San in this world could write them, impossible to be forged by anyone else. Eldest Miss, both crying and laughing, covered her small mouth with tears streaming down: "Lin San, I hate you so much!"

### Chapter 377 Farewell to Luo Ning

Jining was situated exactly between Jinling and the capital, a distance that could neither be considered near nor far. Miss Xu's temperament seemed even more impatient than Lin Wanrong's. She had ridden her horse for three continuous hours, taking the lead without uttering a single word. The famed blood-sweat treasure horse truly lived up to its reputation, demonstrating strong and swift movement. It ran three to four hundred li without showing a hint of fatigue. No wonder the Turkic cavalry was so formidable.

"Hey, Miss Xu, let's find a place to rest up ahead. We don't want to exhaust this precious horse; it's worth a thousand pieces of gold after all!" Lin Wanrong rode up, barely catching up with Xu Zhiqing, and called out with a laugh.

Miss Xu gradually slowed her horse, gave him a sidelong glance, and snorted, "If you can't keep up, just say so. Don't make excuses. This blood-sweat treasure horse can travel a thousand li a day. Even if you fall down, it can still carry you to Jining."

Observing Miss Xu's calm and composed demeanor, showing no sign of fatigue, Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Look at what you're saying. How could I mistreat such a horse? I'm just worried about you, Miss Xu. What if you catch a cold or something during this long journey? I wouldn't know how to explain to your father."

"Thank you for your kindness, Master Lin." Xu Zhiqing shook her head, a faint smile appearing on her face. "This mere eight hundred li journey is nothing compared to fighting fierce nomads cavalry. I'm more worried about you, Master Lin. With your frail body, I don't know if you can endure the journey!"

'Frail body? This girl is calling me weak? Did she observe it or touch me to confirm?' Lin Wanrong grinned, "Miss Xu, you're very observant, even noticing that I'm frail. Perhaps I have been overworking myself lately. I can only manage seven or eight times a night, only half as much as before. I guess I need to rejuvenate. Just don't peek!" As he spoke, he reached into his pocket, pulled out a small box, opened the lid, and inhaled deeply, looking blissful.

Xu Zhiqing caught a faint fragrance and glanced curiously at the item. Recognizing what it was, she blushed furiously, shouting, "You, you, shameless!"

"Shameless?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed in surprise. "I just warned you not to peek. Sigh, I'm merely taking medicine to rejuvenate myself, and you call that shameless? Is there no justice left in the world?"

"You dare to say that? These obscene things are your rejuvenating medicine?" Miss Xu snorted angrily, urging her horse to move on.

Master Lin shook his head and sighed, "People see objects differently, and their hearts are revealed by what they see. The same thing can appear differently to different people. For example, in my eyes, this is an excellent medicine, a life-saving grace. But to Miss Xu, it becomes an obscene object. How can there be such a great difference between people?"

Miss Xu, well-versed in astronomy, geography, agriculture, and medicine, hesitated at his words, "You... you say this is really medicine?"

"Miss Xu is well-versed in the medical arts of Great Hua, so you should understand that in Great Hua medical theory there's a concept called 'shape supplementation,' what we usually refer to as consuming something for the specific part of the body it resembles. Just like how the shape of broad beans resembles kidneys, and thus they are believed to nourish the yin and kidneys. What I have here in my hand is called 'Yangshen,' born beneath the eternal snow of Mount Changbai. As for its medicinal properties, according to shape supplementation theory, haha, I won't say; you're so clever, Miss, you'll surely figure it out!" Lin Wanrong boasted with pride, flaunting the Great Hua medical theory he'd learned from Seo Jang Geum, his heart filled with joy.

"This is the legendary 'Yangshen' from Goryeo?" Xu Zhiqing had clearly heard of it before and said with astonishment, her face flushed with a wave of crimson. She probably never dreamt that the "Yangshen" recorded in the medical books would look so "lewd," just like Lin San.

"Yes, yes, this is Yangshen. Miss Xu, take a look at it," Lin Wanrong said, laughing as he tried to hand it over to her. She shrieked and pulled her hand back, causing Master Lin to burst into laughter, angering her so much that she gritted her teeth: "Despicable, vulgar!"

After their playful exchange, Xu Zhiqing, her face still flushed with embarrassment, no longer insisted on hurrying. She dismounted to rest under a large tree but kept her distance from Lin Wanrong, as if he were a ferocious beast.

"A healer must have a parent's heart. Miss Xu still has much to learn from the great healer Jang Geum about being open-minded," Lin Wanrong said, putting away the frightening little box and lewdly smiling as he walked toward Miss Xu.

Xu Zhiqing was resting under the tree, keeping a close watch on his every move. Seeing him approaching, she immediately tensed up, revealing a delicate repeating crossbow aimed at him: "What, what are you going to do?"

This scene was strikingly similar to when they'd teased each other while taking shelter from the rain at the Jade Buddha Temple. "Slow down, slow down, be careful not to misfire," Lin Wanrong chuckled, tossing her a small bag: "Here, this is for you."

Miss Xu took the small bag, finding inside a water bottle and some delicate pastries, their light fragrance wafting over. She hesitated for a moment, then softly asked, "Is this... for me?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head and sighed: "It wasn't originally for you, but since you're a lone woman and I'm a lone man, if I let you starve, you would probably ruin my reputation, so it's better to take care of you first."

Miss Xu held back a smile, put away her little crossbow, and tossed him a small bag: "This is the dry food I prepared last night. Make do with it."

Lin Wanrong opened the bag and saw several fine snacks, comparable to Qiaoqiao's cooking and certainly more than Miss Xu could eat alone.

'Even my dry food was prepared; this girl is quite considerate,' Lin Wanrong thought, popping a pastry into his mouth and laughing: "This is what we call mutual aid. Thank you, Miss Xu."

The two rested under the tree for a while, and Lin Wanrong stared at the fine horse, lost in thought, before suddenly asking: "Miss Xu, have you really fought against the nomads on the front line?"



Xu Zhiqing took a sip of water and nodded lightly: "I have been to the front line three times."

"Did you win or lose?" Lin Wanrong asked with a smile.

"There was no victory or defeat, only endless yellow sand, blood, and severed limbs." Xu Zhiqing's eyes were slightly moist as she tenderly brushed her hair beside her ear.

Lin Wanrong patted her shoulder, sighing softly, "Generals die in countless battles; brave men return after a decade. Green mountains cover the loyal bones; everywhere there are heroic figures! My condolences, my condolences!"

Miss Xu glanced at him and snorted, "Master Lin, can you please remove your dirty hand?"

"Oh, really? My goodness, what's happening here?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, awkwardly chuckling twice before pulling his hand away from Miss Xu's slender waist. "I apologize, I apologize; it was a habitual move, I'll be more careful next time."

Xu Zhiqing coldly laughed, "Before you act out of habit next time, please make sure to choose the right target. I'm not as easily bullied as Ning'er and Qiaoqiao!"

"I know, you're armed with arrows!" Lin Wanrong laughed, glancing at the two horses that were nuzzling together. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Oh my, they are lovers! Fortunately, Miss Xu, you're here; otherwise, I might have separated this pair of lovers without knowing. A grave sin, indeed."

Xu Zhiqing looked up and saw the two beautiful horses indeed nuzzling each other affectionately. She disdainfully spat, feigning indifference, "Animals know no reason; how could humans learn from them?"

This girl's sharp tongue always seemed to have a hidden agenda. Master Lin could gain no advantage, so he merely laughed and checked the time, "It's getting late, Miss Xu; we should continue our journey."

A faint smile appeared on Xu Zhiqing's lips, and she nodded, "Very well, I was thinking the same." She took two steps, reached for the saddle, and was about to mount, when she suddenly turned to Lin Wanrong, "Lin San, do you remember the words you spoke when we first met?"

