

Finest 401

Chapter 401 Thank You, I Hate You!

The gently flickering oil lamp emitted a soft crackling sound, casting brilliant sparks throughout the room. The atmosphere inside was eerily quiet, and Lin Wanrong felt as if he could hear the pounding of his own heart.

Seo Jang Geum's beautiful eyes were closed gently, and two large tears slowly welled up, her face flushed with an extraordinary, alluring, and feverish red. Her delicate skin was as smooth as glass, shining incomparably under the lamp, seemingly as translucent as crystal. Her nose and cheeks were exquisite, her beautiful eyes slightly closed, and her cherry-red mouth slightly open, trembling as she exhaled a hot and fragrant breath.

She was only dressed in a set of fiery red lingerie, her full and towering bosom half exposed, her ample breasts pushing up the fabric, and the deep cleavage inviting one's imagination. Her waist was slender, as soft as creamy fat, her plump and beautiful hips like newly ground millstones, round and full. Her long and graceful legs were tightly closed, smooth and lustrous, seemingly washed with milk, without a single flaw. Her slender legs were slightly trembling, and the exquisite whiteness shimmered seductively in the dim light. This body, with its perfect curves, was like a flawless work of art, making it unbearable to touch.

"Sir, please save the people of Goryeo. For them, I am willing to give anything," Seo Jang Geum's tears fell like raindrops, her body shivering. At first glance, she seemed frail and helpless, yet she looked extraordinarily elegant and refined.

"Jang Geum Dongsang, what are you doing? A gentleman loves beauty but must acquire it in a proper way. To take it improperly would lead to decay," Lord Lin said righteously, yet his eyes couldn't help but fall on her, enjoying the soft and fragrant contours of her body. Her body was truly a feast for the eyes.

'My goodness, the Goryeo women of this time should not have had any plastic surgery, right? This must be the original and genuine material,' Lord Lin thought to himself, uncontrollably.

Seo Jang Geum's face was flushed with embarrassment, her beautiful lower lip almost bitten through: "Sir, please agree to my request. I am willing to give anything to save the people of Goryeo."

Hearing her words, Lord Lin suddenly became furious: "Miss Seo, what do you mean by this? Do you think you are an object for exchange, or do you think I'm a fool? Let me tell you very seriously, you have underestimated me!"

Seo Jang Geum sobbed: "Sir, please treat me as a commodity. Besides this way, I can't think of any other solution. Goryeo is in imminent danger, people are shedding blood, and I, a weak woman, have no other way but this."

"You think you're weak? Do you think the Goryeo people are truly helpless? You say it's all for the Goryeo people, do you think you are great?" Lord Lin sneered: "Do you really think I, Lin San, am such a fool that I would go to war just for a few words from you?"

Hearing him speak like this seemed to arouse Seo Jang Geum's pride. Her face flushed even deeper, yet she bravely straightened her chest, the breasts hidden beneath her red lingerie trembling: "Master Lin, did I say something wrong? I do not seek personal greatness, nor do I seek eternal fame. I only wish for the happiness and well-being of my Goryeo compatriots, to live forever in joy and contentment. Is that wrong?"

In her excitement, her delicate skin flushed with waves of beautiful red, catching Lin Wanrong's eyes and leaving them dazzled. His heart was filled with infatuation, and he had to silently chant a mantra to suppress the lustful fire within.

"Miss Seo," he said, finally finding his voice, "I suppose you have some self-awareness, knowing that you are praying for the happiness and well-being of the Goryeo people. Every word you speak is about them, and you truly are great! But don't forget, what you are asking for now is the help of the people of Great Hua. Have you ever considered us? In order to save your Goryeo people, our Great Hua sons must wage war across nations, fight on the battlefield. How many lives will be lost, how many wives will lose husbands, how many children will lose fathers? How much will our national treasury suffer? Have you calculated that? Your Goryeo people may suffer less, but has that suffering vanished into thin air? No, it has shifted onto the people of Great Hua. We are bearing the suffering for your Goryeo. Do you understand?"

Lin Wanrong spoke in one breath, feeling incomparably exhilarated. He detested people like her, who loudly proclaimed to save their nation and people, full of slogans but when it came to action, ten of them were not equal to one man.

"But Master Lin," Seo Jang Geum spoke without fear of his imposing demeanor, "Have you thought that once Dongyin annexes Goryeo, settles on the mainland, with their wolfish ambitions, Great

Hua will be their next target? Then, the people of Great Hua will suffer just like the Goryeo people. Do you really think you can escape?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled coldly, "Miss Seo, you are right. The annexation of Goryeo is not Dongyin's goal; their ultimate target is Great Hua. Just as you said, our people will have to face this disaster sooner or later, but then we will be fighting a prepared battle, not rushing to deploy troops at your whim, creating a situation where we are attacked from both sides. The law of the jungle is the rule of this world. If you love your homeland, you must not only love its prosperity but also endure its suffering. There is no savior in this world. Don't place all your hopes on others. Think about Great Hua facing the Turkic massacre, full of disasters, we have never asked anyone for help, have we?"

Seo Jang Geum remained stubbornly silent. Lin Wanrong sighed softly, "Between nations, there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests. If it was your personal hardship, I could stand by your side, but when it concerns the state's affairs, it's not something that can be covered by mere loyalty. Miss Seo, your suffering is not caused by Great Hua; we owe you nothing. To be blunt, your war against Dongyin is buying time for Great Hua, and we would prefer the more brutal it is, the better, so we can have more time. Once we deal with the Turkic forces, we will deal with Dongyin. I'm sorry, I'm being very direct. Perhaps you will be heartbroken to hear this, but if I don't say it, you may be even more heartbroken."

Seo Jang Geum felt her heart grow colder with each word, looking at him with ashen face, "Master Lin, are these your true feelings? Does Great Hua not always claim to be a friendly neighbor, ready to help in times of trouble? Are you really so calculating?"

Lin Wanrong sneered with disdain, "Neighbors in friendship? Miss Seo, three feet of ice does not form in a single day. When my great Great Hua was powerful, all came to pay homage, including Goryeo, and all other foreign tribes, all were very submissive. Because at that time, submitting to Great Hua brought benefits, and we were called neighbors in friendship. But what about when Great Hua was weak? Everyone pushed when the wall fell, and the tea cooled when the guest left. Who else but you would set traps and hide nails behind our back? Ever since Great Hua has been at war with the Turks, how many of you have been truly loyal, truly treating Great Hua with sincerity? Don't say you don't know, this time if the Turks and Dongyin hadn't joined hands to threaten Goryeo, would you have come to Great Hua? I'm afraid you wouldn't even bother with the imperial decree from our Emperor."

"That's because Goryeo is a small country, unable to face the pressure of strong enemies, so we can only—" Seo Jang Geum sighed helplessly.

Lin Wanrong snorted, "Isn't that exactly the point? When Great Hua was in trouble, you faced the threats of strong enemies and remained silent, sacrificing Great Hua's interests in the process. Now

that your interests are harmed, you bring up neighbors in friendship, expecting Great Hua to sacrifice its own interests to help you. Why should I?! Do you really think I'm a fool? You keep proclaiming love for your country and people, thinking you are noble? What you love is the people of Goryeo, not Great Hua. Shouting slogans in front of me is useless. You get what you pay for. This is an unchangeable truth. Miss Seo, think about it carefully!"

Lin Wanrong's anger flared as he spoke. He picked up the bowl of medicinal soup, gulping down two big mouthfuls, only then did his anger subside slightly. His eyes fell upon Seo Jang Geum's graceful and alluring figure, the attractive curves and shapely legs, leaving him dry-mouthed and thirsty. Damn it, he thought, discussing national affairs with a woman was like playing music to a cow. He took another couple of sips of the soup.

Seo Jang Geum collapsed softly to the ground, mumbling to herself, "Is there truly no hope for Goryeo? Master Lin, you are learned and talented, please think of a way for us."

As she slumped down, her long, rounded thighs and slender, sturdy calves came into view, the hidden scenery at the root of her legs particularly enticing.

How can one live like this? Lin Wanrong sighed. Forget it, being a gentleman is too hard; he might as well gaze openly. He relaxed his mind and allowed his eyes to linger on Seo Jang Geum's full and smooth thighs, becoming entranced, even missing her question.

"Master Lin, Master Lin—" Seo Jang Geum's heart pounded as she saw his eyes scanning her body, lingering especially on her beautiful legs. Her face grew hot with embarrassment, wishing she could find a crack in the ground to hide in. Especially as he neither agreed to help nor answered her question, but instead unabashedly admired her beauty. He was the most shameless man in the world.

"Ah, what's the matter?" Lin Wanrong quickly wiped the drool from the corner of his mouth, his face taking on a serious expression.

Seo Jang Geum sighed sadly, "My Lord, if you can think of other ways to save Goryeo, I will be yours."

"This girl coveted my beauty to such a point of obsession?" Master Lin sternly and righteously said, "Miss Seo, I am a person with principles. Any thought of monopolizing me is pure folly. If Goryeo, facing such a situation, relies solely on outsiders, that is absolutely not advisable. You must dig deep within yourselves, resist Dongyin's influence. That's what you need to do."

"Then hasn't Goryeo made a wedding dress for Great Hua? We exhaust our national strength to resist Dongyin, but cannot escape the act of national destruction. In the end, won't the benefits all go to Great Hua?" Seo Jang Geum, the most famous remarkable woman in Goryeo, finally showed her weak and helpless side, lowering her head on the verge of tears. Speaking of taking advantage, her head was buried in her chest like an ostrich, not knowing whether she was lamenting Goryeo or herself.

"Jang Geum Dongsaeng, don't only think of yourself. According to your thinking, can't I also say that Great Hua has made a wedding dress for Goryeo? If it weren't for Great Hua fighting to the death against the Turkic people, Goryeo, that tiny land, would have long fallen under the hooves of the Turkic cavalry, with all the benefits going to you, Goryeo," Lin Wanrong said calmly.

It seemed to be a skewed argument, yet it left Seo Jang Geum unable to rebut. She sat on the ground, stunned, tears falling like raindrops, without a word.

Where have all the men of Goryeo gone, leaving such a heavy responsibility to a weak woman? In the end, Lin Wanrong felt no ill will toward Jang Geum Dongsaeng. While he shamelessly admired her tempting chest and hidden charms, he also felt full of sympathy for her.

"Enough, enough, who else can help you if not your Wanrong Oppa?" Master Lin thought for a long time and finally spoke.

Seo Jang Geum's face lit up, and she stared at him blankly, asking, "Master Lin, are you serious? You really want to help me?"

"Ah, I've always been the most soft-hearted, and you are my Jang Geum Dongsaeng. It's truly a headache," Lin Wanrong said helplessly, tapping his forehead, his face filled with vexation.

Seo Jang Geum, not caring about her scantily-clad appearance, leaped up from the ground, clung to his arm, and exclaimed joyfully, "Is it true? Are you really going to help me? Master Lin, you are wonderful!"

