

## Finest 546

### Chapter 546 Fate Decided by Heaven

"Charge!" With his resounding war cry, five thousand soldiers burst forth like unleashed tigers, galloping their horses wildly toward Dalanzha. Their gleaming battle blades shimmered with icy radiance in the setting sun.

Burning the fields of the Turkic people had been a dream of the Great Hua soldiers for centuries—a chance to avenge their past humiliations. A fervor blazed in their eyes, reddening their faces. The excitement was palpable, as the hooves of their steeds kicked up enough dust to obscure the horizon.

The thundering hooves woke the returning Turkic shepherds. Standing beside their tents, they squinted to get a better look at the oncoming troop. These warriors, dressed in tattered robes, looked incredibly ferocious. Suddenly, the men, women, and children of Dalanzha broke into excited cheers, rushing toward the soldiers. Exuberant shouts and cries echoed across the plains.

Clearly, the Turks, who had never been raided before, mistook these invading Great Hua soldiers for triumphant warriors of their own tribe. They couldn't fathom that people from Great Hua would dare set foot in their plains, and certainly didn't expect such ferocity from what they considered a frail people.

Having covered almost a mile and with only a few hundred yards separating the two parties, it was the Turkic sentries who first sensed something amiss. The menacing troop advanced with blades shining as if slicing through the cold light of the sky, exuding an aura of deadly intent. The knights had yellow skin and black hair, and their eyes were as cold as winter ice.

"Damn it, it's the Great Hua—Ah!" The alarm cry from a Dalanzha sentry was cut short as a swift horse charged at him. A razor-sharp blade flashed by like a streak of white silk. In a shower of blood, the Turkic man was sliced in half, tumbling off his horse. His protruding eyes bulged with shock, a melancholic light clear within. Clearly, he had never expected to meet his end at the doorstep of his homeland, under the blades of Great Hua.

Gao Qiu spat viciously on the Turkic corpse and swung his blade, flicking the blood off its edge. "That's right, I am your grandpa from Great Hua. Those who dare cross mighty Great Hua will be punished, no matter the distance!"

"Those who dare cross mighty Great Hua will be punished, no matter the distance!" Hu Bugui and the five thousand soldiers echoed, their swift figures like shooting stars, charging toward the sprawling tents of Dalanzha.

The cheering Turks, filled with excitement, had been rushing to meet their "returning warriors." But when they saw Gao Qiu's blade flash and slash the sentry, splattering blood across the grass, they faltered. It was then that they saw the faces of the "tribal warriors"—yellow-skinned, black-haired, and black-eyed. A different visage from their own.

"Ah—it's the Great Hua people!" Someone shouted first, and countless Turks abruptly halted. Staring at the bloody blades of the Great Hua soldiers, they seemed to be paralyzed with a kind of fear they had never known. No one could have anticipated that these fierce warriors from Great Hua would actually infiltrate the plains, setting fires and causing havoc in what the Turks had always believed to be an impregnable homeland.

The stark contrast left all the Turks stunned, even forgetting to flee.

"Charge!" Hu Bugui's eyes were bloodshot, ferocious like a wild wolf on the grasslands. He spurred his horse alongside the Gao Qiu and led the charge at the forefront. With a swift motion, his blade fell, and a spurt of blood shot skyward. The severed head of a bearded Turk flew high before landing on the grass. The Turk's eyes were wide open, incredulous to his last breath that the people of Great Hua had actually come to kill them.

Amidst the sky filled with the crimson mist of blood, the Turks finally came to their senses. "Run!" they screamed in terror. Countless Turks sprinted back in fear. From a distance, they looked like boiling dumplings in a pot.

The Turks, panicked and helpless, instantly became living targets for the Great Hua cavalry. The soldiers thought of their kin—elderly, women, and children—who had perished under the Turks' iron hooves, their eyes filled with despair and helplessness. These haunting images fueled the soldiers' rage.

Five thousand Great Hua warriors were consumed by bloodlust, their wolfish ferocity erupting from within. Their expressions were ice-cold as they slowly drew their longbows. They relished the sound of arrows piercing the chests of robust Turks and the shattering of breastbones, as if all their sorrow had been released in a bloody catharsis.

The Turks, now alert, finally began to struggle. The few thousand remaining Turks hastily mounted their horses and charged at the Great Hua cavalry with howls. In their rush, they were unprepared

and had even forgotten their bows and arrows. Brandishing large blades, they charged, but they were no match for the well-prepared Great Hua soldiers.

A few thousand Great Hua horsemen charged forward, only several hundred yards away from Dalanzha's expansive tent. Gazing coldly at the poorly equipped Turks rushing towards them, Gao Qiu sneered and raised his hand. "Crossbows, fire!"

The Great Hua soldiers on horseback unleashed their powerful crossbows in unison. A thick swarm of arrows, like an endless wave of stinging bees, instantly transformed the grassland into a hellish battlefield. Countless Turks screamed as they fell from their horses, only to be trampled into mush by their comrades.

After three volleys of arrows, fewer than half of the thousands of Turks remained. Five to six hundred lay on the grassland, most dead with arrows lodged in them, while a few struggled for breath, bodies filled with arrows.

The blood of their comrades dyed the eyes of the Turks red. Their ferocity was fully unleashed at this moment. Howling, they reorganized and charged, stepping over the bodies of their fallen companions, even treading on the chests of those who were still moaning. They charged like the wind.

The differences between the Turkic people and the people of Great Hua were truly stark. Lin Wanrong shook his head in dismay as he looked on. Trampling over fallen comrades—such a merciless act was something no honorable soldier from Great Hua could ever commit. Furthermore, for the soldiers of Great Hua, preserving the remains of their fallen brethren was as important as protecting their own lives. The beliefs of the Turkic people, however, were entirely opposite; they respected only strength and were willing to sacrifice anyone for victory, even comrades-in-arms who had stood by them through life and death. In this moment, the stark contrast between human nature and wolfish instincts was vividly displayed.

Staring at the charging remnants of five hundred Turkic men, Hu Bugui pointed his bloodstained blade forward, drops of red trickling down its tip. Laughing uproariously, he shouted, "Excellent! Men, let the Turkic know the taste of pain. Follow me—charge!"

Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu led the charge, and five thousand elite cavalry followed closely behind, shouting, "Charge! Let them taste the agony!"

The thunderous sound of galloping hooves filled the vast plains, making them uncharacteristically noisy. Amidst the descending dusk, two dark masses of cavalry clashed on the field, their anguished

cries tearing through the sky and drifting far away. The ground was soaked red with blood, staining the green grass and red flowers.

Five thousand against a few hundred—it was a lopsided slaughter. The Turkic men had probably never dreamt that the very tactics they were so proficient in would be used against them by the people of Great Hua. Even if these remaining five hundred were the bravest warriors of the plains, they were no match for the ferocious elite soldiers of Great Hua.

The chance to rout the Turkic forces on their own plains was a rare opportunity that filled everyone with indescribable joy. The days when the Turkic could wantonly oppress Great Hua were gone, never to return.

The five thousand soldiers channeled all their suffering and hatred into their sharp blades, meting out their wrath on the encircled Turkic men. At this moment, these five hundred enemies were nothing but live targets for the Great Hua soldiers; each strike elicited a new wail of agony.

The fighting prowess of the Turkic was formidable, indeed. Even though they were hopelessly surrounded and facing certain death, they still struggled fiercely. Their blood-soaked faces seemed like the visage of Satan himself. "Kill!" roared dozens of Great Hua soldiers in unison, their long spears piercing from all directions into a Turkic warrior. A flood of fresh blood spurted out, and the man, who now resembled a hedgehog, wobbled a few times before finally collapsing.

Seeing that the remaining Turkic men were on their last legs, teetering on the edge of collapse, Hu Bugui signaled with a flick of his wrist. Thousands of soldiers withdrew from the formation and closely followed him, heading towards the expansive white tents of Dalanzha.

Throughout their journey, they had encountered sporadic resistance, but the ones who stood against them were merely the elderly, the frail, the sick, and the injured from the tribes. They were hardly a match for Hu Bugui and his warriors. These remaining defenders were all that was left of Dalanzha's resistance force. Most were aged or frail, and the others were injured Turks who had withdrawn from the battlefield, practically lacking any fighting capability. Despite being fully aware of the chasm in strength between them and their enemies, they put up a fierce fight, standing their ground before the advancing cavalry of the Great Hua. The scene was both awe-inspiring and tragic, awash in a sea of blood.

