

## Finest 541

### Chapter 541 Walking with the Tiger

The next morning, they broke camp and set out early. Lin Wanrong rode alone at the head of the group, his head hanging low and his expression lifeless. It seemed as if dark circles had appeared under his eyes overnight. Hu Bugui couldn't resist pulling aside Gao Qiu beside him and nodding toward Lin Wanrong's forlorn figure. "Brother Gao, what's going on with the general? Wasn't he perfectly fine last night?"

Old Gao blinked, his face equally puzzled. "Hmm? Could it be that something went wrong last night? That can't be; he was laughing so joyfully with Yueya'er. We all heard it. He should be basking in the heat of love, not looking like this. Perhaps he lost himself rather than messed things up!"

Hearing mention of Yueya'er, Old Hu turned his gaze toward the exquisite carriage at the center of the procession. The curtain was slightly lifted, revealing the figure of a Turkic young woman. Her graceful body, charming face, and deep blue eyes all exuded calm, and she even wore a faint smile.

The young woman, Yujia, carefully carved a delicate curved knife into a bamboo flute she held. Occasionally, she would lift the flute to her lips and play a few cheerful notes. Her long eyelashes trembled from time to time, and a soft smile lit up her eyes, making her look exceptionally sweet.

Seeing this, Old Hu was bewildered. Was this a captive? She seemed more at ease than someone sipping tea at a teahouse.

Comparing Lin Wanrong's mood to Yueya'er's, one looked as lifeless as rotting wood, while the other was as cheerful as a bright spring flower. The contrast was striking and inexplicable.

After a long observation, Old Gao suddenly slapped his thigh. "This is bad, Old Hu. This is really bad."

Hu Bugui was startled. "What do you mean, 'really bad'?"

Old Gao looked around cautiously and sighed. "Whatever General Lin told us yesterday was all bravado. By the looks of it, it's not that he's won over the Turkic woman; she's the one who's won him over."

Having spent considerable time with Lin Wanrong, Old Gao had picked up some of his lingo. The phrase "won him over" rolled off his tongue effortlessly.

"You can't be serious," said Hu Bugui, utterly shocked. "General Lin is the most charming man in our Empire. He's faced countless challenges and women without a scratch. How could he be defeated by a foreign woman? This is inconceivable."

Old Gao sighed deeply. "What's so inconceivable? As the saying goes, a crab eventually dies in water, and a general faces his fate on the battlefield. General Lin has lived a life of conquests. If he finally meets his match amid a field of flowers, it's not that big a deal."

Despite their speculation, the more they talked, the more they feared. What if General Lin really couldn't resist her and decided to stay in the grasslands? Not only would it endanger this isolated expedition, but it would also spell disaster for the two princesses, Miss Xu, and even the entire Empire.

They glanced at each other, seeing mirrored fear and panic in each other's eyes, as if the apocalypse were upon them.

Finally unable to contain themselves, Old Gao and Old Hu let out a synchronized yell, "Go!" Both whipped their horses, sending them galloping to catch up with Lin Wanrong.

The Turkic young woman, leisurely fiddling with her jade flute, slightly lifted her eyelids. Her gaze settled on the three fine horses converging ahead. A faint, mocking smile crept into her eyes.

It was dawn, and the eastern steppe was just beginning to show a glimmer of light that resembled the belly of a fish. The vast sky remained an unyielding black. Lin Wanrong had just let out a yawn when the sound of galloping hooves came from behind him. Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu hurriedly caught up, taking positions on either side of him.

"Ah, you two are in high spirits, up so early for a horse race?" Lin Wanrong waved and laughed.

Gao Qiu exchanged a glance with Hu Bugui. Gritting his teeth, Hu began, "General, there's something unclear to me. It's about this jade-flute girl—"

"Jade-flute girl?" Lin Wanrong's expression shifted awkwardly. "Why bring her up out of the blue?"

Hu Bugui carefully observed the general's face as he carefully spoke, "I'm wondering how your interaction with her went last night. Will there be, um, further 'engagements'—I mean, will there be a deeper level of 'offensive' against her?"

'A deeper level of offensive? Isn't my level deep enough already?' Lin Wanrong sighed and shook his head. "Brother Hu, Brother Gao, you've come at a good time. Concerning this 'Yueya'er,' I have only one thing to say."

"One thing?" Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu exchanged puzzled glances. They worried Lin Wanrong had been swayed by this Turkic woman. Gao Qiu reacted quickly, "What is this one thing, Brother Lin? Speak freely. We are prepared for anything."

Lin Wanrong covertly glanced towards the carriage at the center of their entourage, lowered his head, and spoke deliberately, "Cherish—Your—Lives—Stay—Away—From—Jade—Flute—"

As he finished uttering these words, he took a deep breath, appearing to have lightened his load significantly. Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu were stunned. Was it that serious? It was just a Turkic girl, but in the eyes of General Lin, she seemed like a dangerous beast.

"Don't believe me, eh? I knew you wouldn't!" Lin Wanrong bitterly shook his head. "If it were yesterday, I wouldn't believe it either. But the reality is cruel. Think about it. A beautiful girl like her is in our hands. What can we do to her? As long as Little Li remains unconscious, we can neither hit nor curse her, let alone kill her. We have to treat her well, and even sending her away has become a luxury. To put it bluntly, she could easily sabotage us a hundred times over, while we have no avenue to harm her."

Lin Wanrong expressed his anguish and indignation. Never before had he understood so deeply the saying that it's easier to invite a deity than to send one away.

"Ah, so that's how it is," both Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui said, stretching out the word 'ah,' but then burst into carefree laughter, showing not a shred of concern. Whether Yueya'er was easy to deal with wasn't their worry. As long as Brother Lin hadn't been bewitched by the Turkic woman, all was well. As for dealing with Yueya'er, who would believe that Lin Wanrong was truly helpless? He was just being modest.

"Hey, you two, are you even listening to me? Do you know how dangerous this Yueya'er girl is?" Seeing both men laughing lasciviously, without a care for their future, General Lin couldn't help but roar in exasperation.

Gao Qiu hastily nodded, "Brother Lin, here's what we're thinking. Little Li's injuries cannot be left untreated, and we have no choice but to keep Yueya'er with us for the journey. Although she has some tricks up her sleeve, as you said yesterday, she is ultimately under our control. At worst, we can resort to coercion; rest assured that we won't let you suffer any loss."

"Yes, yes," Old Hu added, "Another crucial point is that Old Gao and I both feel that this Yujia'er holds a significant position among the Turkic people. Keeping her with us could prove advantageous at a critical moment. We are considering the safety of our brothers."

Their back and forth made it clear that although they weren't deliberately keeping Yueya'er, the implication was there. Yueya'er was now Little Li's savior, and driving her away was out of the question. Instead of figuring out how to get rid of her, it was better to think of how to win her over.

Of the three, Lin Wanrong had the most interactions with Yujia'er, and he understood best just how formidable this Turkic girl was.

At the moment, Yueya'er was as mysterious as the moon in the sky, her origins unknown. Yet given her understanding of the language and medical arts of the Empire, no one would believe that she hadn't heard of Lin Wanrong. In their conversation the previous night, she had displayed a keen wit. When she spoke, her words were incisive, as if targeting Lin Wanrong's vulnerabilities. It was both accurate and ruthless.

One of them operated in the shadows, the other in the light. 'I haven't even made my move, and I'm already at a disadvantage. How can I win this fight?' Lin Wanrong mused silently, then finally shook his head with a wry smile. "Brother Gao, Brother Hu, keeping Yujia'er with us is akin to dancing with a tiger."

Gao Qiu grunted in agreement and chuckled, "What's there to fear? Even if she's a ferocious tiger, she's still a female. Old Hu and I have faith in you; go ahead and do what you need to do."