A faint fragrance wafted from Jang Geum's body. The thin undergarment was like a layer of gauze between them, adding to the temptation. Jang Geum's arms gently embraced his, her shoulders soft and smooth, her skin luminous as jade, the trembling peaks of her chest pressing against his arm, displaying their voluptuous charm. Her long eyelashes, quivering with some teardrops, were pure and sparkling, breathtakingly beautiful.

Master Lin lowered his head and saw the thin undergarment loosen, revealing two soft white mounds. The deep valley between the peaks was dizzying.

"Jang Geum Dongsaeng, I have a profound question for you. You must answer me truthfully," Master Lin said, suppressing the urge to nosebleed, his voice serious.

Seo Jang Geum nodded, only to hear Master Lin say, "Is plastic surgery popular in Goryeo right now?"

"What is plastic surgery?" Seo Jang Geum asked, puzzled.

"To put it simply, it's raising the nose, shaving the chin, padding the chest with foam, and adding some fat to the buttocks to make them perkier. Do people undergo this surgery in your country now?"

Seo Jang Geum was unable to suppress her embarrassment and hurriedly shook her head, saying, "My lord, where are you taking this conversation? A woman should cherish her natural beauty; how could anyone resort to such shameless acts?"

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter, thinking, 'It seems this is a genuine product indeed; Goryeo also has pure, natural beauties. How rare!'

'Don't touch what you shouldn't, don't touch what you shouldn't!' Lord Lin, holding onto Jang Geum's slender waist, let his big hand slide downward. Seo Jang Geum let out a cry, her face blushing, and quickly pulled away. Her face as red as fire, she sternly said, "My lord, you—"

"Ah, don't mention that matter to me again!" Lin Wanrong grandly waved his hand, "Jang Geum Dongsaeng, I understand your feelings towards me. But I am not a fickle man. Will you please show me some respect?"

Jang Geum could not help but smile and nod, "My lord, I won't tease you anymore. Please tell me quickly, how are we to save Goryeo?"

"Don't move; let me think. Just a reminder, don't let your mind wander. I am an upright and profound thinker. You won't find any indecent or erotic thoughts in my eyes, will you?" Lord Lin stared intently at Seo Jang Geum's exquisite body, not blinking.

Could this really work? Standing naked in front of an "upright" man, Seo Jang Geum felt humiliated to the point of death, her chest heaving, her white and rounded thighs tense, like a mermaid that had floated out of the water. But Lord Lin's focus was all on her, so she dared not move, fearing that if Master Lin lost focus for a moment, the happiness of the Goryeo people would be lost at her hands.

Time ticked away, and saliva flowed like a waterfall from the corner of Lord Lin's mouth. No one knew how he was thinking.

"Jang Geum Dongsaeng—" Lord Lin extended his hand with a lascivious grin toward Seo Jang Geum.

"My Lord, you—" Seo Jang Geum, horrified, in a panic, grabbed a jar from the table that contained medicinal soup and threw it at his hand.

Lord Lin screamed in pain, standing up suddenly and hastily covering his wrist with a piece of cloth from the ground, his face pale, "After thinking deeply and almost leaving my body, drooling from my pondering, I finally found a solution—hey, Jang Geum, what are you doing with that big jar?"

Seo Jang Geum was speechless; it turned out the lord was truly deep in thought, even having an out-of-body experience. It was not his true intention earlier.

"My lord, what solution have you found?" Seo Jang Geum asked, her voice filled with both shame and urgency.

"This solution is simple, really. As I said earlier, my great nation and Dongyin will eventually come to blows. It's only a matter of time. But right now, we face a significant threat from the Turks to the north and cannot divert our attention to external matters. So, it's a bit difficult, but there are ways to resolve it."

Lord Lin had already mentioned this viewpoint earlier, and Seo Jang Geum, hearing nothing new, became impatient, "My lord, what are you trying to say?"

'This wretched girl! That last blow almost made me bleed; I must tease her a bit to make it up to my hand.' Lord Lin chuckled, "I've already told you, saving Goryeo is at the expense of our great

nation's interests. However, if you can find a way to make up for my great nation's loss, there might be room for negotiation."

"Recoup the interests of Great Hua?" Seo Jang Geum was no fool; after a moment's contemplation, she ventured, "My lord, are you referring to the military expenses, provisions, and compensation for wartime losses incurred by your nation's deployment of troops?"

Lin Wanrong smiled without saying a word, neither confirming nor denying.

This guy was so annoying. Seeing Lin Wanrong's eyes continually roaming over her, Seo Jang Geum's face turned red with embarrassment. After a moment of thought, she answered, "Our Goryeo is weak and might not be able to come up with that much money all at once. But this matter is negotiable, and I will report to the King."

Now, this was strange. How could a lowly palace maid like her report directly to the king of Goryeo? Did she have some special relationship with him? No, that couldn't be. Looking at her closed legs, she was clearly still a virgin. Lin Wanrong gave her an odd look, and Seo Jang Geum sighed, "My lord, do not ask so much. As for your request, I will report it to the King."

"Miss Seo, you are mistaken. This is not my request but something you yourself brought up. I did not agree to it," Lin Wanrong said with a smile.

"What?" Seo Jang Geum's face was a mixture of shock and rage as she stood up abruptly. "My lord, what exactly do you want?"

As she stood up, her shapely and alluring body was pressed against Lin Wanrong, very enticing indeed.

"What can I do?" Lin Wanrong spread his hands in vexation. "Jang Geum Dongsaeng, I am only offering friendly advice here. If you don't want to hear it, then forget it."

"You, you—" Seo Jang Geum's whole body trembled, tears falling like raindrops. "My lord, all you do is bully me! What else do you want? Just say it all at once!"

"Actually, what you mentioned earlier is not insignificant," Lin Wanrong laughed. "But you missed the most important part. Right now, Great Hua is facing the threat of the Turks, and we are suddenly supposed to aid a completely unrelated Goryeo, becoming enemies on all sides. We are in constant

danger of national ruin. How can we justify this to Great Hua's people? How can we mobilize our troops with honor? This is no simple matter. If mishandled, it could be exploited by those with ill intentions and lead to internal chaos in Great Hua."

With Lin Wanrong painting such a grave picture, Seo Jang Geum became worried about him going back on his word and hastily asked, "Then what's your solution?"

"There is a solution, but it depends on whether or not the King of Goryeo can accept it," Lin Wanrong sighed.

"Speak quickly." Seo Jang Geum was highly dissatisfied with his teasing, not even addressing him as 'My lord'.

Lin Wanrong smiled, "Great Hua is now unable to deal with foreign affairs, but if it is an internal matter, that's an entirely different story. If Goryeo's affairs become part of Great Hua's internal politics, then everything becomes simple."

"What?" Seo Jang Geum was horrified, her face filled with anger. "You, you want to annex my Goryeo?"

"Miss Seo, can you have a little patience?" Lin Wanrong said with a bitter smile. "When did I ever say I wanted to annex?"

"Then what is your intention?" Seo Jang Geum demanded angrily.

Lin Wanrong smiled enigmatically, "We can adopt a special approach called 'One Country, Two Systems.' Goryeo is nominally not a vassal of Great Hua, but pays tribute to Great Hua every year, right? Why not take it a step further, having the King of Goryeo recognize Great Hua's central authority, declare the two as one, but let Goryeo continue to be governed by its people? You would have complete judicial and economic rights, with only foreign affairs and the military managed by Great Hua. This is called 'One Country, Two Systems': Goryeo governed by Goryeo people! If the Dongyin people want to attack you, that would be an attack on Great Hua. Would they dare? That's the question. And for Goryeo, there would be no loss. Ah, what a grand idea!"

"One Country, Two Systems?" Seo Jang Geum thought it over carefully. She was no fool and immediately grasped the key issue, her voice filled with anger: "Without military and diplomatic rights, what's the meaning of Goryeo's existence?"

"Miss Seo, that's a good question." Lin Wanrong said with a cold smile, "When our Great Hua assists Goryeo in resisting Dongyin, driving away the Dongyin people, your threat will no longer exist. Then what is the meaning of keeping the Goryeo army? Without the threat from Dongyin, whom are you guarding against? Guarding against our Great Hua? If Great Hua sends troops to help Goryeo drive away the Dongyin people, and Goryeo sets up defenses against Great Hua, Miss Seo, if you were the Emperor of Great Hua, would you be foolish enough to do this? What's the point of us sending troops? Does Goryeo just want to take advantage without giving anything in return? Where in the world does such a good thing exist?"

It was undeniable; Lin San had hit the nail on the head. Everyone has their own interests, and though Seo Jang Geum was intelligent, when it came to these matters, how could she match Lin San? She could only respond with silence.

"After the unification of Goryeo and Great Hua, the two places can freely trade and marry. Great Hua will encourage the residents of both places to migrate to each other, and Great Hua language teaching will be added to Goryeo schools." Lin Wanrong sighed slightly, "Politics has no justice; there is something to gain but something to lose. Choose between losing the country or losing the people; you must think it through. Report to the King of Goryeo truthfully, and I will also petition the Emperor of Great Hua. Ah, this really puts me in a difficult position."

This method was utterly outrageous, but just as Lin San said, it was a choice between losing the country or losing the people. Seo Jang Geum's heart was bitter, and she wiped away her tears, "What are you troubled about? Goryeo has already been bullied to this point by you."

Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile, "Do I need to bully you? Even a heartfelt embrace is rejected; have you ever seen such an honest person? Honestly, Miss Seo, I hate politics, especially talking about politics with women. If it weren't for your insistence, I wouldn't even have mentioned these things. It's really a waste of brain cells. Ah, don't cry—"

Seo Jang Geum's tears flowed like a floodgate, unceasing. Her face full of tears, she looked pitiful as a pear blossom in the rain. Lin Wanrong patted her shoulder sympathetically, "Jang Geum Dongsang, be careful not to catch a cold; better put your clothes on first."

"Mind your own business!" Seo Jang Geum hastily wiped her tears, her anger rising, no longer willing to stand naked before him, "Give me my clothes back."

"What did you say?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, "Miss, even though I am good at 'undressing' women, heaven knows, I didn't undress you."

"What are you holding in your hand?" Seo Jang Geum snorted.

Lin Wanrong looked down and realized that the cloth he had used to wrap his hand was actually Seo Jang Geum's garment that had fallen to the ground. Shameful, truly shameful, Lin Wanrong chuckled embarrassingly.

Seo Jang Geum dressed herself and walked to the door. She turned back to look at him, her eyes complex and inscrutable, and after a long while, she said, "I will convey your intentions to the King. I don't know what the final result will be."

"Actually, I really don't want to be the villain. You know I'm inclined to goodness." Lin Wanrong helplessly shrugged.

Seo Jang Geum nodded, then suddenly rushed over and kissed him on the cheek, her face streaming with tears, "Wanrong Oppa, thank you, I hate you!"

She turned and ran out quickly, disappearing in the blink of an eye. Lin Wanrong touched his cheek and smiled helplessly, thinking, 'An international romance? I'm really not ready for that!'