After fighting all the way, they finally drew near the vast sea of tents that was Dalanzha. Unlike typical military tents, these were larger and sturdier, spacious enough to comfortably house a family. For the Turks, these tents were home.

Hu Bugui sat on his horse, eyes flashing with icy intent. With one swing of his sword, he took down a Turk who had attempted a sneak attack from the side. In his left hand, he held a blazing torch aloft. The crackling of the flame was drowned out by the wails and screams of the Turks.

Gao Qiu, having taken down the last of the Turks, waved his blood-dripped saber and let out a hearty laugh. "What's killing without setting fire? Old Hu, what are you waiting for?"

"A fine point about killing and setting fires. Let's let these Turks taste this bitter experience themselves," Old Hu laughed heartily. Scanning the endless array of tents, his eyes shone with a sanguine light. With a flick of his wrist, he tossed the torch onto the nearest tent.

The oil from the torch splashed across the tent's fabric. With a soft 'boom,' the fire spread rapidly, consuming one tent after another, as if stars had fallen and set the vast plains ablaze. Within moments, the tent was swallowed by roaring flames, which, fanned by the wind, leaped onto the adjoining tents. One by one, tents ignited like matches struck in succession.

Ten tents, twenty tents, a hundred tents—the flickering flames grew brighter and fiercer. When thousands of Dalanzha tents were ablaze under the sky, they resembled bursting fireworks that scorched the night, casting a bloody glow over the expansive horizon.

There was no doubt that they had won this battle. It was perhaps the most unexpected and yet the most exhilarating victory in the centuries-long feud between Great Hua and the Turks. The thought of trapping and annihilating the Turks on the plains made everyone's blood boil with excitement, as if in a dream—yet this dream had become a brutal reality.

As the tents burned and the towering flames lit up their faces, countless soldiers galloped on their horses, brandishing their sabers and letting out triumphant cheers. Their faces, young yet aged by the trials of life, were full of fervor.

Lin Wanrong intentionally stayed at the rear. Although he had only been in this unfamiliar world for less than a year, watching Old Gao and Old Hu lead five thousand warriors in wolf-like ferocity deeply touched him. Hidden behind their bloodshot eyes and excited faces were layers of sorrow and gravity. Lin Wanrong understood their emotions very well; this battle was for them, for all their suffering compatriots who had lost their lives.

He sighed and stepped onto the carriage, his gaze falling on the crimson eyes of the Turkic young woman. Rolling teardrops, deep-seated hatred, and helpless sorrow mingled in her gaze.

"It hurts, doesn't it?" Lin Wanrong removed the rag from her mouth without even looking up, speaking indifferently.

Biting her lip until it bled, she roared like a she-wolf, "Vile butcher of Great Hua Empire, just kill me!"

"Kill you? Unnecessary. I don't need to repeat myself," Lin Wanrong said, waving his hand casually. "Think about when your Turkic people raised their blades against my compatriots. Only by living can you truly feel this soul-cutting pain. Miss Yujia, you will come to understand this in time."

She closed her eyes slowly. Two crystal-clear tears hesitated at the corners of her beautiful eyes before finally falling.

"The ground is soaked with the blood of my people. Why, why is it like this?" she murmured, her voice tinged with an indescribable sorrow.

"You've probably only grown accustomed to seeing the blood of my Great Hua compatriots," Lin Wanrong said with a cold laugh. "If you want to understand this, it's simple. Just ask your esteemed Khan. From the moment he started the war, he doomed himself to be an executioner. This is what your Turkic people deserve."

Her eyes grew icy. "You people of the Great Hua Empire, living in your fertile lands, will never understand the thinking of our Khan. Our Turkic people have roamed these barren steppes and deserts for generations, braving cold winds and harsh rains. How could you possibly understand if you haven't lived it? Why is it that only you Great Hua people, who seek comfort and have no ambition, get to exclusively enjoy the riches of the land? Why must my hardworking and brave people live in tents and survive on horseback? Is that fair? Was our Khan wrong to lead his people in search of a better life?"

Her words were sharp, her eyes filled with tears, yet she stared at him defiantly, as if seeking answers.

From the perspective of her time, her thoughts were indeed unconventional. She acknowledged the prosperity of the Great Hua Empire and dreamed that her Turkic people might one day enjoy the same. But the more intelligent a person, the easier it is for them to become myopic. And she was no exception.

Lin Wanrong shook his head and laughed, "Fairness has never existed in this world. What the heavens give you in one respect, they take away in another. For example, you Turkic people are tall and strong, having a natural advantage in warfare, while we in Great Hua are relatively weaker. Is that fair?"

She thought for a moment but did not answer.

"Your lands may be barren, but your people are robust and not easily bullied. You always like to compare your disadvantages with others' advantages, ignoring the benefits you already have. Is there really such a thing as having the best of both worlds?" Lin Wanrong's eyes blazed as he locked onto her face.

Yujia was stunned for a moment before she clenched her teeth and said, "If what you say is true, then should my people be doomed to remain on these plains forever, subjected to the harsh winds, cold rain, and the misery of disease?"

Lin Wanrong was infuriated. "That's your own narrow-mindedness," he retorted. "Do you think these plains are barren and harsh? You're wrong, gravely wrong. These vast Alxa grasslands hold countless treasures. In a thousand years, it will become a goldmine that many will vie for. To the north of the Alxa grasslands, an immense nation will stand—one so grand that you cannot even begin to imagine—"

"What nation? How do you know this?" Yueya interrupted, full of doubt.

Lin Wanrong paused, annoyed. "Don't interrupt me when I speak—I'm intelligent; I'm speculating. Is that acceptable?"

Yujia glanced at him, her lips curling disdainfully as she turned her head away, muttering under her breath.

"True, our Great Hua is very prosperous," Lin Wanrong continued. "However, there are matters that prosperity alone cannot resolve. Your learning of our Great Hua's script, medicine, and art—does that have anything to do with being prosperous? These are the accumulated cultural assets of a civilization, the crystallization of collective wisdom, which have nothing to do with where one lives. If you want your people to have a good life, it's not achieved by invading and seizing others' resources. It's created by your own industrious and intelligent hands. You can engage in diplomacy, commerce, and intermarriage with neighboring nations. Learn their advanced technologies in textiles, metallurgy, animal husbandry, mining, and tourism. You possess natural advantages; there

are countless ways to thrive. Why must you stifle the living space of other ethnic groups? I tell you, any nation that gains wealth through invasion won't last long. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

He spoke with such fervor, as if delivering a speech. Saliva sprayed everywhere, his mouth even cramping up from the effort.

After a long contemplation, Yujia finally spoke. "Your words sound good, but those technologies—textiles and metallurgy—are they not the treasured skills of your Great Hua? Would you so selflessly impart them to us? How laughable."

Annoyed by her lukewarm attitude, Lin Wanrong snapped, "You haven't tried. How do you know it won't work? As long as you're willing to pay a certain price, nothing is impossible in this world."

Yujia evidently misunderstood his point, her cheeks flushing in anger. "Don't even think about it. Ferocious wolves can never insult the daughters of the plains—"

"Alright, alright, stop reciting your Turkic curses," Lin Wanrong said, waving his hand dismissively. "You're not the Khan of the Turks; what am I even doing, talking to you? It's like playing a lute to a cow!"

Fuming, Yujia snapped, "Exactly, playing a lute to a cow!"

'Incredible! This girl actually knows how to use idioms appropriately,' Lin Wanrong thought, bursting into laughter.

Yujia's face turned a shade redder as she shot him an angry look. "You shameless butcher of Great Hua. Your hands are stained with the blood of my people. What's the point of saying all this now?"

Indeed, she was right. They were at war. What use was there in having this frivolous conversation with her? 'I'm truly failing my comrades,' Lin Wanrong thought, filled with self-reproach.

Hu Bugui's voice resonated from outside the carriage, "General, the battle has concluded. We've lost eighteen soldiers, with thirty injured. All the adult men of the Turkic tribe in Dalanzha have been annihilated. What remains are over three thousand women, children, and infants—awaiting your orders, sir."



Upon hearing Hu Bugui's report, Yujia's face turned ashen. She anxiously glanced at Lin Wanrong, seemingly struggling to say something but unable to find the words.

Lin Wanrong grunted in acknowledgment, about to disembark from the carriage, when Yueya'er suddenly spoke, "Master Lin—"

Lin Wanrong looked up at her. With a pale face, Yujia weakly said, "They are all women and children. Could you possibly—"

Lin Wanrong's eyebrows twitched, and he snorted coldly. Yujia's face darkened even more; her body trembled slightly, and tears welled up in her eyes. In a furious voice, she declared, "We, the Turkic people, shall never bow our noble heads. One day, I'll make you pay a hundredfold for what you've done—"

Before she could finish venting her rage, Lin Wanrong had already leaped down from the carriage. All that remained was the subtle shaking of the curtain, while Yujia's delicate voice lingered within.

