

Finest 551

Chapter 551 The Duel

As night fell, the sky turned into a massive curtain of darkness, so opaque that one could hardly see their hand in front of their face. The vast plains were shrouded in gloom.

The tranquil night was shattered by the hurried and crisp sound of hooves. In the hazy distance, dozens of dark figures rapidly approached, their warhorses slicing through the night like arrows, a rush of unbridled energy in their wake. Only when they drew closer did it become evident that these were three to four dozen bedraggled and worn Turkic people. Dust-covered and anxiety-ridden faces, some even punctuated with arrow wounds, their fresh blood streaming freely. Despite this, they spared no time to bind their injuries, spurring their horses at a galloping pace, frequently casting nervous glances behind them.

From far behind, neither human figures nor the sounds of hooves could be heard. The Great Hua pursuers had somehow lost their trail.

"The plains will always belong to us Turks!" Overwhelmed with emotion, the riders broke into excited shouts, their faces radiant with elation.

After a long sprint covering at least twelve to fifteen miles, the Turkic horses were heavily panting, and their riders, gripped by fear, gasped for air like weary oxen.

They took a brief respite, during which the leader of the Turkic group tried to say something to his companions. Strangely, his usually resounding voice had become hoarse. He attempted to speak in the Turkic language, but what came out were indecipherable grunts.

"I can't speak!" The leading Turk's face turned pale, and his eyes filled with boundless terror. Despite summoning all his strength to shout, all that escaped were hoarse grunts; he could not articulate a single word. What scared him even more was that his companions—each and every one of the three to four dozen who had escaped with him—were also visibly distressed, unable to speak a word.

Among them, a man with a twisted beard and a hat pulled low over his eyes strained his mouth wide open, attempting in vain to say something. For a long time, his efforts proved fruitless. The gathered

Turks listened to his furious howls, and sorrow overcame them. For a moment, the plains were filled with continuous, echoing wails.

The leader of the Turks was the most composed among them. Reflecting on their recent capture, he recalled that aside from a few pieces of dried meat gifted by the Great Hua people around noon that day, they had been starved. They had devoured the meat, transforming it into a feast in their stomachs. Now it occurred to him: the deceitful Great Hua must have tampered with the meat, rendering him and his companions unable to speak.

In the midst of their anguished cries, any joy from their escape evaporated. The faces of all the Turks were filled with bitterness and fear. The treachery and cunning of the Great Hua people made them terrified, and their only thought now was to break free from the clutches of Great Hua and return to the embrace of the god of the plains.

In their profound despair and fear, the fleeing Turks did not even bother to take count of their numbers. Gritting their teeth in silence, they spurred their horses into a frenzied gallop, as if trying to leave the Great Hua demons far behind.

The Turkic man, his face largely obscured by a bristling beard, blended in with the crowd of nomads. Gritting his teeth, his expression was one of bitter resentment. However, the darkness of the night concealed his features, making it impossible for anyone to discern his face clearly.

The crowd moved in gloomy silence, the distance they had traveled uncertain. Suddenly, the rapid beating of hooves echoed, punctuated by the clashing sounds of swords and quivers. From a distance, hundreds of Turkic cavalymen could be seen charging forward, torches held high.

"Ah—Ah—" Upon seeing the robust Turkic cavalry, the nomads who had escaped were instantly moved to tears. They raised their arms and cheered fervently. The troop of Turkic cavalymen accelerated their pace, charging directly toward them.

As the two sides drew near, the faces of the Turkic cavalry became clearly visible. Leading them was a burly man with a prominent nose, his visage truly imposing. Catching sight of the nomadic leader who had escaped, he exclaimed in surprise, "Dulhanza, is that you?"

Dulhanza roared in assent, uttering a few chaotic shouts. The cavalry leader looked puzzled; he didn't realize that Dulhanza had lost the ability to speak. He watched Dulhanza's strange behavior for a moment, confused about its meaning.

The escaped Turkic nomads, anxious, began to shout in unison. Finally, understanding dawned on the cavalry leader's face. "You've all lost the ability to speak?" His expression changed dramatically.

All of the forty or so Turkic men nodded, their faces etched with grief and indignation.

The torchlight brightened the grasslands considerably. The bearded man, who had been the most vocal earlier, discreetly lowered his head to avoid detection. Though he didn't understand the Turkic language, he could guess what these nomads were saying. Sneaking a hand inside his garment, he chuckled quietly to himself. 'Not being able to speak is the least of your worries. If I wish it, I can render you impotent for life—that would be an easy feat.'

All forty men have lost the ability to speak? The cavalry leader, shocked, glanced at Dulhanza's anxious eyes and decided not to probe further. He quickly signaled his men, and the cavalry turned their horses around, escorting the escaped Turkic nomads back to their camp.

After traveling some twenty to thirty miles, they came upon a vast clearing. Two to three thousand Turkic men had gathered there, the air buzzing with chatter. Drenched in sweat and looking fierce yet weary, their strong Turkic horses shimmered with droplets of perspiration under the torchlight, a dazzling sight.

It was evident that the Turkic men had just arrived; saddles were not yet removed, and stables were still under construction. Their three thousand horses wandered around, tails swishing, creating a chaotic scene.

Gao Qiu surveyed the camp and nodded in approval. "Old Hu really has some skills; the Turkic people did indeed camp at dusk."

As the Turkic cavalymen, busy preparing fodder for their horses, saw the ragged, pale faces of the forty or so escaped compatriots shuffle into the camp, snickers began to break out. The Turkic people, by nature fierce and aggressive, revered only the strong. They would willingly step over the bodies of their own to advance, a testament to their wolfish qualities. For these kinfolk who had been captured by the people of Great Hua and then escaped, contempt was written all over their faces.

Bathed in the scrutinizing gazes of the Turkic people, Gao Qiu, disguised as a Western merchant, hastily pulled his hat lower, his head nearly touching his feet, to avoid being recognized. His self-abasement earned him even more contempt and derision from the Turks, but it also spared him any suspicion. No one could have imagined that someone from the Great Hua would have the audacity to infiltrate a Turkic camp alone.

"Stay here and don't wander off!" bellowed the cavalry leader, leading the agitated Dulhanza hurriedly into a newly erected tent.

Gao Qiu's eyes darted around as he covertly surveyed his surroundings. The three thousand Turkic horsemen were covered in dust and sand, their faces weary from their exhausting day-long journey. Most sat on the ground, tearing at strips of dried meat, sipping water they had just fetched. Hundreds more were busy setting up stables, preparing to replenish their horses' feed and water.

The camp had only two hastily-constructed felt tents. Groups of Turks sat resting on the grass, apparently pausing only briefly before continuing on their journey.

Just as Gao Qiu was losing himself in observation, a piercing, mocking laughter reached his ears: "Make way, you timid captives!"

Unable to understand the Turkic language, Gao Qiu instinctively lifted his head to find two Turkic horsemen pushing their way through the crowd, carrying a large bucket of fresh water from a nearby lake. They laughed and shoved Gao Qiu and the other Turkic men aside, making their way towards the stables.

The escaped captives, already on edge from numerous setbacks, couldn't contain their anger at the mockery from their kin. A few men stepped forward, fists flying, igniting an uproar. Those who had been resting leaped up and circled the brawlers, plunging the camp into chaos.

Seizing the opportunity, Gao Qiu slipped through the crowd under the cover of darkness, making his way to the area where the horses were concentrated. Fresh green grass lay in a long line, large, wide troughs filled with water spaced every few steps. After a day of hard riding, the horses, their manes glistening with sweat, were peacefully eating and drinking.

Seeing that everyone's attention was focused on the melee, Gao Qiu reached into his garment and took out various packets of powder. Holding his breath, he tiptoed up to the water troughs and sprinkled the powder silently into the water.

"What's all this commotion?" Three figures emerged from one of the newly erected tents. Besides Dulhanza and the previous cavalry leader, the man at the forefront was a hulking individual, in his early thirties. The moment he glared with his large, bell-like eyes, the noise in the camp died down.

It seemed that this burly man was the commander of the Turkic cavalry. He snarled, "All Turkic warriors, assemble now! The Great Hua cavalry is right before us. It's time to serve our Khan!"

"Soranki, isn't this too risky?" another man interjected. "According to Dulhanza, the Great Hua soldiers who've penetrated the grasslands number at least five thousand, and they're all elite troops. Their leader is notoriously cunning and deceitful. Aren't we falling into their trap by going like this?"

The one who spoke was the cavalry leader who had previously rescued Dulhanza. His brow was slightly furrowed, his demeanor cautious.

"Are you afraid?" Soranki scoffed with disdain. "Do you think my three thousand elite riders can't handle a mere five thousand people from Great Hua? If you're afraid, take your Ha'er Helin tribe and go back first. We Ejina will not retreat."

The other cavalry leader retorted angrily, "You dare to underestimate us? My valiant Ha'er Helin tribe never retreats."

Soranki nodded approvingly. "Good, the Khan needs warriors like you. Now, relay my orders to thoroughly interrogate the thirty-five people that Dulhanza brought back. These Great Hua people are cunning and deceitful. I don't believe they'd let their captives escape so easily. There must be a trick."

As the two conversed, Gao Qiu could only hear their chattering but understood not a word. Having sprinkled medicinal herbs in all the horse troughs and waited the time it takes to steep a cup of tea, the horses were mostly replenished. Gao Qiu couldn't help but chuckle quietly to himself.

The Turkic people began to gather around the camp, and the over thirty escaped barbarians were individually summoned for questioning.

"One is missing!" Soranki suddenly roared after counting several times. "That man must be a spy. Search immediately—"

Before he could finish his sentence, a whistle sounded as a flare arrow shot into the sky, bursting into dazzling fireworks against the night.

"Turkic bastards, your Great Hua grandfather is here!" A burly man clad in a nomadic robe, his face covered in whiskers, sat astride a horse. He shouted and burst into hearty laughter. Tossing his hat aside, he revealed a square-jawed face.

"There he is—catch him!" The Turkic cavalymen yelled in fury, brandishing their scimitars and charging at Gao Qiu.