Chapter 402 A Cat in Heat

When he stepped out the door, it was unexpectedly raining. Everything was rejuvenating, and the spring rain was like oil, with thin drops landing on his face, cold and refreshing, waking him up. Seo Jang Geum he had met earlier that morning was nowhere to be seen. Thinking of the conditions he had offered her, he realized they were indeed hard for a young girl. But from the perspective of his nation and people, he couldn't betray his passionate heart.

"Why have you only just returned?" As he entered the shop, Eldest Miss stood up from her chair, softly scolding.

Lin Wanrong shook off the rain from his cape and smiled, saying, "It was raining, and the roads were hard to traverse. I was also delayed by some trivial matters, so I returned late. I hope I haven't caused Eldest Miss any worry."

"I wasn't worried about you at all." Eldest Miss's face turned slightly red as she approached him, gently brushing the rain from his clothing, and huffed, "You have countless admirers outside. Even if you didn't come back for one or two months, no one would worry about you. Oh, what's this—"

A bright red lipstick mark was printed on the right cheek of Master Lin, forming a small cherry mouth. Eldest Miss's face changed drastically, and she pounded her small fist on his shoulder, shouting, "You, get out!"

Xiao Yuruo desperately pushed him towards the door, and Lin Wanrong hastily leaned against the door panel, confused, "Eldest Miss, what's going on? We were just talking fine a moment ago. How have I offended you?"

Eldest Miss, panting and glaring at him, her beautiful eyes ablaze, and her chest heaving, exclaimed, "You scoundrel, living a debauched life outside while I've been waiting for you to return. You, you, you've infuriated me—" Two sparkling teardrops welled up in her eyes. Xiao Yuruo's face was filled with grief, on the brink of tears.

A debauched life? Master Lin was taken aback for a moment. Had something about him and Miss Seo been exposed? Bah, bah, nothing had happened between them, and he was more innocent than tofu. "Eldest Miss, what exactly is going on? Don't you know my righteous character? How could I possibly be the person you're describing?"

Seeing his wide-eyed innocent expression, Xiao Yuruo became even more annoyed. 'You sure act the part,' she thought. 'As if the two at home weren't enough for you to mistreat, now you're hooking up with vixens outside. Absolutely despicable.'

Eldest Miss sneered, "Don't you dare make up more lies to deceive me. Don't you know what's on your face?"

'On my face?' Lin Wanrong hurriedly touched it, suddenly recalling the soft kiss from Seo Jang Geum before leaving. Oh no, a disaster! He had neither gained anything nor avoided trouble.

"What else do you have to say, you heartless man?" Seeing his stunned expression, as if he were recalling that embracing vixen, Eldest Miss's anger intensified. She pummelled him with her fists as tears flowed like broken pearls.

"Oh, so that's what Eldest Miss was talking about." Master Lin laughed heartily, his mind working quickly, and said very seriously, "Eldest Miss, you've misunderstood. Westerners have a custom of a cheek kiss, a kissing greeting. Haven't you heard of it?"

The Eldest Miss had seen Westerners with her own eyes. During that day in Hangzhou, the one who sold diamonds, Tavernier, was a Frenchman from the West. She had heard that their customs were strange and women were quite liberal. Could it be—Eldest Miss covered her face and wept, saying, “You, you accursed Lin San, even Western women you won't leave alone?”

Lord Lin was stunned for a moment, and thought, ‘The imagination of the Eldest Miss is truly rich!’ Lin Wanrong laughed and said, “Eldest Miss, where has your mind wandered to? This facial greeting and kissing gesture are common Western courtesies, akin to our Great Hua's custom of bowing and saluting when meeting. On my way back, I encountered Seo Jang Geum and helped her solve a problem that had been troubling her for a long time. In a moment of excitement, she simply performed a Western courtesy. There is nothing more to it.”

“Seo Jang Geum?” The Eldest Miss was also taken aback. Earlier, when Seo Jang Geum had come to find Lin San, she was present and saw her anxious appearance as though there was some urgent matter. Could it really have been Seo Jang Geum who performed this gesture out of gratitude? She had never seen her act so freely before.

“Ah, Eldest Miss, were you specifically waiting here for me?” Taking advantage of the Eldest Miss's distraction, Lin Wanrong quickly changed the subject, “Ah, the weather is getting cool; why didn't you wait inside?”

“Who was specifically waiting for you?” The Eldest Miss snorted. She had a good relationship with Seo Jang Geum, the knowledgeable and mild-mannered palace woman. She hadn't heard of any scandals between her and Lin San, so perhaps it was truly a gesture of gratitude. Comforting herself, she quietly wiped away a tear from the corner of her eye, her face glowing as she whispered, “Did, did Mother say anything to you?”

So this girl was worried about this matter. Lin Wanrong closed the door and chuckled, “She did, of course. Not only did she speak, but Madam and I also had a very pleasant chat.”

The Eldest Miss's heart pounded, her pretty face flushed as she lowered her head and softly asked, “What, what did she say to you?”

“She said something very important.” Lin Wanrong teased, reaching to take her small hand. Having learned from the lesson of being caught red-handed by her mother, the Eldest Miss looked around before placing her hand in his.

"I proposed to the Madam." Lin Wanrong whispered in her ear.

Xiao Yuruo uttered a soft cry, lowering her head, her face flushed, her heart beating even harder, her body twisting as she tried to pull her hand from his grip, "What does your proposal have to do with me? The affections of that girl, Yushuang, will finally be fulfilled."

So the elder sister was jealous of the younger one. Seeing the Eldest Miss's shy yet expectant look, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but burst into laughter. The Eldest Miss's face turned red, and she twisted his arm angrily, saying, "What are you laughing at so foolishly? You fool!"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I asked the Madam for her blessing to marry the Second Miss. Eldest Miss, do you agree?"

Xiao Yuruo sighed, turning her face away, softly saying, "It should be so. Yushuang is devoted to you, and now, for you, she's studying hard at the Capital Academy. You must not fail her; otherwise, Mother and I will never forgive you."

"Understood, understood, I thank Eldest Miss and Madam for their support," Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled, "That's about it, really. There wasn't much else said. Eldest Miss, do you have any more questions? If not, I'll go to my room."

"You—" Xiao Yuruo's face clouded with intense disappointment, her teeth clenched tightly. "Is that all you talked about with Mother? What about the rest?"

"The rest? What rest?" Lin Wanrong asked, puzzled. "It seems I didn't talk to Madam for very long."

"You can leave!" Eldest Miss defiantly turned away, refusing to look at him. After waiting in silence, she started to turn her face back towards him, only to hear Lin San's infuriating voice in her ear, "I also asked Madam for your hand in marriage, to have Eldest Miss promised to me."

"You, you, you're talking nonsense," Xiao Yuruo's face turned a shade of embarrassed red, and she hastily turned her head away again. Her red, burning ears were as hot as if they were on fire, and a shy joy rapidly spread across her eyes.

"Let it be nonsense, then," Lin Wanrong sighed. "Anyway, Madam doesn't—"

"What did Mother say?" Xiao Yuruo, hearing a change in his tone, couldn't help but interrupt, no longer mindful of her shyness.

Speaking of Madam Xiao's attitude, Lin Wanrong truly felt distressed: "Madam made it clear, saying I can only marry either Eldest Miss or Second Miss. Eldest Miss, tell me, isn't this making things difficult for me? Both are dear to me; I can't bear to give up either."

Eldest Miss was stunned for a moment, murmuring to herself, "Only marry one?" A bitter expression crossed her face, her eyes closing slightly as large tears rolled down, her voice resolute: "If that's the case, then you must treat Yu Shuang well. She is still a child, ignorant of the world's ways. If you wrong her, even as a ghost, I won't forgive you."

Seeing Eldest Miss's determined expression, Lin Wanrong was torn between laughter and tears, grabbing her hand tightly: "Eldest Miss, you're not intending to play a part in a drama about yielding your husband, are you?"

"What yielding husband? It sounds so unpleasant!" Xiao Yuruo, her face originally filled with grief, couldn't help but laugh at his distraction, hitting him in annoyance, her heart filled with a sour sensation.

"Ah, I must say, Madam isn't handling this matter fairly, putting both Eldest Miss and Second Miss in a difficult position," Lin San sighed, shaking his head and looking regretful.

"Don't you dare speak ill of Mother behind her back!" Eldest Miss glared at him angrily, then added in a softer voice, "How is Mother being unfair?"

Lin Wanrong wore a worried expression: "Think about it, if I marry Second Miss, won't I still have to see Eldest Miss every day? Eldest Miss will be thinking of me every day. This will become an elder sister-in-law longing for her brother-in-law. What if something happens in the future? What will we do then?"

"You're asking for trouble," Eldest Miss flushed crimson, her heart pounding wildly. "What elder sister-in-law longing for brother-in-law? I, I won't think of you."

"Ah? So it's a younger sister-in-law thinking of her brother-in-law? Eldest Miss, you have such thoughts! Ah, why did I have to run into such a difficult situation? Being too charming can be deadly!" Lin Wanrong muttered to himself.

"Shameless, despicable, vile, low!" Eldest Miss cried out in a panic, her mind a flurry of insults. Unfortunately, her vocabulary of invective was limited, and she kept repeating the same few phrases. To Lin San, these words were practically compliments.

Seeing Lin San's gleeful face, Eldest Miss gritted her teeth in anger, but his few words had stirred in her a strange emotion. She felt both afraid and yearning, a mixture of extreme shame and excitement. She quickly lowered her head, not daring to speak.

Having teased her enough, Lin San's expression became entirely serious, and he took her small hand gently, saying, "Eldest Miss, don't worry. I'll handle the Madam. You know I have quite a way with women."

Eldest Miss turned her head away, not daring to respond, while Lin San stretched and laughed, "It's late. Time to rest. Oh, by the way, where are the Qiaoqiao and Ning'er? I've been back for a while, but they haven't come to greet me."

Xiao Yuruo responded softly, "They went to the new residence and asked for you to go there later. They have something to discuss with you."

"Oh, something to discuss with me? That must be important. I must hurry over." Lin San's eyes sparkled with joy, sensing that Luo Ning had persuaded Qiaoqiao. 'She really is a good political commissar.'

Seeing Lin San's elated expression, Eldest Miss didn't know what they were planning, but knowing Lin San, whenever his eyes sparkled like that, there had to be a beautiful woman enticing him. Qiaoqiao was naturally mild and wouldn't use those cunning tricks, but the other one was hard to guard against. Eldest Miss gritted her teeth and snorted, "That foxy Luo Ning, using such low methods to lure away your soul."

Lin Wanrong chuckled and suddenly exclaimed, "Ah, I've thought of a way to make the Madam submit. Eldest Miss, how about this? Let's present a fait accompli, and then there won't be any worries."

"You're courting death!" Eldest Miss blushed with anger and pinched his arm fiercely, "Do you think I'm like that foxy Luo Ning? I can see from her eyes what you two have been up to. I, Xiao Yuruo, am an innocent girl and won't imitate others in a base union."

With a toss of her hand and a twist of her body, Eldest Miss glared at him and turned away. Jealousy, it was pure jealousy. Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, found a carriage, and headed straight for the grand mansion bestowed by the Emperor.