Thinking of Lin Wanrong's tactics, Yujia couldn't help but shudder. The faces of countless women and children flashed before her eyes; she could almost see the ground stained with blood in front of the guillotine...

When Lin Wanrong alighted, he saw Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu waiting for him. Their unsheathed blades still dripped with blood. He couldn't resist patting them on the shoulders in approval.

Destroying a tribe with such minimal casualties—it was nothing short of a miracle.

"This battle was a breeze," Old Gao chuckled softly, lowering his voice conspiratorially, "Actually, we captured quite a few able-bodied Turkic men. But they 'fortunately' found an opportunity to escape, and 'unfortunately' ran into our crossbow bolts— hehe."

Old Gao's antics didn't bother Lin Wanrong, who merely smiled in response.

Thousands of tents blazed in towering infernos, immense black flames clouding the sky. Five thousand warriors rode on horseback, torches held high, lighting up Dalanzha as if it were broad daylight. They surrounded a group of people, their eyes glinting ominously.

The encircled crowd was a dark mass of more than three to four thousand Turkic women and children. The oldest were no more than ten, the youngest still in swaddling clothes. Children clung to their mothers, their eyes displaying a complex range of emotions—fear, hatred. A few even held small bows; ineffective as weapons, yet aimed directly at the Great Hua cavalry. The captured Turkic women tightly held their children, staring at the cold blades and spears of the soldiers, their eyes filled with hopeless despair.

As Lin Wanrong walked through the crowd, he felt his scalp tingle at the sight of young bodies and eyes radiating hate. What was he to do with so many women and children? He frowned and sighed, "Brothers, what do you think we should do?"

Gao Qiu clenched his teeth, making a fierce gesture. "When the Turkic people captured the cities of Great Hua, they showed no mercy to my people, regardless of age or gender, and slaughtered them all! As the saying goes, 'Do unto others as they have done unto you.' How they treated us, we will treat them the same!"

Hu Bugui was clearly hesitating, but eventually clasped his fists and whispered, "I will follow the general's decision."

Lin Wanrong found himself in a difficult position, caught between a rock and a hard place. He had never encountered such a hot potato of a situation before, and he wasn't sure how to handle it.

As he looked at the torches burning fiercely in front of him, the hateful gazes of the Turkic women and children, and the expectant eyes of his own soldiers, he paced slowly, sweat soaking his back. Both Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui understood his dilemma and remained silent, watching his furrowed brow.

Time ticked away. The intense flames from the burning tents reddened everyone's faces. Countless Turkic women and children looked coldly at this dark-faced man from Great Hua who held their fates in his hands, in complete silence.

Suddenly, Lin Wanrong stopped pacing. He sighed deeply and glanced at Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui.

Hu Bugui was startled, "General, have you made a decision?"

Ignoring Hu Bugui's question, Lin Wanrong swiftly climbed to a higher vantage point. His face was as black as coal as he roared, "All Turkic people, look at my face—"

Hu Bugui quickly translated his words. As expected, the gazes of over three thousand women and children focused on him.

"It was me who killed your husbands and your fathers! Because they killed my kin, my fellow countrymen—among them countless women and children like yourselves! You can choose not to believe me, but your Khan would never dare swear to the God of the Plains. I'll say this only once and never repeat it. Remember my face in your Turkic tongue: San Ge Shi—Wo Lao Gong. If you harbor any grudges, aim them at me. If I fear you, then I might as well be your ancestor!" His howl was wolf-like, so terrifying that even babies nestled in their mothers' arms stopped crying. All the Turkic eyes were focused on him, filled with fear but mostly hatred.

He regained his composure, sweeping his gaze over all the Turkic people. Reaching into his robe, he slowly took out an object and displayed it before them. "Given your deeds, neither I nor my brothers should show you any mercy. But there's an old saying in Great Hua—Heaven cherishes all life. Since the old saying goes like this, I will give you one chance and let Heaven decide your fate —"

The Turkic crowd fell silent, as did the soldiers of Great Hua, who were anxious to know how their commander would decide the fate of these people.

Lin Wanrong chuckled coldly, "We in Great Hua have the fairest method of all time to settle this—flipping a coin! When this coin falls to the ground, heads means you can go freely. Tails, you will pay with your lives to atone for my countrymen. May Guanyin and the God of the Plains bear witness—Go—"

With a clenched jaw, he flung the coin into the air. It spun countless times before silently landing on the grass...

## Chapter 547 Recompense

The flickering torches occasionally emitted a soft crackling noise, drawing the attention of everyone present to the small copper coin at the center. The expansive grassland was eerily quiet, with the rapid heartbeats of the Turkic women and children almost audible. Even the Great Hua cavalrymen, holding the torches aloft, couldn't help but hold their breaths, their gaze fixed intently on the gently rolling coin.

Finally, the copper coin fell onto the lush grass, bounced a few times, rolled forward, and gradually came to a stop. It hesitated for a moment, then slowly fell on one side.

Hu Bugui stared intently at the coin, not daring to blink. After a long pause, he softly exclaimed, "It's heads! Could this really be fate?" His expression was a complex mix of emotions; he seemed somewhat resentful, yet also somewhat relieved.

The Turkic women and children erupted in jubilant celebration, hugging each other, dancing, and shouting for joy, their faces awash with tears. The children in their arms, too young to understand their mothers' elation, nonetheless sensed the mood and grinned, reaching out their tiny hands to wipe away the tears on their mothers' faces.

Lin Wanrong stood silently, his gaze lowered, his back turned to the scene. He uttered not a word, showing neither sorrow nor joy. No one could tell what he was thinking, except for the tension revealed in his tightly clenched fists.

After a moment of frenzied celebration, the Turkic women and children quieted down, gradually coming to their senses. They realized that the man who held their fate in his hands, a grim-faced invader, remained silent. The veins on his tightly clenched fists were protruding, indicating the internal struggle he was going through.

What would the coin toss matter? If this man from Great Hua merely shook his head, the fate of over three thousand women and children would still be a massacre. Countless eyes—of Turkic women, children, filled with either hope or hatred—remained fixed on Lin Wanrong's unmoving figure, awaiting his final decision.

"How about we toss again? Best two out of three?" Gao Qiu whispered to Lin Wanrong, audible only to the three of them.

"Only someone like you would come up with such a shameless suggestion," Hu Bugui sneered, glaring at him.

Lin Wanrong took a deep breath and slowly opened his eyes. He looked at Hu Bugui for a moment before speaking languidly, "Brother Hu, if I were to leave this responsibility to you, could you do it?"

Faced with the sight of helpless women and crying infants, Hu Bugui's complexion changed erratically, his cheek muscles twitching violently. Clenching his teeth, he raised his blade. His hands, which had taken countless lives, were trembling. After a long moment of hesitation, he

finally let out a roar, and his sword hand dropped weakly. "I... I can't bring myself to do it," he finally admitted, his face ashen.

Lin Wanrong sighed silently. Turning to Gao Qiu, he said, "Since Brother Hu cannot bring himself to do it, Brother Gao, how about you?"

"Me?" Gao Qiu was taken aback. He looked back at the unarmed women and children, his lips quivering, his face growing paler by the moment. Finally, he shook his head with a bitter smile. "Brother Lin, if it were three thousand Turkic men, I wouldn't blink an eye. But these women and children..." He sighed deeply and shook his head, unable to complete his sentence.

Lin Wanrong took slow steps, walking up to the fallen copper coin. He crouched down to pick it up, lightly blowing away the sand that clung to it. Rubbing the coin between his fingers, he remained silent for a long while before finally tucking it back into his bosom.

Hu Bugui stared intently at his face, whispering, "General, have you truly made up your mind?"

Lin Wanrong didn't respond. His gaze was sharp as he scanned the faces of the Turkic children before him, their eyes filled with a mixture of fear and hatred. After a moment, he sighed softly, "Brother Hu, look at the hatred in these children's eyes. Do you think they'll be friendly toward our Great Hua when they grow up?"

Hu Bugui glared back at the Turkic people, causing the children to immediately turn their heads away. He let out a hearty laugh and declared, "So what if they're not friendly? Today we can kill their fathers; in the future, our descendants can do the same to them. The sons of Great Hua will never be cowards. What do we have to fear?"