"Go!" Gao Qiu shouted urgently, swatting away incoming arrows with his blade in one hand and spurring his steed with the other. His horse let out a long neigh and shot out like an arrow, scattering the Turkic soldiers in disarray, and bolted for the outskirts of the camp.

The Turks were indeed well-trained. Despite Gao Qiu's sudden and fierce assault, they didn't lose their composure. Thousands mounted their horses in unison, giving chase.

"Shh—" Another flare arrow soared into the distant sky, seemingly in response to the action here.

"Great Hua cavalry spotted forty miles ahead!" came a report from a forward scout, causing the Turkic commander's cheeks to flush with excitement. Drawing his curved blade, he shouted, "Invincible warriors of the Turkic tribes, the time to prove your valor for the Khan is now! Kill these Great Hua intruders; kill them all!"

"Kill the Great Hua!" The savagery of the Turkic people was fully unleashed as they howled like wolves. Three thousand riders crouched low on their horses, moving almost parallel to their steeds. They were faster than flying arrows. The thundering hooves struck the grasslands like spring thunder, making the earth seem to tremble.

Glancing back, Gao Qiu felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Over three thousand warhorses were galloping toward him like a rapidly advancing mountain range under the sky, stirring up a cloud of dust. The scimitars in the hands of the Turks shimmered with a dim light, and even before they got close, the whooshing sound of the wind was already audible. Arrows flew with an uncanny accuracy, targeting his head and shoulders. He swung his blade incessantly, his mind numb with fear.

Only on the vast plains could one truly feel the invincible regality of the Turkic people. Their swiftness on horseback and expert archery were unmatched by any foreign tribe. Compared to the raids in the desert, the hordes of Turkic riders on the plains were far more terrifying.

After galloping for over twenty miles, the sweat poured down the Turkic war horse like rain, yet its speed showed no signs of slowing. The Turkic cavalry behind him remained no more than two to three hundred yards away, their screeches and the whistles of their arrows filling the air. Even Old Gao, a man of unparalleled martial arts, could not help but grimace, his ears buzzing from the noise.

"Old Hu, Hu Bugui! Where the hell are you?!" Gao Qiu shouted in despair, clutching his head with both hands as he dodged an incoming arrow. His war horse let out a low whinny and foamed at the mouth. Its front legs gave way, sending it tumbling to the ground. As it fell, its hind hooves kicked upwards, flinging Gao Qiu off.

Seeing the Great Hua soldier thrown from his horse, the Turkic riders let out a cheer, blowing their whistles and galloping toward him like the wind.

"Damn it!" Looking at the Turkic cavalry rushing toward him, Old Gao rolled twice on the ground before leaping up and running for his life.

"Fear not, Old Gao! Hu Bugui is here!" came a thunderous roar from the distance. The pounding of hooves echoed like explosive spring thunder. Countless torches lit up the night, making it as bright as day, while the Great Hua dragon flag fluttered in the firelight. Overwhelmed with emotion, Old Gao's eyes filled with tears. "Mother, the cavalry has finally arrived to save me!"

Watching the Turkic cavalry charge like wolves, Lin Wanrong gripped Old Gao's hand earnestly, "Brother Gao, if we win this battle, you'll be the hero of the day."

"You flatter me, Brother Lin. It was my duty," Gao Qiu grinned, instantly forgetting the recent danger. "The Turkic horses have run over twenty miles without stopping; they're practically running on fumes. These fools are in for a rude awakening."

Just as the two men exchanged a few laughs, the advancing Turkic cavalry slowed to a halt. A gruff voice rang out from the Turkic ranks, surprisingly speaking in the language of the Great Hua Empire, "Who goes there? Are you Great Hua cavalry led by Wo Lao Gong?"

Lin Wanrong rode forward, smiling, "I'm afraid not. That's a name only my grandmother should use. Who am I speaking to? Are you a general from Ejina or Ha'er Helin?"

"I am Soranki of the Ejina tribe," replied a fierce-looking Turkic man, pointing his whip at Lin Wanrong. "Wo Lao Gong, dismount and surrender now. I'll spare you a complete corpse. Otherwise, I'll tear you to pieces."

"How cruel," Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Esteemed General Soranki, I've heard you're the bravest warrior on the plains, is that correct?"

Soranki hesitated for a moment. Though he considered himself extremely powerful, he dared not claim to be the bravest warrior on the plains. But seeing Lin Wanrong's mocking smile, he fumed, "I am one of the bravest warriors of the plains! You weak Great Hua, do you dare to duel me? I swear on my warrior's honor, I will not ambush you!"

Lin Wanrong squinted slightly, his eyes fixating on the other man's horse for a few moments. With a grin, he spoke, "You are the bravest warrior of the plains, no question about it. As for me, I can only be considered the weakest warrior of Great Hua. So, if General Soranki wishes to pit the bravest warrior of the plains against Great Hua's weakest, well, it's an offer I can hardly refuse. Tell me, General Soranki, what weapon are you most skilled with?"

Soranki handed his bow and arrow to someone beside him, then loftily unsheathed his curved blade. "I am a Turkic cavalryman; I will duel you with this scimitar. I swear by the god of the plains, there will be no sneak attacks."

"Ah," Lin Wanrong let out a prolonged laugh, "In that case, I won't take any unfair advantage. To keep things fair, each of us is allowed to use just one weapon. Whoever is first to be dismounted or struck by the opponent loses. What do you think, General Soranki?"

"You wish to test my horsemanship?" Soranki sneered. "Very well, the terms are fair. I will use my scimitar. What will you use?"

Lin Wanrong reached into his robe and pulled out a small, dark object, gripping it tightly in his hand. "To demonstrate the magnanimity of Great Hua, I shall use this short weapon against you. As you can see, it's much shorter than your scimitar. I am an honest man, General Soranki, and I assure you, I won't take advantage."

The short weapon in Lin Wanrong's hand was indeed very small, not much larger than Soranki's palm. Two metal tubes were attached to it, their faint gleam revealing little of their potential lethality.

"Fine, let's proceed as you suggested," Soranki said, relieved. He spurred his horse, preparing to advance.

"Hold on a second!" Lin Wanrong took another glance at Soranki's horse and waved his hand, smiling. "Wait, General Soranki, there's one more thing we haven't settled."

"What more is there?" Impatient and displeased, Soranki shot back.

Lin Wanrong smirked, "Since we're dueling, there should be a wager. General Soranki, if you lose, your three thousand cavalymen will surrender and submit to my judgment. If I lose, I'll let one person go free."

"Do you take me for a fool?" Soranki was visibly upset. "If I lose, I forfeit my entire tribe. But if you lose, you only set one person free?"

"Don't rush," Lin Wanrong said, pulling something from his boot. "Take a look at this, and you'll see it's worth it."

In his hand was a small, exquisitely crafted curved blade made of pure gold. In the light of the burning fire, it shimmered with a brilliant luster.

"Isn't this Yueya'er's scimitar?" Gao Qiu softly exclaimed.

Soranki's eyes widened in a mix of awe, fear, and desire upon seeing the radiant golden blade. He dismounted, dropped to one knee, and offered a deep bow. After mumbling some devout words, his eyes flashed a murderous glint as he remounted his horse. "People of Great Hua, I accept your terms!"

To think that this Yueya'er was more important to him than his three thousand tribesmen? A look of astonishment crossed the eyes of Gao Qiu.

Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled, handing the golden blade to Hu Bugui. "Very well, General Soranki. This is probably the fairest duel in the history of both Great Hua and the Turks. Let's begin now!"

"Charge!" The moment Lin Wanrong finished speaking, Soranki spurred his horse forward. His gleaming curved blade slashed through the air, emitting a chilling light as he galloped straight toward Lin Wanrong. As his horse leaped, there seemed to be a slight stumble, but Soranki was too focused on the kill to notice such details.

"Good move!" Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, squeezed his legs around his warhorse, and darted off like an arrow.

A hundred yards, eighty yards. The two men closed in on each other, ready for a life-and-death struggle. Suddenly, Lin Wanrong burst into laughter, turned his horse, and started galloping perpendicularly to Soranki's direction, crisscrossing the open ground in front of their armies.

"Where are you going?" Spotting what seemed like pre-battle hesitation on the part of the Great Hua warrior, Soranki felt a surge of joy. He yelled and pursued Lin Wanrong.

The generals and soldiers from both sides watched their commanders intently, not even daring to blink as they focused on every move.

Soranki's horsemanship was indeed extraordinary. Lin Wanrong sprinted ahead while he followed closely behind, slowly but steadily closing the gap. From an initial hundred yards to eighty, then fifty, the soldiers of Great Hua suddenly broke into a cold sweat.

"Watch my gun!" Lin Wanrong shouted as he turned his head while galloping. His black gun aimed directly at Soranki.

Soranki, riding his horse, instinctively ducked. However, the short weapon did nothing, emitting no sound. It was a feint. The gap Soranki had narrowed was instantly widened, eliciting a hearty laugh from the Great Hua soldiers.

This cycle continued: one would run while the other pursued. Whenever Lin Wanrong would shout, "Watch my gun," Soranki could only duck his head in frustration, inciting more laughter from the troops.

After two rounds of this, the mocking laughter reached Soranki's ears. The Turkic warrior couldn't take it any longer. Lifting his blade, he roared, "Cunning Great Hua man, if you dare, stop running!"

"Cowardly Soranki, if you dare, stop chasing!" Laughter echoed from the Great Hua side, utterly relaxed.

Finally, Soranki could endure no more. Gathering all his strength, he struck his steed, pushing it to its limits. Foam frothed at the horse's mouth and its body was drenched in sweat that looked like blood.

With Soranki's last desperate effort, the distance between them closed rapidly—thirty yards, twenty yards. Soon, even the hairs on Lin Wanrong's face were visible.

"Watch my gun!" Lin Wanrong roared as he turned his head. This time, Soranki, who had been fooled repeatedly, wasn't scared. He didn't dodge, and his expression grew even more ferocious. With a whip of the reins, his Turkic steed let out a feeble neigh before collapsing forward, sending Soranki flying like a straight stone.