Lin Wanrong was surprised, wondering if she was settling old scores. Before he could speak, Miss Xu continued, "I bring this up not for any other reason, but to hope that someone might reflect. If you think that your wish can truly be fulfilled, that would be as likely as the sun rising in the west. Drive--"

With a sharp cry, the steed sprinted away, kicking up a cloud of dust, disappearing from sight in the blink of an eye. Master Lin stood there for a moment, then burst out laughing. Old Xu's daughter was indeed interesting!

On the way to Jinan, the two riders and their horses kept a considerable distance, never speaking a word. By the time night fell, the panting horses were weakened, their hooves gradually softened, their tails constantly flicking. Even such excellent horses couldn't endure the journey of eight hundred li in a day. Lin Wanrong's face and body were covered in dust. Looking up, he saw a towering city wall standing before them, the walls strong, the guards strict, and the opening left by the bombardment of the White Lotus Sect still not completely sealed.

"We've arrived at Jinan!" Lin Wanrong pulled the horse's reins, and the steed's front hooves soared into the air, letting out a long neigh followed by an excited shout.

Xu Zhiqing stood in front of the city gate, quietly gazing at the tall city wall, sighing softly, "So this is Jinan? Indeed, with such high walls and thick defenses, it's easy to defend and hard to attack. No wonder the White Lotus Sect could remain unbeaten here for so many years. It must have taken you quite some effort when you attacked this place in the past."

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "I gained my advantages without much fighting."

Xu Zhiqing glared at him and snorted, "Gained advantages? You speak lightly of it. Without the blood of the soldiers, where would you gain any advantage?"

'Fine, I said nothing; this young lady is utterly upright.' Lin Wanrong wore a bitter smile across his face, while Miss Xu sighed softly, "We're here, but we don't know if we can actually help Ning'er."

"Big brother, Big brother, is that you?" A cry of surprise came from ahead, and hundreds of people were holding torches, seeming to search for something. A nimble figure in the crowd threw away his torch and shouted excitedly before rushing towards them.

"Little Luo—" Lin Wanrong shouted, dismounting his horse, looking at the approaching Luo Yuan, his heart filled with emotion.

"Big brother, I've missed you so much!" Luo Yuan ran to him, grabbing his arm, shouting excitedly, tears glistening in his eyes.

Months had passed since they last saw each other, and Luo Yuan had grown taller, darker, and thinner. His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked fatigued, but his face was full of excitement and agitation.

"Big brother, Big brother, I'm glad you've come." Like a wronged child, Luo Yuan, who had been strong and hard in front of others, could no longer restrain the tears in his eyes at the sight of Lin Wanrong. They flowed freely, and he embraced him, sobbing loudly.

Luo Yuan had matured a lot in these months, but he was still only seventeen or eighteen years old. The sudden crisis he faced was a tremendous blow, and the fact that he held on this long was miraculous. Lin Wanrong's heart grew heavy as he patted his shoulder, saying, "Little Luo, well done. You were not defeated; you are my good brother."

"Big brother, if you hadn't come, I fear we couldn't have held on. Father, Father—"

"What happened to Lord Luo?" Lin Wanrong anxiously asked, grabbing Luo Yuan. Lord Luo Min had treated him with kindness and protection.

"The night before last, the military funds were robbed, and Father spat out three mouthfuls of blood and fainted. He hasn't woken up yet," Luo Yuan cried inconsolably. In front of his big brother, he was just a child.

The military funds had been stolen, Lord Luo was unconscious, and the entire Jining and Shandong were in chaos. The situation was even worse than he had imagined.

He mustn't panic; he mustn't panic. Lin Wanrong steadied himself, bit his tongue to keep himself alert, and turned to Xu Zhiqing, saying, "Miss Xu, I heard you are skilled in the art of healing. Can you take a look at Lord Luo? Little Luo, you don't know her, do you? This is the daughter of Master Xu Wei and a close friend of your sister, Miss Xu Zhiqing!"

Luo Yuan, startled and then delighted, quickly bowed, "You are Sister Zhiqing? Little brother Luo Yuan pays his respects!"

Miss Xu hurriedly helped Luo Yuan up, "Little brother Luo, please do not be so formal. I came in a hurry and am not sure if I can be of help."

"Having the intention is enough," Lin Wanrong said calmly, then turned to Luo Yuan, "Little Luo, where were the military funds robbed, and what is the current situation in Jining? Tell me about it."

Luo Yuan, seeing his big brother's inquiry, seemed to find a pillar of strength and wiped away his tears, saying, "The batch of military pay was transported from Hangzhou through Chuzhou to Jining the night before last. Originally, it should have been released with the proper clearance documents. However, the carts and horses carrying the silver arrived at Jining late, and the commanding officer in charge of the escort was worried about something happening on the road, so he requested my father to station them outside Jining City for the night. Who knew that something would go wrong that night? Around midnight, my father was uneasy and went to inspect the camp himself. Arriving there, he found it completely empty. Not only had the 350,000 taels of silver vanished, but even the 5,000 elite soldiers, along with their horses and weapons, had disappeared without a trace."

"Where were these 5,000 elite soldiers and 350,000 taels of silver stationed, outside which city gate?" Lin Wanrong asked, furrowing his brow.

"They came from Chuzhou and were stationed outside the South Gate of Jining City," Luo Yuan answered.

The South Gate? That was where Lin Wanrong had initially breached Jining City. He hadn't expected that after all this going back and forth, he would have to return there. He sighed and continued, "When these 5,000 elite soldiers withdrew, taking the 350,000 taels of silver with them, did they not leave any clues behind?"

"Those bastards must have plotted this in advance. When they withdrew, they left the camp clean and tidy, not leaving a thing behind. Later, my father ordered a lockdown of the entire area around Jining City, and we found a few witnesses. They said they saw about 3,000 soldiers on both the east and west sides, each pulling large carts that night without displaying any banners, in a hurried manner. They must have been those scoundrels."

3,000 soldiers each to the east and west, retreating simultaneously? Lin Wanrong and Xu Zhiqing looked at each other in surprise. 350,000 taels of silver was no small amount, requiring dozens of carts. Even if they wanted to split the troops for smuggling, they shouldn't have divided them into two paths; such targets were too big.

"Did anyone see these large carts later?" Xu Zhiqing asked.

"No. Later, the entire Jining and Shandong areas were sealed off, but those 5,000 men and large carts seemed to have evaporated, disappearing without a trace."

Xu Zhiqing's brow furrowed, apparently puzzled by the situation. Lin Wanrong sighed, "They have all been poisoned. Of course, you wouldn't find them."

Xu Zhiqing was startled by his words and was about to ask when Lin Wanrong waved his hand to stop her, "Little Luo, have you searched the area around Jining?"

"Since the incident that night, we have turned Jining upside down. Not only the four gates to the east, south, west, and north, but also the area for dozens of miles around has been dug three feet deep." Luo Yuan shook his head, fatigue in his face, and the result was clear without asking.

Seeing Luo Yuan's haggard appearance, Lin Wanrong couldn't bear to inquire further, saying to Xu Zhiqing, "Miss Xu, please come with us to see Lord Luo first."

Luo Min's condition was of utmost urgency and couldn't be delayed. Xu Zhiqing nodded, and the two followed Luo Yuan in a hurry toward the government building.

Jining was originally a bustling town, but after years of influence by the White Lotus Sect and the bombardment during the city's attack, it was left in ruins. Luo Min's government building was located in a broken mansion in the city. Although it was neat and clean, it was worlds apart from the grandeur of the Jiangsu Governor's Mansion of that day.