Listening to Hu Bugui's unbridled enthusiasm, Gao Qiu wore a face full of concern. "Brother Hu, what you say isn't wrong. However, today's situation is unique. If we spare these women and children, Brother Lin will undoubtedly bear endless disgrace. Many in Great Hua will blame him for his shortsightedness and womanly compassion—'If the nomads can sack cities, why can't we?' they'll ask. 'Mercy to the enemy is cruelty to oneself.' Better to drown in their contempt than to let these women and children live."

Gao Qiu's words were insightful. Killing the women and children would seem cruel to the people of Great Hua, but no one would blame them. On the other hand, if they were to be spared, upon returning to Great Hua, General Lin would face endless censure and questioning. Hu Bugui looked at Lin Wanrong and suddenly became worried as well.

The group fell silent. After a long pause, Lin Wanrong finally spoke, "Brother Gao, Brother Hu, I want to ask you a question. Our Great Hua has thrived for a thousand years, filled with illustrious leaders and renowned generals as numerous as the stars in the sky. They've defended Great Hua and extended its glory far and wide. The tales of our ancestors have spread throughout the lands. But tell me, how many of them achieved victory by sacking cities, and how many of them earned their everlasting fame by doing so?"

His question left Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu stunned. They had never considered this before. Now that they thought about it, Lin Wanrong had a point. Throughout the thousand-year history of Great Hua, despite countless wars and skirmishes with foreign tribes, none of the storied ancestors had won their battles by sacking cities. To find a general who had done so would be exceedingly difficult.

Gao Qiu marveled, "Huh, that is indeed true. Brother Lin, what are you getting at?"

Lin Wanrong sighed deeply, his gaze heavy as he looked at the women and children scattered on the ground. He clenched his teeth and softly uttered, "Because—we are human, not wolves."

"We are human, not wolves!" Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu exhaled simultaneously, feeling as if Lin Wanrong had voiced the unspoken thoughts deep in their hearts.

"People possess humanity. We, the people of Great Hua, are inherently kind. It's etched into our very bones, impossible to erase. The nomads trample even their own kind without hesitation. But for us, such cruelty is inconceivable. If we emulate the Turkic people, killing solely for the sake of killing, we'd be extinguishing our own nature. And when that nature is lost, it's not just my sorrow—it's the sorrow of our entire people. Do you really want to see that day come, Brother Gao, Brother Hu?"

The thought of becoming as ruthless as the Turkic tribes sent shivers down Hu Bugui's and Gao Qiu's spines. They both hastily shook their heads.

"That's what I thought," Lin Wanrong said lightly. "This world is vast and complex. Living in fear of others' hatred is cowardice. Better to strengthen ourselves than to butcher innocents for false courage." He paused, waving his hand dismissively. "Cut off their supplies, drive these women and children into the plains. Let them fend for themselves."

Hu Bugui nodded and turned around. With a swift wave of his hand, the Great Hua cavalries immediately cleared a path.

The Turkic women could hardly believe their eyes. Had the people of Great Hua truly set them free?

After what seemed like an eternity of fear, hesitation, and hope, a few brave Turkic women hesitantly took steps, testing the Great Hua cavalries' reaction. Seeing no interference, the Turkic women, carrying their children, began to run. Their screams and the cries of their children reverberated across the plains like boiling dumplings in a pot.

"Life is precious. Once lost, it never returns," Lin Wanrong murmured to himself. "Perhaps I am just an ordinary man after all. Maybe this cruel battlefield really isn't for me."

Gao Qiu sighed. "Brother Lin, why bring disgrace upon yourself like this?"

"Killing is not a joy. Those who have never experienced life-or-death struggles could never understand this," Lin Wanrong retorted, waving his hand dismissively, a look of disdain on his face.

The fleeing Turkic women and children headed toward Bayanhot, opposite the direction of the Great Hua cavalries' advance. After cleaning the battlefield and replenishing supplies, the 5,000-strong army moved under the cover of darkness toward Yiwu. Their hit-and-run tactics left the Turkic tribes unable to predict their next target, making their movements unpredictable across the vast plains.

Though Lin Wanrong hadn't been in direct combat that night, he appeared more exhausted than Gao Qiu and the others. Physically and emotionally drained, he left all matters to Hu Bugui, climbed into a carriage, and promptly fell asleep.

He didn't know how much time had passed when, half-asleep, he felt something soft brush against his ear, carrying a faint, pleasant scent.

"Who is it? What are you doing?" He grabbed the soft object and pulled, eliciting a shriek. A voice rang out beside him: "Shameless man of Great Hua, let go of me!"

Lin Wanrong jolted awake, his eyes snapping open. To his surprise, he found that he was clutching a handful of lustrous, dark hair that carried a natural scent. Yujia, the Turkic girl, was bound hand and foot, her flushed cheeks pressed close to his ear.

"Ah, you're trying to take advantage of me!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, sitting up abruptly. He quickly checked his clothes and found them intact, sighing in relief.

Yujia, flushed with indignation, retorted, "Shameless! Who's taking advantage of whom? You were sleeping like a log; I called out to you a hundred times, and you didn't wake up!"

Lin Wanrong vaguely remembered that when he had boarded the carriage, Yujia had been securely tied and tossed into a corner. How had she managed to get so close? He noticed the signs of friction on the fabric near her knee and glimpsed her reddened, delicate skin. "Ah, I see. You must have had something to say to me, but I fell asleep as soon as I got on. You managed to get close to me by rubbing your bound legs against the carriage floor. That's quite impressive."

"Shall we continue to share meals, lodging, and sleep? Ah, yes, I almost forgot that. Thank you for reminding me, Miss Yujia. So, do you want to hold me, or shall I hold you?" He grinned, opening his arms to embrace her.

"Don't come any closer—Ah!" Yujia's face turned pale.

"What are you yelling for?" Lin Wanrong roared, visibly annoyed. "You came to me, and now you're saying 'don't come closer'? Shouldn't I be the one saying that?"

Yujia looked at him and saw the fatigue in his eyes, despite his ferocious appearance. "You have a point," she conceded, lowering her voice. "It took me a lot of effort to wake you up. Please, stay awake; I have something to ask you."

Lin Wanrong yawned, "You think I'm your pet dog, obeying your every command? Just wait there quietly. If I'm in a good mood after waking up, I'll indulge you. If not, you'll indulge me."

"Nonsense," Yujia's eyes sparkled faintly. "If you want to sleep, go ahead. But don't talk in your sleep about 'Fairy Sister' and 'Ning'er.' If I hear any secrets about the Great Hua, don't blame me."

Lin Wanrong broke into a cold sweat. "Are you serious? I must have been reciting poetry in my dreams. How embarrassing."

"Don't believe me?" Yujia smirked. "Who is Vixen An? You called her name more than a dozen times in your sleep! How many lovers do you have?"



Wiping the sweat from his forehead, Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I'm very loyal, you know. All my wives combined don't even number more than a dozen. Do you really think I'm some kind of stallion?"

Yujia shook her head and sneered, "You're not even a stallion—just a breeding pig! A breeding pig that sleeps like the dead!"

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. Her insults were almost up to par with his own, about one percent as good, he thought. The fatigue that had been weighing him down lifted considerably. He pulled back the curtain to look outside, and saw only the vast emptiness of the night on the grasslands. In the distance, the fires of Dalanzha were still burning fiercely. He couldn't tell how long he'd been asleep.

Suppressing a yawn, Lin Wanrong mumbled, "Speak your mind. Now's a good time since I'm in a slightly better mood. Wait any longer and I might fall back to sleep."

Yujia hummed, hesitated for a moment, and then clenched her teeth. "Bring out your copper coin!"

"What? Is this a robbery?" Lin Wanrong quickly brought his hands to his chest and widened his eyes in anger. "No money, and you're not getting my life either. Your choice."

Yujia sighed. She wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry at his antics. Her gaze softened as she looked at him, "Sir, could you please show me that copper coin? Yujia really wants to see it."

The Turkic girl's expression had softened, and it actually unsettled him a bit. He chuckled awkwardly, "No can do. Anyone who's heard of me knows that you can't get a penny off Lin San."

Yujia's expression turned solemn, her eyes flashing with an almost imperceptible glint. "If you won't show me, what else can I do? You've killed the men of my tribe, fueling a deep-seated animosity between your Great Hua and my Turkic people, perhaps never to be reconciled. But you spared our women and children, and for that, I am grateful."

"Don't give me that," Lin Wanrong sneered coldly. "I didn't spare them; your people just got lucky. Next time, they may not be so fortunate."