There was a loud "bang," then Soranki crashed heavily onto the ground, a gaping wound on his forehead. His eyes were wide open, refusing to close even in death.

Chapter 552 The Inept Actor

The sudden turn of events took everyone from the Turkic tribes by surprise. No one could have anticipated that Soranki, the brave warrior from the Ejina Tribe, would fall off his horse and succumb to a fatal blow from a Great Hua soldier, especially when he had seemingly been in a dominating position. The scene was indescribable, eerie even. Three thousand Turkic tribesmen stood in stunned silence, not a whisper among them.

In contrast, the soldiers of Great Hua were ecstatic. Gao Qiu led the celebration, exclaiming, "General Lin's abilities are unparalleled, truly without equal in the world!"

"Unparalleled! Without equal!" echoed five thousand soldiers, lifting their weapons and torches. In the burning glow, their jubilant shouts pierced the heavens.

'Ah, this Old Gao knows how to whip up a cult of personality,' Lin Wanrong chuckled softly. He blew away the residual smoke from the muzzle of his gun and stowed it back into his coat. Then he turned his horse slowly towards where Soranki lay. The Turkic warrior was sprawled on the ground, his limbs stretched out in a "大" shape. A gaping hole was in his forehead, blood oozing out, staining the nearby grass and flowers red. Even in death, Soranki's eyes were open wide; he had passed away without understanding how he had been defeated.

Lin Wanrong returned to his troops and laughed loudly. "The fairest duel in the world has been concluded. Soranki is dead! Will you Turkic people not dismount and surrender now?"

"Dismount and surrender! Dismount and surrender!" The Great Hua soldiers chimed in, their spirits high.

The Turkic tribesmen looked at each other in disbelief. They had never imagined that Soranki, the strongest among them in a form of combat they excelled at, would be killed so covertly. They didn't even know what trickery the cunning Great Hua people had used. This was a tremendous blow to their morale. According to the agreement made before the duel, should Soranki lose and die, the three thousand Turkic warriors would have to lay down their arms and surrender—an unbearable humiliation for their wolfish nature.

"You shameless Great Hua people. You used deceit! I, Zozan, will never submit to you!" From the quiet ranks of the Turkic warriors, a furious voice erupted. The man was strong-built, his expression fierce; he was the cavalry leader who had previously rescued Dulhanza. With Soranki's death, Zozan had now become the highest commander of the three thousand Turkic tribesmen.

Lin Wanrong turned to Gao Qiu to ask the man's origin before shouting, "Zozan, is it? I hear you're the leader of the Ha'er Helin Tribe. Don't be so petty. This was the fairest duel, acknowledged by Soranki himself. He may have died, but he died far more honorably than you. To deny the result of the duel is not only to disrespect the Ejina Tribe's brave warrior, but also to blaspheme the God of the Grasslands. And that God will punish you."

Listening on the side, Hu Bugui couldn't help but chuckle. When it came to verbal skills, nobody could outdo General Lin. In just a few sentences, he had not only sowed discord between the Ha'er Helin and Ejina tribes but also invoked the revered God of the Grasslands. Even the defiant Turkic tribesmen wouldn't dare show disrespect to that deity.

As expected, the moment Lin Wanrong finished speaking, a cacophony erupted among the nomads. They hadn't seen how the people of the Great Hua could be deceptive, but Soranki did swear by the god of the plains, and that everyone had heard the promise with their own ears. Breaking such a vow would incur divine retribution. Some devout nomads had already knelt down to pray to the god of the plains.

Ha'er Helin's cavalry leader, Zozan, seeing the situation spiraling out of control, furiously swung his saber and shouted, "Turkic warriors, raise your noble heads high. Never surrender to the inferior people of the Great Hua. In our loyalty to the Khan, I swear—kill them! Charge!"

He led the charge at the front, and thousands of his kinsmen followed closely behind, kicking up a fierce whirlwind on the plains. The initially indecisive Turkic people were immediately roused by

this call to arms, exhibiting a wolfish aggression. They mounted their horses with howls, forming a surging torrent that charged straight toward the Great Hua cavalry's front lines.

Looking at the countless speeding black dots on the plains, Lin Wanrong was infuriated. "Damn it, these nomads truly can't be trusted, as unreliable as their goat milk!"

Hu Bugui chuckled, "All the better if they're untrustworthy. When we make our move, we'll be completely justified. Fall back, men, retreat!"

Upon Hu Bugui's command, five thousand Great Hua cavalymen turned their horses and galloped away. Zozan, seeing this, was overjoyed, "The cowardly people of the Great Hua dare not face us in battle! Warriors, follow me, charge!"

"Charge!" Seeing the retreating Great Hua cavalry, the Turkic warriors felt their blood boil. They'd long forgotten the god of the plains' punishment. Urging their war horses forward, they raised their shining sabers, racing to catch their prey, an imposing force to behold.

After galloping for more than half a mile, the Turkic horses leading the charge were panting heavily, their bodies covered in sweat, trembling with exhaustion. The Turkic knights were confused when their fast-moving horses suddenly faltered, unable to muster any strength in their hooves, and fell forward.

"Ahhh—" The terrified Turkic warriors were thrown off their horses like pebbles, tumbling through the air before crashing down hard onto the ground. The battlefield reverberated with horrifying screams and the hoarse neighs of the warhorses. The cavalymen who followed could not stop in time, their furious hooves trampling their fallen comrades and horses, causing them to tumble off as well. Countless Turkic horses suddenly seemed to shrink in height mid-gallop, collapsing in an instant. The sky was filled with flying nomadic bodies.

The Great Hua troops, who had seemingly fled, swiftly turned their heads back. Hu Bugui reined in his horse and laughed heartily, "Deceitful Turkic people, the god of the plains has begun to punish you. Brothers, charge!"

"Charge!" The cavalry of Great Hua, turning their heads, charged forward like swift-moving mountains on the plains. Their speed and momentum surpassed even the Turks. In the blink of an eye, they covered the less than a mile distance separating them. The Turks who were still groaning on the ground could only watch helplessly as the Great Hua soldiers' swords fell upon them. In an instant, countless Turks became wandering souls under the blades of Great Hua's warriors. Cries of alarm and screams of agony pierced the quiet of the plains and echoed in the night sky.

Zozan, upon seeing countless clansmen falling off their horses and the usually invincible Turkic steeds foaming at the mouth, finally realized the gravity of the situation. Thinking of how Soranki mysteriously got killed, he urgently shouted, "Something's wrong! They've tampered with the horses. Dismount, quickly dismount!"

But who among the fully-engaged Turkic soldiers could hear him now? One by one, the Turkic steeds fell to the ground. Each horse and each Turk became a target for the Great Hua cavalry's onslaught. Amid the sudden chaos, the situation spiraled completely out of control. Even the best-trained Turks couldn't muster an effective defense or counterattack; they could only watch their kinsmen fall one after another. Never before had such fear and despair enveloped every heart.

Drenched in blood, the Great Hua cavalries seemed like devils descending upon the Turks. Their bodies were stained red, and their murderous aura was chilling. Each swing of their swords was accompanied by a Turkic wail. Severed limbs and spatters of blood covered the grass. The sheer force and cruelty even unnerved the Turks, who were accustomed to slaughter. ҖĂŃŃĔŃ

Hu Bugui galloped wildly, laughing heartily. Slaughtering Turks, who were masters of horsemanship, and seeing the deep fear and despair in their eyes, was incomparably satisfying. Each time his blade fell, a Turk's head would fly through the air, drawing a crimson arc before landing with a thud, its features twisted in death.

"Roar—roar—" Gao Qiu rode beside Hu Bugui, a long rope in hand that he had fashioned into a loop at one end. With wolfish eyes glowing red, he hurled the rope like a lasso. His skill and strength were such that the loop settled around a Turk's neck each time, never missing its mark. Gao Qiu laughed wickedly as he pulled the rope taut, relishing the sight of strong Turks being bound like helpless lambs, their tongues lolling out and pupils dilating. Releasing his whip, he galloped wildly, dragging the captured Turks along the grassland. Considering how he had once been chased for miles by the Turks, his actions seemed justified.

The sound of the wind, hoofbeats, clashing swords, angry roars, and agonized wails together composed a blood-red war song that resonated across the vast plains.

"Dismount, quickly dismount!" Zozan, the cavalry commander, shouted, his eyes bloodshot. His voice was hoarse and strained, and fewer than six hundred Turkic warriors remained around him. Everywhere he looked, he saw blood, fallen horses, and severed limbs of his kinsmen. The ghastly scene even made the slaughter-hardened Turks tremble. Perhaps they had never thought that the very things they had done to others would one day befall them. Only when death loomed ever so closely did they come to understand the meaning of fear.

The sound of blades gradually ceased, and the plains slowly returned to a tranquil state. Occasionally, faint wails would break the silence, echoing like soul-summoning incantations, pounding relentlessly against the chests of the remaining Turks. Their hearts had never pounded so fiercely before.

The surviving six hundred or so Turkic warriors, those who had the foresight to abandon their horses early on, were the ones fortunate enough to still be alive. They gathered around Zozan, gripping their curved blades tightly and staring in terror at the encroaching soldiers of the Great Hua.

Five thousand Great Hua cavalymen held their torches high, moving slowly, step by step, silently closing in on the remaining Turkic men. Their faces were cold, not a word was spoken, and even the sound of their horses' hooves seemed softly muted.

Droplets of blood on the Hua soldiers' blade tips silently fell to the grass, coalescing into a barely audible rustle. The plains were so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. The eyes of the Turkic men widened as they watched the formidable Great Hua cavalry approach, their steps as unyielding as mountains. Their pupils dilated, sweat soaked their cheeks, and the silence of impending death weighed heavily on everyone's hearts. The sensation of their fates being controlled by others was more unbearable than being killed a hundred times over.