Guiding the two of them into a room, Lin Wanrong looked on in astonishment. The man lying on the bed, his face as pale as wax and his features thin and haggard, was this really the once portly Luo Min? How had he aged so drastically in just a few months?

Xu Zhiqing extended her delicate fingers, lightly touching Luo Min's pulse, pondering for a long time before finally speaking, "A disorder of the spleen and stomach, suppressed emotions causing blockages, chronic ailments within the body, and the cold invading the abdomen—"

'I asked you to diagnose him, not recite idioms.' Lin Wanrong interrupted impatiently, "Miss Xu, can you just tell me directly what's going on with Lord Luo?"

Xu Zhiqing sighed, "Uncle Luo's condition is due to suppressed emotions attacking the heart, along with longstanding chronic diseases, which have caused him to fall into a coma. Proper care and nourishment are needed, and he will need at least a year to recover."

As long as it was not life-threatening, Lin Wanrong let out a long sigh of relief, wiping the sweat from his forehead. Seeing Xu Zhiqing writing a prescription, the names of herbs like Bellflower and Shell mother from Sichuan making no sense to him, he pulled Luo Yuan aside, "Little Luo, where's your sister? Why isn't she at home?"

Luo Yuan shook his head, his eyes moist, "My sister has been searching outside the southern gate with her men. She hasn't slept for two days and two nights. Big brother, you should go see her."

'This silly girl, she's truly risking her life.' A pang of pain in his heart, Lin Wanrong hurriedly left, heading straight towards the southern gate.

Jining's southern gate faced Weishan Lake, and aside from an east-west official road, there were no other routes to take. When Lin Wanrong captured Jining, his ten thousand troops had captured Lu Kanli here. Later, he spent time with Sister An and Xian'er amidst thousands of cannons, then enjoyed tender moments on Weishan Lake. Scenes flashed before his eyes like a film, filled with bittersweet memories that he would never forget. Now, revisiting this place and recalling the moments with Sister An and Xian'er, he was filled with nostalgia and emotion, his heart heavy with sighs.

Arriving outside the southern gate, he found a bustling scene with people digging and excavating, the clamor of tools unceasing, the area abuzz. Torches and lanterns burned brightly around the city gate, illuminating the dark night as if it were daytime. Countless soldiers were strenuously digging with picks and shovels amidst the flying dust and noisy crowd. Where could he find Luo Ning's shadow?

"They really are digging three feet into the ground," Lin Wanrong said with a bitter smile. Although this seemed like a clumsy method, it was the most effective under the current circumstances. The silver must be hidden within several hundred li around Jining; it was just a matter of when they would find it.

Thousands of soldiers, all clad in armor and helmets, searched throughout the night, but they found no trace of the silver. Lin Wanrong pulled aside a few of the warriors and questioned them, but very few recognized Miss Luo from the Luo family.

As Lin Wanrong continued his search, he ventured further and further, the lights growing dimmer, until he could no longer discern faces. Ahead, a few scattered soldiers were thinly spread, their shadows looking lonely and forlorn.

Lin Wanrong scanned the surroundings, his eyes falling on the emaciated and solitary figure in the distance. She was dressed in heavy armor, her delicate frame enveloped within, hiding her exquisite figure. Holding a small pickaxe in her hands, she swung it desperately, the pounding sound landing in Lin Wanrong's heart, one beat after another.

"Ning'er—!" Lin Wanrong's voice rasped as he yelled.

The figure paused for a moment, then began to tremble lightly, the pickaxe in her hand clattering to the ground.

"Ning'er—!" Lin Wanrong ran madly toward that frail figure.

Slowly, the figure turned around, a soft, beautiful, and pale face illuminated in the cold moonlight, crystalline tears shimmering with a chilly brilliance in the night. Her chapped cherry lips parted slightly, and she murmured, "Big brother," as if it drained the last bit of strength from her body. Slowly, she fell backward...

## Chapter 378 A Peculiar Supplement

Lin Wanrong hurriedly took two steps and steadied the trembling, delicate figure. The cold armor on Luo Ning's body was pressed against his chest, and he couldn't feel a trace of warmth.

"Ning'er, Ning'er, what's wrong with you?" Looking at Luo Ning's emaciated shoulders and her pale, bloodless face, Lin Wanrong felt a wave of distress in his heart, tightly embracing her frail body and calling out anxiously.

Luo Ning's long eyelashes quivered, and her beautiful eyes slowly opened, staring blankly at him. Suddenly, with a "wa" sound, she threw herself into his arms and sobbed uncontrollably: "Big brother, you finally came, you finally came."

"It's my fault; I came too late." Looking at Luo Ning's thin cheeks, her long eyelashes adorned with crystal-clear tears, pitiful as a pear blossom in the rain, Lin Wanrong felt a pang in his heart as well. He tightly embraced her, allowing her to sob freely in his arms, venting all her emotions.

Longing was the most tormenting. Luo Ning had been separated from him for several months, her heart fraught with concern. Meeting with continuous shocks at home, she had been barely holding on. Now that she had seen him, all her strength seemed to dissipate, and tears flowed like a floodgate had been opened, unceasing and overwhelming.

He didn't know how much time had passed when he noticed that Luo Ning's crying had gradually subsided. Looking down, he saw that she had fallen asleep in his arms. Her smooth and delicate skin was as beautiful as fine warm jade. Her cheeks were stained with traces of tears, pure and crystalline, her cherry lips slightly dry and pale, making her look even more pitiable.

Looking at her tear-streaked, smiling face as she slept, Lin Wanrong sighed deeply, feeling a faint sense of satisfaction. Making everyone around him happy—life was that simple.

As he lifted Luo Ning, intending to move, the delicate body in his arms stirred, and her beautiful eyes slowly opened, exclaiming, "Big brother, where are you going?"

This girl had become like a frightened bird. Lin Wanrong smiled gently, stroking her hair and said, "Silly girl, it's cold this spring night; if you sleep like this, you'll surely catch a chill. I'll take you back home, and you can rest for a while."

Luo Ning slowly shook her head, unsteadily rising from his embrace. Lin Wanrong hurriedly steadied her, distressedly saying, "Ning'er, what are you doing?"

Miss Luo's face was full of determination, her pretty lips curving into a stubborn line as she softly said, "Big brother, something has happened to father, and I cannot rest now. If I don't find the treasury silver, I cannot lie down."

"Who says you can't rest?" Lin Wanrong forcibly lifted her, snorting, "Finding the silver is not a matter of one or two days. If you go on like this, you'll collapse before you find it. How can that be acceptable? I haven't even consummated the marriage with you yet—"

"Big brother—" Luo Ning lowered her head in shy embarrassment, a faint blush spreading from behind her ears to her neck, enhancing her jade-like skin's beauty. Her curvaceous figure, hidden beneath the heavy armor, added a touch of heroism to her tender grace, making her even more endearing.



"Silly girl, since I am here, I won't let you suffer anymore. Leave the matter of finding the silver to me. You don't know what I am capable of, do you?" Lin Wanrong winked at her, confidently declaring.

Luo Ning's beautiful eyes sparkled as she gazed at him, her long eyelashes trembling slightly, a faint mist rising from her eyes. She hummed softly, feeling both sour and sweet inside, tightly embracing his broad shoulders, and sobbing softly, "Big brother, is Ning'er very useless? Am I always causing trouble for you?"

"Useless? How could you be useless?" Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "My Ning'er can sing and dance, compose poetry and paint, she's innocent and kind, caring about the people's livelihood, filled with love and compassion, truly a top-notch good girl. I like you just the way you are."

Luo Ning pouted, gently shaking her head, "I know you're just comforting me, big brother. A woman like me, who can only do useless things like writing poems and painting that neither make money nor save people, must be the kind you dislike the most. I feel like a vase sometimes, shiny on the outside but utterly useless. Do you despise me?"