Yujia calmly responded, "Regardless of whether it was luck, I'm grateful. Even though you're a deceitful Great Hua man, ugly and malicious, and talk in your sleep, you sometimes act like a real man."

Lin Wanrong couldn't help but cough uncomfortably, visibly irritated, "Miss Yujia, could you please stop being sarcastic? I have so few virtues as it is."

The Turkic girl glanced at him without a hint of a smile, "We'll settle our grudges on the battlefield, where warriors meet in fire and blood, until death do us part. But for your possibly unintentional kindness tonight, you will be rewarded. I swear by the god of the grasslands, if my Turkic people conquer your Great Hua cities, we will only expel, not slaughter, your women and children. This is your reward."

As she spoke, her beautiful body was tightly bound, curled up on the ground. Yet her face was resolute and strong. Her enchanting, light blue eyes emitted a faint glow. Her lovely eyebrows arched slightly, outlining a stern curve, while her beautiful cheeks seemed to shine, captivating all who looked her way. In that moment, Yujia was majestic and dignified, exuding authority without even raising her voice. Even the garment that adorned her seemed to shimmer with a golden light—.

## Chapter 548 Grievance

Lin Wanrong was momentarily stunned, then shook his head with a cold laugh. "If the Turkic Khan himself had said these words, I might have some faith in them. But for you, Miss Yujia—forgive my candor—do you really possess such influence?"

Yueya'er deeply looked into his eyes and spoke calmly, "You don't need to fish for information from me. How I persuade the Khan is my own business. But when Yujia gives her word, she keeps it. I assure you, from now on, wherever our Turkic cavalry goes, we will not indiscriminately massacre the women and children of Great Hua. I swear by the god of the grasslands."

Her expression was solemn and steadfast, her tone sincere. When she mentioned the god of the grasslands, she seemed utterly devout, a faint glow shimmering in her eyes. If she could swear by the grassland god, then she must be telling the truth. Lin Wanrong was slightly taken aback; Yujia's capabilities greatly exceeded his expectations. Just what was her true identity? She was becoming increasingly enigmatic.

Both remained silent, and the carriage fell quiet, except for the creaking of its wheels. After speaking, Yujia gently closed her eyes, her expression serene. Her long eyelashes quivered as the carriage moved, as if she had fallen asleep.

Distracted by their conversation, Lin Wanrong's drowsiness had vanished. Deciding to leave the carriage, he lifted the curtain and walked toward the Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui.

The plains were tranquil in the night, the sky so close to the ground it felt as if the heavens were resting overhead. A scattering of brilliant stars illuminated the vast night sky, casting a gentle light on the faces of the knights. Torches flickered intermittently as the 5,000-strong army marched through the night.

Gao Qiu held a candle aloft, illuminating the map in Hu Bugui's hands. "The Turkic tribes are far apart, and most of their able-bodied men have been sent to the front lines. Even if they hear about the attack on Dalanzha right away, assembling sufficient forces to come to its aid will not be easy. At the earliest, it will take them a day and two nights to reach Dalanzha, and even more time to assess the situation. With so much time on our side, and in this boundless grassland, even if they had incredible capabilities, finding us would be no easy feat. Ha, old Gao, we've got them now!"

That night, aside from women and children, they had annihilated as many as 4,000 Turkic soldiers while suffering only minimal losses themselves. What was more significant was that this marked the first battle that Great Hua's cavalry had fought deep in the grasslands, revealing their fangs and sending shockwaves across the region. Spirits among the troops were high; they couldn't wait to seize more Turkic camps.

Old Gao chuckled smugly, "Damn, these Turkic people look so big and strong but fall so easily. I only managed to kill about thirty tonight, and that's it. And those women and children, I just couldn't bring myself to harm them. Maybe in my next life, I should be a brute."

Hu Bugui laughed twice and turned his head just in time to see Lin Wanrong yawning as he approached.

"Ah, Brother Lin, overslept, have we?" Old Gao winked and leered mysteriously, his comment laced with double entendre.

Seeing the ever-irreverent Old Gao, Lin Wanrong's annoyance diminished considerably. He laughed, "Sleeping? Do you really think I'm such a mundane man? Brother Gao, you've only been virtuous for a few hours; have you already relapsed?— Brother Hu, what are you two examining?"

Hu Bugui nodded, pointing to the map as he smiled. "Brother Gao and I were just going over the map. Based on our estimates, the first to receive intelligence and come to aid should be two tribes near Yiwu. Look here, one is called Ha'er Helin, the other Ejina. Advisor Xu has marked them on the map."

Yiwu was located at the foothills of the Tianshan Mountains, right next to the Sea of Death, Lop Nur. It served as a natural boundary between the Alxa Plain and the Sea of Death. The two tribes Hu Bugui mentioned stretched from north to south, lying directly in line with Yiwu. Ha'er Helin was somewhat farther away, but the Ejina tribe was stationed near Yiwu. These two tribes and Dalanzha were in a tripartite balance of power, mutually checking each other.

Lin Wanrong was very familiar with the map, having studied it countless times. Even with his eyes closed, he could pinpoint the locations of these tribes. He nodded slightly.

Hu Bugui said excitedly, "Based on the situation in Dalanzha tonight, both Ha'er Helin and Ejina must be large tribes. Their numbers won't be small; fighting them will be even more exhilarating. General, where should we target next?"

Gao Qiu looked at him expectantly and said, "Exactly, Brother Lin, tell us, where should we strike next?"

Ever since following Lin Wanrong, Hu Bugui had come to slaughter their enemies as if slicing vegetables. This gave him an absolute trust and admiration for Lin Wanrong; with General Lin taking action, all difficulties seemed to vanish. Despite knowing that the two tribes near Yiwu were not weak, his confidence was undiminished.

Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile, "Both of you, do you think I'm some kind of god, able to point to any location and just go?"

Gao Qiu said solemnly, "Brother Lin, you're no god—what god could ever compare to you?"

Old Gao's flattery skills have improved quite a bit, thought Lin Wanrong, shaking his head and laughing. Then, becoming serious, he said, "To be honest with both of you, I haven't yet decided which of these tribes we should attack first. Apart from that, we don't even know their exact size and locations, so it would be unwise to act."

This was the truth. Even a god couldn't go into battle unprepared. Demanding a decision from General Lin before knowing the facts was indeed rash. Hu Bugui chuckled awkwardly, his face tinged with embarrassment. Old Gao, shameless as always, showed no sign of blushing.

"However," Lin Wanrong paused, "Brother Hu was right about one thing. The closest tribes to send aid to Dalanzha would be these. The choice isn't difficult; whoever sends troops to Dalanzha, we'll attack them."

Gao Qiu's eyes lit up, "Ah, I see! We'll ambush them when their base is empty."

"But our main target is Yiwu—" Hu Bugui frowned lightly.

Lin Wanrong nodded solemnly, "Indeed, our ultimate goal is Yiwu. However, only the three of us are privy to this secret. The nomads will never suspect it. In their eyes, we are but a lone army venturing deep into the grasslands, fighting to sustain ourselves. We strike and then retreat, aiming solely to demoralize the Turks. If we were to focus on Yiwu from the outset, it would arouse their suspicions and create unnecessary complications. Before entering Yiwu, we should win a few more impressive battles to put their minds at ease. We'll lead the Turks by the nose, keeping them guessing and infuriated. No one but us will know our true intentions."

Gao Qiu, brimming with enthusiasm, asked, "So, there are many more battles to be fought?"

"Essentially, yes," Lin Wanrong's eyes flashed menacingly as he swung his arm dramatically, chuckling, "If possible, I'd like to eradicate all these tribes. Let's see what the Turks can do about it."

Hearing this, everyone felt enlightened. Seeing General Lin's ambition, Hu Bugui excitedly nodded, "Excellent. I swear to follow you to the end."

Lin Wanrong patted him on the shoulder and sighed, "What I'm most concerned about now is not the tribes near Yiwu, but the twenty thousand Turkic cavalry we've lured to Wuyuan."

Hu Bugui was taken aback. "Are you worried that they'll realize our scheme and turn back to pursue us?"

Lin Wanrong nodded, "They came for me. Turning back is inevitable; it's just a matter of time. Fortunately, I've prepared a contingency."

Seeing Lin Wanrong's sly smile, Hu Bugui couldn't help but ask, "What contingency?"

"Have you forgotten, Brother Hu?" Lin Wanrong winked, "Tonight, we released three thousand women and children. They are headed toward Bayanhot."

Gao Qiu's eyes widened in realization, "Ah, I see! Those twenty thousand Turks have been marching for days, exhausted and famished. You plan to use these starving women and children to slow them down. Brilliant!"