Under the immense pressure, a robust Turkic warrior finally could bear it no longer. With two loud screams, his eyes bloodshot, he brandished his battle blade and charged out of the crowd. Like a lone wolf, he rushed towards the Great Hua formation.

With a soft "whoosh," the charging Turkic man abruptly stopped. He stood there dumbfounded for a moment, and then his blade clattered to the ground. His bear-like frame collapsed. A feathered arrow, shot from an unknown source, had pierced his throat, not even allowing a single drop of blood to escape. The Turkic man fell, his eyes still wide open in death.

The Great Hua soldiers seemed to pay no attention to this at all. They continued to slowly advance, their faces as calm as if the arrow had nothing to do with them. The sound of their horses' hooves pounded against the chests of the Turkic warriors. The remaining five to six hundred barbarians clenched their blades, trembling hands held to their chests. Gone was the arrogance and cruelty they had displayed when they first invaded Great Hua. Now, all that remained was fear, an endless and all-encompassing fear.

Suddenly, an awkward howl echoed from the Turkic ranks. The shout from their leader Zozan, urgent and trembling, came through: "Wo Lao Gong, you treacherous, sly, and shameless man of Great Hua, I challenge you to a duel. In the name of the valiant warriors of the Ha'er Helin tribe, let the god of the plains bear witness. I wish to duel you."

"A duel?!" Lin Wanrong spat out the grass stem he had been chewing, furious. "The nerve of this guy! Does he think I'm an idiot? I never thought someone with thicker skin than mine would be born in the Turkic lands!"

Gao Qiu tightened the blood-stained rope in his hand and chuckled, "People can be shameless at times, Brother Lin, just let it go. To think that he could grow skin thicker than yours is actually quite impressive."

Old Gao was becoming more and more capable. Hu Bugui suppressed a laugh and cupped his fists, saying, "General, let me be the one to deal with him then."

Lin Wanrong chuckled dryly, "Brother Hu, my guiding principle in life is to never be at a disadvantage. Duel with this turtle in a jar? Can we really do such an unreliable thing?"

The pace of the Great Hua soldiers remained steady, gradually surrounding the Turkic warriors. The piercing cold of the grassland wind touched the hearts of everyone present.

Just as Zozan was about to speak again, he heard the opposing commander, Wo Lao Gong, laugh loudly, "You want a duel? Sure. But first, you must agree to one condition."

"What condition?" Zozan hastily asked.

"The condition is simple," Wo Lao Gong smiled faintly, revealing his chillingly white teeth. "All you have to do is put down your weapons, strip naked, run a lap around both our armies, and shout 'Grandpa Lin of Great Hua' three times. Then I'll send someone to duel with you."

Veins bulged on Zozan's cheeks as he roared in fury, "You dare to insult the invincible Turkic warriors! I'll never forgive you. Warriors, charge with me! Kill the Great Hua people!"

The Turkic men, who had been waiting anxiously and fearfully, could wait no longer in the face of imminent death. They raised their swords and charged toward the Great Hua lines.

Watching their disorganized ranks and the fear lurking in their eyes, Hu Bugui shook his head and said, "This formation is even worse than the most basic foot formations in Great Hua. It turns out that without their horses, the Turkic people are nothing."

Lin Wanrong slapped Hu Bugui on the shoulder and laughed, "There's no point in feeling sentimental. Every strength has its weakness. Just like they excel in horsemanship, they're naturally bad at infantry combat. If the day comes when the Turkic people give up horseback riding for infantry formations, they won't be Turkic anymore."

His words instantly brought laughter to both Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu.

The desperate Turkic men quickened their pace as the distance closed. They waved their swords, running at full speed, gasping for breath. Veins bulged on their foreheads, their bloodshot eyes clearly visible—reminiscent of the wolf packs that once roamed these plains.

"A wolf is still a wolf, even if its teeth have been pulled," Lin Wanrong shook his head and with a cold wave of his hand, bellowed, "Launch the arrows!"

A barrage of lethal crossbow bolts shot out, forming a dense net of arrows in front of the Turkic lines. Countless arrows penetrated their foreheads and chests. One by one, they fell, eyes open in death. The Turkic warriors, deprived of their horses, had lost their former grandeur and had become live targets for the Great Hua cavalry.

After three rounds of arrow showers, more than half of the Turkic forces had been decimated. The ground was soaked with their blood, and their charge grew sparse. Yet, even with half their number gone, the ferocity of the Turkic warriors was fully displayed. They trampled over the bodies of their fallen comrades, surging forward. Unfortunately, what awaited them were the cold, piercing arrows and gleaming swords of the Great Hua soldiers.

"Charge!" Before Lin Wanrong could even give the order, five thousand cavalry burst forth like a whirlwind, their galloping hooves shattering the tranquility of the grasslands. Blood splattered in all directions as the Great Hua cavalry swept through the remaining few hundred Turkic warriors like a storm consuming all in its path. The battlefield left no room for doubt; what unfolded had turned into an outright slaughter. The Turkic men, now deprived of their war horses, appeared as vulnerable as ants before the iron cavalry of Great Hua. All resistance was futile. With each struggle, they met the unyielding edge of a blade or the blunt force of an axe.

In the moments before their deaths, many Turkic warriors suddenly remembered. They couldn't recall when, but they had once been on the other side of such a slaughter. Back then, they were the ones astride the horses, and it was the people of Great Hua lying in pools of blood. Now the tables had turned; could this be a punishment from the god of the grassland? Even in death, they remained perplexed by this question.

Over two thousand Turkic horses hadn't managed to flee much more than ten miles. Most lay on the ground, legs weak, foaming at the mouth, never to rise again. The few that could endure could not escape a similar fate. What should have been a fierce battle ended anticlimactically. All three thousand Turkic horsemen were annihilated; they would never reach Dalanzha.

"Brother Gao, what kind of poison did you use?" Looking at the dead horses scattered across the grasslands, Hu Bugui was astonished and couldn't help but ask Gao Qiu in detail.

Old Gao thought for a moment and slowly shook his head, "I can't remember exactly. It was a mixture of laxatives, poison, aphrodisiacs, and sedatives. I used everything that could be used, all mixed together. Brother Lin was worried that it wouldn't be potent enough, so he even added a few drops of crane's red crown. Trust me, not even gods could endure it."

Adding crane's red crown made it truly potent! Old Gao shivered and couldn't help but stare at Gao Qiu for a few moments.

"What are you looking at me for?" Gao Qiu rolled his eyes, his face filled with resignation. "I've used up all the precious items I brought for this mission. Now I don't even have a speck of medicine left. For the sake of Great Hua, I have given my all."

Hu Bugui laughed heartily, raising his finger in approval. After some playful banter between the two, Gao Qiu suddenly exclaimed, "Isn't that Brother Lin? What is he doing over there?"

Following his gaze, they saw a corpse lying in the distance. It was Zozan, the cavalry leader of the Ha'er Helin tribe. Struck by several arrows, he lay dead, and standing next to him was Lin Wanrong, holding something and seemingly lost in thought.

Hu Bugui hurriedly went over and glanced at what Lin Wanrong was holding. It was a blood-stained piece of silk. Painted on it was the figure of a person, but from that distance, it was hard to see clearly.

"Brother Hu, Brother Gao, take a look at this!" Lin Wanrong smiled as he saw them approaching and handed the silk to Hu Bugui. "I found it on Zozan."

Taking it into his hands, Hu Bugui felt the silk was incredibly soft and exquisitely made. Upon closer examination, he saw that it depicted a woman. Her raven-black hair, gracefully arched brows, and profound blue eyes made for an enchanting picture. She was adorned in a gold-edged foreign skirt that accentuated her graceful figure, making her extraordinarily charming. In her hands, she held a golden curved blade. Her brows were slightly furrowed, and her eyes emitted a cold light, as if she possessed the force to dictate the fates of others.

"Hmm, this looks so familiar," Old Gao muttered to himself before his expression abruptly changed. "This, this is Yueya'er!"

Old Gao was a bit slow on the uptake. Lin Wanrong chuckled and nodded. "It should be. Old Hu, what's your take on this?"

Hu Bugui carefully examined the silk painting and the figure within it, contemplating for a long moment before nodding. "The woman in this painting should undoubtedly be Yujia. I may be a brute, but even I can see that this portrait is exquisitely done. In the Turkic Khanate, strength is everything. Whoever has the luxury of possessing such a splendid portrait must be someone of considerable wealth and standing."

"Wealth and standing?" Lin Wanrong squinted his eyes, pondering for a while before laughing. "Go on, Brother Hu."

Hu Bugui slightly nodded. "One more thing, the silk used for this canvas is golden in hue, top-grade even in our empire, let alone in the Turkic Khanate where commoners couldn't afford it. Adding to that this finely drawn portrait, I boldly speculate that this silk painting likely comes from the Turkic royal court."

Gao Qiu voiced his confusion. "If it's from the Turkic royal court, how did it end up in Zozan's possession? Could Zuo be Yueya'er's old flame?"

Old Gao sure dared to make wild guesses! Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. "Whether he's Yueya'er's old flame, I can't say. But what I am certain of is that Yueya'er definitely comes from the Turkic royal court and holds a prestigious status. Soranki recognized this golden blade and was willing to risk the lives of three thousand of his kinsmen for Yujia's release. Add to that Zozan possessing this exquisite portrait of Yueya'er; it's not a coincidence. It rather illustrates one point—"

"What point?" Hu Bugui urged.

Lin Wanrong flashed a subtle smile. "It means that the Turkic people are going all out to find Yueya'er. Her portrait has undoubtedly been distributed to various tribes; that's why Zozan was willing to fight to the death. And Yujia's true identity will likely far exceed our expectations—perhaps she might even be a princess or something."

Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui exchanged glances, elation welling up within them. If Yueya'er was indeed a Turkic princess, then without a doubt, they would risk their lives to have Brother Lin become her consort.

After speculating for a while and considering Yueya'er's appearance, talent, and poise, they all began to think she must be a princess. Gao Qiu grinned lecherously, "Brother Lin, why not take advantage of tonight's darkness to seal the deal? Better you than some Turk. As long as you're not marrying into the Turkic family, I, Old Gao, will even present you my last bit of personal treasure. She'll have no choice but to lie down, whether she's a princess or a fairy."