The girl was indeed good at self-criticism, and although she was rather good at spending silver, her husband didn't mind. Lin Wanrong didn't answer her question, instead, he smiled, "Ning'er, what do you think is the most important thing in a person's life?"

Snuggled in his arms, Luo Ning whispered, "Big brother, you're the master of sophistry, no matter what I guess, you'll say it's wrong. You tell me, I'll listen."

'Ah, this girl truly knows me,' Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Actually, in one's lifetime, wealth and status aren't important. What's most important is being happy. If Ning'er you like it, what's wrong with writing poems and painting every day? What's wrong with spending money recklessly? Or even being a vase? I have plenty of money, and I love to see you write poems and paint every day, I love you spending my money. I'm happy, I'm willing. You're kind-hearted and help others; so what if others call you a vase? Have you hurt anyone? Are you unhappy?"

Luo Ning shook her head, whispering, "No, I'm very happy."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "That's it then! The world has no trouble, but the mediocre make it so. People in life, too many mental shackles, it's rare to be as straightforward as you. In the future, with your husband by your side, enjoy eating, drinking, and having fun. Spend my money to your heart's content. Isn't earning silver for the sake of spending it joyfully? Oh, by the way, you like traveling, right? I happened to bump into a Goryeo tour group in the capital this time, and there's a guide

named Miss Seo Jang Geum, who is knowledgeable, broad-minded, and somewhat similar to you. If you like, once we get to the capital, I'll have her take you on a tour of Goryeo."

All this talk of husbands and vases made Luo Ning both joyful and shy. When he mentioned the Goryeo guide, Seo Jang Geum, Miss Luo could no longer suppress her excitement, grabbing his hand, "Really, Big brother? Can I really go to Goryeo?"

"Of course you can," Master Lin patted his chest confidently, "Your husband, me, has a top-notch reputation in Goryeo. Even their prince, named Yi Seung-Jae, wouldn't dare speak loudly in front of me. When you're in Goryeo, whatever you want or need, just ask for it. Don't be polite; politeness is a crime!"

He hummed to himself, 'Damn, the Goryeos have made a profit this time. Fortunately, there's the Lady's route; if my wife hadn't thought of going to Goryeo, I wouldn't even bother with you.' He resolved that he must instruct Ning'er to accept lots of gifts, good gifts, all the way from Jeju Island to Mount Kumgang, otherwise, it would not be worthy of all their painstaking effort.

Luo Ning burst into a chuckle, her voice rich with charm, "Big brother, you always talk nonsense, speaking as if Goryeo is owned by our family."

Master Lin's brows raised, and he smiled, taking her small hand, "Exactly, exactly, Goryeo is practically ours; you just go, I assure you, you will go with joy and return with satisfaction."

Luo Ning softly hummed in agreement, her eyes brimming with affection as she looked at him, softly saying, "Big brother, you are so good to me."

"Good? Then give me a kiss!" Lin Wanrong laughed and pecked her tender little face. Luo Ning jumped in surprise, quickly looking around to see that the lights were dim and no one was watching. Her face flushed, her palms sweaty, she suddenly lifted her head and pecked Master Lin's lips like a dragonfly touching the water, then covered her cheeks with her hands, shyly lowering her head.

"Ah, Ning'er is really polite; you've learned the principle of reciprocity so quickly," Master Lin delightedly said, slowly caressing her small hand.

To the women of this world, Master Lin's mouth was his most powerful weapon. Hearing him brag, and having him take some liberties, Luo Ning was a mix of embarrassment and joy, her melancholy swept away. Her little face was flushed with excitement, whispering sweet nothings in his ear, her voice soft, her words filled with tenderness and sweetness.

With such a charming girl in his arms, her face flushed, Lin Wanrong's mind started to wander, pondering if he should do something meaningful on this beautiful night, to properly "comfort" Miss Luo's tired, wounded heart. Thankfully, the constant sound of pickaxes hitting the ground behind him reminded him that the old Emperor had only given them seven days, one day had already passed, and only six days remained. The lustful thoughts instantly evaporated as he broke into a cold sweat.

All talk and no action would not do. If the silver was not found, tonight's words would be nothing but hot air.

He grabbed Luo Ning's hand and headed back. Before reaching the South Gate, they heard a woman's voice ahead, "Is that you, Sister Ning'er?"

Luo Ning exclaimed in surprise, "Sister Zhiqing? Is that you, Sister Zhiqing?"

Seeing the woman on the opposite side running over in excitement, Luo Ning's face also lit up. She was about to break free from her brother's hand to meet Sister Zhiqing, but Master Lin held her tightly, stepping in front of her with a playful smile, "Miss Xu, Ning'er is frail today, she can't withstand your embrace, let me receive it on her behalf!"

"Shameless!" Xu Zhiqing couldn't dodge in time and almost bumped into his arms. She quickly stopped, her cheeks flushed, her full chest heaving, creating alluring waves.

"Big brother, you're so naughty!" Luo Ning's cheeks turned red, and she playfully scolded him. She moved in front of him, embracing Xu Zhiqing tightly, excitedly saying, "Sister Zhiqing, how come you're here too?"

"I'm worried that you might be taken advantage of if you're not careful." Xu Zhiqing grabbed Luo Ning's small hand, her face filled with joy, and she glanced at Lin Wanrong, giving a light snort.

'Having embraced Ning'er, and Ning'er having embraced Miss Xu, it's as if I indirectly embraced Miss Xu; we're all square, and I won't dwell on it,' Lin Wanrong comforted himself. Seeing a burly man with a twisted beard standing behind Xu Zhiqing, he suddenly exclaimed, "Brother Hu, you're here too?"

Hu Bugui stepped forward with a smile and saluted, "I greet General Lin. I arrived earlier this evening, a couple of hours ahead of the general and Miss Xu. When I reached Lord Luo's residence and saw Miss Xu, hearing that the general was looking for Miss Luo, I decided to accompany her here."

Well-versed in cavalry and horse breeding, Hu Bugui's assistance eased Lin Wanrong's mind. He grabbed him and asked, "Brother Hu, since you came early, did you visit the scene?"

Hu Bugui nodded, "I rushed here without delay. The first thing I did was inspect the scene. Look, over there are the tents of those five thousand cavalymen."

Lin Wanrong looked up and saw hundreds of white tents not far from where they were standing, surrounded by hundreds of soldiers—clearly those sent to seal off the scene after the incident.

Seeing Luo Ning and Xu Zhiqing chatting happily, Lin Wanrong said to Hu Bugui, "Brother Hu, I haven't had a chance to see the scene yet. Take me there, will you?"

"I'm going too!" Xu Zhiqing suddenly interjected.

This girl had been eavesdropping! Lin Wanrong laughed, "Miss Xu, you and Ning'er haven't seen each other for a while. You should catch up. Leave this rough work to us men."

Xu Zhiqing ignored him and looked at Hu Bugui, "General Hu, take me with you."

Hu Bugui looked at Lin Wanrong, torn. On one hand, there was the precious daughter of Xu Wei, the respected female military advisor; on the other, his revered superior. Whose command should he follow?

Luo Ning, seeing that her Big brother and Sister Zhiqing seemed at odds and not knowing how they had fared on the journey, smiled and said, "Since we're all going, let the general lead us. We'll all go together."

Lin Wanrong looked at her, concerned, "Ning'er, you're weak. You should go back and rest. We can handle this."

Luo Ning's cheeks flushed, and she held his hand tightly, shaking her head firmly, "Wherever my Big brother is, I am too. I'll never leave you."

"Then I'll carry you," Lin Wanrong chuckled, "It pains me to see you take even one extra step." Luo Ning's cheeks were suffused with the blush of happiness. She looked at him tenderly, a glance that seemed to drip with sweetness.

