

Finest 536

Chapter 536 My Name is Yujia

The Turkic girl seemed as though she couldn't understand the language of the Great Hua Empire at all. Her eyes icy, she stared intently at Lin Wanrong, without uttering a word.

Seeing Yueya'er in Lin Wanrong's grasp, the other Turkic merchants immediately became furious. With a loud unsheathing sound, they drew their battle blades and roared angrily as they charged toward Lin Wanrong. Hu Bugui rushed forward and with a few quick swings of his blade, two men were down, their fresh red blood spattering on the green grass.

Witnessing her kinsmen's blood spill, Yueya'er became frantic. Regardless of her wrist still being held by Lin Wanrong, she struggled and cried out, "Bos qoy (Stop)! Bos qoy (Stop)!"

"You are not bandits!" The leading Turkic man, who had been in the heat of battle with Gao Qiu, suddenly broke out of the skirmish. With a ferocious glint in his eyes, he shouted, "You all are from Great Hua!"

This time he spoke in the language of Great Hua, albeit with a heavy accent. Gao Qiu managed to comprehend after some effort and laughed out loud, saying, "Clever! Your grandpa here is indeed a brave man from Great Hua. Boy, take another blade from Grandpa Gao!"

Without further ado, he gripped his blade with both hands and with a force like a thunderbolt, aimed straight for the Turkic man's head. Amidst the clattering sounds, sparks flew.

"Damn you Great Hua people! Taste the might of Heliye! Kill—" The Turkic warrior roared, gathering all his strength, and with a whooshing sound, his scimitar clashed hard with Gao Qiu's. Amidst the loud clang, Heliye's feet sunk into the grassy ground, his face flushed red. Gao Qiu's wrist felt numb, and he too involuntarily took a step back, his breath uneven.

It was the second time the two had engaged in serious combat. Heliye, this Turkic man, was astonishingly strong, which made Gao Qiu even more surprised and put away his underestimating attitude.

Hearing that these supposed bandits were actually from Great Hua and that one of them could even stand his ground against Heliye, the Turkic merchants couldn't believe their eyes.

Weak Great Hua people had managed to venture deep into the vast plains to raid and plunder? Such an event hadn't occurred for hundreds of years. Moreover, 300,000 Turkic troops were besieging Helan Mountain Gorge. How could these bandit-like Great Hua people possibly pass through such a blockade? Could they have descended from the heavens? It was unbelievable!

Reading the expressions on these nomadic merchants' faces, Gao Qiu quickly caught his breath and roared triumphantly, "What? Don't believe it? To be honest, even I find it hard to believe. But here I am! What can you do about it, huh?!"

As Gao Qiu continued to fight with glee, the Turkic girl saw her own people falling one after another into the hands of these Great Hua rogues, and her eyes moistened. Trapped and held by Lin Wanrong, she suddenly bent her head down in desperation and bit down hard on Lin Wanrong's hand.

"Ah—" Sharp pain shot through him, and Lin Wanrong's hand now bore a row of neat, gleaming teeth marks, looking like a beautiful Yueya'er embedded in his flesh, from which blood oozed.

The Turkic girl had a certain venom in her bite. Cold sweat broke out on Lin Wanrong's forehead. Just as he was about to lose his temper, the girl violently shook her head and seized the opportunity to break free and run.

"Wind-Slicing Blade!" Lin Wanrong shouted, hastily picking up something from the ground, and without even looking, he flung it furiously.

As Yueya'er dashed forward, she sensed a gust of wind approaching from behind. She thought it was the bandit's "Wind-Slicing Blade" technique and feared she would lose her life to his blade. The young girl let out a soft whimper and quickly turned around, flinging off her golden felt hat. Her hair flowed down like a waterfall as she extended her arms to shield her tribespeople, lifting her beautiful face defiantly.

The wind struck her face, causing intense pain, but it wasn't the sensation of being cut by a blade. She slowly opened her eyes and found, to her relief, that she was not covered in blood. Apart from some dust and sand on her clean veil, she was unharmed.

The dark-skinned bandit across from her looked serious. He focused on his right hand, clenched it, and swung it as he solemnly said, "Impressive skills! In all the world, you are the only one who has survived my unique, earth-shattering technique, the 'Wind-Slicing Blade,' unscathed."

"Wind-Slicing Blade? You mean throwing a handful of sand?" The Turkic girl snorted, extending her arms to protect her tribespeople. She stared fearlessly at Lin Wanrong and angrily exclaimed in her native language, "Meni öltir, biraq meniñ xalqımdı saqta!"

Lin Wanrong was puzzled by her rapid speech in the Turkic language. He turned to Hu Bugui and said, "Brother Hu, I didn't catch what she said. My mind works too fast, and she speaks too slowly. Could you translate?"

Hu Bugui chuckled, "She said, 'Kill me, but spare my people.'"

Lin Wanrong nodded, showing his bloody wrist to Yueya'er and clenched his fist menacingly, "Miss Hua, you bit me! You and your people are all doomed. Do you understand my Turkic?"

Hu Bugui shook his head and chuckled at Lin Wanrong's awkward use of the Turkic language.

From his menacing demeanor, Yueya'er sensed the bandit's cruelty. Her face changed rapidly, and she swiftly picked up a saber from the ground. With a few elegant swings, she positioned the blade in front of her.

Lin Wanrong nodded approvingly, eyeing Yueya'er's graceful figure, "Not bad at all. Flexible, good at riding, and probably great at pole dancing. Brother Hu, did you bring that spiked club? I might need it to interrogate this Turkic woman."

Hu Bugui was shocked. A single blow from that club would turn this beautiful Turkic woman into mush. And as for pole dancing, although he didn't know what it was, he sensed it was something inappropriate from Lin Wanrong's lecherous expression.

Lin Wanrong squinted, scanning Yueya'er from head to toe, nodding and smiling. The Turkic girl felt a chill run down her spine and angrily screamed, and at the same time, blushes crept on her cheeks.

'Misunderstandings can be deadly!' Lin Wanrong found himself needing Old Hu's assistance once again. "Ah, she's blushing! Brother Hu, what did she say?"

Old Hu chuckled awkwardly, hesitating before saying, "Well, she praised you, General, as a fearsome beast of the grasslands, the nemesis of all women!"

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter and slapped Old Hu on the shoulder. "Brother Hu, why are you so keen on saving face for me? Just translate it as 'pervert'; that's alright! She misunderstands me because she's only seen my appearance. Once she gets to know me better, she'll understand my true nature. How could I be a mere pervert? That's an insult—I'm clearly a lecher!"

Taking advantage of the fact that the Turkic girl didn't understand Chinese, Lin Wanrong and Old Gao laughed raucously. Although Heliye understood their words, he was entangled in combat with Gao Qiu and could only howl in anger, powerless to do anything.

"General," a soldier from the scout team came running excitedly, "just as you predicted, we found silk, tea, and a large amount of medicinal herbs in the carts up ahead."

"Really?!" Lin Wanrong shouted in excitement and waved impatiently towards the scout. "Brother Gao, stop fighting! The clanging is driving me crazy! Come down and rest; let's go get the medicine!"

Old Gao chuckled deeply, stepped back from the fighting, and dropped his blade, which was full of notches. "So, your name is Heliye? Not bad, much better than that Labuli fellow. Old Hu, keep an eye on this Heliye guy. I'll be back to fight him once I've fetched the medicine and switched blades."

The medicine was discovered in several carts in the middle. Even before Lin Wanrong and Gao Qiu got close, they smelled a fragrant herbal aroma wafting toward them. Just by the scent, they could tell the herbs were of top quality.

Gao Qiu was the first to pull back the curtain and take a look. He was so stunned his mouth hung open. "Dong quai, balloon flower, mandrake, saffron, fritillary, houttuynia, wild ginseng from Changbai Mountain, antelope horns, red-crowned crane feathers, cordyceps, spider venom, seven-step viper—"

As Gao rambled on, Lin Wanrong grew impatient. "Brother Gao, we're here to get medicine, not to recite a list!"

Old Gao's mouth widened. "I'm not reciting; all this is actually in the cart! Enough to stock ten pharmacies!"

As Gao Qiu had said, the cart was neatly organized with various types of herbs, each wrapped in parchment paper. Many of these were rare and valuable even in the Great Hua Empire.

‘My goodness, are these Turkic people planning to open a pharmacy?’ Lin Wanrong also couldn't help but widen his eyes. After a moment of silence, he muttered, "Who cares! Right now, what matters most is Little Li. The more medicine, the better. Brother Gao, grab whatever herbs you need, and bundle up the rest!"

Among other items in the cart were some feminine products. Most noticeable was a small pillow with a tiny bottle beside it, from which emanated a subtle fragrance—it was the widely renowned Xiao Family perfume. Lin Wanrong chuckled softly. If he wasn't mistaken, this cart must be the temporary boudoir of "Yueya'er." The idea that this Turkic maiden would use a mobile pharmacy as her boudoir was quite amusing indeed.

Gao Qiu nodded, just as he was about to pick up a long white ginseng, he heard a piercing cry. Yueya'er, her eyes filled with tears and her expression one of sorrow and anger, floated toward him, her gauzy skirt dancing in the wind.

Hu Bugui translated, "She says, 'Don't steal my herbs.'"

Lin Wanrong's eyes twinkled, and he chuckled, "This Turkic girl is too stingy. We are civilized people; why would we steal? Brother Hu, tell her that I'll buy all these herbs with silver. My reputation is as good as gold—well, let's make an IOU for now. She's welcome to visit Great Hua anytime and settle the account with the Emperor."

The Turkic girl seemed to understand his intentions. Her eyes welled up with tears, and she spoke rapidly in her native tongue before lunging at Lin Wanrong with her knife.

