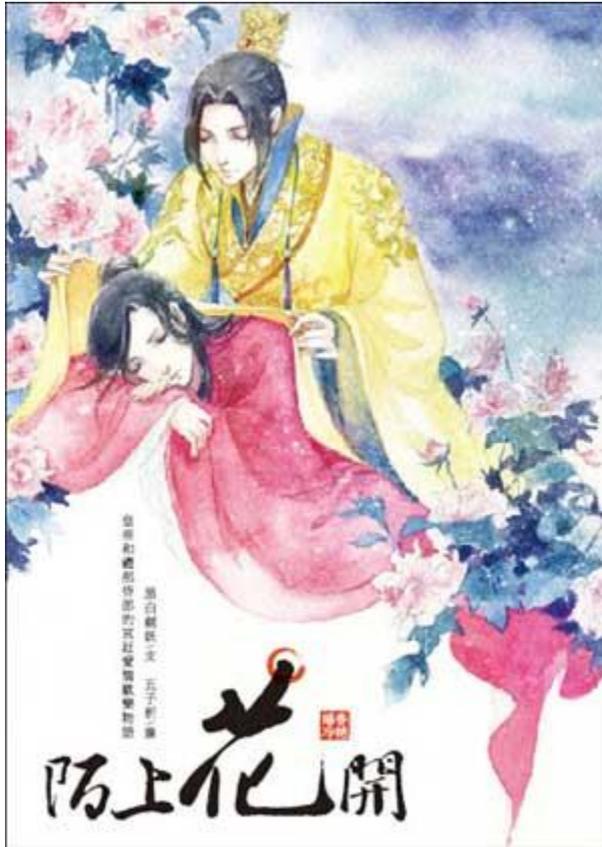


Mo Flower

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Prologue

If you visited the New Mountains (Jiuxianshai), travellers would hear an old folk's song about "The Mo Flower." They said that in every spring Lady Wu Yue visits her family home in Lin An. The King always sent a letter to his wife saying only one sentence. "When Mo Flowers blossom, you can slowly come back."—Su " quote taken from The Mo Flowers."

Verse explanation: when Mo flowers bloom along the field, you can look leisurely at them so there's no need to hurry back- opposite meaning to his true feelings if he would simply say "I miss you."

* *“Lady” is a title used for wives of the King besides the Queen below the rank of the Queen**

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Chapter 1

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In the eighteenth generation of Da Shao’s dynasty, the Emperor has been ruling with righteousness for twelve years.

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In the Palace Court hall, a group of high ranking officials has a report of indictment charges for bribery against another official. They are still waiting for the final verdict from the Emperor who sat on the throne. Soon after, another group walked out of their stations and asked for the pardon of the said official. They are pleading for his crimes to be absolved because the man has spent his entire life working for the better of the country. Even if he has no merit to credit him, still his efforts should be counted. What he had done in a moment of weakness, so they requested for the Emperor to have mercy and so on...

.

In short, all of this happened because of the obese official. He is kneeling on the ground while the Ministers are debating whether to simply kick him or fry him in an oil pan.

.

Standing at the last row, Li Qing’s head could not help but nod every time to everyone’s comment. He seems to agree to everyone, though no one really knows which of the party he was in favour. He is nodding to ensure himself for any foolproof and in a way made him no commitment to anyone.

.

“Your Majesty, I’ m being framed by the villain” said the fat old man tearfully to plead his innocence.

.

The young Emperor quietly listened to each party's pleading, the corner of his lips raised and unhurriedly, started to speak, "Oh, which villain dares to provide conclusive evidence, fabricated charges and framed you? Let me hear the name and I will help your case."

The Emperor's word has stopped his furiously noisy officials. Silence can only be heard in the halls. Not knowing His Majesty's temper, may result to anyone being done as an official.

Li Qing was still nodding, but more frequently to the point that his head is closely dropping to the ground.

The Emperor's eyes quickly swept over his courtiers below, and stopped on top of Li Qing's head.

"Li Qing." The Emperor called.

Li Qing was still nodding, but did not reply.

The closest official to Li Qing was De Gang Bai, who hastily pulling his top elbow, but there was still no sign of response, De Gang Bai was simply anxious that he rolled his eyes.

'This guy really have little nerves to just dozed off here.'

"Rites Assistant Minister Li Qing", the Emperor patiently called him, his tone was gentle not showing his anger.

The officials sweats coldly, their faces were blackening with one line of thought. "Where does Li Qing gets his courage, daring to fall asleep inside the Court Hall so often?" Clearly he doesn't value his life.

Unfortunately, Li Qing was there for the last six years. The Emperor doesn't find any reason to take his life or dismiss him from his duties. His Majesty was the one who appointed him an idle position neither promoting nor demoting him.

.

The Emperor slightly give a wink to his personal servant beside him. Wei Xiao Miao immediately walked down the hall to Li Qing and said, “Lord Li, His Majesty summons you.”

.

De Gang Bai had elbowed him once more with more force, causing him to wobble, Wei Xiao Miao helped to steady him.

.

Li Qing was belated looked up, blinked his misty eyes that seems not getting enough sleep, his eyes did not catch a glimpse of the emperor who was looking down at him.

.

‘What?’

.

“Li Qing” the Emperor then called out again.

.

Li Qing stood, respectfully replied: “I’m here, Sire.”

.

“What do you think?”

.

‘What is it that am I supposed to think?’, Li Qing blinked in confusion and looked ahead at the other officials which stood at the middle of the Court Hall. He ambiguously replied, “As discussed Your Majesty Lord Huang had justified the case, Lord Wei Chen’s words are also agreeable, while Lord Chen.....”

.

In the end, the fat official kneeling down starts to sweat coldly as well.

.

“What way?” , the Emperor’s faint smile become curvier.

.

The Officials thought that the Emperor was obviously intimidating Li Qing and cannot help gloating inside. They guessed that if the Emperor did not spare him again, then the Official would take his hat and His Majesty will order him to be dragged outside, give a few thrashes then be demoted.

.

“Li Qing, the Emperor asked for your Excellency’s opinion on the bribery charges of buying official rank and discrimination against the citizens by Lord Chen.” Wei Xiao Miao reminded him and also taken the initiative to explain the Emperor’s question again.

.

Li Qing understood the situation whilst he slept in the hall, hastily resorted to the old trick “sit on the fence” and rebutted: “Your Majesty, the ancient quote, *‘If one does not encounter the situation before, then one should disregard one’s judgement.’* Therefore I am afraid to dare comment on Lord Chen’s case.”

.

‘What he has said made no difference, he just uttered nonsense!’ The officials all felt the same.

.

The Emperor was neither angry nor continued to intimidate him. He just smiled, looked away and returned with the other ministers to continue the meeting. Therefore, the officials thought that His Majesty must simply laugh at Li Qing and does not value his opinion.

.

Li Qing did not seemed to be bothered by the situation and resumed sleeping which he perfected while standing but he decreased the number of his nod.

.

When describing Li Qing, he seems plain with average intelligence. He does not have many vices or virtues and his rank could be described as moderate.

.

Ironically, even though he is an average person, one cannot be promoted to any official rank. However, six years ago, he had blocked a sword meant for the Emperor and saved him. Thus, he was promoted from the fifth level of Service Ministry to the third level official in Rites Ministry, that’s why he was able to enter the Court Hall for Stately Meeting.

.

Although he was severely injured because of the stab wound which nearly took his life, it still did not explain his attitude. Usually, when one was given opportunity to enter the Main Court Hall, that person uses this chance to rise further in his career. He did not tried this path but instead made a habit of just sleeping and yawning. This of course set off many ambitious and young officials whose goal is to become greater. They were jealous and with clenched teeth publicly scold him as a “gutter.”

.

He did not care and ignored them, he just sighed: “So, why are you describing a Court Official

as a gutter? If the court is really a pit, then the Court Officials will be some sort of things inside it,”

.

This statement spread out and caused many officials filled with anger. Thus they accused him of slandering the court and charged him ruining its reputation. Then they implored the Emperor to severely punish him.

.

The Emperor thereby specially summoned him to his Royal Office for questioning, asked him if he indeed said “The court is latrines and that the court official are muckworms?”

.

“Your Majesty, your servant dare not slander and mock the court officials, it is not I who said the court is a pit.” Li Qing face was blameless but neither showed expression of flattering.

.

If one looked at his words being used literally, then his answer was indeed true.

.

The Emperor did not mind, he just smiled and said, “Are you smart or stupid when you said it?”

.

“Your Majesty is right and just.” Li Qing responded obediently with very sincere attitude and humility.

.

“Alright”, the Emperor decided not to pursue the matter further and personally recorded in the memorandum that “the speaker has no intention but the listener was misintended.”

.

These words were a cynical rebuff to those who had laid the charges and the what ‘so-called getting hold of evidence’ in “slander and ruining the court”, counts against them and further pursuance of the subject means for them to wear it. This kind of situation does not really resolve anything but concluded the saying “If the hat fits”.

.

They were not able laid on one single hair of Li Qing since the incident and he continued to go on with his merry way, living his easy and pleasurable official life.

.

.

Since the Da Shao's dynasty rule for eighteen generations, the nation is prosperous with little trouble over domestic issues, and good defence against foreigners that cause no fear for external invasion. Issues such as natural disaster, forces of event outside of their control; a corruption charge for bribery and oppression of the citizens caused by Official Chen was rare. Moreover, it's not every day occurrence that a corrupt official kneels in the Court Hall. It's a brand new topic for the people to discuss that the common routine report staged a court drama that's why one cannot blame for Li Qing to be lost in Land of Morpheus.

.

The advantage of standing at the end row has allowed him to take a nap; all he has to do was not to fall down (sitting position) to sleep.

.

The main law of Da Shao for the Emperor was to oversee meetings everyday at the Court, this ensure the Officials from becoming lazy. Fortunately, each of the Emperors taken their responsibilities seriously with diligence and caring. Thus without exception had made Da Shao prosperous for many centuries which resulted for unshakable national power. Prosperous period means there was no need for heroes and as a result peaceful time had nurtured Li Qing to became unambitious official was not surprising.

.

Logically this humble officer should not enter the Emperor's eyesight. However, they were unsure when the Emperor started to occasionally summon Li Qing to invite, whenever there is a feast or hunt. The two rarely speak to each other, nor shown any intimate behaviour, and sometimes the Emperor almost ignore his presence, as if he doesn't exist.

.

Some sensitive officials were suspicious, others feel strange but could not find what was the exact problem. They did not understand why the emperor had this "spare" person beside him. Well if this person was from an old noble family or an elegant man like Scholar Lou Chu Yun, then there's no need for an explanation. Li Qing was not from old noble family, at most his appearance could be described as fine placid, and compared to Lou Chu Yun(known as today "Pan An") was far worse. Even Wei Xiao Miao was better looking than him.

.

'Not able to figure it out; yeah, still not able to figure out'

.

The Sixth Duke, the most beloved brother of the Emperor was forthright to these officials unhesitatingly gullible question: “If one could able to read what are on the Emperor’s mind, then you might as well be the Emperor.”

.

“Your subordinate is frightened”; “your subordinate is frightened.”

.

Since then, the officials were not dare to made further speculation privately or otherwise on how the Emperor treated Li Qing. Anyway, from whatever point of views on Li Qing, he was harmless and unobstructed so there’s no need to worry.

.

Let’s return to the present. Inside the court hall, from the perceptive Emperor’s sight of Li Qing, although he no longer saw him nodding his head. Still the anxious man sometimes frown, bite his under lip to prevent from yawning and sometimes quietly rubbed his waist and legs seems. It seems to giveaway that fact and might not stand up any longer.

.

The Emperor decided to discuss the prevention of White River flood for another day, “Today we’ll stop here, the Royal Meeting ends.”

“Your servant, escort Your Majesty out.” The Emperor leaved precisely as the Courtiers echoes sound of custom for his exit.

.

‘... could finally relax.’ Li Qing cannot wait and walked out the hall, his thoughts was how quickly return to his office and sleeping there again.

.

Only a few steps away when Wei Xiao Miao voiced was behind him: “Li Qing, please stay.”

.

Li Qing frowned, really wants to pretend he did not hear and although he was unwilling to stop but still turned around, “Official Wei is there a problem?”

.

“The emperor summoned you to His Royal Office.”

.

“Now?”

.

“Yes, please depart immediately, do not let His Majesty wait.”

.

Li Qing face suffered gravely, he really want to say *'Let me go to sleep first'*, but the Emperor had summoned him. He dare not delay his meeting, unless he was tired of living, so he followed Wei Xiao Miao towards the direction of the Royal Office.

.

“Lord Wei, I really wanted to say thank you.” Li Qing offered his sincere thanks.

.

“Lord Li, please call me Little Miao, do not called Lord, it will be the ruin of me.”

.

“Lord Wei is the Manager of the Palace House, but also the Emperor’s closest personal Officer, I am only an assistant minister so asking me to address you by your name will be my ruin.”

.

“Lord Li, you surely jesting me again.”

.

“Really, Little Miao, do you know why the Emperor summoned me...?”

.

“Lord Li would natural knew what to be expected.”

.

“Ah! I do not understand what is possibly to expect.” Li Qing really felt gravely suffering as he quietly cried out, *'I just want to sleep!'*

.

“Lord Li certainly knows the Emperor’s mind clearly than me.”

.

“I do not want to know what he was thinking.” Li Qing mumbled the words in his mouth; the phrase cannot be blatantly said aloud.

.

A moment later, they had arrived outside of the Royal Office.

.

“Your Majesty, Official Li has come.” Wei Xiao Miao reported at the door.

“Let him in.”

.

“Official Li, please come inside.”

.

Li Qing bowed lowly but did not kneel and strode towards the Imperial chair, “Your subordinate here sees you, Your Majesty.”

.

After he entered the room, Wei Xiao Miao closed the door from the outside, leaving him alone with the emperor.

.

“Come here, beside me.”

.

Li Qing went to Song Yu side, eyes lowered respectfully.

.

Song Yu looked at him carefully; eyes were softened a bit, his fingers brushed slightly over Li tired eyes. “I really tired you out last night.”

.

Li Qing was startled, his eyes dashed back at the door and made sure it was closed for good. Only when determined everything was fine, he pouted and said: “Since Your Majesty knew your servant was tired, why did you singled me out in court?”

.

“If I had not called you, your head certainly hit the ground, where do you think the court hall is for you fallen asleep like that?” Song Yu chided.

.

“I was only taking a short nap, if you had not called, no one would have paid any attention at me.” Li Qing tone little snappish. Lack of sleep would made anyone to have a bad temper, especially when sleeping is his life’s passion, a night with only three hours of sleep indeed almost taken his life.

.

Song Yu saw one of his rare revealing wayward look, smiled: “My bad, I could not help but notice you.”

.

“Your servant did nothing to warrant Your Majesty attention.”

.

“Angry?”

.

“Your servant did not dare.”

.

“I see that you are.” Song Yu pulled him over and seated him over his lap, circled him inside the arms and softly coaxed him and said, “I did not know that tribute drug was powerful, do not get angry, we’ll not use it again.”

.

The Emperor was persuasive; Li Qing could not be bothered to remain angry. Anyway, anger will only consume energy and he did not want to be more tired, so being lazy, he do not like the feeling of fatigue.

.

Whenever they were together he always feel tired, not only physically tired but spiritual tired well concealment of their relationship is a tiring thing, but if he does not conceal it, it would be thousand times more troublesome.

.

Although Li Qing loved being pampered, what he hate the most of all was being bothered by anything in life. Sometimes, Li Qing was depressed over these complex thoughts, ‘*when the problem had began to tied him down?*’ Nevertheless, normally he would not be troubled by anything for too long, because these would waste his memories making him feeling fatigued, thus it was best simply not to be contemplated.

.

Whenever he could sit down he would never stand, whenever he could lie down he would never sit; so he is too detested of his good health, ‘*why could I not be like those sickly patient?*’ He may then be rightfully laying in bed for half a month or ten days at the very least and no one would nags at him. ‘*When I feel like going to bed then I can and no one would fear why I am resting for too long.*’

.

Unfortunately, he had never been sick in his life, the only bad habit was his love of sleeping. Of course this vice was not a good reason to explain to others why he needs twice as much times rest than normal people do.

.

In fact if he was alone in bed, he probably have eight to nine hours of sleeping, though not satisfying but reluctantly acceptable for his wealth being. But whenever he was with Song Yu, he would be lucky just to get five hours, because most of the time.....

.

“Qing, your cries are like mellows, I liked it, if only you not able to maintain your sanity and cluttering aloud for me to listen, then I probably would not tried so hard on loosen up your body, and even drugged you last night.” Song Yu was undisguised frivolous, eyes carefully were glinted.

.

After heard these words, Li Qing thrown away any reverence for his King and angrily glared at him. “Moaning aloud is very tiring and the throat certainly will be numbed and uncomfortable. If you like to listen, why not do it yourself?”

.

“I could never scream so nicely.” Song Yu smiles, mischievous and said “How could you not be ashamed when we discussed something like this.”

.

“The things that should not be doing we had already done, what is there to be ashamed off.” Li Qing pouted, for his legs and lumbar were still sore, his private place..... he thought back on how absurd the Emperor had been last night, cannot help but lower his brows.

.

Of course he did not dislike their love making, he was enjoying the sexual pleasure it had brought, but the after effect had always made him sleepy, tired and feeling unwell, he just need severely sleep in order to rest. However, he always insisted on attending the Court Meeting every day, even Song Yu was sometimes puzzled why he was so persistent. Obviously his heart is not on court matter and was much undisciplined person at the Court Hall, always doze unwilling and yet he had never absent at work.

Everyone have their own perseverance principles. This was Li Qing resolved.

There was a time when Song Yu had forced him in taken a rest and take a sick leave, Song Yu was surprised for such a mild passive person like Qing could shown off such temper. After the incident Song Yu permitted Li Qing to do as he please, pretended not to see him dozed off during the Court Meeting, even if he feels like ordered him to go back to bed.

.

“Just do not made me too tired constantly is fine.” Li Qing once said.

.

“I cannot control myself; I’ve always in need of you.” Song Yu replied.

.

“Why am I so fascinated by you?” the young Emperor muttered to himself; not able to understand why either, what good point about this unremarkable man that had been driven him to points of distraction, and even fascinating. “It is your lips or your eyes? ...”

.

Song Yu’s fingers caressing Li Qing’s face, touching his lips, beautiful rounded lips like a soft small droplet, at first glance his slightly pouting lips for a man have added a subtle innocent cuteness. Two third of the lashes had covered his eyesight’s which already deeply clouds, plus his core being is nothing less than laid-back, constitute a form that is such a man called Li Qing.

.

In other words, Song Yu could only subtle guessed of his ethereal dream.

.

This man who loved to sleep seems put a part of his spirit in living inside his dream, not allowed other to see them.

.

Song Yu memorised Li Qing, his thoughts were tried to search for something deeper inside the man, as if digging out the treasure that buried beneath; Li Qing could not help but yawn aloud, “If Your Majesty have no business with me then I’ll go back to sleep.”

.

“Nothing that is important.”

.

“I’m sleepy.” Li Qing blinks a few times, looked innocently, whenever he wanted to sleep he was unwittingly revealed an incredibly cute face and others would happily to let him off to see Morpheus.

.

Song Yu’s back pounced like a burst of current electricity as he trembling, unable to restrain, he lifted Qing’s face to kiss him. On the contrary to other people act, when he saw Qing expression like this, he had an urge not let the man go to sleep, just pushed him down, enjoyed eating him up, if not finished then pack up for a take away, wanted him for his completely ownership.....

.

“Emperor, Administration Head Official Xu requested for an audience.” Wei Xiao Miao who guarded outside the door spoken, interrupted their sweet lingering kisses.

.

“Go first and sit somewhere nearby.” Song Yu released Li Qing. “Permit to enter,” replied sternly and forbidding majestic of an Emperor.

.

Li Qing obediently waited aside on the couch, he was too tired and sleepy. He barely sat nodding off at first, then fallen fast asleep on the long couch, regardless of everything and became unconscious.

.

Minister Xu entered the Royal Office and saw Li Qing, he only glanced and did not paid any further attention. Li Qing was often called to the Royal Office, especially after being caught asleep during Court Meetings. He thought the Emperor probably do not want him become so idle, that he deliberately made him a personal servant as his punishment. Today, not only he dared to be lazy off in Court Meeting but also here in the Royal Office, such as directly laying there and sleeping unhindered.

.

Minister Xu was very displeased with Li Qing’s laziness. It was even more intolerable when he saw the man’s irreverence, looked sideways at him from time to time, and wondered whether to report to the Emperor for his reprimand.

.

The chill of spring caused Li Qing to sneeze, he quietly shrink his body but did not awaken and continue in the land of Morpheus.

.

The sound of sneeze had caught the Emperor’s glance.

.

‘Emperor, did you see? You must look! This guy actually dares to be arrogant. Please teach him some manners now!’ Minister Xu’s heart cried aloud to the Emperor.

.

The Emperor stood up and went over to him.

.

Xu Minister was ready to applaud it.

.

However, it was unthinkable that the Emperor took the royal robe proffered by Wei Xiao Miao, covered it over Li Qing's body, and asked Wei Xiao Miao to take the shoes and his official hat off for him. Then gently moved his body correctly positioning on the long couch, even placed a soft pillow behind his head so he slept more comfortably.

.

The action was natural, it cannot be mistaken with pity but loving indulgence, like it has been done thousands of times.

.

Minister Xu's jaw dropped.

.

The Emperor casually sat back and proceeds the case with Minister Xu, no longer looked at Li Qing, as if seemingly forgotten him again.

.

Though Minister Xu was too shock by the event that he no longer able to concentrate, and finally it all click in suddenly, he realised what was weird between the Emperor and Li Qing in the end ...

.

This idle official and the Emperor attitudes were incompatible, infrequent showed of lukewarm and yet almost similar to the point of sympathise each other.

.

He looked back carefully, *'as if the Emperor deliberately ignored, but also seems deliberately having him around but when did it all was started, the Emperor and Li Qing in "good term"... ah?! Could it be at the Royal Feast where assassination event had taken place six years ago?'*

.

Minister Xu left the Royal Office but was still contemplating, he was curious to death, but it was the Emperor's private matter consequently he could not inquire them.

.

After he had gone, there were a few high ministers in succession for the Emperor audience, they saw Li Qing sleeping aside and his body was covered with a royal robe.

.

Not only that, a minister happens to see the Emperor help Li Qing tuck in the slipped gown, another minister then saw the Emperor take a handkerchief to wipe his drooling, such an action was undoubtedly favoured.

.

Some people stared; others were speechless, and everyone's reactions were the same as Minister Xu not less terrified.

.

After the shock, gossip quickly began to take its turn, whatever seems like a glimpse of secret unintentionally between the Emperor and Rites Assistant minister, was singled out and itching to be retold to other people.

.

It's hard to blame the ministers for being garrulous, the Court Officials have many important responsibilities, but a little chat during the afternoon tea and away from busy working pressure was the best entertainment. However, they had no guts in daring to gossip about the Emperor openly, only telling it inside themselves, said "The Emperor is really a loving Emperor who loved his people as his children."

.

'But to hold it in the heart is very sad ah!'

.

There is nothing in the world that could be hidden forever; the thing that could not be disclosed had become known as the confidential information and secretly shared.

.

At this time, Li Qing still in his intoxicated dreams and had no idea that he had become the biggest scandal in the kingdom, *'congratulations, and congratulations.'* (Of course not!)

Chapter 2

.

Song Hyun stepped inside the Royal Office and saw Li Qing sleeping, his head on the pillow close to the north window and his body was covered by the Emperor's royal robe. He cannot help but be surprised for a moment, carefully asked: "Third Brother, is this not prohibited?"

.

"It is nothing." the Emperor nonchalantly replied.

.

"Why not entitle him Shang Jun, and have this out in the open?"

.

“You should know his temper.”

.

“Ah Yes, Li’s Family always have been arrogant, stubborn, and obstinacy types.” Song Hyun smiled, shows he clearly understood.

.

“Little Six, why are you especially here to see me?” Emperor asked

.

“Do you that Little Seven is in Chu Nan?”

.

“He’s training an army there.”

.

“Uh, you already know?”

.

“This country is mine.”

.

“Third Brother, I’m admiring you very much, no wonder the commoner called you a Clairvoyant Emperor, and nothing can be concealed from Your Majesty.”

.

“Little Seven committed no treason.”

.

“Why has he take such action, it could lead to misunderstanding?”

.

“He hopes I’ll give him someone.”

.

“Who is it?”

.

“Little Miao!”

.

Suddenly sound of “bang clatter!” was heard, when he turned and saw Wei Xiao Miao stood at the door, a freshly brew pot of tea had dropped at the other man feet, a delicate pale face with a hint of apprehension.

.

“Pardon for Your servant clumsiness, I deserve to die.” Wei Xiao Miao hurried to squat down to pick up the broken pieces.

.

“You came here.” Song Hyun walked over and dragged him up and pulled him into the Royal Office, aggressively questioned: “Little Miao, what the hell are Song Wei and you up to?”

.

“Ah..... so noisy.....” Li Qing’s delirious spoken from his sleep as he was being disturbed then rolled the body.

.

“Little Six, hush.” The Emperor walked to Li Qing, he tucked back the robe, pulled the dishevelled hair back behind ears, leaned over and whispered: “OK, you can go back to sleep.”

.

Song Hyun rolled his eyes several times at the scene, *‘I did not expect the Emperor to have loved Li Qing to this point.’* Song Hyun was unable to comprehend, how his tall and handsome brother, the Emperor who is talented both in civil and military affairs to fancy someone as mediocre like Li Qing. Although, this man is his second brother-in-law, but truthfully also the most untalented of the family member. Each of Li’s Family is very good looking in different way. Only Li Qing was like an ugly duckling in a group of swans.

.

Song Hyun was married to Li Qing’s youngest sister, Li Cong Tong four years; his wife is the Duchess, so Li Qing and the Emperor was related by marriage publicly.

.

Anyway back to present, Wei Xiao Miao was dragged inside, his face did not conceal fear and confusion.

.

“Little Miao, what is between Little Seven and you? Why have I never heard of your involvement, you’re better honest?” Song Hyun lowered his tone.

.

“Your Grace, I don’t know.” Wei Xiao Miao quickly restored his calm, respectful temperament.

.

“Do not be afraid, since we grew up together, the Emperor and I will not hassle you.”

.

“Little Six, you’re embarrassing him, do not be concerned with Little Seventh’s issue.” The Emperor turned to order. “Little Miao, you can go.”

.

“Yes, your servant will be retired.” Wei Xiao Miao withdraws.

.

“Third Brother, you’re seriously assured about Little Seventh?”

.

“You should not waste time to worry about Little Seventh, better concentrate on my sister-in-law; I heard that she is pregnant with your second child. I presume that is what you’re here for today.”

.
“I’m now suspecting you’re not only a clairvoyant, but could also read minds.” Song Hyun although in awe inside he still taunted and laughed “I did not know when will Rites Assistant Minister, my second-in-law become my sister-in-law, Sire?”

.
“He is a man.”

.
“Of course I know that he is a man, Da Shao does have several Shang Jun in the past, the Emperor publicly proclaims his lovers and the status is the same as Lady (rank below the Queen), is it not by entitling him means that you’ve recognise he as your lover?”

.
“Have you ever want to force Li Cong Tong to be a concubine?”

.
“Of course, not.” Song Hyun categorically replied like a fastened nail, continued:
“Nevertheless, it is better than without legitimacy, not being able to see each other publicly. Third Brother, do you know what people called this relationship?”

.
“Lover?”

.
“Oh! I did not say anything.”

.
The Emperor smiled lightly and scolded “No one dares to give me lip service like you.”

.
Song Hyun exaggerates responded. “Thanks to His Majesty who tolerates and loves your brother.”

.
The brothers had their little chat about family matters but before leaving, Song Hyun, he could not help but advise “Third Brother, I do not know how long you and my second brother-in-law relationship will be hidden but if it was not meant to be in public then better not do it, of course, if it is Sire’s intention, then that will be another matter.”

.
The Emperor smiled but did not reply.

.
Song Hyun had gone when Wei Xiao Miao brought another brew tea inside.

.
“Little Miao, if I ordered you to go to Little Seven, are you willing?” The Emperor asked.

.
Wei Xiao Miao knelt down. “Whatever Your Majesty’s command, it will be done.”

.

“ I do not want to give you to Little Seven, but observed him. I will issue an edict tomorrow, three days later you’ll accompany Li Qing in patrolling Chu Nan.”

.

“Your Majesty, there is a bit of distance between the capital and Chu Nan. Since this is work, patrolling will takes Lord Li away at least for several months.” Wei Xiao Miao reminded him.

.

“It would be best if occasionally he’s away. I temporarily handling him over to you to take care.”

.

“Yes, your servant will surely devote to serve Lord Li .”

.

The Emperor smiled faintly and said “You’re to take care of him, not serve; he would not like you to be a meticulous nanny. Regarding about the Seventh Duke, it is up to your capacity.”

.

Wei Xiao Miao pursed his lips and justified: “Your Majesty, your servant has been with sire since early age, I’ve little friendship with the Seventh Duke, and there is no hidden motive.”

.

“I know, when the time comes, whether you choose to go or stay, you’ve to make the choice, and I will not interfere with your decision.” The Emperor said. “You can go and get ready.”

.

“Yes, your servant retires.

.

Li Qing sleeps soundly and unaware that he is about to head on a long journey. Finally when he has enough rest, he woken up and the sun at this time located in the west apparently nearing dusk. He stretched and sat up; the royal robe that covered his body had slide down to his waist.

.

“Wake up.” Song Yu said.

.

“Ah.”

.

Song Yu continues to work on political agenda document (correspondence), Li Qing worn his shoes and sat quietly. A royal servant took a small table and put on the couch, another servant brought a bowl of pea’s porridge on a tray and placed it there, the emperor has specially ordered the royal cookers in made them.

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Song Yu was well aware of Li Qing food preferences; he did not like exotic food but preferred green vegetables. Even though it is a commoner's dish, the Royal cook was still able to present it with great delicacies, the pea porridge looks like a beautiful jade paved bowl which gives the diner a greater sense of satisfaction in eating them.

.

"Eat before it gets cold, a little nibble for the stomach and then later we'll have supper together." Song Yu said.

.

"Alright." Li Qing was carelessly stirring the warm porridge, although he'd slept and did not eat anything all day. He did not feel particularly hungry and so after two spoons he places it down.

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"Why not eat a bit more?" the Emperor's head did not look up and his eyes was obviously staring at the document.

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'It was very amazing the man knew my every move.'

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"I've no appetite."

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"Are you unwell?"

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"No."

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"Unhappy?"

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".....You could have let me sleep at Ting Xia Lou (Summer House)."

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'Let me sleep here and also used the royal robe to cover like a quilt, could be no longer portraying as the Emperor who "loving the people as his children".'

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"You were in a deep sleep so I did not want to wake you."

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"Who came here?"

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"Minister Xu, Minister Huang, Left Wing Prime Minister, Generalissimo, General Shen, and your brother-in-law."

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Li Qing's frown deepen, "And you deliberately let them see me?"

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“You’re too suspicious.” Song Yu puts down the document and sat down beside him, took the bowl and started to feed him with a spoonful of porridge, said: “Three days later, you’ll patrol Chu Nan on my behalf.”

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“Alone?” Li Qing obediently ate the peas porridge from the Emperor’s hand.

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“I’ll have Little Miao to travel with you.”

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“I’ve not been that far out of the capital.”

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“You can take the opportunity to visit your third brother.”

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“When am I to return to the capital?”

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“When Mo flowers blossom, you can slowly come back.”

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Li Qing’s eyes slightly narrowed and then a ripple of smile appears in his eyes, the taste of salty porridge seems to be sweeter. “Your Majesty, let your subordinate to remind sire; that I am your Rites Assistant Minister and is not your Wu Yue Lady.”

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Song Yu puts down the bowl and dragged him over to sit on his lap, and then licks his lips where the residue porridge was lingered. He latched onto the moist sweet glossy lips, passionately kisses them and said: “I sometimes want our relationship out in an open, I am an Emperor but have to sneak around to see my lover, it is utterly insulting.”

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He always felt that Li Qing’s lips is deliciously sweet and sweeter as days going by. And that is why he always wanted to kiss him and then gobbled him up. Li Qing took the initiative to open his mouth and so Song Yu’s tongue entered, continues their lingering kisses, while Li Qing inarticulately said: “A wife is not a concubine; a concubine is not the same as an external affair.”

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“You, ah!” Song Yu was angry and bitten his lips and when they were ending the kiss, he was still slightly annoying but firmly hold Li Qing in the arms. “To be together is that really hard?”

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Unwilling? Li Qing’s heart admitted from the beginning he was indeed not without reluctance to enter this relationship, he always play it safe and greedily lazy about anything, he does not look for trouble so trouble is not looking for him.

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‘Is it not by having a relationship with the Emperor is the most troublesome thing?’

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At first he could not help but be dazed and confused, not sure why the Emperor fancies him. Of course he was unwilling to be under a man's body but cannot be bothered to fight back. Who is the Emperor? He is the most powerful man in the kingdom, only in vain to struggle against such a force. He is not like those who would rather die to protect their virginity, he is Li Qing who wants to be like a small sloth, just laying lazy for all day was enough.

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He thought the Emperor was momentary newly indulgence with him and will not last. All he needs was to have a little patience and everything will be over. However, the situation was beyond his expectation, their feelings have increased over time, involuntarily they have care for each other a bit more every day, ultimately and currently they could not be without the other.

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He's almost certain that the Emperor does love him, and he too is in love with the Emperor. This concealment gradually becomes a hard thing to do, but if he did not hide then it would have been a hundred times harder.

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There was times when he want their feelings to be open, but the other man is the Emperor. To be made public would presumably cause greater deal of trouble and it will exhaust him. If their secret love affair became public, he thought, *'I would probably be the first one to run away, where nobody able to find me and to hide there forever, and pretending nothing had happened.'*

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'Calling me a coward is alright, laughed at my unworthiness is still good; a typical life and just easygoing unfettered path - well, I would volunteer to bury the head in the sand like an ostrich, just ah...'

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"Why are we still together then?" Li Qing muffled whisper, asking Song Yu but as if he was asking himself.

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Occasionally he thought, *'if I had not taken a nap six years ago, not haplessly stabbed by assassins sword hence the Emperor noticed of my existence, then today they would had not be involved with each other? Should I be gratitude or resent of that dim assassin ah? The man had taken a powerless and unimportant official as a hostage.'*

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The Emperor never sighed before, sigh. "It is fate."

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“ A misfortune one.”

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“Even if is a misfortune fate, I’ll make this misfortune to tie you and me forever.”

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“A lifetime...lifetime..... Really a life together.....” Li Qing tones sounds confused, his eyes were vague dreamily.

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“Of course I can!” Song Yu lifted his face and firmly stared, said: “Li Qing, Li Qing, this life you are destined belong to me.”

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Li Qing silently looking back Song Yu for a while, thoughtfully then faintly cried, “Ah!” noncommittal and yawned.

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“You’re still busy, I would rest for a while; call me when we are having dinner.” Then he kissed his lover the Emperor, and once again doing his favourite thing, sleeps.

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Song Yu chuckled loudly; a bit exasperated, he flicks the man’s nose then unconsciously caressed his face. *‘I love this man’s leisurely composure, and his love for serenity. But this attitude and casualness temperament sometimes really annoying. I’m not sure how much of myself is possessing his mind and how important am I weight to him.’*

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“Qing, pay more attention to me, okay?” The young Emperor lightly whispered to the man who has fallen asleep, *‘do not know whether these sentiments of love word will be infiltrated into his dream.’*

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How could an Emperor of De Shao and a low rank minister, the Rites Assistant able to get together? Nevertheless, it was a common question for many people when regarding this presumably hidden affair.

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The story of these two mens’ fates started back about seven years ago.
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In short, it was a test for the nation's officials.

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The head house of Li Family is Li Cong Yin, who was using rough and gentle method. He forced the nineteen year old Li Qing to agree to join their third brother, seventeen years old Li Hyun, who admitted in takes the National Examination in spring.

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Li Qing did not want to become an Official, only happy to possess one of a shop/factory from his oldest brother. But Li Cong Yin wanted to expand his business and believed that it is possible if one of their family member was to sit on an official position. Hence he forces the second and third brothers to study hard, hoping in the future to have one of them takes an official position so his plan and scheme become fruitful.

