

## Finest 486

### Chapter 486 The Campaign against the Villain Lin San

The royal mansion of Prince Cheng had been raided, and both the Prince and his heir fled under the cover of night! This explosive news spread like wildfire. Within just an hour, the entire capital was abuzz with the news, and with inconceivable speed, the information flew to all corners of the Great Hua Empire.

The commoners living near the royal mansion, though terrified last night, had sufficient fodder this morning to vividly describe the raid—allegedly, the court had dispatched tens of thousands of soldiers, setting fires and launching a fierce assault that eventually captured the royal mansion. However, upon entry, they found the place empty; Prince Cheng and his young heir had vanished into thin air. The man sent to capture the Prince was none other than Lin San, a figure of great prominence these days. Rumor had it that Lin San had recently survived an assassination attempt and had returned from the brink of death specifically to seek vengeance on the Prince. When he entered the estate, he was accompanied by the black and white death gods—

The storyteller recounted these details as if he had seen it all with his own eyes, describing how the city's defense forces set fires, how the royal mansion resisted, how both sides clashed fiercely, and how many were killed or injured. It was so detailed that one couldn't help but believe it.

As the news spread farther and became increasingly fantastical, even the clothing of Lin San and the hats worn by the two death gods were meticulously described. It was rumored that Prince Cheng, during the government forces' invasion of his mansion, soared away on a crane, heading southwest. Word had it he was raising an army there and would soon be marching north. Northern nomads were also reportedly rallying more than 200,000 troops, storming the border with an unstoppable force that was advancing toward the heart of Great Hua. With threats from both the north and the south, the fall of the capital and the demise of Great Hua seemed imminent!

Various rumors took flight like winged creatures, spreading throughout every street and alleyway in just a few hours. People in the city were panicking; many timid folks had already packed their essentials, prepared to evacuate the city at a moment's notice.

When the news reached his estate, Lin San had just finished lunch and was sunbathing in the garden, accompanied by Qiaoqiao. The warm spring sun made him drowsy. Having been "tormented" by Ning'er in the morning, Lin San sat in his wheelchair, humming a tune, yawning, and feeling quite content.

"Big Brother, are you sleepy?" Qiaoqiao snipped the last thread in her hand and laid the newly sewn clothes on his chest, scrutinizing him from head to toe.

"With my darling Qiaoqiao by my side, how could I be sleepy? Darling, do you want a son? This morning, I had a passionate discussion about this with your sister Ning'er. She joyfully agreed, eyes brimming with tears—if you want, sneak into my room tonight," Lin San said, his voice dripping with sweetness.

Qiaoqiao chuckled, her cheeks flushing red, "Big Brother, stop being naughty. Sister Ning'er has already informed all the sisters about your shenanigans this morning. She said anyone who lets herself be lured into your room would be harming you and destabilizing our Lin family's unity. She would be denounced by all the sisters!"

'Could it really be that serious?' Lin Wanrong chuckled awkwardly. "The message from Qingxuan must be meant for you and Ning'er. Yushuang and the others might not be aware of it! It seems there are some loopholes—so, Qiaoqiao, tell Yushuang to wait for me in my room. I'll personally convey Qingxuan's wishes to her. I'll need at least an hour to make sure she fully understands and learns the lesson."

Qiaoqiao giggled in response. "Big Brother, you're a little late with that idea. Not to mention the Eldest Miss and Second Miss, even Sister Xian'er and the Madam are aware. Sister herself wrote a note explaining the whole matter, warning them not to indulge your temperament."

'The Madam knows too?!' Lin Wanrong felt an urge to vomit blood. Wasn't it just some harmless flirting with Ning'er? Why was he being treated like a lascivious wolf, damaging the respectable image he'd worked so hard to build?

His face flushed unusually red. "Ah, the Madam knows? What did Qingxuan say actually? Why would she go around talking about it?"

Qiaoqiao draped a piece of clothing over his shoulders and gently massaged his arms. "Big Brother, where is your mind wandering off to? Do you think Sister is so indiscreet? She was worried Madam would feel guilty if your injuries worsened, so she took the time to explain it to her. She even took all the responsibility upon herself. You should realize how tough it is for Sister, having to manage the emotions of so many sisters. You need to treat her well and not make her angry anymore."

Truly, Qingxuan possessed the demeanor of a mature wife. Lin Wanrong was touched beyond words and felt some regret for his impulsive behavior.

"Brother San. Brother San," Si De rushed into the yard, panting. "Quick, quick, something, something big—"

"What big thing?" Lin Wanrong twisted his torso, stretched a bit, and laughed. "You've been with me for some time; how come you haven't learned my composure? Stand straight, legs together, deep breath, exhale—now, what's the matter?"

"Brother-Brother San, something terrible has happened. We, we are surrounded!" Si De stammered, finally getting the words out.

"What?!" Lin Wanrong, who had just been lecturing Si De about keeping calm, almost fell off his wheelchair in shock. Thankfully, Qiaoqiao acted quickly to steady him.

"What do you mean, 'surrounded'? Where are we surrounded? Speak clearly!" Lin Wanrong said urgently, taking a few deep breaths.

Si De wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. His face was pale. "Brother San, it's our residence, your mansion—it's been surrounded!"

"My mansion? You mean here?" Lin Wanrong was taken aback. "You're saying we're surrounded here?"

Seeing Si De nod, Lin Wanrong laughed. "My home surrounded? Don't joke with me. Do you not know who the Brother San is? I'm usually the one doing the surrounding. No one dares to surround me! You must be seeing things."

"Brother San, I dare not deceive you. Our mansion is surrounded three layers deep, inside and out. Listen—"

"Overthrow the tyrant Lin San—"

"Capture the criminal Lin San—"

The din of voices from outside the courtyard walls was deafening. The sharp slogans penetrated Lin Wanrong's eardrums. He could even faintly hear the thumping of battering rams against doors. It was unsettling. R

"No way! We're actually surrounded? And this isn't a small-scale operation!" Lin Wanrong's face changed drastically. He grabbed Si De urgently, "Why didn't you say so earlier? Whose troops are they? How many have come? Who's leading them?"

"I don't know," Si De's face paled as the noise from outside escalated. "I was sent by the Madam to fetch medicine for you, Brother San. When I returned, I saw crowds forming around our mansion. Within a short time, thousands had gathered, surrounding us completely. The walls around us are plastered with various banners. Look, I've brought some back for you."

Si De pulled crumpled sheets of paper from his robe and handed them to Lin Wanrong. He unfolded the sheets hurriedly, finding them in various colors—yellow, green, purple—and full of slogans like a wall of posters:

"Overthrow the tyrant Lin San—Overthrow the charlatan Lin San—"

"Punish Lin San, Restore the Dignity of Scholars—"

"An Open Letter to All Scholars—A Call to Arms Against the Evil Lin San—"

The posters listed a multitude of his so-called crimes: running unscrupulous tabloids, humiliating respected families, oppressing the commoners, defrauding bars beside Xuanwu Lake, consorting with the nefarious Hung Hing Society, breaking laws, manipulating innocent girls, taking Madam Xiao as his concubine through coercion, harboring malice against the esteemed scholar Mei Yanqiu, and many more. The announcements were grandiloquent and inflammatory, attracting attention particularly to allegations made by the two Miss Xiaos, the sorrowful tale of the number one talented woman of Jinling, and the agony of Miss Dong.

Lin Wanrong was sweating profusely as he read, "What is all this? Even if I were executed ten times for these so-called crimes, it wouldn't be enough. Am I really that bad?"

Qiaoqiao flushed with anger as she read, "What nonsense about the agony of Miss Dong and the sorrowful tale of the number one talented woman of Jinling? Don't listen to them, Big Brother!"

"I really want to ignore this too!" Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile. "This can't have been written by the government soldiers. If they wanted to arrest me, why would they waste so much time talking? Si De, have you seen clearly who those people outside are?"

Si De hummed in acknowledgment, carefully recalling the events. Suddenly, as if he understood something, he said, "Brother San, I remember now. These people are all wearing robes, hats, holding fans, and walking with a certain grace. They are refined and don't use any vulgar language, even more cultured than you—"

"Dammit, more cultured than me?" Lin Wanrong smacked Si De on the forehead angrily. "Just say they're scholars! It's your fault for not reading books—"

"Yes, yes, you're right. They must be scholars. Brother San, you are really clever. We're surrounded by thousands of scholars," Si De quickly flattered him.

Hearing that scholars were involved, Lin Wanrong sighed in relief. As long as there were no weapons involved, everything could be dealt with. 'The world has truly changed. My Lin family estate is actually surrounded by a bunch of scholars. I might as well kill myself by running into a block of tofu.'

"Big Brother, why would scholars surround our estate? Don't they know that two Princesses are residing here? Aren't they afraid the Emperor will have them beheaded? These people are really daring," Qiaoqiao asked, bewildered.