Miss Xu felt a chill run down her spine and snorted, "Sweet words and pretty speeches, Ning'er, you mustn't believe him too easily, ah--" She exclaimed in shock, stepping back and looking behind Luo Ning, her face flushed with anger, "Lin San, you, you--"

"What's the matter?" Lin Wanrong sniffed deeply, grinning as he tucked the small box into his bosom, "I'm just replenishing myself after this tiring journey. Miss Xu, would you like to see this extraordinary supplement?"

## Chapter 379 Must Be Washed Clean

"You—" Xu Zhiqing hummed, her face turning red. She kept her distance and dared not speak any further.

This was a case of a villain needing another villain to grind them down. Lin Wanrong laughed a few times, taking Luo Ning's small hand, following behind Hu Bugui, and heading towards the camp.

After the loss of the official silver, Luo Min had already ordered a citywide lockdown in Jining, with the camp being of utmost importance. Elite soldiers were stationed to guard it overnight. Without a special order, no one could enter, so the traces left behind after the loss of the official silver were well-preserved.

Upon entering the camp through multiple checkpoints, Lin Wanrong looked up and saw that the large camp was pitched beside the east-west official road, convenient for coming and going. To the south, it faced the sparkling Weishan Lake, which shone gold in the firelight, and the expansive lake surface seemed to be touched with golden rosy clouds, a sight of great beauty. Inside the large camp, hundreds of white tents were connected one after the other, neatly arranged in all directions.

Hu Bugui led Lin Wanrong to the center of the camp and pointed to the various wheel tracks on the ground, saying, "General Lin, Miss Xu, please look."

Lin Wanrong glanced and saw the ground full of chaotic wheel tracks, winding and twisting, concentrated most heavily where the four of them were standing. Hu Bugui bowed his fist and said, "According to my observation just now, the wheel marks here are dense. The official silver must have been stored here the night before last. From the marks left by the wheels, although they are disordered, the tracks going in the east-west direction are very distinct."

"So according to General Hu, the vehicles carrying the silver should have gone in the east-west direction?" Xu Zhiqing said softly, her brows slightly furrowed, seemingly deep in thought.

Hu Bugui nodded, squatting down, and pressed the yellow earth ground down with his finger, musing, "If it were an empty cart, the wheels would not sink into the mud so deeply. From the rolled-out tracks, the carriages going in both east and west directions were definitely not empty but were laden with heavy weight. As for whether the silver was on them, I cannot guarantee."

Hu Bugui's detailed observation had some merit. From the remaining marks, the carriages were indeed loaded with goods, going in two directions: east and west. But with 5,000 soldiers transporting 350,000 taels of official silver, already a tight situation, why would they split into two routes in a fearful state after secretly stealing the silver? Was it merely to confuse the court whether they were going east or west?

Lin Wanrong and Xu Zhiqing exchanged a glance, both reading doubt in each other's eyes. The matter was suspicious, with many incomprehensible aspects, but they couldn't pinpoint where the problem lay.

"Lin, Lin San," Xu Zhiqing began, her face blushing slightly, probably recalling his unique tonic, "Do you think that the 5,000 soldiers who robbed the silver were all poisoned? Is it true or false?"

"It's probably not false. The area around Jining has been sealed off, with strict searches and no sign of these 5,000 people. They did not ascend to heaven, so they must have gone underground," Lin Wanrong sighed, thinking of the Dongyin Samurai Sasaki's words, feeling an unpleasant stir in his heart.

"That's strange indeed," Xu Zhiqing's elegant brows furrowed lightly, and her jade-like cheeks were filled with an expression of puzzlement. "Since these five thousand men have betrayed the court and are escorting the official silver, why would the person behind the scenes resort to such a malicious trick?"

This question had been troubling Lin Wanrong as well. He couldn't find an answer at the moment and didn't dwell on it. Following the tracks left by the wagon wheels, he slowly moved forward.

Not far ahead, he spotted a row of stables filled with neatly cut dry hay, a substantial quantity at that.

Lin Wanrong picked up some hay and turned it over, curiously asking, "Brother Hu, come take a look. Isn't this fodder for feeding the horses?"

Hu Bugui had already inspected it and nodded, "Indeed, it's for feeding the war horses. These soldiers came from Hangzhou, and their horses are not used to Shandong's hay. They even requested fodder from Lord Luo."

"Oh? Is that so?" Lin Wanrong asked, surprised.

Luo Ning stood beside him, gently nodding in confirmation, "Yes, it's true. That day they wanted to camp in the city. The commander in charge reported to Father that they were short of fodder, and they needed to replenish some in Jining. Father inspected the situation on the spot and saw that their war horse fodder could only last a day, so he agreed to their request. But before the fodder could be delivered, they had already fled with the silver."

"One day?" Lin Wanrong's face broke into a knowing smile, and he playfully grabbed Luo Ning's little hand, teasing, "Ning'er, you didn't remember it wrong, did you?"

Luo Ning's face turned red, and she protested, "I was bored at the time and heard that 350,000 taels of silver were arriving. I'd never seen so much silver, so I followed Father to sneak a peek."

Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter, "Good sneaking, splendid sneaking. Ning'er, your big brother has also made quite a bit of silver. In the future, you can sneak a peek at home, and big brother will sneak a peek at you, too." Luo Ning's little face turned crimson, and she bashfully looked down, delighted.

Seeing the two openly flirting, Xu Zhiqing gently coughed a few times as a reminder to Lin Wanrong. He smiled slightly and pointed to the pile of hay in the field, "Brother Hu, take a look, how many war horses can eat this fodder?"

Hu Bugui carefully observed it and shook his head, "Based on my experience, this fodder could feed at most a thousand war horses for one day."

"That's correct." Lin Wanrong clapped his hands in joy and gave Hu Bugui a thumbs up, "Brother Hu, great eye!"

Hu Bugui looked puzzled, "General Lin, have you discovered something? I'm slow-witted, please enlighten me."

Xu Zhiqing pondered for a moment, and her face suddenly showed a hint of shock, "Lin San, are you saying that their war horses had no fodder at all?"

'This girl is really quick to react,' Lin Wanrong thought, looking at Miss Xu in surprise. Xu Zhiqing was also gazing at him, and when she saw him glance at her, she quickly snorted and looked down.

"Exactly, exactly. Miss Xu is so clever, you see through everything at once. I admire you wholeheartedly," Lin Wanrong said, laughing. "They not only lacked fodder, but even when they left that night, they didn't feed their war horses."

Hu Bugui uttered a sound of realization and exclaimed, "General Lin is right. We cavalrymen have rules for feeding our horses, cutting only as much dry hay as the war horses can eat. These five thousand horsemen clearly had a fodder shortage, yet when they left, they left piles of hay in the stables. This shows they left in a great hurry, and their war horses were not fed at all."

"Three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver can't be moved by manpower alone; they can only be dragged away by war horses. But these horses couldn't have gone far." Xu Zhiqing's eyebrows relaxed, and her face suddenly beamed with joy as she said in a delicate voice, "I understand now. It's not that they left in a hurry, but that they never intended to go far at all! These wheel marks, they were all made intentionally to attract our attention, to divert our thoughts. The silver, the silver must be hidden nearby."

"Sister Zhiqing, are you telling the truth?" Luo Ning's little mouth opened in astonishment, her face full of disbelief.

Xu Zhiqing chuckled, pointing at Lin Wanrong beside her, and said with a light glance, "Ask your family's Lin San. He loves to play mysterious games. Though he had everything planned, he intentionally acted confused to tease us."

As for Xu Zhiqing, she was indeed incredibly intelligent. Lin Wanrong had just begun speaking, and she had already guessed the situation almost perfectly. No wonder she could fight the nomads at the front lines with her nimble mind; few in the world could compare with her.