It seemed there was truly no turning back. Lin Wanrong looked towards the carriage. The curtain was rolled up, and the Turkic girl sat on the floor, carefully picking herbs. She hummed a tune that Lin Wanrong couldn't understand, her face covered by a light veil. Every so often, her face radiated a smile as warm as spring flowers, incredibly beautiful.

In a moment of delight, she grabbed some herbs and lightly scattered them on the carriage floor, forming the characters of her name—"Yujia." Satisfied, she nodded her head. She then mysteriously produced a small, exquisite golden curved knife from somewhere. The knife's sheath shimmered in golden hues, looking incredibly valuable. Yujia placed the golden knife below her name, examining it closely. A touch of blush appeared on her face, and she couldn't help but bite her lower lip as she smiled.

Watching her every move was like feeling the gentle breeze sweeping across the plains—pure, natural, and flawless. At this moment, Yueya'er was just an innocent and carefree Turkic girl, and no one could associate her with the formidable Yujia from the previous night. Hu Bugui muttered, "Who would have thought that such pure and lovely women existed on the plains? I've truly broadened my horizons."

"Pure and lovely?" Lin Wanrong found it impossible to associate the Turkic girl, Yujia, with the words 'pure and lovely' after her behavior the previous night. To say she was hateful was already a compliment.

Seemingly sensing someone's gaze, Yujia slowly lifted her head and offered a smile, radiant like fireworks, her eyes deep and shimmering like water.

"Damn it," Old Gao couldn't help but grab Hu Bugui's shoulder, saying fiercely, "A femme fatale, a disaster for the country and its people! Brother Lin, on behalf of the people of Great Hua, I strongly request that you rein in this temptress to uphold the might of our great nation."

Staring at Yujia's moist, water-like eyes, Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat. An involuntary phrase came to his mind—Walking with a Tiger!

"Report—urgent military news!" From a distance, a steed galloped toward them like an arrow, the scout's shout echoing across the plains. The Turkic horse was soaked through, its rider covered in dust and sweat, charging straight for the central army.

Gao Qiu quickly stepped forward, grabbing the galloping horse's reins. With a loud neigh, the horse came to a stable halt. The scout dismounted but stumbled forward, his knees buckling from exhaustion.

Hu Bugui swiftly moved to steady him. "Calm down, General Lin is here. What's the urgent military news? Speak!"

The scout panted, "General, this is bad. The 20,000 Turkic people who were originally heading toward Bayanhot suddenly changed direction this morning. They are now moving southwest toward our army. Their vanguard is now approximately 77 miles away."

"What? How could this happen?" Both Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu were shocked, leaping to their feet. "How could the Turks know we are here? Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"General, I swear it's true!" The scout said anxiously. "Three more scouts are still hidden up ahead. They will have more information in an hour."

It seemed to be true then. Old Hu's face turned pale. He turned to Lin Wanrong, "General, how could this possibly happen? How could the Turks suddenly change course?"

Lin Wanrong's eyes flashed as he quickly glanced towards Yujia's carriage. The curtain had been quietly drawn. Yueya'er's silhouette was faintly visible, appearing and disappearing; there was an eerie quietness inside the carriage.

"Wait for me!" Lin Wanrong shouted, slapping his horse's rear. The Turkic steed sprinted out, heading straight for the exquisite carriage.

"Ah—what are you doing?!" Amid Yujia's scream, Lin Wanrong tore open the curtain, leaped inside, and slashed his knife toward Yueya'er's head.

## Chapter 542 Dancing on the Edge of a Blade

The blade was swift and fierce, its glint like a meteor streaking through the sky, aimed straight at Yujia's face.

In a moment of urgent alarm, the Turkic girl let out an angered cry. However, her face showed not a trace of fear. Her golden curved blade moved as fast as lightning, thrusting towards Lin Wanrong's lower abdomen.

Neither of them spoke. They both came at each other mercilessly. The carriage's interior was incredibly cramped, making it difficult to maneuver. Even if Lin Wanrong's strike could kill Yujia, he would inevitably be wounded by her thrust in return.

The gleaming steel blade was held against the Turkic girl's fair, delicate neck. Though Yujia was a woman, her resilience surpassed that of many men. Her eyes widened in defiance, the golden blade in her hand merely inches away from Lin Wanrong's abdomen. One move from either would lead to mutual destruction. For a moment, the carriage fell silent. Yujia clenched her teeth and glared at him, her eyes icy cold.

Lin Wanrong took in the sight before him: the Turkic girl's small, flushed mouth was gasping for air; her robe was half-unraveled, revealing a glimpse of her soft, creamy bosom, as pure and radiant as lard-white jade. Beside her lay a brand-new golden silk dress.

Holding her blade in one hand, her other hand clenched the waistband of her silk skirt. Anger filled her eyes, yet there was a trace of embarrassment.

"What are you doing?!" Yujia was indignant, gripping the ribbon on her dress so tightly she seemed to forget about the blade pressed against her neck. Her slender neck tilted slightly forward, the steel blade not budging an inch. A thin line formed on her fair, delicate neck, a hint of blood emerging.

It turned out the girl was changing her clothes. Lin Wanrong couldn't help but chuckle. He looked a few times at Yujia's chest and said with a ferocious expression, "What am I doing? Can't you see—" he shook his steel blade menacingly, "—I'm here to kill!"

"A wolf bares its claws because that's its last weapon. If you're going to kill, then kill. If I even so much as furrow my brows, then I am not Yujia, daughter of the steppes." The Turkic girl snorted disdainfully through her nose, gave him a few contemptuous glances, and slowly closed her eyes, her face calm as ever.

Every Turkic proverb Yujia cited had something to do with wolves, leaving Lin Wanrong both amused and exasperated. Shaking his head, he chuckled, "You should know that I'm too soft-hearted to be a wolf. You, on the other hand, could roar louder than a she-wolf in heat on the steppes. You should be called the Wolf Queen; that title might just suit your status."

The Turkic girl's light blue eyes, deep as the ocean, watched him for a few moments. "In a pack of wolves on the steppes, no one ever knows who the leader is. Because by the time you find out, you're already buried within them."

This girl really did understand the nature of wolves. Lin Wanrong waved his hand dismissively and laughed, "Aside from having some knowledge about lecherous wolves, I don't know much else. However, there is one thing I am really curious about—Little Yueya'er, how did you manage to attract those Turkic horsemen?"

The Turkic young woman hesitated for a moment, then burst into laughter, gripping the carriage window as her body shook uncontrollably. Her laughter intensified until she could no longer hold the golden knife in her hand steady. Finally, she bent over, holding her stomach, laughing so hard that her cheeks turned red. Her melodious laughter carried far across the plains.

'Is she under the influence of some laughter-inducing potion?' Lin Wanrong felt chills run down his spine. He quickly brandished his saber. "Stop laughing, or I'll kill someone."

"I would laugh even if you killed someone," the Turkic young woman responded, as if she had just encountered the most amusing thing in the world. She completely disregarded his threat, her laughter scattering across the plains.

"Uh-oh," Old Gao and Old Hu exchanged a worried glance. If this young woman laughed, it would surely have a detrimental effect on General Lin. It seemed like an unwritten rule.

The young woman, Yujia, finally managed to stifle her laughter, though her eyebrows still remained tinged with a shade of red. "General Lin, or should I say, San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong, you should know that you look a hundred, a thousand times better when you're clumsy than when you're trying to be clever."

Lin Wanrong was both amused and exasperated. "Really? I thought I was already at my most handsome. I didn't realize I could be even more so. Thank you for enlightening me."

"Never met anyone so shameless," Yujia muttered under her breath. "Since you said I led my people here, may I ask how? I'm all alone, confined to this carriage, under constant watch. How could I possibly inform my people?"