Hu Bugui quickly translated, "She says she gathered these herbs to personally treat her father's illness. If we dare touch them, she will fight us—oh, she's attacking!"

Before he could finish translating, Yueya'er was already upon them. Hu Bugui deftly parried her attack, causing her to stagger back several steps, nearly falling.

The Turkic girl was fiercely stubborn. Seeing that she couldn't secure the herbs, she let out an angry cry, tears streaming down like melting snow from the Tianshan Mountains, and raised her scimitar to slit her own throat.

Her audacious act terrified Heliye and the remaining Turkic merchants, who screamed and rushed toward her.

Just in the nick of time, Lin Wanrong, his face stern, deflected Yueya'er's curved blade. A faint red line appeared on her neck, tinged with blood. Her scimitar flew out of her hand, embedding itself deep into the ground.

Lin Wanrong's eyes were icy as he advanced on Yueya'er, "Even if you die, I have a hundred ways to make your soul tremble. Do you believe me?"

Hu Bugui translated his words. The Turkic girl snorted, her small hands trembling slightly.

"Hu Bugui," Lin Wanrong roared, pointing at the remaining Turkic people, "Go, kill all these merchants. Leave none alive!"

"Understood!" Hu Bugui responded loudly, marching toward the Turkic merchants.

Yueya'er clearly understood their intent, her voice filled with anger and her eyes with rolling tears. She spat out a string of words in her native language.

Hu Bugui translated, "General, she says, 'If you dare kill my people, I will kill myself and call upon the god of the grasslands to punish you with thunder.'"

"God of the grasslands?" Lin Wanrong burst into laughter, "I am a Great Hua citizen, and I believe in Guanyin Bodhisattva and the Tathagata Buddha. No matter how powerful your god of the grasslands might be, they can't overcome regional protectionism or implement cross-departmental law enforcement."

Hu Bugui scratched his head for a while, unsure of how to translate "regional protectionism" and "cross-departmental law enforcement" into Turkic. He awkwardly conveyed a few sentences. Judging by Yueya'er's expression, it was evident she was thoroughly confused.

"If you want me to spare your people, it's not out of the question." Lin Wanrong shifted his tone, chuckling sinisterly as he fixed his gaze on the young woman's pretty face, whom he called "Yueya'er."

Seeing his predatory gaze, the Turkic girl clenched her teeth and let out an indignant hum, her eyes filled with contempt. Hu Bugui translated, "General, she says, 'Stop daydreaming. I would rather die with my people than let you dishonor the women of the steppes.'"

"Vulgar! Disgusting! Filthy thoughts!" Lin Wanrong fumed, spitting vehemently. "She wants to take advantage of me? No chance! The virtue of us men from the great Great Hua is like the pure, beautiful snow atop the Tianshan Mountain. It won't tolerate any form of insult or desecration. Even the slightest indecent thought from her is unacceptable—it's a crime that would anger both gods and men!"

Each time Hu Bugui translated the general's words, he felt a shiver down his spine. But given Lin Wanrong's higher rank, Hu Bugui had no choice but to translate courageously. The Turkic girl blinked rapidly, clearly astonished. She couldn't believe that such a morally bankrupt individual could come from Great Hua, a civilization boasting thousands of years of history.

"Brother Hu, tell her that if she wants to protect her people, she must listen to me and do as I say. Otherwise, at the drop of a hat, I could order their heads chopped off. If that happens, she'll have only herself to blame, and it won't have anything to do with me."

Glancing back at her people, who were surrounded by Great Hua's bandits, "Yueya'er" snorted, but her gaze softened.

'Let's see if you can withstand my tactics, little girl!' Lin Wanrong chuckled smugly. "So, Yueya'er, what is your name?"

The Turkic girl clenched her teeth before reluctantly uttering, "I am called Yujia."

Hu Bugui explained, "Yujia, in the Turkic language, means 'beautiful crescent moon.'" [TL: This is a made-up name and meaning by the Author]

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Excellent, that name has a poetic touch. In our language, you're called Yueya'er (Crescent Moon); it all comes back full circle. You mentioned earlier that you wanted to take these herbs home to treat your father. Does that mean you know how to heal?"

At his sleazy expression, Yujia turned her head away and snorted. Annoyed, Lin Wanrong shouted, "Brother Hu, sharpen the blade. Kill!"

With a hateful glare, Yujia reluctantly nodded.

"Good," Lin Wanrong said without turning back, casually grabbing a piece of herb from the carriage. "Then let's test you. What is this called?"

"Platycodon!"

"And this?"

"Honeysuckle!"

"And this—"

"Mandrake!"

"..."

"Tangerine peel!"

"..."

"Cordyceps!"

"..."

After correctly naming dozens of herbs, Yujia's disdain for Lin Wanrong only increased.

"I refuse to believe I can't stump you!" Frustrated, Lin Wanrong rummaged around the carriage, finally grabbing a piece of aromatic, gauzy material. "This is my trump card!" he cackled, holding it aloft. "So what's this? What is it?!"

Yujia, her face reddening like a fiery blaze, shot him a glance full of fury so intense it could have incinerated him hundreds of times over.

Hu Bugui exclaimed in astonishment, "Ah, this one I know! It's called a Dudou!"

Chapter 537 Medical Treatment

Old Gao sneered, his eyes lecherous and sleazy. Lin Wanrong glanced down at his hand and found himself holding a piece of bright red, soft silk, adorned with round lace. Folded, it was no larger than his palm. A faint fragrance emanated from it. It was as soft as water, as fiery as a flame—reminiscent of the blushing cheeks of the Turkic girl, Yujia. He could even sense a faint warmth from it.

Seeing their commander holding such a vibrant dudou, the soldiers of the Great Hua couldn't help but suppress their laughter. Their expressions were as ambiguous as they could be. Yueya'er, the Turkic girl, was even more furious. Her face flushed, fists clenched, teeth grinding loudly. Her eyes, fiery as they were, remained locked on him.

Lin Wanrong appeared unfazed. He chuckled, "Ah, what a large red handkerchief! I can hardly hold it with both hands! I've been in need of a face towel; this handkerchief is mine now—"

"Sen dildi it!" Yueya'er barked, her eyes brimming with tears. She snatched the dudou back from his hand, tore it in half with a swift motion, and threw it on the ground. She stomped on it mercilessly with her riding boots, muttering something under her breath.

Lin Wanrong blinked. "What is she saying, Brother Hu? Why did she take away my handkerchief?"

Admiring Lin Wanrong's thick skin, Hu Bugui chuckled, "No worries, she's just a spirited Turkic girl. She said that you've touched her belongings, likening it to a mad dog biting a flower on the prairie. She curses your imminent demise."

Though Old Hu had translated it gently, Lin Wanrong caught the drift instantly. 'So, she wants me to drop dead, huh?' He laughed heartily, "No harm done. A slap is a sign of love, a kick even more

so. I've never been afraid of young ladies yelling at me. The more they scold, the happier I am. Ahem, after my thorough testing, it appears Miss Yujia is indeed familiar with these herbs. She probably can provide medical treatment. Brother Hu, tell her we'd like to propose an honest trade."

Ignoring some content in his speech, Hu Bugui translated. Yueya snorted disdainfully, "The proverb of the grassland says, 'The glorious moon will never shine upon a greedy pack of wolves.' I, Yujia, will never deal with someone as despicable and depraved as you—"

Before she could finish, the leader of the bandits drew his sword and slashed at a fine horse from the caravan. Blood splattered as the horse let out a mournful cry and slowly collapsed into a pool of its own blood.

The bandit leader, who was just joking around moments ago, now had a face as dark as ink. He blew on his long blade slowly, blood droplets falling off the edge, a ghastly sight to behold.

Yueya's expression changed drastically. She glanced back at her "vulnerable" tribe members. Tears welled up in her eyes, and finally, she nodded slowly, "What trade do you propose?"

Lin Wanrong instantly beamed, "Smart girl! Rest assured, I'm a fair man. Even if you desire me and aim for some illicit trade, it won't happen—my chastity belongs to my wife alone. So here's the deal: if you can heal one of my men, I'll spare one of your tribespeople in return. What do you say?"

"This person is truly shameless." Yueya'er was incensed. "You despicable Great Hua man, do you think I'm a three-year-old? I saved one of your wounded soldiers, and you release only one of my people? Do you think I'm that easy to fool? You dishonest merchant!"

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. "Hold on, if this is a trade, then there's room for negotiation. How many people are you willing to treat in exchange for how many I release?"

Yueya'er snorted, "Unless you release all of my people, I will not help you save anyone."

Lin Wanrong chuckled coldly, his eyes fixed on her. "Young lady, let's be reasonable. Don't assume that you can bully me because you think I'm naive. You only saved one, yet you want me to release so many? It's clear who the dishonest merchant is here. My final offer: I'll release ten, you save one."

Gritting her teeth, Yueya remained silent, her eyes filled with disdain.

"So, you're forcing me to use extreme measures." Lin Wanrong hummed. "Fine, if you won't play fair, let's play dirty. Brother Gao, start executing! I'd like to see how many it takes before she gives in."

Gao Qiu responded and walked menacingly toward the Turkic merchants, brandishing his large blade. His intimidating appearance had served him well in the palace, and no one dared to defy him now. The merchants retreated in fear.

Seeing the menacing look on his face, Yueya'er realized she had no way out. "If you kill my people, I swear by the god of the grasslands that I will not save anyone for you."

"Such a terrifying threat! How scared I am!" Lin Wanrong sneered. "If she's not willing to negotiate—Brother Gao, what are you waiting for? Do it!"

Gao Qiu let out a furious yell and lifted his blade, ready to strike down on the Turkic merchants.

Yueya'er closed her eyes briefly, two silent tears fell. "Fine, you win. Release half of my people, and I will treat your wounded."