"Big brother," Luo Ning exclaimed joyfully, hugging Lin Wanrong's arm, "Is the silver really hidden nearby?"

Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile and said, "According to Miss Xu's reasoning, theoretically, it should be so."

Luo Ning stomped her foot, twisting her delicate body, and turned to run back. Lin Wanrong quickly grabbed her and asked, "Ning'er, what are you doing?"

"Big brother, I am going to call people to dig for the silver. Even if we have to dig three feet into the ground, we must find it," Luo Ning said, her lips pursed firmly.

This young girl was indeed impulsive. Lin Wanrong shook his head and smiled helplessly, "Ning'er, we are only speculating that the silver is nearby, not necessarily right under our feet."

Luo Ning was taken aback and then asked softly, "Big brother, you mean—"

Lin Wanrong walked a few steps, pondering, "This is the south gate of Jinan City. To the north is the city itself. They wouldn't be foolish enough to sneak the silver into the city. East and West are the official roads, where they lured us to track them, so those directions are naturally wrong. That leaves only the south—"

"The south?" Luo Ning looked to the south, where the vast Weishan Lake stretched out of sight, shadowy mountains veiled in the dim night, gentle waves lapping the shore, accompanied by the sound of the tide. Her brows furrowed, she whispered, "Could the silver be hidden in—"

"Yes, hidden in Weishan Lake." Xu Zhiqing took her hand, gently saying, "This place is only a few steps from Weishan Lake. With a boat, they could easily transport the silver to the lake and sink it. Unseen by both gods and ghosts. To deceive others, the mastermind intentionally split five thousand troops into two paths to attract our attention, then struck with a fatal blow, leaving no witnesses alive."

"Hu Bugui—!" Lin Wanrong suddenly shouted out.

"Here!" Hu Bugui hurriedly responded with a fist salute.

"I assign you to lead two thousand cavalymen, follow along the banks of Weishan Lake, and focus on questioning the surrounding fishermen. Find out if there have been any civilian boats requisitioned recently, or if anything unusual has appeared in the lake. Report back immediately with any news!"

"Yes, sir!" Hu Bugui turned and hurried off to make arrangements.

Lin Wanrong stood by the shores of Weishan Lake, feeling the moist breeze gently caressing his face, and he sighed slowly. He was eighty percent sure that the three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver were hidden in Weishan Lake. This lake covered several hundred square miles, several times larger than the towns around Jining. On land, that amount of silver would cover a vast area, but once sunk into the lake, it would be like searching for a needle in the ocean. Damn, he didn't know who had come up with such an ingenious plot; it was truly brilliant, layer upon layer of deception. Even if he guessed that the silver was in Weishan Lake, it was like a dog biting a hedgehog—impossible to grasp. Was he really expected to drain the lake?

Luo Ning stood behind him, not daring to say a word, afraid to interrupt his thoughts. Xu Zhiqing was indeed intelligent, but faced with this needle-in-a-haystack problem, she couldn't find a solution either. Watching his solitary figure standing there, and recalling his misdeeds along the way, she felt a sudden sense of unreality: Were these two Lin Sans really the same person?

After an unknown amount of time, a gentle and soft sensation came from behind, a warm and tender body seemed to cling to him like a flame. Lin Wanrong quickly turned to see Luo Ning had removed her armor, wearing only a thin long skirt, tightly hugging his sturdy back, her face pressed against his shoulder, her eyes filled with tenderness. She whispered, "Big brother, Ning'er loves you. Loves you enough to die for you!"

"You silly girl," Lin Wanrong quickly took off his own coat, wrapping her soft body, "It's freezing cold, why did you take off your armor? What if you catch a cold?"

"Ning'er isn't afraid; Ning'er wants to warm big brother." Luo Ning smiled softly, her face a mix of shyness and determination, holding him tightly and placing his large hand on her chest. "Big brother, feel how fast Ning'er's heart is beating!"

The feeling of warmth and smoothness spread through his fingertips, two soft protrusions tightly sandwiching his large hand, skin as delicate as milk. Luo Ning gently closed her eyes, her rosy lips slightly parted, her full chest heaving, causing his hand on her chest to bounce slightly. Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat, and his hand naturally slid across her chest, covering the soft flesh,

the two upright red beans beneath his coarse hand constantly jumping like frightened little rabbits, pressing against his palm.

"Ning'er—" He swallowed hard, his palm grinding gently against the tender red beans. Luo Ning let out a soft moan and slumped into his arms, her red lips slightly open, panting, exhaling a fragrance like orchids. "Big brother, Ning'er is yours, forever yours—"

"Cough, cough--" Seeing the two of them deeply immersed in their passionate love affair, oblivious to everything around them, Xu Zhiqing, who stood not far from them, knew that if she didn't intervene, there was no telling what might happen. Her heart was pounding in her chest, her cheeks burning like fire. She wanted to leave but found herself unable to move her feet. Hastily, she feigned a cough, hoping to remind them of her presence.

Overwhelmed by her emotions, Luo Ning had entirely forgotten that Xu Zhiqing was nearby. Awakening from her reverie, she saw Xu Zhiqing looking at her with cheeks flushed, a look of amusement in her eyes. With a cry of surprise, she quickly hid behind Lin Wanrong, her beautiful eyes wide and her face blushing as if it could drip water. She leaned against her big brother's back, not daring to look up again.

"Ah ha, the moon is so round tonight--" Lin Wanrong laughed cheerfully, pretending not to notice Xu Zhiqing's disdainful glance and shamelessly made a comment. Luo Ning, hiding behind her big brother, wanted to laugh but didn't dare to. What nonsense about the moon being round? It was only the beginning of the month!

This man was truly incorrigible. Xu Zhiqing snorted softly, then seeing Luo Ning's blush, she smiled gently and beckoned, "Níng'er, come here."

"Sister Zhiqing--" Luo Ning responded timidly, her head almost bowed to her chest. Lin Wanrong lightly teased her, chuckling, "Níng'er, why are you afraid? We are husband and wife, acting openly and honorably. This girl loves to be a third wheel, spoiling our fun."

Though Luo Ning didn't understand what being a "third wheel" meant, seeing her big brother's playful expression, she gained courage, nodding slightly, regardless of Xu Zhiqing's surprised look, and whispered shyly in his ear, "Big brother, I can't wait any longer. I want to be your wife. Do you want me?"

His response was full of joy, nodding like a pecking chicken, "Want, want! I've wanted it every day!"

Gathering all her courage, she embraced his neck, her face flushed, her voice as soft as a mosquito's, "Big brother, Níng'er will wait for you in the room! You must come!"

With that said, she didn't dare to look at Lin Wanrong again. She turned and took Xu Zhiqing's hand, her voice trembling, "Sister Zhiqing, let's go quickly!"

"What's the matter?" Xu Zhiqing asked curiously, wondering why the girl was leaving her lover so abruptly.

"Don't ask, just let's go quickly." Before Xu Zhiqing could finish speaking, she felt Luo Ning's seemingly endless strength, pulling her into a sprint, even Lin San couldn't catch up.

This situation, letting a girl take the initiative, how could Lin Wanrong be comfortable with that? He burst into laughter, then suddenly remembered something crucial, calling out loudly, "Níng'er, which room are you in? I'm afraid I won't be able to find it!"

Luo Ning, in her haste, almost tripped, stomping her foot in a mix of shyness and sweetness. Under Xu Zhiqing's puzzled gaze, she softly replied, "Next to Sister Xu's room!"

Lin Wanrong was momentarily taken aback. Next to Sister Xu's room? Then, where was Sister Xu's room? Luo Ning was indeed extraordinary, her words full of mystery.