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When National Examination pre-qualifiers list was announced, Li Cong Yin was pleased as both of his brothers has been admitted as successful candidates. Even if they did not get into first rank or second rank, as long they get to the third rank they would automatically have an official post and worked their way up the ladder in later dates should not be a big problem.

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every examination he tried to use all his brain powers and could able to assemble about three thousand words which would be incredible lucky while others could hand in millions words at least.

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Therefore, he often wonders that his passing on every examination were actually results from his brother's bribes to the official and unlike Li Hyun who earned the placement by his own merit.

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Although it may state that successful candidates are to be tested by the Emperor but in fact, the examiner is a high rank officer and there are only a few people that were personally questioned by the Emperor. Normally, it takes only about fifty candidates respond to the weary the Emperor thus the later candidates would be at a disadvantage from not being heard probably, because to arouse the attention of the Emperor would be very difficult.

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Li Hyun was the seventeenth candidate that is the first batch of successful candidates while Li Qing from the last batch, the candidate of number ninety two. He was drowned off, continuing taken naps from the long wait, it was until he called that he had to pinch himself to manage awake.

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After kowtow on the ground with the young Emperor who sitting on throne, Li Qing stood below and listen to those standing in front of him answer. They were impassioned, talking about generosity and justices. They were eloquent on the issues like a massive counterattack on a battlefield, his eyes narrowed again and again open; open eyes and closed them, really a painful struggling effort.

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'I want to sleep why I can't do it, really want to sleep

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“Li Qing..... Li Qing.....”

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‘*What a familiar name.....*’ Li Qing was in a trance as someone pushed him, “Hey, they’re calling you.”

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‘*Uh, it’s me!*’ Li Qing forced to open up his eyelids, and hastened went out of the queue.

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The examiner saw his sleepy looks, eyes dazed, seems not an intelligent person so he picked the simplest question and asked him: “His Majesty asked ‘*How can he make the kingdom to be a safer place?*’”

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He did not answer like the others, who attempted to shows off their talents, only replied in a short statement: “Enough food and clothes are sufficient for people to feel safe. People considered food as the most important thing.”

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“Is that all?”

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“Yes.”

“Why not add a few more statement, which should be fine.”The examiner kindly gives him second chance.

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“Keep the Ruler’s ethics (justices) for the citizen then the nation will not be in danger.”

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“Anything else?”

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‘*Still not enough, ah?*’ Li Qing contemplated hard and then said: “The nation does not belong only to the Emperor; His Majesty must make effort and use his mind to provide peace to the citizens, to follow the examples of wise sages to have a long life.”

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Suddenly the hall was momentary silenced.

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Li Qing was confused; he really wonders what he had said that could make everyone speechless. He did not think he could excel as one of the successful candidates, always thinking how quickly he could leave here and return home to sleep. He was forced to wake up in the morning before dawn and driven into the palace, it was better off to kill him instead.

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The examiner looked at him from head to toe as if he’d seen a demon, thinking inwardly how this youngster dared to teach ‘*How to be a good Emperor*’ (Holy Emperor), *is it not implied that His Majesty did not rule justly like a wise sage?*’

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“What is your thought, of being a Holy Emperor?” The Emperor suddenly broke the silence and shocked the audiences.

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Li Qing was indeed surprised but nonetheless replied: “Eat the food of the people eat, thinking of what the people think, delight in the people’s happiness, sympathize with the people’s trouble, love the people then the people love back, do evil lead people to be evil criminals, respect the people as they are the tiger, and able to see the pain of the people.”

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“What are you trying to say? That the Emperor do not belong to himself but to all the people of the nation?”

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“The Emperor always says: “I am the nation.” Therefore, the Emperor is the head of the nation, if there are no people then there will be no nation.”

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The Hall became quieter.

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In fact, what Li Qing said was the well known truth so nothing new is cliché, except that none would dare to preach the Emperor about it. Even saying the statement “I am the nation” was guilty of disrespect. The person who said this would be an idiot or have a great deal of courage, the audiences at present were sweating coldly for him.

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The Emperor did not show anger, but gives a faintly smile and said: “What you’ve said is correct.”

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The examiner watched over the situation, saw the Emperor seems liked Li Qing response, then with cinnabar pen circled his name.

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'A blind cat catch a dead rat' is probably the case for Li Qing. His luck has ranked him into the first group, taken third place, the fifth rank level in government ministry and served in Social Service Department as an entry level. Li Hyun was real gold, who champion of the first place, fifth rank level in government ministry and sent to "River Province", took over the Head of Government House in the county.

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The two brothers both passed the examination in first rank, one work as a minor official in the capital and the other placed as the high official of a county and both positions are lucrative. Li Cong Yin laughed almost straining his jaw. He took three days to celebrate, set off firecrackers and open great banquets. Although the feast was charged to be able to attend but many rich people still came as they want to make with the right connection. Such feast had helped Li Cong Yin to acquire a few business opportunities and funds. Above all, it was a great fun event!

Song Hyun stepped inside the Royal Office and saw Li Qing sleeping, his head on the pillow close to the north window and his body was covered by the Emperor's royal robe. He cannot help but be surprised for a moment, carefully asked: "Third Brother, is this not prohibited?"

"It is nothing." the Emperor nonchalantly replied.

"Why not entitle him Shang Jun, and have this out in the open?"

"You should know his temper."

"Ah Yes, Li's Family always have been arrogant, stubborn, and obstinacy types." Song Hyun smiled, shows he clearly understood.

"Little Six, why are you especially here to see me?" Emperor asked

"Do you that Little Seven is in Chu Nan?"

"He's training an army there."

"Uh, you already know?"

"This country is mine."

"Third Brother, I'm admiring you very much, no wonder the commoner called you a Clairvoyant Emperor, and nothing can be concealed from Your Majesty."

"Little Seven committed no treason."

"Why has he take such action, it could lead to misunderstanding?"

"He hopes I'll give him someone."

"Who is it?"

"Little Miao!"

Suddenly sound of "bang clatter!" was heard, when he turned and saw Wei Xiao Miao stood at the door, a freshly brew pot of tea had dropped at the other man feet, a delicate pale face with a hint of apprehension.

"Pardon for Your servant clumsiness, I deserve to die." Wei Xiao Miao hurried to squat down to pick up the broken pieces.

"You came here." Song Hyun walked over and dragged him up and pulled him into the Royal Office, aggressively questioned: "Little Miao, what the hell are Song Wei and you up to?"

"Ah..... so noisy....." Li Qing's delirious spoken from his sleep as he was being disturbed then rolled the body.

"Little Six, hush." The Emperor walked to Li Qing, he tucked back the robe, pulled the dishevelled hair back behind ears, leaned over and whispered: "OK, you can go back to sleep."

Song Hyun rolled his eyes several times at the scene, 'I did not expect the Emperor to have loved Li Qing to this point.' Song Hyun was unable to comprehend, how his tall and handsome brother, the Emperor who is talented both in civil and military affairs to fancy someone as mediocre like Li Qing. Although, this man is his second brother-in-law, but truthfully also the most untalented of the family member. Each of Li's Family is very good looking in different way. Only Li Qing was like an ugly duckling in a group of swans.

Song Hyun was married to Li Qing's youngest sister, Li Cong Tong four years; his wife is the Duchess, so Li Qing and the Emperor was related by marriage publicly.

Anyway back to present, Wei Xiao Miao was dragged inside, his face did not conceal fear and confusion.

"Little Miao, what is between Little Seven and you? Why have I never heard of your involvement, you're better honest?" Song Hyun lowered his tone.

"Your Grace, I don't know." Wei Xiao Miao quickly restored his calm, respectful temperament.

"Do not be afraid, since we grew up together, the Emperor and I will not hassle you."

"Little Six, you're embarrassing him, do not be concerned with Little Seventh's issue." The Emperor turned to order. "Little Miao, you can go."

"Yes, your servant will be retired." Wei Xiao Miao withdraws.

"Third Brother, you're seriously assured about Little Seventh?"

"You should not waste time to worry about Little Seventh, better concentrate on my sister-in-law; I heard that she is pregnant with your second child. I presume that is what you're here for today."

"I'm now suspecting you're not only a clairvoyant, but could also read minds." Song Hyun although in awe inside he still taunted and laughed "I did not know when will Rites Assistant Minister, my second-in-law become my sister-in-law, Sire?"

"He is a man."

"Of course I know that he is a man, Da Shao does have several Shang Jun in the past, the Emperor publicly proclaims his lovers and the status is the same as Lady (rank below the Queen), is it not by entitling him means that you've recognise he as your lover?"

"Have you ever want to force Li Cong Tong to be a concubine?"

"Of course, not." Song Hyun categorically replied like a fastened nail, continued: "Nevertheless, it is better than without legitimacy, not being able to see each other publicly. Third Brother, do you know what people called this relationship?"

"Lover?"

"Oh! I did not say anything."

The Emperor smiled lightly and scolded "No one dares to give me lip service like you."

Song Hyun exaggerates responded. "Thanks to His Majesty who tolerates and loves your brother."

The brothers had their little chat about family matters but before leaving, Song Hyun, he could not help but advise "Third Brother, I do not know how long you and my second brother-in-law relationship will be hidden but if it was not meant to be in public then better not do it, of course, if it is Sire's intention, then that will be another matter."

The Emperor smiled but did not reply.

Song Hyun had gone when Wei Xiao Miao brought another brew tea inside.

"Little Miao, if I ordered you to go to Little Seven, are you willing?" The Emperor asked.

Wei Xiao Miao knelt down. "Whatever Your Majesty's command, it will be done."

"I do not want to give you to Little Seven, but observed him. I will issue an edict tomorrow, three days later you'll accompany Li Qing in patrolling Chu Nan."

"Your Majesty, there is a bit of distance between the capital and Chu Nan. Since this is work, patrolling will takes Lord Li away at least for several months." Wei Xiao Miao reminded him.

"It would be best if occasionally he's away. I temporarily handling him over to you to take care."

"Yes, your servant will surely devote to serve Lord Li."

The Emperor smiled faintly and said "You're to take care of him, not serve; he would not like you to be a meticulous nanny. Regarding about the Seventh Duke, it is up to your capacity."

Wei Xiao Miao pursed his lips and justified: "Your Majesty, your servant has been with sire since early age, I've little friendship with the Seventh Duke, and there is no hidden motive."

"I know, when the time comes, whether you choose to go or stay, you've to make the choice, and I will not interfere with your decision." The Emperor said. "You can go and get ready."

"Yes, your servant retires."

Li Qing sleeps soundly and unaware that he is about to head on a long journey. Finally when he has enough rest, he woken up and the sun at this time located in the west apparently nearing dusk. He stretched and sat up; the royal robe that covered his body had slide down to his waist.

"Wake up." Song Yu said.

"Ah."

Song Yu continues to work on political agenda document (correspondence), Li Qing worn his shoes and sat quietly. A royal servant took a small table and put on the couch, another servant brought a bowl of pea's porridge on a tray and placed it there, the emperor has specially ordered the royal cooks in made them.

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The examiner saw his sleepy looks, eyes dazed, seems not an intelligent person so he picked the simplest question and asked him: "His Majesty asked 'How can he make the kingdom to be a safer place?'"

He did not answer like the others, who attempted to shows off their talents, only replied in a short

statement: "Enough food and clothes are sufficient for people to feel safe. People considered food as the most important thing."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Why not add a few more statement, which should be fine." The examiner kindly gives him second chance.

"Keep the Ruler's ethics (justices) for the citizen then the nation will not be in danger."

"Anything else?"

"Still not enough, ah?" Li Qing contemplated hard and then said: "The nation does not belong only to the Emperor; His Majesty must make effort and use his mind to provide peace to the citizens, to follow the examples of wise sages to have a long life."

Suddenly the hall was momentary silenced.

Li Qing was confused; he really wonders what he had said that could make everyone speechless. He did not think he could excel as one of the successful candidates, always thinking how quickly he could leave here and return home to sleep. He was forced to wake up in the morning before dawn and driven into the palace, it was better off to kill him instead.

The examiner looked at him from head to toe as if he'd seen a demon, thinking inwardly how this youngster dared to teach 'How to be a good Emperor' (Holy Emperor), is it not implied that His Majesty did not rule justly like a wise sage?

"What is your thought, of being a Holy Emperor?" The Emperor suddenly broke the silence and shocked the audiences.

Li Qing was indeed surprised but nonetheless replied: "Eat the food of the people eat, thinking of what the people think, delight in the people's happiness, sympathize with the people's trouble, love the people then the people love back, do evil lead people to be evil criminals, respect the people as they are the tiger, and able to see the pain of the people."

"What are you trying to say? That the Emperor do not belong to himself but to all the people of the nation?"

"The Emperor always says: "I am the nation." Therefore, the Emperor is the head of the nation, if there are no people then there will be no nation."

The Hall became quieter.

In fact, what Li Qing said was the well known truth so nothing new is cliché, except that none would dare to preach the Emperor about it. Even saying the statement "I am the nation" was guilty of disrespect. The person who said this would be an idiot or have a great deal of courage, the audiences at present were sweating coldly for him.

The Emperor did not show anger, but gives a faintly smile and said: "What you've said is correct."

The examiner watched over the situation, saw the Emperor seems liked Li Qing response, then with cinnabar pen circled his name.

'A blind cat catch a dead rat' is probably the case for Li Qing. His luck has ranked him into the first

group, taken third place, the fifth rank level in government ministry and served in Social Service Department as an entry level. Li Hyun was real gold, who champion of the first place, fifth rank level in government ministry and sent to "River Province", took over the Head of Government House in the county.

The two brothers both passed the examination in first rank, one work as a minor official in the capital and the other placed as the high official of a county and both positions are lucrative. Li Cong Yin laughed almost straining his jaw. He took three days to celebrate, set off firecrackers and open great banquets. Although the feast was charged to be able to attend but many rich people still came as they want to make with the right connection. Such feast had helped Li Cong Yin to acquire a few business opportunities and funds. Above all, it was a great fun event!

End of Chapter 2

Mo Shang Hua Kai chapter 2 – the last part.

The next day after the public announcement of the successful examinees, according to the customary practice, the court would conduct a banquet for passing the Imperial Examination. Setting up a tent by the Taiye Lake side to hold the banquet. Three successful candidates who got the highest point in the same Imperial Exam would have the special honors to have a seat on the same mat with the Emperor. It was said as sitting on the same mat, but the Emperor's seat still a bit distance from them, it was merely having a feast on the same tent only, there were also a group of high officials inside the tent.

There was an unwritten custom for the Pass an Imperial Exam's Banquet, the candidate who came third* in the examination would have to pick the most beautiful peony in the capital, on behalf of the world scholars, dedicated it to the Emperor, while saying : "Heaven bestows the world with the spring's thousand fragrance, this unrivalled beauty is presented to Our Emperor."

(t/n : *探花郎 – Tanhua Lang : Tanhua means a candidate who came third in the Imperial examination or the Third Place Examinee, Lang means bachelor or junior official. So, I will use Tanhua Lang or the Third Place Examinee when necessary, so, please don't be confused. XD)

When the Emperor accepted it, he would reply : "The grace from Heaven not only for the swallow on the highest building, The beauty of the spring returns to the world."

After that, the Emperor would give the peony back as present to the successful examinee. It served as a metaphor, that the Emperor and his great number of people, praying and wishing for the continuous prosperous years. Wonderful as well as elegant indirect meaning.

When Li Cong Qing in accordance with the customary enjoined, reverent and respectfully offered a full bloom bright red like a flaming blaze peony, the Emperor was like smiling yet not smiling, didn't immediately accept it. The originally rather noisy tent fell silent, all line of sight was cast on his direction.

What is it this time? Li Cong Qing was unable to understand the situation. Last night he especially turned in very early to have a full rest, to keep him in good spirit. They wanted him to pick a peony, he already picked one. So, why the scene became so strange again?

The Sixth Prince, Song Xuan, moved closer and said in surprise : "Isn't this the outstanding beauty* that His Majesty planted personally?"

(t/n : * 天香 – literally means : divine fragrance, national grace or Ethereal color and celestial fragrance – word to describe an outstanding beauty of a peony.)

The tent blew up the cauldron at once. This fellow is extremely daring, he actually cut the flower which is personally planted by the Emperor!

Li Cong Qing was stupefied. Then he realized that he had got himself into trouble. Thinking back, this morning when he received the assignment to pick the peony, even though he usually lazy by nature, he wouldn't dare to just choose whichever flower to be dedicated to the Emperor. So, he was searching here and looking there along the Taiye Lake, yet he couldn't decide which one to pick. It so happened that the Great Sage, the Great Teacher of the Nation was passing by, amiably asking him what are you looking for?

He answered, the most beautiful peony in the capital.

The Great Teacher of the Nation told him and pointing, go to find one at Baihu Temple, the most beautiful peony in the capital is in there.

Baihu Temple was an ancestral temple for the Imperial Family, commoner must not enter without authority. But our Third Place Examinee was extremely fortunate to have the Great Teacher of the Nation leading the way. Smoothly he entered the Baihu Temple which was not so far from Taiye Lake. Just his luck that he settled on the Emperor's peony. Carefully thinking back once again, that peony was specially planted on a big topaz pot inside the bamboo pavilion. Proudly blossomed with its splendid scarlet color, the fragrance of the flower assaulted one's nose, truly an extremely honorable flower.

The Great Teacher of the Nation was not alarmed nor stopped him, to the point of laughing while nodding his head, even actually said great choice, what a great choice.

Good, of course good! Good to the point that he might have his hands chopped off for good!

Seriously thought of doing his best on the matter, the result had become so terrible instead. Li Cong Qing for a period of time didn't know what better to do. He was pondering would it be necessary to throw himself and kneeling on the floor, crying bitterly in tears while begging the Emperor to have a mercy on his petty life? Or just said a high-sounding speech, pleaded not guilty because one who doesn't know cannot be held responsible?

The Emperor solemnly gazed at Li Cong Qing. Li Cong Qing blankly stared at the Emperor. Both of them did not pay attention to all sorts of comments from the crowds, just looking at each other.

Several days ago at the Grand Audience Hall, even though The Emperor was looking up and down, he could only see the hat of Li Cong Qing, from head to toe not so different from the other frail scholars, considerably not be noticeable. Li Cong Qing from the beginning until the end lowered his head and hung down his face, moreover, the Emperor was sitting so high and so far, so far as if at the far end of the world, so they couldn't see each other clearly, didn't have whatever impression whether it was round or it was flat.

Now that Li Cong Qing could see the sacred countenance in close range, he could see that the Emperor had dashing sword like eyebrows* bright eyes. Indeed it was the out of the ordinary extreme handsomeness as rumored, elegant with distinct cultured character. In regard solely for the outward appearance, compared to his two eminently handsome to the extreme brothers, Li Cong Yin and Li Cong Xuan, the Emperor was not inferior in any respects, even he didn't have Li Cong Yin's deceitful air, didn't have Li Cong Xuan's grave and stern cool face, adding more to his inborn natural honorable impressive and dignified bearing, his calm as the sea manner, not flaunting his power, making him beating his heart in awe and veneration.

(t/n : *dashing sword like eyebrows : Lu Cang's eyebrows.. LOL.. Kidding XD : straight eyebrows slanting upwards and outwards. Please imagine Lu Cang's eyebrows. Ahahahhahaha.... XD)

The Emperor by accident happened to notice a faint small roundish bead on Li Cong Qing's lips. It was like a bead-shaped dew rolling on flower bud that was about to burst, causing his lips looks like slightly pout. On that mediocre face, a contradictory feeling of a childishness and a woman's lovely charm was mixed in, particularly now when he blinked his eyes with his innocent expression, that lips unconsciously pouted higher, unexpectedly he was noticeably cute, causing him to have the impulse to get on intimate terms with him.

An Emperor of course may not carry out this kind of indescribable action. Gradually forming a smile, he was the first to open his golden mouth : "The grace from Heaven not only for the swallow on the highest building, The beauty of the spring reflects on Tanhua*."

(t/n : * check the previous note.)

Eh? The Emperor changed the last three words of the reply verse, the meaning is.....?

"I heard that this flower is sweet, Third Place Examinee, do have a taste." The Emperor said, ordering someone to bring a small plate of honey to him.

Li Cong Qing had a fixed face as he had decided, he was not excessively panic-stricken or to be at a loss. He thought to himself, if there was only a dead-end left, calling father shouting mother dropped on the ground and rolling about would be of no use, it would be better to save the effort. Just like that, under all of the crowds stunned eyes, dipped them in the honey, petal by petal he ate it.

The flower petal was a bit bitter and acidulous, fortunately the honey was very sweet, the strong fragrance mixed in the syrupy sweet honey, the taste actually pretty good. Eh..... could it be this is poisonous, so the Emperor wants to poison him to death as his punishment?

The light red lips was biting on the brilliant red petals, glossy as it tainted by the honey. The Emperor cast a sidelong glance at the seemingly more delicious than the peony lips, to the point he couldn't move his line of sight for a period of time.

Li Cong Xuan on the side calmly observed, didn't even said a word regarding his brother's unfavorable situation, incredibly cool to the extreme.

But on the contrary, this year Second Place Examinee, Geng Bai Zuo, forced a hollow laugh. He took the courage to laugh loudly and said : "Our Third Place Examinee resembles an ox, this time it really isn't just in name only, but literally an Ox chewing peony."

The cold joke broke the deadlock situation, everybody laughed loudly upon hearing this corny joke.

After finishing the peony, Li Cong Qing realized that he was not going to die as it had no poison. Looking at the happy and contented face of the Emperor, he supposed that roughly for the time being he wouldn't have to worry about his life, heaving a relief sigh and laughed together. He was not having an ashamed look at all. Leisurely just like that he delivered his gratitude to the Emperor for bestowing him with the outstanding beauty.

When he laughed, the perked up lips was similar to a blossoming flower which soaked by the dew, mouth-watering desirable fresh and tender.

The little detail which had never been noticed by anybody, yet the Emperor had noticed it. He thought to himself, why there is a man with the lips the color of spring flower in this world? Actually more desirable than the woman's cherry bright red lips. In addition, on a face of completely ordinary looking man.

That lips, what kind of taste would it like?

After day dreaming for a while, the Emperor gently laughed out and said : "Third Place Examinee has picked one great flower indeed."

The Dragon was delighted, the Emperor allowed Li Cong Qing to sit closer to him. The Pass an Imperial Exam's Banquet was proceeded smoothly, joyfully and cheerfully.

The Third Place Examinee was sitting under the left side of the Emperor, The Best Examinee was sitting under the right side of the Emperor, they both so happened to be the Li brothers. When Li Cong Yin learnt about the matter after the banquet, he was laughing so hard and for several days couldn't close his mouth as he couldn't conceal his happiness. HA HA HA----- This time, the Li Family definitely will have a meteorite rise, making great profit for life, right?

At that time, nobody could have foreseen, that someday in the future, Li Cong Qing's Ox Chewing Peony would chew the Emperor to the depth of his heart.

The scene from the past turned back to the present.

The Emperor decreed an edict, Li Cong Qing was assigned to do the Imperial Inspection, would travel to Chunan and Erhe Province to inspect. To directly check the people's condition as well as to listen to the voice of the people.

Many of the officials thought, The Emperor most probably was unable to endure this eat-for-free worm anymore, using this inspecting reason to kick him out. However, several high officials who happened to see Li Cong Qing in the Imperial Study that day had a different kind of opinion. Until now, they still had to resist with great difficulty, didn't dare to share with other people about this couldn't be told secret, they almost exploded from holding back.

For the court to dispatch an Imperial Inspection was something common, to represent the Emperor who couldn't often travel on a long journey to inspect the world. However, this time was rather special because The Emperor ordered Wei Xiao Miao to travel together with the representative.

Wei Xiao Miao since childhood had been chosen to be Third Prince's, ---currently The Emperor, personal attendant. The whole education and training he had to undergo was definitely different than with other Palace's attendants. Naturally, his status was not the same. Moreover, he was growing up together with the Emperor, it could even be said that they were inseparable body and shadow, always together.

He was not a mere personal attendant of the Emperor. He was also the Chief of the Palace's Internal Affairs. He held the highest position in the inner palace as a third rank level official. Although his rank was lower compared to the other high officials, and he was an eunuch, however, in the Inner Palace he had the control over essential authority. In the Imperial Court, more or less, he also had an influence. Most of the higher officials respected him to some extent.

Such an important attendant of the Emperor was given to Li Cong Qing to go along with him, of course it would lead to another theory. The one who was truly dispatched for the Imperial Inspection was actually Wei Xiao Miao. Li Cong Qing was a mere paper tiger¹ to be used for outward appearance.

Indeed, it was the truth. Li Cong Qing was taking this task as to visit various scenic spots. All the relevance affairs were taken care of by Wei Xiao Miao. He was only in charge of sitting in the horse carriage and having fun in wherever place they arrived. Just barely having some respect, he was a rather irresponsible person, he only cared to lay idly and live leisurely, just the same as having nothing but this willful thinking.

The Emperor connived in his willful thinking to live comfortably as he pleased in accordance to his temper. But this time, to allow him to leave his side for this long, he couldn't help but have this

reluctant to part with him feeling.

This time, the departure of the Imperial Inspection from the Capital was also not the same from how it used to be. Before, The Imperial Inspector, after the courtesy from receiving the Imperial Edict, would select the date of departure on one's accord. But to unexpectedly have the Emperor to see him off from the Capital until the Capital's outskirt personally, before Li Cong Qing left, The Emperor even entered the horse carriage to be alone with him. [To have a secret talk!]

Ehem, this [secret talk] was not the kind of prohibited for viewers under eighteen's vivid show that the adult readers expected. That kind of limited affairs had been performed coarsely and wildly three days ago. It was unnecessary to do it one more time in the horse carriage. Too tiresome!

"Truly unwilling to let you go to that faraway place." Song Yu was holding him in his arms, kissing him with his reluctant to part feeling.

"Then just don't assign me to go." Li Cong Qing disapprovingly said while yawning exhaustedly.

Because he was about to leave soon, the Emperor was half forcing him to stay overnight in the Imperial Palace. Spending the spring night* passionately three times in a row indeed exhausted him. Last night he was letting him having his way, to the point where the Emperor wouldn't let him off before early in the morning. Fortunately, because of the preparation for the Imperial Inspection, he wouldn't have to attend the morning court, so he could have his hard earned luxury of sleeping until late in the morning and to be up later than usual. He didn't need to suffer the drag and pull by Zhougong ^[2] in the Grand Audience Hall.

To speak the truth, he was not keen at all to go to the place where 'Heaven is high and The Emperor is far away'^[3]. On one side, he had to suffer the travel-worn, on the other side, he had to part too far with his lover the Emperor. Despite he never said it out loud, from the bottom of his heart, he was also very much reluctant to part with Song Yu. After all, he had become accustomed in indulging himself in each other's company. Suddenly had to separate to go on a long journey, he really couldn't get used to it.

"There is some matter that you of course will understand." Song Yu as if had a profound meaning behind his words.

"Your Majesty has confused this humble subject."

"Cong Qing, I want you to firmly remember one thing."

"What is that?"

"Whatever might happen, I will always be here to wait for you."

"I will be back as soon as possible." Li Cong Qing was a little confused and couldn't comprehend his words, but didn't ask further.

"No need to rush. Just come back when you feel like it." Song Yu gazed at him meaningfully.

"However, don't let me wait for too long, there will be a day when my patience inevitably will be used up."

"Your Majesty..." Li Cong Qing had the feeling even more that he wasn't like his normal self. Every word that he said seemed to drop a hint. What was he hinting at?

"Now go. Be careful on your way. Take good care of yourself. Don't let me feel anxious. Understand?"

"Mm, I know."

Both of them stepped down from the horse carriage together. Li Cong Qing once again paid his courtesy to the Emperor with a bow while clasping his hands in front of his chest as a farewell salute. Then slowly disappeared from the Emperor's line of sight. But, the several high officials who were accompanying the Emperor to see him off had gone crazy from their own wild disordered imaginations. Really wanted to shout to the heaven, ---The Emperor and the Ministry of Rites Assistant must have some kind of (affairs^[4]) AAAAA..... ---

The Imperial Inspection's group traveled with little luggage and few attendants, all together the group was made up of fourteen. Besides Li Cong Qing and Wei Xiao Miao, there were still two officials who followed them on this trip, four bodyguards on horses, three attendants, and three cart drivers ; The four bodyguards on horses were guarding them by lining up in the front, back, left, and right. The other passengers were divided to the three carriages.

Li Cong Qing and Wei Xiao Miao were together in a carriage. Their carriage's floor was paved by a layer of thick but soft carpet. To provide them an extensive comfort. The small table by the side was pinned with a piece of thin metal, to make the magnetic tea set stay safely set on the table.

"Xiao Miao, you already know, me, regarding other people's affairs I usually don't like to pry. However, this time I couldn't not ask. Why is it His Majesty wanted you to accompany me on this trip?" Li Cong Qing suddenly asked with an indifferent tone.

"His Majesty wanted his subject to serve Sir Li."

"It must be more than that."

Although this Sir Li ordinarily was careless and absent-minded in appearance, there would be times when he surprised people with his keen observation. Wei Xiao Miao couldn't help but become speechless, he didn't know what he should say, regarding the Seventh Prince's matter...

"Chunan...I have never been there before, I wonder what kind of place would it look like?" Li Cong Qing listlessly propped up his chin while speaking. "The Seventh Prince, three years ago, pleaded to be sent to Chunan. At that time, many people were extremely shocked. Why would a Prince go to a place where 'birds don't defecate and hens don't lay eggs'?^[5]It was practically asking for banishment on his own accord."

Wei Xiao Miao remained silent.

"Forget it, in any case, i will never understand these people of royal family's way of thinking. It is better if I take my sleep." Li Cong Qing made another big yawn, inclining his body to recline, to catch up on his sleep.

Wei Xiao Miao took a piece of silk cloth to cover his body, attentively he took care of his master's most beloved person. He entered the Palace when he was nine years old. At ten, he was chosen to serve his present Master, the Emperor. In a blink of an eye, fifteen years had passed. He had never seen the Emperor dote on someone to this extent. To the point that he no longer accepted new Imperial Concubines. He even made less Imperial Visitations to the Imperial Harem.

If one wanted to say who had the most understanding regarding the Emperor and Ministry of Rites Assistant's affairs, hahii..., romantic love life, then it would have to be none other than Wei Xiao Miao.^[6] He quietly witnessed it from the very beginning until now. Silently, he helped them to keep this secret.

If you curiously asked him, what actually was the turning point, what kind of faithful encounter for these two people brought them together until now, he would say, it was roughly six years ago, at the Spring Festival with the incident of the assassination attempt.

Talking about assassins, one couldn't not say that the occupation as The Emperor was full of danger in his line of duty. At all times and all places, there would be possibilities of life threatening situations. That's because no matter whether what you had done was good or bad, there would always be people who tried to kill you with poison, burn you to death with fire, trample you to death with a horse, threw snakes to bite you to death, lifted the knife to chop you to death, took a sword to stab you to death...Persistently and dauntlessly, wouldn't be satisfied if not attempting to harm you to death numerous times. Didn't know which historian reviewer said these words because of this situation ---

'An Emperor who never met with an assassin, couldn't be regard as a real Emperor.' (Soft roar, without intimidation.) ---

After ruling by virtue for five years, nearly one year after the said Imperial exam.

The Emperor of Dashao would hold an annual memorial ceremony every spring, by the day marking the beginning of the forth solar system^[7], to pray for the Heaven to bestow the year with favorable weathers for the crops to grow, for all five grains to have a bumper harvest. After the Spring Ceremony, what else but the routine Grand Banquet.

The Spring Ceremony's Banquet was the Emperor's important annual festival which allowed the commoners to have fun together in this joyful Grand Banquet. Not only the relatives of the Emperor, the kin of the officials and non-officials, this Grand Banquet also allowed the local commoners who were the native of the nation to participate. These local commoners had to go through a selection, they must possess some traits, ranging from benevolent integrity, filial piety, loyalty and righteousness. The people who had this quality, would be recommended by their local authorities to come. And even ones with a high honorable reputation, in their lifetimes only had this one chance to come to the Imperial Palace to sight-see. Not to mention having the opportunity to have an audience with the sacred countenance of the Emperor.

Obviously, there were also people who would like to spend lots of money to buy the place. Li Cong Yin also bought that one 'Kind and Charitable' place, in high spirit, he excitedly entered the Palace to participate, to entice more customers for the sake of his business. In short, if there were assassins mixed in with the commoners to get in, it also was not something that was beyond expectation.

It was told that from the beginning, Li Cong Qing who passed last year's Imperial Exam was assigned to assume the position in The Ministry of Revenue. A position that would dim the freshly graduated official's ring of light not long after he had assumed the position. A department in the Palace which had lots of third rank officials like himself. If one wanted to be promoted, wanted to make fortune, then one had to rely on their own actual strength.

The Ministry of Revenue was in charge of administering for the whole nation's territories, farm lands, census register, taxes, the payments and the salaries, national treasury, as well as every financial arrangement. It was the busiest department among the Six Boards of Ministries. Their daily jobs included writing, copying, transcribing, counting this and counting that all day long. Li Cong Qing who had a listless nature was forced to work hard until he was badly battered and in terrible shape. How he wished he could resign from his official post and return to his original job as the shopkeeper of a bookstore.

If not, he hoped he could be transferred to another department that was more relaxing compared to this one. For example, The Ministry of Rites.

Although being busy, he should still rest when it was time to rest. The officials could partake in the Palace's banquet, this was his opportunity to seize the chance to take a break from work. At the very least, on that day, he didn't need to stay up all night to work overtime. Imagine, a person who only

needed a cup of wine to become limitlessly drunk, could he properly calculate the exact amount of taxes, payments or the correct expenditure of funds to build a bridge and to pave the roads?

Li Cong Qing attended the Spring Grand Banquet. He who had zero tolerance for liquor drank a little wine, because if he didn't drink the wine, there was a possibility he might get caught and dragged back to work by the workaholic Assistant of the Revenue Minister, to accompany him in playing with the amusing everlasting layer by layer stacks, like little happy mountains of files.

A few cups of yellow rice wine down his belly, caused the usually loving to sleep Li Cong Qing all the more to lose his consciousness. However, the banquet had yet to end. His Majesty the Emperor still enjoyed the festival with the commoners somewhere far away. They were merely lowly officials, of course they couldn't leave earlier than the Mighty Emperor.

Using the need to urinate as his excuse, he freed himself from Geng Bai Zuo who constantly urged him to drink. Searching for a desolate place behind the Chinese Rose hedge, he enjoyed his undisturbed leisurely free time. Ever since he entered the Palace to work, it had been a long time since he had this kind of careless and sloppy time when he didn't have to do anything. He simply laid down peacefully on the soft and cold lawn of grass. Floating about during the snatched gap.

The half-moon in the mid-spring. The Chinese Roses were in bloom. The full bloom of the Liu Chao Jin Fen in the magnificence of multicolored splendor, filled the air with the luxuriant floating lush fragrances of the flowers.

Amidst the flowers and under the moonlight circumstances caused the drunken with bleary eyes Li Cong Qing to happily and care-freely recite a poem in scattered verse. The first half of the poem he recited << Hao Shi Jin >>: "Fei Yan Xin Zhuang, strived to dye the path between the field with its radiance of spring. The outstanding beauty of Xi Shi Zui Wu, drunk to its heart's content behind the sleeve." He recited another half verse <>: "Jiao Rong San Bian, filled the small hedges on the yard with its bustling spring color. Amidst the flowers and the wine, envy the carefree and leisure contented old man." Another poem <> "Happily drunk in the Jade Tower for a while, gazed upon the Su Yu Han Hong. Lazily wrapped in thin clothes to sleep in the cold night, the pillow of spring flowers fragrance' every night." --- (note)

Casually recited the poem in disorder, every verse was chanted in a such lazy way, he recited while mimicking the little puppy playing in the meadow, rolling here, rolling there, without any cause he would burst out into laughter, amusing himself, becoming extremely happy.

Extremely drunk!!

The next scene was what was normally written in the book ---- Precisely at the moment when the Emperor leisurely passed by, was precisely the moment he recited the poem's verse with a laughter which attracted the Emperor's attention. Afterwards, precisely at the moment he was playfully rolling here and rolling there on the clustered full bloom flowers, was precisely the moment the Emperor caught a glimpse of him. Because of this, The Emperor had a clear look at him.

It could be said, a predestined affinity was indeed a wonderful thing, right?