Gao Qiu's blade stopped abruptly above the head of one of the Turkic men; he grinned triumphantly.

"Half? That's a lot!" Lin Wanrong frowned, clearly displeased.

Yueya'er's pale blue eyes shot fire as she clenched her fists and shouted, "You detestable Great Hua man, what exactly do you want? If I can't even save half of my people, I'd rather die with them under your bloody blade!"

"Fine," Lin Wanrong sighed reluctantly. "Half it is. I've never seen a bandit as kind-hearted as myself. But let me make this clear: my brother is still unconscious from an arrow wound." His eyes flashed menacingly as he continued, "If you can't save him, don't blame me for being ruthless. I'll make sure every one of your people joins him in death."

His eyes were filled with a murderous intent so fierce that it resembled a ravenous wolf prowling the plains. Even the towering and courageous Turkic men felt a sense of dread creeping into their hearts.

Unfazed by his intimidating presence, Yujia looked at him disdainfully. "As long as the man is not dead, I am confident that I can save him! I hope you will keep your word and release my people soon."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Don't you worry, Miss Yujia. I am renowned as the most upright and compassionate man in all of Great Hua. And I'm not just saying that. To prove my sincerity, I'll release one of your people right now—the one with the broken legs. Hey you, yes, you! You can go now. Brother Gao, give him a crutch! Life's tough for all of us, you know."

The Turkic merchant had suffered severe injuries to both of his legs at the hands of the Great Hua soldiers during the recent charge. Upon hearing that he was to be released first, he felt an overwhelming mixture of urgency and anger. 'If I could walk, you'd be the first I'd come for, you dark-faced rogue,' he thought. Infuriated, he slumped backward and fainted on the spot.

"Ah, so he fainted from excitement? Truly lacking in national spirit," Lin Wanrong remarked disdainfully. He turned to Yujia and leered, "Compared to you, my Yujia, he falls far short—ah, look at those curves! How old are you? Do you keep such a figure from drinking milk? Do you own the cows that produce it? I'd like to own one too—"

Gao Qiu shuddered as he listened to Lin Wanrong's ramblings, finally grasping the boundless depths of both knowledge and depravity.

Yujia's face flushed red, her teeth clenched tightly. With a swift motion, she stepped into the carriage. The curtain she lowered struck General Lin squarely on the nose.

"Thinks she's so high and mighty!" Lin Wanrong muttered, touching his nose. Gao Qiu leaned in with a sly grin, "Brother Lin, your insight is unparalleled. A Turkic woman who raises cows—that's something else!"

'What a buffoon,' Lin Wanrong shot him a disapproving look. "Brother Gao, if you want to be like me, you must be upright and have a purpose. Don't be entangled in base pleasures. Remember, as the saying goes: 'Where there is a will, there is a way; where there's desire, it's boundless.' You should really understand this deep philosophy."

Gao Qiu let out a prolonged "Oh," as if coming to a revelation.

All of the hundred-plus nomads were bound, Yujia included. At first, the nomad named Heliye struggled, but after Yujia whispered something to him, he settled down.

Five thousand cavalymen, along with the hundreds of captives, rode hastily to the south. Lin Wanrong was exceptionally cautious; he sent scouts hundreds of miles ahead. Despite traveling for several hours, there was still no sign of the Turkic cavalry. The vast plains seemed to stand still, as if the only remaining force was this isolated army of Great Hua rebels.

Judging by the time that had passed, even if the Turkic cavalry were as slow as snails, they should have heard the news about Bayanhot by now. Yet, there was no sign of them. This strange circumstance left everyone feeling anxious and on edge.

"General, are we truly planning to pass through Wuyuan and return to Helan Mountain?" Hu Bugui patted his war horse's flank vigorously to catch up with Lin Wanrong. Wiping the sweat from his cheeks, he asked the question that weighed on his mind.

Three hundred thousand nomads besieged the Helan Mountain gorge, their iron hooves trampling across hundreds of miles of land along Wuyuan. Dreaming of breaking through this encirclement and reaching Helan Mountain was pure fantasy.

"So, what do you suggest we do?" Lin Wanrong retorted, instead of answering Hu Bugui's question. "Should we climb back along the mountain ranges we came through?"

The eastern side of Helan Mountain was high, while the western side was lower. When they had crossed it, they had moved from east to west, downhill all the way. The treacherous journey had taken its toll on their soldiers. Retracing their steps was not an option; the towering peaks were insurmountable. Had it not been for these natural barriers, the nomads would have already crossed Helan Mountain to attack Xingqing Prefecture.

Hu Bugui knew they couldn't go back the way they'd come. But marching five thousand surviving soldiers into the midst of three hundred thousand enemies was a suicide mission, even under Lin Wanrong's calculated and ingenious leadership.

After some pondering, Hu Bugui let go of his concerns. 'If it's my fate to die on these vast plains, then that would be the greatest honor for a soldier of the Great Hua.'

"General, there's something I'd like to bring to your attention," Hu Bugui lowered his voice, glancing at the carriage in the middle of their column. "The identity of this Yujia seems far from ordinary."

"Oh?" Lin Wanrong laughed. "How extraordinary could it be?"

"With all due respect," Hu Bugui said gravely, "the man named Heliye who accompanies him is a nomad of enormous strength. It took Old Gao immense effort just to subdue him. I don't know Heliye's reputation, but having such a formidable Turkic warrior by her side raises questions about Yujia's true identity."

Lin Wanrong grinned lecherously. "Could it be a Turkic princess? If so, we've struck gold! Even if I can't be her Golden Saber groom, I'll certainly turn her Golden Saber green! Ha!"

"Do you really think capturing a Turkic princess would be that simple?" Hu Bugui was stunned by Lin Wanrong's lecherous bravado. "Moreover, why would a Turkic princess be mingling with a merchant convoy? This isn't some romantic adventure novel."

Hu Bugui had a point. Lin Wanrong nodded, growing increasingly curious about the identity of this Turkic girl, Yujia.

"You're right, Brother Hu," he slapped Hu Bugui on the shoulder, grunting approvingly. "It looks like I'll have to employ my irresistible charm for some intense interrogation. Prepare the wolf's-tooth mace, and bring along Yueya'er. With me taking action, we'll see whether she takes off her clothes or not—"

Hu Bugui looked at him with disbelief, prompting Lin Wanrong to widen his eyes. "What are you staring at me for? Ah, you must have misheard. I was saying, we'll see if she confesses or not! How could you misinterpret that? One must always maintain pure thoughts!"

"Yes, yes," Hu Bugui wiped the sweat from his face, pointing at the carriage in the center. "Yujia is in that carriage. Just a moment ago, Old Gao had someone carry Little Li into it. I heard she's about to use her magic to heal him."

Ah? Lin Wanrong was greatly surprised and immediately spurred his horse to rush over. As he lifted the curtain, he saw the Turkic young woman wielding a sharp dagger, poised to stab into Li Wuling's chest.

Chapter 538 The Goddess of Healing

"You wicked woman—" Hu Bugui, who was following Lin Wanrong, had just climbed into the carriage when he witnessed the perilous scene. His soul nearly left his body as he let out an angry roar, reaching out to grab Yujia's wrist.

"Hold on, Brother Hu—" A large hand reached out diagonally and firmly grasped him. Lin Wanrong's solemn voice echoed in his ear, "—Don't move; she's saving someone."

Saving someone? Hu Bugui was shocked. This Turkic woman was clearly pointing a knife at Little Li's chest. Could stabbing someone also be considered saving them? But General Lin looked serious, not like he was joking, so Hu Bugui suppressed his doubts and watched how Yujia would save the person.

Yueya'er was solemn, her sharp dagger slowly approaching Li Wuling's chest. She gently cut through his skin, and a slow trickle of bright red blood flowed out, making one's heart tremble. Li Wuling lay motionless in the carriage, feeling no pain.

Yujia took a handful of crushed herbs in her left hand, aimed at the cut, and gently applied the herbs. Strangely enough, the bleeding from Li Wuling's chest stopped almost immediately.

Incredible! Lin Wanrong was dumbfounded. The herbs Yueya'er used were from her medicine cart, which he had never seen before. Yet their hemostatic effect was miraculous.

Although it was a minor cut, the force and precision required for the incision were difficult to manage. Sweat beads formed on Yueya'er's smooth forehead, shining brilliantly.

She paused for a moment, then made another small cut near Li Wuling's arrow wound, preparing to apply the hemostatic medicine. Lin Wanrong hurriedly leaned in, "Let me do it; you focus on the surgery."

The Turkic girl glanced at him and snorted, seemingly not understanding his words.

Seeing that Yueya'er didn't seem to trust him, Lin Wanrong became anxious and gestured, "Mine, to stop the bleeding. Yours, the surgery. Together, perfect harmony!"

Hu Bugui, who understood General Lin's "Turkic language," quickly translated. Yujia paused for a moment and then handed him the herbs.

Her fingers were long and white, like jade onions. Despite the urgency of Little Li's injuries, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but feel a thrill as he lightly brushed against her hand. The sensation was as smooth as spring water, irresistibly delightful.

Yujia seemed to notice his lecherous action and snorted angrily, glaring at him. Lin Wanrong pretended to be serious, "Ah, these herbs are so slippery; I almost couldn't hold them. Sister Yujia, after we're done here, I'll strip naked for you to have a good look. But for now, focus on the surgery."

Old Hu was too embarrassed to translate this into Turkic and just laughed it off.

Watching Lin Wanrong successfully stop the bleeding with the herbs, Gao Qiu who had been silently observing finally sighed, "I've been practicing medicine for many years, and only today have I truly opened my eyes. I never thought that combining a few things could produce such an excellent hemostatic medicine."