Lin Wanrong had also been pondering this. Sprinkle some sort of signaling substance? Impossible—soldiers were keeping a close eye on her. Even if she were to drop a needle, someone would notice. Blow a whistle to signal? That was ludicrous; if the tribesmen could hear the sound, he would have been dead by now. "I have no idea," he finally admitted, "So, how did you do it?"

"I did—what? Signal? Never!" Caught off guard, Yujia's face flushed with indignation.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Whether you signaled or not doesn't matter. Sooner or later, I'd be discovered on the plains. Whether you bring twenty thousand or two hundred thousand, it makes no



difference to me. Besides, your people are still more than sixty miles away. I have ample time to make my moves. I can fight or retreat at will; they won't have an easy time with me."

His words rang true. Guerrilla warfare was the name of the game on the plains; not being discovered was an impossibility.

Yujia snorted, "You're cunning, disguising advance as retreat. But as you said, being discovered is inevitable. Why would I risk my life and the lives of my hundreds of tribesmen to send a needless signal? Do you think I'm as foolish as you?"

"It seems like you have a point," Lin Wanrong chuckled and nodded. "So you're saying it wasn't you who tipped them off? Then who could it be?"

Yujia's expression was icy. "Must I repeat myself? I am not as despicable as you. The god of the plains can bear witness for me. Don't overestimate yourself; heroes are born every day in my tribe. Seeing through your petty schemes is as easy as flipping a hand! Do we even need someone to leak information?"

Yujia invoked the god of the plains, evidently dismissing any inclination towards deceit. A lightbulb went off in Lin Wanrong's head, and he suddenly realized, "Ah, I understand now. They never actually discovered us."

A flicker of surprise flashed in the eyes of the Turkic young woman. "How do you know?"

"It's simple," Lin Wanrong grinned. "I released two of your tribespeople and deliberately sent them back with false information. The twenty thousand Turkic cavalry, upon hearing the news, would've easily considered the possibility of a diversion. After all, they still have forty thousand troops at Wuyuan waiting. They can confidently proceed in the opposite direction to probe our actual location. No need for spies; it's pure strategy. I enjoy watching such tactics play out. Thanks to you, Miss Yujia, for the reminder. I never thought there'd be such talent among the Turkic people."

Yujia snorted, "All these are merely your speculations. What's there to be proud of? If you're so confident, stay here and let's see who the true warrior is."

Lin Wanrong waved his hand and smiled, "Once we enter the plains, we're dancing on a blade's edge. As a warrior, I'd rather perform an enticing dance. There are always some Turkic folks who'd appreciate it; I don't mind. As for my words being mere speculations, you know better, Miss Yujia. There's a glaring flaw in this whole scenario, one that you haven't noticed."

Yujia's cheeks flushed at his audacity, but his confidence was so overwhelming that she couldn't help but be surprised. "A glaring flaw? What flaw?"

"The glaring flaw, my dear, is you," Lin Wanrong's eyes narrowed into slits, his grin lascivious.

Yujia hummed dismissively, "Nonsense, what flaw could I have?"

Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled, "Miss Yueya'er, even though I don't know your background, one thing is certain. Someone as beautiful and intelligent as you must hold a significant position among the Turkic people. Am I right?"

Yujia snorted through her nostrils, neither confirming nor denying.

"Having captured such an esteemed individual, I deliberately sent two of your tribespeople to relay the message. These twenty thousand Turkic cavalry would not dare risk your life, even if they doubt our real location. At worst, they would split their forces. Some would pursue us at Wuyuan to protect the precious Miss Yujia, while others would scout the direction they suspect. Not even tenfold courage would make them deploy all their troops toward an uncertain location—see, there's the flaw! I'll bet that after they've gone a hundred miles without seeing any sign of us, they'll call off the search. Your twenty thousand reinforcements will have no choice but to head to Wuyuan. What do you say, Miss Yujia, care to wager?"

The young Turkic girl's eyes flashed with a sharp glint, her astonishment no longer concealable. Yet, she defiantly snorted, "What do you want to bet?"

Lin Wanrong carefully observed her expression, feeling more confident. He chuckled, "The stakes are simple. If you win, I'll immediately release ten of your tribespeople."

Yujia cast him a cautious glance and snorted, "You want to use my people for your theatrics again? And what if I lose—"

"If you lose—" Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, his eyes roving over her body, glowing with a lecherous light. Yujia hastily covered her chest with her clothes, her golden knife held tightly against her bosom. She shouted, "Vile wolf, you'll never tarnish the honor of a steppe daughter—"

"Hmm, that's a nice little knife, all shiny and golden," Lin Wanrong said with a smile. "If you lose, give me that knife. I could use it to peel fruit or trim my nails—"

"Daydreaming." Yujia interrupted him, disdainfully adding, "The person worthy of receiving this golden knife hasn't been born yet."

Annoyed, Lin Wanrong huffed, "It's just a broken knife. Even if it were made of pearls and agate, I wouldn't care. Fine, new terms: if you lose, you'll have to shout my Turkic name a hundred times in front of everyone. Agree or not—disagree, and I'll kill!"

"Your Turkic name?" Yueya'er considered for a moment and nodded, "San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong, what a ridiculous name. Shout it, I shall; I'm not afraid of you."

"Good, it's settled then," Lin Wanrong laughed uproariously, sheathing his saber. "Pardon the intrusion; please continue changing your clothes, little sister."

Yueya'er looked at him, a cold smile on her lips, "What, you're not killing me now?"

Lin Wanrong mysteriously replied, "How could I? You're now my treasure, too precious to be carried even in a palanquin. My five thousand brothers are all counting on you to save their lives."

A cold light flashed in Yujia's eyes. Upon reflection, she realized that today's skirmish had been entirely different from last night's. This bandit had subtly gained the upper hand.

Just as he was about to jump off the wagon, the silent Yujia suddenly spoke, her voice dripping with allure, "Lord Wo Lao Gong, I forgot to tell you, I also enjoy dancing on the edge of a blade."

"Oh, is it an exotic dance?" Lin Wanrong replied without turning back, "We can dance together; I even have a pole—"

Before he could finish, Yujia, now furious, hurled a few dried herbs at him, "Degenerate! Get out —"

Lin Wanrong jumped off the wagon, his back already soaked in sweat. He wiped the sweat from his forehead, contemplating his recent encounter with the Turkic girl. Her meticulous thoughts, accurate judgments, and mastery over human psychology were unlike anything he had ever seen or

heard. Thankfully, he had managed to dull her edge this time; otherwise, who knew what she might have done.

"General Lin, what's the news? Did you find out anything?" Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu anxiously galloped up to him, full of urgency. Judging from General Lin's current demeanor, full of exuberance and glowing like spring, it didn't seem he had been frustrated by Yueya'er. Could it be that he had won over Yueya'er? Both Old Hu and Old Gao were puzzled for a moment.

"I've found out half the story," Lin Wanrong chuckled as he briefly described what had happened. Gao Qiu murmured in surprise, "Oh, so she didn't send the message?"

Hu Bugui nodded, "The God of the Plains is held in the highest esteem by the Turks. This woman from the Turkic tribe has a proud and lofty spirit; she would never lie in the name of the Plains God. It seems there must be a mastermind among the Turkic cavalry. General, do you really believe these Turkic people haven't discovered us and are only probing in this direction?"

Lin Wanrong spoke seriously, "If Yueya'er is not the one who sent the message, then these Turkic people would definitely not be able to find us; at most they'd be suspicious. Moreover, judging by the current situation, Yueya'er's status among the Turks must be extremely important. They wouldn't dare to underestimate her. Before they ascertain our exact location, they must go to Wuyuan. As for Yueya'er, hehe, Brother Gao, you were right; she's a big fish."