Last year, after the Imperial examinations, The Emperor didn't pay him any special attention. But the Emperor's ability to remember such things was much more superior compared to the ordinary people. Therefore, he roughly had an impression, about the man who seemingly lacked of good virtues yet had lips like spring flowers.

But now, seeing this man after a year, his sparse figure was floating among the fragrance. His drunken appearance was simply innocent, charmingly naïve.

<< Hao Shi Jin>>, <>, <> ... The Emperor unconsciously slightly raised the corner of his mouth. Unexpectedly, this ordinary man had a refined and romantic literary grace. Using his tipsy mellow feeling to comply with his chant, he leisurely recited those splendid verses. Between the words and the lines was the undulated sluggishness of flirtatious expressions.

Lazily wrapped in thin clothes to sleep in the cold night, the pillow of spring flowers' fragrance every night. What a charming reverie to attract infinite thoughts.

"Your Majesty, should we wake him up?" Wei Xiao Miao who accompanied him asked in a whisper.

"No need."

During the banquet, the drunken people who staggered about could be seen everywhere. Wasn't really a strange thing. The Emperor walked away from the man who was wrapped around the flower's hedge, let this drunkard be immersed in his own world.

Li Cong Qing absolutely didn't know that his drunken state had been seen by the Emperor. Absent-mindedly he took his drunken nap. Sinking in his dreamland, looking for Zhougong who shared the same great luck with him, to play chess.^[8]

Just when he was excitedly fought in at close quarters, he was about to beat Zhougong's army in total defeat, Zhougong became hostile and unexpectedly lifted the table, shouting loudly: "Assassin!! An assassin!! Quick!! Capture the assassin!!"

Tsk!! Really didn't have the quality to play chess!! Fortunately this old man was an ancestor of the sages that he had to respectfully worship.

Turning his body, he resumed his nap. Wanting to arrange the chessboard back.

It happened so suddenly, there was someone unexpectedly coming in his direction and stepped on his body. He cried out in pain and suddenly got up with a start. Opening his eyes, he wanted to see, actually who was it that stepped on his body. Just about to open his eyes, there wasn't enough time to look clearly, his body was already weighed down by a heavy object.

"Protect His Majesty!!"

"Quickly capture the assassin!!"

"Hold him down!! Don't let him run away!!"

The noisy uproar was rapidly closing in from a far. Ferociously noisy with murderous-intention.

So actually it wasn't because Zhougong had lost in the chess game that he acted shamelessly. There was truly an assassin. The wine effect hadn't completely worn off, Li Cong Qing was pondering in a daze. So to say, the one who stepped on him was..... an ASSASSIN??!!

That's right! He was an assassin!!

That assassin, when he was trying to jump over the flower's hedge, he stepped on Li Cong Qing,

losing his central of gravity and tumbled to sit on Li Cong Qing's body.

Without any coincidence, there would be no stories. In this world, there were such things as being in the worst of luck until one couldn't be even worse anymore. There was a person who was walking on the road who could actually be caught in the midstream of thunder and lightning. The poor Li Cong Qing, reclining on the ground, being stepped upon, being weighed down, breathed in a little air, but had to gasp out a lot of air, the mouthful of air had difficulty to pass his narrow passage causing him to be unable to breathe.

This assassin also had extremely bad luck. He chose the wrong route to escape. A single slip might cause lasting sorrow. Already slipped and fell, would he be able to turn around and flee? The large number of Imperial Guards were rushing like swarms, surrounding him in a circle to block his way, along with the unable to get up for a while, Li Cong Qing.

The Emperor saw the assassin ran to the direction where Li Cong Qing was reclining, jumped to cross over the flowers hedge, soon after that an out of pain cry was transmitted. Upon hearing this painful cry, in his heart, he couldn't help but have a fearful feeling. Unable to conceal his worry, he went to Li Cong Qing's place, afraid that he had been killed by the assassin.

Without much consideration, without being guarded tightly by his guards, he moved closer. Ignoring the anxious bodyguards who wanted to protect him by blocking his way, with him unable to restrain the concern, he strode forward to the assassin and Li Cong Qing's direction.

Li Cong Qing endured the pain and made an effort to get up. But his body hadn't had the chance to stand upright properly, a long glittering sword was already on his neck. Made him unable to decide, should he stand upright? Or was it better if he goes back to recline on the ground? This drunken insect who loved to sleep eventually became scared to death, unable to hold the pea-sized cold sweat from rolling down.

"Don't come here!! If you come, I will kill him!!" The killer in the commoner's attire shouted out his threat. Looked like he was mixing himself in the crowd of commoners who entered the Imperial Palace for sightseeing.

Li Cong Qing was being seized as hostage.

The Imperial Guards who surrounded them didn't dare to make any reckless movement, only confronted him with their glaring eyes.

The Emperor opened up the barricade, entered the inner side of the made of people wall, ordered with his solemn manner and deep voice : "Let him go."

"Make way!!" The assassin who took Li Cong Qing as his hostage made a very slow shifting, attempting to charge out alive.

"Your subjects are waiting for Your Majesty's order." The Chief of the Imperial Guards was waiting for the Emperor to give his order, to lift the sword and kill the assassin, didn't pay much consideration for the safety of the hostage.

The Emperor calmly raised his hand, signaling the prohibition of impatient action. He didn't want Li Cong Qing to be harmed, so much to the point of death.

As it went like the saying goes, even if you closed your door and sat inside the house, the calamity would still befall upon you. Li Cong Qing truly received the descended from Heaven's calamity, his facial senses had formed a sad shape^[9], stammering said : "A...aiii.... , Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, I am but an insignificant lowly ranking official. You take me as a hostage is of no use."

“SHUT UP!! Be mindful or I will kill you!” The assassin roared with an angry voice.

The sharp edge of the knife was pressing close to his skin, Li Cong Qing obviously could feel the chilly cold air of the metal, furthermore, he could feel that the assassin's hand was shaking greatly. He was extremely afraid that the assassin's terrible shake, once he made a slip because of the trembling, he would snap his neck and send him to be the son-in-law of the King of Hell. In that case, he indeed had been treated unjustly to death.

“Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, may I plead, could you please not tremble?” Li Cong Qing was sincerely pleading to him. Hoping that he would emit compassion and didn't tremble like crazy anymore. Two of his fingers, while trembling in fear were trying to pinch away the sword's edge, trying to move them away a little bit.

“SHUT UP!! Don't move!!” The assassin was using more strength to press him down using the sword.

Li Cong Qing hurriedly withdrew his fingers, so as not to let his fingers be the first to suffer, he stiffened his body, didn't dare to move randomly. An idea passed through his mind like a flash of light. Mustering up his courage, he attempted to negotiate by reasoning with him: “Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, I understand that you must have unsatisfied feelings towards the Imperial Government, you bravely risked your life to face the danger and entered the Imperial Palace, thinking about sharing your opinion to His Majesty the Emperor. Everything could be talked over. Need not to move the knife or shift the sword, alright?”

“What shit do you know!!”

“Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, you may not speak like that. The saying goes: ‘To say you know when you know, and to say you don't know when you don't know.’ If you say, then I will know. If you don't say, of course I wouldn't know.”

“What kind of know this know that, I don't understand you! I just know that I want to kill that dog Emperor!!”

“Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, as far as I know, the Emperor isn't like a dog, but like a rat.”

“Hmph!! Then, that rat Emperor!!”

“Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, put down your knife, repent and attain enlightenment.” Li Cong Qing patiently tried to persuade him, sincerely advised him, he looked exactly like an old monk from a temple.

“I am holding a sword, not a knife!!” The blue veins on the forehead of the assassin were twitching greatly.

“Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, put down your sword, repent and attain enlightenment.” People would be able to think fast in an emergency. Li Cong Qing was emitting cold sweat. He was practically babbling nonsense.

“I don't want to attain enlightenment!! I want to kill that dog Emperor!” The blue veins of the assassin were twitching like crazy as if almost burst out the blood vessel.

“Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin, it is a rat.....”

“SHUT UP!! SHUT UP!! YOU JUST SHUT YOUR MOUTH!! Don't call me with that whatever shitty Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin!! If not, I will kill you!!” The assassin had almost gone

crazy because of him.

Li Cong Qing opened his mouth, wanted to say something, but thinking again, it would be better if he obediently shut his mouth. Beside frightened to the point of having an appearance of feeble legs, he truly felt that he was actually very unlucky. The hard to get undisturbed nap was ruined by this not too bright assassin. Was there truly no such thing as laziness anymoreeeeeeeeeeeeeee.....

Hearing the laughable conversation between Li Cong Qing and the assassin, the Emperor was almost unable to hold back his laughter from bursting out. This Li Cong Qing was unexpectedly this kind of interesting man. Death was about to befall on him, he was still able to speak off the cuff, blabbering nonsense to get his way, to make the assassin's emotional state disturbed and disordered. He hadn't experienced this kind of amusement for a long time, even though that under the threat of a sword Li Cong Qing could be dead at any time.

The Emperor didn't laugh. May not laugh. Straightening his face to maintain his piercingly cold smart face, didn't leak out the slightest amount of intent to laugh, the Emperor put on his completely majestic manner and ordered: "Let him go, I will let you escape."

"Hmph!! You think I will believe your dog Emperor's words? No! Rat Emperor is the correct one!!"

"That's right! That's right! Big Brother Assassin, you finally can remember that Emperor is like a rat!" Li Cong Qing responded excitedly, only without giving the cheering applause to encourage him.

"Aaaaaa.....---You shut your mouth!! Aaaaaa....." The assassin stomped his feet in anger.

Li Cong Qing's heart fearfully skipped a beat, the Emperor's heart anxiously skipped a beat. Afraid that the assassin went crazy and stabbed him to death.

Taking advantage of the confused state of mind of the assassin for immediate precautions, The Emperor's sharp eyes flashed with an idea. Seized this crucial moment, he decided to quickly instruct the Chief of the Imperial Guards who was standing by his side: "You can kill the assassin, but do not harm the hostage."

The Chief of the Imperial Guards received the order. Swiftly, he charged forward, as sudden as a flash of lightning he launched his attack.

The assassin was driven to desperate action^[10]. Hurriedly shoved Li Cong Qing to the Emperor.

The Emperor unconsciously spread both his arms to catch him.

Li Cong Qing's whole body was staggering, then fell forward.

The assassin's sword ruthlessly pierced through his shoulder blade from behind causing him to bleed profusely. He was planning to stab the Emperor who was about to catch Li Cong Qing, using his sword and pierced through his body, to stab the Emperor's heart.

Li Cong Qing was being shoved too forcefully, instead of falling into the Emperor's chest, multiplied by his own effort, he pushed away the Emperor's opened arms.

The Emperor retreated two steps because of his shove, resulting in the tip of the sword being halted in front of the Emperor's chest at a very close distance, didn't even hurt half the size of the hair.

Everything, from the beginning to the end happened in the twinkling of an eye. Li Cong Qing was unable to bear the sudden acute pain, in front of his eyes was a layer of darkness. Gradually, he toppled down.

“LI CONG QING!!”

Before losing his consciousness, he heard the calm and deep voice of the Emperor uncontrollably broke out into a shout, calling out his name loudly. Haai... Who would have thought that the Emperor would remember his name...

The next day, when Li Cong Qing slowly regained his consciousness, he realized that he was in some strange place.

Oh! Oh! Oh! , was it the sleeping quarter of the Emperor?

Ehem... If you are cupping your cheeks with your hand, and shrieking while expecting it with all the flowers in your heart in full bloom. Really have to say sorry to all the dear readers, you have guessed it wrong!!

Was the Emperor's sleeping quarter a convenient place where just anyone could enter and sleep?^[11] Just say that our Li fellow is the leading role here, but at this time, in the Emperor's eyes, he is not more than an injured person.^[11] To stay in the Emperor's sleeping quarter to heal and recuperate is a matter that could stimulate alluring and erotic thoughts. At least for now, if there is nothing happening, of course it is proper and to be expected as a matter of course.

He was reclining on the Imperial Physician's quarter's sick bed. His entire body was weak and powerless. The first thing he felt right after he regained his consciousness was; the sudden burst of scalding hot with the extremely sharp and intense pain on his shoulder.

Hurts! It was really hurts! In his life time, he had never felt such acute pain!

“.....So hurt.....” Couldn't bear it, he let out a weak moan.

“Ah!! Sir Li has woken up!!”

“Great Doctor, Sir Li finally has woken up, come and check him!!”

“Quick, send the word to inform His Majesty. Report that Sir Li has awoken!”

There was an unnecessary racket by his side. All of Li Cong Qing's awareness was on his acute pain, instinctively he struggled for a bit, causing more pain.

He was a man who adopted a comfortable life style. Never had to suffer such a serious wound. Never had to bear such acute pain. All of himself was spoiled with delicate skin and was a fair complexioned person. Regarding intense pain, his endurance was much more lower than any ordinary person. Absolutely couldn't bear this kind of violent and intense suffering. Tears had been rolling down like pouring. Loudly cried and shouted: “So hurt!! So hurt!! So hurt!!”

“Sir Li, please don't move randomly!! Your wound is bleeding again!!”

“Quick, hold Sir Li down! Don't let him flail about!”

“SO HURT! SO HURT! SO HURT!” Li Cong Qing was weeping loudly like a little child. Unable to contain it, he was uncontrollably crying and shouting loudly. He felt like he was hurt to death!

Everybody acted in confusion in order to hold him down.

When the Emperor arrived, the sight of Li Cong Qing's hands and feet being held down by a crowd of

people met his eyes. The doctor was busily untying the blood stained wrapping cloth from his seeping out blood's wound. Repeatedly applied the thick ointment on the wound.

The Emperor strode to the bed's side. The attendants who were helping the Great Doctor saw the Emperor, hurriedly they let go of the troublesome patient who was still crying nonstop and respectfully greeted the Emperor. "Your subject respectfully greets Your Majesty."

"SO HURT!!!" Once his hands and feet were freed, Li Cong Qing started to struggle and crying loudly again.

"I know you are hurt, don't flail about anymore, otherwise, it will be more hurtful." The Emperor even surprised himself with his unusual gentle intonation. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he lightly pressed the other side of his shoulder which was not wounded. With his gentle push, he pressed him back on the bed, not allowing him to resist. "Doctor, quick, carefully treat his wound."

"Yes." The Great Doctor proceeded without delay. He took clean wrapping clothes and wrapped the wound.

Li Cong Qing was hurt to the point of dying! But under the Emperor's gentle pressure, he didn't recklessly flail about anymore. Gradually, he calmed down. Only his tears were still rolling down like before. Couldn't be stopped. His crying and shouting loudly had changed into a sobbing and whimper sound. Extremely miserable and pitiful. Whole heartedly he cursed and blamed the assassin, why didn't he just give him a simple and direct stab to kill him? Making him suffer a living hell.

His mediocre looks originally couldn't be said as ugly. But he was crying so unsightly, with a running nose. The Emperor not only didn't feel disgusted, he even felt that this kind of face was a little adorable. He couldn't resist to lift his sleeve and wipe the flowing profusely tears and snivel from his face. Smiling while lightly mocking him: "A big man crying like this, don't you feel ashamed?"

"Wuuu.... The one hurting is not you.... Of course you can speak like that...." With much difficulty, he squeezed out his voice to retort, his hoarse voice was shaking from the pain.

This was the very first time Li Cong Qing expressed his unruly self to the Emperor. At this moment, his mind was unclear because of the pain, he completely had forgotten that the one he was speaking to was his Big Boss.

However, unexpectedly, towards his disrespectful, unruly, inconsiderate and disobedient attitude, the Emperor tolerated him with a contained smiling face.

This kind of manner, this way of speaking, was close to an intimate relationship.

After the wound had been wrapped, the Great Doctor brought a bowl of medicine, carefully propped to help him sit. "Sir Li, please drink this medicine."

Li Cong Qing glanced at the dark with seven layers of blackness and thick with stink odor deathly looking medicine, he twisted his brows with a look of disgust on his face. "Don't want!!" He cast his face to the side, pursing his lips and momentarily transformed into a child.

"Sir Li, this medicine, not only can heal your blood clot and relax your stiffened muscle, this medicine also has the effect of a pain reliever." The Great Doctor also coaxed him like coaxing a child.

Hearing that it could relieve his pain, he couldn't help but waver for a while. But in his whole life, he loathed to drink medicine the most. It was practically asking him to die!

"Give it to me." The Emperor took the bowl of medicine from the Great Doctor's hand and held it in front of him. Under the eyes of the shocked audiences, he condescended and held the spoon to feed

the medicine to his mouth. Coaxing him with soft words: "Come on, drink this."

Li Cong Qing with his childish temper pursed his lips tightly, his face was of defiant.

"Open your mouth." The Emperor ordered him with a gentle voice.

He glanced again at the black and thick medicine, then glanced at the gentle but not losing his dignified expression of the Emperor, Li Cong Qing as stubborn as a bull, pursed his lips even tighter. Showing an unwilling to drink temper. Even though this man ordinarily showed a careless, lazy, easy going, obliging and an everything could be settled through discussion kind of appearance, but once he became strong-head, he wouldn't be different to an obstinate bull.

Oh! Oh! Oh! Would the Emperor proceed to feed him the medicine with his own mouth?

Haiiii... Dear honorable readers, your expectation are truly too high. This couple at this time hasn't had that kind of sharing meager resources ^[12] relationship yet.

Deadlocked for a period of time, the middle of spring's air was still cold, the hot medicine had become cool. The Emperor handed over the bowl of medicine back to the Great Doctor.

Li Cong Qing's eyes were shining brightly, he thought that he didn't have to drink the medicine anymore.

The Emperor wouldn't want to grant him his wish, instructed the Great Doctor: "Bring a new one." He was not being impatient nor angry. Also not forcefully coercing Li Cong Qing, instead, he lightly said: "I will just sit here, waiting for you to drink the medicine. After that I will go."

The words were telling that he would dilly-dally together with him. Just see, who had the most patience.

Looking at him pouting his cheek and biting his lips, The Emperor felt a kind of awkwardness for his spoiled as if being wronged impression. Attentively looking at his face, a hard to resist shred of interest was rising, wanting to ask him, are your lips delicious?

Not long afterwards, a bowl of steaming hot medicine was coming again.

The Emperor was looking at him, firmly and quietly looking at him.

Really wanted to dilly-dally?

Li Cong Qing, who at first persisted for a while, was feeling that the Emperor's direct gaze had made his head and skin numb. Moreover, the pain on his shoulder was hard to bear, in the end, he raised his white flag and surrendered. Obediently opened his mouth. Forcing himself to swallow the medicine that the Emperor personally fed him. His brows were knitted into a deep frown. His whole face was distorted and forming a regiment.

The Emperor patiently fed him spoon by spoon. Li Cong Qing was unable to bear the spoon by spoon bitterness. Better to get it over with it rather than prolong the agony. He simply snatched the bowl from the Emperor's hand, faced up and gulped down a mouthful of the medicine. Mommy.... It bitterness is killing me!!

His too sudden reckless movement pulled the wound and causing a sharp pain. Made him cover his wound with his hand and leaked out a suffering expression.

"Don't move about anymore, be good and recuperate." The Emperor helped him to recline. Once again, unable to resist the urge to caress his pale face, like a gentle wind, his thumb carelessly

brushed past the blood colored lips.

Recalling that dark red as the spring flowers' color of his lips, beautifully fresh and made people enchanted.

After the pain was already alleviated a bit, Li Cong Qing also was worn out from the pain, worn out from the crying, worn out from the fussing. His consciousness finally became calmer and sober. With his eyelids half hanging, he returned to his normal humble subject's bearing, respectfully said: "Humble subject is thankful for Your Majesty's concern."

Hah!! Finally you are aware about me, huh? The Emperor's smile had become wider. Unwittingly he recalled the time when Li Cong Qing was seized as hostage by the assassin, the sad shaped face he made at that time was of a 'how come I am so unlucky' expression rather than 'Help me!! I'm afraid!!' expression. The Emperor thought to himself, this person is actually a very interesting one, unlike his ordinary dull and indifferent outward appearance as one has seen.

From this occasion, the Emperor firmly remembered about Li Cong Qing.

A pure coincidence had become an impure predestined relationship. These two people's relationship was officially led by the red thread of destiny.

Long afterwards in the future, whenever he recalled about this matter, Li Cong Qing would suddenly be reminded, at that time, he was already literally being held firmly by the Emperor. Whenever he displayed his obstinacy temper, the Emperor would always have a measure to make him obediently listen to him.

The so called: there is a greater thing above a great thing^[13], was this saying coming from this kind of sense?

And then, this kind of talk was not expected to be talked, Li Cong Qing, after that event had learnt one more truth which made him speechless.

When he was seized by the assassin, confronting the life and death situation, the Master of his family, Li Cong Yin, not only didn't he rush to his rescue, but with the heart of a wolf and lungs of dog he even opened up a gamble board.^[14] ---- The assassin was flatten, Li Cong Qing was rescued; The assassin successfully escaped, Li Cong Qing laid his life for his country; Both the assassin and Li Cong Qing was spent. ----- The payment compensation ratio was one to two to three.

Besides openly setting up a gamble board in the Imperial Palace, he also used his own younger brother's life to rake in some dirty money as to settle the sum of money he had paid. After that event, he even said to Li Cong Qing, "Fortunately our family also has this funeral and interment business, in case you were unfortunate enough and departed earlier, the coffin could be afforded with a good price. Who knows, maybe the gravestone price also could be reduced to half."

"Why don't you just wrap me in a simple grass mat, then just casually dig a hole to bury me?" Li Cong Qing languidly responded to him.

"May not!! If I do this, it would hard for me to tell the people that I didn't take too much from the relief payment."^[15] Li Cong Yin feigned his seriousness and earnestly answered him.

Although understanding that the Master really had faith in him, believed that he definitely would be rescued, and without any conscience passed it off as a mere dark joke, Li Cong Qing still put on a dark expression. With this kind of big brother, what can a younger brother say?

As for the assassin, as the reason he wanted to assassinate the Emperor, was nothing else but about

an authority dispute, enemy from another nation. To sum it all up, this kind of act could be counted as a wasteful act? ^[16] With this, for the time being, let's press down the button and not talk anymore.

Whenever Song Yu recalled that year's Spring Ceremony Banquet, he would always be unable to contain his smile.

The drunkard under the bushes of Chinese Roses, being seized as a hostage, willfully and noisily cried over the wound, he had seen three different manners of Li Cong Qing's character, yet, all of these three different manners of character were cute. Even though Li Cong Qing was a man, besides 'cute', there wasn't any other adjective that would be more suitable for him that could be thought of.

"Uh-huh. Sometimes, he is cute indeed. Especially when he had that sleepy expression, like a delicate and charming puppy... Not right! I wasn't here to talk about this. Third Brother, you let Xiao Miao go to Chunan, do you intend to give him to seventh little brother?" Song Xuan asked.

"Want or not want to follow seventh little brother, it's all up to Xiao Miao's wish." The Emperor lightly answered.

"If that's so, why order Li Cong Qing to go together?"

"I have my own purpose."

Song Xuan hesitated for a while, he was about to say something, considering whether to say it or not: "Third Brother, recently, your subject brother has heard several hearsay... Mmm... I don't know if I should tell you or not."

"I know, hearsay about Li Cong Qing, right?"

"Indeed, in this world, there are no affairs that could be hidden from you!" Song Xuan exaggeratedly sighed in admiration. "You let him go at this time, aren't you afraid that henceforth he won't come back again?"

"No. He surely will come back. Come back to my side." Although the Emperor's expression remained the same, without any rise or fall like a railing wave, the words he said revealed his firm trust.

"Sometimes your subject brother truly doesn't understand, actually is it you who is set on Li Cong Qing or is it Li Cong Qing who set on you?"

The Emperor only laughed without saying anything.

To properly say, it was both of them mutually set on each other!

Every time Li Cong Qing displayed his obstinacy, he would surely patiently use warm speech and soft words to coax and comply with his whim. He never felt bored or sick of him, he couldn't get angry at him even the least bit. He only thought to dearly dote on him, to indulge him, to give him the world's best things, he was actually spoiled and pampered by him. To think that he was the impressively dignified Son of the Heaven, Emperor of Dashao, in this world who could have caused him to be most willingly on the verge of petty and low, there was only Li Cong Qing.

The so called, 'there is a greater thing above a great thing', was this saying coming from this kind of sense?

In the beginning, he also didn't expect that Li Cong Qing would hold such important measure in his heart. Thread by thread, drip by drip, directed to the bottom of his heart, rooted deeply, firmly tangled and thickly wrapped around, until it couldn't be removed anymore.

In this life, he already couldn't be without this person.

But he believed, Li Cong Qing was also the same.

Whoever couldn't be without the other?

He knew that outside the Imperial Study Room, the rumor regarding the Emperor and the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites was quietly spreading like the ripples. Presumably not so long after, it would surely cause stormy winds and waves that could break them apart. He knew this person too well. He practically already could predict what kind of reaction he would have.

He would run away!

Afterwards, he would come back to his side again.

The stars, no matter what kind of movement they made in the sky, in the end, they would return to the same place. Li Cong Qing once pointed at the starry sky and told him this. Those pair of eyes which in the daytime would always be half open and half closed as if he didn't have enough sleep, under the dim light of the night scene would have such clearness and brightness as if shining.

So, no matter where he went to, how far he was, how long, in the end he would return to his side.

Definitely!

Having escaped safely from great calamity, certainly one would have future blessings until one's old age.

Li Cong Qing who had the worst of luck yet the best of fortune had confirmed this saying.

In fact, even though his shoulder was stabbed and pierced through, but that sword was thin and sharp to the point that it would cut through iron as if it were mud¹, the tip of the sword was small, so the wound it caused was considerably nimble, the thrust and pull of the blunt part of the sword was the main cause of the greater injury. At the same time, it was very fortunate that it didn't wound the muscle, arteries and veins. At one glance it was as if a very harmful accident happened, but it barely prevented him from dreadful harm. The skill of the assassin whose brain wasn't so bright was truly wonderful. What an awesome skill!!

Strictly speaking, his wound could be counted as a fairly serious wound on the skin and flesh only. Under the treatment of the Imperial Doctor and the application of the Imperial medicinal material, his wound was closed and healed in a short period of time. The recovery also went extremely smooth. He no longer occasionally cried out in pain like a butchered chicken.

However, he was being pampered and spoiled during the two full months he stayed at home to recuperate. His family towards the injured him doubled their care. Even the Li Cong Yin who loves money like his own life also didn't mind to spend money on him. He purchased the highest grade of valuable nutriment to completely nourish him every day.

But yet, big brother's mouth was as harsh as before, he said, 'You don't have to be so moved, your big brother here still counts on you to form a connection with the government, so, please don't waste my highest grade of antler and thousand years of ginseng. Quickly get your health back and get out, go back to the Palace.'

Li Cong Qing was giggling while retorting, 'Your younger brother here still wants to eat Yu Chan Xue Ha² and Ice Lotus Seed from the polar region.'

'Stupid kid!! Why don't you just drop dead!!'

The next day, thick Yu Chan Xue Ha soup and Ice Lotus Seed broth were served as his after meal snack. Reaching out his hand, here comes the tea. Opening up his mouth, here comes the food. He was literally living in heaven on earth. What a dreamy world.

What kind of blessing would he have next?

It was on that very day when he returned to the palace to resume his duties, finally he could fulfill his long wished for desire, to be transferred to the Ministry of Rites as the Assistant Minister.

Here was how it happened. After the morning court, he was summoned to the Imperial Study Room. At that time, Minister Xu from the Ministry of Civil Office, Minister Zhang from the Ministry of Rites and the Great Teacher of the Nation were already present on the scene. These three were quite the highest officials as well as the most honorable.

After he had kowtowed to bow in salute to the Emperor, The Great Teacher of the Nation looked at him with his kind brows pleasant eyes³ and asked: "The flowers are already in full bloom, do you want to pick it again?"

Li Cong Qing cupped his hands in obeisance for greeting and answered him: "Thank you Great Teacher for the other day's guidance. The flower had been dedicated to the Emperor, humble subject need not to pick it again."

"I remember that the flower was eaten by you." Minister Zhang, with the same kind brows and pleasant eyes as the Great Teacher, at one look he definitely had a very very good old gentleman's appearance.

Li Cong Qing didn't show his embarrassment, he was laughing while cupping his hand and respectfully said: "Sir Zhang has a very good memory, could remember this humble subject's embarrassing's affair of that day."

"Today His Majesty summoned you to come here, it's all because months before you had performed a meritorious service by saving the Emperor. Asking you, what do you want for the reward?" Minister Xu mentioned of the main topic.

Performed meritorious service by saving the Emperor? Li Cong Qing was slightly dumbfounded. Could it be that they pointed at that time when he pushed away the Emperor thus causing the assassin's failed attempt to wound the Emperor? Ai, actually that was because the assassin exerted all of his strength in pushing him, so he also ended up pushing the Emperor away. At that time, the scene was too chaotic so they confused his action as if he had dealt with the strike himself. What's with the thought of him wanting to save the Emperor? It was merely like what others had said, purely sheer coincidence.

"Humble subject wouldn't dare⁴. Only wish for His Majesty's wellbeing. Even though humble subject lost his life, it was worth it. Absolutely does not dare to seek any award." Li Cong Qing assumed an air of in fear and trepidation⁵, speaking as an honorable official who was lacking his confidence.

"Li Cong Qing, you might as well feel free to ask for whatever you want." Said the Emperor.

"That's right. You don't need to refuse. What is yours will be yours." The Great Teacher of the Nation smilingly added, he looked like he was quite fond of this young man.

To straightly refuse other's offers was a kind of impolite manner, also the Emperor insisted on giving to him. If he didn't accept, it would be counted as disrespectful. Li Cong Qing pondered, then followed

what is right as a stream follows its course⁶: “In that case, humble subject only has one wish, wishes he could be transferred.”

“Want to have a promotion?” Minister Xu raised his brows.

“No. Humble subject wishes he could be transferred to the Ministry of Rites. If needed to be demoted I also wouldn’t mind.”

It was too late to ask for a promotion, but actually there was someone who asked for a demotion? Minister Xu looked at him in astonishment. Could it be that this fellow’s brain was ruined by that assassin’s strike?

“Ministry of Rites isn’t bad at all. If you transfer to Ministry of Rites, you could only frequently go to Baihu temple to pick peony.” The Great Teacher of the Nation laughingly told him.

Mentioning the pot that didn’t boil⁷, the Great Teacher of the Nation especially raised this matter. Li Cong Qing couldn’t help but think to himself, I heard that unceasingly repeating the same matter is the indication of an old man starting to lose his wisdom, could it be that The Great Teacher is having this old man’s imbecility?

“Why do you want to be transferred to the Ministry of Rites?” Minister Zhang asked.

It was reasonable to say, at present he was dealing with the Ministry of Revenue which was the easiest way to show his wisdom and ability amongst all Six Boards of Ministry. It was a department to obtain the opportunity of achieving some appreciations. Why would he wish to be transferred to the Ministry of Rites which had the least prospect amongst all Six Boards of Ministry?

“Answer, Sir Zhang. Because humble subject has more interest in the Ministry of Rites’ general affairs.”

Interest? Was he taking the court’s general affairs as a joke? The astonishment in Minister Xu’s eyes was completely wiped out. He was in charge of appointing, dismissing, and transferring the forth rank and below officials for such a long time in the Ministry of Civil Office, naturally he would look down on people who had no initiative at all.

“Is there any vacant position in Ministry of Rites?” Asked the Emperor.

“Answer, Your Majesty. The Ministry of Rites is still in need of Assistant Minister.” Minister Zhang replied.

“Then, starting from tomorrow, Li Cong Qing will be transferred to the Ministry of Rites to fill the post as the Assistant Minister and granted a third rank official title.” The Emperor decreed right then right there.

“Humble subject thanks Your Majesty.” Li Cong Qing knelt down to kowtow as his gratefulness. Being an Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites for him was a dream come true position. Deal with little problems, great amount of salary, and very close to his home.

“You all can get back to your job. Li Cong Qing stays here.” The Emperor gave them his order.

“Humble subject asks to be excused.”

“Li Cong Qing, you can rise now.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“Lift your head.”

Li Cong Qing listened to the order and lifted his head.

The Emperor attentively gazed at him. Didn't see him for a full two months, his complexion compared to the time when he was wounded had become much better, to the point that he became plumper and ruddy, utterly a smooth appearance. His skin emitted a thin and soft glossy color, his lips also regained its spring flower color, delicate, fresh and beautiful.

The Emperor realized, unconsciously he had missed him.

“The wound still hurts?” His tone without him realizing had somewhat become soft and gentle, unlike the previous unapproachable tone.

“Thank you for Your Majesty's concern, it doesn't hurt anymore.”

The Emperor suddenly had the impulse to look at Li Cong Qing's wound, wanted to check whether it had really healed or not. His status as an Emperor of course wouldn't allow him to do so, also this kind of impulse even made him surprised at himself and caused his heart to beat harder for a while. He didn't understand why he was particularly so concerned about this person? Was it because two months ago he almost died for him?

He is an Emperor. Even if in order to rule the world by virtue, would he be less of people who willingly died for him? He had never had this kind of strange concern about someone before. Because of this he couldn't help but be a little annoyed, irritated towards this indescribable feeling which he shouldn't have.

Li Cong Qing who was being looked at intensely by the Emperor started to have a numb feeling on his scalp. For him who always could find himself at ease and comfortable in whatever circumstances, in front of the Emperor he actually felt uncomfortable, to the point of awkward, especially when the Emperor silently looked attentively at him, it was as if he wanted to find something on his body, made him really wish to tell the Emperor, can you not stare at me anymore, I am not the least bit good looking.

The Emperor could see his uncomfortable state, solemnly asked him: “You have passed your adulthood, why haven't you gotten married yet?”

Ehh?? For the Emperor to have concern about this complicated problem, Li Cong Qing couldn't help but be startled. “Answer, Your Majesty. Humble Subject has not met an appropriate partner yet.”

Actually, there were people who offered to be his matchmaker, or intended to have the sheltered girls to be married to him, both were not small in number, after all he was a youthful official who had passed the Imperial exam, perfect candidate as he had hopeful prospects for the future. But each and every one of them was refused by him. Furthermore, the Li family's concept regarding romantic feeling, marriage and such was considerably lenient. Whether he wanted to get married, or wanted to stay single and unmarried, as long as he was happy, it was more than good already, they wouldn't force him. His life belonged to him, he could freely choose the way he wanted to live his life.

“How about I become your matchmaker?”

Ehh? Ehh?? Li Cong Qing was dumbfounded, in an instant he became stupefied. The great and mighty Your Majesty the Emperor, can I plead to you not using this serious and solemn expression as well as the earnest tone of speaking. Talking like those women of dubious characters, it didn't match your brilliant divine impressive and dignified figure at all.

“Thank you for Your Majesty's concern. Humble subject hasn't had the intention to get married at the

moment.”

“Why?” Breaking the rock and smashing the sand⁸, straightforwardly he asked for the real reason.

It's simply because I don't want to, there is no such thing as why. “Answer Your Majesty, humble subject only wishes to be able to have complete achievement, only then will I be capable of establishing a family.” Supposedly if this was truly the case, then he most likely wouldn't be able to establish a family in this life time.

The Emperor still gazed at him for a little while before saying: “You may go.”

“Humble subject asks to be excused.” Phew, Li Cong Qing secretly let out a relaxed sigh. Who would have thought that the Emperor also loved to play matchmaker? He even concerned himself with his subject's marriage affairs. Truly proved himself as the so called good Emperor that every voice gave praises⁹, who loved his people like his own children. (Is it?)

Henceforth, our fellow Li Cong Qing went to ride and to take up an official appointment¹⁰, joyfully and gleefully he strode to enter the Ministry of Rites' doorstep. Entering a modest, not too big also not too small, clean room as his office, to carry out his ideal job and to start his good days ahead.

Excluding the fact that he had to punctually enter the Grand Audience Hall since he also had started to join the morning court every day.

Although previously he also had to attend the morning court, but for the fourth rank and below officials, they were attending the court from the outer side of the Grand Audience Hall, on the public square to be exact. Pay courtesy to the Emperor inside the Grand Audience Hall who couldn't be seen from the outside, 'Step forward and report when there's a matter, move back and retreat when there's nothing to report', afterwards he could return to his office and resume his nap for a short while, didn't have to endure the tiredness from not having enough sleep and standing in the Grand Audience Hall unable to leave.