The grand mansion, located opposite the Golden Jade Bridge, was a prestigious place in the capital, surrounded by dignitaries and officials. Lin San's status was on par with Xu Wei and Li Tai, indicating the Emperor's high regard for him.

Upon reaching the front gate of the residence and disembarking from the carriage, he found the mansion completely refurbished with golden plaques, jade lions, red bricks, and green tiles, looking quite majestic. The vermilion door was tightly shut. Lin Wanrong pushed it a couple of times but found it bolted from inside.

'Damn, they're not going to make me climb the wall to get in, are they? Stealing into my own home to see my wife? What a world!' Just as he was preparing to scale the wall, he heard a muffled sound, and the red door opened. A dim lantern emerged, and a charming young maid poked her head out, asking, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

'Who am I? That's a good question.' Seeing the adorable appearance of the young maid, Lin Wanrong leaped forward a few paces with a playful laugh. "Are you asking me?" he teased. "Everyone calls me Brother San! Little sister, how old are you? Do you live here alone? Are you scared? Would you like Brother San to keep you company?"

"Ah—" the little maid screamed in surprise, stepping back, her face flushed. "You're Master Lin?!"

"Hmm, little sister, you recognize me?" Lin Wanrong nodded, adopting a serious tone. "Well, considering my dashing and handsome appearance, which has already captured the hearts of countless young maidens, your recognizing me is not so surprising."

The little maid burst into giggles. "I don't recognize you at all. My young mistress told me about your characteristics. I recognized you as soon as I compared them."

"My characteristics? What characteristics?" Lin Wanrong was intrigued.

The little maid explained, "My young mistress said, 'If you see a man who's always laughing and flirting, shamelessly arrogant, and tries to tease every woman he sees, peeking around at the front door, that's undoubtedly Master Lin.'"

"What? That's a mistake! Who knows me so well?" Lin Wanrong protested angrily. "Do I even have any privacy left? Who is your young mistress? I need to argue with her."

The little maid laughed coquettishly, holding up her lantern, revealing a large character "Xu" on the oxhide paper. Master Lin's face changed, and he waved his hands in regret. "I take back the last sentence. Forget I ever said it. But let me remind you, little sister, you're still young. Don't always believe what you hear. Flirty, shamelessly arrogant, teasing women—is that me? I don't flirt with more than a few each year. Most of the time, I'm the one being teased."

The little maid smiled demurely and bowed to him. "Master, my young mistress has specially instructed me to meet you. Please follow me."

‘Your young mistress is meeting me? In my own house? How absurd!’ The little maid led the way with her lantern, and Master Lin followed, feeling disgruntled. The mansion had been completely renovated, clean and tidy, with freshly planted flowers and plants throughout the courtyard. They made their way through halls and alleys, stopping at an elegantly designed three-story pavilion in the backyard, where bright lights were shining. The little maid curtsied, "Master, the three young mistresses are waiting for you upstairs!"

Lin Wanrong nodded, and as he crossed the threshold, he heard a burst of joyful laughter from upstairs. The voice of Qiaoqiao rang out, "Sister Zhiqing, your eyeshadow looks really good. If big brother sees it, he will surely be stunned."

Miss Xu's voice responded, "Why mention him out of the blue? It ruins the mood. By the way, Qiaoqiao, is this eyeshadow and mascara really a gift from the Goryeo girl named Seo Jang Geum? I never knew Goryeo had such talent. However, Qiaoqiao, Ning'er, don't blame me for not warning you. I heard that this girl Jang Geum is ambiguously involved with your family's Lin San. You'd better keep an eye on him. If a foreign vixen seduces him, that would be a disgrace to our Great Hua women."

Lin Wanrong listened, grinding his teeth in secret. So what if he had accidentally touched her a few times, or mistakenly kissed her a few times? Was it worth her gossiping and scheming behind his back?

He strode up the stairs with a commanding presence, only to find three young women sitting in front of a mirror, giggling and painting their eyebrows, enjoying themselves. On Miss Xu's eyelids was a newly drawn layer of pale blue eyeshadow mixed with some silver, paired with her mature and fiery body, she was truly as enchanting as had been described by Qiaoqiao.

"See, I knew big brother would be stunned by the sight," Qiaoqiao's soft laughter rang in his ears. Lin Wanrong snapped out of his trance, chuckling, "My eyes aren't stunned, what do you think they are, crooked? Hey, am I mistaken? Isn't this Miss Xu? We parted only a few hours ago, how come we meet again now?"

Xu Zhiqing snorted, discontentedly saying, "You think I want to see you? If it weren't for my father's message from the palace, instructing me to inform you, I wouldn't bother seeing you."

Seeing that big brother and Miss Xu seemed to be somewhat indifferent to each other, Qiaoqiao quickly grabbed Lin Wanrong's hand, smiling, "Yes, big brother, Miss Xu has come to convey a message from Lord Xu from the palace. Also, she has put a lot of effort into refurbishing our mansion. Many places were planned by her personally. You could say, she knows our home even better than you. Isn't that right, Miss Xu?"

Xu Zhiqing smiled faintly, saying, "I came to help for the sake of you, Qiaoqiao, and Ning'er, and it has nothing to do with anyone else."

Lin Wanrong, having long understood this girl's stubbornness, didn't argue with her. Considering that tonight was a special night, he sneaked a glance at Luo Ning, noticing her blushing face and the intense affection in her eyes as she gazed at him.

"So Miss Xu is here to convey an order, I wonder what Lord Xu has commanded?" Lin Wanrong said, his heart burning with impatience, eager to send Xu Zhiqing away and enjoy his romantic evening.

Miss Xu snorted and said, "The Emperor urgently summoned my father for a meeting, and he has not yet come out since noon. A message just came from the palace, saying that tomorrow morning, the Emperor has summoned you to discuss urgent military matters in court. You must attend."

"The morning court?" Lin Wanrong hesitated, saying, "But I still need to sleep!"

"You—" Miss Xu was infuriated to the extreme, almost wanting to march over and beat him up. The Emperor had been gracious enough to Lin San, summoning anyone to court would normally be

met with profound gratitude. Yet Lin San treated state affairs so lightly, naturally stirring some anger in Miss Xu.

Suppressing her irritation, Miss Xu slowly said, "My father said, there are three urgent matters that need discussion. First, the Emperor of Dongyin has sent an envoy, demanding an explanation from Great Hua for the disappearance of Tsugumi Takeshita within our borders; second, yesterday Dongyin's army of a hundred thousand set sail for Goryeo, war is imminent; third, General Li Tai's army is about to set out, and the expedition must be discussed."

These three matters were all somewhat related to Lin Wanrong, and there was no avoiding them. Lin Wanrong nodded reluctantly, "Then let's see what it's about. Alas, it's a pity that I won't be able to fulfill my dreams of spring."

"My father also said, concerning Miss Xiao Qingxuan's matter, he is probing the Emperor's intentions, and he will notify you immediately when there's news," Seo Jang Geum added.

"Really?" Lin Wanrong was overjoyed. Old Xu was indeed efficient in handling matters.

Xu Zhiqing snorted and said, "Who would bother to deceive you?"

Having finished discussing serious matters, Xu Zhiqing seemed to have more to say, and without regard to whose house she was in, she began to whisper to Qiaoqiao.

"Big brother, I have something to tell you. Come in with me." Luo Ning gave him a charming smile and stepped into the inner room.

Something to tell him? Lin Wanrong had just stepped into the room, and the door gently closed behind him. A fiery body wrapped around him like a serpent, and Ning'er, dressed only in a thin garment, pressed tightly against him, panting, "Big brother, this is our home, do you like it?"

"I like it." Lin Wanrong was taken aback for a moment, then his blood boiled, and he feigned seriousness, "Ning'er, Miss Xu is still outside."

"I don't care." Eldest Miss exhaled a fragrant breath, "Big brother, this is our home, and Ning'er is truly happy. Do you remember what you did to Qiaoqiao in my room in Jinling? Ning'er wants a turn too."

This request was truly hard to refuse. Lin Wanrong's hands slid down her buttocks, feeling a damp sensation. Luo Ning softly moaned, her body aflame, and her smooth, voluptuous legs entwined around him like serpents. Her hips twisted slightly, and her eyes were full of seduction, "Big brother, be gentle, Ning'er is afraid she can't help but make noise, and Miss Xu might hear. Oh, big brother, you're so naughty—"

Eldest Miss had seen through the nature of the Talented Lady Luo, an unabashed enchantress. How could Lin Wanrong resist? Pressing against her raised buttocks, Luo Ning let out a cry, a little shriek like a kitten, stealing a glance at him, her lips slightly parted, her eyes watery, "Big brother, you did that on purpose! You mustn't think of Miss Xu; she's just outside. Oh, she heard—"

"What was that noise?" Xu Zhiqing's eyebrows furrowed slightly, and she curiously peeked into the inner room.

"Oh, it's nothing." Qiaoqiao's face turned red, and she hurriedly covered up, "It's probably just a little cat in the house!"

"A cat in heat!" Miss Xu snorted, and for some reason, her face also turned red.

Chapter 403 Going to Court

A night of tender whispers needed no words. Under the guise of celebrating their new home, Luo Ning, the foxy temptress, opened her arms, pulling the shy Qiaoqiao into the fray. Under Luo Ning's exemplary lead, Qiaoqiao reluctantly joined the lustful man and woman, fulfilling Lin Wanrong's grand dream of having two at once. The ecstasy of the experience was beyond words for outsiders.

The fine rain drizzled non-stop, and Lin Wanrong was sound asleep when he suddenly felt a small hand gently nudging him. "Big brother, wake up, wake up!"

Lin Wanrong groggily grabbed her little hand and kissed it. "Qiaoqiao, my little darling, it's still dark outside. Sleep some more."

Qiaoqiao giggled, covering her red lips. "Big brother, you're talking nonsense. It's already past the fourth watch of the night."

"Who cares what time it is? Sleep is what matters." Lin Wanrong yawned, groping a plump hip beside him, only to hear a kitten-like moan as Miss Luo mumbled, "Big brother, don't tease me. Ning'er can't take it."

Miss Luo's face was flushed in her sleep, perhaps dreaming of spring. Her smooth arms tightly embraced Lin Wanrong's arm, her full and firm breasts pressed against his waist, forming a deep cleavage.

Master Lin's lust was ignited. With closed eyes, he caressed Ning's smooth leg. Miss Luo was very sensitive, moaning in half-sleep, her hot body moving closer to him.

Qiaoqiao's cheeks turned red as she covered her face. "Big brother is so naughty, and so is Sister Ning."

"You naughty girl, where was I naughty?" Luo Ning opened her eyes, her face flushed with seductive charm, her eyes seemingly dripping with passion.

"You, you—" Qiaoqiao was both shy and embarrassed, peeking at her and whispering, "You and big brother, teasing me like that, I could die of shame."

Luo Ning laughed, burying her head in big brother's chest, pointing at Qiaoqiao's pretty nose. "You hypocritical little girl, since you say I'm naughty, I'll ask you a question. Answer me honestly."

"Answer what?" Qiaoqiao asked, her shyness fading.