"That might not be so good," Lin Wanrong said with a sheepish smile. "Though I'm good at undressing women, I'm not one to take advantage. Using drugs would be too despicable. Why not just—use force?"

Old Gao and Hu Bugui looked at each other, initially stunned, but then they burst into laughter. The three men chatted and joked, thoroughly enjoying themselves.

After cleaning up the battlefield, the army moved overnight. They traveled tens of miles before finding a place to set up camp. Throughout this process, Yujia was exceptionally quiet. She neither yelled nor struggled; her eyes were as calm as still water, leaving everyone clueless about what she was thinking.

When Lin Wanrong entered the tent, it was already well past midnight. Yujia lay on the cold grass, her slender figure curled up in a corner. Dewdrops adorned her eyelashes, making her appear tranquil in her deep sleep. The Turkic girl looked serene and peaceful in her dreams, far removed from her usual mischievous and obstinate demeanor. She was truly adorable.

Lin Wanrong gazed at her for a long time, silently shaking his head. He bent down to gently lift Yujia and place her on the folding bed next to him. His movements were smooth and gentle. But just as he had settled her, her eyes snapped open, flashing coldly as she glared at him.

Lin Wanrong jumped back with a start. "What are you doing? Can you even open your eyes in your sleep?"

"That's the question I should be asking you," Yujia retorted with a snort. "In the dead of night, why did you lift me onto your bed?"

"You're mistaken; this is no longer my bed," Lin Wanrong said with a grin. "You 'contaminated' it last night. Who else would dare sleep on it?"

Yujia's beautiful face flushed slightly. "Contaminated? You're talking nonsense. I wouldn't sleep in your foul nest."

"As you wish," Lin Wanrong stood up, chuckling as he stretched lazily. "I'm going to step out to relieve myself and take a bath. Then I'll practice swordsmanship with Old Gao, and work on my Turkic with Hu Bugui. I won't be back tonight. You sleep first."

"What a shameless bandit!" Yujia gritted her teeth, having built up some resistance to Lin Wanrong's audacity. Seeing him about to step out, she hurriedly said, "Wait, wait a moment!"

Lin Wanrong turned to look at her, and Yujia's face turned even redder. She lowered her head and softly said, "Don't go. I'm scared! If you want to learn Turkic, I can teach you."

Lin Wanrong couldn't help but laugh. "Interesting. Is there something more terrifying in this world than me?" He chuckled again and sat down beside her bed. "What are you afraid of?"

Yujia's beautiful eyes fluttered as she spoke softly, "I'm afraid of wolves."

Lin Wanrong rolled his eyes. "What a letdown! Do I not even measure up to a wolf in your eyes?"

As if reading his thoughts, Yujia giggled, a coquettish expression crossing her face. "Lord Wo Lao Gong, I've heard that you're one of the smartest men in Great Hua?"

Lin Wanrong gave her a playful glance, "If you remove the two words 'one of', I'd happily agree with you."

"Boastful," Yujia said, her smile blooming like a beautiful flower. Lin Wanrong found himself unable to look away.

The bright moonlight streamed through the tent's window, casting a radiant glow on Yujia's face. She gazed dreamily at the clear night sky and murmured, "Since you claim to be the smartest man in Great Hua, can you tell me how many sparkling stars are in this vast sky?"

Lin Wanrong looked at her and grinned, "Counting stars is a rather boring affair. But if you insist on knowing, just consider your strands of hair. The number of stars in this sky is as numerous as your tresses."

"My hair strands?" Yueya'er blinked in surprise, her eyes lighting up. "I've never counted my hair strands. Wo Lao Gong, can you tell me how many I have?"

"It depends on the lines in your palm," Wo Lao Gong said, taking her small hand and gently holding it up to her face. Yueya'er looked puzzled. "Palm lines? How do you read them?"

Bandit Leader, as he was known, softly chuckled, leading her eyes to her hand. "You see, each curved, fine line on your palm represents a strand of your hair. It's also a line in the story of your life. Understanding the lines on your palm is like understanding the number of strands on your head, and every joy and sorrow you've experienced. So, let's start counting: one, two, three..."

Yujia scrutinized her palm and found that, just as the Bandit Leader had said, her white palm was filled with countless intricate lines, each barely discernible yet undeniably real.

"Do these lines really foretell my life?" Looking at Bandit Leader gripping her hand, Yujia felt emotionally flustered, her palm beginning to sweat.

"Have you counted them?" The Turkic girl slightly struggled, pulling her hand away a little, and softly asked, "Can you tell me how many lines are in my palm, and how many ups and downs will I have in my life?"

Lin Wanrong looked at her and laughed, shaking his head. "The number of lines on your palm, the joys and sorrows of your life, perhaps they are as numerous as your whims. Little sister, it's better to remain pure."

"You're the impure one!" Yueya'er shot him an annoyed glance. Although she seemed angry on the surface, there was an indescribable charm that was subtly present.

How exasperating! Lin Wanrong shook his head in resignation, sighing inwardly.

"Bandit Leader, how do you know so much?" Yujia's voice was barely a whisper, her cheeks flushed like a light brush of rouge. Her delicate hand, now trembling slightly, reached out to grip Lin Wanrong's hand. "Why aren't you one of us Turkic people?"

The Turkic girl's body was sinuous, outlining the most alluring curves. Her beautiful cheeks were flushed like the setting sun, her eyes as moist as spring water, and her red lips slightly parted, exuding a soft fragrance. Her tender fingers, slightly damp with perspiration, gripped Lin Wanrong's hand tightly. The sensual feeling was almost too much for any man to bear.

"If I were a Turkic, would you take me as your husband?" The Bandit Leader stared at her enticing figure, swallowing hard and jokingly remarked.

A glint of curiosity flashed in Yujia's eyes. Her cheeks slightly flushed, she lowered her head without uttering a word, her silence speaking volumes.

"You look beautiful!" The Bandit Leader chuckled, gently patting her tender face, his eyes clear as water. "But I must say—Miss Yujia, you're a really bad actor."

Chapter 553 Teaching You How to Act

"What do you mean, 'Actor'?" The Turkic girl glanced at him, her expression a mix of shyness and confusion. "I don't understand what you're saying!"

Lin Wanrong shook his head at a leisurely pace, a small smile gracing his lips. "A good actor needs to not only distinguish between different scenes and moments but also control their gaze. When you are expressing your love for someone, your eyes must be filled with deep emotion and passion. Understand this: every time you look away, it signifies a momentary distraction, which could be fatal to your performance. Look at me—"

Yujia couldn't help but lift her head. Before her, Lin Wanrong's face was adorned with a subtle smile, his eyes locked onto her own. His eyes were as clear as water, the dark pupils reflecting a

beautiful image. His demeanor was as natural as a breeze brushing against one's cheek, filled with love and focus.

"What—what are you doing?!" Yujia panicked; the thumping of her heart was unmistakable.

"I am teaching you how to act!" Lin Wanrong stared at her beautiful face, his expression serious. "When you're facing someone you love, your emotions may cause your heart to race or your voice to quiver, but your eyes must remain steadfast and passionate, conveying the depth of your feelings. Like how I am looking at you now—"

Moonlight, quiet as water, spilled gently through the window, the plains outside so still you could hear the grass breathing. Lin Wanrong gazed at her, his voice as soothing as a hypnotic incantation.

Their cheeks were inches apart, eyes meeting as if their breaths were mingling. Locked onto his deeply emotive eyes, Yujia found her breath hitching, her chest heaving with tension. She quickly turned her head away, her cheeks flushed with anger. "You despicable bandit! Don't cast your spells on me! I will not yield!"

"Spells?" Lin Wanrong shook his head. "Miss Yujia, you give me too much credit. It's you who've been casting spells on me all along, so much that I've lost count!"

"I did no such thing!" Yujia hummed softly, her voice feeble.

Lin Wanrong gave a simple "oh," his eyes gleaming as he smiled at her. Yujia felt unnerved under his gaze; her cheeks turned even redder. She hurriedly looked away and scolded softly, "What are you staring at? You despicable bandit!"

'It seems I can't shake off the title of 'bandit,' Lin Wanrong said with a wry smile, gently patting Yujia's head. "The age-old saying still holds, young lady—innocence is a virtue."

"Whether I'm innocent or not is none of your business!" The Turkic girl retorted with cold sarcasm. "You keep talking about acting—well, you're the real actor here! Your entire life is a performance! Bah, you despicable bandit, loathsome scoundrel!"

Watching Yujia's righteous indignation and profuse cursing, Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. "Miss Yujia, I didn't expect you to see through my nature so quickly! You're right; my life has been nothing but a play. Unfortunately, you'll never understand."

He sighed, his smile tinged with a hint of loneliness.

"You're so full of yourself!" Looking at Lin Wanrong's expression, Yujia found it incredibly irritating. She lowered her head and muttered her complaint.

The tent fell into a momentary silence, neither of them uttering a word. The silver moonlight streamed into the felt chamber, casting a cool, ethereal glow.

Yujia had no desire to engage him further. But with only the two of them inside the tent, and him sitting so close, she couldn't possibly fall asleep. Casting a slight glance his way, she noticed that the bandit had already sat down. Somehow, he had produced an envelope, and was smiling as he stared at the letter inside, lost in thought. Moonlight spilled onto the paper, revealing a series of exquisitely drawn women, captured in various postures—some in motion, some still, some smiling, some frowning. The bandit caressed the letter lovingly, his eyes gleaming greedily, and saliva trailing down from his mouth.

The Turkic young woman let out a disdainful "tch" and exclaimed, "You really are despicable. I wonder whose portraits of women you've stolen to entertain yourself like this!"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Well, you're nosy. What's wrong with admiring a portrait of my wife?" He stashed the letter into his robe, and then casually produced a blood-stained piece of silk, slowly unfolding it before Yujia's eyes. ¶

Yujia stared, then her face turned pale. "This...this is my portrait. Where did you get this?"