To enter the Grand Audience Hall and participate in discussing official affairs, almost could be said as soaring to the sky. Other people would admire and envy him. But for him, it was rather a hard and unprofitable thing. Sigh, if only he knew, at that time he would have immediately asked to be a mere middle class official, to the extent even if he had to be demoted to a lower official, it would be fine. It was alright to promote him, but why did he have to be of a third rank Assistant Minister?!

Nevertheless, it still had its good points. The Ministry of Rites compared to the Ministry of Revenue indeed was far more relaxing. Even though it also had to deal with many general affairs, but he was an Assistant Minister now. One rank lower than the Minister, he could appoint the right and proper people to do things for him, sort out the files, transcribe and copy, all those small odd jobs, he no longer needed to do them by himself. He only needed to assign the lower ranked officials to complete the jobs on the list for him then look closely one more time to check whether they made a mistake or not, before it was presentable to be submitted to his superior the Minister.

Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites was publicly known as the idlest position. A position that people most avoided since there would be no chance of promotion. Yet, Li Cong Qing happily and leisurely filled that position.

The colleagues in the Ministry of Rites also got along better than at the Ministry of Revenue. For the middle ranked officials in the Ministry of Rites, Li Cong Qing was a completely miraculous person. If they made a mistake, he would correct them and guide them with a good voice and a mild temper, he would never sternly reprimand them; he looked as if lacking in discipline, absentminded, yet still able to realize so many tiny detailed parts, he prevented a great deal of mistakes to have happened.

The strangest thing was, no matter when and where, he would be able to doze off. If they had a

problem and woke him up, they could only see his thread like narrow sleepy eyes looking at the documents, very soon he would fall head first on the documents. But after he went through all the documents he still as before could correctly point out their mistakes without fail. Even instructed them how to revise and amend the issue. Afterwards, he would fall head first again to continue his nap. Minister Zhang was seemingly lenient towards him. He wanted to sleep, just let him sleep. As long as he performed his responsibility and finished them on time. The Internal affairs had become better and better.

Sir Li was actually very smart, only that he loved to sleep a little bit, only his body was a little weak and his bones a little soft, it was so rare to see him stand straightly or sit uprightly with vitality. Except for this, there was nothing bad about him. This was the conclusion of the Ministry of Rites officials after they observed him.

But, Li Cong Qing viewed himself as --- Not wishing to have any merits, only wish for no mistakes.

Being an Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites truly suited his taste. Not even the least bit desired to be transferred to another Board or to be promoted.

On the other hand, the Emperor noticed that Li Cong Qing often dozed off during the morning court. Sometimes from the beginning to the end of court he closed his eyes as if concentrating on listening, sometimes he would nod his head. People still thought that he was agreeing with one's political view. However the Emperor could clearly see, he was obviously dozing off. Even if he stood at the corner of the last row, a corner that mostly wouldn't be noticeable, the Emperor still could notice him. But he never reprimanded him in the public, just acted as if he didn't see.

Eventually, other people would also find out. Henceforth Li Cong Qing gained a title --- The Sleepy Assistant Minister.

Minister Xu looked down on him even more. He often tried to find his fault, to seize an opportunity to drive him away from the Grand Audience Hall. He couldn't stand the person who had an attitude of negligence to stand in the sacred Grand Audience Hall. Contrary to his expectation, except for dozing off, he couldn't find any fault. The Emperor also turning a blind eye regarding his dozing off, making Li Cong Qing peacefully stand on his place, steadily for the rest of his life.

Afterwards, the Emperor accidentally found out that Li Cong Qing not only dozed off during the morning court, but also, ordinarily he was a lazy sluggish person who always seemed to be short of sleep.

On a certain afternoon, by chance he went pass the Ministry of Rites, caught the sight of the bending over the table and taking an afternoon nap Li Cong Qing. He was sleeping so soundly to the point that he wasn't aware of his flowing out saliva. Inwardly said, this person truly loves to sleep, lethargic nature, no wonder he asked to be transferred to the Ministry of Rites.

The Emperor entered the Ministry of Rites' General Affairs' Office. All the officials left their jobs at hand at once and knelt down to kowtow. One person in a great rush was about to shake Li Cong Qing to wake him up. The Emperor made a keep silent gesture, meaning, don't make a noise that could wake him up.

"All of you can leave first." Wei Xiao Miao told the other officials in a low voice, then together with all the officials he stepped out, leaving the Emperor alone with the unaware of the situation Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites in the administrative office.

The Emperor sat by his side. Silently gazing at his childlike innocent sleeping face. There was such an intriguing feeling that he had never felt before, by merely having a clear look at this person, his heart could relax with the same leisured feeling, it seemed like all of the burden on his shoulders could be put down temporarily.

Perhaps because there had never been anyone who could appear to be so relaxed like this in front of him before. Even his own two year old son seemed to be overcautious in front of him. Only this Li Cong Qing, being respectful yet could reveal the highest quality of his comfortable and idle nature.

Slightly smiling, he lifted his sleeve to wipe the drop of spilling saliva by the corner of his mouth. As if the flapping wings of a butterfly, his fingers caressed the slightly parted pair of lips.

All of a sudden, butterflies were fluttering their wings in the pit of the Emperor's stomach, gently, mildly, delicately, throbbing from nervousness.

The beginning of summer, the refreshing breeze would come in occasionally from the window, gently whisked over the wind-bells of colored glass which hung under the eaves, emitting a clear and melodious jingling sound of bells, the pleasant to the ear sweet sound seeped into the heart.

The Emperor didn't call to wake him up. Also didn't touch his hand nor his foot, only quietly sat, soundlessly he gazed at him, all the way until he left, Li Cong Qing didn't wake up.

But after the Emperor left, Li Cong Qing slowly opened his eyes, slowly sat upright, lifted his hand to touch his lips, sitting blankly as if in a trance, until all of the others had come back, only then he stood up and stretched himself, twisted his waist, pounded his shoulders, and kneaded his waist.

Hu! Ha! --- This afternoon's nap really caused his arms and legs to become stiff and rigid, his waist tingled, and his back ached.

The breeze is still, waves are quiet¹¹ peaceful days were going on, summer had passed in the twinkling of an eye, and autumn had come.

The shoulders of the Emperor must bear the whole of the nation, surely his workloads compared to ordinary people would be much more heavier. For this reason, he needed proper amusement to leisurely relax and loosen the pressures of work.

The Imperial outing for hunting was the Emperor's common leisure exercise. To adjust the function of body and mind altogether, as well as to keep the body fit and buildup its strength. The hunting trips would be particularly often during the autumn.

This year's first time out of the Palace for an autumn hunt, the Emperor called in several civil officials to accompany him, Li Cong Qing was one amongst them. His reason was, the civil officials also required to possess a healthy physique, so that they could do their best to serve the country with all their life.

Li Cong Qing was naturally a weak scholar whose hands didn't even have the power to tie up a chicken, needless to say about his heroic spirit to whip a horse and enter the forest, even more about his ability to hold a hunting bow, for not losing his balance on the horse and tumbling down with four legs facing the sky¹², he already thanks the heaven and thanks the earth. In addition, this spring he had just suffered a dreadful injury, although under attentive care he was already recovered, but the shoulder which endured the wound would still feel uncomfortable once in a while, especially when facing the changing of weather.

He chose the most docile mare, even riding on a horse also was leisurely slow, he lagged on the very last row far far behind the main procession, compared to a pulled by an ox cart not even a bit faster.

After catching two deer, the Emperor went back to the Emperor's tent to have a rest, to listen to the report regarding government affairs, while the rest of his companions were spreading out a hunting

competition.

When everybody was striving to be the best and fearing to be the last¹³ in hunting the foxes and deer, Li Cong Qing was just the same as before, hanging around and hovering about. Leisurely he went for a stroll to enjoy the scenery. He lacked the hunting interest. He was running here and there to chase after the small animals, wore himself out even more than the pitiful small animals.

Granted as a matter of course, Li Cong Qing didn't even manage to hunt a little bird nor a little rabbit. With both hands empty, he filled the honorable last place. He didn't care the least bit, in any case he wouldn't lose his head or his job just because of this, at the most, only causing people to ridicule him as useless.

The worth of a man was not determined by how many foxes or rabbits they could hunt. He fully understood his own worth and capability. How people evaluated him was their business, it was not a big deal to him.

At the nightfall time, everybody returned to the temporary Imperial residence in a vast and mighty procession. A lot of people offered their hunting as a tribute to the Emperor, wished to gain the dragon's favor. In the end, all of these hunted animals were sent to the kitchen, to be served on the table and entered the temple of five internal organs¹⁴. So, it didn't matter at all whether he caught one or not since he would still be able to eat it.

However, if they could eat the deer that the Emperor personally hunted, that's what's called receiving the Emperor's grand favor, the utmost satisfactory merit, like having the benefit of eating the sacred flesh of Tang San Zang¹⁵.

What had made everybody shocked was, the Emperor called Li Cong Qing to sit by his side, shared with him the deer he caught today. Of course everybody else also shared a little chunk of the meat, but none of them had as big a chunk as Li Cong Qing's meat.

But even to the extent that the Emperor granted the most tender belly meat to this Sleepy Assistant Minister! Fine, at the time being it was because he had saved the holy Emperor's life, it could be counted as one of court's merits, so for the Emperor to grant him a small chunk of deer meat there wasn't anything extraordinary. The refused to believe officials busily found a good logic to reason, to not taking this occasion seriously.

Li Cong Qing very calmly sat by the Emperor's side. Little by little he nipped and bit the deer meat. Chewed carefully and swallowed slowly in his own leisure, didn't socialize with the other person by his side. The Emperor also acted normally and unceasingly received the Officials who stepped forward and proposed a toast to drink together to their heart's content. No one looked to the other's side anymore.

Only until all had drunk and eaten to their heart's content that the feast ended. Having their own talks in two's or three's.

"Sir Li, you really make me envy you to death!!" These words were said by the also called to join this hunting trip, Geng Bai Zuo, who came over to have a chat with him. He was also the last year's successful candidate who passed the Imperial Exam. He could be counted as the few people that rather got along well with Li Cong Qing. At present, he served as Assistant Minister of Ministry of Transport and Irrigation. He stood not too far away from Li Cong Qing during the morning court in the Grand Audience Hall.

"What do you envy me for?"

"To be able to eat the deer meat that His Majesty hunted, truly makes me admire you!"

That's right, so do you want to replace me to take the envy and the admiration? I would gladly hand over that piece of meat to you. Li Cong Qing thought to himself. Then casually said: "Only a piece of meat, nothing to be admired at!"

"The person who is in blessing wouldn't realize the blessing. Don't you know just now how many people stared at you?"

Can I refuse this kind of blessing? He didn't intend to be the Emperor's and everybody else's focus of attention, not the least bit, he almost let out a sour expression. The meat just now was definitely delicious, the roasted skin of the meat was crisp and crunchy, on one bite the delicious juice of the meat would spurt out...however, the him now only felt that it was not different with sugar coated arsenic, as if it poisoned him to death.

At this time, he could feel that the Emperor 'treated him favorably'. The always wanted to feel relax Li Cong Qing was slightly pouting, couldn't help but bitterly cry in his heart.

Night was getting late, the laughter and clamor in the temporary Imperial residence gradually quieted down. After they played and tired themselves, everybody went to have their rest.

Unexpectedly, Li Cong Qing didn't sleep. He walked out of the temporary Imperial residence, with slow steps he went to a prairie plain that was not so far away.

Raising his head, tonight the crescent moon looked like a hook, the stars and constellations were shining brilliantly, the Milky Way extended all the way across the vast night sky, each and every constellation was presented clearly and reflected in his eyes.

"Běidǒu, Gōu chén, Hǔbēn, Língtái, Shǎo wēi, Tàibái, Zhǎng Yuán, Yīndé ...¹⁶" Concentrating on observing, he muttered all the names of the stars and constellations that he could see.

"What is that that can make you look so engrossed?"

Eh!? The abruptly raised voice made Li Cong Qing jump out of fright, turning his head, he was surprised to see the Emperor was standing at his back, at a very close distance.

"Humble subject pays respect to Your Majesty." Busily he turned his body to salute the Emperor.

The Emperor stretched out his hand and held him up, obstructing him from kneeling down. "Minister Li, no need to be too formal. Next time if you see me, you don't have to perform such formality."

Li Cong Qing paused for a while, made a bow with hands clasped: "Humble subject obey."

"What are you looking at?"

"Stars. Tonight this place is extremely suitable to see the configurations of the stars."

"You often observe the configurations of the stars?"

"Yes."

The Emperor finally understood, not only that he originally loved to sleep, one of the main reasons was because he was observing the stars every nights resulting in him sleeping during the day.

"Do you want to foresee the luck or the disasters as foretold in the stars?"

"Answer Your Majesty, humble subject observes the stars merely as a hobby, just feels like looking at them. Not at all to make astronomical observations about disasters or to advise people. So, couldn't

foresee whatever luck or disasters.” Replied Li Cong Qing. His pair of pupils were glistening and sparkling under the night sky. Completely a never seen before kind of spark. “A person’s fate lay in their own hands. Not to be determined by the stars at a faraway place.”

The Emperor smiled, asked him: “Do you want to be transferred to the astronomy office?”

“Thank you Your Majesty, but I better refuse. When a hobby becomes a must do work, it will lose its delight.” By these words, how Li Cong Qing spent his time in this world could be seen, passing through life in leisure was his main point, other things in life such as hobby could be placed next.

Probably because they were talking about Li Cong Qing’s most favorite subject, maybe because of the Emperor’s intimate manner, both of them, word for word had started to engage in their idle chat. Gradually they became more relax towards each other, no longer restricted or strained, not having any distance anymore.

“For an instance, the appearance of Mars, since ancient times was considered to bring disaster and national calamity as well as the most dreadful omen. The fact is, it is only a natural pattern for it to revolve.” Li Cong Qing pointed at the stars. Very rare for him to start a conversation. “The stars, no matter what kind of movement they made in the sky, in the end, they would return to the same place.”

The starry sky was just like the scattered ice crystals that filled the sky, twinkling and flickering, each of them as if hiding a tale of their own.

The Emperor realized, he liked to listen to Li Cong Qing’s unhurried voice when he talked, slightly he leaned in to listen.

Li Cong Qing realized, he liked to see the Emperor’s warm and gentle smile. The Emperor’s warm and intimate gesture made him almost forget that they were a monarch and a subject.

Few hours ago he still distressed over the Emperor’s special treatment towards him, after chatting for a while, his distress had been casted to the back of his mind. To forget things in an instant was one of his strong points, moreover, even if the Emperor wanted to look at him with a different view, it was out of his control. He was too lazy to be annoyed, it would be better not to be annoyed.

They were talking while standing, after being tired out from standing, both of them sat side by side, shoulder to shoulder.

Both of them had become silent, but the atmosphere didn’t become uncomfortable because of the silence.

Merely sitting calmly and leisurely, didn’t utter even a single word, also could create a very good feeling.

The love to sleep Li Cong Qing sat, sat, unknowingly had fallen asleep. His head nodded and nodded, his body shook and swayed, extremely disrespectfully leaned on the Emperor’s shoulder by his side.

The Emperor turned his head to stare at him.

Both of them were leaning on each other on such proximity, so close to the point one could feel the other’s warm breath. Involuntarily, the ruddy rosy lips were also at a very close range.

Your lips, is it delicious? Let me have a bite to taste it, alright?

Upon this thought, he was unable to restrain himself and arched his head, softly pressed on the red like spring flower lips... In a split second, even he scared himself and gave out a jump, he sprang up his body, quickly stood up and patted the soil.

Li Cong Qing's bended body tumbled on the grassland, he awoke with a start, opened his pair of misty eyes, and bleakly looked up at him without knowing the reason why.

The Emperor wordlessly gazed at him, the always gentle and refined person who never showed happiness nor anger on his face, at this moment appeared somewhat annoyed and rather angry, his eyes were showing mixed feelings and darkened like the ocean.

"What's wrong?" Li Cong Qing blinked his eyes.

The Emperor's throat became tight, an unknown line of brilliant light passed through his pupils, with a not so pleasant expression he turned away his face, not looking at him anymore. Without saying a word he turned his body and left.

"What is he getting angry at?" Li Cong Qing was puzzled and murmured to himself. Shaking his drowsy head, he reclined on the grassland. With a miraculous speed, he fell back into the dreamland.

Since when he was at home he often fell asleep in the courtyard, he was already accustomed to it. Didn't consider that when at home there would be someone who would bring him a quilt to cover his body, but this was a desolate open field on the countryside, The Heaven wouldn't be as kind to drop down a warm quilt for him.

However what made him surprised was, the next day when he awoke, he realized that didn't know since when he was already back to the room in the temporary Imperial residence. It was also unclear who brought him back. He was sleeping so soundly, almost no different from fainting. The outdoor landscape appeared to be obstructed.

Mmm... Could it be the Emperor? Sigh, how could there be such possibility!

Li Cong Qing was wrong! The one who brought him back to the room, exactly the one he deemed as the most impossible, was the Emperor.

At that time, after the Emperor left for quite some distant, he couldn't help but to turn his back to look at Li Cong Qing. He surprisingly didn't get up, only reclined and continued with his sleep. Made him simply want to get angry, also wanted to laugh. To be lazy also to this extent. Really didn't know how to properly take care of himself!

The night in autumn was very cold. Didn't have the heart to let him suffer the freezing wind, he could only come back to his side. Originally he intended to order him to return to the temporary Imperial residence, but upon the sight of him sleeping so soundly, he hesitated for a while. Bowing his waist, he took him up into his embrace. To avoid the keep watch at night guard, he arranged for him to stay in a vacant room, after putting him down, he left in a hurry. Not even staying for a while...

The Emperor who used to have control over himself, for the first in his life found himself going out of control.

Li Cong Qing and Wei Xiao Miao with the party of people came all the way from a thousand li away, trudging for nearly a month, they finally entered the border side of Chunan.

When they entered the lodging for the night house to do preparations for the next day's journey to enter Chunan, surprisingly, the Seventh Prince, Song Wei, was already there waiting for them.

"Humble subject Li Cong Qing respectfully greets Seventh Prince."

"Humble me pays respect to Seventh Prince."

Li Cong Qing and Wei Xiao Miao made a courtesy with bowing while clasping towards the Seventh Prince.

"Xiao Miao, you finally came." The Seventh Prince's eyes were shining when he gazed at Wei Xiao Miao, immediately Li Cong Qing became a dotted line person, out of sight.

"Seventh Prince, long time no see. His Majesty especially instructs this humble me to represent the Master to greet you." Wei Xiao Miao respectfully greeted with his utmost courtesy, lowered his head, not allowing his eyes to look directly at the Prince.

Li Cong Qing was standing by the side, obviously he could feel the strange atmosphere surrounding these two people. Although he was used to sweep his own snow by his door¹, but the gesture of the Seventh Prince who was about to swallow the white rabbit looking Wei Xiao Miao in one gulp, if he didn't help Wei Xiao Miao to get out of this predicament, he just couldn't justify himself.

"Ehem ehem... Prince, Sir Wei has been on the move the whole day, surely he is already hungry, exhausted and tired." Li Cong Qing didn't say that he himself already was hungry and tired, because the Seventh Prince already gave him a completely "I don't give a damn about this whole monarch shit!" cold eyes.

Upon hearing those words, the Seventh Prince ordered them to eat. He also took a seat to eat together with them. However, seemingly what he actually wanted to eat was Wei Xiao Miao.

Finishing the taste like an insipid meal in haste, Wei Xiao Miao ordered some men to prepare hot water for Li Cong Qing to bath and take it to his sleeping room, readily to wait upon Li Cong Qing bathing and changing his clothes.

The face of the Seventh Prince had become severe to the utmost, his eyes were on Li Cong Qing, glaring fiercely as if he wanted to take his life.

Li Cong Qing was not surprised or intimidated, he remained calm and composed, to the point he still wanted to show off and tell the Seventh Prince, sometimes Xiao Miao and I sleep together in the same room, Xiao Miao's sleeping face is so sweet and cute, hehehe... But adding trouble would unlikely reduce the problem. Not to challenge the Seventh Prince's jealous heart would be a rather smart move.

Comfortable and at ease after taking his bath, he climbed to his bed. Occurred for the first time, he actually ... couldn't sleep?!

Tossed to the side and turned to the side like a fish on the frying pan, fried for a period of time, the fish already burnt, Zhou Gong still hadn't paid him a visit. He simply draped an outer garment and walked out his room, to observe the stars in the sky.

Looking up to the sky filled with the twinkling stars, he couldn't help but recall the scene when he and the Emperor observed the stars together.

He loved to lean on the Emperor's embrace like a boneless person, or rest his head on the Emperor's lap while watching the stars. With words, or wordlessly talking about the tale of the stars. His lover the Emperor would always smile dotingly at him, not looking at the stars, but looking at him.

Is he also looking at the stars in the same sky right now? Sigh, I really miss him. If he doesn't miss me as much as I miss him, when I return, I will surely give him a hard time with my obstinacy.

These kinds of thoughts made him unable to restrain his smile. He was not a willful or conceited person at all, he was only extremely willful towards the Emperor alone. Also, the Emperor always showed him his myriad of tolerance, submit meekly to insults. (Except for when they are in bed)

To submit meekly to insults...pfft, In the end he couldn't hold back his 'pfft' laughter from escaping. Why the great and mighty wise and brilliant His Majesty the Emperor became the one who always got the blame from him, hahahaha!!

His heart brewed a sweet as honey feeling, and as a result his bitterness languished with lovesickness was slightly alleviated.

With much difficulty the sleepiness finally came to him, he turned his body to head back to his sleeping room. Suddenly, by the corner of his eyes, he caught a glance of someone striding out from Wei Xiao Miao's sleeping room. The two people eventually ran into each other.

"Prince." Li Cong Qing made a bow with both hands clasped.

"Mm!" The Seventh Prince's expression was so unsightly when he answered him with his indifferent mutter. He was still in the same indifferent manner towards Li Cong Qing while passing through.

"Prince, humble subject has something to say to you, if you feel offended, I beg Your Highness to pardon me." Li Cong Qing spoke to his back figure.

"About what?" The Seventh Prince stopped his pace and cast him a sidelong glance.

"Fruit that is picked by force won't be sweet, flower that is plucked by force will wither in no time."

"Humph!" Giving him a heavy snort, he left with a flick of his sleeve.

Li Cong Qing went back to his sleeping room, climbed back to the bed, patted the pillow and reclined properly. "Sleep, sleep."

Finally, Zhou Gong came and knocked at his door.

Early the next morning when he woke up, he saw that Wei Xiao Miao was still the way he used to be, already in his room and ready to wait upon him when he got out of bed.

Li Cong Qing accidentally caught a glimpse at several small disorder blood traces on Wei Xiao Miao's neck, seemingly had been sucked out. Towards those kind of marks, he wasn't unfamiliar at all. The Emperor often left those kinds of marks on his body.

After washing and brushing as well as putting on his clothing, he passingly said: "Xiao Miao, can you bring me a scarf?"

"Yes."

Wei Xiao Miao searched in the suitcase and took out a dark blue with flowery pattern silk scarf, intending to help Li Cong Qing to wrap it on his neck. Li Cong Qing just took it over, gently wrapped it around Wei Xiao Miao's slender neck. To cover the several dubious marks.

Wei Xiao Miao was startled.

"This flowery scarf is unsuitable for me, it looks better on you." Li Cong Qing casually said.

"Humble me will take another one out for you, Sir."

"No need. When I saw the scarf just now, I realize that I am not suitable to wear any scarf. I will look exactly like a monkey wearing a scarf if I wear it." Awkwardly laughed at himself, he added: "I see that this Chunan is barren hills and treacherous rapid². Unruly people are everywhere as far as one's eyes

could see. There is nothing else to think. We make a round or two around this area to mention that 'we were here' before we leave."

"Sir Li..." Wei Xiao Miao hesitantly wanted to say something.

"What it is?"

"Humble me probably will have to stay here for a period of time before leaving."

"The Emperor ordered you to stay?"

"It was not..."

"You decided to stay by yourself?"

Wei Xiao Miao didn't say anything.

"Xiao Miao, you sure you want to stay here?"

"I..." Shaking his head, "I don't know."

"In that case, for these several days you just properly think about it. Nobody will force you. You also don't have to take it too hard on yourself." Li Cong Qing patted his shoulder, not saying anything any longer. He was an outsider. He didn't have the position nor the qualification to intervene.

Getting along for several years, he knew that even though on the surface Wei Xiao Miao possessed such a slender appearance, his inside was tougher than anyone else. And he also was a considerably bright and intelligent person. If not, how could he become the inner palace's General Affairs Head of Administrator? Also, he was protecting the secret between him and the Emperor to the point of not a single drop of water leaking out³.

This kind of Wei Xiao Miao with his skillful, detailed and attentive heart, really wanted to stay in this barren land of the Southern? Forget it! It was not his business at all. Why should he think too much of it? What kind of character Wei Xiao Miao was, was it necessary for him to groundlessly take trouble to worry? After the next several days, he would go to Erhe to pay a visit to the Third Brother. Playing with a pair of adorable little nephew, and then return home afterwards.

At least, he would reach the Capital at early winter.

After being stabbed by the "Honorable Sire, Heroic Sir, Big Brother Assassin" in that faithful year, the wound on his shoulder would occasionally throb in pain during the winter. The Emperor would message it for him, using the center of his palm to cover and warm the trembling in cold old wound.

Mm, Early winter must already have arrived at home. Return to his lover's side, ask him to embrace him to go through the seemingly very long winter.

The next several autumn hunts, the Emperor would ask Li Cong Qing and the others civil officers to go with him.

Even so, Li Cong Qing's horsemanship wasn't getting any better, every time still as before, ended up empty-handed. However, every time he still could eat the best meat that the Emperor granted upon him, making many people's eyes read to the utmost.

Also, every time they went out for autumn hunts, he and the Emperor would meet up at the vast

prairie in the dead of the night. It was practically as if they were having a secret private meeting of lovers in the middle of the night. All the time the both of them would leisurely chat in an indifferent manner about many unimportant matters. Sometimes they wouldn't say anything and just silently and solemnly stayed there. Without any of intimate or exceeding the norm's weird kind of behavior. Perhaps they were intentionally there or probably they were just accidentally there, a stream of ambiguous atmosphere between them was quietly sprouting to bud, growing, rooting and interlocking.

Because of this, Li Cong Qing was puzzled, he was perplexed, having the kind of guilt as if he looked exactly like a woman who committed adultery. Truly made him wanted to burst out into loud laughter before he held his head in his hands in dismay and shouted loudly; I am not a womannnnnnnnnnnnnn-----

Because of this, the Emperor was very depressed. He was obviously a steady as a mountain person, never lost his temper, moreover to be irritated. However at this very moment he was having this thought to push and pin Li Cong Qing down on the ground, this kind of eating him from inside terrible impulse. There was this wisdom from the ancestors, a good Emperor may not resort to this lowly method to eat up his subjects...

They told themselves, next time they may not go again. But those hateful pair of legs didn't want to listen and just walked to the prairie. Giving their lifetime to the one and only indecisiveness towards the other one.

Violent turbulence under the serene surface, to put it bluntly, it was the so called 'sealed trouble' fermenting.

When the weather had come down to frosty cold in the dawn, it rapidly became frigid and freezing, not suitable for hunting anymore, Li Cong Qing finally didn't have to eat the poisonous like meat anymore. Also didn't have to commit whatever shameful deed by meeting the Emperor in secret. He heaved a mouthful of relaxed sighs, but from the bottom of his heart generated a threadlike unknown why he was upset as if losing something's faint feeling.

The starry sky on that prairie, seemed as if causing him to be dazzled and stunned, had become his little secret for what happened on the autumn that year.

Not so long after, the first timely snow of the winter was fluttering down from the sky.

Li Cong Qing feared the cold. The morning court early in the winter morning tormented him. The Grand Audience Hall though had put so many heaters, but he was standing at the nearest point to the door. His back was exposed to the cold, the cold air which could freeze the bone was pouring on his body, causing him to unceasingly shudder and shrink his body. The sleeping worm would freeze to death during its winter hibernation, wouldn't it?

The Emperor of course would notice. He didn't give any specific order for this. Yet, Wei Xiao Miao was somewhat a skillful, detailed and attentive kind of person. The next day he adorned a thick curtain at both sides of the Grand Hall's doors, the curtain would still be there even when the doors were widely opened.

The Grand Hall's door leaf had six parts altogether, couldn't be opened with a mere shove or pull, let alone to open it entirely. During the morning court, the door would be opened entirely, after the court, it would be closed again. It would be the same even in the winter. But hereafter, from this winter to every winter, there would be a curtain from both sides of the doors, hanging from left to right.

Wei Xiao Miao also especially put some heaters beside Li Cong Qing, not to make him suffer the freezing cold.

His back was now covered from the winter's blow, he was warmed by the heaters by his side, he only

lacked of the spreading cloth with pillow and quilt on the floor, the winter morning court had become warm and comfortable. The hibernating sleeping worm had been revived and alive once again.

Watching him starting to doze off again, the Emperor couldn't restrain the corner of his mouth to slightly form a trace of smile.

The courtiers would have their Chinese New Year's holiday from the beginning of the Spring⁴ Festival until the lantern festival⁴. However, some of the important high position Officials were not allowed to leave the Capital during this time, must be ready to serve the Emperor at any time when they were called upon. So, to be called a high official was actually not really that great, on standby twenty four hours all year long to teach and to be called on without rest.

But this term didn't include Li Cong Qing at all. The rest of the Ministers of the Six Board Officials, excluding the Ministers, only need to take turns on their standby duty. Extremely idle. The on duty officials usually would flock together to play chess or betting on card game, to pass the time.

On the ninth of the first month, Li Cong Qing and the other two middle ranked officials got their turns to be on duty at the Ministry of Rites. Li Cong Qing as usual, took his nap. The other two middle ranked Officials were called to drop in at the Ministry of Transport and Irrigation.

In the middle of soundly dozing off, suddenly there was someone patting him, calling him: "Sir Li, Sir Li."

Li Cong Qing managed with an effort to open his pair of eyes, unhurriedly sat upright, blinked his not fully opened eyes to gaze at that person. "Sir Wei. What's the matter?"

"His Majesty asks you to come to Baihu Temple now to appreciate the flowers." Said Wei Xiao Miao.

"Humble subject received the order." Li Cong Qing exasperatingly slowly raised his body, tidied up his clothes in a very slow manner, stroked here and patted there.

Wei Xiao Miao extremely patient waited upon him. Not even saying a word to urge and haste him.

The Beginning of Spring, the remnant of snow hadn't completely dissolved, the air was very cold. Just before they stepped out the door, Wei Xiao Miao opened a roll of rough-edged purple woolen coat, carefully he wrapped it on Li Cong Qing's body. The texture of the knitted Tibetan antelope fur was soft and warm.

"Thank you." Li Cong Qing faced him and said his gratitude.

"Sir Li is too courteous. This is what His Majesty had specifically ordered this humble person to give to you."

Li Cong Qing fell silent, together with Wei Xiao Miao they stepped out the Ministry of Rites' door. Even if being wrapped by a fur coat, the icy cold air still could enter the lungs when he breathed in. He still couldn't help but quiver in cold when the freezing air roused up.

Walking for a while, they entered the Baihu temple. Inside the temple, the peonies were already in bloom one after another. Each of the towering purple buds and every beautiful yellow bud were competing to be the most glamorous. Emitting a kind of unworldly frosty fragrant, magnificently flourishing.

Wei Xiao Miao led him to go through the flower nursery's narrow path, to the front of a place with a bamboo pavilion. Two years ago Li Cong Qing came to this exact place to pick the peony that was cultivated by the Emperor to be presented to the Emperor.

Every Emperor of Dashao every year needed to personally plant a stump of peony. The successive generations of Dashao always prayed for the blessing from the ancestors for the nation's prosperous and flourishing future. At this time, the Emperor was holding a clipper, carefully trimming the branch and leaves of an about to bloom peony in the middle of the pavilion. The flower bud was as big as a child's fist, it wasn't hard to imagine how astonishing and dazzling it would be when it was in full bloom. Colorful crown with splendid fragrant.

"Humble subject greets Your Majesty." Li Cong Qing stood at the outside of the pavilion while saluting the Emperor with a bowed body and clasped hands.

The Emperor didn't put down the clippers, still trimming the whole branch and leaf when he said: "This peony here is the one you picked two years ago. Initially, I thought that because it was picked by you, it wouldn't sprout any bud anymore. Never would have thought that it would still sprout the bud after two years. The bud is much better compared to the previous one."

"This only happens because of Your Majesty's great blessing."

The Emperor turned his body to face him, lightly gave him a smile. "Whenever I see this one, I will always be reminded of that year's awesome peony."

"Humble subject feels ashamed."

"I couldn't see that you could have that ashamed feeling, you are very calm and unperturbed."

"Humble subject wouldn't dare."

"Li Cong Qing, what do you think, a flower is better picked and to decorate the room, or better to let it wither naturally on its branch?" The Emperor asked, seemingly he indirectly implied something.

"Answer Your Majesty. Even though there is a saying that a picked flower might endure for a period of time, however, a picked flower's endurance surely couldn't be compared to the time of a flower on its branch."

"So..." The Emperor put down the clippers, gently caressing the flower bud. "To put the flower altogether with the soil in a pot then use it to decorate the room is the best option, don't know if Minister Li would agree with my idea?"

Li Cong Qing was speechless for a while, then respectfully replied: "Your Majesty's words are good. It is indeed best."

The Emperor seemed like he still had something to say, but he was interrupted by a notification that rose up from a distant point. "The Honorable Princes, Princess and Imperial Concubines are asking for an audience ---"

Soon afterwards, three children and several beautifully dressed up ladies leisurely came in.

Speaking about the Emperor's wives, basically, there were numerous beauties in the harem. But the ruling by virtue Emperor's harem didn't consist of innumerable beauties at all. Only when he ascended the throne, in courtesy to the ancestors, he took four Imperial Concubines, no one was enthroned as an Empress yet. Later on, every year in according to the Imperial Harem's regulation, twenty four beautiful girls would be selected to enter the palace. But only those who had received the Imperial Visit could stay, promoted to an Imperial Concubine or a Lady position. If entered the Palace for a full year and still not received the Imperial Visit, then following the regulation, they would be returned to the family while still remaining intact, issued a divorce to let them able to marry.

Be enthroned for six years, up to this day, there were only five beauties who stayed, adding to the

former four Imperial Concubines, at the present, the Emperor had nine wives altogether. Among them, three had given the Emperor two sons and a daughter. Couldn't be compared with the previous Dynasty's sons and daughters if summed up together. Obviously not enough to be able to increase the duty and the dedication for the nation to the utmost point, also causing the many people who racked their brains, to present their daughters to enter the Palace, then using this as pretext to strengthen their power of influence, to make a futile effort.

Now, with the presence of the Emperor's Imperial Concubines, as a man, Li Cong Qing was not suitable to stay on the scene, he bowed respectfully and asked permission for leave. The Emperor asked him to stay, he could only retreat to the side.

The Princes, Princess and all of the Imperial Concubines paid their respect to the Emperor. The Emperor took the two year old daughter to his embrace, the two Princes stood closely by his side, the Imperial Concubines were following behind, the whole family consisted of more than ten members that treated each other as an honorable guest⁵, happily and harmoniously enjoyed the sight of spring flowers together.

Li Cong Qing was looking from a distance, looking at the gentle smile of the Emperor, the perfect picture of a family bond was like a scene of a play from afar. His heart couldn't help but generate a bit of depressed feeling. Not a very pleasant one. He hated himself for having this nameless intriguing and strange sentiment. It was like having this kind of sour, bitter, painful but hard to understand feeling, as if he wanted to pour out everything from inside his stomach.

"Sir Li, outside is cold. Please wait inside." Wei Xiao Miao came over to talk to him.

"No, I want to go back." Li Cong Qing answered unenthusiastically. Didn't take into consideration the decree of the Emperor who wanted him to stay, on his own accord he turned his body and left.

Returning to The Ministry of Rites, he leaned his head to continue with his nap, but even the sleeping worm had left the house⁶, he could only take the folder that he had been working on and examined it carefully.

At the time when the two middle rank officials returned after finishing their duty, they unexpectedly saw the usually half awake half asleep him actually had fully opened both of his eyes, seriously looking at the official documents. They were surprised to the point their lower chin almost fell off. They secretly speculated; Our sleepy Assistant Minister hasn't changed his character, has he?

"Sir Li, what's the matter with you?" The middle ranked official asked.

"What's with what's the matter?"