Listening to the ever-increasing shouts from outside the wall, Lin Wanrong shook his head wryly. "That's a question I'd like to know the answer to as well. The old saying goes, 'When scholars revolt, it takes them ten years to accomplish anything.' Why is it that when they come to me, that rule doesn't seem to apply? Qiaoqiao, let's go outside and take a look."

Qiaoqiao acknowledged and hurriedly pushed him towards the front courtyard. They passed through the alley, descended the stairs, and saw that the main door of the Lin residence was tightly sealed with two wooden pillars. Qin Xian'er stood with her hands on her hips, directing servants to place stones at the base of the door. From outside came loud banging sounds, along with several voices shouting, "Overthrow the tyrant Lin San! Restore the innocence of scholars—"

"Eliminate Lin San, rescue Miss Xiao's family—"

Upon hearing this, Si De snorted, "That person certainly has a loud voice. He must eat a lot of white rice daily. Brother San, mark my words, he must have been hired to shout these slogans."

"Why so?" asked Qiaoqiao.

"Madam Qiaoqiao, think about it. Those scholarly young masters spend their entire days buried in their books. They can't even eat a few steamed buns and are as weak as chickens—have you ever seen a young master with such a loud voice?" Si De reasoned.

Qiaoqiao nodded. Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "Not bad, at least you have some insights."

"It's all thanks to Brother San's guidance!" Si De quickly brown-nosed.

"My husband, what brings you here?" Qin Xian'er skipped over and laughingly grasped his hand. Miss Xiao also walked to his side, giving him a gentle smile.

"I came to see how you and Qingxuan are working together against the enemy—Xian'er, you looked so heroic just now!" Lin Wanrong praised.

"Who's working with her—" Qin Xian'er's face flushed, but then she looked pleased. "Really? Was I that heroic? My husband, do you like me like that?"

"I like it! You look quite unique, especially when you and your sister stand together!" Lin Wanrong responded with a smile.

"I don't consider her my sister!" Qin Xian'er's brows furrowed slightly, her words carrying a hint of insincerity.

'This is promising!' Lin Wanrong was overjoyed. Miss Xiao felt relieved in her heart, shooting her husband a grateful look before softly saying, "My dear, let my sister and I handle this. You should go rest."

"Handle it? How will you handle it?" Captivated by Xiao Qingxuan's radiant glow, as if she were some saintly goddess, Lin Wanrong took her hand and caressed it gently.

"Kill them. Leave no one alive!" Qin Xian'er interrupted, her pretty face filled with murderous intent. She raised the short sword in her hand, glinting menacingly.

## Chapter 487 The Allure of Uniform

Xiao Qingxuan was taken aback, urging, "Sister, this is out of the question. The men outside are mostly scholars with no real strength, numbering in the thousands. They're just misled individuals who joined the siege. How can we possibly kill them all? Wouldn't that make My Dear unjust and subject to public scorn?"

Qin Xian'er's eyebrows slightly raised as she retorted, "Scholars with no real strength? Such nonsense is only believable to you. They brazenly attacked the Lin residence and insulted my husband. Where is the demeanor of a scholar in that? Even the bandits in the mountains are better than them. If we don't make an example out of a couple of them, people will think our Lin family is weak and easily bullied. Husband, wait here. I'll go with Gao Qiu to capture some of them. I intend to personally cut down a couple to set an example."

Qin Xian'er had always been a fearless woman within the White Lotus Sect, treating killing as if she were merely chopping vegetables. After being with Lin Wanrong, however, her temperament had softened considerably, and she had committed far fewer violent acts. But her fiery and straightforward personality was not so easily changed. Now that people were oppressing her husband, how could she bear it? After speaking, she turned to leave in search of Gao Qiu.

"Sister, this matter can't be rushed. Let's discuss it properly—" Xiao Qingxuan hurriedly grabbed her sleeve and shot a desperate glance at Lin Wanrong.

Xian'er might be rash, but her words were not without reason. 'These people dare to cause trouble, so why shouldn't I dare to kill? This sort of situation calls for making an example to deter others. Capture two, deal with them, and the rest will naturally behave,' Lin Wanrong mused, largely agreeing with Xian'er's view. However, given Qingxuan's temperament and background, he knew she'd prefer to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

"My Dear, say something quickly!" Seeing that Lin Wanrong was appearing rather nonchalant and not acting urgently, and realizing she might not be able to restrain Xian'er much longer, Miss Xiao became irritated.

Qingxuan, visibly pregnant and increasingly anxious, caught Lin Wanrong's attention. Hurriedly, he spoke up, "Well, actually, there's some truth to what Xian'er is saying."

"Husband, you're wonderful!" Delighted that Lin Wanrong agreed with her in front of Xiao Qingxuan, Miss Qin broke into a joyful smile. She cast a glance at Xiao Qingxuan's abdomen and lightly huffed, "Let go of me. I don't fight with pregnant women."

Qiaoqiao couldn't help but chuckle at the scene. Embarrassed, Qin Xian'er lowered her head.

"You still find this funny?" Seeing her husband snickering off to the side, Xiao Qingxuan rolled her eyes at him, reproaching, "The scholars outside have been manipulated by malicious rumors to attack our home. They're not inherently bad people—"

"Not inherently bad? Ha!" Lin Wanrong wrapped his arms around Miss Xiao's waist and shook his head, sighing, "Qingxuan, you're too kind-hearted, almost to the point of indulgence. There's no smoke without fire, as they say. Even the Buddha in the temple speaks of cause and effect. I won't deny that they've been misled, but they're all adults capable of judgment. Everyone must take responsibility for their actions; one can't just excuse them as being manipulated. They came and destroyed my home, and they must face the consequences. There's no arguing about that."

Miss Xiao fell silent at his words, pondering their meaning and finding they weren't without reason. It's the simplest of truths: every individual is their own person and must take responsibility for their actions.

"Husband, you are correct," said Qin Xian'er, gazing at him with eyes full of admiration. "When I was young, my master taught me that human nature is fundamentally evil. So-called 'good people' are simply those who commit fewer bad deeds. Once provoked by external factors, they reveal their true selves. Look at those scholars outside. Seemingly refined, but one nudge and their evil side are exposed. Killing them would be an act of justice. Husband, you truly are exceptional. No wonder my master likes you—"

"Ah, Xian'er. Don't speak nonsense. My relationship with Sister An is completely platonic," Lord Lin interrupted hurriedly, casting a surreptitious glance at Miss Xiao. Seeing her expression remain unchanged, he relaxed slightly. He hadn't expected Sister An to have taught Xian'er such profound theories. Shaking his head in admiration, he was deeply impressed.

Looking at her husband's impassioned countenance, Miss Xiao felt a sense of nostalgia for when they first met in Jinling. She softly smiled, "You always have a way with words, and I can't argue against that. But if you plan to kill, wouldn't you be falling into the enemy's trap? We need to think this through."

"Of course we must consider carefully," said Lord Lin. "Do you think I would be foolish enough to kill openly? Wait, let me go outside and have a look first—"

"No!" Qin Xian'er and Xiao Qingxuan exclaimed in unison.

"—My Dear, the villains outside are waiting for you to come out. How can you risk yourself? Don't worry; my father has already sent help. If they don't repent, why not kill a few as my sister suggests?" Seeing her husband intending to go out, Miss Xiao also grew anxious, her face turning stern, aligning her with the equally fierce Qin Xian'er. The two of them did indeed appear like true sisters.

Lord Lin grinned, "Wife, don't you trust me? Just stay here and wait; I will handle it. Si De, fetch my battle robe—"

"Battle robe?!" Si De paused, then realized what he meant and dashed off. In a short while, he returned with a set of garments, including the heaven-silk armor gifted by the Emperor and a neatly folded green shirt and cap.

Lord Lin nodded in satisfaction, "You do know how to get things done, young man. I haven't worn this battle robe for quite some time. Ah, it's so clean—"

After Si De helped him put on the green shirt and cap, he placed a bronze mirror before him. Lord Lin scrutinized his reflection carefully, a young man in a green cloth robe and tilted cap. Quite a dashing figure indeed.

After a long moment, he sighed, pointing at his reflection, "As the saying goes, 'Clothes make the man, and the saddle makes the horse.' If you want to look good, look at Lin San here—What can I say, young man? Why are you so handsome? Is there no justice left in the world?!"

The young ladies chuckled softly, their inner turmoil dissipating noticeably. Miss Xiao looked at him with tender eyes filled with a myriad of emotions.

Qiaoqiao smoothed out the wrinkles in his clothes, sizing him up and down before giving a playful nod and laugh. "Big Brother, for some reason, you look the best in these clothes—"

"Exactly, exactly. Brother San, it seems this outfit was made just for you," Si De interjected with flattery, a fawning smile on his face.