Eagerly, Gao Qiu asked, "But what kind of fish is she? Brother Lin, have you figured it out yet?"

"I'm still working on it," Lin Wanrong said solemnly. "But don't worry. As the saying goes, 'With enough effort, even iron can be ground into a needle.' Trust me, we'll eventually have a breakthrough."

Old Gao winked and grinned lasciviously, while Hu Bugui, who was relatively more pure-hearted, did not understand their hidden meaning and grunted, "So what should our army do now? Should we stop?"

"No, why should we stop?" Lin Wanrong waved his hands dismissively. "Even if you trust me, you shouldn't trust Yueya'er. She's even more cunning than I am. If she's secretly sent out a message, we'll just be sitting ducks. For safety's sake, let's continue advancing west into the plains, striking deep into the heart of the Turkic lands. We must terrify the Turks. Additionally, keep sending scouts to keep tabs on those twenty thousand Turkic cavalymen, Brother Hu. We're bound to encounter them sooner or later."

Both Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu simultaneously responded in agreement and set off to make arrangements. The troops sped up their advance to the west, running ever faster as if those twenty thousand Turkic horsemen were right on their heels.

Yueya'er lifted the curtain and watched the chaotic retreat of the Great Hua remnants. The dark-faced bandit rode at the forefront, brandishing his whip and charging forward in a rage.

The Turkic girl hummed through her nose, "Cowardly bandits, do you dare to dance on the edge of a blade?"

### Chapter 543 Top-Secret Information

As far as the eye could see, the vast expanse of the Alxa Plain swayed with wildflowers and boundless greenery. The azure sky looked as if it had been washed clean. A gentle breeze caressed the face, carrying the fragrance of the grassland. Five thousand remnant soldiers of the Great Hua Empire moved swiftly across the open plains, eventually vanishing into the depths of the tall grass.

Human presence was scarce on the Alxa Plain. After the establishment of the Turkic Khanate, they had united several small tribes, dividing territories based on population, with no interference between these regions. During the dry season and winter, each tribe would graze within its own territory. When spring blossomed and grass was abundant, the whole tribe would move out to graze, their awe-inspiring momentum resembling flowing clouds across the plains.

This system of community living was mostly borrowed from the Great Hua Empire, with certain adaptations for the prairie, creating a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Guided by this policy, a variety of Turkic settlements had formed on the Alxa Plain—some small, housing only a few thousand people, while larger ones had tens of thousands.

To ensure that each tribe had enough grazing lands, Turkic settlements were spaced at least several hundred miles apart. This distancing gave the Great Hua cavalry ample room to maneuver. At the moment, around 300,000 of the finest Turkic cavalymen were gathered around Helan Mountain Gorge, and all the robust men from the tribes had been summoned, giving Lin Wanrong's solitary army more confidence as they ventured deep into the plains.

The map of the Alxa Plain that Xu Zhiqing had gifted before their departure was marked simply, but its routes were crystal clear. It had been a great help to this isolated force. Additionally, with the

experienced assistance from Hu Bugui, the five thousand men would not lose their way on the prairie.

After capturing Bayanhot, the army had already replenished supplies for six or seven days. Even if they couldn't find a single grain of food after venturing deeper into the plains, they could last for at least another week.

Despite this, Lin Wanrong was still not at ease. He rode back and forth, inspecting every soldier. Seeing that each of their Turkic horses was laden with dried meat and provisions, he finally nodded in satisfaction.

"Brother Lin, good news, good news!" Gao Qiu shouted excitedly, galloping forward with Hu Bugui from the rear of the formation.

"What's the good news?" Lin Wanrong smiled as the two men approached and dismounted. "Could it be that Advisor Xu has defeated the 300,000 Turkic troops?"

They had lost contact with Xu Zhiqing for seven or eight days. Now, they were penetrating further into the prairie, moving farther and farther away from Helan Mountain Gorge. They were completely unaware of the situation there.

Gao Qiu shook his head. "You're joking, right? I'm no oracle; how could I have news from Miss Xu? What I meant is that the 20,000 Turkic men did indeed probe us, just as you suspected. They traveled less than a hundred miles, found nothing, and have now turned eastward toward Wuyuan."

Lin Wanrong uttered an acknowledgment, feeling neither surprise nor excitement in his heart. It was only a matter of time before these 20,000 Turkic troops, realizing they'd been duped, would turn around. Encountering them was not inevitable. That girl Yujia was at least honest; she hadn't lied. However, with her cleverness and intelligence, she was even more terrifying than a hundred thousand Turkic troops.

"Speaking of Advisor Xu, I'm reminded of something," Gao Qiu spoke softly. "We've changed our plans at the last moment. Instead of returning to Wuyuan, we continue to advance westward into the Great Plains. Shouldn't we inform Advisor Xu? She might coordinate with our main army, which could prove advantageous for us."

"Good point," Lin Wanrong looked at him with surprise and chuckled. "Brother Gao, your understanding of military strategy has improved so much, you're almost catching up with me. I'm impressed."

Listening to their conversation, Hu Bugui shook his head solemnly. "Brother Gao, informing Advisor Xu isn't as easy as you make it sound. With three hundred thousand Turks stationed at Wuyuan, not even a fly could get through. How would we notify her?"

Gao Qiu hummed in agreement, his expression serious. Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. "Contacting Miss Xu might not be as difficult as you think. Who knows, those Turks might be doing some free publicity for me as we speak."

"Free publicity?" Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu were both momentarily stunned. It was Hu Bugui who finally asked, "General Lin, what do you mean by 'free publicity'? We're in the dark here."

"Ah, I've received quite a lot of criticism for this very matter. It's rather unjust, to be honest," Lin Wanrong sighed mysteriously. "Both of you, do you know what my Turkic name is?"

Lin Wanrong's Turkic name? Gao Qiu eagerly nodded with a lecherous smile, "I know, I know. It's San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong. I've heard that girl Yueya'er call you that several times. Ah, what an excellent name, perfectly designed for taking advantage. Brother Lin, I admire you!"

Giving a thumbs-up, Gao Qiu couldn't stop praising him. Hu Bugui was a bit slower to react and asked, "Brother Gao, how does this name suggest taking advantage? Explain it to me."

"Don't you know? San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong simply means Brother San is My Husband! The name is specifically for Yueya'er to use. Do you understand now?" Gao Qiu smugly explained to Hu Bugui.

Upon realizing the meaning, Hu Bugui burst into laughter, deeply admiring Lin Wanrong's cunning.

This lascivious fellow! Lin Wanrong shook his head and sighed, "The same name can have entirely different implications to different people. What you see is a true reflection of your own thoughts. Ah, the gap between people is truly vast."

"What... what do you mean? Brother Lin, isn't your Turkic name pronounced like that?" Gao Qiu stuttered.

"Of course not," Lin Wanrong snorted. "People who see this name think I'm lustful, shameless, and unscrupulous in seducing young girls. In reality, those who misunderstand my name and criticize me are the ones who are truly lustful. Brother Hu, your thoughts are rather upright. Why don't you read my Turkic name in reverse and see what it actually means?"

Hu Bugui responded, carefully pondering for a moment, "Gong Lao Wo—Shi Ge San! Is this how it's read, General Lin?"

"Absolutely! When read in reverse, it indeed means that—attacking the stronghold is the mission of us three brothers!" Lin Wanrong hummed, "This is the only correct way to read my name, and the secret I intend to share with Miss Xu. Brother Gao, what have you been thinking? A rush of blood to the head?"

‘So that's what it meant!’ A cold sweat trickled down Old Gao's forehead. No wonder Brother Lin was so indignant. His name, rich in meaning and nobility, had been misread in such a vulgar manner. Clearly, he had misunderstood Brother Lin all this time. How shameful.