"This is the first time your subordinate sees your eyes widely opened." Added another official.

"What? No wonder I feel that my eyes are tingling." Putting aside the folder, he rubbed his eyes, stretching his waist to the left and to the right, as his eyelid closed to half right away, he narrowed his eyes to resume his half awake half asleep eyes.

"Ai ya! Why do you close it again? Your subordinate just realizes that Sir Li actually has such beautiful eyes."

"True, true. The refined and smart Sir Li, upon proper look, is also tall and graceful, bright and handsome. Truly a proper man with proper behavior!"

The both of them added one line to the other words, eagerly praised him, nearly behaved like kissing up to a henchman.

Could it be that the usual me is a cat imitating a dog or maybe the attendant of the King of Hell? Li Cong Qing was laughing amusingly inwardly. Languidly he answered them: "It is too tiring to open my eyes widely for the whole day."

Involving in the casual idle chat with the fellow officials, his heart remained stuffy as before, the unpleasant feeling still hadn't dissipated yet, the unhappy feeling was following him from hereafter, all the way until the Lantern Festival⁷.

The Li Family was the same as the other families during the Lantern Festival, they would take everyone along, young and old, to go sightseeing at the most bustling Main Street. But the brothers and sister, once stepped out of the house would all split up in all directions. To do whatever they wanted to do.

The oldest Li Cong Yin would never let go of the chance to make a profit, busily doing his seasonal business. The third Li Cong Xuan would take his wife and son to stroll at the temple fair. The fourth Li Cong Tong nobody could tell where had she gone to. The fifth Li Cong Zi most probably occupied with his taking advantage by deceiving the young masters. Our honorable the second Li Cong Qing could only take the youngest brother Li Cong Bai to have a walk.

The main street was crowded by the stream of people, the come and go sightseers were like being knitted. Horses and carriages filled the street.

Li Cong Qing led the little brother to stroll about in the excitement. The whole street was filled with colored lanterns as if the east wind was scattering the flowers of a thousand trees at night. The sound of a bamboo flute was stirring the air, the beautiful jade was reflecting the light, all night was bustling with the fish and dragon's dance.

Walking about, strolling about, his heart couldn't help but slightly throb. Without any awareness, he stopped his pace. Raising his eyes to look into the distance amongst the crowd of the multitudes people, seemingly he wanted to find that most important person in the mass of living beings.

Who was his most important person? Shaking his head, he inwardly laughed at himself for feeling nervous for nothing. Turning his body to continue with the walk, in that split second, amongst the bustling street when the multitudes of people were pushing and squeezing each other, his line of vision accidentally met, interlocking.

Nobody could shift his line of sight, the world became quiet and soundless in this instant. Nothing could be heard anymore, only his own heartbeat and breathing; nothing could be seen anymore, only the person by the other side.

Searching for him inside the crowd to this great extent. Abruptly thinking back...that person really is in the dim light of the lantern...isn't he?

"Second Brother, what's the matter with you?" Li Cong Bai pulled his brother's hand.

Li Cong Qing returned from the God's realm, regained his senses. "Nothing."

When he was about to walk away, crossing the distance from the layer upon layer crowd of humans from the other side, a voice called out to him when arrived before his eyes: "Li Cong Qing."

"Third Prince." Li Cong Qing respectfully made a bow with hands clasped.

Needless to say, the Emperor who loved the people like his own child was dressed up in simple clothing to go out of the Palace. Coming to the world of commoners to be delighted with his people. Even though he disguised himself in the commoner's clothing, he still couldn't conceal his most revered and respected high ranked natural disposition. Among the ordinary people, he was extremely

outstanding, excellent and unrivalled.

“Third Brother, You don’t suddenly run away, if we happen to scatter, what will you do?” The Sixth Prince together with Wei Xiao Miao and the other two guards hurriedly pushed against the crowd to squeeze to their place. They surrounded Song Yu to guard him from all sides.

“Sixth Prince.” Li Cong Qing made another bow toward him.

“It is actually you. What a coincident.”

Li Cong Qing inwardly made a wry smile. This coincidence, the coincidence that added more to his heart’s throbbing as if being fiddled with, making him to have no courage to look straight at that person.

Afterwards, the crowd of people simply walked together just like that.

If you really wanted to talk about coincidence, the sequence of coincidences indeed left Li Cong Qing not knowing whether to laugh or to cry.

They first ran into Li Cong Yin who was bringing some people to peddle the lanterns along the main street. From the only several copper⁸ lanterns to the most expensive lanterns that cost for several liang⁸, he had them all. One could well imagine, Song Yu and his men were surely having too much lanterns in their hands, even the most expensive ones. One year ago he was participating in the Spring Ceremony’s Banquet, he recognized the Emperor’s sacred face, being sensible as not to disclose his divine status, he handed over the business to his subordinates and joined in their group.

Following after, they bumped into Li Cong Zi who was giving a lesson to a pampered son of a wealthy family. They heard his clamor ‘You! The kid that was only born yesterday, what do you look at! Still dare to look?! If today I don’t beat you until your parents can’t recognize you, it’d be a wonder!’

Li Cong Qing really wanted to pretend that he didn’t know him and wished he could make a detour to get out of the way, but he knew that Li Cong Zi had keen sight, right away he got rid of the fool with bloody nose and swollen face and directly strode to their direction, shouting; Big Brother, Second Brother, Little Brother, finally I found you guys.

The face of Li Cong Zi who hadn’t reached his adulthood was extremely pretty and charming, fair as a carved white jade. Once he joined in, immediately, the originally already too eye-catching group became even more eye-catching and attracted more attention.

The next was, Li Cong Tong from the third floor window of a wine shop waving her hand at them while calling out, Big Brother, Second Brother, Fifth Little Brother, Sixth Little Brother, I am here! Exactly after she finished her words, from the window railing of the shop, she jumped off.

The Li Brothers were not shocked nor worried. They just let that crazy girl to jump off from a building. Their face was saying life, death, wealth and honor are fated by Heaven, life or death is your own business.

In contrary, Song Xuan was frightened to death and rush straight ahead, heroically spreading both of his arms like a hero rescuing the beauty, catching the beautiful like a fairy descended from Heaven’s girl.

The beautiful fairy was not only ungrateful to his saving life’s favor, instead, her beautiful eyes widening in rage and verbally abused him for meddling in her business, she also turned into a choked and hot chili pepper. As the matter of course, the brothers and sister reunited, naturally joyous and congratulatory was in order. Worthy of celebration. (What a wonder!)

Li Cong Qing wordlessly asked the Heaven, made a guess, the last one, the Third should appear on the scene anytime soon.

As expected, Li Cong Xuan and his family of three appeared soon afterwards. Casually joined in the group.

This party of people, except for Li Cong Qing and the other two nameless guards, every man was handsome and every girl was charming, outstanding looking with extraordinary bearing, they looked exactly like a crowd of immortals had walked out of a painting. Even more dazzling than the lanterns, causing the passerby's to fix their attention on the breathtaking group.

When Li Cong Xuan's beautiful wife saw Song Yu, she stepped forward and intimately clung on his arm, excitedly spoke: "Third Brother, Long time no see!!"

"You have returned to the Capital, why didn't come home?" Said Song Yu.

"I have cut all ties with the family, it won't look good if I go there again."

"That year you left a letter saying you wanted to sever all connection with the family, then ran away just like that. We still haven't agreed." Song Xuan joined in the conversation, scornfully said: "You bad girl, could only see your Third Brother, didn't see your Sixth Brother."

"Sixth brother, your little sister missed you so much." Song Xi switched to coil on Song Xuan's arm and acted spoiled. Afterwards, taking from Li Cong Xuan's arm, she brought over a child, wanted to hand over to Song Xuan. "Come and look at your nephew."

Li Cong Tong suddenly stretched her arms and snatched him away. Her beautiful eyes were glaring fiercely. "This big man's hands and feet are both hard and coarse, I am afraid he will hurt our little sweetheart."

Song Xuan blankly gazed at her, smiling at her with a slightly dumb expression. Causing Li Cong Tong to boldly swear abusive words at him, why do you smile at me with such a strange face! Extremely disgusting, makes me want to vomit!

Li Cong Yin dragged Wei Xiao Miao to discuss about expenditure of the economy subject. Hoping to take this opportunity to persuade the inner Palace's main administer to purchase some daily used products from the Li's Family trading company.

Li Cong Zi occasionally roared with an angry voice and a furious temper at people who stole a glance at him, in passing, he pushed the people who blocked the way, kicked several chairs of the street peddler, trampled on the hoodlums who dared to make fool of his overlord power. It was a pity that his face was too good looking, even if he assumed such hideous, detestable, hateful and fierce-looking manner, yet, with his shockingly beautiful face, the results of the intimidating was not as good as expected!

Li Cong Bai went to his side, unceasingly tugged him and said, Fifth Brother, don't be like this, you have frightened the people. Li Cong Zi stopped and said to him, it is exactly because I want them to fear this Little Lord me... There! That fat dead pig! Yes, You! Still dare to stare at me the Little Lord, want this Little Lord to dig blind your cursed eyes?!

Li Cong Qing was extremely speechless when he looked at them, didn't know what to say. To make a long story short, he was unceasingly put into the disordered situation yet still under control.

"Your family is very amusing." Song Yu suddenly spoke to him.

"Causing you to laugh at them."

"Your character is seemingly rather different from them."

"Yes. Even the appearance is also not as good looking as them."

"Your face is very good looking."

"Hah??"

Song Yu gazed at him attentively, repeated his words again: "In my eyes, you are very good looking."

Li Cong Qing stared blankly at him for a period of time, couldn't absorb his words.

"Ai, the Second in our family is actually very bright. If only he had a little willpower to strive for an advanced position, it would be better." Li Cong Yin suddenly interrupted and chipped in the chat. "Previously, he suffered the sword of an assassin in place of our mighty, wise, brilliant and divine Emperor, His Majesty. He should seize this opportunity to get a quick promotion in his career, to have a meritorious rise. But the core of his heart is honest and kindhearted, not as greedy as a lion with mouth widely open. Be obliged to a small position as an Assistant Minister already made him satisfied."

Li Cong Qing was not in the mood to show his interest, he lazily let out an artificial sigh, as if the spring wind passing through a horse's ears.

"Second Brother's nature is extremely lazy. If not for Big Brother insisting on him taking part in the Imperial Exam, he probably would become a lazy pig that eats then sleeps, sleeps then eats, for all of his life." Li Cong Tong also noisily chipped in.

"Humph! Humph! Big Brother simply wanted to sell his brothers to strive for glory." Li Cong Zi didn't approve of her.

"Your Big Brother indeed sells the brothers for glory!" Li Cong Yin became fierce at once. "If the mighty, wise, brilliant and divine Emperor, His Majesty prefers men, I would absolutely make him wash clean his buttocks, and personally present him."

"Big Brother, you are very vulgar!" Li Cong Tong angrily told him, yet laughed so hard as if very happy, not the least bit reserved and timid like a girl.

"Present the buttocks to the Emperor for what?" Li Cong Zi didn't understand.

"Mouse hits the hole in the ground!" Song Xi replied, laughing so hard to the point her tears were gushing out.

"Then it will be very painful!" Li Cong Zi shouted while taking his hands to cover his buttocks.

"Rest assured, Big Brother doesn't want to give your buttocks as a present for the mighty, wise, brilliant and divine Emperor, His Majesty. You are too stupid. The Emperor wouldn't like you." Li Cong Yin patted his head, didn't know whether it was on purpose or not, he continued to irresponsibly ramble: "If you want to give, it will be your Second Brother. Although your Second Brother is not as good looking as you, but his head is smarter than yours, his buttocks is also much more worth-seeing than yours."

Li Cong Qing finally couldn't endure from rolling his eyes again and again, completely lazy to deal with these despicable corrupted minds of the unscrupulous businessman. Really shooting his mouth, saying everything in disorder!

Li Cong Xuan who didn't say anything from beginning till the end stayed silent and said nothing. His handsome face stayed cool and calmly gave his hand to his child to be gnawed like a chicken cutlet.

Song Xuan restrained his face, wanted to laugh but didn't dare.

Song Yu's expression remained calm without too much rise and fall, still smiling as gentle as before, not in the least bit furious. Instead, he felt interested to the utmost. Since small, he grew up within the Imperial Palace's strict etiquette. He had never heard this kind of undisguised frank and vulgar speech.

The still too young Li Cong Bai didn't understand the foul atmosphere of the obscene talk. He tugged the sleeve of the Second Brother, earnestly said: "Second Brother, you definitely must properly assist His Majesty the Emperor to become a benevolent and brilliant monarch."

At long last, someone was speaking in a presentable and sensible human speech.

Li Cong Qing comfortably laughed, told him: "Your Brother because of those words of yours will manage with an effort to remain in the Palace."

Chunan was situated in the Southern of National Territory. Surrounded by high mountains and vast plain, stone valley everywhere. The people who came to this place, besides for sighing in admiration for the magnificent mountains and rivers of Dashao, could only have another thought --- barren hills and treacherous rapid¹. Unruly people were everywhere as far as one's eyes could see.

In the past, this place was originally an independent land ruled by a tribe, afterwards, it was conquered by Dashao and turned into a place to banish criminals. Calling it by the fine-sounding name as to let the criminals reform themselves by casting them to bring the wasteland under cultivation in this place, as a matter of fact, they were allowed to emerge and perish on their own. And as time passed by, it had become outside the pale of cultivation border.

Then, although the court had dispatched some soldiers and officials to be stationed to govern this place, not to allow this place in such a way as regardless of the law and of natural morality², yet, the stubborn and unruly folks still followed the intractable tradition as before. Eighty percent of the men were rough, reckless and fierce with overbearing fiend. Ninety percent of the women were cunning, fierce and shrew as a vixen. Walking on the street at any time one could hear the catchphrase of "You're dead meat!!", "You evil woman!" and such raging roars. There was no difference between man and woman when they wrestled in the open street. The chickens flew everywhere, the dogs jumped all over to add to the extremely lively street. Nobody could have the upper hand and nobody could take advantage of the other.

Oh oh oh, The woman's claws were extremely violent!

Tsk Tsk Tsk, The man's hand speed in grabbing breasts was actually too vulgar!

Every time Li Cong Qing saw this kind of sight, he would be overflowing with joy. For the whole of his life he was living within the feudal ethical code in the Capital, men were taught to be refined and courteous, women were to be restrained and become composed, elegant and virtuous. That's why, towards these Chunan's overbearing fiends and shrewed vixens, he felt as if he was having a new and refreshing experience.

Of course, in the Capital also had some girls who didn't know what composed, elegant and virtuous was about and could only think of playing that kind of devilish woman. Li Family also brought up one. Li Cong Qing smiled while thinking about this. The Forth, that girl should be fond of this place.

Although he was coming to this place to patrol with the status of Imperial Inspection, that alone should make him to be accorded a serious courteous and polite reception, however not only did the Seventh

Prince only straight up look at Wei Xiao Miao, actually there were not even a few people who shared him even a glance, couldn't even act to smooth whiskers and pat a horse's back³. Li Cong Qing didn't even care in the slightest. There wasn't anyone who would make him feel like treading on thin ice by looking at him from the front and from the back. He felt even happier and more comfortable.

He didn't think that the Emperor really wanted him to hold an inspection in this place. Giving him such a heavy and big responsibility for checking the condition of the people. He had the feeling that he wasn't expected to do this. He felt that besides taking Wei Xiao Miao to Chunan, it seemed like to make him leave the Capital temporarily. And to act on the Emperor's behalf to patrol was a really reasonable pretext to send them away from the Capital.

However, he didn't give it much ponder. The boat upon meeting a bridge still had to move forward. He was just too lazy to waste his energy by letting his imagination run wild.

But since now that he was wearing the Imperial Inspection hat on his head, it was necessary to make a show that he was doing his duty. Li Cong Qing dispatched the people who came with them to take care of the matters, he and Wei Xiao Miao hung around in all direction with the two horseman bodyguards insisting to protect them.

It wasn't difficult to find out, this southern rash and impertinent land with thick weeds, under the Seventh Prince's renovation, opened up the wasteland to develop a field plain, only in three years had it already become a good agricultural land. Moreover, he had strong soldiers and sturdy horses⁴, could be considered as he was secretly giving vent to his anger by making preparations for war.

Is this also the main reason the Emperor wanted him and Wei Xiao Miao to come here to inspect?

Li Cong Qing felt that even if Song Wei had a soaring ambition, he wouldn't be a wolf cub with a savage heart⁵ kind of person for the sake of the Emperor's position. Could it be that he has a hidden agenda? If it is really a hidden agenda, then he has the general idea for who this whole hidden agenda is for. Only a blind person couldn't see the way the Seventh Prince looked at Wei Xiao Miao, glared like a tiger watching his prey⁶.

To avoid Wei Xiao Miao from being eaten to the point of not even leaving a bone, when Li Cong Qing was about to go out for his stroll he would take him along.

The first few days, The Seventh Prince tagged along wherever they went like a sticky candy. But he had to manage such a big area, couldn't always neglect his own proper jobs, tagging along everyday like a bum beetle. He had no choice but to let Li Cong Qing take Wei Xiao Miao away before his eyes with an itching tooth⁷.

Today, the both of them also roamed around. Once in a while they stopped to have a chat with the local people, listening to their thick local accent while telling all kinds of stories regarding this place; sometimes they looked for a nice landscape to appreciate the scenery, to sing of the wind and the moon⁸; tired of walking, they conveniently had a rest at the roadside tea stall with a slight shed, all satisfied and contented.

"Look, this Chunan is able to manage by themselves. The people don't know the Son of Heaven, only recognize the King of Chunan, It is almost like an independent small country." Li Cong Qing's tone of voice was careless and sloppy, the words he uttered actually caused someone to be apprehensive. "Xiao Miao, what do you think?"

"Humble me doesn't dare to talk wildly." Wei Xiao Miao prudently replied.

"I recall that your maternal grandmother is from Chunan."

“Yes.”

“So, Chunan can be said as your homeland.”

“Humble me indeed lived in Chunan for a period of time during my childhood.”

“Your family is still here?” Li Cong Qing asked to follow up his statement.

“There is none anymore. Nobody remembers me here.” It was hard for Wei Xiao Miao to hide the dark and dim-looking light from his eyes.

“I still feel strange that the Seventh Prince, for what reason, wanted to come to this kind of place, Xiao Miao, do you by chance know why?”

“Humble me honestly doesn't know.”

Li Cong Qing at a leisurely pace sipped his tea. Abruptly uttered more shocking words: “Can't say precisely, but maybe the Seventh Prince wanted to present Chunan to you as his betrothal gift.”

“Sir Li?!” Wei Xiao Miao raised his voice.

“I just made a wild guess, don't take me seriously. Look, your face has become so pale. If the Seventh Prince sees this, he would think that I am bullying you. It would be a wonder if he didn't take off my head and play it like a ball.” He mischievously teased him, then added: “For another several days, if there is no special serious matter, I am considering to move forward and head to Erhe. How about you?”

Wei Xiao Miao didn't answer directly, he remained undecided.

“Xiao Miao, You are a person who deserves to be respected deeply. Don't look down on yourself.” Li Cong Qing sincerely told him.

“Being a servant, how could I not to look down? Especially a eunuch like me. Even if I have the glory, splendor, wealth and rank⁹ to the point of having this kind of heavy responsibility, in the end I am still an incomplete disabled person.” Wei Xiao Miao managed with difficulty to remain calm when he spoke of his hearty thoughts. The refined face spread out a thread like bitter smile.

Hearing him say these kinds of words, Li Cong Qing didn't say anything anymore. When a superior and inferior's concept had already been deeply-rooted, a mere one or two words could not change them. Wei Xiao Miao had given up everything, not only the part of his body, at the same time his soul had been eradicated to the corner. Body and soul all shattered.

Abruptly, he had a little comprehension for the agitation of the Seventh Prince. The one he loved was Wei Xiao Miao as a 'person', not as a 'eunuch'. Hence Wei Xiao Miao didn't hold himself as what people saw in him. He set his own worth from the beginning to the end, through and through, as a eunuch. He submitted to his fate as a petty and lowly being, didn't dare to accept the feelings of the Seventh Prince. Resulting in the Seventh Prince could only resort to a coercing method, rudely and unreasonably shoved his own feelings and longing then obstinately stuffed it into his hand.

The onlooker sees most clearly indeed.

Perhaps, for Wei Xiao Miao to stay in Chunan could be a good thing. Surely Song Wei could give him a different kind of horizon and world, to enable him to regain his measure and become a complete person.

Speaking of 'the onlooker sees most clearly', the days ever since Li Cong Qing left the Capital, he

would recall all kinds of memories between him and the Emperor, every little bit of it. He suddenly realized, he was also 'the onlooker sees most clearly', particularly at the beginning when their circumstance was still unclear. He recalled that year's Lantern Festival's encounter, at that time his head was basically a regiment of plaster, his large piece of tofu was eaten and he was muddle-headed.

Maybe because of the lights and the fireworks that day were too beautiful, beautiful to the point they dazzled and stunned the eyes.

The further they separated, the clearer they could see, the longing also grew deeper. Scene by scene as if it only happened yesterday.

Ai ai, really miss him so much.

Missed his indulging doting, missed his sweet kisses, missed his gentle caressed and soft fondled, missed his coarse and wild touch when they were entangling.... His body couldn't help but slightly heated up.

"Sir Li, your face is really red. Are you not feeling well?" Wei Xiao Miao carefully showed his concern.

"No. The weather is hot." Li Cong Qing rustled the fan and waved it for cooling himself.

Recalling the Lantern Festival on that year, if not because of Li Cong Yin's vulgar remark, would the Emperor towards his buttocks...ahem, body, be interested? At that time, he had never thought that he would be forcefully kissed by a man. After that, the next day, he was stripped off with nothing left. From head to toe was thoroughly eaten, clean and smooth, not even leaving the least bit of residue.

That man was, behind his outwards appearance of a deep water calm stream, was actually a surging forward rolling wave. The surging up violently passions caused him to be unable to resist, not at all allowing him to pull himself out from sinking into degradation in one piece.

Like today, he missed being drowned completely, whether it was his body, his heart, or his soul.

His heart was missing him, his body was also yearning for him...

"It is very hot indeed." The fan in his hand was flashing even more rapidly.

Wei Xiao Miao also hurriedly took a fan and flashed wind for him.

Tormented by the love sickness, the desire was violent as well as irritating. Even if the wind from the fan was blowing like a typhoon, no matter how strong it blew, it still couldn't put out the arising like flaming hot body heat.

Also, this flame was ignited since that year's Lantern Festival, unbearably hot, terribly burnt, until now it had never died out even once.

Watching the crane lineup of music and singing eagerly, talking and laughing in the luscious hazy savory.

The festival was lively with the vast and various entertainments. The sightseers remained enjoying themselves and had no thought of leaving. Song Yu as well as Li Cong Qing with the party of more than ten people vast and mightily walked on the road. Following the stream of people who came to the riverside to admire the view just before the fireworks were released, the sightseers were actually too many, bumping shoulders and grinding heels, the crowd was blocked up to the point of

impenetrable. One by one they were scattered by the stream of rushing people.

When Li Cong Qing was pushed and about to separate from him, Song Yu stretched out his hand and grabbed his wrist to pull him back, raised his arm and encircled it around his shoulder, securely seized him by his side.

Li Cong Qing's whole person was being kept close and pressed against Song Yu's body. Due to their difference in height and body build --Li Cong Qing was not as strong and sturdy as Song Yu, immediately he had the bad impression like a little bird hanging on another's body. This kind of misperception caused him... absolutely horrified, difficult to breathe... he truly wanted to push Song Yu away. But not only because there was too much pushing and squeezing that caused him to be unable to move even a single step, Song Yu also bound him even closer and tighter.

Only in a blink of an eye, the both of them already completely separated from the others.

Li Cong Qing slightly stiffened his body from his uneasiness. Reminded with an unsure voice: "That... Third Prince, say, the time is already late, shouldn't you go home by now?"

"Don't worry." Replied Song Yu.

"Because of consideration for your safety, lowly me brazenly requests you to go home as quick as possible. If you happen to get into even the slightest bit of trouble, lowly me absolutely wouldn't be able to shoulder such a heavy responsibility."

"Haven't seen the fireworks yet."

"If you want to see, you just need to issue an order. Whatever kind of beautiful fireworks will be available for you. No need for you to squeeze in here with the crowds of people."

"Li Cong Qing."

"Here."

"Are you talking back at me?"

"Eh?! Lowly me wouldn't dare to." Li Cong Qing hurriedly resumed his docile self, if he didn't mind the trouble of getting his head separated from his neck, at that time he would dare to retort at his boss, the Emperor.

Song Yu opened his mouth still wanted to say something, but suddenly an ear-splitting sound of explosions blasted. The sky was flared up by the brilliant dazzling fireworks. The multitude of people raised their heads to look at the fireworks, letting out a "Wah!" praising in awe at the same time.

Soon after the first, one by one the fireworks burst into bloom, turning the night sky into a layer of splendid feast for the eyes.

"This is what I came for, to see the most beautiful fireworks." Song Yu lowered his head, speaking softly with his deep and low voice at Li Cong Qing's ear, the timbre of his voice carried the demonic magnetism.

The warm breath whisked on his temples, it was like the paw of a cat scratching on his ear, Li Cong Qing couldn't help but slightly shiver, he could feel that he was held even tighter. The dazzling fireworks flooded in disorder, bursting with a boom boom boom, in accord, his heart also was going thump thump thump, beating wildly.

"I suddenly thought of an official position that will be suitable for you." Song Yu added to his speech.

“What official position?”

“Shang Jun.”

Having heard what was said, Li Cong Qing was flustered. Tilting his head to gaze at him, he didn't even have the time to blink yet, Song Yu suddenly swept his mouth on his lips. The usually half-open-half-close pair of eyes were opened widely all of a sudden, as if he didn't dare to believe, the Emperor actually in the public with numerous people... Being frivolous towards him?!

Fortunately the surrounding masses focus was completely on the fireworks in the sky, nobody noticed the two men's flash of intimacy. However, Li Cong Qing was still awfully frightened.

“Your... No... Third... Third Prince...” He stuttered as he was stunned.

“Let's go.” Song Yu dragged him out from the crowd.

Li Cong Qing muddle-headedly let himself to be half-pulled-half-dragged, walked away from the boiling cauldron of voices¹⁰ Main Street. When he slightly regained his awareness at a small alley where nobody around, he was just about to open his mouth, his back had been abruptly pressed against the wall. He didn't even have the time to be shocked, his mouth was already blocked up forcefully.

Li Cong Qing was staring with the greatest extent of his eyes, tightly clenched his mouth in surprise, didn't even dare to make the slightest movement.

Song Yu also stared at him with eyes widely open, his mouth which was pressing on his lips also didn't move.

Big eyes stared at small eyes, seemingly in the middle of competing their patience, to see whether Li Cong Qing would open the city and be first to surrender, or Song Yu would throw weapons to get rid of armor first¹¹. The two people maintain their refused to budge's gesture was not something could be described as ambiguous anymore.

Each other's breath brushed on each other's face, brushing spell by spell with both crisp and tickle peculiar ripple.

“Open your mouth.” Song Yu gave him an order in a gentle voice.

The usually such a pushover Li Cong Qing actually dared to defy the order by refusing to obey. Pair of lips was pursed even tighter, extremely disrespectfully glared at him. As a matter of fact, his mind was disordered and in a great mess, from the start he was unable to think deeply, all of him now was of an instinct to protect himself.

“Really don't want to obey?” Song Yu was not angry, on the contrary, he was smiling. Shifting his target, he suddenly sucked on his earlobe, suck and lick to tantalize it.

Li Cong Qing motionlessly rooted to the ground, his scalp became numb, since he was small until now, besides the yellow big dog they raised before which liked to lick all over his face, there was none other who would touch his ear, let alone with this filled with sexual intention way. His body involuntarily gave a slight quiver, a stream of hot tide began to bubble up. He wanted to push Song Yu away, but both of his hands were seized and pressed to both his sides, enabling him from moving.

“Your... Your Majesty... Please... Don't be like this...” In the end he couldn't restrain his pleading.

Song Yu ignored him, shifting his mouth back to his lips.

Li Cong Qing anxiously turned into a clam, closing his mouth extra tight, no matter what he wouldn't be willing to let another's tongue to enter his mouth.

Song Yu wasn't being rough or forced him, very patiently he lightly licked the stretched tight lips, just like tasting a delicious snack. How sweet, even sweeter than what he had imagined.

Li Cong Qing felt that... It was as if that previous yellow big dog was licking him AHHHH-----

When he was being licked to the point that he thought his lips were about to be eaten, the corner of his eyes caught a sight of three people running very fast towards their direction. Upon a careful look, they were Wei Xiao Miao and the other two bodyguards.

Great! Savior has come!

"Your Majesty, Wei... Wuu..."

Not losing any time, Song Yu took the opportunity to launch a successful attack, invading inside the soft and sweet cavity.

Wei Xiao Miao with his party of three upon seeing their master was like a wolf or a tiger biting on someone's mouth, abruptly paused at the distance of five steps outside the alley, not at all stepping forward to admonish or to prevent, instead, they turned their bodies and formed a tight line, on one hand as not to improperly watch, on the other hand was to use their body to hide them from the street, to enable other people from catching a glimpse of them.

Not savior, but accomplice! Li Cong Qing really wanted to cry, inwardly he told himself, supposing the Emperor wanted to swallow him whole at this place, they most probably would take a screen to cover them. If he was about to struggle and resist, not to submit even at the cost of his life, who knows, they probably would help to press his hand hold his feet, to let their master be able to smoothly make his move, to eat heartily to his heart's content.

It was really the so-called 'Plead to the Heaven with no answer, call the earth to no avail' situation. Li Cong Qing gave up and stopped bothering, giving up the meaningless stalemate resistance. His body became feeble at once, allowing the Emperor to kiss him however he liked.

Song Yu could feel that he had loosened his resistance, thus unable to restrain his emotions, like a violent wind and rainstorm, he enthusiastically kissed him, sucking and biting in passing, hurting the lips of Li Cong Qing.

Li Cong Qing had never experienced this kind of feverish kiss before, kissed to the point he was about to faint with blurred vision¹², forgetting how to breathe properly, the blocked up air was making his face red, nearly suffocated.

Until Song Yu realized that he was about to faint, only then did he let him go.

Li Cong Qing hurriedly breathed in a mouthful of air to fill his lungs. From head to toe powerlessly trembling slightly, the wet feeling on his mouth and lips made him subconsciously lift his sleeve to wipe clean.

"May not wipe!" Song Yu made a soft shout. His fingers were caressing the even redder and moister petal-like lips while asking: "Li Cong Qing, I'll make you a Shang Jun, what do you think?"

Li Cong Qing was still gasping for air, after a period of time he finally could make a distinguished reply, with his weak and soft voice: "Answer Your Majesty, lowly me has no merit and is incompetent, would not be able to shoulder such a high position."

“Aren't you willing to wash clean your buttocks then present it to me?”

“It was my brother. If Your Majesty wants my brother's buttocks, my brother will surely be most welcomed to give it.”

“You are not willing?”

“Your Majesty is joking.”

“Look carefully, do I look like I'm joking to you?” Song Yu lifted his chin, to make him look at him directly, to let him see clearly the no longer concealed flame in his eyes.

Li Cong Qing lowered his eyes, using his not so long but dense eyelashes to separate their line of vision. Managed with an effort to reply calmly, saying something without meaning it¹³: Your Majesty's sacred face is not for an ordinary person to look at, humble subject deeply wouldn't dare.”

“Never thought that you are a stubborn person.” Song Yu's laughter was pleasantly warm. His eyes were bright as a torch, revealing his firm determination to win. Slowly he said: “Li Cong Qing, I won't force you.”

“Your Majesty is wise.”

“However, I also won't let you off.”

Li Cong Qing couldn't help but complain inwardly. Respectfully made a bow with hands clasped: “It is late already, humble subject earnestly requests Your Majesty to return to the palace as soon as possible. Excuse humble subject for retreating in advance.” Not waiting for approval, on his own accord he hastily turned his body, smearing oil to the soles of his feet, he escaped at once, so as not to be really then and there skinned alive and snapped to the bone, to be eaten alive!

“Remember to wash clean your buttocks.” Song Yu spoke to his back which was showing a sorry figure.

Li Cong Qing stumbled on his feet, barely escaped from slipping and tumbling, his quick pace was staggering along as he walked away.

Song Yu followed him with his eyes before he got in the crowd, his eyes were sparkling, the little flame was leaping in both his pupils. He had never been as excited as now for a long time, the desire which was hibernating within his body had started to move, wave after wave, rushing forth.

As things went on like this, now that he understood the thirst in his heart, why the need to still be puzzled and annoyed by this unusual restless? He was the Son of Heaven, in this world, he was the person who held the highest position, there was nothing that he wanted he couldn't have. Li Cong Qing, Li Cong Qing, I will look forward to having your buttocks.

Meanwhile, Li Cong Qing, in his muddle-headed state of mind, was absent-mindedly in a trance all along on his way back home.

Li Cong Yin had returned home earlier than him. Seeing that the Second compared to the time before had become more detached from the world, those pair of his eyes were at a loss, his both cheeks were smudged by unnatural blush. Even more, his desirable petal like lips had generated a brighter color compared to before, seemingly had been forcefully plucked.

Eh, what's going on? Li Cong Yin was moving around him while measuring with his eyes, observing from left to right, up and down. Clicking the tongue in surprise all the while. In accordance with his

unscrupulous businessman nasty looks, calmly he examined the goods, estimated how much was the value altogether.

"Why look at me like that?" Li Cong Qing was still confused, couldn't help but have a guilty conscience, afraid of being found out.

Li Cong Yin stroke his chin, saying out loud his final conclusion: "Tsk tsk, I have always thought that in our family the most valuable are the third and the fourth. Who would have thought that the object of profiteering is you."

Li Cong Qing slowly beat in a daze, only a long while later could he raise his response, immediately became somewhat irritated, the rarely heightened volume blurted out: "Big Brother, a person can't be dishonest and insincere to this extent!"

"As a businessman, as long as I can see the profit, what do I care about what sincere and whatnot. I only slightly hinted to the Emperor that I sell fruit, I didn't forcefully promote it. What's more, whether he wants or doesn't want to buy, I wouldn't dare to disrespectfully force him." The dazzlingly handsome like the sunshine face was satisfyingly smiling in a sinister way. Patting his little brother's cheek, made an embarrassing remark to tease him: "Be good, listen to your Big Brother, wash clean your buttocks and serve him properly."

He was simply a minister who provoked a rebellion by exploiting the people! Forcing an honest person into prostitution!

"Why don't you just wash your own buttocks clean and give your own self!"

"I also want to, but too bad, that person has already set his eyes on yours." Li Cong Yin shrugged his shoulder, saying sincere words and earnest wishes as if he was greatly affected: "I must say, Second Brother, once that person has set his eyes on you, even if you want to hide, you wouldn't be able to. You can only regard this as the good fortune that the Heaven befalls on you. Our Li Family will rely on your buttocks to bring honor to our ancestors. You can endure this humiliation as part of important mission¹⁴. Heavy responsibility as well as a long way to go."

The heavy responsibility to honor the spirit of the ancestors, he would really appreciate it! The Li Family ancestors in their graveyards, if they happened to know that their unworthy descendant was selling his buttock to gain glory, it would be really a wonder if they didn't angrily jumped out of their coffins and snapped like contracting epilepsy.

"Seek nothing but profit¹⁵! Have no conscience!" The eight hundred yearlong never lost his temper Li Cong Qing was getting angry upon this matter.

"What is conscience? Can you eat it? If you trade it in a shop, how much cash could it be traded for?" Li Cong Yin was giggling while mocking him. The play thing such as conscience since way before had been fed to a dog.

Annoying! Li Cong Qing brought his fist before his Elder Brother's skillful sharp tongued mouth. Turning his body, he angrily strode to his own courtyard. Buttocks! Buttocks! Buttocks! If there's someone who dared to say this word to him again, no matter who, he would become hostile at once!

Back to his bedroom, huffing and puffing in rage, he climbed into his bed, pulled the quilt and buried his whole self in it.

Just sleep, quickly sleep, when I wake up, whatever goddamn thing would have disappeared. Unceasingly he constructed his mentality to believe his own lies. But his lips, mouth, skin, until his ear, could still feel the kisses and the flavor still remained. His state of mind was in a mess. He couldn't clearly divide whether it was fear or confusion or the beginning of an improper love. Unable to

press down his getting hotter body, he huddled up into a ball-shaped. Previously, when he was seized as a hostage by the assassin, he didn't feel as confused and helpless as now.