Without hesitation, Brother San lifted his relatively unscathed leg and gave Si De a kick on his rear. "Nonsense! Do you think I'm meant to serve people all my life?"

Miss Xiao grinned, chiding him, "You're about to become a father; watch your language. Actually, I agree with Qiaoqiao. You look better in these clothes than any others. Otherwise, why would both of the beautiful young ladies of the Xiao family be so smitten with you?"

While Miss Xiao's words were playful, they weren't without reason. Given his temperament, even wearing imperial robes wouldn't make him look like an Emperor. This outfit of simple clothes and hat suited him best. As the old saying goes, character determines destiny.

Hearing his wives praise his style, Master Lin glanced around mysteriously and whispered, "Since everyone likes this outfit, I'll wear it. Actually, do you know why I look good in these clothes? There's a very serious science to it—a very serious one!"

"What science?" Seeing his smug expression, Miss Qin asked in amusement.

Master Lin puffed out his chest and chuckled lecherously, "If I tell you, it will shock you. It's called—the allure of a uniform! Eldest Miss and Second Miss will surely be over the moon!"

"What allure of a uniform?!" The ladies spat out in unison, their faces turning red. They understood their husband's lascivious nature all too well.

"Lin San, come out—Save Miss Xiao—"

"Down with the tyrant Lin San—"

"When a country is about to fall, Lin San will surely arise—"

People were standing at the front door. The shouting and cursing from outside came wave after wave, each cry hitting their ears. At this moment, it seemed to reach a climax, as shouts came from all directions, threatening to burst their eardrums. Qin Xian'er frowned slightly; if not for being firmly held by Miss Xiao, she would have probably rushed out to kill.

Master Lin, engrossed in his own world, paid no mind to the shouts outside, which paradoxically seemed to cheer him on. After getting dressed in his 'uniform,' he proudly moved around the garden. He then called for Xian'er to also change into men's clothing and, accompanied by Si De, they sneaked towards the back door of the Lin residence.

Upon reaching the back door, Xian'er pushed his wheelchair up to it, ready to unlock it. Just then, a voice of surprise came from the garden next to them. "Lin San, is that you?"

"It's me, it's me!" Lin Wanrong quickly turned his head to look towards the garden. Eldest Miss stood there in a light pink dress, holding several vibrant roses. Her lovely face was as red as the petals. Xiao Yuruo was looking at him, her face a mixture of surprise and delight, an expression of indescribable joy.

"What on Earth are you wearing?!" The Eldest Miss walked up to him, her voice tinged with a gentle curiosity. Yet her eyes betrayed a delight she couldn't quite hide.

Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Just felt like dressing this way. Do you like it, Eldest Miss?"

Xiao Yuruo stealthily glanced at Qin Xian'er standing nearby. A delicate blush seemed to touch her cheeks. She softly nodded, her voice trembling with coyness. "It's been a while since I've seen you dressed like this. You looked just like this the first time I met you."

He looked like this the first time she met him? Elated, Lin Wanrong thought to himself: 'Ah, the allure of a uniform! She must love it.' His spirits rising, and forgetting the jealous Qin Xian'er beside him, he took Xiao Yuruo's hand, gently caressing it. "Since you find this uniform so memorable," he smirked mysteriously, "I'll make sure to wear it often, especially when there's serious business to attend to—Ah, what brings you here?" Catching Qin Xian'er's fiery glare, he hastily swallowed the rest of his words, giving Xiao Yuruo's palm a soft squeeze.

Naughty fellow! Xiao Yuruo felt her body warm with a mix of embarrassment and joy. Fearing that Qin Xian'er might notice, she lowered her head and spoke softly. "Fubo brought some flowering branches from Jinling. Mother wants me to plant them here, to make this place resemble our home in Jinling. I thought you might like it too."

"Ouch—ah, I mean, yes, I like it, I like it!" Lin Wanrong grimaced as Qin Xian'er pinched his waist. "Eldest Miss, there's been some disturbance outside today. You, Yushuand, and Madam should stay inside and rest. Do not go out. I'll be wearing this battle robe and attending to some official matters."

Rolling her eyes playfully, Xiao Yuruo retorted, "I'm not a fool, you know. You don't need to tell me that when you wear that uniform, you're hardly up to any good."

'Ah, she knows me well!' Delighted, Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. Xiao Yuruo lightly scratched the palm of his hand, sending a warm, tingling sensation through him. They exchanged knowing smiles, a moment when silence spoke louder than words.

"Brother San, what should we do? Should I open the door now?" Si De stood behind the door, gripping the latch, his legs trembling as the noise outside grew increasingly chaotic.

"No!" Lin Wanrong gestured dismissively, winked at Qin Xian'er, and nodded at Si De. Qin Xian'er picked up a small stone and threw it over the wall. Si De yelled, "Look, Lin San has come out—"

"Attack, Lin San is out, kill Lin San!" Before the shout could even subside, a cacophony of yells erupted from outside. Countless bricks, stones, and old shoes hurtled through the air like shooting stars, slamming against the wall and gate. The impact was so great that the walls seemed to hum with the vibration. The commotion outside was so intense it felt as though the ceiling would collapse.

Good heavens! Lin Wanrong wiped the sweat from his forehead. These aren't scholars, they're practically bandits. Qin Xian'er was about to reach for her command arrow, the sound of which would summon city defenses and palace guards, and result in many lost lives.

"Hold on, now's not the time," Lin Wanrong grasped her hand, his smile dark and chilling. "We'll sneak out, no need for shooting yet. Whoever tries to surprise me will get an even bigger surprise in return."

## Chapter 488 Coercion

"Brother San," Si De looked at him with an expression of unparalleled reverence, "your words are too profound for me to understand."

"If you don't understand, then don't listen," Lord Lin said with a smile, patting him on the head. "You just focus on leading the way for me, and your rewards will not be lacking. Take this—" With that, he casually handed Si De a chopping axe. The blade was sharp, shimmering with a dark glow. Lord Lin then commanded solemnly, "Now, on my order—open the door."

Open the door?! Si De felt like his soul was about to flee. The scholars outside were out for blood; wasn't opening the door akin to seeking his own death?

"Brother San, could we perhaps wait a bit?" Si De spoke cautiously, "The situation outside is perilous—"

"Time waits for no one," Brother San said, slapping him reassuringly on the shoulder. "As the old saying goes: the soft fear the hard, the hard fear the reckless, and the reckless fear the fearless. Don't worry, brother, with me here, what could go wrong? When have I ever let down my own brothers?"

Hearing Brother San say he wouldn't be let down, Si De felt a touch of comfort in his apprehensive heart. He knew that Brother San's promises were never empty.

"Fine," Si De gritted his teeth and grumbled as the clamor from outside seemed to escalate. Fear dissipating, he quietly unlocked the door. No sooner had he peeked his head out than a rotten egg flew from an oblique angle, splattering squarely on his face.

"Damn it, who threw this at me!" Si De roared, charging outside, his forehead shining in the light. The stinking egg yolk dripped down his nose, a horrifying mix of yellow and white.

Taking advantage of this brief moment, Lin Wanrong surreptitiously glanced outside. He was shocked to see a sea of people surrounding his mansion. Scholars in long robes, holding folding fans, each looked irate. They were chanting slogans, encircling his house so tightly that not a drop of water could seep through. Some of the more radical ones had already rolled up their sleeves, clamoring to storm into the Lin residence and rescue the trapped ladies.

The gate of the Lin mansion suddenly burst open, and out charged a fierce-looking servant covered in foul egg yolk. In his hands was a shimmering, deadly axe, revealing his ferocious disposition.

"What the hell are you doing? Are you revolting?" Si De sprinted into the crowd, swinging his axe wildly, generating whooshing sounds. Within moments, he had forced the crowd back several steps. Those who retreated slowly almost got hit by his axe, and they screamed as they scrambled backward, creating chaos on the scene.

When the crowd saw the servant rushing out of the Lin residence, though unremarkable in appearance, his gleaming axe and fearless demeanor made him quite intimidating. Once the crowd regained their footing, a burly scholar seemed to come to his senses and shouted, "You, what are you doing?!"

"What am I doing? You're asking me?" Si De wiped the egg yolk from his face, licked his lips as if relishing the taste, and said, "I'd like to ask what you're doing!" He swung his axe forcefully near the scholar's face and yelled, "Speak, what are you up to?!"

That scholar took two hurried steps backward, his voice instantly lowered. "We... we came to get rid of the scoundrel Lin San. Step aside!"

Si De spat vehemently, his voice seething with rage. "You're here to confront someone else, but why throw eggs at me?! Who threw it? Stand up now! I'll chop you into pieces—tell me, was it you?"

"It wasn't me, it wasn't me!" said the closest scholar, waving his hands in denial.