"I understand now," Hu Bugui clapped his hands and said, "General Lin, as the leader of our army entering the prairie, and the captor of Yujia, your name will surely spread far and wide across the grasslands. With Miss Xu's intelligence, as soon as she hears General Lin's Turkic name, she'll grasp our intentions. General, you've been wronged; I've never respected you more."

General Lin shook his head, his face tinged with melancholy as he sighed deeply,

"People laugh at me for being too mad,

I laugh at them for failing to see the truth.

The tombs of the heroes of Wuling remain unseen,

With neither flowers nor wine, they till the fields.

—

People like me are destined to be lonely all their lives. Alas, get used to it, just get used to it."



Who would have thought General Lin was such a profound individual? Old Hu shook his head in admiration. In the future, he shouldn't judge General Lin solely based on his flamboyant exterior but should focus more on his solitary inner world.

Old Gao chuckled awkwardly, then earnestly said, "Brother Lin, I've made up my mind. I'll try to emulate you—a man whose appearance may be debauched, but whose heart is noble. I already show signs of it."

'Signs of what? You're debauched both inside and out!' Hearing Old Gao's insincere confession, even Hu Bugui couldn't help but smirk.

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "My dear brothers, I can say without reservation that the meaning of my name is the highest secret of our army. Now that you understand this secret, you should know where our ultimate destination lies in the grasslands, right?"

"Understood. The stronghold, of course—" Old Gao cheerfully responded, but his face quickly changed, "The stronghold?! Brother Lin, are you planning to march directly to the Turkic royal court?!"

Lin Wanrong nodded and grinned, "Otherwise, could it be called our highest secret? What about it, Brother Gao, are you scared?!"

Old Gao spat and retorted disdainfully, "Scared? Not a chance. During our circle-and-cross game in the camp, I noticed your silence, Brother Lin, and knew this wasn't over. As expected, after taking such a detour, we're still heading for the Turkic stronghold. Ha! It's exhilarating! Following you, Brother Lin, is the most thrilling experience of my life."

Lin Wanrong nodded slightly and turned to Hu Bugui, "And you, Brother Hu, are you in or out?"

Initially, Hu Bugui had thought that just invading the grasslands and destroying some nomadic tribes would be an incredible accomplishment. He had never expected that General Lin harbored such grand plans. Already boiling with excitement, he shouted, "In! If I don't go, I might as well be squatting to pee!"

Gao Qiu looked puzzled. "Old Hu, your oath is quite interesting. What do you mean by 'squatting to pee'?"

Lin Wanrong looked at him deeply and nodded. "Brother Gao, you've truly become more innocent. I'm very pleased."

Setting aside the newly purified Gao Qiu, Lin Wanrong turned to the matter at hand. Since he had already shared the plan with the two of them, he saw no reason to hold back any longer. He took the map sketched by Xu Zhiqing and laid out his long-considered plan. "Brother Hu, look here. According to the map from Advisor Xu, our current location is at the southwestern tip of the Alxa Plateau. The Turkic royal court, Kyzil, is located at the northern end of the plateau. If we continue northward, we'll naturally reach Kyzil. However, there are countless tribes of nomadic people scattered between us and our destination. Even if we were to defeat all of the Turkic tribes, by the time we reach Kyzil, it would be several months later. Waiting for us there would be a hundred thousand Turkic cavalry. There'd be no point in fighting then."

Hu Bugui studied the map carefully and nodded. "General, you are absolutely correct. If we were to march directly north, we would not only reveal our intentions but also embark on a path to certain death. A different, unnoticeable route, much like the one we used for the surprise attack on Bayanhot, is necessary."

Lin Wanrong moved his finger on the map to a specific location. "This place is called Yiwu. I've heard that there's a magical Silk Road that crosses through the desert and snowy mountains, passes Yiwu and Nantai, crosses the Ulungur River, and arrives at the Altai Mountains. Crossing those mountains, we'll come upon a region abundant in 'Nose-piercing Grass,' known as Khovd. Beyond that lies the Turkic royal court, Kyzil."

The route Lin Wanrong pointed out began at Yiwu and left the Alxa Plateau, making a small arc to cross the Altai Mountains before re-entering the plateau. Upon crossing, they would face Khovd, the treasure trove of the Turkic people's 'Nose-piercing Grass,' and the royal court in Kyzil.

Hu Bugui's eyes lit up with excitement. "General, is there really such a path? If that's true, reaching Yiwu would allow us to bypass the Turkic blockade."

"Probably," Lin Wanrong laughed. "But who knows? Maybe this path only comes into existence after we've traveled it."

Hu Bugui was undeterred. The success of the surprise attack on Bayanhot had proven Lin Wanrong's ability to choose routes. If General Lin said they could reach the Turkic royal court, then they most certainly would.

Gao Qiu listened carefully to their discussion, closely examining the map before nodding. "If Brother Lin says it's possible, then it must be. However, the most crucial question is how we'll reach Yiwu. There are several Turkic tribes between us and there!"

Xu Zhiqing's map was rather vague on this section; it only indicated that there were a few Turkic tribes without specifying their locations.

"It's simple; we'll fight our way through," Lin Wanrong stated calmly. "To get to Yiwu, we'll have to forge our own path. We're not just sending a message to Miss Xu with the blood of the Turkic people; more importantly, only through combat can we secure supplies."

"But we don't even know the locations of these tribes!" Hu Bugui exclaimed in doubt.

"You may not know, but others do," Lin Wanrong responded with a mysterious smile. "Have you forgotten? Yueya'er and her tribe are with us. Why do you think I've gone through the trouble of bringing them along? They are the best guides we could ask for."

#### Chapter 544 Sharp Confrontation

Based on the markings on Xu Zhiqing's map, the nearest tribe of nomads was named Dalanzha. In the Turkic language, Dalanzha meant "Pearl of the Grasslands." According to Lin Wanrong's plan, since this "Pearl" was within reach, it should be the first battlefield for the Great Hua cavalry's expedition into the grasslands.

Unfortunately, Miss Xu's map only provided a rudimentary layout of the tribes' locations on the Alxa Plateau, without detailed information on their populations. Hu Bugui had dispatched scouts in three directions to search for dozens of miles, but there was still no sign of Dalanzha.

Old Gao grew somewhat impatient. "Did Advisor Xu get it wrong? There's no 'pearl' within a hundred miles of here."

Hu Bugui chuckled, "Brother Gao, don't be hasty. General Lin has instructed us; our first battle deep in these grasslands has to be striking, ruthless, and victorious. We'd rather be cautious than reckless before we have precise intelligence on Dalanzha. The Turkic people must not easily detect our movements. That's why our scouts have been so careful. As for Dalanzha's exact location, I believe General Lin has it all figured out—wait, where is General Lin?"

He glanced around. Lin Wanrong, who had just been chatting jovially nearby, had vanished.

Old Gao pointed to the distance and laughed, "There he is! He's investigating the location of the 'Pearl of the Grasslands' on Miss Yujia!"

Hu Bugui looked and couldn't help but chuckle. Lin Wanrong had, at some point, slipped over to Yujia's carriage, and was peeking inside after pulling aside the curtain.

Just as Lin Wanrong poked his head in, he felt a swift gust of cold wind flash past his face. Yujia's angry voice resounded, "You shameless person from Great Hua, what are you doing now?"

"What can I do?" Lin Wanrong grinned and grasped her hands. With a secret squeeze, the golden blade in Yujia's hand stopped inches away from his face. She couldn't advance any further. The Turkic girl huffed a few times, her face flushed as she struggled with all her might.

Watching Yujia wriggle like a small snake, her curves flowing, a picture of breathtaking beauty, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but steal a few more glances. He touched her soft, delicate arm, and chuckled, "Miss Yujia, do you want to kill me or embrace me? Even I can't tell anymore."