Lin Wanrong winked and started to pack up the silk, "Where it came from is not your concern. I'm merely passing along a message—Miss Yujia, your people miss you. They're wondering when you'll return to the Turkic court."

Yujia clenched her fists, taking a few deep breaths to calm herself, "Don't think you'll get anything from me, you despicable Great Hua bandit. I will never submit to a wolf like you!"

Lin Wanrong nonchalantly waved his hand, "No need to answer. I can guess, can't I? Coming from the royal court, educated, and beautiful, and even having artists draw your portrait—you must be someone important. A princess or something of the sort, am I right?"

Her eyes calm as still water, a sarcastic smile crept onto Yujia's lips, "Aren't you the cleverest man in all of the Great Hua Empire? If you can even count the lines on your palm, why ask me?"

Lin Wanrong had already experienced Yujia's resolve and tenacity. Seeing her unfazed demeanor and hearing her flawless speech, he wasn't surprised. Nodding, he smiled, "No rush, we have all the time in the world. We can play the long game—maybe even forever." He handed the silk back to her, "Here, this is yours."

"Give it back to me?" Yujia was taken aback, staring at him incredulously, "Are you really giving it back? Are you actually being kind?"

"What else could I do?" Lin Wanrong sighed, "If I keep it, you'll think I have ulterior motives. Better to give it back to you, then I can be at ease."

Her pretty face flushed, Yujia lowered her head and tightly gripped the silk in her hand.

Lin Wanrong shook his head, patting her gently, "It's getting late. I have things to attend to. You should get some sleep. Remember to count the lines on your palm, see how much sorrow and happiness you've had. That's all one can expect in a lifetime—hey, why are you staring at me like that?"

Yujia's lips moved hesitantly a few times before she finally let out a hum. Softly, she said, "I wonder if you're just putting on a show. Is that palm reading really that effective?"

"Do not doubt! Less skepticism, more sincerity," Lin Wanrong replied calmly, "From a human perspective, aside from ethnic differences, there's no fundamental difference between you and me."

Yujia pondered over his words for a while, feeling they held deep meanings. Even with her intelligence, she couldn't grasp them immediately. As she watched him stride towards the tent's exit, she hesitated for a moment and then softly called out, "Wo Lao Gong—"

"Hmm?" The bandit turned around with a smile, "I love hearing you call my name, Little sister Yueya'er. What do you want?"

This man's mood changed faster than flipping a page! Yueya'er gritted her teeth and said seriously, "If you truly wish to learn the Turkic language, I'm willing to teach you. And I guarantee my pronunciation is a hundred times better than your subordinates."

"Thank you!" Lin Wanrong waved without looking back, "You know, I'm an actor. Don't take my words too seriously. I have no interest in the Turkic language or Turkic women."

There was a soft "snap" behind him, echoing distinctly in the quiet night, startling Lin Wanrong. He turned around to see Yueya'er's portrait lying on the ground behind him. Yujia, lying on the bed, had cold, steely eyes.

With her hands tied together, how could she have thrown the portrait so far? Lin Wanrong stared in disbelief. Yujia glared at him angrily, her eyes unblinking. Her long eyelashes, under the cold moonlight, resembled the misty rain of March.

'It's an act! It must be an act!' Lin Wanrong thought, feeling a chill in his heart, and quickly stepped out of the tent.

His steps were swift, and as he lifted the curtain, he felt as if he had bumped into two mountains. Before he could dodge, he crashed into them. "Ouch!" Two strong figures fell heavily to the ground, groaning in pain.

"Brother Gao, Brother Hu, what are you two doing here?" Lin Wanrong said, looking at the two men on the ground, both amused and annoyed.

Gao Qiu rubbed his buttocks as he stood up, chuckling, "Nothing, nothing. The night was so beautiful, I couldn't sleep. So, I invited Hu Bugui out for a chat. Right, Old Hu?"

He sneakily pinched Old Hu a few times. Hu Bugui's face turned red as he wiped the sweat from his forehead, "Yes, yes, just chatting."

"Oh, so you chose to chat in front of my tent in the middle of the night," Lin Wanrong said with a sarcastic smile, "You both are in such high spirits."

What kind of person is Brother Lin? He's as cunning as a fox! Gao Qiu knew he couldn't deceive him and quickly said, "Actually, chatting was secondary. We mainly wanted to hear how Brother Lin showcased his prowess and conquered Yueya'er."

"Yes, yes, Old Gao is right. We came to eavesdrop," the honest Old Hu hastily added.

"Oh, eavesdropping, I see," Lin Wanrong grinned, "So, what did you two hear?"

Gao Qiu laughed lewdly, "It was even more intense than we imagined. Brother Lin, you were truly impressive. Your tactics were brilliant. She took the bait completely unaware! Truly, it's all about emotions, with a touch of force. Admirable, truly admirable!"

"What's all this talk about taking the bait?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "What kind of person do you take me for? Brother Gao, one must remain pure!"

Gao Qiu nodded solemnly, his expression utterly serious. "Pure enough to tame a wild horse? In the past, I would never have believed it! But after hearing your plan today, I finally get it. Whenever you, Brother Lin, take action, the pure can turn salacious, and the salacious can turn pure! Your theatrical brilliance today is absolutely awe-inspiring. Your skill is as subtle as it is profound—leaving no traces, yet effective in every way. Yueya'er has no idea she's trapped in her own play. Indeed, he who seeks to control others is controlled in turn. It's both laughable and lamentable! Only you, Brother Lin, move freely and effortlessly. It seems like there's no trickery, but in fact, every move is calculated. How can I sum this up but to say it's brilliant!"

"All this talk about trickery—Brother Gao, you're making me dizzy!" Lin Wanrong laughed. "You're overthinking it. I'm not that cunning! I just return what others try to do to me—that's all, nothing intentional."

After both men shared a laugh, Hu Bugui finally spoke. "General, the scouts we sent to Ha'er Helin and Ejina have just sent back information. They have located both tribes! As we expected, these tribes still maintain a significant military force—over four thousand strong men!"

Lin Wanrong nodded and said, "They are probably waiting for news from Zozan and Soranki. They won't make any moves for the time being."

Gao Qiu frowned. "This is problematic. If they remain holed up, with over four thousand men guarding Ejina, we might suffer significant losses trying to pass through to Yiwu. The risk may outweigh the reward."

Hu Bugui nodded in agreement. Lin Wanrong smiled and said, "Brother Gao, no need to worry. The greatest advantage of waging war to support war is that we have no burdens. We can attack or retreat as we wish. No one knows where we'll strike next. The initiative is entirely in our hands! On the other hand, the tribesmen must defend their territory, leaving them on the defensive. That's not

their style! With some tactics, taking Ejina won't be a problem. To be honest, what I'm most worried about isn't on the grasslands—"

"Not on the grasslands?" Hu Bugui exclaimed. "General, are you referring to Advisor Xu?"

Lin Wanrong nodded and sighed. "Going deep into the grasslands is thrilling, but it also severs our contact with the outside world. How are things at the Helan Mountains? How is Miss Xu? Has she received the message I sent her? All of this is an unknown, and that's our greatest pain."

Chapter 554 The Golden Blade

Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui felt their spirits grow heavy as they listened. Helan Mountain was the emotional anchor for the five thousand soldiers—it held their hopes and dreams. Should Helan Mountain fall, these five thousand men deep in the grasslands would be like drifting duckweed, left with nothing to cling to.

Old Gao hummed in agreement. "Miss Xu is intelligent and wise; she must have received your message by now. Perhaps she is already finding a way to establish contact with us. Put your mind at ease, Brother Lin."

The crackling bonfire burned intensely, casting its dim light on their faces. Lin Wanrong shook his head. "What do I have to worry about? From the moment I set foot on these grasslands, life and death ceased to be my concerns. Traveling with both of you in this vast land and accomplishing something magnificent—should I die, I die a hero. What regret could there be?"

"Well said!" Hu Bugui clapped and laughed heartily, full of spirit. "Why envy a fur coat worth a thousand gold? A man should carry a Wu Hook! Standing tall in this mortal world, able to touch the earth and reach the sky, driving away nomads, and protecting our homeland—what's there to fear in living grandly or dying gloriously?"

Gao Qiu looked Hu Bugui up and down, grinning broadly. "Old Hu, I've known you for some time, and this is the manliest thing I've heard you say! You both rest easy—whether it's a mountain of blades or a sea of arrows, if Old Gao so much as furrows his brow, consider me a coward."

The three men looked at each other and burst into laughter. Their six hands reached out, clasping tightly together. The firelight illuminated their dark, resolute faces.

After three consecutive victories, five thousand soldiers penetrated deep into the grasslands, launching a surprise attack on Bayanhot and wiping out three thousand cavalymen from Ha'er Helin and Ejina. In just a few days, they killed over ten thousand enemies, all of whom were robust Turkic men. It was indeed a grand victory, psychologically shaking the enemy as well. It was hard to believe that any Turkic people would underestimate this daring team from Great Hua any longer.

The army rested on the spot for half a day, replenishing supplies while also awaiting the enemy's reaction. Of course, deep within Lin Wanrong's soul, there lingered a nearly naive hope. He wished that Xu Zhiqing, upon hearing the news, would find a way to contact him. At the very least, before entering Yiwu and embarking on this journey of life and death, he needed to know the situation at Helan Mountain. This was not just his own wish but also the collective yearning of the five thousand soldiers.

As expected, the Ha'er Helin and Ejina tribes became anxious and unsettled after losing three thousand cavalry. According to reports from the scouts, there were indications of troop movements within the tribes. However, after tasting defeat, they had become much more cautious, no longer daring to send out small cavalry units. The situation gradually reached a stalemate.