"What about you? And you?" Si De pointed the blade of his axe at each nose in the crowd, questioning each one individually. The sharp blade glistened menacingly, causing the crowd to take a few more steps back in fear, each one shaking their head in denial.

"Dammit, if it wasn't any of you, then did a flying swan in the sky lay that egg?!" Si De was utterly furious. Just as he was about to lash out, the leading scholar hurriedly grabbed his sleeve. "My friend, it was a misunderstanding. We came to confront the villain Lin San, and it has nothing to do with you. Please, don't take it to heart. Oh, the embroidery on your clothes reads 'Xiao.' Could you be from the Xiao family, whose two young ladies are said to be monopolized by Lin San?"

"I am from the Xiao family. So what?" Si De snorted.

"That's excellent." The leading scholar's face lit up with excitement. "We are here to rescue the Xiao family's young ladies. Look at our group; these are all well-known scholars from the capital —" ̄A◆

Si De glanced over and saw that about seventy or eighty percent of those surrounding the Lin residence were scholars, many of them even accompanied by their servants, dressed no differently than he was.

"My friend, are the two young ladies alright? Have they been subjected to all sorts of humiliations by that scoundrel Lin San?" The lead scholar asked urgently.

Si De rolled his eyes. "What nonsense are you spouting? Lin San and the two young ladies are in a consensual relationship. Lin San has gone through great lengths to win their affections—"

Someone nearby couldn't bear to hear this any longer. "My friend, one should speak the truth."

The leading scholar looked over and noticed that the one interrupting was also a servant. He had a small mustache and an ageless face, wearing a simple robe and cap, and his smile seemed very innocent. However, one of his legs was heavily bandaged and he was being pushed in a wheelchair by another young servant who was handsome and delicate. "Do you know the details?" he eagerly asked.

"Yes," said the servant with the bandaged leg, nodding gravely. "A distant cousin of my distant cousin once served in the Xiao family. He has already told me everything in detail."

"Really?!" The leader was overjoyed. "Tell us, how did Lin San commit his wrongdoings?"

The servant with the bandaged leg solemnly said, "To say that Lin San went to great lengths to pursue the two young ladies is utterly absurd. In fact, it's the complete opposite—the two young ladies went to great lengths to pursue Lin San—"

"What are you saying?! How could you betray your own conscience?" Si De raged. "It was Lin San who pursued the young ladies, and they were moved by his sincerity! If I'm lying, may Lin San cut off my tongue."

"Nonsense. It was clearly the young ladies who ardently pursued Lin San. Brother Lin was modest and reserved, eventually moved by their sincerity, and thus they became a loving pair. Lin San is handsome, graceful, and a role model for all men. If you speak nonsense again, be careful or Brother Lin might cut off your tongue," the man with the broken leg retorted sharply.

"Lin San pursued the young ladies—"

"The young ladies pursued Lin San—"

The two men loudly argued, neither willing to give ground, their faces flushed and necks thickening. The leading scholar shouted in indignation, "Heavens! Lin San has taken it too far, not only monopolizing the two young ladies but also hiding the truth. He even threatens to cut off the

tongues of those who speak out. Such malevolence must not be tolerated. We must eradicate Lin San in the name of justice!"

"—In the name of justice! To save the young ladies of the Xiao family, brothers, charge with me!" The man with the broken leg raised his right fist, his voice filled with impassioned anguish.

Seeing even a crippled servant so enthusiastically engaged, the crowd was uplifted and roared as they rushed toward the Xiao family's residence.

Noticing the crowd surging toward the back door, and finding himself left alone with Si De, the man with the broken leg wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and spoke to the handsome young servant beside him, "Xian'er, did you secure our back door? I have a lot of flowers growing in my garden. I don't want these people to break in and ruin them."

"Rest assured, husband." Seeing his skillful performance alongside Si De, Miss Qin couldn't help but giggle, "The residence bestowed upon us by the Emperor has high walls and heavy doors. No one can break in. The delicate flowers you've planted in the Xiao family's garden will be safe."

Noting a tinge of jealousy from the young lady, Lin Wanrong laughed twice, pretending not to hear.

Miss Qin hummed and quickly moved her steps, her figure flashing as she reached the corner of the alley. With two muffled grunts, she caught two burly men, tossing them on the ground as if they were little chicks, giggling, "Husband, look—"

Both men were dressed like scholars, but their builds were robust, their skin tanned, and their palms calloused. Rendered immobile by Miss Qin, they screamed and flailed about.

"What are you up to?" Lin Wanrong's face darkened, his old face black as coal.

"We are scholars from the east side of the city, here to punish Lin San. Release us immediately, or we will deal with you as well!" one of them said hastily.

"Ha! Scholars, you say?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, picking up a small stone and throwing it at the man's face. "You dare to come and punish me? Who sent you?"

The man's eyes darted around defiantly, "Who sent me? The villainous Lin San bullies the weak and seizes innocent women; he must be punished by everyone—"

"Enough!" Si De, exasperated, kicked the man in the face, "Brother, I hate these types the most. Look at his crooked face and rough palms; does he think he's a scholar? Disgusting!"

He spat out a glob of saliva, hitting the man square in the face. That man had been captured by him; his life literally lay in his hands. Anger seethed within him, but he dared not voice it. Another man lying on the ground averted his gaze, a flicker of fear in his eyes. He didn't dare meet Lin Wanrong's eyes.

Lin Wanrong chuckled darkly and tenderly grasped Miss Qin's delicate hand. "Xian'er, could you find a larger forest for us? I'd like to show you a very interesting game."

Miss Qin giggled in reply, "A forest? They're everywhere. What kind of game is it, Husband? I don't like games that don't involve killing."

Si De shivered as he listened. This Lady was truly a perfect match for his Brother San.

"Killing? Too gruesome. I'm not that kind of person," Lin Wanrong shook his head. "This game is quite simple. You find a sizable forest and choose some live people to bury in the ground. Leave only their heads exposed and shave all their hair. Then, smear their heads with a thick layer of flower nectar and cover them with a sealed cage. Inside the cage, release some wild bees—remember, not too many, a few tens of thousands should suffice."

"My goodness!" Miss Qin exclaimed, her petite hand gesturing excitedly. Her innocent face glowed as she asked, "What would happen with all those bees and the nectar-covered heads in such a confined space?"

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Tens of thousands of worker bees would sting their heads, which would then start itching and swelling, getting larger and larger until—"

"It explodes!" Si De screamed, his face awash with fear.

Miss Qin's eyes twinkled mischievously, "Oh, Husband, what a wicked idea you've come up with—sounds like great fun. Shall we go try it out now? We already have two perfect candidates; which one shall we choose first?"

Her beautiful eyes glanced back and forth between the two men on the ground. Seeing the beautiful but utterly terrifying Princess, both men hastily retreated their heads in fear.

"Husband, let's choose him," Miss Qin finally decided, pointing at a trembling, burly man who had been too scared to speak. "His head is bigger; it will be more entertaining when it explodes, with flesh flying everywhere."

Si De's heart raced with dread. This Princess was certainly beautiful but her ideas were devilishly twisted. Only Brother San could possibly rein her in.

The man Miss Qin had chosen nearly fainted from terror and began screaming, "Mercy, Princess, mercy! Sir, I'll confess, I'll confess!"

"Brother San, he's confessing," Si De exclaimed in immense relief.

Miss Qin snorted in disdain, "How could Great Hua produce such cowards? Now my game can't even proceed. Husband, let's choose this other man. He seemed more resilient when he spoke earlier; it'll be more fun when he explodes."

Before she could finish speaking, the man deemed 'more resilient' cried out in terror, "Mercy, Princess, mercy, Sir, I confess too!"

"Confessed? Already?" Lin Wanrong frowned, his face filled with disappointment. "Well, speak up then. But let me clarify one thing first. I am truly a kind person. I've never resorted to violent interrogations. The two of you better not tarnish my reputation in the future—alas, when will I ever get to try out my bee-sting cranial explosion technique?"

"My Lord," seeing Lin Wanrong's methods, the two men dared not be stubborn anymore and quickly knelt down. "We dare not hide it; both of us are from the Gu family!"

"Gu what Gu?" Lin Wanrong snorted. "Just saying your surname is Gu is enough? How would I know if you're Gu Three or Gu Four?"

Noticing her husband hadn't caught on, Miss Qin urgently tugged at his sleeve, "Husband, these two men are likely sent by the Gu family father and son."

## Chapter 489 A Surprising Discovery

Qin Xian'er nodded, "Who else could possibly have the influence to gather so many scholars overnight? Husband, do not forget that Master Gu Shunzhang is a renowned imperial tutor. Even my father, the Emperor, has to show him respect when they meet."