Luo Ning smiled seductively, drawing circles on Lin Wanrong's bare chest. "Little girl, tell me honestly, how did it feel last night? Were you happy or not?"

Qiaoqiao's face turned purple with embarrassment. "I, I won't say!"

Luo Ning laughed sweetly. "You don't have to say, I know. Who was the one clinging to big brother last night, first saying no, then not letting go? We both have eyes, you know. You seem so innocent, but who knew you could be so wild?"

Qiaoqiao was mortified, burying herself in Lin Wanrong's arms. "Big brother, Sister Ning is bullying me. Punish her like you did last night. Sister Xu hasn't left yet, and she's already throwing herself at you. I bet Sister Xu heard everything, hee hee!"

Luo Ning's face turned red, her big eyes blinking, her hot little tongue licking her red lips, shyly and seductively saying, "Big brother, Sister Xu heard everything. What should we do?"

'Damn it, with these two bewitching vixens, both big and small, I can't find any peace to rest. If this continues, I'll soon have to use that thing Seo Jang Geum sent me.' Lin Wanrong felt unbearably itchy, suddenly opened his eyes, and with a swoosh, pulled the two women into his embrace: "Did you hear? Done, it's all done!"

Qiaoqiao let out a startled cry, and Luo Ning moaned softly twice, causing the temperature in the room to rise again.

"Sister Ning—sister, all the good things are done by you." Seeing big brother's hands misbehaving on Sister Ning, Qiaoqiao's little face turned red as she panted: "Big brother, it's time, don't forget, you have to attend the morning court."

Attend court? Lin Wanrong paused for a moment but didn't stop his hands: "Ning'er, what time is the court?"

Eldest Miss Luo, her face glowing, nestled in his arms and trembled: "Big brother, court is at the fifth watch. It's a rule; you must get up quickly."

Lin Wanrong sighed in disappointment. Going to court at the peak of a man's vitality, what a bloody inhumane rule. He buried his head in the blanket in a fit of pique, causing Miss Luo and Qiaoqiao to giggle.

Ning'er, through the embroidered quilt, gently stroked his chest and sighed softly: "Attending court is something others can't even beg for, yet my husband is unique. Just a little servant, yet even the Emperor's accounts mean nothing to him. Such a mindset, how many in the world possess it? No wonder even Eldest Miss Xiao, who's so high and mighty, is smitten with you."

Qiaoqiao giggled: "Not just Eldest Miss Xiao, but also the famous Talented Lady Luo. Didn't she also fall into big brother's arms? Big brother, being this servant, gaining property, and deceiving beautiful women, is truly a wonder in the world."

The two women chatted like birds, their beautiful faces blooming, singing softly around him. The spring sentiment in the room dispelled some of the chill from the spring rain outside. Lord Lin

stretched lazily and thought, 'No wonder they say "A man's grave is his love nest"; being entangled by these two girls, even if I were offered the Emperorship, I wouldn't take it.'

The three got out of bed, enduring his fondling. Miss Luo and Qiaoqiao gently helped him dress.

'Calling me, a mere servant, to attend court and discuss matters, the old Emperor must have quite the imagination. My position as a vice minister is just a small, nominal role; I've never handled any real business. At court, won't I have to behave according to others' whims? It's not as enjoyable as being a servant in the Xiao household, where Eldest Miss serves tea, Second Miss massages my back, and the Madam sings. Everyone looks to my face; that's real freedom and joy.'

Hearing big brother sigh, Luo Ning's face turned red. Suddenly, from behind, she tightly hugged his waist and said: "Big brother, there's something Ning'er wants to ask you."

"What is it?" Lin Wanrong casually groped her round, jade-like hips and laughed.

Luo Ning's face turned redder, and she stammered for a moment, her voice as fine as a mosquito's: "Big brother, is Ning'er so wanton?" At these words, even Qiaoqiao's face turned red.

"Wanton?" Lin Wanrong laughed loudly: "Ning'er, my little darling, don't you know who your big brother is? In terms of being wanton, who in the world can compare to me?" He whispered in Luo Ning's ear: "Keep on being wanton; big brother likes it very much."

"How annoying!" Miss Luo clenched her little fist and punched him in the chest, her expression becoming more and more charming. She grabbed Qiaoqiao's hand, then her big brother's, and said softly, "To be married to my big brother and Qiaoqiao is the blessing of Ning'er's lifetime. Ning'er is very happy. Since we are husband and wife, we are one body. Qiaoqiao, don't blame your sister for being so wanton; in front of my husband, even if it's a hundred times more, what does it matter? The affection between husband and wife is a very important thing. As long as the three of us are happy, the form and content are irrelevant. Sister, don't you agree?"

Qiaoqiao blushed, lightly nodded and looked down. Miss Luo was truly learned and talented. Even Lin Wanrong couldn't think of this theory and laughed heartily. Just as he was about to embrace her, Ning'er gave a slight smile, stopping him. "Big brother, there's one more thing Ning'er wants to discuss with you. Yesterday, I agreed with Seo Jang Geum that when she returns to Goryeo, I will accompany her. As I've told big brother before, I've wanted to travel around since I was young. Now there is such a good opportunity, Ning'er doesn't want to miss it. Big brother, will you support Ning'er?"

Lin Wanrong fell silent for a moment. It wasn't a good time to go to Goryeo right now. Thousands of Dongyin ships were ready, and a great war was about to erupt on the Goryeo Kingdom. But he had long known Luo Ning's wish. Born with this nature, loving to help others and travel, if she didn't do these things, she wouldn't be Luo Ning. Now that Seo Jang Geum was going with her, if it wasn't for a war, it was indeed a good opportunity.

He pondered for a moment before saying, "Ning'er, whatever you want to do, of course, big brother will support you. But isn't Goryeo quite unsettled lately? Hasn't Seo Jang Geum told you?"

Luo Ning grabbed his hand, smiling, "I know that. But as Miss Jang Geum has said, life is not only about enjoying happiness but also learning to face hardship. I want to see how the people of Goryeo resist the invasion."

'This Seo Jang Geum girl is indeed harmful.' Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile and said, "Let me think about it first. Sigh, I haven't encountered such a difficult question in a long time."

Luo Ning suddenly giggled, rubbing against him and looking at him with alluring eyes. "Silly big brother, all these were told by Seo Jang Geum. If you want Ning'er to stay, Ning'er will never leave you."

Lin Wanrong slapped her on the buttocks, and Luo Ning let out a delicate moan, giggling as she ran away. Qiaoqiao brought his rain gear, carefully tidied his clothes, and escorted him downstairs with Luo Ning.

Outside the door, there was a carriage, and the little maid they had seen last night popped her head out, waving excitedly, "Master Lin, Master Lin, we're here."

"Oh, little sister, up so early?" Lin Wanrong, holding an umbrella, smiled as he walked over.

"It's not that I'm up early, but that you're up late," the little maid said playfully, making Lin Wanrong's face turn red.

The little maid turned back to the carriage and said, "Miss, Master Lin is here; can we go now?"

The carriage was silent for a moment before Xu Zhiqing's voice came out, "He's walking outside alone, and if he's too slow, it could delay national affairs. Considering the urgency, let him come up and join us."

'It's just an invitation to ride in a carriage, and there's so much fuss,' Lin Wanrong thought, not being modest and stepping into the carriage. He heard Miss Xu say, "You, going out alone like this? Don't you know to bring some people with you?"

"Have you ever seen a house servant going out with attendants?" Lin Wanrong patted the raindrops on his body and laughed, "If word of this were to spread, it would surely make people laugh their teeth off."

Xu Zhiqing snorted slightly, "You have even taken possession of other people's mistresses, two at that. How do you even resemble a house servant? Calling you a wicked servant would be more like it."

"Thank you for the compliment," Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, and looked up to see Xu Zhiqing dressed in a green lotus-root silk dress, her hair adorned with a pure gold phoenix hairpin, her face lightly made up with rouge, glowing with a faint red hue, radiantly beautiful.

"Oh, Miss Xu, what's this all about? Going on a date?" Lin Wanrong was stunned and asked.

Miss Xu's face changed drastically, "Yuzhu, fetch my golden whip and cast this shameless scoundrel down from the carriage."

In a daze, the maid Yuzhu had already taken out a golden whip from somewhere and weakly said to Lin Wanrong, "Master Lin, please forgive this servant. You'd better get down quickly. Our mistress's golden whip was bestowed by the Emperor himself, used to strike treacherous officials and behead villains—"

'A golden whip? Seriously, that works? I have a man's whip, but I don't know if it will withstand it!' Seeing Miss Xu's face as cold as ice, without a hint of kindness, and not knowing where he had offended her, Lin Wanrong sheepishly laughed twice and dejectedly stepped down from the carriage.

"Little girl, where is your mistress going?" Little maid Yuzhu peeked out to pull the curtain, and Lin Wanrong quickly asked.

"The Emperor has summoned my mistress to attend court and discuss matters," the little maid laughed, and her body disappeared behind the curtain. The carriage splashed away, moving further into the distance.

Xu Zhiqing is also attending court? No wonder she waited at the door for me to accompany her. It seems the old Emperor is serious this time; this battle against the Turks must be won, or the Great Hua will surely perish.

Though the Golden Bridge was just opposite the mansion, as the old saying goes, 'the mountain seems closer than it is,' and Lin Wanrong took the time of two cups of tea to reach the outer city. The continuous cold rain and chilly spring dew had chilled him to the bone, and his anger toward the old Emperor, his father-in-law was burning. No wonder Xu Zhiqing was riding in a carriage; that girl was too clever.

Upon entering the inner city, moving straight ahead, through the Hall of Extended Years and the Hall of Supreme Harmony, he finally saw the shadow of the Hall of Literary Brilliance. Mr. Lin rubbed his frozen palms, and a figure came over, calling in a shrill voice, "Oh, my Mr. Lin, you've finally arrived."

"Ah, isn't this Eunuch Gao? Long time no see," Lin Wanrong laughed, clasping his hands in greeting.

Gao Ping hurriedly returned the gesture, anxiously saying, "Sir, today is your first time attending court, why are you so late? This old servant has been waiting for you for a long time."

'I was busy being affectionate with my wife; I don't have time to accompany you to court,' Lin Wanrong chuckled, taking out a hundred taels of silver note and stuffing it into Gao Ping's hand, "Little brother got lost and took a few wrong turns, that's why I'm late. I've made a fool of myself in front of you."

Gao Ping quickly drew his hand back and ingratiatingly smiled, "I dare not. The Emperor has ordered me to welcome you here. He said it's your first time attending court, and there are some rules to explain. Please follow me."

Gao Ping led him to the Hall of Literary Brilliance, explaining the rules of attending court all the way. Lin Wanrong yawned non-stop, with seven parts of it going in his left ear and eight parts coming out of his right.

"——Sir, have you understood everything?" Gao Ping finished explaining, then looked at him uneasily. This Master Lin was prone to mischief, and it would be disastrous if anything went wrong.

"What's there not to understand?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Eunuch Gao, rest assured. I'll stand there without uttering a word, ensuring no mistakes will occur. Once you announce the end of the assembly, I'll head home for dinner."