Seeing the two women almost disappearing from sight, Lin Wanrong shouted, "Níng'er, remember, you must wash up! You must wash up!"

"What does 'wash up' mean?!" Xu Zhiqing quietly asked the girl beside her.

Luo Ning, her face warm and her heart pounding, only felt that her big brother's words had sapped her strength. She grasped Xu Zhiqing's hand and managed to say, "Wash up, wash up, oh, that must be a dialect from my big brother's home. It probably means to wash your hands."

"Wash hands? How strange!" Xu Zhiqing heard this and shook her head with a light laugh, "Then I must go back and wash up as well."

Seeing Luo Ning and Xu Zhiqing sprinting away, their figures swaying with a captivating grace, Lin Wanrong felt a restless itch in his heart. He chuckled lewdly a few times, then took large strides, heading straight for the government office.

## Chapter 380 Must Be Washed Clean

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Lin Wanrong glanced and saw the ground full of chaotic wheel tracks, winding and twisting, concentrated most heavily where the four of them were standing. Hu Bugui bowed his fist and said, "According to my observation just now, the wheel marks here are dense. The official silver must have been stored here the night before last. From the marks left by the wheels, although they are disordered, the tracks going in the east-west direction are very distinct."

"So according to General Hu, the vehicles carrying the silver should have gone in the east-west direction?" Xu Zhiqing said softly, her brows slightly furrowed, seemingly deep in thought.

Hu Bugui nodded, squatting down, and pressed the yellow earth ground down with his finger, musing, "If it were an empty cart, the wheels would not sink into the mud so deeply. From the

rolled-out tracks, the carriages going in both east and west directions were definitely not empty but were laden with heavy weight. As for whether the silver was on them, I cannot guarantee."

Hu Bugui's detailed observation had some merit. From the remaining marks, the carriages were indeed loaded with goods, going in two directions: east and west. But with 5,000 soldiers transporting 350,000 taels of official silver, already a tight situation, why would they split into two routes in a fearful state after secretly stealing the silver? Was it merely to confuse the court whether they were going east or west?

Lin Wanrong and Xu Zhiqing exchanged a glance, both reading doubt in each other's eyes. The matter was suspicious, with many incomprehensible aspects, but they couldn't pinpoint where the problem lay.

"Lin, Lin San," Xu Zhiqing began, her face blushing slightly, probably recalling his unique tonic, "Do you think that the 5,000 soldiers who robbed the silver were all poisoned? Is it true or false?"

"It's probably not false. The area around Jining has been sealed off, with strict searches and no sign of these 5,000 people. They did not ascend to heaven, so they must have gone underground," Lin Wanrong sighed, thinking of the Dongyin Samurai Sasaki's words, feeling an unpleasant stir in his heart.

"That's strange indeed," Xu Zhiqing's elegant brows furrowed lightly, and her jade-like cheeks were filled with an expression of puzzlement. "Since these five thousand men have betrayed the court and are escorting the official silver, why would the person behind the scenes resort to such a malicious trick?"

This question had been troubling Lin Wanrong as well. He couldn't find an answer at the moment and didn't dwell on it. Following the tracks left by the wagon wheels, he slowly moved forward. Not far ahead, he spotted a row of stables filled with neatly cut dry hay, a substantial quantity at that.

Lin Wanrong picked up some hay and turned it over, curiously asking, "Brother Hu, come take a look. Isn't this fodder for feeding the horses?"

Hu Bugui had already inspected it and nodded, "Indeed, it's for feeding the war horses. These soldiers came from Hangzhou, and their horses are not used to Shandong's hay. They even requested fodder from Lord Luo."

"Oh? Is that so?" Lin Wanrong asked, surprised.

Luo Ning stood beside him, gently nodding in confirmation, "Yes, it's true. That day they wanted to camp in the city. The commander in charge reported to Father that they were short of fodder, and they needed to replenish some in Jining. Father inspected the situation on the spot and saw that their war horse fodder could only last a day, so he agreed to their request. But before the fodder could be delivered, they had already fled with the silver."

"One day?" Lin Wanrong's face broke into a knowing smile, and he playfully grabbed Luo Ning's little hand, teasing, "Ning'er, you didn't remember it wrong, did you?"

Luo Ning's face turned red, and she protested, "I was bored at the time and heard that 350,000 taels of silver were arriving. I'd never seen so much silver, so I followed Father to sneak a peek."

Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter, "Good sneaking, splendid sneaking. Ning'er, your big brother has also made quite a bit of silver. In the future, you can sneak a peek at home, and big brother will sneak a peek at you, too." Luo Ning's little face turned crimson, and she bashfully looked down, delighted.

Seeing the two openly flirting, Xu Zhiqing gently coughed a few times as a reminder to Lin Wanrong. He smiled slightly and pointed to the pile of hay in the field, "Brother Hu, take a look, how many war horses can eat this fodder?"

Hu Bugui carefully observed it and shook his head, "Based on my experience, this fodder could feed at most a thousand war horses for one day."

"That's correct." Lin Wanrong clapped his hands in joy and gave Hu Bugui a thumbs up, "Brother Hu, great eye!"

Hu Bugui looked puzzled, "General Lin, have you discovered something? I'm slow-witted, please enlighten me."

Xu Zhiqing pondered for a moment, and her face suddenly showed a hint of shock, "Lin San, are you saying that their war horses had no fodder at all?"

'This girl is really quick to react,' Lin Wanrong thought, looking at Miss Xu in surprise. Xu Zhiqing was also gazing at him, and when she saw him glance at her, she quickly snorted and looked down.

"Exactly, exactly. Miss Xu is so clever, you see through everything at once. I admire you wholeheartedly," Lin Wanrong said, laughing. "They not only lacked fodder, but even when they left that night, they didn't feed their war horses."

Hu Bugui uttered a sound of realization and exclaimed, "General Lin is right. We cavalymen have rules for feeding our horses, cutting only as much dry hay as the war horses can eat. These five thousand horsemen clearly had a fodder shortage, yet when they left, they left piles of hay in the stables. This shows they left in a great hurry, and their war horses were not fed at all."

"Three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver can't be moved by manpower alone; they can only be dragged away by war horses. But these horses couldn't have gone far." Xu Zhiqing's eyebrows relaxed, and her face suddenly beamed with joy as she said in a delicate voice, "I understand now. It's not that they left in a hurry, but that they never intended to go far at all! These wheel marks, they were all made intentionally to attract our attention, to divert our thoughts. The silver, the silver must be hidden nearby."

"Sister Zhiqing, are you telling the truth?" Luo Ning's little mouth opened in astonishment, her face full of disbelief.

Xu Zhiqing chuckled, pointing at Lin Wanrong beside her, and said with a light glance, "Ask your family's Lin San. He loves to play mysterious games. Though he had everything planned, he intentionally acted confused to tease us."

As for Xu Zhiqing, she was indeed incredibly intelligent. Lin Wanrong had just begun speaking, and she had already guessed the situation almost perfectly. No wonder she could fight the nomads at the front lines with her nimble mind; few in the world could compare with her.

"Big brother," Luo Ning exclaimed joyfully, hugging Lin Wanrong's arm, "Is the silver really hidden nearby?"

Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile and said, "According to Miss Xu's reasoning, theoretically, it should be so."

Luo Ning stomped her foot, twisting her delicate body, and turned to run back. Lin Wanrong quickly grabbed her and asked, "Ning'er, what are you doing?"

"Big brother, I am going to call people to dig for the silver. Even if we have to dig three feet into the ground, we must find it," Luo Ning said, her lips pursed firmly.



This young girl was indeed impulsive. Lin Wanrong shook his head and smiled helplessly, "Ning'er, we are only speculating that the silver is nearby, not necessarily right under our feet."