"Imperial tutor?" Lin Wanrong shook his head in resignation. How could Master Gu, who served as the Emperor's teacher, not assess the situation properly and choose to be confrontational with his own students? He snorted, then turned to the man who had just spoken, "What is your role in the Gu family? Did Master Gu Shunzhang send you here?"

"I and my companion are caretakers at the Gu residence. The old master has gone on a journey and hasn't yet returned. The mistress heard that the young master was in trouble and sent us to investigate," the man hastily replied.

"Mistress? That explains it." Lin Wanrong nodded and chuckled, "Your mistress is quite scheming, isn't she? To come up with such a brilliant idea to besiege the Lin Manor overnight is truly impressive. Does she have a brilliant advisor helping her make these decisions?"

"I wouldn't know," the man, sensing Lin Wanrong's sarcastic tone and intimidating demeanor, hastily bowed in submission. "We are merely lowly servants of the house; we truly do not know the details of what you're asking."

"Both of you are simply hired help and know so little." Lin Wanrong lost interest in questioning further. He gestured to Si De to call over two hidden guards and had the pair escorted away.

"Husband, what shall we do now? Should we go directly to the Gu residence to settle scores with this mistress?" Miss Qin Xian'er was rather impatient. Upon hearing that the Gu family had instigated the commotion, she wanted to charge over immediately.

"Settle what scores?" Lin Wanrong laughed, shaking his head. "Do you think that merely based on the words of these two, we could have your father's esteemed teacher's property confiscated? Isn't that a joke?"

Qin Xian'er pondered and realized her impulsiveness. After all, Master Gu Shunzhang was a renowned imperial tutor; even her father, the Emperor, dared not act recklessly in his presence. Who would dare seize his property?

"Then what should we do?" Qin Xian'er huffed, frustrated. "We can't fight them, nor can we kill them. Are we supposed to let them besiege our home indefinitely?"

"Don't worry," Lin Wanrong took her hand and smiled reassuringly, "These people are a disorganized rabble; they won't cause any real trouble. What's truly important is the person pulling the strings from behind."

"Are you talking about Prince Cheng?" Miss Qin Xian'er's eyes lit up at Lin Wanrong's sly smile. "Husband, can you really capture him?"

Lin Wanrong fondly touched her hand and chuckled lasciviously. He neither confirmed nor denied her query. Qin Xian'er knew her husband well; he would not voice anything unless he was certain. Thus, she felt assured and asked no further questions.

Qin Xian'er found a palanquin, and they both climbed in. After traveling for a while, they had successfully left the mob of scholars far behind. She noticed Lin Wanrong continuously peering out, looking in all directions as the palanquin zigzagged through the alleys. Confused, she asked, "Husband, what are you looking at? Where are we going?"

Lin Wanrong smiled mysteriously but offered no reply. Just as Qin Xian'er was growing more puzzled, the palanquin suddenly stopped. The carrier turned and said in a hushed, respectful tone, "Sir, we have arrived."

Had they arrived? Qin Xian'er gracefully descended from her palanquin, taking a slow, curious look around. What she saw left her stunned. She and her companion stood in a narrow, dimly lit alleyway, despite it being broad daylight. Across the alley was a vast estate, seemingly covering hundreds of acres. At its entrance, a pair of stone lions stood imposingly. Its large red door hung ajar, wobbling as if ready to fall off. Beyond, one could barely see the opulent pavilions and halls that filled the estate; their wooden beams were charred black, and several towering structures were reduced to mere skeletons. The air was thick with the acrid smell of sulfur smoke, assaulting one's senses. The entire place was a sight of devastation, yet the glimpses of gold bricks and jade rooftops hinted at past grandeur.

"Husband, why have you returned to the Royal Mansion?" Qin Xian'er looked puzzled. Their shaky palanquin had, inexplicably, brought them back to the very alley facing the once-glorious Royal

Mansion. The sight of its overnight downfall filled her with a sense of loss, and naturally, some curiosity.

"I'm not sure myself." Lin Wanrong helplessly spread his hands and pointed toward a man approaching from a distance. "This young fellow summoned me."

The man who was rapidly approaching was burly and hurried. Upon setting eyes on them, he immediately knelt in reverence. "I am Gao Qiu, at your service, Princess Nishang and Master Lin."

Gao Qiu looked disheveled, his stubble unkempt, and his eyes bloodshot as though he hadn't slept all night. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Spare us the pleasantries, Brother Gao. You must be exhausted." R◆

Qin Xian'er recalled something her husband had mentioned before leaving the house. "Husband, what task did you send Gao Qiu on that made us return to the Royal Mansion?"

"Well, for that, we should ask Brother Gao. I'm as in the dark as you are," Lin Wanrong shrugged, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Commander Gao, what exactly is going on?" Qin Xian'er's gaze shifted to Gao Qiu, her tone inadvertently imbued with a touch of authority.

Visibly intimidated, Gao Qiu hurriedly explained, "Princess, this started last night. I entered the Royal Mansion on Master Lin's orders to search for evidence and investigate. However, the estate was so vast that I lost my way. Somehow, a fire broke out in the courtyard—Oh, Princess, you must believe me, I did not start the fire. Master Lin can vouch for me—"

"Yes, I can vouch for him," Lin Wanrong confirmed, his face solemn. "Given Brother Gao's character, he could engage in all sorts of misconduct, but arson is beneath him. Someone else who despised the corrupt ways of Prince Cheng must have set the fire. It had nothing to do with Brother Gao."

Aware of the ruse between her husband and Gao Qiu, Qin Xian'er couldn't help but chuckle. "Commander Gao, in such dry weather, an accidental fire is entirely plausible. I'm not concerned with such trivialities. Speak of the more critical matters."

Indeed, it was no surprise that husband and wife would resemble each other; even her manner of speech bore an eighty percent resemblance to Brother Lin. Gao Qiu chuckled and said, "I'm grateful for your understanding, Princess Nishang. Last night, a fire broke out in the mansion. I was roaming all over the mansion, doing my best to extinguish the flames. I then personally witnessed you and Master Lin display your extraordinary abilities. Within moments, you subdued over a hundred guards. Your benevolence was evident when you released these offenders one by one. Such magnanimity is awe-inspiring, it shakes the heavens and stirs the earth, moving even ghosts and gods. My men and I hold you in the highest regard."

"Brother Gao, please get to the point. I'm sitting here with a broken leg, and I don't have time for your flattery," interrupted Master Lin, clearly irritated by the sycophantic speech.

"Yes, yes," Gao Qiu's face flushed, and he hurriedly continued, his tone becoming more serious, "After the Princess released those several dozen guards, my men and I, under Master Lin's secret orders, secretly tailed them—"

Qin Xian'er paused, then remembered the situation last night when her husband had asked her to release those people. She slapped her palm to her forehead in exasperation. "Oh, why didn't I think of that? I wondered why my husband suddenly became so generous, but it turns out he was laying a trap."

"What are you saying? Am I not usually generous?" Master Lin felt helpless. Qin Xian'er gave him an appreciative glance and then turned to Gao Qiu, "Go on, what else did my husband instruct you to do? He has many tricks up his sleeve."

"Yes. My men and I divided into several groups and followed those guards dismissed by the Princess to investigate their whereabouts. Most of them heeded the Princess's advice, repented, and dispersed—"

"So, there were exceptions?" Qin Xian'er nodded, smiling.

"Exactly, Princess, you are truly clever and quick-witted. I admire you immensely!" Gao Qiu bowed, heaping more flattery.

"Look, Husband," Qin Xian'er laughed, "Your men may not have picked up many of your skills, but they've certainly mastered the art of flattery."

"I'm humbled, Princess, you're too kind," Gao Qiu responded earnestly, "How can my meager talents compare to Master Lin? I owe it all to his excellent guidance—"

"Enough with the flattery," Master Lin finally lost his patience, "Get to the point. What were the exceptions? Tell us clearly."

"Yes, yes," Gao Qiu said, his smile ingratiating, "After much hardship and sleepless hours, having only eaten ten steamed buns, we stayed close on the heels of these two individuals. Finally, our diligence paid off, and we made a discovery."

This old man might have stopped with the flattery, but now he was singing his own praises, leaving Master Lin completely speechless. Qin Xian'er chimed in, "Gao Qiu, as long as you've done your job well, I will certainly recommend you to my father for a grand reward. Now, what did you discover?"

"In my humble position, I seek neither merit nor reward, but only to forever guard by His Majesty's side. Long live His Majesty, long live, long live forever!" Gao Qiu knelt on the ground, knocking his head against the floor three times before standing up. He glanced around cautiously, lowering his voice to say mysteriously, "I have been discreetly tailing two of the individuals. These young men are highly vigilant, frequently stopping and looping around in an attempt to detect any followers. Fortunately, my skills and courage, along with my agility and wit, ensured that they did not notice me. It wasn't until today that I made a shocking discovery—they've circled back to the royal mansion."