Master Lin was refreshingly blunt. Gao Ping led him to the front of the great hall and pointed to a spot. "Master Lin, remember, this is your position. You must not overstep it."

Lin Wanrong looked up and saw that the position Gao Ping was pointing to was at the far right, in the last seat of the second row. It was right near the doorway, so if he stood there, the people in front would shield him, and he could even take a nap without anyone noticing. 'Damn, what a great spot reserved for me,' he thought, thrilled. This was like snagging the back row in college lectures, definitely something to celebrate.

Master Lin held the idle title of Vice Minister in the Ministry of Personnel. Although the name sounded impressive, the reality was far from it. Among the three chambers, six ministries, and nine bureaus, there were hordes of scholars and officials, easily numbering forty to fifty. The Ministry of Personnel alone had over a dozen Vice Ministers, epitomizing bureaucratic bloat. Master Lin was famous, but he had never actually worked in the ministry. Everyone knew his main job was as the steward of the Xiao family. There was really no place for him in the court. Having a corner spot to stand in was a huge grace from the Emperor.

Gao Ping was initially worried that Master Lin might feel slighted, but seeing Master Lin's excitement, as if he'd found a gold ingot, he admired the man's ability to be flexible and thought he had a promising future. Then, he hurried away.

Officials arriving for court always came early, rushing as if chased by dogs. Master Lin's leisurely stroll, singing along the way, was rare, like a lone star in the morning sky. By then, the great hall was filled with seventy to eighty officials, each clutching documents, standing in groups, and chattering away.

In the crowded hall, Master Lin couldn't spot Xu Wei or Li Tai, but given their status, they were undoubtedly in the front. He did notice the long-absent Top Scholar Su Mubai, chatting lively with a few ministers. He seemed to be doing well lately, thriving in the political arena.

He had heard from the young maidservant that Xu Zhiqing was also attending court, but despite looking around, he couldn't spot her. Given her imperial-gifted golden whip, she held a significant position. The old Emperor had convened an expanded meeting, so if Master Lin had a seat, Miss Xu surely wouldn't be left out.

After surveying the area and finding no acquaintances—those standing nearby were all like him, small officials who stood stiffly without chit-chatting—Lin Wanrong grew bored and yawned, leaning against the door to doze.

"The Emperor arrives!" Gao Ping's shout rang out, and the great hall immediately fell silent. The civil and military officials took their places and knelt. Lin Wanrong lazily sat on the floor, looking towards the Dragon Throne.

After not seeing him for a few days, the old Emperor's complexion had turned much paler, though his spirit seemed quite well. Next to him, a temporary screen had been erected, and a thin, sparse curtain hung in front of it. Behind the curtain, a woman sat quietly.

Her silhouette was blurry, her features indiscernible, yet somehow, Lin Wanrong's heart suddenly began to thump rapidly.

Chapter 404 Might of Ten Thousand Years

"Rise, my Dear Ministers," the old Emperor's voice rasped slightly as he slightly lifted his hand. The civil and military officials of the entire court thanked him in unison and respectfully stood up. Lin Wanrong examined the woman behind the curtain closely. She sat quietly, neither speaking nor smiling, her figure extraordinarily graceful.

The Emperor raised his eyes and looked around, nodding slightly, "At today's morning assembly, there is an important matter of state that I must discuss with you all. Concerning the rise and fall of our great Empire, I specifically permit Miss Xu Zhiqing to enter the court with a golden whip. Although Xu Zhiqing is a woman, she has several times personally fought fiercely with the northern nomads and is a true heroine among women. I allow her to enter the court to discuss politics, situated in the adjoining room. Does anyone object?"

Allowing a woman to participate in the court's affairs was against the rules, but since the Emperor had spoken, and the woman had achievements and status, and she was also discussing politics in the side room next to the Hall of Literary Brilliance, everyone nodded, praising the wisdom of the Emperor.

Gao Ping loudly called out, "Summon Xu Zhiqing to the great hall's side room for discussion."

"Thank you for the Emperor's great grace," a crisp voice of a woman came from outside the hall. Lin Wanrong heard it clearly; it was Xu Zhiqing. Though Miss Xu was full of talent, surpassing many in the court by hundreds of times, she still lacked the qualification to enter the main hall. Such was the difference between men and women. Lin Wanrong had been outsmarted by her earlier that day, and he felt a bit aggrieved. He then looked at the woman behind the curtain, whose treatment was much higher than Xu Zhiqing's, wondering what her identity might be.

"Dear Minister Xu, what major issues need to be discussed today?" the old Emperor asked Xu Wei.

Xu Wei stepped forward from the first position on the right and respectfully said, "Your Majesty, at today's morning assembly, there are three major matters that need to be discussed. Firstly, the Emperor of Dongyin sent a letter yesterday, stating that his second son, Prince Tsugumi Takeshita, had come to our capital for pilgrimage and has been missing for many days within our borders. Dongyin hopes that we thoroughly investigate Prince Tsugumi's whereabouts, insisting on an explanation."

Seeing Xu Wei's hesitant manner, it was estimated that Dongyin's communication was not so polite, and old Xu was understating it. Hearing the first matter, the ministers looked at each other, and no one spoke.

Lin Wanrong was the clearest about Prince Tsugumi Takeshita's whereabouts. He wouldn't be foolish enough to draw attention to himself and simply leaned against a nearby pillar, yawning lazily, listening to these people's ideas.

The old Emperor snorted and pondered, "Regarding the disappearance of the Dongyin prince, what are your opinions?"

Everyone looked at each other, not knowing what the Emperor meant, and dared not speak rashly. Prince Cheng, standing at the first position on the left, gave a profound smile and glanced back casually.

One person stepped forward from the row and respectfully said, "Your Majesty, in my humble opinion, Dongyin and our great Empire are close neighbors, connected by water, and are friendly to each other. Prince Tsugumi Takeshita came to our great empire for pilgrimage and disappeared on his return journey, which is not unrelated to us. This concerns the interaction between the two countries, and if mishandled, it could lead to a diplomatic dispute, affecting our Empire's face. We must not take this lightly. In my humble opinion, we can strengthen the investigation on one hand,

search for Prince Tsugumi's traces, and crack down on those who are causing chaos between the two countries. On the other hand, we can offer some concessions first, issue a decree to appease, and temporarily halt the dispute between the two countries."

Lin Wanrong was feeling drowsy, but the moment he heard someone speaking, he immediately became alert. The one who had stepped forward was the long-lost top scholar, Su Mubai. Su Mubai had been responsible for receiving the envoys of the three countries when they came to the capital for the pilgrimage, and he had considerable say in diplomatic matters.

The old Emperor nodded slightly, glanced left and right, and asked, "What do my beloved ministers think of Top Scholar Su's proposal?"

Another man from the left chimed in, "Top Scholar Su's proposal is well-considered and sensible, and I fully support it." Lin Wanrong recognized this person as his superior's superior, Minister Ye, whom he had met at Prince Cheng's mansion a few days earlier.

With the leadership of Minister Ye and Top Scholar Su, the other ministers began to express their agreement, and the atmosphere became lively. Only Xu Wei and Li Tai remained silent.

"Where is Lin San? Where is Lin San?" the old Emperor looked around and suddenly shouted. Among the dozens of people in the great hall, Lin San was nowhere to be found.

A civil official beside Lin Wanrong hurriedly nudged him, anxiously saying, "Master Lin, wake up, the Emperor is calling you!"

"He's calling me?" Lin Wanrong was stunned for a moment. Seeing everyone's eyes fixed on him, it seemed that the man's words were true, and he had to step forward, saying, "Your Majesty, did you call me?"

Upon seeing Lin Wanrong come forward, the woman behind the curtain trembled slightly, her eyes fixed on him.

Daring to address the Emperor in such a way in the golden hall, Lin San was the only one who would do so. The old Emperor did not mind, smiling and saying, "Lin San, are you satisfied with your spot in that corner?"

"Satisfied, there's no better position than this," Lin Wanrong said with a laugh.

The ministers shook their heads and chuckled. A servant's lot was a servant's lot; to have a foothold even in the most remote corner of the court was a fortune he must have accrued over several lifetimes.

The Emperor nodded indifferently, "You are indeed rare, content in every circumstance. Do not underestimate your position. When I first attended court at the age of sixteen, I stood right where you are. The late Emperor told me, 'In small things lies great benevolence.' Lin San, remember this well."

At these words, the entire court was astonished. The Emperor was actually comparing Lin San to himself and openly instructing him in the court. Master Lin's rapid advancement seemed imminent. Prince Cheng's eyes flashed a sharp cold light, and he remained silent, his eyes slightly closed.

"Lin San, Prince Tsugumi is missing. Top Scholar Su suggests that we should comfort the Dongyin by extending a small favor. What do you think?" the old Emperor said with a smile.

"Ah, the prince is missing?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed. "Your Majesty, who told you this? Could it be a deception?"

Hearing Lin San's disrespect, Su Mubai snorted and said, "This was personally informed by the Emperor of Dongyin; it concerns the relationship between the two countries, how can it be false?"

Lin Wanrong laughed, "So according to Sir Su, if the Emperor of Dongyin writes a letter himself, it can't be false? Decades ago, when our Great Hua was incomparably strong, the Emperor of Dongyin even wrote a letter of submission to Great Hua, pledging to send ten thousand rolls of brocade and one hundred thousand taels of silver every year. Sir Su, you're well-educated, don't you know about this? How much have they accumulated so far? Did they deliver the silver when Prince Tsugumi came to pay tribute this time?"

Lin San was indeed a master of sophistry. Su Mubai's face changed, and he stammered for a moment, murmuring, "That was then, this is now. We are talking about Prince Tsugumi's affair now; it has nothing to do with the silver."

"Discussing Prince Tsugumi? That's rather simple. He came to our Great Hua to pay tribute, and we entertained him with the best food and drink, fulfilling the duties of a host. He's not a three-year-old child who could be enticed away by some courtesan. Can it also be asked that Great Hua bears responsibility? If so, Your Majesty, I dare to make a request!"

A smile appeared on the Emperor's face. "Speak!"

Lin Wanrong laughed, "I dare to propose, please send Sir Su on a mission to Dongyin. Along the way, send two beautiful young ladies to secretly entice him and abduct him back. Then Your Majesty can write to the Dongyin Emperor, demanding the return of Su Mubai, who ranks two hundred and fifth in our Great Hua's examination. Otherwise, our close relationship between the two nations will be affected, and the consequences will be severe. Please ask the Dongyin Emperor to give an explanation."

Everyone who heard this couldn't help but chuckle. Clearly, it was a sophistry, yet this Lin San made it sound so logical. Such talent was indeed rare!

Su Mubai's face turned livid, and he angrily said, "Sir Lin, matters of diplomacy can't be resolved through mere analogy. If we act as you suggest, how can nations deal with each other? If this continues, who can guarantee that Dongyin and other nations will not harbor ill will?"