Luo Ning was taken aback and then asked softly, "Big brother, you mean—"

Lin Wanrong walked a few steps, pondering, "This is the south gate of Jinan City. To the north is the city itself. They wouldn't be foolish enough to sneak the silver into the city. East and West are the official roads, where they lured us to track them, so those directions are naturally wrong. That leaves only the south—"

"The south?" Luo Ning looked to the south, where the vast Weishan Lake stretched out of sight, shadowy mountains veiled in the dim night, gentle waves lapping the shore, accompanied by the sound of the tide. Her brows furrowed, she whispered, "Could the silver be hidden in—"

"Yes, hidden in Weishan Lake." Xu Zhiqing took her hand, gently saying, "This place is only a few steps from Weishan Lake. With a boat, they could easily transport the silver to the lake and sink it. Unseen by both gods and ghosts. To deceive others, the mastermind intentionally split five thousand troops into two paths to attract our attention, then struck with a fatal blow, leaving no witnesses alive."

"Hu Bugui—!" Lin Wanrong suddenly shouted out.

"Here!" Hu Bugui hurriedly responded with a fist salute.

"I assign you to lead two thousand cavalymen, follow along the banks of Weishan Lake, and focus on questioning the surrounding fishermen. Find out if there have been any civilian boats requisitioned recently, or if anything unusual has appeared in the lake. Report back immediately with any news!"

"Yes, sir!" Hu Bugui turned and hurried off to make arrangements.

Lin Wanrong stood by the shores of Weishan Lake, feeling the moist breeze gently caressing his face, and he sighed slowly. He was eighty percent sure that the three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver were hidden in Weishan Lake. This lake covered several hundred square miles, several times larger than the towns around Jining. On land, that amount of silver would cover a vast area, but once sunk into the lake, it would be like searching for a needle in the ocean. Damn, he

didn't know who had come up with such an ingenious plot; it was truly brilliant, layer upon layer of deception. Even if he guessed that the silver was in Weishan Lake, it was like a dog biting a hedgehog—impossible to grasp. Was he really expected to drain the lake?

Luo Ning stood behind him, not daring to say a word, afraid to interrupt his thoughts. Xu Zhiqing was indeed intelligent, but faced with this needle-in-a-haystack problem, she couldn't find a solution either. Watching his solitary figure standing there, and recalling his misdeeds along the way, she felt a sudden sense of unreality: Were these two Lin Sans really the same person?

After an unknown amount of time, a gentle and soft sensation came from behind, a warm and tender body seemed to cling to him like a flame. Lin Wanrong quickly turned to see Luo Ning had removed her armor, wearing only a thin long skirt, tightly hugging his sturdy back, her face pressed against his shoulder, her eyes filled with tenderness. She whispered, "Big brother, Ning'er loves you. Loves you enough to die for you!"

"You silly girl," Lin Wanrong quickly took off his own coat, wrapping her soft body, "It's freezing cold, why did you take off your armor? What if you catch a cold?"

"Ning'er isn't afraid; Ning'er wants to warm big brother." Luo Ning smiled softly, her face a mix of shyness and determination, holding him tightly and placing his large hand on her chest. "Big brother, feel how fast Ning'er's heart is beating!"

The feeling of warmth and smoothness spread through his fingertips, two soft protrusions tightly sandwiching his large hand, skin as delicate as milk. Luo Ning gently closed her eyes, her rosy lips slightly parted, her full chest heaving, causing his hand on her chest to bounce slightly. Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat, and his hand naturally slid across her chest, covering the soft flesh, the two upright red beans beneath his coarse hand constantly jumping like frightened little rabbits, pressing against his palm.

"Ning'er—" He swallowed hard, his palm grinding gently against the tender red beans. Luo Ning let out a soft moan and slumped into his arms, her red lips slightly open, panting, exhaling a fragrance like orchids. "Big brother, Ning'er is yours, forever yours—"

"Cough, cough--" Seeing the two of them deeply immersed in their passionate love affair, oblivious to everything around them, Xu Zhiqing, who stood not far from them, knew that if she didn't intervene, there was no telling what might happen. Her heart was pounding in her chest, her cheeks burning like fire. She wanted to leave but found herself unable to move her feet. Hastily, she feigned a cough, hoping to remind them of her presence.

Overwhelmed by her emotions, Luo Ning had entirely forgotten that Xu Zhiqing was nearby. Awakening from her reverie, she saw Xu Zhiqing looking at her with cheeks flushed, a look of amusement in her eyes. With a cry of surprise, she quickly hid behind Lin Wanrong, her beautiful eyes wide and her face blushing as if it could drip water. She leaned against her big brother's back, not daring to look up again.

"Ah ha, the moon is so round tonight--" Lin Wanrong laughed cheerfully, pretending not to notice Xu Zhiqing's disdainful glance and shamelessly made a comment. Luo Ning, hiding behind her big brother, wanted to laugh but didn't dare to. What nonsense about the moon being round? It was only the beginning of the month!

This man was truly incorrigible. Xu Zhiqing snorted softly, then seeing Luo Ning's blush, she smiled gently and beckoned, "Níng'er, come here."

"Sister Zhiqing--" Luo Ning responded timidly, her head almost bowed to her chest. Lin Wanrong lightly teased her, chuckling, "Níng'er, why are you afraid? We are husband and wife, acting openly and honorably. This girl loves to be a third wheel, spoiling our fun."

Though Luo Ning didn't understand what being a "third wheel" meant, seeing her big brother's playful expression, she gained courage, nodding slightly, regardless of Xu Zhiqing's surprised look, and whispered shyly in his ear, "Big brother, I can't wait any longer. I want to be your wife. Do you want me?"

His response was full of joy, nodding like a pecking chicken, "Want, want! I've wanted it every day!"

Gathering all her courage, she embraced his neck, her face flushed, her voice as soft as a mosquito's, "Big brother, Níng'er will wait for you in the room! You must come!"

With that said, she didn't dare to look at Lin Wanrong again. She turned and took Xu Zhiqing's hand, her voice trembling, "Sister Zhiqing, let's go quickly!"

"What's the matter?" Xu Zhiqing asked curiously, wondering why the girl was leaving her lover so abruptly.

"Don't ask, just let's go quickly." Before Xu Zhiqing could finish speaking, she felt Luo Ning's seemingly endless strength, pulling her into a sprint, even Lin San couldn't catch up.

This situation, letting a girl take the initiative, how could Lin Wanrong be comfortable with that? He burst into laughter, then suddenly remembered something crucial, calling out loudly, "Níng'er, which room are you in? I'm afraid I won't be able to find it!"

Luo Ning, in her haste, almost tripped, stomping her foot in a mix of shyness and sweetness. Under Xu Zhiqing's puzzled gaze, she softly replied, "Next to Sister Xu's room!"

Lin Wanrong was momentarily taken aback. Next to Sister Xu's room? Then, where was Sister Xu's room? Luo Ning was indeed extraordinary, her words full of mystery.

Seeing the two women almost disappearing from sight, Lin Wanrong shouted, "Níng'er, remember, you must wash up! You must wash up!"

"What does 'wash up' mean?!" Xu Zhiqing quietly asked the girl beside her.

Luo Ning, her face warm and her heart pounding, only felt that her big brother's words had sapped her strength. She grasped Xu Zhiqing's hand and managed to say, "Wash up, wash up, oh, that must be a dialect from my big brother's home. It probably means to wash your hands."

"Wash hands? How strange!" Xu Zhiqing heard this and shook her head with a light laugh, "Then I must go back and wash up as well."

Seeing Luo Ning and Xu Zhiqing sprinting away, their figures swaying with a captivating grace, Lin Wanrong felt a restless itch in his heart. He chuckled lewdly a few times, then took large strides, heading straight for the government office.