'Damn, after all that boasting from old Gao, it's this last sentence that's the most crucial,' Lin Wanrong hurriedly asked, "They returned to the royal mansion? Where are they now?"

"The strange part is exactly that," Gao Qiu frowned, his face full of bewilderment. "As soon as they returned, I immediately sent someone to fetch you. What's puzzling is that once those two entered the royal mansion, they vanished without a trace. We couldn't find them again."

"Vanished?!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, "Could they have escaped through some other routes?"

Gao Qiu shook his head solemnly, "All the surrounding areas are under our surveillance. Even if they had grown wings, escaping under our watch would be impossible."

Gao Qiu sounded so certain, and considering he hadn't been detected while tailing them, there was no reason for those men to run. But why did they disappear upon entering the royal mansion? Lin

Wanrong took a deep breath, his brows furrowed, and sank into contemplation as he leaned against his wheelchair.

Qin Xian'er knew this was a critical moment and dared not disturb Lin Wanrong's thoughts. She quietly extended her small hand and began massaging his shoulders.

Satisfied, Lin Wanrong hummed softly, patted Qin Xian'er's hand, and slowly opened his eyes. It seemed as though a divine light emanated from them, "Brother Gao, have you thoroughly searched the royal mansion? Are there any secret tunnels or chambers?"

Gao Qiu hurriedly shook his head, "That was my initial thought too. Therefore, I paid special attention. We have searched the entire residence three times—courtyards, chambers, gardens, even the kitchen stove. Every nook and cranny where someone might hide, we have looked. But the residence is eerily clean, not a single hidden chamber or a single flaw. It's truly puzzling."

"Not a single flaw? That's quite odd indeed!" Lin Wanrong smirked coldly, "If there is not a single flaw, then that itself is the biggest flaw! Brother Gao, immediately organizes another search. Dig up the earth three feet down if you have to, but find those two men for me."

Gao Qiu acknowledged, still puzzled, "Brother Lin, are these two guards really that important, warranting such a massive operation?"

"It's not that they are important—" Lin Wanrong closed his eyes and mused before chuckling coldly, "—it's the person hiding behind them that is. Brother Gao, you must see this task through. If my suspicions are correct, the big fish we are looking for is definitely hiding within the royal mansion."

"What?!" Both Qin Xian'er and Gao Qiu exclaimed in unison.

## Chapter 490 Cunning Arguments in the Royal Court

"Brother Lin, is what you're saying true?" Gao Qiu's expression tightened instantly. He hurriedly said, "If this is indeed the case, it bodes ill. After raiding the royal mansion yesterday, Master Xu's troops have already withdrawn. Only my men remain here as guards, and our vigilance has naturally slackened. I should request additional troops from Master Xu immediately—"

"I'm about seventy percent certain," Lin Wanrong's face was more serious than ever as he stopped Gao Qiu. "Brother Gao, let me ask you a question. That night, Prince Cheng escaped from the

Grand Prime Minister Temple. Master Xu traced him to the entrance of a tunnel but discovered another secret passage leading out of the city. What do you think, did he manage to escape from the city or not?"

After pondering for a moment, Gao Qiu gave a wry smile, "Prince Cheng is sly and cunning; I can't be certain."

Qin Xian'er interjected, "Husband, I think your analysis that night was spot-on. With the army rigorously positioned outside the city, how could he dare to leave easily? Therefore, that secret passage to the outside must be a decoy, meant to mislead us into thinking he had fled in haste. He would only seize the opportunity to escape when the formation outside the city is disrupted by troops searching for him."

Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled, giving her an approving glance, "Xian'er, so you think Prince Cheng is still in the city?"

Gao Qiu seemed to have a revelation, his face lighting up with excitement, "The Princess is right. Knowing there's a net cast outside, he wouldn't dare to leave without making a hole. He must still be in the city."

"Brother Gao, you have keen insights. I admire you," Lin Wanrong jested with a smile. "If Prince Cheng is indeed still in the city, where do you think he might be hiding?"

"He must be hiding in an extremely safe place where outsiders can't find him," Gao Qiu answered solemnly.

Lin Wanrong gave a thumbs-up, praising him and then teasingly asked, "According to your wisdom, Brother Gao, where would that safest place be?"

Gao Qiu hesitated, unable to find the words. It was Miss Qin who clapped her hands in excitement, "Husband, I've figured it out—"

"What have you figured out?" Seeing the joyous smile on Xian'er's charming face, Lin Wanrong held her hand and asked with a smile.

"The most dangerous place is the safest. Prince Cheng, being a wily old fox, would certainly understand this principle. After our raid on the royal mansion last night yielded nothing, we

naturally let our guard down here. That creates his perfect opportunity. If he were to double back and hide right here in this royal mansion, who would suspect?"

Gao Qiu had an epiphany, "Ah, how could I not have thought of this? The Princess is indeed as intelligent as Brother Lin. You two truly are a match made in heaven; I wish you both a lifetime of happiness and the blessing of children."

This Gao Qiu was becoming more and more shameless, seizing every opportunity to flatter. Yet, these were the very words that Miss Qin loved to hear. Xian'er giggled and said, "I can't hold a candle to Husband. Even the craftiest like Prince Cheng can't escape from the palm of his hand."

"Ashamed, truly ashamed," Master Lin shook his head. "Had it not been for the indiscretion of those two guards, I would never have thought to come here. When it comes to schemes and plots, Prince Cheng is the most cunning of all. Brother Gao, enough chit-chat. Deploy your men and turn this royal mansion upside down for me."

"Understood!" Gao Qiu confidently departed. Master Lin sat in his wheelchair, pondering for a moment before sighing. "Xian'er, your royal uncle truly possesses some skills. Had I not been extra cautious, he almost fooled me."

Miss Qin playfully slapped his arm and giggled, "I told you long ago, if he rebels, I won't acknowledge him as my royal uncle."

The two shared a brief moment of laughter before a guard came to report. "Your Highness, Master Lin, Eunuch Gao has arrived."

'Gao Ping? What is he doing here?' Lin Wanrong wondered. Eunuch Gao hurriedly entered the room and knelt before Qin Xian'er, "Old servant Gao Ping pays his respects to Princess Nishang, and to Master Lin."

Miss Qin gave a nod, "Eunuch Gao, please rise."

Gao Ping stood up, made a fist salute to Lin Wanrong, and anxiously said, "Ah, Master Lin, I've finally found you."

"Found me?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I'm a man grievously injured, even receiving white mourning cloth from His Majesty. What do you need me for?"

Gao Ping hesitated but then laughed, "Master Lin, you underestimate His Majesty's care for you. You survived this ordeal; surely good fortune will follow." *R*

Lin Wanrong found comfort in the old eunuch's words and nodded, "Eunuch Gao, did His Majesty send you? What does he need from me?"

Gao Ping anxiously spoke, "Master Lin, are you truly unaware? You led troops last night to raid the royal mansion, accused the prince of treason, and captured the son of Master Gu Shunzhang. This has caused an uproar! This morning, hundreds of officials from the Inspectorate and the Scholars of Hall of Literary Brilliance have jointly submitted petitions against you. The Golden Hall is in chaos, and the morning court has yet to disperse."

"So let them petition," Lin Wanrong waved his hand dismissively. "This isn't the first time. Once I finish this matter, I'll write a memorial to His Majesty to clarify the situation. Misunderstandings will be cleared up, and all will be well."

Seeing his lack of concern, Gao Ping hastily urged, "Master Lin, this matter affects the fate of the Empire; it cannot be taken lightly. Master Gu Shunzhang was already traveling in Shandong and is rushing back upon hearing the news. His Majesty has ordered you to appear before the court immediately to explain yourself."

'Explain? What's there to explain?' Lin Wanrong shook his head in resignation. Since His Majesty had ordered it, he had no choice but to oblige. It was, after all, a most stressful time for the Emperor.

Gao Qiu had already prepared the palanquin. The bearers rushed him into the palace, heading straight for the Hall of Literary Brilliance.

Before they even reached the door, the cacophony from the Golden Hall could be heard. Several ministers standing at the entrance caught sight of the speeding palanquin and began to shout, "He's here, he's here—Lin San has arrived!"

The palanquin came to a halt at the entrance of the grand hall. Dressed in simple blue attire and a modest hat, Lord Lin was lifted out of it, seated in a wheelchair. The stark white bandages on his thighs were glaringly conspicuous.

The royal court that day was anything but ordinary; around fifty or sixty courtiers stood on either side of the grand hall. The moment Lord Lin was wheeled in, all eyes immediately turned to him, as if pulled by a magnet.

The aged Emperor sat majestically on his dragon throne, his heavy brows furrowed, eyes slightly closed, appearing as if he hadn't noticed Lord Lin's arrival.