'You call yourself a seasoned physician? I suspect you've only practiced medicine in the slums,' Lin Wanrong disdainfully snorted. "Brother Gao, what kind of medicinal herbs are these? How come they work so miraculously when my Yueya'er uses them?"

Proud when it came to medicine, Gao Qiu began to flaunt, "Don't underestimate this hemostatic medicine, Brother Lin. It contains at least five different herbs: Lotus seed head, golden monkey fur, ramie root, chrysanthemum leaves, and large thistle. All of these are abundant in our great nation. I've spent years studying medical texts; how could I not know to mix these five together for their hemostatic effects? I'm truly humbled."

While they were talking, Yueya'er's dagger was now close to the arrow wound on the chest. Her expression grew increasingly serious. Each movement of the dagger was as delicate as treading on thin ice, and her face was dampened by sweat.

Taking on the role of a nurse, Lin Wanrong rolled up his sleeves, approached her beautiful face, and spoke gravely, "Don't move, stay absolutely still. I'll wipe your sweat for you, so it doesn't infect the wound."

Just as Yueya'er's small knife touched the wound—a critical moment—she saw his grimy sleeve approaching and her eyes widened in anger. However, she couldn't afford to move an inch.

Both Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu looked on with envy. "What do you call a masterful stroke of audacity? Just look at General Lin, he knows exactly when to seize the opportunity! Truly admirable!"

Lin Wanrong continued to wipe Yueya'er's face, who looked as if she had been taken advantage of. Her eyes filled with tears, which threatened to spill over any moment.

"Eh, why are you crying?" Lin Wanrong was shocked. "Ah, there's no need to be moved to tears. Now, I'll have to wipe those too. Brother Gao, on my horse, there's a bag containing a pair of floral underwear that Ning'er made especially for me. I've only worn it twice and nothing untoward has happened yet. It's wrapped around a beautiful handkerchief. Fetch it for me; I'll use it to wipe away Miss Yueya'er's tears. Ah, these two items are my personal treasures."

Yueya'er's expression changed drastically. Her eyes were filled with horror, and her hand trembled uncontrollably. She dared not let her tears fall any longer.

Gao Qiu struggled to contain his laughter, "If these clothes were made by Lady Ning'er, then they must be extremely precious. Why keep such treasures locked away? Isn't that a waste?"

Lin Wanrong sighed, "What can I do? It's been so hot lately, I had to take off my underwear, lest it hamper my growth. Ah, I fear I'll have to use a large sack for underwear in the future. There was a song, how did it go? 'I don't wanna grow up'—it perfectly captures my current mood."

The two men, Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui, looked at each other in astonishment, as if their teeth would fall out from sheer shock.

All three of them continued to chat and laugh obscenely while Yueya'er kept her head lowered, focusing on the wound. Her ears and neck were tinted a faint rose.

In Li Wuling's chest were several small crisscrossing bloodstains. With precise aim, Yueya'er focused on the arrow wound and delicately inserted the blade of her dagger just an inch deep. Her face grew tense, and the bandit leader, quick to read the situation, hastily wiped the sweat from her brow.

The Turkic girl clenched her teeth and lightly exhaled as the dagger went in a little deeper. A gush of blood spilled from Li Wuling's chest—dark and thick. Lin Wanrong was stupefied. "What kind of technique is this? How did she manage to expel all the clotted blood with just a single cut?"

"Aqmaq, qan aqitudi tez toqtat!" Yueya'er's exclamation snapped Lin Wanrong out of his daze. Looking up, he saw the Turkic girl's eyebrows inverting sharply, her eyes glaring at him furiously. He didn't understand what she was saying.

"General, she's calling you an idiot! Stop the bleeding, quickly!" In his rush, Old Hu, forgetting to omit any crucial words, hurriedly translated for him.

Lin Wanrong looked down and noticed that the stagnant blood from Li Wuling's chest had been drained, replaced by bright red fresh blood. No wonder Yueya'er was urging him to stop the bleeding. In his haste, Lin Wanrong awkwardly smeared some medicinal herbs onto the wound.

Yueya'er snorted dismissively, casting a few disdainful glances at him.

When she finally withdrew her dagger and the bleeding stopped, the Turkic girl took a deep breath and slowly sat down on the carriage floor. Sweat glistened on her smooth, pale forehead, even soaking through her light veil.

Li Wuling's chest was covered in scars, his face pale. Hu Bugui felt his forehead and found it frighteningly hot. Gao Qiu, however, was overjoyed, "His skin is burning up. Although he's overheating, it's a sign that his body is starting to function again. Brother Lin, Little Li is truly alive. He's really alive! This Miss Yueya'er is simply miraculous."

Old Gao was right. Despite running a high fever, Li Wuling was far better off than before, when he showed no signs of life. Grinning, Lin Wanrong bowed to Yueya'er, "Thank you, Turkic miracle healer. Together, we have created a miracle."

Hu Bugui translated his words, and Yueya'er snorted dismissively, "I am not a miracle healer. And I don't need your praise. Just keep your promise and release my people."

"Of course! My honesty and kindness are renowned throughout Great Hua," Lin Wanrong said cheerfully, nodding repeatedly. "Brother Gao, release one more of Miss Yueya'er's people. Oh, I remember there's a blind man among them; let him go first. We might be bad, but we can't mistreat the disabled. Congrats, Turkic Brother; you can now search for your beacon in the grasslands with all your heart!"

Listening to this Great Hua bandit talk was enough to choke someone. Yueya'er was furious and about to chastise him for his insincerity when Lin Wanrong, unfazed, waved his hand and chuckled, "Don't worry, Miracle Healer. I always keep my word. Once my brother wakes up and recovers, I'll naturally release your people. For now, I'm just giving you a small token of my intentions. By the way, could you tell us when my brother is likely to wake up?"

Under someone's roof, one must lower one's head. The Turkic young woman had no choice but to suppress her emotions and said, "I don't know! He was seriously injured by arrows. The clotting blood wasn't drained in time, compressing his chest and causing him to remain unconscious. All I did was drain the blood. As for when he will wake up, only the god of the grasslands knows."

Lin Wanrong gave a thoughtful nod. So she had just used a dagger to cut around the wound to drain the clotting blood from Little Li's chest cavity. She wasn't exactly performing surgery, but her courage, demeanor, and judgment were indeed extraordinary. Lin Wanrong nodded deeply, "I see, I see. May I be so bold as to ask, how many times have you performed such a procedure?"

The young woman named Yueya'er hummed, "Do you want the truth or a lie?"

'Hmm, has this young woman learned my tactics? Is she trying to tease me?' Lin Wanrong blinked, "You see, I'm most afraid when young women get sincere with me. Many of them, not winning me over, resort to violent methods. So, better stick to the lie."

Yueya'er smirked, "If I say I've done this treatment thousands of times, would you believe me?"

"So, you've only done it a few dozen times?" Lin Wanrong looked at her incredulously.

Yueya'er shook her head and raised a delicate finger, waving it in front of him.

"Ten times?" Lin Wanrong went pale.

"Do you not know how to count?" The Turkic young woman grew irritated, "The first time!!!"

Thud. Lin Wanrong sat heavily on the cart floor, his forehead beading with cold sweat. So it turns out Little Li was Yueya'er's lab rat, and she had hidden her inexperience so well. 'Dammit, she's a fake healer.'

The young woman disdainfully looked at him, "What? Are you scared now?"

"Why should I be scared if you're not? — Brother Gao, we've been duped. Quickly move Little Li to another cart and establish an intensive care unit. Monitor him around the clock, and never leave him unattended. The danger he's facing now is unlike anything we've ever seen before. Hurry—"

Yueya'er let out a string of laughter as sweet as silver bells, the corners of her beautiful eyes curving like a charming crescent moon. Her triumphant demeanor seemed to sweep away all her previous discontent, transforming her into a cheerful Turkic girl.

Lin Wanrong gritted his teeth, "In that case, I'm afraid we'll have to inconvenience you, 'healer,' for a few days. Until my brother wakes up, don't expect me to release your people. Of course, if you have any special needs, feel free to ask. Even if they're unreasonable, I will consider them. Brother Hu, go prepare the most spacious cart for our 'healer's' special needs."

What special needs could a healer have? Hu Bugui was puzzled but obeyed the general's orders without question and excused himself.

Once everyone had carefully moved Little Li away, Lin Wanrong stepped down from the cart. Suddenly, he lifted the curtain and peered inside, speaking mysteriously, "Healer Yueya'er, I heard you can't understand our language, is that so?"

The Turkic young woman, Yueya'er, looked at him blankly. Her beautiful, large eyes blinked rapidly, and the light blue irises were as deep as the clearest lakes in the grasslands. She genuinely couldn't understand his words.

"Good." Lin Wanrong patted his chest and took several quick breaths. "Since we're alone, there's something I've been meaning to tell you. Miss Yujia, you're one of the eighty thousand most beautiful young ladies I've ever seen. Naturally, those who rank higher are my wives. They're ordered by the strokes in their names, so there's no particular ranking. You're beautiful too, but only to the extent of one in eighty thousand, comparable to my household maid, Ruhua. But I'm not here to compliment you today; I want to talk about your flaws."

Yujia looked at him with a neutral expression, her gaze indifferent as if she didn't understand what he was saying.

"Actually, you're not bad overall—your nose is a nose, your eyes are eyes. But there's one area that's just incredibly unattractive. Honestly, I've never seen something so unappealing. If you're interested, you could guess which part I find most unappealing."

The young woman from the Turkic tribes bit her red lips and remained silent, her small hand tightly clenched. A thin, uncolored vein subtly emerged on her pure and white neck, like a swan's.