If they couldn't capture Ejina, they couldn't proceed to Yiwu, let alone raid the Turkic royal court of Kyzil. Were these five thousand brothers to wander the grasslands forever? Under these circumstances, both Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu grew increasingly anxious. Lin Wanrong, on the other hand, maintained a casual demeanor, joking and laughing with the men, showing no signs of stress. It was as if he was truly ready to settle in the grasslands, to be an outlaw for life. This attitude puzzled Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui but delighted the soldiers. They vied to talk to him, and the atmosphere as they marched was light. Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu could only sigh, still unclear as to what Lin Wanrong was really thinking.

"Sweet as honey, your smile is sweet as honey, like a flower blooming in the spring breeze, ah, blooming in the spring breeze—" A bandit lay on the cart shaft, hands behind his head as a cushion, a blade of unknown grass dangling from his mouth. He swayed from side to side, humming a little tune contentedly.

The thin cart curtain swayed gently, revealing the petite face of Yujia. She sat cross-legged, just a few feet away from Lin Wanrong. Her eyes slightly closed, she remained silent. Since the "performance" last night, she had not spoken to Lin Wanrong, not even giving him a proper look. Even when treating Li Wuling earlier, she had been as silent as iron, not uttering a word. These two sat in the same cart— one humming a tune, the other in stillness. The harmony between the dynamic and the quiet was quite extraordinary.

"Shoot, shoot quickly, hurry up and shoot!" A frantic and enthusiastic clamor carried over, accompanied by the hurried sound of hooves. Lin Wanrong looked up and saw Hu Bugui and Gao Qiu, bows and arrows in hand, galloping on horses. They were gleefully chasing a small white

figure darting across the grassland, seemingly engaged in an archery contest. The soldiers around them were cheering them on.

"Huh, such a small white horse?" Lin Wanrong squinted and observed for a while before saying in amazement.

Yujia slowly opened her eyes, glanced distantly, and then said, unable to bear it any longer, "If you keep quiet, no one would notice your ignorance. Have you ever seen such a small horse? That's clearly a jade rabbit, you fool!"

Lin Wanrong let out a long 'oh,' and chuckled, "So it's a little white rabbit. My apologies, it's been so long since I've hunted rabbits that I mistook it for something else. Thank you, Miss Yujia, for the correction."

Seeing Lin Wanrong's playful expression, the young Turkic girl suddenly felt tricked. This man was full of schemes, deliberately coaxing her into speaking. How did she not see through him?

"You don't have to thank me," Yujia glanced at him helplessly and said, "I just hope that next time you sing your off-key tunes, you'll be farther away from me so I can't hear you. That would be a blessing from the god of the grasslands for Yujia."

She shook her head in irritation, her eyes deep and her expression ambivalent, a mix of smile and seriousness.

"Miss Yujia, you flatter me again," Lin Wanrong unabashedly said, "I was actually preparing to sing a song in the Turkic language. But when it came to it, I forgot those Turkic lines. I'm truly sorry!"

Speaking of learning the Turkic language brought memories of last night. Yujia lightly clenched her teeth and said, "Weren't you not interested in the Turkic script and Turkic women? Why are you singing Turkic songs now?"

"Ah, while it's true I have no interest in Turkic women, I can't stop Turkic women from taking an interest in me," Lin Wanrong spoke with an air of melancholy, "It can't be helped, being charming comes with its downsides. By the way, Miss Yujia, what do Turkic young ladies usually say to express their feelings to someone they love?"

"What are you asking this for?! You're not allowed to bring harm to Turkic women!" The young girl looked at him warily, her expression grave.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Miss Yujia, you're being too harsh. Who's harming whom is still up for debate! Actually, I just wanted to discuss something scholarly with you—I've heard that the most sincere way for Turkic women to express their feelings is by giving something they depend on for their life to the man they love, as a sign of unwavering loyalty. Is that true?"

The bandit's eyes twinkled as he stared intently at Yujia. Yueya'er, visibly indignant, haughtily lifted her beautiful face. "So what if it is? I'm not afraid to tell you that we Turkic women have been cherishing a life-dependent treasure since childhood. When we come of age, we give it to the man we love. Once given, whether he's rich or poor, healthy or sick, we have no regrets for life! We Turkic women are passionate; we love boldly and hate decisively, unlike those timid, coquettish daughters of wealthy families in your Great Hua. They play coy while pretending to be reserved. Hypocrites!"

The young Turkic woman spat out the word, her face full of disdain, clearly having little regard for the daughters of wealthy families in Great Hua.

Lin Wanrong shook his head and laughed, "Miss Yujia, you're being too absolute! Being straightforward has its own charm, but so does being shy. Just as different flowers have different blooms, people have different tastes and preferences. You can't understand since you're not a man!"

Yueya'er looked at him, her red lips tightly held, and scoffed coldly, "What a sophist you are!"

"Let's say I am," Lin Wanrong said nonchalantly, waving his hand. "If Turkic women do have a treasure more important than life itself, I'm curious, given Miss Yujia's noble background, what sort of treasure have you chosen?"

He sighed lightly, pulling a golden blade from his boot. The scabbard shone brightly in pure gold, and the sharp blade emanated a chilling glow. With a casual flick, several strands of hair were cleanly cut, falling silently to the ground.

Yujia stared, dumbfounded, her face changing abruptly. She lunged at him, struggling to free her hands and feet, "Give it back to me, you wretched bandit!"

Tears formed in Yueya'er's lightly blue eyes as she bit her red lip and pounced at him like an enraged young leopardess. But her hands and feet were bound; she struggled twice, breathless, and only realized her error when she had fully thrown herself into his arms. Trying to pull away, she found she no longer had the strength.

"What...what are you going to do?" Leaning weakly against the bandit and sensing his scent, the young Turkic woman's heart raced, her face flushed as she cried out in horror.

"That's what I should be asking," Lin Wanrong adjusted her posture, looking at her amusedly.

Their faces were close, eyes meeting, as if they had returned to last night's dramatic scene. Yujia's face turned a slight shade of red, and she lowered her voice, "Give me back my golden blade, or else, I won't let you go!"

"Such a formidable threat, huh?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Fear not, Miss Yujia. This golden blade may be more valuable than life in your eyes, but to me, it's just a heap of scrap metal. Even if you offered it, I wouldn't want it."

"You accursed bandit, give it back to me, now!" Yujia's pretty face flushed red as she yelled, her voice tinged with fury. She lunged at him.

Watching her body struggle continuously, beads of perspiration forming at the tip of her nose, Lin Wanrong casually waved his hand. "It's merely a piece of junk to me, useless. Don't worry, I'll return it to you. However, Miss Yujia, your desperation for this blade has reminded me of something."

"W—what is it?" The young Turki woman, caught in her struggle, abruptly looked up. Her eyes flashed a momentary but unmistakable shock.

Lin Wanrong gently blew on the blade and smiled. "This golden blade is lavish and seems to hold great sentimental value. No doubt, it is a token of affection you intend to give to your lover. But, to simply consider it as such would be to underestimate you, Miss Yujia."

Yujia looked up at him. Her pale blue eyes shimmered with a faint light, constantly shifting. Finally, she ceased her struggles and offered him a radiant smile. Her beautiful cheeks blossomed like a hundred flowers in the chill of winter, utterly enchanting.

"A beautiful golden blade—what else could it mean?" Her voice was soft and melodious, like a stream of pearls tumbling down. Her eyes sparkled as they appraised him, her cheeks as translucent as jade. A few strands of hair brushed against her forehead, lending her an air of nobility and grace. Her mouth curved into an alluring smile, her red lips slightly parted, tempting as a ripe cherry.

Moments ago, she had seemed like a young girl in the throes of her first love. Now she appeared to be a mature and seductive woman. This dramatic change left Lin Wanrong utterly speechless.

"This blade may well signify your true identity," he said, finding it hard to keep up with the chameleon-like Yujia, a far cry from the demure Yueya'er he'd met earlier. Overwhelmed, he quickly looked away.

"Really?" Yujia smiled, her eyes as gentle as water, her red lips impossibly vivid. "Well then, why don't we make a bet? If you can guess my true identity, I'll gift this golden blade to you. Remember—" She chuckled lightly, her eyes softening. "—it's a gift from me, not something you took. Are you willing?"

"Ah, I just remembered—I need to practice my marksmanship. Excuse me, excuse me!" Lin Wanrong broke into a sweat, abruptly standing up. His head collided with the carriage beam, causing a dull thud and a slight rocking of the carriage.

Watching his awkward retreat, Yujia's giggles echoed for quite a distance, crystal clear. "A cowardly bandit you are! Who's the bad actor now? Do you understand?"

Chapter 555 The Potent Elixir

Lin Wanrong jumped down from the carriage, his forehead drenched in sweat. His entire body was soaked through. There's truth to the saying that appearances can be deceiving. This girl's cunning and shrewdness were unparalleled. Not only among the Turkic people but even within the entire realm of Great Hua, there were only a few who could match her wits—especially considering she was still but a young Turkic maiden. If allowed to grow, who could be her equal in time?

Thinking about last night, her face a complex mix of anger, humiliation, and hesitance, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but shake his head and sigh. 'Spending all my time hunting geese, only for the goslings to blind me. Turns out she was toying with me all along last night.'

He had to admit that when it came to acting, she far outshone him, validating the old saying that women are naturally good actors.

He now had a feeling of respectful fear toward her. Neither could he kill her nor touch her; she was truly a hot potato. He could only hope that Li Wuling would wake up soon, freeing him from this young maiden's threats and allowing him to live in peace.

The golden blade she'd given him was still in his hands, and he examined it carefully. The curved blade glinted in the light, its scabbard inlaid with incredibly beautiful pearls. At the center of the blade was a dark green agate stone, sparkling brilliantly.

'Such a beautiful blade, too beautiful to be used for killing,' he sighed as he caressed it. It undoubtedly represented her identity. Yet, she was as pure as a blank page at times and cunning like a fox at others. Trying to get her to reveal anything? Not a chance!

"Brother Hu!" Lin Wanrong pondered for a moment before vigorously waving his hand at Hu Bugui, who was triumphantly returning in the distance.

Old Hu held a plump wild rabbit, boasting to everyone as he rode on his horse. The rabbit had been shot through the head with an arrow—a clean and ruthless shot. Gao Qiu was puffing his beard and glaring beside him, clearly disgruntled.