"Commoner Lin San greets Your Majesty. I'm injured and unable to kneel and perform the ritual bows. I seek Your Majesty's forgiveness," Lord Lin said, bowing his head and lowering his eyes in a display of utmost respect.

"Dispense with the formalities," the Emperor said with a nod. "You've already faced death once, and you're severely injured. The ritual bows are not necessary."

"Thank you for Your Majesty's graciousness!" Lin Wanrong clasped his fists in gratitude.

The old Emperor scrutinized him from head to toe. "Lin San, a few days ago your family reported that you were severely injured and beyond recovery, even presumed dead. How is it that you're alive today?"

"In response to Your Majesty," Lin Wanrong began earnestly, "I was the victim of an ambush and indeed was dead. However, when I reached the underworld, King of Hell noticed the injustice done to me. He let me return to the realm of the living and even granted me an additional hundred years of life—"

"Nonsense," interrupted a voice from the first row of courtiers on the Emperor's left. A man stood up, "Lin San, stop this deceit. There's no underworld or King of Hell in this world. How dare you concoct such absurd tales in front of His Majesty? Your Majesty, I am Chen Biqing, the imperial censor. I request that Lin San be charged with misleading the public and deceiving the Emperor."

The man was around fifty years old, wearing a bright red official's robe and a winged hat. He had a noble air about him, stern and upright. His standing position was once occupied by the late Prince Cheng, indicating his high status. Lin Wanrong understood somewhat—the imperial censors were officials responsible for monitoring the conduct of the bureaucracy, and they could submit memorials directly to the Emperor.

"Little brother, you must be cautious," whispered Xu Wei, standing in the first row of courtiers on the right, pulling on Lin Wanrong's sleeve. "This Chen Biqing is the chief imperial censor and the

nephew of Master Gu Shunzhang. He has immense influence among the scholars and censors of the imperial library. You haven't met him before because he was away on inspections. Just look at his standing position, and you'll know his importance."

'So, he's the cousin of Gu Bingyan. No wonder!' Lin Wanrong grinned and saluted, "So you are Imperial Censor Chen Biqing. I've long heard of your reputation. Tell me, have you ever died?"

"What are you saying?" Chen Biqing was taken aback for a moment, then his face flushed with anger. "How dare you curse me, Lin San?"

"Curse? No," Lord Lin spread his hands, appearing innocent. "Everyone heard clearly; I asked if you have ever died. You only need to say yes or no—it's that simple. Where does a curse enter the conversation? Lord Chen, have you ever died?"

Chen Biqing snorted, "I've always been upright and incorruptible; why would I die? It's people like you, who commit numerous misdeeds, who should expect retribution!"

"Is that to say you've never died?" Lin Wanrong nodded with a smile and said, "Exactly. Since Lord Chen has never tasted death, how can you be certain that there's no Underworld with its King of Hell? If you don't trust my word, the solution is simple: die once, and everything will become clear."

Lord Lin truly had exceptional eloquence; he managed to insult others without using vulgar language. The crowd struggled to hold back their laughter, and Xu Wei almost burst out laughing himself. However, who dared to laugh at Chen Biqing, the Imperial Censor, a man responsible for overseeing officials?

"What a sharp tongue you have," Chen Biqing finally said, composing himself. He turned to the Emperor and spoke, "Your Majesty, since Lin San has arrived, it is my duty as an Imperial Censor to investigate. I wish to collaborate with several colleagues and submit a report against Lin San for his lawlessness and audacity."

The Emperor slightly nodded, "Lord Chen, please proceed. If you have credible evidence, I will not be partial."

"Your Majesty, I accuse Lin San of abuse of power, false confessions through torture, and framing loyal subjects. I present this petition signed by hundreds of my colleagues in the court," Chen Biqing said, his face a mask of righteous indignation, as he respectfully handed over the document.

Gao Ping took the petition and passed it to the Emperor. The Emperor read through a few pages and became furious, slamming his palm on the table, "How could this happen? Seize Lin San at once!"

Xu Wei was startled and quickly stepped forward, "Your Majesty, what grave offense has Lord Lin committed to warrant such wrath?"

"See for yourself," the Emperor coldly huffed, tossing the petition to him.

Xu Wei picked up the document and glanced over it, then slowly shook his head, "Your Majesty, if the allegations in this petition are true, Lord Lin is indeed a great sinner deserving of punishment. However, should we condemn him based solely on Lord Chen's word? How do we know he isn't being falsely accused? Both Lord Lin and Lord Chen are present; why not let them confront each other here and now for Your Majesty to judge? It would be fair for both."

The Emperor pondered for a moment and then looked at Chen Biqing, "Lord Chen, what do you think of Xu Wei's proposal?"

"Lord Xu is wise and prudent. I agree with his suggestion. However, I wonder if Lord Lin has the courage to debate with me openly in this court," Chen Biqing replied, bowing to the Emperor, and then turned to look at Lin Wanrong with disdain.

"Well," Lord Lin hesitated, "As everyone knows, I am reserved and not well-spoken. Debating Lord Chen here would be quite a challenge for me."

Lin San, not well-spoken? The crowd couldn't help but laugh.

"However," Lord Lin quickly added, becoming serious, "Since this concerns my honor and integrity, even if I am not eloquent, I cannot ignore it. I ask for Your Majesty and the other lords to indulge me, and I ask Lord Chen to be merciful with his words."

The Emperor nodded, "Lin San, rest assured. If you are indeed innocent, I will certainly do you justice."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Lin Wanrong said, visibly moved.

Upon witnessing the two men prepared to engage in a public confrontation, tension began to fill the imperial court. At first glance, it appeared to be merely a dispute between Chen Biqing, the Imperial Censor, and Lin San, the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Personnel. However, the implications ran deep. Each man represented different factions. Chen Biqing was the nephew of the Emperor's esteemed tutor, Gu Shunzhang—a paragon respected by all, whose reputation was unparalleled, even the Emperor was his pupil. Chen Biqing was also the Chief Inspector of the Censorate, overseeing hundreds of officials, his position and power second only to a few, such as Prince Cheng.

On the other side was Lin San, a rising star within the Great Hua. He had the support of not only Xu Wei, the Empire's foremost statesman, and Li Tai, its leading military general, but also, it was rumored, the affection of the Emperor's two princesses. He was a true representative of the younger faction.

When these two men verbally clashed in court, it was nothing short of a battle between dragons and tigers.

"Lord Lin, have you prepared your arguments?" Chen Biqing, embodying the demeanor of an Imperial Censor, sought to lay a small trap before initiating his inquiry.

Lin San was unyielding: "I appreciate the concern, Lord Chen, but I am innocent. Why should I need to prepare? On the other hand, I assume you've prepared various statements to list my alleged crimes. You must have done plenty of homework last night, even losing a few strands of hair in the process. My apologies for the inconvenience."

Xu Wei, overhearing this, almost burst into laughter. Lord Lin was naturally good at turning the tables; he had already pushed Lord Chen onto the defensive.

"As the Chief Inspector, overseeing provinces and purging corruption is my duty. What harm is there in doing some extra homework?" Chen Biqing replied with a cold smile, effortlessly parrying Lin San's attack. "I, Chen Biqing, accuse Vice Minister Lin San of two crimes. First, abuse of power and forcing confessions—"

"I'm afraid I don't understand, would you please elaborate, Lord Chen?" Lin San interrupted with a smile.

"You don't understand?" Chen Biqing glared at him, "Lord Lin, are you saying you don't even remember what you did last night?"

"Last night?" Lin San pondered. "I had dinner, followed by eating fruit. After that, I drank ginseng tea and received a massage—"

The courtiers exchanged puzzled glances, suppressing their laughter. Lin San was notoriously smooth-tongued, and it seemed he hadn't changed even in the presence of the Emperor.

"How audacious!" Chen Biqing became furious. "Lin San, you dare to use such cunning language even before His Majesty?"

"Lord Chen," Lin San responded, his smile not quite reaching his eyes, "you're quite daring yourself. His Majesty has already stated that this is a public confrontation between equals. You're not interrogating me. Yelling as if I'm your criminal—where do you place His Majesty in all this?"

Upon mentioning the Emperor, Chen Biqing found himself at a loss for words. The Emperor interrupted, "Focus on the important matters. I have no time for your petty squabbles."

"Yes." Wiping the cold sweat from his brow, Chen Biqing composed himself, "Lord Lin, you don't remember? Allow me to jog your memory. Last night, you led soldiers from the city guard to illegally raid the Royal Residence, capturing Master Gu Shunzhang's son, Gu Bingyan. As Vice Minister of the Ministry of Personnel, attacking a royal mansion is an abuse of power. Furthermore, you subjected Gu Bingyan to torture to extract a confession. Do you admit to these charges or not?"

The tension in the court hall was palpable as the ministers listened intently. Finally, they were getting to the crux of the matter—assaulting a royal mansion, a grave charge indeed.