Lin Wanrong stared at her ample bosom, swallowed hard, and nodded. "I believe you've guessed it. Yes, it's the rations you carry with you. Do you know that buns should not be made carelessly? There are standards. In my household, for instance, the buns must be rectangular. The dimensions, length, width, and height must adhere to strict rules. That's the standard set by the Lin family and shouldn't be changed. If you change it, it's not a bun anymore. Now look at you—your buns are both round and large, completely against the standard. So unappealing!"

Yujia's face flushed red, her hands clenched into fists, and the thin vein on her white neck swelled instantaneously.

Lin Wanrong spoke earnestly, "Making round buns, and so large at that—you've violated the standard, and this is a severe issue. It's had a massive impact on both my sight and soul, leading to unforeseeable consequences. You must rectify this—make them square!"

"Your wives are the square ones! You devil from the prairie—" Yujia could no longer contain herself. Her neck and cheeks reddened with fury as she grabbed the dagger she had used for treatment and lunged at him.

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily as he grabbed her hand, immobilizing her. "My wives naturally have round buns, even larger and rounder than yours. As they say, Rome wasn't built in a day—those are the results of my laborious fondling and caressing. But you, you're not even married, and yet they're so large and round? You've seriously violated the bun standards—it's an outrage! Wait, how come I can understand what you're saying now?"

Chapter 539 Catching Off Guard

"Let go of me!" Yueya'er sharply cried out, her voice crisp. She was speaking in the language of Great Hua, and although she wasn't as fluent as Lin Wanrong, who made a living with his eloquence, she was quite adept.

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. "So you really can speak our Great Hua language, huh? Yueya'er, the divine healer, you're so beautiful; why do you like to deceive people? It's not a good habit. You see, I never lie."

‘As if you ever speak the truth!’ The Turkic girl held no fondness for this Great Hua rogue. She huffed angrily, "Say it again; my name is not Yueya'er, it's Yujia. Dare to bully me, and the god of the steppes will never forgive you."

‘This girl dares to threaten me?’ Lin Wanrong calmly responded, "Yujia and Yueya'er mean the same thing; one is in Turkic, the other in Great Hua. But I respect others' preferences. If you don't like me calling you Yueya'er, I'll call you Yujia from now on. What do you say, Miss Yueya'er?"

Having nothing more to say to this man, Yujia let out an irritated hum and turned her head away, ignoring him.

Noticing the Turkic girl's exquisite face and untamed spirit, all so rich with exotic allure, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but smile and sigh lightly, "A name is just a symbol; it doesn't matter what you're called. For example, in Great Hua, my bandit name was Lin San. But here in the Turkic lands, I've got a poetic Turkic name that everyone loves."

Yujia snorted through her nose, disdainful, "You? Even the wild wolves on the steppes are nobler than you. What kind of poetic Turkic name could you possibly have?"

Her Great Hua might not be perfect, a bit stiff with some words, but among the Turkic people, she was unparalleled in fluency—far surpassing even the Turkic National Tutor Lu Dongzan.

Hearing this Turkic girl speak in Great Hua was such a delight! Lin Wanrong pulled out a piece of paper and pencil from his pocket, quickly wrote down some characters, and smiled, "You'll know whether my Turkic name is good or not with just a look. By the way, Yueya'er the divine healer, you can read Great Hua script, right? Don't let my efforts be in vain."

Hearing him seemingly forgetting that her name was Yujia, not Yueya'er, the girl felt her anger rise but felt helpless, left with no choice but to let him proceed.

Lin Wanrong handed the paper to Yueya'er. Yujia cast a casual glance and scoffed, "San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong. What kind of name is that? It sounds awful." [The literal meaning is “Three Cut Clan Nest Old Attack,” but it sounds similar to “Brother San is My Husband”]

Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter, "New names often sound awkward at first. Read it a few more times, and you'll get used to it. From now on, call me by this name; I like to hear it."

Yueya'er hummed coldly several times, her face full of disdain.

This girl really has a wild streak. Lin Wanrong chuckled and casually touched her small hand a few more times before finally letting go.

Yujia quickly withdrew her hand, only to see deep red marks clearly visible on her wrist, translucent as jade. It was evident how ruthless this rogue had been. She let out an indignant hum and glared at Lin Wanrong with fiery eyes, her hatred for him now etched deep into her bones.

"Ah, one more thing." The bandit took a few steps, then abruptly turned back with a mysterious smile. "I wonder when the divine healer, Yueya'er, will reveal her true identity to me. I'm quite looking forward to it."

Yujia's face flushed with anger, her voice fiery. "What nonsense are you spouting? My home is the great prairie; I am a daughter of the prairie. What 'true identity' are you talking about?"

"Is that so?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "An exquisite carriage, the finest perfume from the Xiao Family in the Empire of Great Hua, guarded by the prairie's bravest warriors, proficient in the Great Hua language and medical skills. Even the silk used in your garments is top-quality Suzhou silk. It seems the prairie is so prosperous that even a 'common daughter of the prairie' can afford such luxuries. I'm envious. Perhaps I should consider moving there and becoming a son-in-law of the prairie."

"You—" Yueya'er looked shocked and horrified, apparently not expecting such keen observations from a bandit intruding upon her homeland.

Lin Wanrong nodded mockingly. "A daughter of the prairie, you say? Hmm, it must be an intriguing tale. I look forward to hearing the divine healer Yueya'er regale us with the most captivating version of it."

With that, he burst into laughter and turned to leave. Yujia's eyes narrowed anxiously. She gritted her teeth and whispered, "San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong, wait a moment."

The bandit halted, his face breaking into a broad smile. "Very well, very well. You've called me aptly. Now, divine healer, what do you wish?"

Yujia hesitated for a long moment before lowering her head. "Nothing much. Just remember to keep your promise and release my people in due time."

Lin Wanrong gave a nonchalant "Oh," waved his hand dismissively, and turned to rejoin his caravan.

Yujia lifted her head to watch his retreating figure. Her eyes glinted with a mysterious cold smile; her lovely lips curved slightly, resembling the most beautiful crescent moon.

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"General, did you find out anything?" Watching General Lin gallop on his horse in silence, Hu Bugui cautiously approached and asked in a low voice.

Lin Wanrong slowly reined in his horse, his face stern as he shook his head. "She's not falling for my charms. My unmatched allure seems to have no effect on her. This young lady may just be indifferent in some aspects. What a pity, what a pity."

Hu Bugui shuddered at hearing two consecutive 'pities.'

"This Yueya'er is too mysterious," said Gao Qiu who was riding beside them. "In my opinion, we should simply finish it once and for all—kill all her people and just keep her to heal Little Li. Let's see what waves she can make then."

"That won't do," Hu Bugui quickly shook his head. "Brother Gao, you don't understand the Turkic people. Their sense of clan loyalty is extremely strong. If we kill Yueya'er's clan, she'll surely follow them in death. What will we do about Little Li then?"

Gao Qiu remained silent. Lin Wanrong let out a long sigh and shook his head. "Brother Gao, Brother Hu, I feel we are perhaps underestimating this Yueya'er. Forget about everything else, just consider the fact that she, such a beautiful woman, dares to travel alone between the territories inside and outside Xingqing Prefecture, remains calm even when captured by us, and even dares to perform surgery on Little Li without absolute assurance. How many women in the world have such courage?"

Old Gao and his companion couldn't help but nod their heads. Indeed, as Lin Wanrong had said, a woman with such valor and spirit was rare in this world. Hu Bugui fell silent for a moment before suddenly saying, "Considering Yueya'er's poise and aura, she's no ordinary woman. It reminds me of something. When the Turks wiped out the Tiele and unified the grasslands, the Tiele Khanate's royal family was annihilated. There were rumors that a princess—in Tiele they call a princess 'Dada'—was rescued by loyal tribespeople and has since been lost in the vast grasslands. Could Yueya'er be that missing Tiele Dada?"

Lin Wanrong patted him on the shoulder and laughed, "Brother Hu, you've been reading too many historical novels. This business about a princess being rescued by her people is mostly just sensational storytelling. If Yueya'er really was some Tiele Dada, she would have a deep grudge against the Turks. But look at her carefully. Does she look like she hates the Turks? Besides, a beautiful Tiele princess wandering aimlessly in the grasslands, as if hoping to be seen—is Yueya'er foolish, or are the Turks?"

"Could she be a Turkish princess then?" Gao Qiu exclaimed, his eyes widening. "If so, we're in luck. We could capture her and have her warm Brother Lin's bed; we would immediately become heroes of the empire!"

Old Gao couldn't let go of the idea of 'warming the bed,' causing everyone to chuckle.

"Brother Gao, let's not talk about that anymore," Lin Wanrong cautioned. "If irrelevant people hear about it, they'll think I'm kidnapping young women. I always use words, not force; everyone knows that."

"What a kind-hearted man Brother Lin is!" Gao Qiu exclaimed, his voice tinged with both admiration and respect.

The three men went to visit Li Wuling again. Whatever elixir Yueya'er had used, Li Wuling's forehead was still hot, but the burning sensation had lessened. When they touched his nose, they even sensed faint breathing.

This discovery brought tears to everyone's eyes, and their attitude toward the Turkish girl changed significantly. Even Lin Wanrong became bashful, no longer daring to flirt with the young healer.

By the time they spotted the Turkish cavalry, it was already approaching dusk. Scouts reported back that around twenty thousand Turkish cavalymen were racing toward Bayanhot; clearly, they had received news of the fortress being attacked.

Lin Wanrong heaved a sigh of relief. They had left Bayanhot twelve hours ago; the news should have reached the Turks by now. However, there had been no movement, which had made him uneasy. Now, although these twenty thousand Turkish cavalry were late, they finally put his mind at ease.

"Brother Hu, are you sure these twenty thousand Turks are coming from deep within the grasslands?" Lin Wanrong hummed, staring at the map before him.