"Ill will?" Lin Wanrong scoffed with a smile. "Sir Su, I want to ask you, with promises unkept and tributes unpaid, when has Dongyin ever been sincere with us?"

Su Mubai was rendered speechless, and after a long while, he managed to say, "If you continue like this, acting forcefully in every matter, what nation would dare to deal with our Great Hua?"

Lin Wanrong laughed coldly, "Sir Su, it's Dongyin who is aggressively demanding a person from Great Hua, how did it become us being forceful? A tiny speck of land, daring to insult Great Hua like this; if we accept this humiliation, where will our nation's dignity stand? Where will Great Hua's honor be? If this is considered being forceful, I hope Great Hua is forceful for ten thousand years!"

"Lin San, well said!" came the voice of Miss Xu from the adjacent room, "I, Xu Zhiqing, agree with Lin San!"

Lin Wanrong's few words, full of stirring power, especially his slogan "forceful for ten thousand years," made everyone's blood boil.

"What a 'forceful for ten thousand years!'" Xu Wei suddenly spoke, "I, the old minister Xu Wei, agree with Sir Lin!"

"I, the old minister Li Tai, agree with Lin San!"

...

"Forceful for ten thousand years?!" Tears welled in the eyes of the lady behind the curtain, and she quickly penned down a vivid figure on paper.

The old Emperor squinted his eyes, a smile playing on his lips, and nodded slightly toward Lin San. The echoing voices of agreement from the courtiers indicated their unanimous support for Lin San.

"Gao Ping, draft the decree!" the Emperor smiled slightly, "Notify the King of Dongyin, his second son, after paying tribute to our celestial empire, has not returned on time, and we do not know where he has gone. He's of a very unruly nature. Instruct him to be well disciplined, and not to repeat such behavior. By Our decree!"

"Your Majesty is wise," Lin Wanrong chuckled, flattering.

The court's first matter had thus reached a unified decision. Xu Wei, greatly pleased, seemed more confident about the following court discussions: "The second matter of today's court meeting also concerns Dongyin. According to reports from the southeast coast, Dongyin has assembled a hundred thousand soldiers and hundreds of ships, all set to sail. In the past two days, they have embarked and are heading straight for Goryeo."

As these words fell, a commotion erupted in the court. Two consecutive matters had Dongyin playing the leading role, and it seemed as if there was a hidden mystery behind it. The officials started to whisper and discuss amongst themselves.

The matter was related to the significant affairs of the military and the state, so Lin Wanrong said no more, retreating to the position where the Emperor had once stood, and resumed his pleasant dream.

"Dear General Li, you are a general of our imperial court. How do you see this matter?" the Emperor asked Li Tai.

Li Tai nodded, "Your Majesty, Dongyin's invasion of Goryeo this time happens to coincide with the moment our Great Hua's soldiers are about to embark on a distant expedition. The timing is

certainly not accidental. Goryeo borders our Great Hua; if Dongyin were to conquer Goryeo and establish a foothold in the northeast, it could collaborate with the northern nomads, creating a pincer attack and leaving our Great Hua with enemies on both sides, hard to defend. In the view of this old servant, the matter of Goryeo cannot be ignored; it must be treated with caution."

This was the word of an experienced and prudent man, and the people nodded in agreement. The Emperor glanced at Prince Cheng, smiling, "What are your wise thoughts, brother?"

Prince Cheng clasped his fist and said, "General Li is right in his words. If Dongyin were to conquer Goryeo, it would indeed pose the risk of having our Great Hua face enemies on both sides. However, there are two sides to every matter. At present, the Turkic tribes are invading, the north is in urgent danger, and if the Turkic people break through, they could march straight in, leaving our Great Hua in imminent peril. Between two evils, we must choose the lesser. While Goryeo is in trouble, our Great Hua is equally in dire straits, and there are no more troops to deploy. We must wait until the Turks are repelled before considering the matter in the northeast. This brother is blunt; please scrutinize the situation carefully, Your Majesty."

Prince Cheng's words were logical and well-reasoned. Great Hua itself was still in peril, so how could they find the time to take care of Goryeo?

"Your Majesty, this cannot be!" A woman's voice rang out, "Goryeo is our Great Hua's close neighbor, and the Dongyin people are ambitious like wolves. Once they conquer Goryeo and have a land base, they can march straight in, directly targeting the northern heartland of our Great Hua. The Dongyin people are taking advantage of our Great Hua's battle with the Turkic tribes to attack Goryeo recklessly. This move can also be seen as their test toward our Great Hua. If we abandon Goryeo, their arrogance will surely grow, and our Great Hua will be like placing a wolf at the doorstep, susceptible to its fangs at any time. In the view of this common girl, our Great Hua must not only send troops to assist but also send our elite and strong soldiers to cut off the wolf's claws and make them roll back into the sea."

Xu Zhiqing indeed had foresight, much stronger than most of the fools standing in the hall. Had it not been for her being a woman, she would have been worthy to succeed her father as the top person in court.

Xu Zhiqing's words were not without reason, but Prince Cheng was also considering the welfare of Great Hua, leaving the Emperor in a difficult position to choose.

A note was suddenly passed from behind the curtain; Gao Ping hurriedly received it and respectfully presented it. The Emperor glanced at it and suddenly called out, "Dear Minister Lin, Dear Minister Lin!"

"Sir, the Emperor is calling you!" a civil official beside him reminded, his tone unusually respectful.

Dear Minister Lin? Why did that name sound so awkward? Lin Wanrong smiled and stepped forward, "Your Majesty, don't ask me about fighting a war; I faint at the sight of blood!"

"It's not I who wish to ask you!" The Emperor laughed, took the note, and looked at it with a serious expression, "Is it imperative to save Goryeo?"

‘Coming from your mouth, isn't it you who's asking?’ Lin Wanrong nodded, "It is imperative!"

Chapter 405 The Brave and Loyal Army of the Great Hua Empire

The Emperor slightly moved his countenance, pausing to ponder for a long while before saying, "Lin San, why are you so certain? You've heard Prince Cheng's opinion. This matter concerns the very lifeblood of our Great Hua. We must not take it lightly. In this time of crisis, if we divide our forces to Goryeo, won't we put our Great Hua in peril? What do you think?"

Lin San was widely knowledgeable, and others had heard of him. Seeing that his opinion was at odds with Prince Cheng's, the courtiers were instantly intrigued, eager to hear what he would say.

"As Prince Cheng said, everything has two sides. His Highness has seen the threat from Dongyin, considering the safety of our Great Hua. His loyalty and wisdom can serve as a model for the world," Lin Wanrong laughed, metaphorically patting the prince on the back without spending a cent. "However, from another angle, might this not be a grand opportunity created by Dongyin for our Great Hua?"

"Opportunity?" The courtiers were momentarily puzzled. The people of Dongyin had reached Goryeo, and Lin San was calling it an opportunity? Had he gone mad? The Emperor frowned, "What do you mean by opportunity, Lin San? Come forward and explain more clearly."

Lin Wanrong took a few steps closer, glimpsing through the curtain at the gentle and calm woman inside, feeling a sense of familiarity welling up in his heart.

"Your Majesty, I will not mention the strategic importance of Goryeo's geographical location, as Miss Xu has already explained it clearly. Sending troops to Goryeo is not merely a tactical need; it's a strategic deterrence, firmly stating the attitude of our Great Hua. We will never allow anyone to create chaos under our watch."

Prince Cheng smiled slightly, saying, "Lord Lin's action is indeed to uphold the dignity of our Empire. But sending troops to Goryeo not only consumes our manpower and resources but also poses a great danger to our Great Hua. To exhaust the national treasury and strength for mere fame is something we must approach with caution."

How could upholding national pride be more important than maintaining the stability of Great Hua? Prince Cheng's words hit the nail on the head, and the courtiers nodded in agreement.

"Your Highness is right; only fools would exert effort for no gratitude." Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I dare to ask, considering Dongyin's arrogance, there will be a battle between Great Hua and Dongyin sooner or later. Do you agree, Your Highness?"

Prince Cheng replied seriously, "Of course. Dongyin's disobedience and self-importance deserve a proper lesson. However, as there are issues in the north of Great Hua, dealing with Dongyin can wait until we have driven away the northern nomads."

"Deal with them later? By then, if Dongyin conquers Goryeo and establishes a foothold on land, how easy will it be to deal with them?" Lin Wanrong snorted, "Your Highness, if sending troops to Goryeo is beneficial for Great Hua, will you support it?"

Prince Cheng shook his head, replying indifferently, "I'm short-sighted and can't see the benefits. I hope Lord Lin can enlighten me."

Lin Wanrong grinned and looked around, his eyes landing on Xu Wei as he smiled and said, "Mr. Xu, there's something I don't understand. I hope you can shed some light."

Seeing Lin San and Prince Cheng locked in a heated debate, the courtiers' interest was piqued. One was a powerful royal prince, and the other a rising star favored by the Emperor. Their lively argument on the golden hall was certainly entertaining to watch.

Xu Wei bowed to the Emperor, then turned around, smiling, and said, "Little brother Lin, if you have anything to ask, please speak freely. This old man will surely tell all that he knows."

“Well said, well said.” Lin Wanrong clasped his hands together and chuckled, “Mr. Xu, who should be the most worried about the Dongyin attacking Goryeo?”

That question seemed needless to ask; even a fool knew the answer. Xu Wei replied, “The most anxious, of course, should be the King of Goryeo!”

Lin Wanrong nodded, “Considering Goryeo’s national strength and resources, can they resist the Dongyin?”

“Goryeo is weak, and cannot be compared to Dongyin. In my humble opinion, the request for assistance from the King of Goryeo will certainly arrive by today,” Xu Wei confidently stated.

“That makes sense,” Lin Wanrong said, smiling. “Since Goryeo is seeking assistance from our Great Hua, expenses such as military funds, provisions, and compensation should naturally be borne by them. Thus, the talk of draining our treasury does not apply. By timely deployment of troops, we can also minimize the loss to Great Hua’s military strength. Mr. Xu, isn’t that how it’s calculated?”

Not quite sure what Lord Lin was up to, Xu Wei nodded, then shook his head, “If you only calculate the loss of material and manpower, Little brother Lin’s calculations are correct. However, when deploying troops to Goryeo, the enormous risks that our Great Hua must undertake have not yet been considered.”

“First, we must not suffer any losses; that’s our basic principle. As for risks—” Lin Wanrong slightly smiled and spoke lightly, “Compared to the immense benefits, all risks are worth taking!”

“Nonsense! Helping Goryeo, where’s the benefit?” An earlier offended official, Su Mubai, angrily said.

Lin Wanrong laughed a few times, “Mr. Su, just because you don’t see something doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. If our Great Hua can take Goryeo without a single shot, tell me, isn’t that a benefit?”

Take over Goryeo? The officials in the hall were all stunned. This Lin San was really bold, speaking words others would not dare to utter. With the Turks attacking at the moment, how could Great Hua even think of taking over Goryeo?

Xu Wei, rich in experience, thought deeply for a while before saying, "Little brother Lin's intention, could it be to take advantage of Goryeo's request for troops and seize the opportunity to take over Goryeo? The idea is good, but the King of Goryeo might not be unprepared. If they are determined to die rather than submit, this might be difficult to achieve."