Walking over, Hu Bugui tossed the juicy wild rabbit onto the ground, laughing, "It's not easy to find such a large rabbit in early spring, and even harder to hit it! Tonight, I can prepare a feast for the General!"

Gao Qiu who was following him retorted, "What do you mean it's hard to hit? If it weren't for you, Old Hu, blocking my view while on your horse, tonight it would've been me offering a feast to Brother Lin!"

"Thank you both for your kindness," Lin Wanrong replied warmly, shaking his head. "Such fine game should be reserved for our injured comrades. They need nourishment more than I do. Brother Hu, there's an important task I need you to handle."

"Please give your orders, General!" Seeing Lin Wanrong's serious expression, Hu Bugui immediately responded with a salute.

Lin Wanrong nodded and slowly handed over the exquisite blade to Hu Bugui, "Brother Hu, take this."

"Huh? Isn't this Yueya'er's knife?" Gao Qiu exclaimed in surprise from the side.

The blade appeared delicate and gorgeous, but it was surprisingly heavy. Hu Bugui carefully held it and looked at Lin Wanrong, puzzled, "General, what task do you wish for me to perform? Is it related to this golden blade?"

Lin Wanrong smiled, his eyes falling on the blade in his hand. "This golden blade is closely related to our situation. Brothers, you've likely guessed that Yujia holds an unusually important position in the Turkic Khanate. However, just how important, none of us really know."

The identity of Yujia had always been the most perplexing issue for the three of them. Hearing Lin Wanrong mention it again, the two men held their breaths, attentively awaiting what he had to say next.

"From my interactions with Yujia, I have a feeling she may be the most intelligent and wise woman in the Turkic Khanate. As the old saying goes, 'If you walk with the tiger and don't lie down, you'll end up being eaten.' To say she is a fierce tigress would not be an exaggeration. To be honest, I don't have much confidence in dealing with her." Lin Wanrong chuckled, his thoughts drifting to Yujia's eyes—sometimes pure, sometimes seductive, and always captivating. He shook his head in exasperation.

The two older men exchanged surprised glances. If Lin Wanrong, a general who had seen it all, couldn't handle a young Turkic woman as innocent and beautiful as Yujia, then who could? Old Gao blinked and sincerely offered, "Brother Lin, I have some special elixirs in my private collection. Would you like to borrow some?"

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. "Thank you for the kind offer, Old Gao. However, Yujia herself is an excellent physician. Her skill with medicines probably surpasses both of ours. We wouldn't want her to turn the tables on us by reversing the effects of some aphrodisiac, would we?"

Old Gao shuddered at the thought. "You're absolutely right, Brother Lin. Since Yueya'er was captured, has she ever shown a hint of fear? If it were so easy to drug her, she wouldn't be Yujia. We better not get counterattacked by her."

Hu Bugui nodded, his face filled with concern. "What the general says is correct. Turkic women are of strong character. If we force her into submission, she will fight to the death. At this stage, Little Li's life still depends on her medical skills. If she dies, neither of us will benefit. It's simply not worth it." RÁNOBEŠ

Old Gao sighed heavily and spoke in resignation, "So what can't we do, and what can we do? How should we deal with her then? Should we just let her push us around, Brother Lin?"

Lin Wanrong rolled his eyes. 'What are you talking about? The only person who can bully me hasn't been born yet.'

"Thanks for your concern, Old Gao," Lin Wanrong chuckled a few times. "Actually, dealing with Yujia is quite simple. It's all a matter of cunning schemes and an eye for an eye. As they say, 'If a ruffian knows martial arts, no one can stand against him.' I humbly say, when it comes to cunning schemes, I'm an absolute master. She thinks she has something on me, but little does she know, I've already found her weakness. Heh heh!"

Seeing Lin Wanrong's signature roguish grin, Old Gao and Hu Bugui shivered in unison. As the saying went, 'If Brother Lin knows martial arts, even the ruffians can't stand against him!' Poor Yujia, she was in for some bad luck. Old Gao suddenly became enthusiastic. "Brother Lin, what's her weakness?!"

Lin Wanrong turned his back and walked a few steps away, speaking in a measured tone, "I believe both of you are as curious as I am about Yujia's status in the Turkic territories. Now we have a golden opportunity to see just how influential this mysterious 'Yueya'er' really is among the nomads. Brother Hu, you still have that Turkic warrior, Heliye, in your custody, don't you?"

Hu Bugui grinned, "As for the Yueya'er tribe, he is the only one alive now. We've had Heliye captive for a few days without food or water, yet his strength remains undiminished. Truly, he's a brave and robust man. I believe he deserves the title of 'The bravest warrior of the steppe.'"

"The bravest warrior of the steppe? Fascinating!" Lin Wanrong clapped his hands, laughing. "Such a warrior should not go to waste. Why not let him escape when no one is looking?"

"Let him escape?!" Hu Bugui was immediately alarmed. "General, how can that be? Heliye is not like any ordinary Turkic man. He has immense strength and can take on a hundred men single-handedly. Releasing him would be like letting a tiger back into the mountains! Who knows how many of our men will meet their end at his hands in the future?"

Lin Wanrong patted his shoulder and grinned slyly, "Don't worry, Brother Hu. Escaping is one thing, but where he can escape to is another matter entirely. As for you, Brother Gao, could you contribute some more of the precious medicines you have?"

"I'm out! I'm out! I've used them all!" Gao Qiu clutched his chest, yelling in a frantic manner.

Lin Wanrong eyed him from head to toe, "Really? That's too bad. I had planned to use this opportunity to conquer one or two nomadic tribes, march into Yiwu, and head straight for the Turkic royal court—what a shame, truly a shame."

Old Gao reluctantly pulled out a few small packets of paper from his bosom and said with a gloomy face, "Brother Lin, I don't have much left, so use it sparingly. I'll need it to interact with the heroines after the war!"

Old Gao really never forgets that matter, does he? Lin Wanrong waved his hand and chuckled, "Don't worry, Brother Gao. We won't need much. We only need Heliye to drop dead on the outskirts of the Ejina or Ha'er Helin tribes!"

With only one person to poison, Gao Qiu suddenly felt less panicked, "Brother Lin, if you just want to kill this Heliye, why not do it with one stroke of the sword? Why waste my medicine?"

Lin Wanrong gritted his teeth and hummed, "If it was just about killing him, would I go through all this trouble? I want the fleeing Heliye to deliver a letter for me!"

"Have Heliye deliver a letter?" Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui were both stunned. The idea sounded like a fanciful tale. Heliye was one of the strongest warriors on the steppes; how could he ever become a messenger for them?

Lin Wanrong gave a subtle smile, offering no explanation. "Brother Gao, can you ensure that Heliye drops dead without any of the nomads seeing his face?"

"Of course," Gao puffed his chest and nodded repeatedly. "This is how I make my living!"

"Good," Lin Wanrong nodded, a glint of ruthlessness flashing in his eyes. "Brother Hu, when Heliye makes his escape, chase him down and shoot a few arrows into him. The more grievously he's injured, the better. When the time is right, and Heliye is at his last breath—" He paused, smiling subtly, and pointing to the blade in Hu Bugui's hand, "—then place this golden blade into his hands."

"What?!" Both Hu Bugui and his companion yelled, their eyes almost popping out of their sockets. "Leave it to him? How could that possibly work?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "What's there to worry about if we're leaving it to a dead Heliye? Furthermore, Brother Gao, you must write a blood letter in Heliye's name. Make the handwriting rough and scribbled, and the strokes blurry. Anyone who sees it should instantly realize it was written by Heliye on his deathbed."

The blood letter would naturally be in the Turkic language. Old Hu, being a military man, had handwriting that was not too dissimilar from Heliye's. It was fitting that he write it. Gao Qiu was puzzled by Lin Wanrong's intentions, but seeing his serious demeanor, they both nodded in agreement. "What should the blood letter say?"

Lin Wanrong paced a few steps, suddenly turning his head to look at Yujia who was lost in thought on the carriage. The Turkic maiden sensed Lin Wanrong's gaze and looked up, casting him a bewitching smile that outshone all flowers.

Lin Wanrong quickly lowered his gaze and chuckled, "The letter will say that the warriors of the Ha'er Helin and Ejina tribes fought a bloody battle against the people of Great Hua. Although the entire army was annihilated, the Great Hua also suffered heavy losses, with only a little over two thousand soldiers remaining!"

Hu Bugui had a sudden realization, "General, you're planning to create the illusion that Heliye made a daring breakout and risked his life to send this message, in order to lure out the nomadic tribes, correct? Heliye is indeed a valiant and fierce warrior, well-known on the plains. It would be logical for him to be the one to deliver the message. Moreover, his body full of battle wounds, as if he fought his way out and died outside the tribe, makes it even more convincing. This plan should work!"

"The nomads are not fools; this alone isn't secure enough," Lin Wanrong shook his head, "We need to add something more potent to drive them completely insane."

"What sort of potent addition?" Gao Qiu and Hu Bugui looked at each other, speaking in unison.

Lin Wanrong's eyes focused intently on the blade in Hu Bugui's hand. He grinned, "This golden blade is that potent addition! Imagine the majestic eagle of the plains, Heliye, holding this golden blade and the blood letter, traversing a thousand miles to seek aid. Ah, the thrill lies right here! Brother Hu, add one more sentence to that blood letter—"

"What sentence?"

Lin Wanrong paused slightly. Yujia, as if sensing something, looked up. With her enchanting, fresh and beautiful face, Lin Wanrong whistled and waved enthusiastically at the young girl, "Little sister Yujia, shall I find you some romantic companions? Do you prefer them chubby or skinny?"

Yujia was stunned, unable to react in time, as Lin Wanrong lowered his gaze, his eyes narrowing slightly, and spoke leisurely, "The last sentence, remember it well—By the order of the owner of this golden blade, whoever can personally rescue her shall be gifted this golden blade and share in the highest glory, sworn in the name of the god of the plains."