Lin Wanrong raised his hand and laughed, "There are wise men among those twenty thousand cavalry. They nearly exposed our plan days ago. They might suspect the reason I released these people and overthink it. But even a small delay is better than none."

Everyone laughed and settled their plans. They traveled over thirty miles before setting up camp, close to midnight.

Lin Wanrong had already realized that Yujia was no ordinary person and had tightened security around her. Once the tent was set up, he unhesitatingly pulled her into his own tent.

Yujia's face changed color, and she shouted, "What are you doing? Don't touch me!"

"If I really wanted to touch you, what could you do?" Lin Wanrong looked her up and down, grinning, "Bite your tongue? Hang yourself? Or commit seppuku?"

Remembering the threats he had made, that even in death she wouldn't find peace, Yujia clenched her teeth, her face pale, and remained silent for a long time.

Lin Wanrong disdainfully raised his hand. "Do you think everyone is a beast in your eyes? I'm done talking to you! Now there's a camp bed and a spacious meadow. Where would you like to sleep?"

"I'll sleep nowhere. I have my own carriage," Yujia retorted angrily.

"Carriage?" Lin Wanrong snorted. He pulled a golden curved scimitar from his bosom—the very one he had taken from her when she was bound. Waving the shimmering blade near Yujia's face, he coldly declared, "I forgot to mention, Miss Yujia. Your carriage has been requisitioned by my injured brothers."

Seeing him brandish the golden scimitar before her and smiling so obscenely, Yujia's face turned pale. "Return my blade. You— you barbaric Great Hua person!"

"Barbaric? Am I more barbaric than the Turks?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. With a swift flick, he raised the golden scimitar, cutting off a single strand of hair next to Yujia's ear, demonstrating its fearsome sharpness. "While I'm in a good mood, let me ask again, Miss Yujia, will you sleep on the meadow or the bed? If you don't answer, you'll sleep on horseback tonight!"

"Do you think Yujia would be afraid of you?" The Turkic girl glared at him and gritted her teeth. "I'll sleep on the bed!"

"Aha! Good choice, knowing that I've slept on it. Alright then, let's share, let's share!" Lin Wanrong had barely finished speaking when Yujia looked horrified. "I won't sleep in a man's bed; I'll sleep on the meadow!"

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. "How considerate of you, with the awareness of a prisoner. Fine, the meadow is yours. Seriously, I've never seen a girl voluntarily request to sleep on the ground. It would be hard to say no!"

Is this man a hero of Great Hua, or a scoundrel? Pushed to her limits by him, Yujia felt utterly bewildered. Over the past few days of their encounters, she had initially had the upper hand, then they fought to a draw, and finally, this dark-faced outlaw seemed to take the initiative. He was an enigma—never weak when he should be, and stronger when facing strength.

Lin Wanrong stretched and yawned several times before lying down comfortably on the camp bed, completely ignoring the Turkic girl beside him as if she were mere air.

The tent was good only for sheltering against wind and rain; the ground remained barren. Yujia clenched her teeth and lay on the meadow, a bone-chilling cold creeping in. Dew seeped through her thin silk skirt, making her shiver involuntarily. Anyone would find it hard to withstand sleeping on such ground for a night.

She couldn't help but glance at Lin Wanrong. The outlaw lay on the bed, still holding her golden scimitar, his eyes closed and his breathing even. He was already drifting off to sleep.

As long as this outlaw did nothing worse, it would be a blessing from the god of the plains. What more could she hope for? With moist eyes, Yujia suppressed the sorrow in her heart, clenched her fists tightly, gritted her teeth, and slowly closed her eyes.

## Chapter 549 What Have You Done to Me?

"Blue skies above—a cloud drifts by—below it a horse runs, the whip cracks loudly all around, birds soar in unison—"

Piercing and resonant singing broke the tranquility of the grassland morning. The voice was anything but melodious; its only redeeming quality was a certain hearty vigor.

Lured by this singing, a few larks appeared from nowhere, chirping and circling above the procession. They danced joyfully in the air. The first rays of the morning sun bathed the young faces of the soldiers, and the pristine dewdrops on their hair and skin sparkled, casting a pure and crystalline glow.

Lin Wanrong rode on his horse, singing loudly along the way. The songs he chose were strange tunes that no one else understood, yet they were oddly catchy, making them easy to remember. As the army of 5,000 soldiers marched slowly, they couldn't help but grin at Lin Wanrong's casual demeanor, his strikingly loud voice, and his off-key melodies. "With a voice like a broken gong, he dares to flaunt it?" Yet he sang without a break, and the crowd couldn't help but burst into hearty laughter. Gradually, everyone felt uplifted, their spirits released from the burden of war. The joyful atmosphere was infectious, making the vast grassland feel like another home for them.

"Brother Lin seems in high spirits today. Did something good happen last night?" Old Gao, riding his horse, couldn't help but ask with a tinge of suspicion.

Hu Bugui took a cautious glance ahead, then lowered his voice, "I don't know whether he was successful last night, but the General's singing skills certainly need improvement. Old Gao, you're daring—could you please go and ask him to stop for a while? We are about to make camp and cook breakfast."

"How dare you criticize Brother Lin!" Old Gao laughed. "When he sings, it means he's confident about accomplishing great things. That gives us peace of mind. That said, Brother Lin's singing is indeed terrible, far worse than the courtesans in Eight Great Alleys. But we should be grateful. Listening to a courtesan costs money, while listening to Brother Lin may actually make him pay us. Ha-ha!"

Both men chuckled wickedly, indulging in their own amusement, feeling momentarily cheerful.



From a distance, a scout galloped towards them, urgently stopping in front of Lin Wanrong. It was the same scout he had dispatched last night. Previously, to ensure safety, Lin Wanrong and Hu Bugui had sent out several scouting parties ahead before attacking Dalanzha. Unexpectedly, news had returned so quickly.

Wiping the sweat from his forehead, the scout urgently reported, "General, we've spotted a troop of Turkic cavalry about a hundred miles ahead."

"Oh?" Lin Wanrong's eyes flashed. "Where did they come from? How many are there?"

Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu had already rushed over upon hearing about the Turkic cavalry. The scout continued, "There are over two thousand of them, but less than three thousand. We can't confirm where they came from yet, but based on my estimate, they are likely from the Ha'er Helin or Ejina tribes."

"Ha'er Helin or Ejina?" Lin Wanrong hummed in acknowledgment, nodding. "It's a possibility. Have you located the positions of these two tribes?"

The soldier shook his head regretfully, "Due to the sudden appearance of this troop of Turkic cavalry, we dared not proceed recklessly. We are still unable to confirm the exact locations of the two tribes."

With only about a dozen men in their scouting squad, there was no choice but to avoid direct confrontation when unexpectedly encountering a large enemy cavalry force. Lin Wanrong turned to Hu Bugui and asked, "Brother Hu, where do you think these over two thousand men came from?"

After contemplating for a moment, Hu Bugui nodded. "Considering the surroundings of Dalanzha, only Ha'er Helin and Ejina tribes have the power to both defend their homeland and send aid to neighboring tribes. Though not large by steppe standards, this force of just under three thousand men is not small either. Most likely, these two tribes received news of Dalanzha being attacked and dispatched their men overnight. Given that our scouts have already encountered some Turkic cavalry, they might have already reached the outskirts of these tribes. We must be cautious in every move now to avoid being detected by the Turks."

Hu Bugui's analysis was sound, and Lin Wanrong nodded in agreement. "Brother Hu, according to your judgment, if we continue in this direction without changing course, when would we encounter these over two thousand Turkic men?"

After counting on his fingers for some time, Hu Bugui spoke cautiously, "It's hard to say. The Turks are unaware of the situation in Dalanzha as well as ours. They would likely proceed with caution. If the two forces were to meet, it would be at the earliest by dusk today, when the sun sets."

"Not many hours left then," Lin Wanrong nodded. "These Turks have moved rather quickly. They could reach Dalanzha by tomorrow morning."

Hu Bugui waved his hand dismissively, smiling. "Traveling day and night is not feasible. Even if the Turks can endure it, the warhorses cannot. The Turkic people have a custom of traveling during the day and resting at night. Even though Turkic horses are swift, such intense activity leads to extreme exhaustion. The grasses of the Alxa Plains are far from sufficient. Every night they must replenish the horses with fodder and water."

Lin Wanrong simply responded with a 'Oh,' his eyes narrowing slightly, lost in thought.