"That's why a more gentle approach is needed. After several days and nights of deep thought, I finally came up with a grand idea, called 'One Country, Two Systems; Goryeo Governed by Goryeo.' If all goes well, Goryeo will be incorporated into Great Hua's territory."

"One Country, Two Systems; Goryeo Governed by Goryeo?! What does this mean?" Not only the people in the hall but even the Emperor on the dragon throne could not sit still and eagerly asked.

Lin Wanrong was triumphantly beaming, his face lit with a smile, "The so-called 'One Country, Two Systems; Goryeo Governed by Goryeo' means that the King of Goryeo recognizes the central authority of the Emperor of Great Hua, declaring the two as one entity. Yet, Goryeo continues to be governed by the King of Goryeo. They may have complete judicial and economic rights, with only foreign affairs and military matters managed by Great Hua. After the unification of Goryeo and Great Hua, the two can freely trade and intermarry, with Great Hua encouraging mutual relocation, and the inclusion of the Chinese language in Goryeo schools. Once this announcement is made, if Dongyin wants to attack Goryeo, it would be attacking Great Hua, directly confronting our Empire. Tell me, does Dongyin have the guts to do that?"

Everyone listened with eyes wide and mouths agape. Was this idea really conceived by Lin San? Such a magnificent plan was beyond what an ordinary citizen could think of.

In the meantime, Xu Zhiqing was also secretly sighing. Seeing how Lin San used to laugh and joke with Seo Jang Geum, she never expected that when he acted, he was utterly resolute. How could he face the little palace maid like this? Even Qiaoqiao could see Seo Jang Geum's deep affection for him, and he was so heartless? Miss Xu gritted her teeth, her nose snorting, "Unfaithful and heartless, you traitor!" Her small face flushed red, and her hands covered her cheeks, feeling a surge of heat.

Xu Wei was skilled in statecraft, and hearing Lin San's words, he was truly elated. By preserving the Goryeo royal family's rule but stripping them of military and diplomatic power, this was a brilliant move. It didn't annihilate them completely but caused the Goryeo king both pain and a touch of consolation. It ensured that the resistance would not be too intense, ultimately accepting this "one country, two systems" grand dream under the pressure from the Dongyin. Even more wonderful was Lin San's proposal for mutual marriage and mutual relocation, subtly achieving national assimilation. With a mix of both sides, Goryeo would never be able to revolt.

The Emperor's eyes flashed with a tiger's glare. After much thought, he said to Prince Cheng, "Brother Wang, what do you think of Lin San's suggestion?"

"Your Majesty, although Lin San's words are bewitching, our Great Hua's greatest enemy is the Turkic tribes. Only by driving away these nomads can we preserve our Great Hua's foundation. If we are distracted, it will inevitably affect the great cause of resisting the nomads, leading to irreparable consequences. Please, Your Majesty, think thrice," Prince Cheng earnestly said.

"Please, Your Majesty, think thrice!" Su Mubai led some court officials, echoing in unison.

Prince Cheng was experienced and prudent, Lin San was sharp and explicit. Both sides had valid points, but as Prince Cheng said, Great Hua's foundation was the priority. Whether focusing on Goryeo would bring fortune or disaster to Great Hua remained unknown. The Emperor closed his eyes, deep in thought, before finally sighing heavily, "The state comes first! Lin San, if you want to persuade me, you only have one chance."

"I don't intend to persuade Your Majesty," Lin Wanrong said, smiling indifferently, "This is a matter of state, nothing to do with me. But seeing the indecisiveness of the gentlemen in the court, I have something stuck in my throat that I must say!"

"Speak!" The Emperor's eyes flashed sharply, his hands resting on the dragon throne, staring at him.

Lin Wanrong did not back down, speaking loudly, "In our Great Hua's hundred years, not one person has expanded our territory!"

The court fell into silence; no one dared to speak, so quiet that you could hear a pin drop.

"Good, good!" The old Emperor clapped his hands, suddenly standing up, his face flushed with excitement, shouting, "No one has expanded our territory; Lin San speaks well! I will be the first to do so. We will not tolerate Goryeo's issues. My ministers, discuss how to send military assistance to Goryeo!"

Seeing that the Emperor had made up his mind, no one dared to contradict him. Prince Cheng glanced at Lin Wanrong and said, "Your Majesty, our Great Hua has no troops to spare at present. To aid Goryeo, Lord Lin must go himself."

A woman behind the curtain passed out another note. The Emperor glanced at it, his furrowed brows relaxing, and he laughed, "Brother Wang, don't worry. Lin San hasn't finished speaking. Dear Minister Lin, I see you are full of confidence, do you have a way to send troops? But let me warn you, I have not a single soldier to spare."

'It's as if the old Emperor was the worm in my stomach. How did he know I had a way?' Lin Wanrong looked forward with puzzlement, only to see the old Emperor's face mysterious, smiling at him.

"Your Majesty, this commoner has a small idea that I wish to discuss with everyone."

"Speak quickly!" Upon seeing the sly smile on Lin San's face, the Emperor immediately sensed that the matter had been settled. With Lin San alone, he could counter millions of soldiers.

Lin Wanrong stamped a few steps, smiling and said, "The battle with Goryeo is imminent. If a large army is dispatched at this time, I fear they may arrive only after Goryeo has been attacked. In my opinion, it would be better to recruit soldiers locally in the northeastern part of Great Hua, as well as the areas near the border, and name them the Great Hua Loyal and Brave Army. They would be directly under the control of the court, and experienced officers would be appointed to lead and train them. First, the north is closer to Goryeo, and the turmoil of war may affect it at any time. The people there are more enthusiastic about defending their homes and country. Second, the northern folk are rugged, with many horse-riding and herding tribes, so it will be easy to form an army without much effort. Of course, all military expenses and provisions will be paid for by Goryeo. The Great Hua Loyal and Brave Army will be solely responsible for the defense and security of the Goryeo region, fostering growth through war, and thus adding a new vitality to our great Great Hua. What do you think of this idea?"

Even a fool could see that this method would work. The court would not have to make any effort, and all the funds would be paid for by Goryeo. Where else could they find such a great deal as this newly forged brave army, tempered by blood and fire?

"Miss Xu, you are known for your wisdom. What do you think of Lin San's suggestion?" the Emperor asked Xu Zhiqing on the other side.

Xu Zhiqing softly sighed, and spoke faintly, "Your Majesty, Lin San is innovative and good at thinking, and I, a common woman, am ashamed to be inferior. This method of local conscription is indeed a novelty. As long as it is properly implemented, it can add fresh forces to our great Great Hua in no time."

The Emperor laughed heartily, "Well done, Lin San! You really thought this through. Listening to you today is better than ten years of studying the classics. If anyone dares to say you cannot govern the country, I will be the first not to forgive them. The Great Hua Loyal and Brave Army, loyal and courageous, protecting the homeland; this name is well chosen, ha ha ha ha!"

Li Tai and Xu Wei looked at each other. This Little brother Lin was truly unfathomable, capable of coming up with any kind of idea. His absence from the army was indeed a great pity.

"Can Zhi'er persuade him to join our army?" Li Tai frowned deeply, "This kid's ideas pop up like beans. Having him would be worth a hundred thousand strong soldiers."

"Zhi'er?" Xu Wei shook his head with a bitter smile, whispering, "That foolish girl is deeply involved but unaware of it. Who will persuade whom, I am not sure."

Li Tai furrowed his brow, "Deeply involved?" He glanced at Lin Wanrong and nodded with a smile, "So that's how it is. I was wondering why Zhi'er has been spending more time in her room lately. Lin San is not bad, possessing character and ability. Aside from being a bit thick-skinned and fancy, he lacks nothing."

Prince Cheng's brows were tightly furrowed, and he cautiously said, "Your Majesty, I have one more concern. Even if we form the Loyal and Brave Army locally with these untested recruits to aid Goryeo and fight against Dongyin, will it be effective? I have seen the swordsmanship of the Dongyin warriors with my own eyes, and it is incredibly formidable!"

"Oh, so the prince knows the Dongyin people?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, "The Dongyin warriors' swordsmanship is indeed powerful, but don't forget, they are fighting on land, so how much of their sword skills can be utilized? There's another essential point. Once our great Great Hua sends troops to Goryeo, showing our unwavering resolve, would Dongyin still dare to challenge us? Dongyin is like a spring; the weaker you are, the stronger they are. As soon as they show up, we must firmly strike them, and never show mercy."

"That settles it then," the Emperor said with a smile. "Draft the edict at once, and conscript soldiers from both inside and outside the passes. Select capable officers from the capital's imperial guard to be responsible for training the Loyal and Brave Army. Since this plan was conceived by Lin San, Dear Minister Lin, I appoint you as the commander of the Loyal and Brave Army—"

Commander of the Loyal and Brave Army? Everyone was taken aback. Though this army was newly established, its focus was on guarding the security of Goryeo beyond the borders. With the

Emperor's word, Lin San held military power in his hands, becoming the uncrowned King of Goryeo. How could this not astonish people?

Lin Wanrong waved his hand and laughed, "I am but a humble servant of the Xiao family, dedicated to serving the Eldest Miss and the Madam. The Emperor's handwritten honorific title of 'First Talent Under Heaven' is an encouragement for me to be loyal and do my duty. As for other matters, Lin San's ambitions are small, and I've never considered them. I ask Your Majesty to retract the command."

To be content with the status of a servant and not accept a title of nobility, Lin San was probably the first in history. People looked at him with burning eyes, filled with admiration, jealousy, mockery, and a hundred different thoughts.

The old Emperor seemed unsurprised, as though he had expected this response. He smiled, "The Xiao family is indeed fortunate to have such a loyal servant as you. However, I have heard that you have a significant connection with the Xiao family's second daughter. It seems suspicious, as if guarding one's stolen property. Haha!"

Many had heard something of this matter, and when the Emperor mentioned it, everyone laughed heartily. Lin Wanrong, looking helpless, replied, "Your Majesty, as you can see, with my outstanding character, it's impossible not to be liked by women! Could Your Majesty teach me how not to stand out? I am genuinely perplexed!"

From national affairs to personal matters, Lord Lin was always the pioneer, and the ministers laughed heartily.

The third matter was the previously planned campaign to the north against the nomads. Li Tai explained the routes and distribution of troops in detail, with Xu Zhiqing supplementing from the side, speaking for more than half an hour. The woman behind the curtain listened quietly to the conversation, without any movement.

Lin Wanrong's gaze fell on the quiet figure behind the curtain. As he calmed his mind, that familiar feeling grew stronger. As everyone's eyes focused on the military map, he approached the curtain, reaching the bottom of the stairs. He heard a soft sigh, a choking voice, quietly reciting, "Mountains beyond mountains, towers beyond towers, when will the songs and dances of West Lake end? The warm breeze intoxicates the traveler, mistaking Hangzhou for Bianzhou!"

"Qingxuan?!!!" Lin Wanrong's mind went blank with a loud thud, and he knew nothing more.