How did it come to this? Why would the Emperor suddenly kiss him by force... Heaven, the great and mighty, wise and brilliant His Majesty the Emperor had actually kissed him... So frightening... Yet his body actually became limp and feeble, even until the last moment he didn't feel sick or disgusted the slightest bit, instead, he almost got drunk by it...mommy... this is honestly too frightening...

The next morning, first morning court after the New Year.

Today, they wouldn't discuss general affairs or great events. As customary, multitude of government officials would take turns to step forward to wish the Emperor propitious greetings, by means to wish the prosperous beginning of spring, to wish that the affairs of the state this year would be steady and successful.

Originally the Emperor thought that Li Cong Qing would be so frightened and ask for leave, daring not to attend the court. And yet, he saw him standing at the utmost end of the line. Carefully thinking back, even though this person was fond to be idle and slacking off, but he had never been absent. Despite he almost never uttered his opinion in the Hall, the Emperor couldn't help but generate a layer of respect to esteem his progress.

Li Cong Qing's head was even lower than the usual him, the shoulder was crooked and recoiled, he was dying to roll up his body into a small ball, not allowing whoever to notice his existence, in particular the Emperor who sat on the highest Dragon Chair.

Contrary to his expectation, the Emperor's most noticed person today was him. Obviously he could see that today he wasn't dozing off, that he was more sober compared to the usual him. Recalling the last night soul-stirring kisses, he felt that he wanted to continue, truly wanted to eat his whole person up so that he could be satisfied.

"Wish our Emperor the longest of live the greatest of health, Dashao will be imperishable generation after generation." Li Cong Qing was the last one who delivered his propitious greetings. His head was lowered to the utmost, promptly after he delivered his greetings, he quickly retreated to his respective place.

All Officials in the Grand Hall had delivered their greetings, only waited for the Emperor to also speak his encouraging words as the wishes reply, only after that the court could then end.

"I also wish that all Ministers would place the people in their heart, and give their concern to the land." The Emperor said, afterwards, leisurely added: "Recently, I am thinking about to appoint a Shang Jun. What do all Ministers think?"

Once the words were said, the whole of the Hall raised an uproar. Everybody was gazing at one another in speechless despair.

Li Cong Qing held his breath and quivered. His body shrank even smaller. He really wished that he could dig a hole and put himself in it.

Speaking about 'Shang Jun', this post was originally a proper and equally high official post. Established for the first time in order to assist the Emperor in managing all matters, whether it was important or insignificant. From making a strategic decision for the nation, until the food and clothing outlay. In other words, Shang Jun was the Emperor's personal secretary. Only listening closely when the Emperor handled matters, did not participate in the court's discussion.

The position was similar as highly regarded but have no authority. Yet the person was the closest to the Emperor. Moreover, to be appointed as Shang Jun, certainly because that person was the Emperor's most trusted subordinate, may not talk if there was nothing to discuss. As a result, towards the Emperor's decision and opinion, that person held the influence to hold the balance of power.

Also this person usually selected through the favoritism of the Emperor to fill the post. All was up to the Emperor's whim. Afterwards, there were several Emperors who designate their same-sex lover the title of Shang Jun. To be able to openly and honorably walk in and out together. Because of this, the official post had caught this kind of characteristic, moreover, most of the successive of Shang Jun coincidentally were beautiful males, it had taken such shape even in the future, whoever the Shang Jun is, could be easily guessed that he must be 'that kind of a person' to the Emperor.

A proper normal man wouldn't be able to endure the shame of homosexuality, didn't wish to serve on this post. As time passed, this post had become a could be filled and could be unfilled post, not all the reigning Emperor's would appoint one. If they happened to appoint one, in eight or nine cases out of ten, most likely, that person was 'that kind of person' to the Emperor.

Although they could be called as the first rank official (Dashao only had the Emperor alone as the first rank official), but actually the position was about the same as the Imperial Concubines, the position as the person who shared the same pillow as the Emperor, the only difference rest with the Imperial Concubines were legally and formally married wives and concubines, Shang Jun was an unspoken mutually understood lover. Exempted from the originally set to do tasks, it could even be said as the highest under one person but above all others' idle official.

"Forgive me Your Majesty, if I may ask, who is the one Your Majesty has set the choice on?" One old official cautiously and prudently made an inquiry.

Those 'set the choice on' words themselves carried an ambiguous implication, in some other extensive explanation, with the 'fall in love deeply with' or 'be enamored with' statement considerably the same kind of term.

"This person..." The Emperor swept his eyes over the courtiers in the Hall.

All the officials were having the kind of thought hoping for the small deer, inwardly said, Your Majesty look at me! Your Majesty look at me!

Only Li Cong Qing who cried out inwardly, You can't see me! You can't see me!

The Emperor was like smiling yet not smiling, not to talk about the matter any longer, even until the court ended.

Li Cong Qing sigh in relief, but this relieve was not for long, Wei Xiao Miao was calling out to him at the Hall's corridor. Privately told him: "Sir Li, His Majesty is expecting you, please follow this lowly me."

The premonition of great disaster was just above his head. Li Cong Qing resentfully thought, if he feigned his fainting and pretended to be dead, is it possible to escape this calamity temporarily... sigh, don't be a fool, just say that he really fainted and died, there is also someone who will carry him to go there. It isn't to be skinned with nothing left then carried to the Imperial Bed, it is directly put on burial clothes and put him in a coffin...

Ai Ai, a lawsuit in a fire. Either way a brave man with no place to hide, like what Li Cong Yin told him last night, once that person has set his eyes on you, where else can you hide?

Li Cong Qing was having the premonition of the black clouds, he almost could feel...his buttock had starting to ache dully in pain...

Everyone held their own mountain of rumors in their heart ----

Third Rank Official Sir Zhang, I will secretly tell you something, you absolutely may not tell the others, if this matters were about to be heard by others, you will lose your head for sure. I heard that the Emperor and the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites are engaged in a love affair, ssssh--- You definitely cannot tell the others!!

Is that true? You can rest assured, I wouldn't dare to talk much about those kinds of affairs, I still haven't been tired of living ... Fifth Rank Official Sir Liu, just now I heard from the Forth Rank Official Sir Li a shocking news, in regards that we have been neighbors for a long time, I will secretly tell you, however, don't you ever tell this to the others, your tongue will be pulled for sure...

Auntie Jian Yao, Third Rank Official Sir Zhang told me an unbelievable affair, you just give me more scallion as a bonus then I will secretly tell you.

You don't have to say anything, isn't it about the Emperor and the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites? Housewives know better than you! You buy more radish, I will secretly tell you something more that any other has ever heard before, if you don't tell the others about this, then you don't have to worry that you will be taken away and fed to the pigs...

Gossiping and rumoring. Gossiping here and rumoring there.

Although to stop the rumor would be wise, contrary to the expectation, the ordinary people were unable to keep off from the charm of gossip. Everybody would say that they absolutely would never tell the others, but once they turned their head, their heart itch, teeth itch, and their tongue would be even itchier, couldn't restrain to tell the other person and share the secret. One person told ten people, ten people told a hundred people, the gossip was spreading at an even faster speed than a seasonal febrile disease spreading, at an even wider-ranging extent. The upper class, all high ranking officials. The lower class, all common people and the peddlers. Everybody was happy while gossiping inexhaustibly.

Just like that, the grandma from the east family would secretly tell the sister-in-law from the west family, the sister-in-law from the west family would secretly tell the auntie from the north family, stealthily passing from mouths to ears, not long after, the hearsay love affairs of the certain couple had caused a great clamor. To the point of: 'the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites is actually a woman disguised herself as a man', 'Leaving the Capital is a sham, hiding to give birth is the truth' this kind of beyond reasonable limits theory was coming out of the steamer one after another, saying invariably without exception and argued with the courage of one's convictions, splashing their saliva and speaking as if it was the truth of the truth.

But the two rumored people were not admitting nor denying at all. Also, nobody dared to openly talk about the matter on the street without restrain. So, up until now, upon the words 'I heard that...', everybody would lengthen their ears, crane their necks in anticipation of any breakthrough development.

"Third Brother, do you know? You and Li Cong Qing's affair is already spreading outside?" Song Xuan especially came over to report this matter to the Emperor.

"I have heard about it." The Emperor wore an indifferent look, not allowing any ripples to surface.

"There are also rumors that... khe khe, ridiculous to the utmost point." Song Xuan was utilizing the cough to cover up his laughter.

"A woman disguise as a man to take part in the Imperial Exam?"

"Not only that, they also said that actually Li Cong Qing is the one who gave birth to the Little

Princess. It is way too funny!”

“Heee, Is it?” Softly letting out a laughter, he said inwardly, if Li Cong Qing really could give birth, definitely he would make him give birth to eight to ten children, it will be best if all of the Princes and Princesses are from him. “Is there anything more? Tell me everything.”

“Third Brother, I feel that... you are rather happy.”

“This kind of amusing talk, it’s not like I can hear it every day.” The Emperor’s easy-manner admitted to it, those kinds of absurd beyond belief gossip not only didn’t enrage him, even to the extent that they served as a means to amuse him.

Song Xuan told him every single rumor that he had collected, even the extremely absurd to the point of impossible matters---

There was a rumor that Li Cong Qing was the peony plant from that year of an ox chewing peony event. Remembering with gratitude the kindness of the Emperor for cultivating it, practiced asceticism to become a human, and devoted its life to the Emperor by pledging to marry him; Also on that year when the assassination event took place during the Spring Ceremony’s Banquet, afraid that the Emperor would be puzzled by an evil flower spirit, and wish to get rid of the people of evil, unexpectedly Li Cong Qing was not an evil spirit, he was the Flower Goddess sent by the Lord of Heaven to descend to the human realm, by any means the celestial being must protect the Emperor, only then the assassination attempt could fail; also, Li Cong Qing was not a woman disguised as a man, but a hermaphrodite, that’s because he was a flower, and gave birth to a little Princess for the Emperor, fulfilled the merits and virtues satisfactorily, everybody was delighted and happy... All sort of bizarre odd power random spirit which gave a forced interpretation and drew farfetched analogies mostly centralized on Li Cong Qing, for the most part the rumor could be regarded as good.

The forbidden love between a Goddess and the Son of Heaven, true love of the Heavenly and the mortal, truly touching to the depth of the soul, deeply moving and tugging the heartstrings, undulating the thoughts of love, beautiful without boundary...

The people in times of peace and prosperity without a doubt would be idle after filling their stomach, the power of imagination was enriching the romantic story from the other, made up an extremely brilliant rumor out of thin air, the plot was similar to ‘Flowers in the Mirror’¹ adding in the ‘Romance of the West Chamber’¹ with the ‘Romance of the Pipa’¹, like a heavenly steed, the rumor was soaring across the sky¹, each new high point would be replaced by another. To summarize it all, it would be sufficient enough to compose a Chinese novel¹ and Chinese Opera, guaranteed it would appeal to the audiences and invite the shouting of ‘Well done’ applauded and chanted by the later generations.

Of course, it was bounded to the chance for slander, mostly from the scholars and intellectuals whose belly filled with ink. Unmistakably, they were the nationalists who condemned Li Cong Qing for taking profit at others expense. Criticizing him for using his male body to mislead their Emperor, condemning him for offending the public morals, viciously criticized him for violating the heavenly principles, the crime is great and the evil is extreme, guilty of the most heinous, unforgivable! Certainly unpardonable!! And so on and so on.. Wait wait wait, this kind of wrath was as if Li Cong Qing had slaughtered their whole family and snatched away their wives. Wasn’t he simply dating the Emperor only?

In short, the rumor was transmitting endlessly, the whole city was lively, then it began to gradually spread further to the outside of the city.

The Emperor couldn’t hold back his laughter, even added in: “This time Li Cong Qing is out from the Capital, actually because I dispatched him to go to Mount Kunlun, the mountain of immortals, to seek the elixir of life, in the hope that we could be everlastingly together for generations.”

Song Xuan on the contrary was not laughing as hard as him. "Don't you worry that he will be unable to endure it once he hears about everything?"

"He would never feel wronged by that kind of unbearable thing, he only worried that things would be troublesome."

"You really have faith in him?"

"He is not a woman, he wouldn't let himself weep and wail over this devious matter." Said the Emperor.

Song Xuan understood that his Imperial Brother had a well-thought-out plan regarding whatever affairs, he chose not to comment further on the issue.

Abruptly, an attendant hurriedly came in to submit a report: "Report, Your Majesty. Her Majesty the Empress Dowager has returned to the Palace."

The Emperor immediately stood up, together with Song Xuan he stepped out of the Imperial Study to welcome the Empress Dowager. Just right at the time he stepped out, a woman in neat and refined silk, about forty something old, features and figures was of graceful yet reserve bearing, came forward to meet them.

"Your son respectfully greets our Mother." Two people stepped forward, simply kneeling as a little part of a grand courtesy.

"My sons, quickly rise your body." Empress Dowager helped them to stand up. Though she didn't have the phoenix coronet as well as the embroidered tasseled cape, she still revealed her extremely elegant and utterly poised.

"Mother, why didn't father return to the Palace with you?" Asked Song Xuan.

"He made a detour to somewhere else to meet someone."

The two brothers secretly looked at each other, they were well aware who he was about to meet.

"Come come come, we three mother and sons haven't met for a long time, let mother have a good look at the both of you." The Empress Dowager dragged them to enter the Imperial Study, dismissed the attendants, asking about her sons health condition, not even mentioning the rumor for a very long time.

They chatted until the time for dinner. The three mother and sons were having their meals together. The Empress Dowager was putting the dishes into their bowls in turns, displaying a plentiful of motherly love, unlike the usual solemn and strict stand on ceremony Imperial Family, warm and comfortable like the commoner household. Until, an abrupt sentence flew from a faraway distance: "Yu er, is the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites as delicious as this red-cooked pork?"

Song Xuan who was in the middle of chewing the red-cooked pork nearly spouted it out, beating his chest from choking and coughing nonstop.

Song Yu did not flatly deny, using the same usual calm intonation to answer: "Much more lighter, however it suit my taste."

"How long have you been eating?"

"Answer, mother. Six years."

The Empress Dowager carefully looked at her son the Emperor. "You are serious about it?"

"Yes."

"Since it is so, why don't you give him a formal status? How could you treat him unjustly?" The Empress Dowager restrained her kind smile, changed it to a condemnation expression. "If not because the rumor has spread wide and wild outside, how long do you actually plan to cross the sea by a trick?"

"Mother, it is not Third Brother who doesn't want to give a status." Song Xuan passionately interfered, attempting to put in a good word for his elder brother.

"To properly say it, it is because he doesn't agree to let others know." Suddenly slapped the table, the loving and caring mother had changed into a strict and stern mother. "Say, was it because you lost your head over the lust, so you took an ordinary man by force?"

The two brothers put down their bowls and chopsticks, obediently listened to the scolding. The two people who held the most power and influence in Dashao were not afraid of the Heaven and not afraid of the Earth, only afraid of their mother Empress Dowager.

"I wouldn't dare to." Song Yu was still as unperturbed as before.

"Wouldn't dare to deceive superior and delude subordinate? Or wouldn't dare to take an ordinary man by force?"

"Mother, Third Brother didn't force him..."

"You shut your mouth! You too, actually dare to act as accomplice to the tiger³, helping the tyrant ruler in his oppression³, that Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites is your wife's second brother!" Swiftly shifted her gaze to glare at Song Xuan, head on right in his face she scolded him at once.

To be subjected to a trouble not of his doing, Song Xuan became speechless. He even didn't have the courage to lift his head for a moment.

Song Yu's expression didn't change, plainly speaking to sincerely and fairly admit to his mother: "Mother, he and I are harmoniously loving each other."

"Not to mention that an improper relation between two men would create the most disgraceful scandal, a ruler and his minister's immorality is already the greatest outrage!" Empress Dowager's manner of speaking was entirely strict when she angrily pointed at his fault. "You You You... You intend to anger me to death, don't you?"

"Mother please calm your anger. I understand that for men loving each other will not be tolerable by the world, however we already love each other deeply, one body and soul. Wish you could understand." Song Yu sincerely said in a composed manner.

The Empress Dowager glared at him with a taut face for a long time, then all of sudden giggled with a 'pfft' before bursting out into a laughter. Her expression changed in a split second. "Love each other deeply, One body and soul, even this kind of sappy corny words you have the nerve to say it out loud. Even your mother's face blushes red in your place. Truly deserve to be called as my son."

The two brothers heaved a sigh of relief. Their mother Empress Dowager was mischievous by nature. It so happened that she prefers to make fun of others, changed her expression as easy as flipping the book. All thirteen Imperial brothers and sisters whether she gave birth or not, each and every one of them had been played by her since small until they grew up. Actually, toward her they were

respectful, loved as well as afraid.

“Mother, Third Brother and him do really love each other, even I envy them when I saw them like that.” Song Xuan hurriedly spoke to support his brother.

“What do you know! Go home and hold your own wife.” Empress Dowager gave him a quick-fried chesnut.

“Oh, That’s right! Mother, your son’s wife has conceived the second child!”

“So, why are you still poking your nose here? Go home now and wait on your wife!”

“Yes! I will go at once!” Song Xuan followed the orders. Smoothly made a clear getaway from the scene of crime.

The Empress Dowager shifted her attention back, then heaved a sigh. “Ai, How come I didn’t know that you like men before? You really hide it perfectly. Even the whole family has been deceived.”

“Before, I really never liked men, only until I came across him.”

“Do you still need a new pavilion at the southern of the harem?”

“No need. I just want him alone.” Song Yu said. “Mother, he and I genuinely want to be together forever. Absolutely not a momentary lost in sentiment feeling.”

The Empress Dowager could see the earnestness in her son’s eyes, firmly in her consideration, she asked one more time: “Is it because of this reason that you still haven’t enthroned an Empress until today?”

“Yes.” Song Yu spoke frank and sincere without concealing anything. “If he was a woman, I would be sure to confer him to be my Empress.”

“Just say you can’t confer him to be your Empress, you still can confer him a Shang Jun title, can’t you?”

“I don’t want to force him to become a Shang Jun.”

The Empress Dowager nodded her head, solemnly said: “Whether it was to take an ordinary man by force, or harmoniously love each other, whichever is fine. Yu er, an Emperor has no qualification to have personal matters. Your each and every action is carrying the weight of the nation. Countless people entirely looking up to you. You are not only responsible for the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites, but also in charge of the people in the world.”

“I understand.”

“How will you deal with it?”

“I will wait for his return.”

“When will he return?”

“Answer, Mother. I don’t know.”

The Empress Dowager pressed her beautiful eyebrows together. “Are you playing ‘let loose to capture’ game?”

"I am not."

"You are still young yet experienced and prudent. Since five years old, compare to your father, you looked more like an Emperor than your father. No matter what you do, you don't need people to meddle or to worry over you. You have your own reason. To put it in good words, it is to think deeply and plan carefully. To put it in blunt words, it is scheming and reserved. Mother will not care whatever game you are playing, just won't allow if it produces a tragic ending." The Empress Dowager admonished repeatedly exhorted tirelessly. "Remember, You are the Son of Heaven, an Emperor, not a mountain bandit King."

"Mother, between he and I absolutely will never occur whatever kind of tragedy."

Song Yu gazed at the outer window, gazed at a faraway place, his eyes penetrated through the thousands of mountains and ten thousands of torrents, gazed at the unseen figure of his beloved that had deeply taken root in his heart. He wouldn't allow whatever tragedy to befall them. They would live for generations, be together with each other eternally.

The next day, the rumor had advanced to the point "The Emperor has admitted his relationship with the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites", the Capital had blew up the cauldron.

Due to the progression, man, woman, adult, young people, were holding the fiction book in their hands. Especially obscurity books that dropped a hint about The Emperor and the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites were published like a swarm of bees. In short time it had pushed up paper prices in Luoyang⁴.

Dashao Dynasty's control regarding the activity of the published literatures was not severe whatsoever, would not imprison or execute an author for writing something considered offensive by the Imperial court, even more would never burn the books and bury the scholars alive, as long as not initiated the unrest within the people or excessively directly mentioned on names, not affect the things as a whole, more or less would have one eye open one eye close, to turn a blind eye.

Li Cong Yin's paper and book store certainly would seize the chance without neglecting even a stroke. He could tell you the story as if enumerating his family's treasures⁵. Those best-sellers books were, "The Fate of Flower Goddess", "Romance of the Peony", "Your Majesty, No", The one on the top of the best-sellers was, "The Wind, Flower, Snow and Moon⁵ between His Majesty and Me". Both title and the content of the books, the more frank with erotic details, the sales volume would be even burning hotly looked up. Also, all of these books were written by the author whom he supported. All of you, who haven't reached eighteen years old, please don't read those books.

Come, let's shift the time back to six years ago, the first morning court after the Lantern Festival. The beginning chapter of "The Wind, Flower, Snow and Moon between His Majesty and Me".

It is said that after dismissing the morning court, His Majesty called in Li Cong Qing in private. Li Cong Qing was bracing his nerve, tightened up his buttocks, in his ready to battle stance followed Wei Xiao Miao to the Imperial Study to have an audience with the Emperor.

"Report, Your Majesty. Sir Li has come." Wei Xiao Miao led Li Cong Qing to enter the Imperial Study. Retreating to the Emperor's side to wait on him, personally prepared the ink for brush writing for the Emperor.

"Humble subject respectfully greets Your Majesty." Li Cong Qing stood so far far away. This was his very first time to be called to enter the Imperial Study alone.

"Come closer." The Emperor's eyes hadn't left the document.

Because of his order, Li Cong Qing took a step forward, a very tiny step.

“Move closer again.”

Took another step forward, still a very small step.

“Come to in front of me, raise your head.”

Li Cong Qing sighed inwardly, lifted his pair of heavy legs to move to the front of Imperial seat, raised his head, but his eyelashes still hung low, didn't dare to look directly at the Emperor.

The Emperor was looking at him now, looking at his whole face as if about to receive a punishment like, a smile floated up slightly, with a relaxed and unhurried manner of speaking, like having an idle chat, he said: “Don't know why, in the past I didn't feel that you are good looking, but why the more I look at you the more I feel that you are good looking? Xiao Miao, say, what do you think this is all about?”

“Answer Your Majesty. There is a popular saying, in the eyes of a lover appears Xishi⁶ ⁷, even if to be used on Sir Li is not quite right, but the idea is not that far apart.” Wei Xiao Miao answered respectfully.

Those words made Li Cong Qing awkwardly uncomfortable from head to toe, couldn't restrain to rush his mouth to say: “Your Majesty, if you want to find someone to amuse and pleasure you, you ought to find a beautiful man like Scholar Lou who possess an unrivalled beauty so that you can be truly excited.”

“Minister Lou already became a Xishi in many people eyes. I have no intention to fight over him with the others.”

“As long as Your Majesty says a word, who would dare to vie for him against you?”

“Then it won't be interesting.”

“There is no one who will compete with you for me too, isn't it the same uninteresting?”

“No one to compete with me, I can be more spared from worried.”

So to say, basically, Li Cong Qing was the one and only he wanted.

Li Cong Qing was blocked up until could no longer retort, he was shouting at the Heaven in his heart. He was thinking to himself, whether he was good looking or not, whether he had some talent or not, the only explanation was his whole person's best virtue was dull and colorless to the utmost. He really couldn't understand what it was the Emperor actually saw in him? He honestly really wanted to advise the Emperor, call in the Imperial Doctor to check whether there was something wrong with his eyes.

“I wanted to give you a good official post, you actually became frightened.” Said the Emperor.

“Humble subject has no ability nor virtue, couldn't shoulder such a heavy responsibility.”

“Nobody expected you to shoulder a heavy responsibility.” The eyes of the Emperor were flashing with a light of excitement. “Except your honorable elder brother who wanted to sell your buttocks to me.”

Why would he mention this matter again! Li Cong Qing almost tumbled. Crying loudly inwardly, Big Brother really had harmed him and caused his buttocks to be split!

“Li Cong Qing, do you agree to become my Xishi?” The Emperor asked with a gentle voice.

Li Cong Qing’s heart was beating in a wild rhythm. Wanted to outright say do not agree, but also thought it would be useless so he ended up not saying a word. He didn’t have such strong determination as to rather die than a submit character, moreover, only towards the Emperor, there was some unusual weakness, made him helpless and unable to resist.

“Come to my side.”

Wei Xiao Miao put down the ink stick and retreated to the side. Li Cong Qing was hesitating for a while, then moved around the Imperial seat to come to the Emperor’s side.

The Emperor pulled him to sit on his lap, caressing his fresh and smooth lips with his thumb. “You are the first person to make me upset and excited. I have said, will not force you, but also will not let you off.”

The almost improper intimate touching caused Li Cong Qing to slightly shiver, rigidly he squeezed out his voice: “Your Majesty really wants my...ahem...my buttocks?”

“At the present, it seems like that.”

At the present, so what about in the future? Li Cong Qing helplessly made a wry smile. “Please pardon humble subject’s audacity to speak bluntly, these words of Your Majesty are truly cruel.”

“You think that I only regard you as my plaything?”

“When loved, they would be held in the palm and be regarded as treasure. After not loved anymore, they would be cast away like a pair of worn-out shoes. Isn’t this like what they call as a plaything?” Li Cong Qing threw his words, the tone was close to questioning.

“Your outward looks is of a weakling, your inward actually conceal an opposite courageous. However, this side of you might be what really makes me fascinated by you.” The Emperor cupped his face, stared fixedly on his eyes. “In your eyes there is no monarch nor subject, no passion nor plead. I want to know, the you who are not taking everything to heart, once you care for something, what would you look like? Li Cong Qing, have you ever really attached to something?”

Li Cong Qing was at a loss for words. Thinking back, ever since he was born until today, he had never shown any kind of absurd stubbornness. Towards whoever and whatever, he chose to get by however he could, to the extent of satisfied just to be able to get through, drank water if there’s water, ate porridge if there’s porridge. Without principle was his principle. This was the most relaxing way of living, but this way of living made his life seemingly empty and meaningless.

The Emperor’s words urged him to look back and reflect on his life. Even though muddle-headed and ignorant lifestyle was the most suitable for his negligent inactive temper, but it was truthfully an extremely boring life, hardly any difference with an utterly useless person. In simple terms, only drink and eat till the day he died.

He should change, shouldn’t he?

The Emperor wasn’t being impatient and just held him to make sure he didn’t fall down, but also not allowing him too much time for hesitating to find a way out. Whispering by his ear with a gentle voice to order him: “Tonight, head to the Summer Palace and wait there.”

The deep and low voice was filled with seduction. When the brilliantly handsome and fascinating His Majesty the Emperor wanted to seduce someone, who could withstand and stop him?

Li Cong Qing shuddered, his ear became very hot. "Your Majesty said will not force me."

"If you say you do not agree, I definitely will not force you."

Nonsense! Who would dare to say do not agree in front of you, the Son of Heaven! Li Cong Qing had an impulse to roll his eyes to let him see. However, he didn't dare.

The Emperor let him go. "Go back to the Ministry of Rites first."

"Humble subject retreats now."

"Remember to wash clean your buttocks." He might as well coldly remind him.

The just walked for a couple steps Li Cong Qing fiercely stumbled so that he barely escaped from tumbling, utterly detested the mention of this body part, in a split second he flew into rage, and actually forgot the respect from a subject to a monarch, he turned his head to give a glare. Raising his head and straightened up his chest, he stomped away with a large and heavy step.

Looking at him like that, the Emperor was no longer able to restrain his clear and loud voice from a loud laughter. "Xiao Miao, this Li Cong Qing is a very interesting person, isn't he?"

"Your Majesty said it correctly, lowly me hasn't seen Your Majesty to be happy like this for a long time already."

"Am I usually not happy?"

"Not at all, only not as relaxed and comfortable as when with Sir Li." Wei Xiao Miao said sincerely. "I wish Your Majesty can be happy for all His life."

The Emperor lightly laughed without saying anything.

The just went out from the Imperial Study Li Cong Qing really wished to throw away everything and make himself scarce. But in the end he still obediently returned to Ministry of Rites. Fidgety, unable to sit or stand still out of nervousness, tossed and flipped about the documents, not even going through a single document after a long while.

The fellow officials in Ministry of Rites had never seen him as agitated and uneasy as today. Strangely he didn't doze off as usual. The concerned colleagues one by one came to ask what's wrong with him.

He managed with an effort to laugh and said no problem. Anxiously, he thought to himself, if just now he said do not agree to the Emperor, the ruling by virtue Emperor was not a fatuous and self-indulgent ruler at all, would never just because he refused him cut his head, at the worst he would end up losing his job. But why 'do not agree' these three words somehow lumped on his throat, he couldn't say it outright? Could it be that, actually he is also expecting this?

Expect?! Pfft---- he spurted out a mouthful of tea. Which normal man would expect their own buttocks to be split open! Li Cong Qing depressed and pulled his hair.

His fellow officials jumped and were sacred by his indescribable sudden bizarre movement. Today there was really something wrong with him. "Sir Li, are you not feeling well today? Do you want to ask for earlier leave to go home and have a rest?"

He indeed wanted to secretly run home, but he could only hide for a while, couldn't escape forever. Moreover, defying a decree was a great crime. Ai ai, being forced by a powerful person, for a person

hanging under the eaves, who would dare not to yield.

“No need. I will go out to take a walk.” With his feelings not in the slightest way peaceful, Li Cong Qing glided out. He was moving about in the flower garden outside the office. Thinking back to the interaction with The Emperor from the time he entered the court as an official two years ago, everything only started from the Spring’s Ceremony Banquet, several times during the autumn hunting, why didn’t he realize that the Emperor’s eyes, every time when he was looking at him he became more and more deeper, more and more filled with the desire to eat him up.

Unwittingly he recalled the savory roasted meat bestowed by the Emperor, so, the Emperor wanted to feed him to grow more fat, after becoming more delicate with fat, he would choose a fine time, the lucky day to slaughter and eat him... What do I do? What do I do? He didn’t want his buttocks to split open, also didn’t dare to revolt...

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhh So annoyinggggggggg! My head hurts to death, I don’t want to think anymore!” Li Cong Qing held his head in dismay and stamped his foot while shouting loudly.

“Sir Li, what’s wrong with you?” The next door Ministry of Revenue official, Geng Bai Zuo, accidentally just came out and saw that Li Cong Qing was by himself and looked out of his mind.

“Sir Geng... What do you think about me?” He couldn’t help but ask.

“What is that about you?”

“If you are a man, eh, you are already a man, will you like me?”

Geng Bai Zuo leaped and stepped back until three steps all of a sudden, his face was darkened like a waterfall of black thread. “Sir Li, You you you... I I I... my bad, I have nothing to say!”

Li Cong Qing was dumbfounded, then busily said: “You have misunderstood, I don’t mean...”

“Excuse me, I still have something to attend to, goodbye.” Geng Bai Zuo ran away as if flying.

This time it was Li Cong Qing who had a darkened like a waterfall of black thread face. Aiyaa, being misunderstood... Sigh, forget it. Whether it is fortune or disaster, a disaster couldn’t be avoided. Anyhow, it is hard to escape from calamity, no matter how much I troubled over it, it wouldn’t be of any use. It is better to go to sleep for a while, so tired to death.

Li Cong Qing who was even lazy to be worried went back to Ministry of Rites. Finally he resumed his normal sleeping habits, vented all of his grievance to Zhou Gong. Dozing off a not so peaceful afternoon nap until close to night time. When Wei Xiao Miao personally came again to call him up, he truly wished that he could just feign death, to end all the troubles when the main troubles end.

“Sir Li, please forgive me for talking too much. His Majesty has given you a day to ponder, if you do not agree to yield, this time you don’t have to go with me.” Wei Xiao Miao told him.

“I...” Do not agree, these three words once again choked. Weird, what was he actually conflicted at?

As the final result, he involuntarily went with Wei Xiao Miao. Passing through the Imperial Flower Garden, facing towards the situated not so far from the Imperial Study Room, Summer Palace. Summer Palace was set up in the middle of the pond Yao Guang, a building of two floors high, elegant and refined in a tranquil remote place. When the Emperor was tired after managing the government affairs, he would just come to this place to have a rest, occasionally spent the night here.

Striding on the zigzag bridge which linking to the Summer Palace, Li Cong Qing’s legs were getting slower and slower with each step he made, crawling as slow as a turtle pace. Wei Xiao Miao didn’t

hasten him, patiently went along with his pace.

Finally strode in the Summer Palace, they went up to the second floor where the Emperor usually used for rest.

The Emperor was not there to wait for him at all, he must be still busy with the government affairs. What was required to be a good Emperor, was the kind of a ruling by virtue Emperor required to do, not a person who just because of personal affairs would cast aside the Nation's affairs. This little thought let Li Cong Qing to be slightly relieved, at the very least, he wouldn't bear the accusation of deluding an Emperor and caused him to neglect the affairs of the state.

But the Emperor sent the never part from his side Wei Xiao Miao to attend to him, from this it could be clearly seen the extent of his seriousness. Even though Wei Xiao Miao was a eunuch, but he was the Emperor's most trusted attendant, as well as the Inner Palace's Main Administer. Essentially, his position, strictly speaking, was higher than Li Cong Qing. But he personally waited upon him like a lower subordinate, completely didn't show even the slightest amount of his annoyance to serve him. Gently and humbly waited upon him to have his dinner, bathed him and changed his clothes, piece by piece, each and every detail carefully done in utmost preciseness, making Li Cong Qing feel like bathing in pleasant spring breeze. Eventually Li Cong Qing relaxed little by little, and held a casual idle chat with him.

During the dinner, Wei Xiao Miao especially gave him a pacifying soup to drink, to let him be relaxed and loosened his stretched taut body and his strained mood. He also accompanied him talking, until he saw that Li Cong Qing showed his sleepiness. Softly he said: "Sir Li, you can go to bed and have some rest first."

"His Majesty hasn't arrived yet, how do I dare to sleep first?" Voice was weak and soft with strong sleepiness, body and heart had relaxed, he wasn't aware that he was no longer anxious of the Emperor's arrival.

"His Majesty wouldn't blame nor punish you for this." Wei Xiao Miao helped him to recline on the spacious and comfortable Dragon bed.

The love to sleep Li Cong Qing, once his head had a contact with the pillow, his sleepiness became stronger, completely had forgotten the matter regarding his buttocks was about to be deflowered. Leisurly made a long yawn, easily indulged himself in his little sleep.

After tucking in Li Cong Qing properly, Wei Xiao Miao went to the Imperial Study room to report to the Emperor. The Emperor had finished all of today's government's affairs since earlier. Calling in an Imperial Physician, he wanted the Imperial Physician to explain clearly what matters should be paid attention to during the homosexual joyous moment. More or less he had heard the matter about same-sex coupling, also had seen a little from the book. But he had never personally experienced that. He didn't want Li Cong Qing to be afraid and in pain in the midst of accepting him.

The questions that the Emperor asked were as if the questions out of a man's wild and fanciful thoughts, but his face just the same solemn and calm as usual, not affected by shyness, absolutely not vulgar and perverted. The Imperial Physician couldn't suspect him as well as wouldn't dare to treat him disrespectfully, orderly and thoroughly from the structure of human body, how to prepare in advance, and the clean up afterwards, he explained all in detail. He also asked his attendant to go to the Imperial Physician's quarter to get the lubricating oil and cream to be presented to the Emperor. He also added, when join together, the posture is the same when join with a woman, only the body of a man is not soft like a woman's body, if being excessively bent and pulled, probably will cause the sprain of the muscles, and so on and so on, the etcetera about the should be learnt problem of the body.

Wei Xiao Miao waited until the Imperial Physician retreated, after that he moved to the Emperor's

side, in a low voice told him that he had helped Sir Li to go to sleep first.

The Emperor nodded his head, taking the two small porcelain's bottles which were the present from the Imperial Physician, he went to the Summer Palace.

Li Cong Qing was still reclining on there, so comfortably serene and quiet. The Emperor couldn't bear to disturb his sleep, sitting by the bed's side silently staring at this normal looking ordinary face, but those lips were the color of spring's flower man.

The Emperor had been patient for the whole day, forcefully restrained himself from the urge of going to the Ministry of Rites and executed Li Cong Qing. Letting his heart to have a good preparation. He also called in the Imperial Physician to explain about the things regarding the homosexual intercourse. This kind of thoughtful consideration had never before been given to any of his Imperial Concubines, but now he was giving it to a man, even he himself couldn't help but feel rather unexpected, his heart had become this soft.