Hu Bugui nodded solemnly, "Indeed, they are. I didn't expect that the first to come to Bayanhot's aid would not be Batur's massive army located just a few hundred li away, but these cavalymen from deep within the grasslands. They're coming from far away, bypassing the nearer forces. There must be more to this than meets the eye."

Lin Wanrong stared intently at the map, saying nothing. His isolated army, deep within the grasslands, had already ventured hundreds of miles southeast from Bayanhot. They were less than one hundred and fifty miles from the transitional area where the grasslands met the vast desert. Crossing this boundary would bring them to Wuyuan, where the first shots in resistance against the nomadic tribes had been fired.

The land stretching from Wuyuan to the Helan Mountain Gorge, some one hundred miles, had already fallen into the hands of these tribes. That meant a daunting journey of nearly three hundred miles awaited them if they were to rejoin Xu Zhiqing at the gorge. And lurking there were also three hundred thousand Turkic cavalry.

He sighed deeply, his previously jovial mood long gone, replaced by sheer gravity. "Brother Hu, tell me what you think. Why would these Turks go to such lengths?"

"Considering they're not making use of Batur's nearby army of three hundred thousand," Hu Bugui replied, "there could only be two possibilities. First, our staunch resistance at the Helan Mountain Gorge has put them in a tight spot. Even if Batur and Lu Dongzan want to rush to Bayanhot's aid, they have no soldiers to spare."

Lin Wanrong shook his head adamantly. "Impossible. With the cunning of the Turkic National Tutor Lu Dongzan, he would never play all his cards at once. Moreover, they control the initiative at the

Helan Mountain Gorge. They have at least forty thousand troops in Wuyuan alone. They are far from being out of options."

Hu Bugui nodded, thoroughly convinced. "You make a valid point, General. If it's not a matter of insufficient forces, then only the second scenario remains."

He paused, not speaking further. Gao Qiu inquired, "Old Hu, what's the second scenario?"

Lin Wanrong sighed lightly, "Brother Hu means there's a trick at play here."

"A trick? What kind of trick?" Gao Qiu was genuinely puzzled.

Lin Wanrong said thoughtfully, "Brother Gao, if you were Lu Dongzan, wouldn't you anticipate our route of withdrawal?"

Gao Qiu pondered for a moment and nodded. "Our surprise attack on Bayanhot would be unexpected, but if we're to rendezvous with Miss Xu in Helan Mountains, given its impassable terrain, the only remaining route would naturally be through Wuyuan."

"Exactly," said Lin Wanrong. "The value of a deep-penetration raid is in its surprise. But once achieved, the element of surprise is lost, and the danger increases exponentially. In this context, retreating and regrouping with the main forces would be instinctual, something Lu Dongzan would definitely anticipate. Look here—"

Lin Wanrong crumpled two pieces of paper into small balls and placed them on either side. "This is Wuyuan, and the other side is Bayanhot. Our current location is right in the middle of these two. When their twenty thousand cavalry reach Bayanhot—"

He stopped speaking, picked up both paper balls, and then pressed them toward each other, symbolizing a pincer movement.

Gao Qiu suddenly looked intrigued. "Ah, this trick. I've used it on some women in the Eighth Great Alley, quite invigorating. I never thought you, Brother Lin, would be so skilled in this as well."

"Yes," Lin Wanrong gritted his teeth. "All learned from my intensive study of Dongxuanzi's Thirty-Six Stratagems. I didn't expect you, Brother Gao, to be self-taught and equally proficient."

The atmosphere was heavy, but the gravity of their situation left no room for levity. They were between a rock and a hard place, and the choices ahead were dire.

Hu Bugui laughed so hard he nearly lost his breath. Finally composing himself, he said, "Brother Gao, let's focus on military matters for now. We can discuss other things when we get home."

Gao Qiu finally seemed to understand. "Brother Lin, are you saying that the Turks will launch a pincer attack on us from Wuyuan and Bayanhot?"

The shock was evident in his eyes. Forty thousand Turks garrisoned in Wuyuan City and another twenty thousand cavalry in Bayanhot. Sixty thousand in total, closing in on the five thousand isolated Great Hua soldiers. Was there even a point in fighting this battle?

"As it stands now, it seems Lu Dongzan wants to encircle us completely," Lin Wanrong said solemnly.

"Good grief, has this Lu guy gone mad?" Gao Qiu grumbled, clearly agitated. "So we burned some of his provisions; does he really need sixty thousand men to deal with just five thousand of us? It's just unreasonable!"

Hu Bugui shook his head. "Brother Gao, you misunderstand. Our five thousand men are likely insignificant in the eyes of the Turks. These sixty thousand troops have been mobilized for one person alone."

Gao Qiu's eyes fell on Lin Wanrong, his face a mask of horror. "You're saying that Lu Dongzan wants to capture my brother Lin?!"

"Exactly," Hu Bugui nodded with a smile. "I heard that Lu Dongzan was defeated by General Lin when he proposed marriage to Princess Nishang of our Great Hua. If it weren't for the Emperor's soft-heartedness, he'd still be rotting in our dungeons. Setting personal grudges aside, capturing General Lin, who now commands the Great Hua forces fighting against the Turks, would be a massive victory for them, even if they fail in everything else."

Hu Bugui's words struck at the heart of the matter, illuminating aspects even Lin Wanrong hadn't considered. His status had indeed changed. Protected by the Emperor and connected to two

princesses, he was far more significant than before, yet he had failed to realize it himself. And a shrewd man like Lu Dongzan wouldn't overlook such an opportunity.

"In that case, it's my fault that everyone is in danger," Lin Wanrong sighed. "Brothers, as you both know, I am truly innocent in all this. Nepotism is something I've always detested, so why are these Turks so vulgar as well?"

Everyone burst into laughter, lightening the mood significantly.

"Brother Hu, what do you think our next move should be?" Lin Wanrong asked, squinting his eyes at Hu Bugui.

"Heh heh," Hu Bugui chuckled. "What we should do is something Lu Dongzan would never expect. General, you must already have a clever plan in mind, do you need me to make any suggestions?"

Lin Wanrong gave him a thumbs-up. "Well said, Brother Hu. We'll do what Lu Dongzan can't anticipate. Only by catching them off guard can we achieve victory. If the Turks intend to trap us between Bayanhot and Wuyuan, then we'll do the opposite—" He slammed his finger down on the map. "We'll move in this direction."

Gao Qiu glanced over and was immediately startled. "Brother Lin, are we really going to charge into the grasslands?"

"What's the matter, Brother Gao, getting cold feet?" Old Hu grinned at him.

"Scared? Not at all. Actually, I'm concerned for the women of the Turkic tribes—" Old Gao gestured towards Lin Wanrong and chuckled suggestively, "As the saying goes, 'When Brother Lin steps out, who can rival him?'"

Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter. "Look at what you're saying, Brother Gao. I'm not that kind of man."

"Very well," Hu Bugui roared with laughter and extended his palm. "In that case, let's plunge into the heart of the nomadic lands and give them a few good stabs. Even if we die, we'll die gloriously."

"Die gloriously!" All three men clasped their six hands together tightly. Their boisterous laughter echoed far into the distance...

Chapter 540 Caught in a Snare

After deciding on the route of the march, Hu Bugui conveyed the orders down the ranks. The troops were already accustomed to General Lin's unconventional tactics. Whether returning to the Helan Mountain Gorge through a blockade of three hundred thousand Turks or advancing into the great plains while facing encirclement by nomadic tribes, the dangers were equivalent. Either way, it was a life-and-death situation. Instead of meaninglessly being annihilated by sixty thousand Turks, they'd rather plunge into the vast grasslands and fight a glorious battle.

Five thousand cavalry silently changed direction, opting for a route diametrically opposed to their original path. Moving from east to west, they traversed deep into the boundless grasslands under the cover of darkness.

Lin Wanrong looked back from his horse. Amidst the dark sky, there was only the vast emptiness. He could neither see where the grasslands met the desert nor catch a glimpse of the haunting Helan Mountain Gorge. With each step, he was getting farther from his homeland—Qingxuan, Qiaoqiao, Eldest Miss, Ning'er, Fairy Ning, Vixen An... He wasn't sure if he would ever live to see them again. A sense of melancholy surged within him, and his eyes grew moist.

Gao Qiu rode alongside him, sensing his emotional state. "Don't worry, Brother Lin," he comforted. "We will return. Even if it costs me my life, I will ensure your safety."

Lin Wanrong simply nodded, not uttering a word. His eyes caught sight of the lavish carriage in the middle of the formation. After a long silence, he finally spoke, "Brother Gao, keep a close eye on this Yueya'er. She is not someone to be underestimated. I have a strange premonition that our journey is intricately tied to her."

Gao Qiu chuckled. "Even if she's extraordinary, she's still a woman. With your knack for dealing with women, she'll probably be begging for your favor soon. What's there to fear about her?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head, amused. "Brother Gao, you're mistaken. The thoughts of this Turkic woman are far from simple. Do you remember the situation when treating Little Li on the carriage?"

Gao Qiu couldn't forget; Lin Wanrong's exceptional skills were awe-inspiring. "I remember," Gao Qiu smirked lasciviously. "That Turkic girl couldn't handle your teasing and nearly fled. You really know your stuff."

Lin Wanrong sighed, shaking his head. "You're wrong again, Brother Gao. What if I told you, it wasn't me teasing her, but her teasing me? Would you believe it?"

"Teasing you?" Gao Qiu was flabbergasted. "Is there even a woman in this world audacious enough to tease Brother Lin? Just how formidable would she have to be?"

Lin Wanrong nodded, his face deadly serious. "Think about it, Brother Gao. During our banter in the carriage, Yueya'er seemed outwardly enraged, but her eyes were clear, her composure intact. Despite the emotional turbulence, she managed to calmly treat Little Li's injuries without a single mistake. What kind of mental strength does that require? Not to speak of women, but even among men, how many could remain so composed? The irony is that we didn't even realize it. We thought we were amusing ourselves, but psychologically, we were the ones being toyed with by Yueya'er!"