Standing aside, Gao Qiu, having listened to their discussion, couldn't help but laugh. "Dispatching nearly three thousand men in one go? Whichever tribe can afford such a move must have emptied their main camp. Why don't we take this chance to set their camp on fire?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, shaking his head, "Brother Gao, if you think that way, I'm afraid you'll be walking right into their trap."

"Into a trap?" Gao Qiu widened his eyes, "Why?"

Lin Wanrong looked exasperated but before he could speak, Hu Bugui interjected, "Brother Gao, you're underestimating the Turkic people. If we're not wrong, this force of nearly three thousand should be a coalition between Ha'er Helin and Ejina tribes."

"An alliance of tribes?!"

"Exactly," Hu Bugui nodded solemnly. "Think about it, Brother Gao—If you were the chieftain of a Turkic tribe, responsible for protecting your people, yet you also had to send troops to aid others, how many would you dispatch?"

"No more than 30 percent of our force," Gao Qiu asserted.

"Exactly. To send 3,000 cavalymen to assist Dalanzha, either the Ejina or Ha'er Helin tribes would need a reserve of at least 8,000 to 10,000 able-bodied men. While the Turks are all focused on attacking the Helan Mountain Valley, which tribe could still afford to retain a vast reserve of over 10,000 strong men? It's impossible. Thus, the over 2,000 men must certainly be a joint force from both tribes. And by my estimation, in both Ejina and Ha'er Helin, each camp must still have at least 4,000 barbarian cavalymen remaining. To defeat them as easily as we did at Dalanzha would not be feasible." Hu Bugui sighed, a hint of helplessness in his tone.

Hearing this analysis, Gao Qiu was enlightened. Indeed, as Hu Bugui said, the Turks were not fools; they wouldn't make the same mistake as they did at Dalanzha twice.

"So, what now? Should we fight or not?" Gao Qiu was visibly troubled, hesitating. Hu Bugui looked at General Lin with the same expectant eyes, awaiting his decision.

Lin Wanrong closed his eyes slightly, lost in thought. From Hu Bugui's analysis, it was clear that either Ejina or Ha'er Helin had a force many times larger than Dalanzha's. If they attacked with their current 5,000 cavalymen, they would not have an overwhelming advantage. Even if they managed to break the Turkic tribes, their side would suffer heavy losses. And without additional troops, these 5,000 soldiers were their most valuable asset—there were bigger tasks awaiting them. Yet, bypassing these tribes and heading straight for the Turkic capital would also require passing through these lands.

After a long moment of contemplation, Lin Wanrong suddenly brightened, a fierce light flashing in his eyes. With a decisive wave of his hand, he declared, "Fight, of course we will fight! Brother Hu, instruct our brothers up front to heighten their vigilance and report any movement from the incoming Turkic reinforcements."

"Brother Lin, do you mean to say we should first take down these 2,500 men?" Gao Qiu exclaimed, visibly delighted.

Lin Wanrong nodded, his expression stern. Hu Bugui furrowed his brows, "Defeating them may not be that easy. Our victory over Dalanzha last night was due to the Turks being completely unaware, and the encumbrance of women and children made it easy for us to wipe them out. But these over 2,000 Turks are mobile. To silently encircle them would be highly difficult. Should we make the slightest error and they become aware of our presence, they can easily flee. On the vast plains, if the Turks decide to escape, no one can stop them. That's why the chieftains of these two tribes confidently sent them to reinforce Dalanzha."

Hu Bugui's caution was not unfounded, but Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Brother Hu, you are correct. If the Turkic people want to flee, then nobody could stop them. But what if the Turkic people were without horses? Do you think they could still run?"

"Without horses, they'd be like a tiger that's lost its fangs—naturally, they couldn't escape. But how could the Turkic people be without horses?" Hu Bugui queried, puzzled.

Lin Wanrong flashed a mysterious smile. "Brother Hu, as you've said, the great Turkic horses can cover a thousand miles in a day. However, their food and water supplies must be assured—"

"Exactly so," Old Hu quickly nodded in agreement.

Lin Wanrong chuckled darkly, patting Gao Qiu on the shoulder. "Very well, very well! It's time for our invincible and courageous Gao Qiu to take action!"

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After giving out all the necessary instructions, Lin Wanrong finally had time to visit Li Wuling. Yujia was tied to the carriage shaft, acting as a temporary coachman. Her resentment was palpable. When she saw him, she snorted coldly and turned her head away.

"It's time for healing; Divine Healer, please follow me," Lin Wanrong said, smiling as he untied her ropes and stepped into the carriage first. Li Wuling's complexion had visibly improved; his breathing was becoming more even, and his chest wound had started to scab over. Indeed, the medicine provided by Yueya'er had remarkable effects.

When Yujia entered the carriage, Lin Wanrong noticed two purple bruises on her delicate, white hands. "Ah, you're injured? Divine Healer, let me apply some medicine for you."

"There's no need for your concern," Yujia replied, her face cold, as she began examining Li Wuling's injuries. Concerned for Li Wuling's life, Lin Wanrong intently watched Yueya'er's expressions, gauging her reactions.

After checking Li Wuling's pulse, lifting his eyelids, and carefully inspecting his wounds, Yujia shook her head and coldly said, "He's fine."

'Is that it? Just two words?' Anxious, Lin Wanrong was about to ask more when Yujia interrupted, "You don't need to ask further. All I can tell you is that his condition is gradually improving. As for when he will wake up, I don't know."

She was a captive, yet also a healer. Frustrated, Lin Wanrong had no choice but to accept this. Fortunately, even if Li Wuling hadn't yet regained consciousness, his improving condition was evident to all. Lin Wanrong firmly believed that one day, Li Wuling would be bouncing around, healthy and alive, in front of everyone.

As he was about to step out of the carriage with Yujia, Yueya'er, who was sitting on the carriage shaft, suddenly spoke, "Bandit, I have a question for you."

"Could you please not give me random nicknames?" Lin Wanrong turned around, visibly irritated. "Isn't it fine to call me by my Turkic name?"

Yujia fixed her eyes on him and gritted her teeth. "Last night, I was clearly sleeping on the grass. How is it that when I woke up this morning, I was lying in your—your—"

Her cheeks flushed slightly, and she couldn't finish her sentence. Her eyes were aflame with anger. "What exactly did you do to me?"

## Chapter 550 The Fleeing Nomad

Lin Wanrong looked puzzled. "Miss Yujia, what are you talking about? It's all a bit vague. Can you explain it more clearly and in detail?"

The young woman, defiant with integrity, stared intently at him. "Do you genuinely not remember what happened last night? I woke up this morning on your bed. What did you do to me?"

"Why were you lying on my bed?" Lin Wanrong's eyes widened in disbelief. "Miss Yujia, even if that happened, shouldn't you be the one explaining? It was you who climbed onto my bed, yet now you're blaming me—"

"Nonsense! How could I possibly—?" She cut herself off, her face flushing with anger and humiliation as tears began to stream down her cheeks.

This Turkic maiden could be intelligent at times, naive at others, sometimes noble, sometimes vulnerable. Lin Wanrong was mesmerized by her ever-changing expressions. "You didn't climb onto my bed? How odd. Then who was it that I found in my bed when I returned from patrolling the camp this morning?"

"I—I don't know." Yujia lowered her head, her voice barely audible. "When I woke up, you were nowhere to be seen."

Lin Wanrong nodded slowly. "Well, it must have been the god of the grasslands lending a hidden hand—ah, no matter. I won't hold it against you, even though my bedding has been mysteriously ruined. I'm a very easygoing person. Let's let bygones be bygones. You don't even have to wash the sheets—"

"Stop it. Your bed is as filthy as a dog's kennel; what bedding are you talking about?" Yujia was both embarrassed and angry.

"Oh, is it? You seem to remember it quite vividly," Lin Wanrong laughed. "It's a campaign bed; simplicity is to be expected. You'll get used to it—perhaps you might even grow to like the smell."

"I certainly will not," Yujia snapped back, glaring at him, her cheeks flushed and her eyes captivatingly deep.

Her figure was alluring, her chest heaving softly, her slender legs firm and agile under her thin skirt. From a distance, she looked like a young leopardess ready to pounce, full of raw power and sensuality. Every scowl and every flash of anger seemed to intensify her exotic allure.

'Good heavens, is she trying to tempt me into sin?' Lin Wanrong's heart pounded, and he swallowed hard. Yujia was a complex blend of innocence, wisdom, nobility, and allure. What intrigued him most was her indomitable spirit, something any male would want to conquer.

Seeing Lin Wanrong gaping at her, almost drooling, and his eyes fixated intently on her, Yujia felt a surge of blush color her cheeks even more. "Shameless rogue, what are you looking at?!"