"Ah, so that's what this is about," Lin Wanrong said, nodding with a smile. "Indeed, I visited the royal mansion last night—"

"So you admit it?" Chen Biqing roared.

"Admit what?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Lord Chen, I went to pay a courtesy visit to His Highness Prince Cheng. What's wrong with that?"

"A courtesy visit? With troops?" Chen Biqing sneered dismissively.

Lin Wanrong's expression darkened in an instant, becoming stern. "Lord Chen, you can joke about food but not words. I indeed paid a visit to the Prince, but when did I ever bring troops?"

"Xu Zhen, the city's chief of defense, was under your command in the past. He attacked the royal mansion last night at your summons, without official approval. Is this false?" Chen Biqing pressed him sharply.

Lin Wanrong sneered, "Lord Chen, you speak well. Xu Zhen was indeed under my command in the past. But as you said, that's the past. How could I, a mere deputy minister, command the chief of city defense? As for your claim that I summoned troops to assault the royal mansion—what nonsense. The royal mansion caught fire last night, as everyone saw. General Xu, as the chief of city defense, entered to put out the fire. Where's the fault in that? If he hadn't gone, I'd have charged him with negligence. Don't you agree, Lord Chen?"

"What a story—going into the royal mansion to put out the fire," Chen Biqing snorted. "City defense was fully prepared—with hoses and wooden logs. As soon as the fire broke out, they rushed over. Could it be any more convenient?"

"Shouldn't the city defense be prepared to safeguard the entire city? This only reflects their commitment and thorough service to the public. As for their quick response, is that also a fault? Should they have waited for the royal mansion to burn down? What a joke. My view is the exact opposite of yours, Lord Chen. They acted promptly and deserve commendation."

Chen Biqing was so furious that he turned pale, and growled, "What about the wrongful detention of Gu Bingyan?"

"That detention was correct," Lin Wanrong retorted sharply. "During the emergency of the fire, Gu Bingyan, in his arrogance, resisted arrest and obstructed the city defense troops from saving the royal mansion. This is what everyone saw. As the saying goes, when the prince breaks the law, he is treated like any other citizen. If not him, who should be arrested? Lord Chen, are you defending a guilty person because you have some unspeakable secret?"

Lin Wanrong grinned maliciously.

‘Despicable!’ Chen Biqing cursed inwardly, unable to find words to retort.

"Enough. I am aware of the matter," said the Emperor, barely opening his dragon-like eyes, and speaking in a nonchalant manner. "There might have been some misunderstandings and friction

between the city defense and my worthy younger brother Gu during last night's chaos. It's not a big deal. Mutual understanding and better communication will resolve this in the future."

"His Majesty is wise!" Lin Wanrong grinned, visibly relieved. Chen Biqing, on the other hand, was both furious and frustrated, left without any options.

"Your Majesty, may the first charge against Mister Lin by Mister Chen be considered as not established?" Xu Wei, ever cunning and opportunistic, struck while the iron was hot.

The Emperor pondered for a moment, then nodded and chuckled. "Just as Minister Xu has said, neither Minister Chen nor Minister Lin have done anything wrong; it's merely a lack of communication."

'What a cunning old fox! You promised me justice, didn't you?' Lin Wanrong cursed inwardly. However, it seemed as though the Emperor had seen through him, his eyes sharp as lightning, shooting him a brief, piercing glance.

Chen Biqing also appeared disheartened. Lord Lin was even more challenging than the rumors suggested. Unwilling to accept defeat, he huffed, "Even if there was no abuse of power, Minister Lin, you've disregarded the law and falsely accused Prince Cheng of rebellion. How would you deny this?"

"What, what?" Lord Lin's face turned pale, almost falling out of his wheelchair. "Minister Chen, clarify what you mean. Who, who is plotting a rebellion?"

"It's you who falsely accused the prince of rebellion," Chen Biqing nearly slipped, almost falling into Lord Lin's trap. Cold sweat poured down his back. Lin San, that shameless, cunning man, he cursed inwardly.

Lord Lin was furious. "Minister Chen, one should have a conscience. When did I ever say such a thing? Who heard it? I am close friends with the prince and have been his guest. Who said I accused him of plotting a rebellion? Bring that person here; let's clarify this matter before His Majesty."

Looking at Lord Lin's righteous indignation, not only the observing ministers but even Chen Biqing himself began to doubt. "You, you never said that?"

"By heaven and earth, I, Lin San, am a man of integrity. Why would I make such false accusations?" Lin Wanrong raised his right hand high, vowing vehemently.

"Then what about the evidence found in Prince's residence last night?" Chen Biqing asked.

"What evidence? Bring it and let's have a look," Lin Wanrong spread his hands, looking innocent.

Xu Wei blinked, "Indeed. Minister Chen, I heard some evidence was discovered in the prince's residence last night. Why not present it to the court for all to see?"

'Ah, I've been tricked.' Seeing Lord Lin's eerie smile, Chen Biqing felt a chill run down his spine. The young man was so unpredictable, impossible to defend against. But since the words had been spoken, regret was useless. Waving his hand, he ordered the items found in the prince's residence to be presented.

As the guards brought forward a brocade-wrapped dragon robe, a golden crown, and a jade seal, the court instantly erupted in whispers. Each of these items was unique and for the emperor's personal use. If they really were found in Prince Cheng's residence, what else could this be but treason? Especially the ancient, grand jade seal, said to have been stolen twenty years ago, was now revealed to have been in the prince's possession. The court officials, who had initially agreed with Chen Biqing in defending the prince, now deeply regretted it.

The old Emperor's face alternated between shades of red and white. He looked at the items in front of him but remained silent. Those keen of mind noticed his grip tightening on the armrest of his dragon throne, veins popping on his hand, a fury too great for words.

"Minister Chen, were these items truly found in my brother's residence?" The Emperor's voice was eerily calm, a disturbing shadow seemed to rise, making everyone in the hall break out in sweat.

One miscalculation led to a chain of defeats. When the evidence was presented, Chen Biqing knew he was in trouble. Even if Prince Cheng was innocent and had been framed, the Emperor's suspicion towards him would never be fully dispelled. Such is the nature of human hearts. Lin San was truly ruthless!

Chen Biqing clenched his teeth in frustration, but composed himself to reply, "Your Majesty, these items were found in the royal mansion by Minister Lin. However, I suspect there is more to this story. Knowing the character of the prince, he would never commit such an act of treason. He must have been framed. Minister Lin, since you discovered these items, you may also be implicated."

"Indeed, I found these items," Minister Lin patted his chest, "but I never said that the prince was plotting a rebellion." Everyone in the room sighed in relief, but then Minister Lin continued, "These items could be for a performance, or they could have sprouted from the ground in the garden. In any case, the prince would have been unaware. He is, after all, the Emperor's own brother."

Confusion erupted among the onlookers. Was Minister Lin defending the prince? His comments seemed to be sowing chaos. Better he had said nothing at all!

Seeing the Emperor's face turn pale, Chen Biqing wished he could tear Lin San to pieces. Hurriedly, he added, "Your Majesty, the only witnesses on that day were Lin San's trusted associates. It's possible someone framed the prince."

"I agree with Minister Chen's point," Lin San interjected, supporting Chen Biqing for once. He shrugged, "I only discovered the evidence. Whether the prince is guilty of treason or has been framed, we can't be certain. However, I haven't seen the prince at court recently. I wonder where he's vacationing. Ah, how carefree he must be—"

"You despicable—" Chen Biqing was so angry he couldn't complete his sentence.

"Name-calling won't do, Minister Chen," Lin San smirked. "I believe the prince is innocent, and I hope we can clear his name soon. Then everyone will be happy. Ah, I truly despise my own kindness—"

"Enough!" The Emperor finally lost his patience, slamming his hand on the table. His eyes swept across the room like bolts of lightning, daring anyone to meet his gaze. "My brother and I share the same mother. I refuse to believe he would betray me like this."

Everyone fell silent, even Lin San dared not respond.

Pacing back and forth, the Emperor's light footsteps seemed to weigh heavily on everyone's hearts. After a long pause, he finally spoke, "We are on the verge of deploying hundreds of thousand-strong army, and now we have this internal chaos. It is heart-wrenching. Lin San, hear my command—"

"I am here!"

"Humph," the Emperor coldly commanded, "since you unearthed this evidence, you are involved. I order you to thoroughly investigate this matter. You have two days to explain."

Two days? Cold sweat appeared on Lin San's forehead. He understood this was an ultimatum.

"To ensure Lin San doesn't manipulate the investigation and to prevent further rumors," the Emperor turned towards Chen Biqing, "Minister Chen, you will oversee Lin San. Both of you are responsible for solving this matter within two days. If you two fail, consider it your retirement."

The gravity of the Emperor's words hung heavily in the air, making the ultimatum all the more dire.