After hearing the analysis, Gao Qiu was enlightened. "Had you not pointed it out, Brother Lin, I would never have realized it. This young woman is indeed excessively reserved. Ah, I see now. Your teasing on the carriage was all intentional, a way to test her, wasn't it? I must admire your superior acting skills; you even fooled me."

"It's of no consequence," Lin Wanrong waved a dismissive hand and sighed. "People only see my uninhibited exterior; how could they understand my passionate and sincere heart? Such 'learned libertinism' is mistaken for debauchery. Alas, I've grown accustomed to the misunderstandings."

Gao Qiu nodded sympathetically. "A learned libertine, indeed. Brother Lin, you are not one to be taken lightly. You courted public scorn by teasing Yueya'er, suffered endless injustice, and yet, you still remain so composed. I truly admire you."

Upon Lin Wanrong's orders, Hu Bugui stationed scouts at a significant distance. From the moment they changed course, the isolated force of 5,000 soldiers was destined to engage in a game of cat and mouse with the nomads. The vast Alxa Plain presented an uncharted journey for everyone; no one knew what awaited them ahead.

They traveled further into the depths of the plains for over two hours before setting up camp. With both visible and hidden scouts stationed, it was already midnight. Hu Bugui pointed at the map and said, "Those twenty thousand elite Turkic soldiers are now about a hundred miles to our northeast. Considering their pace, they should reach Bayanhot by tomorrow morning. My guess is that some

will remain there to reinforce the city, while the rest will continue to pursue us, aiming to surround us."

"Correct, the nomads are not slow," Lin Wanrong nodded. "That means, by tomorrow morning, the lame and blind men we released will 'accurately' inform the Turks of our whereabouts."

Hu Bugui laughed heartily, "Only now do I fully understand, General, that your decision to release Yueya'er's tribespeople carries such deep implications. This will only fortify the Turk's determination to encircle us from both sides. The young girl could never have dreamed that her people would end up aiding us."

"Not necessarily," Lin Wanrong solemnly shook his head. "Given Yueya'er's cunning, she would have thought of this. It is only because we separated her from her tribe that she's powerless to act."

Having already learned of Yueya'er's cleverness from Gao Qiu, Hu Bugui grunted, "General, in my opinion, regardless of Yueya'er's identity, she's undoubtedly a thorny issue. To eliminate future troubles, why not—" His voice halted, and he drew his finger across his neck in a slashing motion.

A look of regret washed over Gao Qiu's face. "Old Hu, such a beautiful young woman, the likes of which appear once in centuries among the Turks. What a waste it would be to kill her. Why not let me administer some bewitching medicine instead, so that she remembers only Brother Lin for the rest of her life? Wouldn't everyone be happy then?"

Hu Bugui looked alarmed. "Brother Gao, is there truly such a medicine? That would be excellent."

Gao Qiu nodded solemnly, "Indeed. Once we finish dealing with the Turks this time, I'll devote myself to researching and creating that medicine. You'll just have to be patient, Old Hu."

'Talking to this guy is pointless,' thought Hu Bugui, who snorted dismissively and ignored him.

Lin Wanrong sighed and said with a bitter smile, "Brother Hu, with your way of thinking, I'm afraid Little Li will never wake up."

Hu Bugui, a clever man himself, was instantly alarmed. "General, are you suggesting that Yueya'er might have done something to prevent Little Li from waking up?"

Gao Qiu also grasped the crux of the matter, his face darkening. If that were true, it would be horrifying indeed.

Lin Wanrong spoke slowly, "A beautiful Turkic woman like Yueya'er, with her intelligence and wit, is sure to have some means of self-preservation. We can't be certain she hasn't done anything to Little Li, but what I can say for sure is that she absolutely has the ability and means to make Li Wuling never wake up."

This final statement struck Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui like a sledgehammer to the heart. Lin Wanrong was absolutely right; inviting this Turkic woman to treat Li Wuling was an endeavor fraught with both opportunity and danger. They could threaten Yueya'er with her tribespeople, but couldn't she use Li Wuling to threaten them in return? Could they really jeopardize Little Li's safety and kill all of Yueya'er's tribespeople? It was easier said than done. Their relationship with Yueya'er was one of mutual benefit, constraint, and counter-restraint, a matter of who could outmaneuver the other.

Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu felt their heads spinning. On the surface, they appeared to be in control of Yueya'er, but secretly, wasn't she pulling their strings as well? What was the story behind this Yueya'er? How was it that every young woman they encountered on the plains was so formidable? Was there even room for them to live between this contest of courage and intelligence?

"Brother Lin, I feel like we've fallen into a trap," said Gao Qiu after a moment of confusion, and Old Hu nodded in agreement, seeming to see the problem as well.

Seeing the discouragement on their faces, Lin Wanrong chuckled, "What kind of trap could it be? At most, it's just a femme fatale. Don't forget, no matter how formidable Yueya'er is, she's still a woman, and we hold her in the palm of our hand. I humbly say, there's not a single two-legged female creature on this earth I can't handle."

'That's humility?' Both Old Hu and Gao Qiu exchanged glances. 'So, you think you can handle female monkeys and gorillas too? More like they would handle you.'

Though Gao Qiu usually sang praises for Brother Lin, even he felt a little doubtful at this moment. "Brother Lin, are you really that confident? Don't forget, your wives are all daughters of Great Hua, fond of love poems and the like. You've won them over with your dashing good looks and irresistible charm. But these Turkic women are completely different; they're like wild horses on the plains, worshiping strength and heroes, preferring men with rugged faces and beards. You don't have any of these qualities. If you really want to tame this wild horse—forget love, better use drugs."

"Exactly, we should use some kind of drug—" Hu Bugui blurted out, only to immediately shake his head, "No, no, that won't work. Yueya'er herself is a physician; she knows medications better than anyone else. It's too risky. I think we should simply use force. She won't be able to resist, and after a few days of crying, she'll get over it. Women are like that. Sentiments are secondary; force is the key!"

As they delved into their immoral plans, the two men became enthusiastic, a complete shift from their prior despondency. Lin Wanrong couldn't help but shake his head in disbelief. 'Why don't you show this kind of enthusiasm when studying military tactics?' However, a previous comment from Old Gao about "falling into the trap" triggered some vague resemblance in his mind, but when he tried to think more deeply, he was lost.

Hu Bugui and his companion talked and conspired well into the night. They devised countless ideas but failed to find a practical way to subdue Yueya. Only then did they realize the greatness of General Lin. It's true what they say, "One minute on stage requires ten years of work off stage." They pondered how Lin Wanrong effortlessly won the hearts of many young ladies; behind this glamour were indeed years of hard work and dedication. Truly admirable!

Lin Wanrong had no patience for their depravity. He walked away, heading directly towards the tent where Li Wuling was stationed.

Li Wuling's safety was of the utmost importance. His tent was located at the center of the military camp, close to Lin Wanrong's own quarters. Around a dozen guards were posted near the entrance, maintaining strict vigilance.

"General!" Seeing him approach, the guards perked up and saluted.

"Thank you for your hard work," Lin Wanrong nodded. As he lifted the tent flap, he noticed a fleeting white shadow and felt a soft breeze brush against him, as if a swift bird had flown past him.

"Who's there?!" Startled, Lin Wanrong swiftly unsheathed his blade and slashed forward. His actions were refined through years of battle—swift, precise, and ruthless. Even the Turkic warriors couldn't match his speed.

As his sword cut through the air with a whooshing sound, it met no resistance, missing its intended target. The tent was empty; not a fly, let alone a person, was in sight.

"General, what happened?" Hearing the shout, the guards rushed in to see Lin Wanrong gripping his sword, his face filled with disbelief and astonishment.

Lin Wanrong took a deep breath and asked in a solemn tone, "You were guarding the perimeter. Did you see anyone rushing out?"

The guards quickly shook their heads. "No, since setting up camp tonight, aside from you, General Hu, and General Gao earlier, no one has approached this tent."

Lin Wanrong scanned the interior. Li Wuling lay quietly on a makeshift bed, his face as pale as paper. Although his breathing was slow, nothing seemed amiss. The gauze wrapped around him was shocking to see—Lin Wanrong recognized it, having dressed Li Wuling's wounds himself earlier that day.

A bowl of medicinal soup was also present, and the air in the tent was thick with the scent of herbs. Other than that, nothing unusual caught his eye.

‘Could it be that my eyes were playing tricks on me?’ Lin Wanrong was filled with doubt as he slowly sheathed his knife and walked briskly to where the young lad, Li Wuling, lay.

Li Wuling's eyes were tightly shut, his sleeping face peaceful. His slightly youthful cheeks and lips were dry and cracked, likely from dehydration. Lin Wanrong touched his forehead; it was still warm but seemed to be cooling.

Nothing seemed out of place. Could it be that fatigue from the march had made him hallucinate? Lin Wanrong rubbed his eyes involuntarily. Several of his guards watched as the general aimlessly sniffed around, his eyes darting back and forth—they couldn't make heads or tails of what he was doing.

After scrutinizing the area thoroughly and finding no signs of abnormality, Lin Wanrong looked up and chuckled. "No harm done, gentlemen. I was merely checking on your vigilance. Seeing you all so dutiful and fearless brings me great comfort."

Exiting Li Wuling's tent, he cautiously scanned the area. It was utterly silent except for the occasional neighs of warhorses. For safety, the remaining Turkic men had been divided into small groups and were being kept under watch. One particularly robust Turkic man named Heliye was heavily bound and watched over by Hu Bugui's personal troops. Only Yueya'er, a solitary girl, had

her own tent not far from Lin Wanrong, surrounded by several guards, presumably to prevent any mischief on her part.