"Shameless—" Yujia fiercely shouted, using both hands and feet to kick at him.

Lin Wanrong's face suddenly turned cold. He released his grip, and Yujia, who had been struggling, fell heavily onto the carriage floor, wincing in pain. She made a small cry, clearly hurt by the fall.

Lin Wanrong didn't even glance at her, and said coldly, "Whether or not I have any shame is none of the Turkic people's business. Miss Yujia, I'm here to remind you that it's time for medicine. You have to treat my brother."

"No, I won't—" Yujia gritted her teeth, barely getting the words out, when a distant scream echoed, accompanied by roars in the Turkic language. It sounded like Heliye.

Yujia hastily drew back the curtain and saw that not far away in the crowd, a Turkic man lay decapitated, his blood soaking the grass. Heliye was bound hand and foot, looking as though he'd been wrapped like a zongzi dumpling, and his face twisted in a ferocious scream of rage. A bandit named Hu Bugui stood nearby, grinning ominously as he nonchalantly wiped the blood from his large blade. Though he seemed at ease, his eyes were filled with lethal intent.

"What—what have you done?!" Yueya, struck by horror, underwent a swift change in complexion. She raised her little fist toward Lin Wanrong, as furious as a she-wolf on the prairie. "You killed my kinsmen!"

Lin Wanrong spread his hands, his face a picture of innocence. "Miss Yujia, you're mistaken! The man who killed them is my Brother Hu, not me. I respect your right to say no, but I also respect Brother Hu's right to kill. You can continue to shake your head; I'm a patient man."

"Despicable!" Fire blazed in Yujia's eyes. "Threatening me by slaughtering my people—I will not let you go!"

Lin Wanrong's gaze was as cold as the ice in the twelfth lunar month. "You won't let me go? Miss Yujia, you must be joking. Three hundred thousand Turkic cavalry have trampled over my Great Hua borders, committing every crime from arson to abduction. Countless of my compatriots have been violated, killed under your Turkic blades. Yet you, the beautiful Miss Yujia, stand here accusing me of massacre and shamelessness—fine, then. I am a murderer, I am shameless. What can you do to me?"

His face darkened, and he stared contemptuously at Yujia. His eyes were like unmelting glaciers, devoid of any emotion. Yueya hesitated; her intuition told her that this bandit had transformed from vulgar and shameless to cold and emotionless, as if he'd changed his clothes.

His contemptuous gaze ignited a desire to resist within her. Yet, when she lifted her head, she couldn't withstand his piercing gaze. All she could do was clench her fists, hum in anger, and lower her head.

"Miss Divine Healer, it's time for you to attend to the sick." From a distance, Hu Bugui leisurely wiped the blood off his large blade, occasionally swinging it toward another Turkic man. He seemed utterly relaxed. Lin Wanrong's voice reached Yujia's ears, exuding an indescribable sense of calm and indifference. His disdainful smile was clearly visible.

If the earlier confrontation could be considered a narrow win for Lin Wanrong, now Yujia felt an inexplicable emotion. A mere change in his expression had exerted an intense pressure on her, making her feel constrained for the first time.

Looking at her fallen kinsmen, lying in pools of blood, she could no longer muster the courage to refuse. With an angry hum, she picked a few medicinal herbs and jumped off the wagon.

The carriage carrying Little Li was situated in the middle of the convoy. When the two boarded, they found that Li Wuling was still in deep sleep. However, his face seemed peaceful, and his breathing had improved considerably, showing signs of recovery.

Lin Wanrong was overjoyed and felt like giving Yueya'er a few kisses of gratitude. Setting aside the ethnic animosities, he truly admired this Turkic woman's medical skills.

"What are you so pleased about? He's far from recovered!" Yujia saw his elated expression and was greatly annoyed, doing her best to dampen his spirits.

Lin Wanrong shook his head nonchalantly. "No worries, I can wait. Even if they decapitate me, I won't abandon my brothers. Thank you, divine physician."

His eyes glinted with sincerity. The Turkic girl lowered her head and sneered, "Are all you men from the Great Hua such crybabies?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled. "The winds have been strong these past days, and I used a bit too much water when washing my face. I didn't dry it well enough, I apologize for any confusion, divine physician."

'Lying Great Hua man!' The girl named Yujia couldn't be bothered with him any longer. With the lives of her tribesmen at stake, she carefully examined Li Wuling's injuries and busied herself checking his pulse.

Lin Wanrong scrutinized the Turkic girl's actions. Her medical techniques were remarkably varied. In addition to the traditional methods of Chinese medicine, she was also highly skilled in treating external wounds. Clearly, she had acquired a wealth of practical experience.

"What are you staring at?" Yujia seemed annoyed by Lin Wanrong's gaze and roughly tossed several herbs at him. "Grind these medicines!"

He chuckled and picked up the herbs she'd thrown. "Honeysuckle, Panax notoginseng, snow ginseng—these are for reducing inflammation and improving clarity of mind. Eel blood, carp scales, angelica—these are for enriching blood and body fluids. Very well-targeted prescriptions, divine physician."

Yujia looked at him in surprise for a moment before scoffing, "So you know a thing or two about medicine. Then what do you need me for?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head with a smile, "You misunderstand, divine physician. I'm notoriously all talk and no action. I can name the herbs but can't prescribe them. Sadly, among all disciplines, medicine is my weakest."

She looked at him and asked softly, "Then what are you best at?"

"Arts of the bedchamber!"

Yujia was stunned for a moment before her face flushed with indignation. "You shameless man from the Great Hua!"

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, very pleased with himself. 'She even knows about this? This girl has a profound understanding of our Great Hua's culture.'

He proceeded to grind the herbs—half for oral administration and half for topical application. Changing Li Wuling's dressing was something Yujia would never do. That task was always performed by Lin Wanrong and Gao Qiu.

As he applied the herbal paste to Li Wuling's chest, Yujia remained silent for a moment before suddenly speaking, "General Lin, can you please stop killing my people?"

Lin Wanrong paused, struck by the softness in her tone—a first since he met her. He nodded solemnly, "That's a good question, Miss Yujia. May I ask in return, can your 300,000 Turkic people retreat to the steppes, swearing never to invade our Great Hua again?"

Yujia remained silent, seemingly unwilling to answer. Reading her thoughts, Lin Wanrong said lightly, "You only want to take but not to give? Then there's nothing to discuss. The shame the Turkic people have brought upon the Great Hua can only be cleansed with blood."

Yujia looked up, her eyes defiant. "Countless events have already proven that you people of Great Hua will never be a match for us Turks. Resistance will only lead to greater bloodshed. I suggest you surrender now. If you lay down your arms, we Turks will not kill a single citizen of Great Hua."

Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter. "Miss Yueya'er, you're quite confident, aren't you? Unfortunately for you, you're in my hands now."

A faint light flickered in Yujia's eyes. "Being in your hands doesn't necessarily mean I've lost. I can assure you, you will fall to me, and you will do so willingly."

"Then let the facts speak for themselves. We shall see," Lin Wanrong retorted.

Silence filled the carriage, interrupted only by the breathing of Li Wuling. Their eyes locked, neither willing to back down, a palpable tension in the air.

Lin Wanrong suddenly smiled, gazing at Yujia's watery eyes and rosy cheeks. He reached into his robe and pulled out something. "Divine physician, this is for you."

Yujia stared in disbelief. "How do you have my jade flute?"

"I found it in Xingqing," Lin Wanrong said, handing her the small jade flute. "That night, I was almost killed by the bolts of Turkic crossbows."

Grinding her teeth, Yujia silently took the jade flute, caressing it carefully before breaking into a smile and handing it back. "Since you found it, you keep it. I have plenty more like it."