Bending down, he affectionately kissed his lips, by his ear side mumbled jokingly: "Li Cong Qing, I will give you another opportunity. If you don't get up, today, I will let your adorable small buttocks off for now."

Didn't know that Li Cong Qing was fortunate or unfortunate, his sleep was not too soundly. The kiss from the Emperor woke him up to his half asleep and half awaken awareness. In his haziness, he heard that someone was talking by his ear, but he couldn't hear clearly what he had said, a little while later he awoke and opened his eyes to form a line of crevice. Muddled-headedly looking at the closest to the extreme handsome face. Murmuring as if talking in his sleep: "Oh... Your Majesty, you have come."

How could a sleeping to the point of muddled and hazed person remember the courtesy of a ruler and a subject. Not in the least on alert or in panic, completely naïve and cute. A light illuminated the brilliant eyes of the Emperor, burning fiercely to devour, said: "It looks like, you are destined to be mine."

His lips landed on Li Cong Qing's, hot and madly biting and sucking, taking the half conscious Li Cong Qing into a deep kiss.

Li Cong Qing went numb immediately, didn't refuse or struggle. His body was still as feeble as when he was sleeping. But his heartbeat as well as his breathing felt like stopping out of nervousness, his body shivered and gave rise to the temperature.

The Emperor took off his loose and thin sleeping robe, to reveal his usually never met the sun fair and clear skin and muscles. Lips and tongue wriggled down, meticulous like the sprinkle of rain on the visible outline of the body, using a gentle but potent way to ignite the spark.

The lips and tongue flew to the lower abdomen, all of a sudden he flipped him to lie on his stomach, attentively bit and gnawed the top of the round fair and tender buttocks.

Li Cong Qing was shocked to the point of become completely awaken. His waist was quivering in jolt after jolt, his mind on the contrary had become more blank, incapable of thinking, unable to stop the tremble from head to toe, to bear the earth-shattering lust from spreading on his body, wave after wave of electric shock was raging in all directions.

The Emperor pried open his narrow crevice, to disclose a hidden valley between it. the color and luster was pinkish, the shape was of a flower pistil. "Who would have thought that this part of you is so pretty?"

Pretty? How can buttocks be pretty! Li Cong Qing clamped instinctively, but was forcefully pried open

again, an overview undoubtedly was exposed under the red hot line of sight.

“Don’t look...” Li Cong Qing buried his head in the pillow, he was ashamed to death. His body was heating up and became even hotter, it was as if he was roasted thoroughly by the eyes of the Emperor.

More than merely looking, the Emperor stretched his fingers to stir and touch, caress, rub, and knead.

Feeling that the finger made its way to enter, the jolt on Li Cong Qing’s waist became even more severe.

Know that he was afraid of pain, the Emperor suppressed the clamoring desire inside of his body, gently and lovingly caressed him, using a large number of lubricating cream to open him up, but the pain from the very first time bearing the lust of course was unavoidable. When Li Cong Qing was being penetrated, he let out a pained shout.

To be honest, his body was not hurt to the point of unbearable at all, the pacifying soup and the sufficient amount of the lubrication as well as the loving caress, had made his body relaxed and limp. However, the feeling of a huge intruder piercing his body caused him to be terrified to death. So shocked that his soul felt like flying out of his body.

He loved to read random vulgar and miscellaneous books. Books that described about the obscene love between men naturally he wouldn’t let it slipped. What called as “Unofficial History of Homosexual” , “A Man’s Cap and A Woman’s Hairpin” , “The Forbidden Fragrant of Spring” and so forth, he had read quite a number. When he read, he felt that it was so amusing. But when it was actually befallen on his own body, it was not the slightest bit delightful at all.

The Emperor shifted in a very slow movements, patiently let him adapt to adjust to him.

The deliberately slow pace process, was as good as equally lengthened the tormenting time, by each of thrusting movements, Li Cong Qing would feel like a scalding hot iron was slowly stabbing in. When it was slowly pulled out, he could clearly feel that part of his body was opened up little by little, the inch by inch friction...

He bit down on his lips, firmly grabbed the Emperor’s arm. The ordinarily always half open half close pair of eyes were widely opened. The mist and fog was swirling and passing, seemingly about to burst from the dike and bubbled up. He had never released such a big material, even more impossible to stuff in such a big thing ...I will die! I definitely will dieeeeeeee!-----

The Emperor saw him afraid that his face had become so pale, he couldn’t help but pity him, unceasingly kissing to comfort him, softly spoke in his ear: “Lazily wrapped in thin clothes to sleep in the cold night, the pillow of spring flowers fragrance’ every night.”

Li Cong Qing was in a daze for a while, how familiar, seemingly he had heard of it somewhere.

“Of course have been forgotten.” The Emperor not in the least unexpected this. When Li Cong Qing recited this two verses he was in his utmost drunken extent, most probably had forgotten once he sobered up. He gave him a hint : “Last year, at the Spring Ceremony’s Banquet, it was recited from a mouth of a drunkard.”

“You saw that?” Li Cong Qing’s ears became hot from being ashamed.

“Also remember.” The Emperor kissed his eyes, ordered him with a gentle voice: “Close your eyes, don’t be afraid, you know by heart, I would never harm you.”

Li Cong Qing blinked his eyes, obediently closed his eyes, slowly relaxed his stretch tight body.

Greatly shuddered, he accommodated the hot and firm as iron which entered his inner part.

The regular movements of the sensual passion from slow, gradually had become swift, from light to become weighty. Li Cong Qing felt that he was like a leaf which fell into a river, at beginning he was slowly drifted along with the flow, gradually flew into a harsher and swifter current, finally drowned in an intense billow of an ocean waves. Drowned into the waves, thrown out from the waves, drowned into the waves again, and thrown out again from the waves...

Each time he was drowned in and thrown out, when he was in the midst of the pain, a thread of unfamiliar pleasure was piling up. Piling up higher and higher and higher. Whose panting is that that has become more intense? Also, whose moaning is that which is pouring out?

“Nggh... Ahhh...”

When his certain part was triggered by the touch, when the piling up pleasure had drowned the pain, that pleasure suddenly became more acute, plundering on his even more sensitive senses, he wanted it but also didn't want it, he wanted it to be finished but also didn't want it to end.

“...Ahhh... No... Don't want... Ahhh...”

“Yes, you want this.” Faster and stronger, deeper and heavier, finally resulting in a hysterical disorder, wantonly spurted out.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhh...”

In the split second when he was in the peak of pleasure, seemingly he could see, the last night's sky blooming with fireworks, that kind of splendid and glaring light, dazzlingly dizzied his eyes, emptying all of his thoughts.

“Ahh!”

Rolling in the surge forward waves, jolt by jolt trembling from the highest attainment of pleasure, two wet and moistened bodies were jerking spasmodically, mixed together to become one body, at the moment, it was unclear whose blood whose flesh.

Hu hu hu... The heavy pants gradually calmed down, the intertwined skin and body didn't want to loosen and let go, inseparable in a sticky embrace. He had the illusion that he was still pushed and squeezed by the last night's crowd, he seized him, he leaned on him... Searching for him from the greatest extent of distant, when he suddenly turned around, that person had already been there, under the dimmed light of the lanterns...

After a long while, the Emperor softly asked him: “Are you a virgin?”

“No. On the day of my fifteenth birthday, my family brought me to the brothel to celebrate my coming of age.” Li Cong Qing honestly answered him, with the heavy nasal sound, dizzily.

“But your sensitivity is like never entered a person before.” The Emperor leisurely poked fun at the soft drooped down body part, fondly admired it, even this part was like its owner, adorably lazy.

“My back part indeed had never been entered.” Lazily shot a sideways glance, powerlessly disregarded the careless and haphazard position, fatigued and weakened, didn't even think to make any move for a while.

After experienced it on his fifteenth birthday, in the beginning he would stealthily go to the brothel to drain himself. But after several times, he felt that this kind of thing was actually very tiring, so he didn't go as often anymore. How about when he had the desire? The pair of hands could absolutely do

everything, not only convenient, but also quick, the most important was he didn't have to waste so much of his strength. However, this little detail was unnecessary for him to explain to the Emperor, so, he didn't tell him everything.

"Was it painful?" The Emperor's fingers crawled to his backside, lightly caressed the wet and slippery pistil, the sweet and luscious lust had reformed afresh.

"A little bit."

"Was it tiring?"

"Extremely tiring." Li Cong Qing writhed away to resist from the fingers which tried to make its way to enter. The inactive him didn't have such good endurance, he wouldn't be able to stand the continuously intense motion. "I don't want anymore."

First time tasting the ecstasy of homosexual flavor, splendidly wonderful couldn't be expressed by words. The Emperor really wanted to do it one more time, but couldn't afford to harm the person who was already extremely tired upon the first time. He could only suppress another rising up desire. Pulling out the fingers and no longer disturbing him, kissing his lips while saying: "Go sleep."

"Mm."

The Emperor waited until Li Cong Qing was deep in his sleep, lightly took him in bridal style, taking him to the bathroom. Placing him into the comfortable warm water, personally cleaned and washed him, carefully fished out the male essence inside his body. Thinking to himself, this is the dragon seed that so many women dreamed and pleaded to have, however it is wasted on a body of a male that's impossible to lay eggs.

Although not wounded to the point of bleeding, the Emperor still applied the ointment to reduce the swelling. After that he took him back to the dragon's bed, sleeping neck to neck with him. Inwardly he said, looks like it will be necessary to properly build up the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites' physical strength.

At the present, at Dashao all level of society, the government and the public, there were two pieces of big shocking news ---

The first was, the King of Turpan brought the Turpan's unrivalled rare and precious national treasure, Turpan Honeydew, coming to Dashao to propose a marriage¹, in hope that he could marry and take the Emperor's youngest brother, the Twelfth Prince, this year just reached sixteenth, Song Shuo, as his wife, to be his Queen. As the result, Song Shuo took that unrivalled rare and precious honeydew then smashed it on the head of the Turpan's King, saying, You go die! The entire people of the nation if were not clapping their hands while applauding 'well done', would raise their thumbs while saying 'Our little Prince is just too cool!'

The King of Turpan did not give up, worked with perseverance; the more obstructed the more courageous. Now he was still at Dashao chasing the running away Twelfth Prince all day long, annoyed the Twelfth to the point of him almost going crazy.

The other news was more popular. That's right. Congratulation dear honorable readers, you finally have guessed it right. It was about the Emperor and the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites' illicit love sex scandal.

Whether it was the Imperial Court's high officials or the local commoners, the whole nation, up and down, man and woman, old and young, all were talking about these two affairs. They usually used the afternoon idle time to chat, about that rumored Turpan's Honeydew having what kind of fragrance and sweetness and very juicy, and then used the evening after dinner teatime, to talk in whispers about

the series of the Imperial Court's topmost sex scandal, the adultery between the Monarch and his subject.

Under the sun of the time of peace and prosperity, it had been so long since whatever uncommon news occurred. These two pieces of news were greatly inspiring people's hearts with enthusiasm! Compared to the event two years ago, the incident of Scholar Lou Chu Yun's naked painting's outflow to the public, these events were even more bubbling and gurgling.

What?! The next door's daughter eloped with her lover? Gee, what is so great about it, news about the Emperor and the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites is more important, alright?!

The Emperor's feeling and livelihood was not limited to one person's affairs, there were also the Imperial Family, the Imperial Court, Dashao's numerous people who watched with their eyes opened widely to be considered as the nation's affairs.

A man together with a man was violating the harmonious heavenly principal of Yin and Yang, but at Dashao this was not such a big crime that couldn't be defied at all. Flourishing age prosperous style, to the point that there were men who married a man as his wife. To stand on the Imperial court's position, this measure of action had violated the upright custom of society, therefore, their marriage was not legally admitted, however, the not affected by the people's mouth's quality and quantity would go ahead with the mentioned topic, as long as you agree and I am willing, they could live happily and merrily, need not to heartlessly break the mandarin ducks², simply must let them live in harmony.

But before Song Yu, Dashao already had many Emperors who didn't appoint a Shang Jun. Everyone made a guess, the eighteenth generation, Emperor De Zhi would or would not let Li Cong Qing to sit on this position?

So to say, Li Cong Qing didn't wish to make known to the public about his romantic relationship with the Emperor, not at all because the Heavenly Principal disagreed with a man to love another man, all the more not at all because he wanted to uphold the upright custom of society, it was simply because of his fondness of laziness and fear of troublesomeness. If he became Shang Jun, he wouldn't have the freedom to do as he pleased to leisurely pass the days anymore. Every move and every action of the Shang Jun would become the central focus to be looked at and also become the gossip target of all the people.

So, Li Cong Qing was just as the Emperor had expected, truly ran away, no, to say the truth it should be hiding himself, hiding in Er'he's Governor's Mansion, at the back room in a little garden.

Li Cong Qing could be said as the very last person in Dashao who learned about this sex scandal. When he together with Wei Xiao Miao left Chu'nan to visit Er'he, the taciturn Li Cong Xuan upon the sight of him, even a greeting he still hadn't said, already in a cool manner threw him a line of words first: "Your secret is already out."

What is out? The awfully leisure Li Cong Qing was at a loss for a while. "What secret?"

"The Emperor and the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites' affair."

"Eh?!" Li Cong Qing's face was radically changing. "No way..."

"Do you think you really can wrap it tightly?"

"Have you told Big Brother?"

"I don't, but he is even sharper than a fox, do you think he won't be able to find out? Before, there was only a few people who know, now already known by everyone without exception." Li Cong Xuan added another hurtful note in the end, throwing him a book entitled << The Secret of the World >>.

This book was very famous, specialized in reporting miscellaneous news about famous people's all sort of news and eccentric people as well as odd things, particularly to criticize and to reveal some gossips and news to stir up the situation. It would be published once a month, be on sale throughout the country. However, this time on the front cover a huge headline caption ---- The Secret Relationship of the Assistant Minister is Exposed!

A sudden clap of a thunder, in an instant the explosion caused Li Cong Qing to become muddle headed and blurred vision, on his face was a splendid multicolored.

Be accustomed to always having an affair in a stealthy method, when he had yet to prepare his mentality, suddenly the affair was unexpectedly exposed. Casually exposed under the sunlight, in a split second he had a horrible illusion as if he was caught in the act, then stark-nakedly paraded through the streets. Before, when he was still in the Capital, he often had a secret meeting with the Emperor but nothing had happened. Why once he left, on the contrary, the affair was leaked out instead?

Even if he was about to be beaten to death, he still wouldn't admit it!

Right, even if I have to die, I will never admit it! After all, the Emperor also wouldn't admit it. Li Cong Qing decided to vehemently deny this matter until the very end. Yet, afterwards, he heard that the Emperor had personally faced the Empress Dowager to confess and come clean, that between he and the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Rites indeed had this kind of relationship. Li Cong Qing all the more didn't know how he should properly react.

AAhhhhh...! Why did he have to admit it? He was the Emperor, who could force him to endure whatever, but he was only a little Assistant Minister, it would be a wonder if he was not skinned alive! Even if it was not concerning a life or death, survive or perish great affair of the nation, but in this life time, this was the very first time for Li Cong Qing to experience what was called as panic-stricken. To think about that year, when he was eaten clean with nothing left by the Emperor, he did not at all feel at a loss of what to do, to the point he nested himself under the quilt and did not dare to meet people for the whole day.

Once he nested himself, he nested for nearly half a month. Except for disposing his basic physiology's demand, his leg practically didn't touch the ground. The whole person would be from muddy to sandy³. Didn't want to face, didn't want to think, didn't want whatever, he only wanted to simply sleep to die would be fine.

However, he couldn't break off from the growing stronger intense longing, longed for the faraway at the other side of the world lover, yearned to the point his heart became hurt. How much he wished that he could return to that person's side, unfortunately he didn't have the strength and courage to face the reality, upon the thought that he had to face the query eyes of the people, he would be annoyed to death.

"Li Cong Qing, how long do you intend to nest?" Li Cong Xuan asked without hiding his detest.

"It is good if I can nest until I die, you don't have to mind me. Leave me alone." The stuffy teary voice was passing out from the cotton quilt. The him who loved to sleep, after hiding himself at there had become more aggravated, dejected to the utmost point.

"Second Brother, if you don't come out to bask in the sun, you will become a worm." Song Xi with one hand hugging her little son, the other hand holding her elder son, stepped into the room while teasing him.

"Get up. Someone has come to meet you." Li Cong Xuan said to him in his cold voice.

"Haven't I told you, I don't want to see anyone."

"You can't not meet."

"I said I don't want to meet."

"Rong'r, go and ask your second uncle⁴ to get out of bed." Said Song Xi while releasing her hold on her elder son.

"Yes." Three year old⁵ kid happily pounced, leaped and jumped on the drum-shaped little mountain of quilt. Lively shouted and jumped. "Second Uncle, Second Uncle, get up! Quickly get up!"

From inside the piling up cotton quilt passed out a pained groaning sound. Li Cong Qing couldn't stand the trampling of the little frog, finally stretched out his head to beg for mercy: "Rong'r please don't jump anymore. You almost flattened your uncle⁶ with your jumping!"

"Second Brother, hurry up and get up. This person you absolutely may not refuse to meet." Added Song Xi.

Looks like if he didn't get up from the bed, they wouldn't let him off. Li Cong Qing heaved a heavy sigh, undertook the difficulty to raise his body and out of the bed, dilly-dally to wear all of his clothing. "Who wants to see me?"

"Second Uncle, it is maternal grandfather⁷!" Li You Rong answered in place of his parents.

Little nephew's maternal grandfather, is the father of Song Xi... Ee, isn't he the father of the current Emperor --- the Retired Emperor⁸?!

Li Cong Qing was dumbfounded.

"Quickly go." Li Cong Xuan yanked him to go.

Unwilling and grudgingly, he strode out from the room. The hadn't seen for a long time bright sunlight caused him to be dazzled for a spell, hurt his eyes and made his tears almost flow out. Half-pulled half-dragged, he arrived at the inner side of the manor's courtyard. Seen in the wayside pavilion, seated was a man about fifty years old, elegantly with an impressive and dignified bearing. Wei Xiao Miao was standing by his side and talking with him.

They were talking about that year, when the Third Prince Song Yu turned seventeen, Emperor Wen Zhi announced that he abdicated and handed over the throne to him. Successfully managed the grand ceremony to abdicate the throne, --- the new reigning Emperor was given the title De Zhi, conveniently, hand in hand with the Empress they went to visit both sides of Yangtze River⁹, very rarely they went back to the Palace. Because of this, Li Cong Qing had never met the retired Emperor before, even so, without much thinking one also could find out that the man in the pavilion was a man of an honorable status.

"Grandfather! Grandfather!" The little kid pounced at him and act spoiled.

Li Cong Qing got a headache as if struggling. Hesitating and not moving forward. Li Cong Xuan simply shoved him to enter the pavilion. He had no choice but to bend his knees and make a bow with clasped hands for courtesy sake: "Humble subject meet..."

"We are family, need not much formality." The retired Emperor stopped him, supported him to rise while smiling and scrutinizing him.

A big drop of cold sweat rolled down from Li Cong Qing's forehead. That... actually was the expression of a father-in-law checking on his daughter-in-law... The retired Emperor must have purposely come to see what kind of appearance his son's secret lover had.

"Come, come to sit and talk." The retired Emperor asked everyone to sit, holding Song You Rong¹⁰ and put him on his knee. With the manner of an elderly he lightly chatted about the daily life of the family. Regarding the sex scandal, he hadn't raised this phrase. His eyes were watching Li Cong Qing closely.

Even if Li Cong Qing had not appeared to be alarmed and all in fluster, his face also appeared to be carefree and leisurely as he used to be, but the fact was he wasn't comfortable at all to be looked at from head to toe, he couldn't find any excuses to leave his seat too, could only silently sit and listen to their idle chat.

"Xi'r you, amongst your brothers and sisters, you are the most willful. Having your brother to approve your marriage won't do, you only wanted your brother to abolish your Princess' title, demoted you to a commoner, and ultimately, you actually left the palace secretly without permission. Say, is there such a bold and reckless Princess like this?" The retired Emperor smilingly criticized, there was not a tiny bit of fury in his face.

"Father, this is what's called, go to the ends of the world for love." Song Xi completely didn't admit that she was at fault. "Cong Xuan said he would rather be a monk than to be the Emperor's bother-in-law. That's why your daughter better not be a princess anymore."

"Stubborn girl!"

"We Song family, which one is not stubborn? Once set our mind, for the rest of our life we will never leave each other. It couldn't change until we die." Said Song Xi, all of a sudden she looked at Li Cong Qing, asked: "Second Brother, what do you think? Isn't it right?"

"Huh? Yes..." Li Cong Qing absent-mindedly agreed, his surname was not Song, she shouldn't have asked him.

"Alas, my Third Brother is truly pitiful. He had set on someone, but that person doubtfully set on him. His tolerance is truly higher than me." Song Xi made a heartfelt sigh. "He is the Emperor, if he was being wronged, he couldn't say it to people. If there is a problem, he couldn't escape nor hide. Sadness could only be swallowed. That's why, what is so good to be an Emperor. He doesn't have the freedom of living like the commoners."

In an instant Li Cong Qing felt like being stabbed by her words. His heart was throbbing in pain, depressed to the utmost point.

Always in the past, he usually only thought about his own self, very rarely considered about what Song Yu had in mind and his feelings. Always thought that because he was the Emperor, he should not have anything he couldn't do, stood upright unshakeable, he had overlooked that the Emperor was also human, also has his weakness. To stand on high place couldn't bear the cold, also to the extent that compared to the ordinary people, he was more isolated without any help.

--- When the flowers on the path bloom, you may slowly return.

When leaving the Capital, he steadily gazed as well as gently said the words on his ears.

Song Yu had predicted from earlier that this kind of thing would happen? The so called blooming flowers, was referred to their exposed secret?

Hide for a while, couldn't hide for a lifetime. Two people eventually would have to face this problem.

He had put him out from the center of the storm beforehand, not causing him to have any chance to suffer the harm, bearing alone the enormous pressure of spreading embroidered stories and malicious gossip.

How could Li Cong Qing not understand. His lover the Emperor always extremely doted on him, protected him, and also understood too much about his character. Knowing if he was in the Capital, surely he wouldn't have any way to calmly think it over, perhaps he might have run away without even considered to think about it. He had always been indecisive and a cowardly kind of person, hadn't he?

Carefully thinking back, he had always been the kind of person who enjoyed himself on the expense of his lover, freely spent the gentleness and consideration that his lover bestowed on him thus he had become a spoiled rotten person... Aii Aii, the Emperor at the moment is all alone in the Capital to shoulder this enormous' pressure, will he be suffering? Will he blame my tardy return, blame me for not standing by his side, to share the responsibility with him?

Thinking again, he couldn't help but have a detest feeling for his own self. He felt that he was truly selfish to the extremity.

--- Just come back when you feel like it.

Silently considered for quite some time, Li Cong Qing finally made up his mind, his heart had told him that he should go home.

"I..." He lifted his head to look at the retired Emperor.

"How is it?" The retired Emperor warmly gazed at him.

Didn't know how to properly say it, Li Cong Qing simply raised his body, made a bow with his hands clasped. "Truly apologize, humble subject Cong Qing would have to retreat first."

"Second Brother, where do you want to go?"

"I want to go home." Said Li Cong Qing, with a very rare to occur speed, he left with a quick steps.

Wei Xiao Miao also busily paid respect to the retired Emperor, then hurriedly followed behind.

The remaining three people inside the pavilion shrugged their shoulders, some of them smiling, but none of them stopped the steps of the suddenly seen the light person.

Li Cong Qing walked very quickly. His state of mind gradually cleared up and calmed down.

He always thought that he was actually not particularly persistent about this unwilling to make known feelings. Often assumed it in his heart, if one day the Emperor didn't love him anymore, he shouldn't be too sad and too heartbroken, also he wouldn't be too embarrassed, since there was not many people who knew the facts of the case.

Today he could clearly think it over, so he suddenly became aware, basically he cared more than what he had imagined, cared to the point... unwilling to let go, must not let go!

He thought, he was destined to be unable to leave that person for this lifetime. Just like the fish couldn't be separated from water, once separated, he thought, he probably would wither and die.

Back to his room, he hurriedly packed his luggage. Before Li Cong Qing sat in the carriage, he said to Wei Xiao Miao: "Xiao Miao, although I don't know much regarding the matter between you and Seventh Prince, however I still want to stick in my mouth to encourage you. Don't be like me, escape and shrink to avoid."

“Sir Li...”

“What you should hold, you ought to properly hold onto it. What do you want to pursue, just bravely go and pursue. Don’t because you are afraid and feel that you are inferior thus make you hesitate to move forward.” Li Cong Qing patted him, sincerely told him: “Xiao Miao, you are the same with everyone else, you deserve to have your dignity, even more deserve to obtain happiness.”

Wei Xiao Miao fell silent for a while, his eyes flashed through a line of radiant light of determination. “Sir Li, please return to the Capital by yourself. Humble me wants to go towards Chu’nan.”

“Mm. Go.”

“Please be careful on your way. Be sure to take good care of yourself.”

“You too.”

Looking at each other while smiling, soundlessly gave each other their sincere wishes.

Hence upon, two people crossed path here and then. Each went to pursue the sky which belonged solely to them.

“Can you be more faster?” Li Cong Qing frequently hastened the horse driver, really wished that he could grow wings to fly back home.

“Sir, this is already the fastest. If more, the cart will surely fall apart to pieces!” The driver was already diligently urging on his two pitiful horses to run like mad as if flying.

Originally, Li Cong Qing wanted to ride on horse so he could be faster, however, his riding skills were extremely disappointing. Who could know that even before he could reach the Capital, half the way he already broke his hands and legs by falling or twisted and snapped his neck? Although he was being impatient to go back, still, to obediently sit on the carriage would be much more safer.

While sitting on the carriage, one by one he recalled all sorts of affairs between him and the Emperor. Lastly, he recalled about the matter after that very night six years ago. Even though he had been peeled naked and eaten completely, the afterwards still remained undecided. Would he be just like that to be with the Emperor, become the Emperor’s... male favorite?

In the beginning, he intended to enter the court as a scholar and just leisurely hang around while taking it easy, how would he expect that without rhyme or reason he would actually be drifted to the Emperor’s dragon’s bed. Truly such a complicated and bizarre thing!

Remembering that day before dawn, the sky wasn’t bright yet. Because he usually had to attend the morning court, he had cultivated a habit of no matter what time he went to sleep, immediately in the morning he would wake up at a certain fixed hour. But would still stay in bed, until the servant came to call him up then he would get up in anguish.

Closing his eyes while in a half dreaming half awakening state, his hand touched a warm and smooth thing... ehh??... What did they put on his bed? Upon a touch it was rather comfortable.

The Emperor because of being caressed here and there was troubled and woke up. Caught a hold of that easily lit up a flaming hand, softly said: “It is still early, go back to sleep for a little while.”

“Mmm... Xiao Guo Zi, later don’t forget to wake me up...”

Has he mistaken me as the manor's attendant? The Emperor smiled. "Yes."

"Your Majesty, time to dress up." Wei Xiao Miao already by the bed side waiting to serve.

The Emperor tucked the quilt for the person who still remained on the bed before he got up and climbed down the bed, allowed Wei Xiao Miao to serve him by washing the face, rinse the mouth and change clothes.

After a while, Li Cong Qing absentmindedly muttered: "Xiao Guo Zi, is it the time already?"

"Not yet. You just sleep a little more." Wei Xiao Miao answered.

"Xiao Guo Zi, today why do you have two kinds of voice..." His speech gradually became weaker, fell asleep again.

The Emperor turned back and kissed his mouth, ordered the people who left to wait upon him for not waking Li Cong Qing up, and then left.

Li Cong Qing half dreaming half awake, when his mind finally became clearer, the sky was already misty bright. Blinking his eyes, he shouted an "AH!!" and sprang up to sit. He lifted up the quilt, jumped out of the bed. Suddenly he felt a spell of slight chill, lowered his head to see that he was actually stark naked without even a line of thread. Eh, yesterday why did he go to sleep without putting on clothes? Not right! Where is this?

Blinking his eyes again to see clearly, he realized he was not at home. Just suddenly remembered that yesterday he stayed over in the Palace, his cheeks unwittingly flushed red from the heat.

"Sir, have you gotten up? Servants will enter to wait upon you." Someone spoke from in front of the room.

"No need. Do not enter!" Li Cong Qing busily took the whole court uniform which hung on the screen and neatly dressed himself, hurriedly opened the door.

"Sir, please wash your face." Two Palace's attendants were holding fresh water standing outside the door.

Li Cong Qing carelessly washed and rinsed for a little while, rushed out just like that. Running while tying his official's hat and fastening his official's belt.

In the hall, they had begun to discuss about official affairs. He bended low his body, tiptoeing and quietly entered. Fortunately his place was on the foremost backside to the nearest to the door, he wouldn't disturb the others.

The Emperor's dragon seat was on a high place, of course he could see him secretly enter. Didn't understand and pondered to himself, why was he so insist on attending court? The idea to confer upon him the Shang Jun title became even stronger, but in the end, he restrained it. He did not wish to force him to do something he didn't want to. But of course, with exception of that matter on bed.

Remembering last night's first sexual intercourse, his body inadvertently gave a rise to a great mass of fervor. The Emperor was not at all a sex indulgent type of person, but Li Cong Qing had aroused his never had before enormous desire. He wanted to embrace him, kissed him deeply, deeply entered his inner body, one at a time firmly rammed on it... upon the thought, almost slightly trembling, his lower belly heated up and began to undulating a sweet electric current.

"Your Majesty, Your Majesty?" An old high Minister softly called out to the inattentive Emperor.

"This matter, let me think about it again." The Emperor collected his focus, half of his heart was on the court, the other half was on Li Cong Qing. After discussing several affairs, he simply ended the court.

Li Cong Qing went back to the Ministry of Rites, his mood appeared to be irritated and be in unease. His buttocks was unsettled on the chair, once he sat down, he would spring up again, as if there were pins and needles spread on the surface, impossible to sit uncomfortable to stand. The old Minister saw his face in unusual color, body seemed to not be very comfortable, thus allowed him to leave earlier to rest.

When the Emperor asked Wei Xiao Miao to summon him, he had already left the Palace. Wei Xiao Miao reported back, asked the Emperor if he need or not go to the Li's Manor to call him back, the Emperor said no need, in his heart he thought that it was good that he went home. If Li Cong Qing was within his reach, he would only be thinking about dragging him to the bed to do this and that. Because of this, he felt that he would completely turn into a sexually pleased indulgent person.

Shaking his head and sneering at himself, since long time ago, this was the first time he yearned for a person like this, this kind of thing had never happened before. Was he seeking out for a new thing? Or had he really fallen in love? No matter which one, this was absolutely not just only a momentarily sudden impulse.

Never mind. In one's whole life, it was hard to come by a chance to just carefully and considerably follow the nature. If Li Cong Qing was not vehemently refusing the Imperial favor, he could obtain a kind of hard to explain by words' pleasure, therefore didn't need to closely force him to cause him scare and run away or make him deliberately complicate an issue.

After Li Cong Qing went back to his home, he went straight to bed and got into the quilt to nestle himself. He wanted to sleep but he couldn't. His head was in a mess, he wanted to think about everything, yet he had no idea what to think.

Li Cong Yin heard from his subordinate that second master returned home in the daylight, quickly returned from his trading company. Becoming more proficient in his profession, he asked while knowing the answer: "Second Brother, last night you stayed over at the Palace, didn't you?"

"Mm." Angry but had no strength he gloomily replied.

"Busy about what? I see that you are tired, do you want me to ask someone to cook a bowl of soft-shelled turtle to build up your strength?"

"I don't eat turtle."

"Aiii, sometimes you ought to eat this turtle even if you don't eat turtle. I as your big brother worry that your kidneys will be poor in health."

"You are the one with the weak kidneys!" Unable to restrain his retort, he stretched out his head to glare. This kind of stretch out the head appearance was a little bit alike with that soft-shelled turtle.

Looking at Li Cong Yin whole face extremely wicked and sinisterly smiled, seemingly like he could see through the matter, Li Cong Qing felt that he was not having a weak kidney, but a weak heart. Last night's affair undoubtedly was absolutely secret taboo. If only this matter was about a man on man improper sexual relationship, it would be easy. However, that man was the current Son of Heaven. If he was to be frankly speaking, your little brother's treasured delicate backyard was deflowered last night as you wished, to let the great and mighty, wise and brilliant His Majesty the Emperor to deflower, certainly could extremely amuse this heartless devil for sure! Tsk!

Li Cong Qing shrank his head back into the shell, not in the mood to deal with the master of Li Family

who wholeheartedly sold his younger brother for glory. Continued to huddle up like a turtle drawing in its head and legs inside the cotton quilt. Sigh, very annoying... forget it, it would be better to just sleep first then think later. He didn't want to think about whatever anymore. His head was distressed for having too many loads. He still wished for a leisurely long-drawn-out hundreds of years to live!

Despite being agitated and fidgety, he still could sleep as usual, if not, he wouldn't be the sleepy Assistant Minister.

After sleeping for a whole day, the next day he headed to the palace to attend the court as always, persisted in not being absent from duty without good reason.

At first he thought that the Emperor would summon him, perturbed for a whole day yet he didn't hear whatever notification. The second day, the third day also the same. The Emperor seemingly had forgotten about his existence.

Logically, Li Cong Qing ought to feel lucky, sighing in relief was the right thing to do. But he faintly had a slight disappointment as if missing something. During court, he also didn't doze off but began to be absent-minded. Time and again secretly glanced at the person who sat on the highest place, unexpectedly expected that person to notice him a little. However that person did not share him even a glance.

Just like that, the Emperor's indifference towards him had come to the sixth day. Li Cong Qing's heart subconsciously raised a nameless anger. Told himself, the Emperor indeed only had a momentary interest to have a taste of a fresh new thing, in a result realized that he was not delicious at all, so that once he got down from the dragon's bed he easily cast him to the back of his head, forgot about him completely.

Ai ai, fine! Just regard it as a scene of a strange spring's dream. After all, he was a man, except for experiencing an unspeakable grievance, his body didn't lose even a small chunk of flesh, unlike women who needed to put their chastity and reputation in the utmost importance thus attempted to commit suicide because of this. Also, one thing added was not like one thing less. Like this was also good.

The seventh day, Li Cong Qing's undulating state of mind had already settled down, thereupon he intended to adjust back to his former calm as still water self. Not to think about and not put the matter with the Emperor in his heart again. Continued with his negligence to pull through the days, even if deep in his heart he still had a threadlike disappointed melancholy.

On the other side, these few days, The Emperor's face seemingly was not different than the usual, forever without any distinct emotions, methodical, not allowing people to see his actual feelings.

In reality, the Emperor was aware of every move and act of Li Cong Qing, saw him attending the court punctually as always, by each passing day, his thirst and desire was growing even more intense. He forcefully pressed down the desire thus not calling him, one side, not wishing to indulge himself in the desired pleasure, on the other side, to give Li Cong Qing more time to ponder over and to adapt to the situation.

The Emperor because of this matter often found to be inattentive, no matter in the court discussing the matter or in the Imperial Study while managing the government affairs, even to the extent when taking a stroll in the Imperial Garden, he would fix his stare at the magnificently burst Chinese Rose for a long time.

Until the eighth day, the Emperor had to go to Bai Hu temple to worship the Buddha and honor the ancestors. The Ministry of Rites was in charge for the Imperial Family's rites and ceremony, naturally he would summon the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites to accompany the Emperor, even not allowing the other high officials and nobles to follow suit.

Bai Hu Temple was not far away from the Palace. There was a path that directly could lead to that place. The Emperor rode on the Imperial Carriage, the Li Cong Qing who came to accompany him, according to the custom, should walk behind. But the Emperor made an exception and granted him a sedan chair next to Imperial Carriage. In the past, to have this kind of honor to travel together, there was only the Empress. However, because amongst the courtiers who traveled together, Li Cong Qing held the highest post as an official, nobody dared to lodge an objection for this exception.

The originally prepared his heart to be calm and cool Li Cong Qing couldn't help but have his heartbeat become faster. The golden sedan chair was half a foot lower than the Imperial Carriage, only needed to slightly turn his head, he already could see the Emperor's side face. But his head was lowered and dared not to lift it all along, even more dared not to look at the Emperor.