Having eliminated all foreseeable risks and unable to find any cause for his unease, he decided it was a waste of energy to ponder any further. Whether it was good luck or bad, if something was meant to happen, it would. It was best to just go home and sleep.

Just as he took a step, the distant notes of a flute echoed softly through the air. The melody was tranquil, as if it had descended from heaven, tinged with a touch of sorrow. It felt like droplets of spring rain gently falling on loquat trees.

Walking a few steps further, he saw a figure sitting alone on the distant grass, her back turned towards him. Her golden, silky hair flowed down naturally like a cascading waterfall as she set aside her small felt hat. Her attire, a long dress with golden edges, was casually spread on the grass. Bathed in the bright moonlight, her exquisite form resembled a golden flower blooming in the meadow.

A jade flute rested against her lips, the crisp notes dancing from its bamboo body. Sometimes the melody was lively, at other times slow, as though she was caressing her own face with the desert winds.

‘Trying to seduce me? Not a chance!’ Staring at the elegant figure, Lin Wanrong swallowed hard.

"Young hearts are as fickle as clouds; who will accompany me in this everlasting night—Ah! Isn't this Miss Yueya'er? Can't sleep either?" he chuckled, taking heavy steps that rustled the grass beneath his feet.

The Turkic girl slowly turned around. In the dim moonlight, her eyes were deep pools, yet they also contained an untamable wildness. Two clear trails of tears were visible on her flawless, moon-like face.

Wow. Lin Wanrong's mood involuntarily tightened. Who said the Turks had no beauties? This Yueya'er really had a different kind of charm.

"What are you doing here?" The Turkic girl glanced at him, her voice full of disdain.

"Ah, you've got it wrong. I should be the one asking you that question," Lin Wanrong laughed. "The moonlight is so bright tonight that it kept me awake. Just so happens, my inner beast stirred, compelling me to compose some verses—Ah, the desert's brilliance bathes the field, as a damsel plays her jade flute with zeal. When spring arrives, flowers mirror lakes, as moonlight and snow make the desert quake—Ah, splendid poetry. Were you perhaps lured by my verses? In the terms of our Great Hua, that would be a fortuitous sign, like heaven-sent monkey feces."

"What fate are you talking about?" Yujia sneered coldly. "Your Great Hua and my Turks are sworn enemies. You've captured my people, forcing me to heal yours. Such despicable tactics truly befit the reputation of your Great Hua."

Lin Wanrong waved his hand dismissively as he moved closer and sat down beside her. "Whether it's despicable or not isn't for you to decide, Yujia. Besides, didn't you also leave a secret mark on my brother?"

Yujia's expression remained unchanged, but she shifted away from him. She let out a disdainful humph, yet her eyes revealed a glimmer of icy detachment.

Lin Wanrong squinted his eyes and offered a faint smile. "You don't need to admit it; everyone has their own moral compass. Just like how you appeared before me, we don't need to discuss the process, only the outcome matters."

Yujia toyed with the jade flute in her hand and responded dismissively, "Don't think you're so clever. A pack of wolves on the plains will never outwit a cunning hunter."

"Is that a Turkic proverb?" Lin Wanrong nodded, "Interesting. As for wolves, we in Great Hua have a famous saying too—'Seven wolves in a night,' meaning our men can become a ferocious wolf seven times in a single night. Do your plains have such skilled hunters for such a wolf?"

"Shameless—" Yujia scolded, her ears turning a shade of pink, evidently having heard this 'famous' saying before. Lin Wanrong let out a few hearty laughs before his expression turned cold, "Let's get to the point, Miss Yujia. I can ignore your background, I can free your tribespeople, but I want you to stop playing games with my brother. I wish for him to wake up and be with us as soon as possible."

This was him laying his cards on the table. Facing a clever Turkic girl like Yujia, he felt it better to go on the offensive and see her hand.

Yujia snorted and stared at him coldly, "Please don't think everyone is as despicable as you. The breadth of the Turks' hearts is something you couldn't possibly fathom."

"Yes, yes, indeed very broad," Lin Wanrong said, ogling her "broad" chest with drooling anticipation, his eyes gleaming green.

Yujia's face turned icy, and her pale blue eyes emitted waves of coldness. "The reason you freed my tribespeople earlier is something you understand better than I do. Who's really playing games here, you people from Great Hua know very well. I just can't imagine how someone as cunning, despicable, and shameless as you could become an official in Great Hua."

The young Turkic woman's contempt for him was evident, stemming not just from her innate prejudice against Great Hua, but also from his own disgraceful behavior.

'I'll just consider it a compliment,' Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Ah, Yueya'er, it seems you haven't fully grasped the grandeur of our Great Hua culture. But that's alright; your ability to speak our language fluently is already quite an accomplishment. By the way, considering how proficient you are in medicine and our language, did you study in Great Hua? If so, where did you polish your skills? Do you know Xu Wei, Mei Yanqiu, or Gu Shunzhang?" His excitement was palpable as he rattled off several names.

Yueya'er clearly understood his line of questioning but chose to remain silent, offering neither a nod nor a shake of her head.

Seeing that his questions were getting him nowhere and the girl was a tough nut to crack, Lin Wanrong felt a rising sense of irritation. He smirked, "Ah, I get it now. You must have a Great Hua lover and you've been diligently learning our language and medicine to elope with him. Very interesting, indeed!"

Listening to his nonsense, Yueya'er could no longer contain her anger. "Elope with a man from Great Hua? What we, the daughters of the grasslands, yearn for are invincible warriors. Great Hua men are timid and weak, like cotton on the plains—crushable beneath one's foot and utterly spineless!"

Lin Wanrong, visibly indignant, retorted, "That's quite an overgeneralization, Miss Yueya'er. How can you judge an entire forest by one withered tree? Take me, for instance—am I weak? Do I lack spine?"

"You?" The young woman from the Turkic tribes snorted. "You might have a semblance of spine, but it seems to be solely used for unscrupulous matters."

The critique was sharp to the bone, yet Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter. "You have quite the keen eye, Miss Yueya'er; you see right through to a person's core. If it weren't for the fact that we've just met, I'd think you had known me before. By the way, have you ever heard my name prior to this?"

"San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong," Yueya'er disdainfully replied. "Why would I care about such an ugly name?"

Holding back a laugh, Lin Wanrong responded, "Names grow on you over time. So, you haven't heard of me. What a pity. Given your deep insights into my character, I assumed you must have studied me intensively."

His comment seemed both intentional and unintentional, leaving Yueya'er momentarily stunned. Her pale blue eyes deepened like tranquil waters.

Lin Wanrong, locking eyes with her, continued, "Actually, I have an acquaintance in the Turkic lands, though not exactly a friend. His name is Lu Dongzan; he's quite intelligent. But you, Miss Yueya'er, are even smarter. Do you know Lu Dongzan?"

Yueya'er's expression remained unchanged as she slowly replied, "Lu Dongzan, the famed National Tutor of the steppes? Every Turkic citizen knows of him. How could I not?"

"I see you do know him," Lin Wanrong said with a meaningful smile. "Well, if you ever have the time, please pass along a message to him. Tell him I welcome him back to Great Hua as a guest and promise not to swindle him out of his Nose-piercing Grass this time. What was the place called where those herbs are abundant? Altai Mountains, Khovd—wonderful places, indeed!"

He stared intently at Yueya'er, his face twisted into a wolfish grin, exuding a sense of triumph.

Yujia'er's small hand trembled slightly, and a chill surged through her. She broke into a sudden smile and shook her head. "How clever you think you are, oh man of Great Hua. So you've taken me to be sent by Lu Dongzan?"

Unexpectedly, she was the first to expose his thoughts. Lin Wanrong chuckled coldly, "Aren't you?"

Yueya'er burst into a series of laughter, sharp enough to shatter the night's tranquility, carrying far and wide, attracting the gazes of countless soldiers.

Old Gao and Old Hu peered out from their tent, stealing glances in their direction. Spotting Lin Wanrong standing beside Yueya'er, their eyes lit up. They gave Lin Wanrong an enthusiastic thumbs-up, grinning in a sleazy and ambiguous manner. God knows what they were thinking.

‘Damn it, I haven't done anything wrong! Why the presumption?’ Seeing the self-satisfied look on the Turkic girl's face, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but say, "What are you laughing at? Disrupting people's sleep and causing undue speculation is a serious matter, you know?"

Yujia halted her laughter, looking at him squarely. "Oh, clever man of Great Hua, don't presume to understand others through your narrow mindset. I swear on the god of the plains, I was not sent by Lu Dongzan."

The god of the plains held an incomparable position in the hearts of the Turkic people. Could it be that Yujia really wasn't sent by Lu Dongzan? Lin Wanrong found himself flustered by her words. Despite his extensive experience with women, he felt utterly helpless in front of this Turki girl, as though hacking at cotton with a great sword—effort wasted.

A strong sense of danger overcame him. Lin Wanrong abruptly stood up, his voice filled with anger. "Miss Divine Healer, revive my brother Little Li, and I'll let you and your tribe go—now, immediately!"

Yujia also rose to her full height, meeting his gaze fearlessly. "Wake your brother up now? I'm sorry. With my medical skills, I can't accomplish that. Of course, you can still choose to release me and my tribe. If so, I'd be eternally grateful."

She bent down gracefully to brush off the dust and debris from her long skirt. Her figure was captivatingly alluring.

‘What in the world is going on? She's sticking around and I can't even drive her away?’ Watching Yujia's retreating figure, Lin Wanrong clenched his fists, rage filling him.

“I feel like we've walked into a trap,” Old Gao's words kept ringing in his ears. Lin Wanrong's face turned pale, and he remained speechless for a long time.