"Really?" Lin Wanrong laughed. "Then I won't be shy." He held the precious jade flute, taking a deep breath. "Such a valuable flute, and I only have one."

Yujia cast him a glance, her light blue eyes holding a hidden intensity. Lin Wanrong's expression turned solemn, and he squinted slightly.

After an unknown period of silence, Yujia suddenly stood up. "Let's end it here for today. Your companion's condition has stabilized. I will come back to check on him tomorrow."

"Thank you, Divine physician," Lin Wanrong said, lifting the curtain to watch Yujia jump out of the carriage. After she had walked a few steps, he called out, "Ah, I forgot to tell you something, Miss Yueya'er."



Yujia turned back, puzzled. Lin Wanrong pointed to the distance and smiled, "As a token of my gratitude for your medical attention, I'm releasing half of your tribespeople."

Yujia looked up to see Hu Bugui and several soldiers untying the ropes binding her fellow Turks. At first, they couldn't believe it. But when they cautiously took a few steps and saw no reaction from the Great Hua soldiers, they broke into ecstatic runs.

Having witnessed Lin Wanrong kill and then release people, Yujia, despite her unparalleled intelligence, couldn't fathom his true motives. Her mind was suddenly in disarray.

"Miss Yujia, you must believe that I'm sincere," Lin Wanrong said, his face breaking into a wolfish smile. "Blood debts can only be repaid in blood."

#### Chapter 545 Let the Turks Remember the Pain

Yujia pondered for a moment and suddenly realized something. Her expression changed dramatically as she dashed out, shouting at her tribespeople who were running away in the distance, "Kelaydın̄dar (come back), bəriñiz kelaydın̄ (you all come back)!"

The released Turkic people sprinted away, covering a distance of a third of a mile in an instant. They couldn't hear her cries. Yueya'er, in her desperation, was about to leap forward when she was stopped by a pair of strong, muscular arms.

Lin Wanrong stood in front of her, smiling gently, "Your shouting is futile; they can't hear you. Look at how gracefully they run. Ah, life is precious to everyone—"

"Devil!" Enraged, Yujia lunged at him, gripping his wildly flailing arms and bit down hard.

Another bite? A piercing pain shot through him. Lin Wanrong grimaced and roared, shaking her off. Yujia yelped as she fell to the ground. Looking down, he saw another clear crescent-shaped mark on the back of his hand, from which blood slowly oozed. It mirrored the bite mark from the previous day.

Annoyed at having been bitten twice by Yujia, Lin Wanrong snapped, "Little sister, can't you do something other than biting?"

Yujia glared at him, her white teeth clenched tightly against her red lips, "Are you planning to ambush Dalanzha?"

Though accustomed to her intelligence, Lin Wanrong was still taken aback when she pinpointed his intentions. This Turkic girl was a formidable combination of beauty and brains. One of her was worth a hundred thousand Turkic cavalry. Fortunately, she was in his hands; otherwise, the consequences would be unimaginable.

"Dalanzha? Is that your Turkic tribe?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, a cold glint in his eyes, "Rest assured, Miss Yujia, if I have the time, I'll pay a visit."

Yujia, discerning his intentions, clenched her fists, her eyes ablaze with indomitable spirit, "You despicable Great Hua man, you would raise your blade against my tribespeople in Dalanzha? I hate you! Yujia hates you!"

"Hate me?" Lin Wanrong sneered, "Go ahead. I never expected you to fall in love with me anyway."

"You—you lowly, despicable wolf!" Who in the world could out-talk Lin Wanrong? The Turkic girl was so angry her face turned pale, her body trembling. She couldn't find a single word in the Great Hua language to describe this Great Hua bandit.

Lin Wanrong spoke dispassionately, "To call me a wolf is quite flattering from you, Miss Yujia. I'm far from such a beastly nature. We have an old saying in the Great Hua: 'Do not do unto others what you do not wish for yourself.' You sympathize with your own people, feeling their pain as if your heart were being cut with a knife. That's good; it shows you have a sense of humanity. But what about when your people slaughter my Great Hua brethren? Have you ever spared a thought for how they feel? Aren't there people weeping for them too? Where does your overflowing sympathy go then? Yes, I have killed members of your tribe, and for that, you may think me despicable. But when your Turkic people massacre countless Great Hua civilians, is that noble? To put it bluntly, the Turkic people are also wolves, wolves devoid of humanity. Your sense of morality, Miss Yujia, is aimed at everyone but yourself. And yet you still sit there, acting self-righteous and superior. It's laughable, truly laughable."

His tone was neither salty nor bland, but his eyes burned intensely as he gazed at Yujia, filled with a mix of pity and disdain, as if he, in that moment, was the true master of the Turkic people.

If he had said these things to Sheng Dan or La Buli, it would have been like playing a lute to a cow, a complete waste of effort. But Yujia was someone well-versed in Great Hua culture and exceptionally intelligent. When she heard his words, they struck her differently.

Yujia clenched her teeth, struggling to lift her head, unwilling to be looked down upon by this Great Hua bandit. But each time her eyes met his sharp gaze, she felt herself involuntarily losing ground.

After a few attempts with the same result, she lowered her head, her eyes shimmering as she let out a reluctant sigh. "If someone were willing to seriously consider your suggestions, would you spare Dalanzha?"

"Spare them? Impossible," Lin Wanrong firmly shook his head. "Did you ever think of sparing my people the moment you invaded Great Hua and slaughtered my kin? War is not child's play. Since the Turkic people have started this war, someone must pay the price. Only when you have bled will you understand the meaning of pain—corpses scattered everywhere, homes ruined, families torn apart, lives shattered. Without deeply understanding this suffering, the Turkic people will never know what Great Hua has endured."

These words resolutely underscored his intent: the Turkic people must pay in blood, and there was no room for negotiation. His hardline stance angered Yujia. Her delicate eyebrows raised slightly as she retorted, "The blood of my people will not flow in vain; you will pay the price!"

Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter, shaking his head as he looked at her. "Miss Yujia, you've only learned Great Hua writing and medicine but will never understand the character of us Great Hua people. My brothers and I didn't come here expecting to leave alive. Threatening me with that is simply humiliating yourself."

Yujia hesitated, staring at the scornful smile on this Great Hua bandit's face. A strange feeling arose in her heart. Though the great plains were her and her people's territory, standing before this Great Hua man, she felt as if her fate were controlled by someone else. All her intelligence and wisdom seemed utterly useless against this fearless Great Hua man.

She clenched her teeth, her face flushed with anger. With a small swing of her fist towards Lin Wanrong, she conveyed, "I, Yujia, will never let you go." The rare display of girlish defiance left Lin Wanrong momentarily stunned, but a smile eventually crept into his heart.

"Oh, right," Lin Wanrong said, pausing after a few steps and turning back to Yujia with a sly grin. "I was so caught up in my joy that I forgot to inform you, little sister Yueya'er, about something very important."

Important? Every time Lin Wanrong uttered those words, it was never good news for her. Yujia felt her scalp tingle. "Can't you just say everything at once?" she gritted through her teeth.

"Ah, questioning me now? Good, good!" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Our army is about to enter an era of rapid, high-tempo warfare on the plains. To ensure your safety, little sister Yueya'er, we've decided after thorough discussion to provide you, Miss Yujia, with even stricter protection—eating, living, and working alongside me!"

Yujia's face turned pale. "You shameless Great Hua man, just kill me!"

"Please, Miss Yujia, keep it clean," Lin Wanrong retorted irritably. "I'm not that kind of man—even if you were willing, my wife wouldn't agree! We're just sharing a tent, not a bed. We can even put up a curtain in between. You Turks don't have any silly rules about men and women not touching, do you? Wait, are you trying to kill yourself?"