"Watching a game—ah, no, I'm using my wise and profound gaze to search for the laws that govern the growth of all things in the universe." Lin Wanrong wiped the saliva from the corner of his mouth, focused on her chest, and said without blinking, "Little sister Yueya'er, after the battle, could you take me to your home? I want to see what kind of fertile grass can nourish you to be so—big!" His eyes widened, and his hands formed a round shape, exaggerating a spherical gesture.

"If you want to go, I'll give you the chance," Yueya'er responded, her lips curling into a sweet smile, her expression irresistibly charming, and her tone inexplicably gentle. "Sir Wo Lao Gong, where will you attack next?"

The bandit with the dark face had a glint of green light in his eyes, and drool flowed freely from his mouth. Seemingly unaware, he mused, "The next target? I'm planning to attack—"

Yujia's eyes lit up with joy, but she kept her expression calm, quietly hummed in acknowledgment, and listened to him continue.

"—to attack right here!" The bandit didn't even have time to wipe his drool as he pointed straight at her chest, his laughter both lecherous and despicable.

Yueya'er was slightly stunned; her pretty face flushed red, and she inwardly hummed in annoyance. When she looked up at Lin Wanrong, she saw his eyes filled with green light and his mouth dripping with saliva, completely captivated by her beauty. This didn't look like a joke.

Was this his true intention? Yueya'er thought, her cheeks burning. "Shameless Great Hua man!"

Her eyes glinted, her brows furrowed slightly, and her face turned cold as she said, "Sir Wo Lao Gong, I hope you respect Yujia's dignity and refrain from making such indecent remarks. We Turkic women are not to be trifled with."

'Huh, this young lady was just acting as charming as a vixen a moment ago; how did she become an ice cube so quickly?' Lin Wanrong thought, intrigued by the sudden change. "I can respect your dignity, but I also hope Miss Yujia respects my 'beastliness.' Evolution from man to beast was not easy for me either!"

Yujia chuckled lightly, responding, "I've never heard anyone proudly proclaim themselves as a beast, and yet you seem quite pleased with yourself. Are all Great Hua men as thick-skinned as you?"

"What's the use of having thick skin? It's not like it can be eaten," Lin Wanrong stared at the young girl's beautiful and captivating face and smirked. "On the other hand, how many beautiful women like little sister Yueya'er do you Turkic people have? I'm really looking forward to it."

Yueya'er gave a slight nod, the cold light in her eyes almost imperceptible. "Turkic women are hardworking, simple, and endowed with wisdom, beauty, and resilience. They can fight on horseback and remain behind the scenes, shining like pearls on the grassland, and there are countless outstanding individuals among them. The strength of our tribe owes much to the contributions of our women."

'So she's a feminist too,' Lin Wanrong exclaimed, laughing, "Indeed, women hold up half the sky! But from what you've described, little sister Yueya'er, the status of Turkic women seems much higher than I had imagined."

"Can a woman hold up half the sky?" Yujia chuckled, her demeanor exuding unparalleled charm. "Your analogy is quite amusing. Sir Wo Lao Gong, ever since I met you, this is the only phrase that has been music to my ears." She laughed softly, her beauty radiant and her ample chest moving in gentle waves, reminiscent of a tempting red apple.

At times she was regal, at others cold, and then seductive. These ever-changing moods made Lin Wanrong itch with curiosity. He couldn't help but chuckle, "Really? Have we found common ground then?"

Yujia playfully shook her head, "Not necessarily. Sir Wo Lao Gong, the difference between you and me is like that between man and beast. How can we have a common language?" She looked at him with a faint smile, her face slightly flushed, her lips curved in amusement, and her long eyelashes quivering. She looked both adorable and alluring.

Lin Wanrong seemed entranced by her face, nodding seriously, "Alright then. Tonight, let's act like beasts!"

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"Tsk. Shameless!" Yujia exclaimed softly, her cheeks flushed like a sweet, tempting red fruit. The sight made one's heart race. "Sir Wo Lao Gong" stared at her, drooling.

Watching the infatuated look on Lin Wanrong's face, Yueya'er's deep eyes revealed a hint of a smug smirk.

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"First touch, touch the edge of sister's hair. Second touch, touch sister's face..." Lin Wanrong sang as he rode his horse, swaying from side to side, humming happily.

Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu exchanged glances, both surprised. The song he sang in the morning was so refined. How did he become so lewd in just a few hours?

Gao Qiu hummed and laughed, "Oh, is this a new song by Brother Lin? I've never heard it before. My apologies."

‘Acting!’ Hu Bugui shot him a disdainful look. ‘When you, Old Gao, sang the ‘Eighteen Touches’, General Lin was probably still playing in the mud!’

"Brother Lin," Gao Qiu caught up and whispered into Lin Wanrong's ear with a sly grin, "How are things with Yueya'er? Earlier, I saw you two getting quite close. What were you two talking about? I bet something happened last night."

Lin Wanrong narrowed his eyes and smiled, "Don't think of me as someone so casual. We discussed serious matters. About heaven and earth, yin and yang, man and woman, human and beast..."

Heaven, earth, yin, yang, man, woman, human, beast? That's deep. Gao Qiu smirked, "Then, congratulations on finding someone to warm your bed."

"Warm my bed?" Lin Wanrong grinned, "Brother Gao, you've got it wrong. I think she wants me to warm her bed."

Gao Qiu's eyes widened in shock, "Really? She dared to invite you? Can the bed even handle it? How is that possible?"

"All these cunning and inappropriate matters might harm your pure soul, Brother Gao. Let me handle them," Lin Wanrong said with a smile, patting his shoulder, "Your main task now is to ensure everything goes smoothly tonight."

Gao Qiu patted his bulging chest confidently and declared, "With me around, you can rest easy, Brother Lin. I excel at tasks like these."

Lin Wanrong nodded with a smile. Just then, Hu Bugui approached and reported, "General, according to our scouts, over 3,000 Turkic cavalry are heading directly for Dalanzha. They're currently only less than 50 miles away from us."

Lin Wanrong looked up at the sky, where the setting sun was slowly sinking toward the horizon. He hummed thoughtfully before asking, "Brother Hu, how much longer do you think the Turkic cavalry will take to set up camp?"

Hu Bugui pondered for a moment before cautiously answering, "These 3,000 Turks have been riding nonstop since last night, only pausing for the time it takes to drink two cups of tea. Such a rapid advance would wear out not just the people but also their horses. They must camp to replenish their supplies; otherwise, they won't get another thirty miles before their horses collapse from exhaustion. According to our scouts, they've already sent out fast riders up ahead. It appears they're planning to set up camp as night falls. Once their horses have water and fodder, they could recover most of their stamina within two hours. They could then continue their advance during the latter half of the night."

Hu Bugui knew the Turkic people well and was an expert in horse rearing. His analysis was meticulous and aligned perfectly with the reports from their scouts.

"Regardless, the Turks will certainly have to replenish their supplies tonight," Lin Wanrong affirmed, pacing slowly. "If they set up camp, even if they only rest for an hour, that should give Brother Gao enough time to execute our plan."

Hu Bugui chuckled, "Having enough time is one thing. The real challenge will be for Brother Gao to appear at the right moment before the Turks, and then infiltrate their camp without making a sound."

"Difficult, yes, but not impossible," Lin Wanrong nodded. He then raised his voice, "Instruct our scouts to keep an eye on the Turkic cavalry's movements and report back at all times."

As Hu Bugui scanned the surroundings, he suddenly exclaimed, "Wait, where did Brother Gao go?"

Lin Wanrong offered a mysterious smile, "Just wait, he'll reappear soon enough."

No sooner had he spoken, shouts erupted from behind their ranks, "It's bad, the nomads have escaped!"

Both men turned quickly to see that the forty or so captives, members of Yueya'er's tribe who had been bound together, had somehow been untied. They let out furious roars as they seized nearby horses, swiftly mounting them and galloping away into the distance.

"Do not let them escape, kill them!" Lin Wanrong's fiery roar echoed far and wide. Hundreds of soldiers fiercely pursued the fleeing Turks, arrows shooting out like raindrops. The last three Turks screamed as they were hit and fell off their horses.

Among the fleeing nomads, one man had his hat pulled low, his face obscured by a full beard. This man kept looking back and letting out enraged roars at Lin Wanrong's soldiers, appearing very menacing.

Hu Bugui stared at the defiant figure of the escaping nomad for a moment before suddenly bursting into laughter, "Well played, Brother Gao. You even managed to fool me!"