Yujia's golden scimitar was at her throat, tears filling her eyes. "I will never let a wolf tarnish my honor—"

"I wouldn't let a little she-wolf from the plains tarnish me either," Lin Wanrong snorted. "I was going to give you a chance to assassinate me. But if you don't want to, fine, go ahead and kill yourself. Little Li's injuries should be fine by now."

Stunned, Yujia was about to make her move when Lin Wanrong muttered, "—After you're done, I'll strip you naked and send you to Dalanzha to see if anyone recognizes you. Ah, I really look forward to that moment."

Those words drained Yujia of even the strength to cry. Seeing Lin Wanrong's triumphant expression, a deep sadness flashed in her eyes.

"Don't flatter yourself. If I wanted to take advantage of you, I would have done it long ago," Lin Wanrong advised solemnly. "I'm not the man you think I am. You should know that in Great Hua, we have a gentleman known for his self-control, named Liuxia Hui. I never told you this, but I'm his cousin. If you don't believe me, a few nights together will make it clear."

He left those words hanging, not caring for Yujia's feelings, and walked away laughing heartily.

Yujia's eyes flickered for a long while before she finally clenched her teeth and muttered, "You shameless Great Hua man, I will defeat you and make you kneel before me."

Gao Qiu pricked up his ears, eavesdropping for a moment. Seeing Lin Wanrong approaching hastily, he quickly grabbed his sleeve and earnestly said, "Brother Lin, I have a question—Who is the cousin of Liuxia Hui? How come I've never heard of him?"

"You don't know? Brother Gao, you've truly become pure!" Lin Wanrong laughed and glanced at him, "The cousin of Liuxia Hui is 'Hui Xia Liu.'"

Gao Qiu stood there stunned for a while before finally regaining his senses. He couldn't help but burst into hearty laughter. "Brother Lin, you really are something! Liuxia Hui's cousin is indeed 'Hui Xia Liu,' which sounds like 'capable of being indecent!'"

'This lecher got sidetracked again.' Observing Gao Qiu's lewd excitement, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but shake his head and sigh, "Am I really that easy to misunderstand?"

The setting sun in the west slowly dipped, revealing half of its face. Its golden afterglow sprinkled across the prairie, illuminating the distant green grass and flowers. Twilight gradually descended, and the slightly chilly spring breeze brushed against the wild grass and small flowers beneath their feet, creating faint ripples like a breeze gliding over water.

Under the distant dome of the sky, countless large felt tents appeared like white flowers swaying on the horizon. Herds of cattle and sheep grazed leisurely on the grassland, slowly approaching the tents. From time to time, clear and melodious songs drifted over, the distinctively robust voices of the Turkic people penetrating the plains. This massive nomadic tribe seemed exceptionally peaceful and serene under the setting sun.

"Brother Hu, how are things?" A shadow darted into the bushes where Hu Bugui was hiding and whispered beside him.

Hu Bugui turned his head, and Lin Wanrong's bearded face appeared before him. After days of marching and fighting, everyone was disheveled, their faces covered in dust and hair and beards untamed. Even Lin Wanrong's face had become somewhat unclear in these conditions. Yet his unique wheat-colored healthy skin, dotted with light beads of sweat, shimmered golden in the sunset.

"General, you are indeed a strategic genius; Dalanzha is right ahead. Look," Hu Bugui pointed with a large hand, his face gleaming with excitement. He had led several scouts on a forced march to this point and had been in hiding for some time. He hadn't expected that General Lin would personally follow to gather intelligence on the enemy. To be this close to a Turkic tribe was a first in the history

of the Great Hua Empire. Thinking of what would unfold next, Hu Bugui was immediately filled with excitement.

Lin Wanrong hummed in agreement and gazed into the distance. Beneath the far-off heavens, the white felt tents connected one after another, vanishing into the horizon. Columns of cooking smoke rose, the hooves of the returning steeds gently tapping against the prairie. The melodious pastoral songs of the Turkic people floated in the wind, lingering for a long while.

The Turkic tribe of Dalanzha, bathed in the afterglow of the setting sun, seemed as serene and tranquil as any of the countless peaceful villages in the Great Hua Empire.

"After making some initial estimates, the Dalanzha tribe has over 8,000 Turkic people. Apart from 1,500 or so able-bodied men, the rest are women, numbering over 2,000, and children over 2,000 as well. The remaining are mostly elderly, frail, or sickly," Hu Bugui said, rubbing his palms together in excitement. A Turkic tribe of this size would usually have at least 5,000 or 6,000 able-bodied men in its prime. However, the ongoing war between the Turks and Great Hua had pulled most of their men to the front lines, leaving behind a nearly defenseless tribe. For Hu Bugui and his 5,000 Great Hua soldiers, this was a delectable piece of meat practically in their mouths already.

Lin Wanrong gave a noncommittal grunt, and sighed softly. "Were it not for those white yurts and numerous flocks of sheep, I would have thought we'd returned to one of our peaceful little villages in Great Hua."

"Exactly," Hu Bugui agreed wholeheartedly. "This Turkic tribe is similar to our villages in Great Hua. If I hadn't seen them invade our lands and slaughter our kin, I would hardly believe that this peaceful tribe could transform into savage wolves in the blink of an eye."

"People are dual-natured, aren't they? Under extreme conditions, anyone could turn into a wolf," Lin Wanrong sighed lightly. "Brother Hu, what have you done with the members of Yueya'er's tribe that we released?"

Hu Bugui chuckled awkwardly. "We covertly followed them until they were not far from Dalanzha. To prevent them from alerting others, we had to—" He drew his finger sharply across his neck, the implication clear.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "That's not very good, is it? I promised Yueya'er I'd release them."

"General, you indeed set them free," Hu Bugui said with a sly smile. "It's just their bad luck they ran into us again. Miss Yueya'er can't blame you for that. If anyone is to blame, it's her tribespeople for not using their heads when they ran."

Old Hu was learning the art of thick-skinned excuses, Lin Wanrong thought as he laughed a few times, not commenting further.

After the Turks unified the plains, they either subdued or massacred other tribes, making it their domain entirely. The people of Dalanzha probably never thought Great Hua would dare to venture so deeply into the plains. Their outposts were only point six miles away—essentially non-existent. For Lin Wanrong, this lax defense was a godsend.

As darkness deepened, the rest of the troops caught up. The soldiers fitted the Turkic horses with bits and slowed their pace, moving forward soundlessly.

Yueya'er and her remaining dozen or so tribespeople had been deliberately kept at the back by Lin Wanrong. All were tightly bound, their mouths stuffed with rags, rendering them unable to struggle or shout—Yueya'er included.

Taming this young she-wolf had been a struggle; she'd scratched his cheek and landed a few blows on him. However, General Lin had his ways of secretly making up for the hardships he'd endured.

Since they shared meals, accommodations, and labor, Lin Wanrong unceremoniously climbed into Yueya'er's fragrant carriage. As if to assert his dominance, he took several deep breaths of the fresh air inside. Yueya'er was bound like a wrapped dumpling, struggling desperately. Her beautiful face was flushed red, and her eyes shot flames of fury, as if she wished to burn this dark-faced bandit to ashes.

"Miss Yueya'er, I have some good news for you—we have arrived at Dalanzha!" Lin Wanrong grinned, his voice echoing melodiously. Yueya'er's body stiffened abruptly before she began to twist wildly, her legs kicking toward him furiously, her eyes reflecting deep pain.

Ignoring her serpentine and enticing movements, he lightly patted her soft, fragrant shoulder, and said with a smirk, "It's your first time, so some pain is inevitable. You'll get used to it eventually."

The Turkic girl growled incoherently, unable to articulate her thoughts.

Stepping down from the carriage, Lin Wanrong unsheathed his battle sword high into the air, his angry roar reverberating across the plains. "Brothers, let the Turks forever remember this pain. Charge!"