The sedan chair swayed here and there lightly, despite having an unsettled heart, yet the sway was truly awfully comfortable. Only half the way, his eyelids already couldn't help but narrowing, then he dozed off again.

The Emperor caught sight of his head throw to the left nod to the right, worried that he would fall from the sedan chair, he called out to him: "Li Cong Qing."

"Mm?" Opening his hazy eyes, subconsciously directed his gaze at the person who called out to him.

The Emperor was looking at him, a smile was on his lips. That misted sleepy appearance on the Emperor's eyes appeared to be extremely cute. He hadn't ever met anyone who loved to sleep more than him, very rare to let whatever opportunity to doze off slip away.

"Your Majesty has what command?" Li Cong Qing busily gathered his shattered spirit, lowered his brows and eyes submissively.

"Beloved Minister, recently when you observe the stars, do you find any exceptional configurations of the stars?"

Li Cong Qing was stunned for a while. Since when did he become the Emperor's 'Beloved Minister', how come he didn't know any of it? "Answer Your Majesty, humble subject hasn't observed the stars for many days."

"Heee... No wonder you didn't doze off during the morning court." The Emperor softly laughed, and in a manner of idle chat he said: "Official Si Ming from the Ministry of Astronomy has seen that my red phoenix's star secretly moved."

Li Cong Qing stared blankly and did not understand the words. The little deer in the pit of his stomach had begun to move wildly disregarding his wish. The Emperor was hinting on what to him? Why did he feel that his heartbeat became even faster?

The Emperor saw that his cheeks became red, whole face stupefied appeared that he understood but didn't understand. Very cute to the point that it made him really wanted to pull him to enter the Imperial Carriage, hold him in his embrace, and then immediately inside the Imperial Carriage make this and do that, to convey his recent days of constrained passion and longing.

Several days ago, the Emperor saw that Li Cong Qing didn't doze off during the morning court for days, his mood appeared to be rather not calm. He basically was not someone who was good at concealing his feelings, couldn't hide his restless with anxiety, a little sad, a thread of losing. Although the Emperor seemed to be indifferent, but he could clearly understand everything.

As a trial was fine, leave him to apprehend himself also good. The Emperor at least could see that Li Cong Qing towards that night's affair was not at all stemmed from the helplessness of being forced,

much or less was also willing. Therefore the Emperor realized that he was not only yearning for Li Cong Qing's body, but also yearned for his heart. If he was a woman, the Emperor thought to himself, certainly for sure he would welcome him to enter the palace and conferred him the Imperial Concubine title.

Unfortunately, Li Cong Qing was a man through and through. Impossible to become Empress or Concubine. To make him a Shang Jun, he also disagreed. Only way was to make him stay by his side.

As an Emperor, why should he waste too many thoughts if he wanted a person? Upon his decree, what couldn't he obtain? But to secure something by force was not his style. He did not want to force a helpless subject to submit. He wanted Li Cong Qing to be willing from his heart.

Li Cong Qing, Li Cong Qing. Do you know how much thoughts I put on you?

When Li Cong Qing jumped into the carriage, the rumors about him and the Emperor had come to an out of hand extent. Multiplying and spreading like wildfire. The people who didn't know would be laughed at as not up to the present trend. Even the current affairs had created folk rhymes as the response---

Peony has bloomed, burst with joy to be picked, oh Fairy descend to the world to pay a debt of gratitude. Chrysanthemum has blossomed, burst with joy to be picked, oh Fairy where are you going to. Peony has bloomed, chrysanthemum has blossomed, the Prince is waiting for you hurry up and return, the nameless flowers has withered, you still haven't come back.

The lyrics was frank and blunt. Thirty percent to delight children seventy percent was enchanting. When being passed from streets to lanes, from one person to another, everyone could recite it with ease. Little children innocently sang it, adults recited it ambiguously. Within the borders of Dashao, because of the Monarch-Subject sex scandal, had become very lively and happy. The entire people of the nation from upper to the commoner wholeheartedly flipped over the heaven together. The Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites was taking so long to return, everybody was more anxious than the Emperor, worried to the extent that they were afraid that their Great and wise brilliant Emperor was dumped by the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites.

"Third Brother, the hearsays regarding you and Li Cong Qing, the more it rolls, the bigger it becomes. To the point that it has become even more unreasonable!" Song Xuan would come to the Palace every day to report on the latest progress.

"I know." The Emperor still as before, didn't have any huge reaction.

"You still don't want to take him home?"

"Wait until he has straightened out his mind, he will definitely return."

"What if he doesn't return?"

"He will surely return." The Emperor said in confidence. Li Cong Qing since six years ago had been living as Song's family, he would die as a Song's spirit. No matter how far he went or how long, in the end he still had to return, there was only here that could be counted as the one and only place he belonged to.

"I really couldn't comprehend, why in the first place you asked him to leave the Capital."

"I have let him have his way for way too long. I hope that this time he can think over everything clearly."

Song Xuan upon what he had heard stunned him for a while. Suddenly he realized what had happened. Carefully thinking back, so that day the Emperor deliberately let Li Cong Qing sleep in his Imperial Study, allowing people to see him covering him with his yellow robe and such meticulous intimate manner, then afterwards dispatched him to go out of the Capital. Following next was the rumors flying everywhere and so on. Everything was as the Emperor had anticipated.

Sigh, probably the pressure was too heavy, finally couldn't bear to carry on the secret affairs with Li Cong Qing, so he bended and turned the corner to stir up trouble and let it become the talk of the town. To force Li Cong Qing who couldn't afford to not admit their taboo relationship.

"Third Brother... Are you trialing him?" Song Xuan asked cautiously.

"Between him and I need no trial."

"Then why...?"

The Emperor only smiled, didn't want to explain too much.

Song Xuan didn't dare to ask further. Convincing himself with the words he said before, if the Emperor's thoughts can be thoroughly guessed, then that person could be converted to become the Emperor. In any case, the bright Emperor had everything well-thought. Everything was under his control. No matter what he did, he had his own reason. Why in the world should he be worried to death when the Emperor himself wasn't worried?

To say the truth, the Emperor indeed had taken such great pains for Li Cong Qing. Really wished for them to be close to each other and be clear like the clouds give way to the moon. It wouldn't be good if they kept their relationship like its current state.

"However, Third Brother, have you heard the latest song that is passing amongst the people in the town?"

"The flower bloom?"

"Not only that. There is also some more... ahem... unpresentable."

"Oh, sing for me to hear."

"Really want to hear?"

"There is no harm to have a try."

Hence Song Xuan called a little eunuch to enter, asked him to sing. Little eunuch used a timid and nervous voice to sing: "Cherished Brother, cherished Peony, the flower married for debt. My body is fragile and gentle, don't be like the ox chewing on Peony, be slowly in touching my branches and leaves, again and again sprinkle chilly water on me, the result of course twisted in delight. The delicate pretty flower, also obtain a handsome dearest cherished brother, gently and softly come to pick me." (note: adopted and self-arranged from <<Gua Zhi Er>> / Ming Dynasty, Feng Meng Long¹.)

The shrinking and cowering voice sang out the erotic and amorous lyrics. After the little eunuch finished with his singing, Song Xuan flushed red to the ears. Who couldn't find out from the song that 'cherished brother' and 'cherished peony' was the metaphor for the Emperor and the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites.

The Emperor remained calm and composed as before, unperturbed and not batting an eyelid, only the smile on his lips had extended to greater grin. "What a good singing. Is there another one? Just

sing it for me to hear.”

Little eunuch upon hearing the praise from the Emperor, happy as if could fly. Courageously sang another song. With each song, the lyrics became bolder and bolder. What said as “Monarch and Official together every night, enjoying the fine evening.”, also “Sweetly tight, mildly warm, the lovely squeezing backyard flower garden.”, each songs was hinting to the Emperor and Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites sexual relationship. Obscene songs with insolent lyrics fantastic and caused the nose to spurt blood.

The Emperor was not angered when he heard the songs, listening to the end, to the point that he broke out in laughter, laughing to death, laughed to his heart’s content without restraint.

Song Xuan because of this, the more he listened the more he sweated, he thought to himself, to be referred to with those kind of vulgar and obscene words, he was actually not angry but laughing instead. His Older Brother the Emperor was truly having such an exceptional compassion. It would be better to be said... covering the coquettish tightly...

But regardless of the obscenity that passed through in the town, they actually contained an openly approving meaning. The chant was praising the beautiful and romantic love of the two people. The infinite radiance of spring on the dragon’s bed, you will want then the passionate love that would overflow.

The next day, the Emperor received a letter from the carrier pigeon. The brief three words were written in powerful stroke: “Qing has returned.”

Finally willing to return and face the problem? Smiling while pondering these three words, he recalled the event that took place several days after the first night with Li Cong Qing that year. The feeling at that time and this moment was somewhat similar. He was still waiting, waiting for a definite answer.

The face of the Emperor remained unruffled, but in fact, his mood was not as relaxed as Li Cong Qing. The dimension of things he needed to take into consideration was more. The pressure he had to endure was heavier. Yet he still silently waited for Li Cong Qing to nod his head and say yes. It was said that a fruit which was picked by force wouldn’t be sweet, a flower which plucked by force wouldn’t be fragrant. He thought to himself, Li Cong Qing should be his lifetime sweetest fruit, the most fragrance flower.

However this fruit, this flower had been sleeping too much, sleeping to the point that his head had paused from thinking. He actually regarded their feelings and relationship into a kind of habit, ignoring that this habit was accumulating from their strong feelings. Perhaps because the distance between them was too near, near to the point he couldn’t see clearly each other’s heart. That was why he let him go a little further for the time being, waited for him to look back to see clearly.

The Emperor was not particular about small matters as who loved who the more, the deeper, this kind of petty matter. However, their relationship indeed was roughly because he was the one pursuing Li Cong Qing. Cast aside the discussion about status and position, their relationship actually was in an unequal condition. They both stood on the both ends of a stick. Li Cong Qing’s end always stuck up higher.

This time the Emperor stopped himself, letting Li Cong Qing to take the initiative to turn around and come to him. He was not pursuing him directly anymore, since his demand had caused him to mistakenly regard their feelings as a kind of feeling that he had to endure.

If Li Cong Qing could admit that his feelings were not less than the Emperor’s at all, in that way, they could truly stand on equal position. Side by side, shoulder to shoulder on the equality standpoint of love.

Afterwards, they could begin a brand new phase.

Mentioning about 'Live as Song's Family, Die as Song's Spirit' phrase, it was not the Emperor's made up words all. It originated from the golden mouth and pearly wisdom of the Great Teacher of the Nation. At that time, Li Cong Qing simply didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Come, let's continue our story to the end. Starting from the day the Emperor summoned Li Cong Qing to accompany him to pay respect to the ancestors at Bai Hu Temple. All the way, both of their hearts were like a capering monkey and their minds were like a galloping horse², until the Imperial Carriage and the procession arrived at their destination. The Abbot of the Temple, the Great Teacher of the Nation already respectfully stood by the temple door and welcomed them.

Bai Hu Temple was the Imperial Family's ancestral temple. Only the member of the Imperial Family could enter. The escorting officials would have to wait outside the temple. But the Emperor ordered Li Cong Qing to follow him to enter the temple, also brought him to enter the Pagoda to worship.

The Pagoda had nine levels, the three upper levels were to worship Tathagata Buddha. The three middle levels were to worship the family's ancestors. The three lower levels were to respect Dashao heroic martyrs. The Emperor took Li Cong Qing along to ascend the stairs all the way to the highest level of the Pagoda. The Great Teacher of the Nation because he was already so old, couldn't climb that high. Two young monks were assisting him on ascending the stairs.

Li Cong Qing thought that he only needed to stand far far away while escorting. Or just helping with the miscellaneous jobs such as helping to pass the incense, arranging the kneeling pillows and so on. He never had thought that the Emperor actually wanted him to kneel by his side and together with him perform the courtesy.

Although puzzled, he still obediently obeyed the Emperor's decree, from the hand of the Great Teacher of the Nation he received the lighted incense, together with the Emperor he worshiped the Tathagata Buddha first, then the Song's family's ancestors, afterwards paid respect to Dashao heroic martyrs. Worshipping and enshrining the Buddha and the ancestors, it was a must to kneel down and kowtowed three times. For the Dashao heroic martyrs, offering the incense was already sufficient enough.

He carefully followed the Emperor to worship from the upper level to the lower level. The Emperor offered the incense, he just followed suit to offer the incense. The Emperor knelt down and kowtowed, he would also kneel down and kowtow. In the solemn and respectful also foggy by the smoke place, his whole body was tainted with the sweet smell of burning incense.

Li Cong Qing came to experience the heavy and complicated tedious long courtesy of the Imperial Family when paying respect to their ancestors. The standing up, kneeling down and kowtowing was considerably tiring him out. Yet the Emperor was not in the least bit impatient. From beginning to the end, he was seriously performing it without even one thread loose³. Unlike Li Cong Qing who was having an almost giving out knees in the end of the ritual.

With much difficulty finally the paying courtesy was completed. The Great Teacher of the Nation was smiling while telling Li Cong Qing: "Already paid respect to the successive generations of Song's ancestors. For this life time, live as Song's Family, die as Song's spirit."

Wa yo. What actually had happened? Making him unknowingly from Li's Family become Song's spirit?! If Li Cong Qing was in the middle of drinking tea or eating meal, surely he would have spouted them out.

Fortunately he was having nothing in his mouth, he could only dumbfoundedly be at a loss for words.

His face was darkened. He was having a hard time in absorbing the Great Teacher of the Nation's words, couldn't make heads or tails whether he was joking or seriously saying it. Why each time this old man would open his mouth, he would make him not know whether to laugh or to cry.

The Emperor slightly smiled, didn't say anything.

Afterwards, they went to the Flower Garden. The Emperor held a clipper to trim the Peony that was planted in the topaz pot, he wanted Li Cong Qing to loosen the soil with the little trowel. That time was just like the time of the flowering season. The flowers bloomed magnificently. Strong fragrantly gorgeous colors. The two people wholeheartedly and attentively attended to the delicate Peony.

"According to usual practice, every year I have to plant a new peony. But I could only concentrate on this one. Even if in the future it would not sprout a flower anymore, I will still adore it the same way." Said the Emperor as if starting a light chat.

Li Cong Qing didn't know how he should respond. Should he praise "Your Majesty is sentimental and single-minded."? It was not quite right. Or maybe he should kiss up by commending "Your Majesty truly cherished the flower kind of person."? It was also not quite proper. Or how about "This flower really has cultivated countless of good karma, to have Your Majesty extremely favor it." ... This phrase seemed to have a larger issue. Pondering it over and over again, no matter what he was about to say, it would end up weird. Might as well just not say anything. Silence is golden!

"Li Cong Qing, What do you think?" The Emperor asked all of a sudden.

What what? Li Cong Qing couldn't comprehend.

The Emperor put down the clipper, took away the trowel from Li Cong Qing's hand, pulled his hand, washed them together in the basin which was placed beside them.

Li Cong Qing dumbfoundedly let the Emperor wash clean the soil from his hand. His heart was pounding from nervousness all the while, thadump, thadump, thadump...

When the Emperor took his clean hand and lifted it to his lips, kissed the dripping wet fingertips and palm, Li Cong Qing's face heated up. Taking it away was not able, not taking it away was also could not. His heart beat wildly to the point that it almost jumped out from his chest.

"I always notice you."

Li Cong Qing was stunned, blinked and blinked his eyes. After a while he finally could react. Couldn't help but secretly disagree. Of course, these days have been indifferent. I have suspected that I was seduced then abandoned, kicked out of the place.

The Emperor saw that he was unable to hide his disagreement. His lips also slightly pouted. It was very easy to guess what he was thinking of. Presumably he was not all rejecting, there was at least a little bit of care in his heart. Upon this thought, the Emperor felt extremely elated. Grasping his hand, saying: "Li Cong Qing, say, what should I do to have you?"

Li Cong Qing pondered and pondered, thought it over and over, pondered over it again. He always only wished to have smooth and poised days in the future. But the Emperor seemed determined to win. Just say that this time he would let him off, next time most probably he could never run away.

Sigh, the Monarch wanted his subject to die, subject could never not die. Much less to say if the Monarch wanted his subject buttocks, could the subject not take off his trousers? He was Li Cong Qing, although not a genius, he also too rather had a clear view of things.

If he honestly asked himself, he was actually not strongly rejecting to be together with the Emperor. In

addition, he had rolled here rolled there on the Dragon's bed, to pretend that he dared to die to guard his chastity; it would be truly a bit too artificial.

After a period of time to ponder over reason, his confusion as well as his indeterminate heart gradually settled down.

After all, the thing he was unable to escape he would never be able to escape. To think that if he didn't comply with the Emperor's wish, the Emperor was also unwilling to give up. In the days to come, pulled here dragged there impossible to unravel. Who knows, might even lead to a pointless bitter taste. In the end he would still be eaten clean even the bone would not remain by the Emperor. As good as wasted energy in vain, only brought trouble upon himself.

Li Cong Qing's train of thoughts was just like the scene in the novel and fiction, made him feel very tired. He was not the same as those faithful women who would die in defense of their chastity, therefore...so... Just like an old monk tolled a bell, each day passed, each day wasted. ----

At home wherever one is⁴.

Li Cong Qing gave up his not so much in resistance struggle. He came to terms. Replying in his stammered and stuttered manner: "Everything is depended on Your Majesty's decision."

"Have you clearly thought it over?"

Even if he thought until he damaged his brain, he still could never think clearly. Li Cong Qing thought to himself, then said again: "Humble subject has only one request."

"What is it?"

"Do not wish to make it known to the public."

This person was the type that was afraid of troublesome matters, how could the Emperor not understand this kind of request. He gave his permit: "I agree."

"Thank you Your Majesty."

"Do you have another request?"

"Let me think." Li Cong Qing tilted his head to think, he always felt that he had been treated unjustly, he ought to demand something to make it fair. Fame and glory he did not pursue. Wealth and riches he was not lacking of. He really couldn't think of what he wanted to demand. Managed with an effort to squeeze out one thing: "Let me continue my position as Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites."

The Emperor originally considered to promote his official post, upon hearing what he had said, he couldn't restrain his smile from breaking out into laughter. Eagerly pulled him into his bosom. "Li Cong Qing. You are truly a strange person."

"Right, there is another thing."

"Eh?"

"Ahem... I am afraid of pain, therefore, ahem ahem...when doing that, you may not let me feel the pain." Li Cong Qing said it, his cheek faintly raised to a thin red color.

"That is the matter of course. That night, had I made you feel the pain?"

"Tolerable." His awkward face became even redder. He said again: "Also may not do that thing during

daytime.” Just said that he agreed to be on intimate terms with the Emperor, the sense of shame of this still remained.

“The ancestors had clearly set, to prohibit the Monarch to commit adultery during daytime.” A good Emperor must be abided and protected the ancestry’s law. Even if burning with desire he would still have to restrain it.

“Pheww, then it will be fine. Also, if I fell asleep during the morning court, do not pay special attention on my little misconduct.”

“When did I ever fuss over your little misconduct?”

Li Cong Qing extended his requests one after another. Today he was the favorite. Simply gave him an inch and he wanted a mile. Even if all of his requests were nothing more than chicken feathers and garlic skin⁵ kind of demands.

The Emperor was laughing as if he must grant whatever he asked for. Even more effective than asking from the Tudi Gong⁶. His pair of eyes was unwittingly filled with love, in the end he couldn’t bear to block up the voice with his mouth. Still couldn’t he see that Li Cong Qing was trying to stall for time?

Sigh, The Emperor basically had set on him.

Li Cong Qing secretly felt happy in his heart. Obediently he opened his mouth, to allow the Emperor’s tongue to enter and mix with his tongue. And then, he also closed his eyes, to enjoy the sweetness of the passionate kiss.

The Emperor’s constrained desire for many days ignited to form a blaze in an instant. But this was not the right time and the proper place, he had no choice but to painfully restrain his lust. Whispering in Li Cong Qing’s ear with his husky voice : “You have to make good mental preparation. Tonight, it won’t be enough with only one time.”

Li Cong Qing whole face suddenly burned up. The him now was still extremely delicate, with regard to the Emperor’s seductive offense, his resistance was still lacking. Just a little bit of teasing, he would blush out of embarrassment. Cute to the extreme.

The Emperor was really dying to be a bad Emperor. No matter three times seven is twenty one⁷, he could push him down then and there. Who would give a damn to that troublesome ancestry’s law! He had never had this kind of outrageous idea since the day he was born. This was solely because of Li Cong Qing, and only for Li Cong Qing.

However, in the end he diligently pressed it down. He only wished that the sun would hurriedly head to the west and sink behind the mountain, after that, they could go hand in hand to their highest paradise.

As the matter of course, tonight definitely would be a fine spring colored endlessly passionate spring night.

The pitiful Li Cong Qing was turned and tossed for the whole night. Until he could no longer bear it and repeatedly begged for mercy, the Emperor just satisfyingly let him go, hugged him in a tight embrace and slept.

That night was a brilliant starlight night.

They were hugging each other, together they fell into the sweet dreamland.

In the dream, the Emperor stretched out his hand to Li Cong Qing and said, how about we go together?

Yes. Li Cong Qing interlocked his hand with the Emperor's hand.

They were hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, together they walked on a long long road, an endless road, yet they were extremely at ease while walking on the road.

Perhaps, they would walk to the utmost end of the world, maybe they would walk until the ends of the time, they just walked together, no one let go of the other hand, just walked and walked, walked and walked...

Hence upon, the Emperor of Dashao and the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites just naturally and uprightly will be together.

Without much force and struggle, without disturbing whoever. On one side, Wei Xiao Miao was skillful to keep the secret in the family. On the other side, nobody suspected that the tall and handsome Emperor would actually look at the mediocre Li Cong Qing. Moreover, the Emperor had never called upon a male escort before. Because of this, only very few close people who held the lantern inside their stomach, heart knows stomach understanding is enough.

One year passed another year had come. In a blink of an eye, the two people had been together for six years already. Although they couldn't openly and honorably stick to each other like glue, but with each passing day, their growing deeper feelings caused them to be unable to be separated from each other.

Until this year, the Emperor dispatched Li Cong Qing to inspect Chu'nan. Once separated, they were separated for no less than half a year. When he was setting his foot on the road to return from the countryside, His and the Emperor's love affair was bustling to the point it could pull down the heaven.

--When the flowers on the path bloom, you may slowly return.

The King of Wu Yue gave this written message to Lady Wang who returned to her hometown to pay a visit to her parents. It appeared as if not to hasten Lady Wang from returning to Capital, but the short words and expression indeed revealed the densely yearning affection, expecting her to return earlier.

Passing door, be situated on the Emperor's most obscured little side door, a hidden place, a narrow alley linked it to the outside road. Rumor had it that a certain Emperor set it up for the sake of having a secret meeting with his lover who lived outside the Palace. Normally, nobody would use it to enter or leave the Palace, it was equally half abandoned already, there were only two guards who would keep the door on guard. This side door which held an ambiguous function, today was actually opened. Besides the usual two guards, there were also two Palace attendants.

"Aii, we have been waiting for three months, that Sir why hasn't he come back yet." A young eunuch couldn't contain the boredom and complained in whisper.

"Don't talk too much. Stand properly." Another older eunuch reprimanded him.

The younger eunuch obediently stood properly. Not a long while afterwards, he couldn't bear but ask again: "Zhang Gong Gong⁸, what would we do if that Sir is not going to return?"

"Even if we have to wait to death we also have to wait."

"Wouldn't it be much faster to just issue an Imperial Edict to summon him to return?"

"As a little servant you talk too much, watched your tongue." Older eunuch admonished him with a warning voice.

The young eunuch was surprised and stuck out his tongue. Hurriedly closed the door. Frequently stretched out his neck towards the end of the road to wait and see. Day after day they could only wait in expectation, until the sunset dyed the horizon with its red color, they thought that they would have to wait for another day. Contrary to expectation, a gush of smoke and dust from the distant place was flying upward.

The young eunuch opened his eyes widely to see properly, excitedly yelled: "Zhang Gong Gong, look, someone comes to this direction."

Very soon, a man riding on a horse arrived, that was one of the bodyguards who followed Li Cong Qing on his inspection. "Sir Li is coming back, his carriage will arrive roughly in two hours."

"Quick go to the Imperial Study to report." The older eunuch ordered the younger eunuch.

"Yes!" The young eunuch joyously dashed to report.

Roughly about two hours later, a carriage actually galloped in a fast pace. When they stopped in front of the door, the older eunuch stepped up to welcome him. Yet, the person inside the carriage had not made an effort to go out yet.

"Sir, we have arrived." The whole body covered by dirt the cart driver faced towards the man inside the carriage to call him up.

"Mn."

After quite a period of time, a low sigh sound passed out from inside. Li Cong Qing finally lifted the carriage's curtain.

"You have gone through such a trouble on your way, Sir." The older eunuch in his utmost respectful manner supported him from descending the carriage.

"Where is His Majesty?" asked Li Cong Qing.

"In Imperial Study."

Li Cong Qing looked at the red coated Palace door. His heart had all sorts of mixed feelings. Formerly, when he had a secret meeting with the Emperor, he would leave using this passing door. Really carried out its function as the hearsay said. Originally he was impatient to wait and wanted to just fly and return. When the time had actually come, he was hesitating instead. Really missed and wanted to see him, but also didn't know how to face him. The term close to homesickness mostly from this kind of feeling.

He understood, this time, once he set his foot to enter this door, all of his position and his unfavorable situation would have a distinct change. Perhaps this time he would be unable to decline and could only agree to become "Shang Jun".

While pondering, he had already taken a step to enter the tall threshold. Walking on the familiar winding narrow path, with every step he was thinking deeply and hesitating. He was considering about the personal gains and loses. Eventually, he arrived outside of the Imperial Study. Hesitating and not moving forward again. Hesitating and wavering.

"Your Majesty. Need or not to call Sir Li to enter?" The replacement of Wei Xiao Miao, He Gui Gong

Gong asked.

“No need.” The Emperor lightly answered. Even if he had known about the news earlier, he did not immediately go out to meet him. Still reading and amending the official documents. Waiting for Li Cong Qing to make his own move to enter.

A period of time had passed, Li Cong Qing still hadn't entered yet.

“Your Majesty, I'm afraid that Sir Li would be tired.” He Gui Gong said it softly. Serving the Emperor personally, everyone would find out that Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites was the master's most precious treasure, his heart, head and flesh⁹.

“Move out the long chair for him to sit. Also take the pastry, snacks and the tea out.” Ordered the Emperor.

“Yes.”

Several Palace attendants lifted the chair and moved it out, said that was granted by Emperor, to diligently and thoughtfully attend upon him.

Li Cong Qing honestly wanted to laugh, also moved. The Emperor had always been afraid that he would be tired, afraid that he would be thirsty, afraid that he would be hungry, in every possible way he would take good care of him. Truly regarded him as a delicate flower to be cultivated.

What was there to hesitate?

Searching for him amongst the multitude of people to this greatest extent, suddenly when he turned around, that person was there, under the dim light of the lantern.

This kind of perfect lover who was not to be found even with a lantern¹⁰, where can you find? If not properly and firmly hold him, could be counted as a lifetimes misfortune caused by stupidity. Li Cong Qing stepped in the Imperial Study. Did not have whatever kind of hesitation anymore. Went straight to his lover the Emperor's side.

“You have returned.” Song Yu's face and attitude was warm and calm like in the past, not too excited, not too impatient, it was as if the two people were only separated for several days, like Li Cong Qing hadn't left him for such a long time, for such a distant.

Contrariwise, Li Cong Qing was not to be touched like before. For the first time he made an initiative to come closer, sat on Song Yu's lap.

“Mm. I am home.” Li Cong Qing hugged his neck, buried his face on Song Yu's broad and firm chest. Insatiably derived in the warm body and breathed in the scent. With his stifled voice he said: “The weather is cold. My shoulder is aching.”

Song Yu didn't say anything. Putting down his official documents, he began to massage his shoulder.

“Waist also hurts.”

Massaging the waist.

“Legs also hurts.”

Massaging his legs.

“My whole body is aching.”

Song Yu laughed in understanding. They had been together for such a long time, how could he possibly not understand his stubbornness and his spoiled actions. --- the days they had been separated, his whole body from head to toe not even a part was ever comfortable.

"You ah, supposing that you were not coming back, I was about to personally go and drag you home." Lovingly pinched on his nose.

"You wouldn't do that kind of thing." Li Cong Qing crumpled his nose, retorted in disbelief.

"I have said, there will be a day when my patience inevitably will be used up."

"Therefore you deliberately let others to see that you treated me well. Wanted me to leave the Capital on purpose, intentionally ignored the gossips that rose from all directions, isn't that right?" Unable to conceal his lips from curling, he muttered to himself.

"You think too much."

"Seven years already..." Li Cong Qing slightly narrowed his eyes, a flash of doubt flashed through his eyes. "This year, we are together for exactly seven years. You are not itching to tell this seven years affairs, so that you set this up, aren't you?"

"Where has your mind been wondering to." Song Yu laughed.

"Sigh, forget it. In any case, it has come to this. If you want to make known our relationship, just do it."

"Not afraid of trouble?"

"You will help me to block the trouble, won't you?"

"Want to become Shang Jun?"

"Don't want." Unhesitating with his stubbornness. "To make known our relationship is not to stand for that I surely want to become Shang Jun."

"But Empress Dowager wanted me to give you a position." Song Yu put on a troubled face.

"I only need this Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites' position, that will be enough. " Since he had been stubborn, he might as well to stay stubborn. "Even if you beat me to death I still don't want to become that whatever Shang Jun."

"How can I be willing to beat you to death? I still want you to accompany me to go through the days to come difficulties and hardships. Cong Qing, the things we need to face is still plenty."

Li Cong Qing of course understood. The country, the people, the harem, the heir...there were lots of problems that could not be easily solved merely dependent on two people's love and trust. The Emperor needed to employ more wisdom to be more tactful, and he also needed a greater courage, this way they would be able to face and solved the problems together.

However, tomorrow's trouble just let it be to tomorrow's worry.

"...I... I missed you so much." Li Cong Qing confessed his true feelings.

How come Song Yu did not miss him, Heaven knows that he missed his pair of spring flower like lips, missed his half opened half closed eyes, missed his sluggish and sleepy figure, and missed his warm, tight and delicate body... Heaven! How much he wished that he could enter the body that he intensely

yearned for. To drain his suppressed for long time desire as much as he liked.

But he still could endure with his surprising self-control. Holding Li Cong Qing's face with both of his hands, he gazed fixedly at him, smilingly said: "It is rare to have you initiatively say that you miss me. These several yearning days could be counted as not in vain."

"How sappy, Hoamm----- for these several days was always on the move in a rushing carriage. How tiring, I want to sleep." In an instant without showing any interest, he yawned loudly and slipped down.

"Be good, go and have a nice rest." Song Yu gently whispered, affectionately caressed his whole tired face.

Li Cong Qing kissed his lover's lips, on his own accord he reclined on the couch inside the Imperial Study to sleep. He also grabbed the hanging by the Emperor's side yellow robe to cover his body. Put down his head then fell asleep. Promptly afterwards he had begun to snore. Continuously rushing about really had exhausted him. Who gave a damn about whoever saw him covered by the Emperor's yellow robe and slept here.

When he awoke, it was already a brand-new beautiful day. Just said that the sky is crumbling, there was the Emperor who was the highest being under this heaven to help him prop up the sky. He would be as before, be free from worry and continue with his job as Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites. That's perfect!

Whole-heartedly to repay the given trust, that was the greatest love he could give to the Emperor.

Dear readers, you said that this is unfair? One is ready to hit, the other is willing to endure. Everyone is like this, there is no such thing as fair or unfair. If at this time, the people who are involved feel happy and merry, that is good enough. We insignificant passersby need not to interfere.

Shouldering the sky for the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites, the Emperor happily is willing to.

The autumn sky is clear and the air is bracing. On one peaceful and tranquil afternoon, when several High Ministers came to discuss matters with the Emperor in the Imperial Study, in a flash, there was an illusion as if time moved backwards to that day half a year ago.

The Emperor seriously read through to evaluate the Official Documents.

The Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites was peacefully sleeping in there.

Seemingly there was an invisible intangible thread that connected the two people.

The High Officials finally stopped their suspicion, removed and replaced by a clear understanding in their heart. Some people creased their brows. Some people smiled. But there was no one who criticized in disagreement.

Regarding the Emperor and the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites' illicit... ahem, romantic relationship, if not damaging the country and causing suffering to the people to arouse the great indignation of both men and Gods, the onlookers had what to say?

Peaceful and flourishing era, good weathers for the crops, the country prospers, and the people are at peace.

I originally thought that the Palace would stir up trouble that not even chickens and dogs are left undisturbed¹¹, men and horses thrown off their feet¹¹. Long time afterwards, Li Cong Qing unexpectedly raised the problem, as if he was a little bit disappointed.

Did you wish for it? Song Yu said. If you want to have the not even chickens and dogs are left undisturbed, men and horses thrown off their feet kind of situation, then I will grant you that.

No, I just randomly said it.

I also randomly replied.

Ai ai, the impressive Emperor De Zhi has caught my accent.

Because I drink your mouth's fluid every day.

Your Majesty the Emperor, please don't use that serious face to talk about indecent matters, can you.
==

I can. You give me a kiss, then I will use an indecent face to talk about serious matters for you. ^_^

...=□= (This is not the Emperor... This is not the Emperor...)

...^_^ (How amusing, how can you be so cute.)

...囧rz (Third Brother, you forget that your little brother is still here... almost want to vomit...)

...\$▽\$ (Second Brother, I promoted your buttocks to the great and mighty wise and brilliant His Majesty the Emperor, definitely this lifetime's most properly and powerful investment Hahahaha!)

Li Cong Qing has returned!

This news had been undulating in the court, one after another they whispered in secret.

The numerous Officials, who earlier saw the person from the crack between the door leaves, could clearly see Li Cong Qing lying flat. Who could have known that the sleepy Assistant Minister unexpectedly slept on the pillow beside the Emperor.

No matter from which angle, horizontally or vertically, the Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites was not of the appearance of the victim of a crime, the best heroin who could charm the Monarch. The Emperor actually would just like this bestow favor upon him, everybody thought it was too fantastic, shout out loudly TOO UNFATHOMABLE!

The Imperial Court because of this matter was divided into three fractions. One fraction approved of it. One fraction opposed to it. Another one fraction had no opinion, as long as the Emperor happy, that will do.

What caused people to be in utmost astonishment was, the previously objected to Li Cong Qing the most, Xu Minister, stood on the approving fraction. Simply made the jaws of multitudes of people fall to the ground.

The person was the person, the matter was the matter. Li Cong Qing could be said as having a little enterprising spirit. Xu Minister thus said, from now on, if he was in the same fault, could be counted as to set good example from clearly separating the public and private affairs.

All beings possess love, all wish it could be granted, all deserve happiness, deserve to be congratulated. Shan Zai Shan Zai¹. The Great Teacher of the Nation thus said while smiling, a line of Buddha's teaching, endless for eternally.

The Emperor still industriously conducted morning court as before every day. Li Cong Qing still fell asleep during morning court as before every day. Ten years like a day.

What was different from the past was, everybody from a distant could catch a glimpse of the couple hand in hand leisurely strolling in the Imperial Garden; on the autumn hunting season, when the Emperor bestowed upon Li Cong Qing the most tender and delicate piece of meat, everybody no longer became envious to the point of red eyes. If Li Cong Qing got drunk during the Palace's banquets, leaned on the Emperor, nobody would be surprised and deemed it as a disrespectful behavior towards one's superior, as if that kind of thing was of the Heaven's law and Earth's principle².

Li Cong Qing for all of his life was posted as Assistant Minister of Ministry of Rites, lived to the age of sixty nine. Passed away in peace due to advanced age.

The following year, Song Yu who had become the retired Emperor followed forth. Died a natural death at the age of seventy one.

The Retired Emperor on his deathbed had specially said in advance, to take the remaining of Li Cong Qing into his coffin to be buried together. This story became a story that was told for generations in Dashao.

Some people said, the Peony Fairy and the Son of Heaven had written together the heavenly book, in extreme happiness continued their predestined love forever and ever even in their afterlife.

Without extremely disturbing greed, hate and angry sentiment, needless to hold dear the violent social upheavals, more over need not to regret the mortal life-and-death. The feeling which quietly flowed like a tiny stream in this too peaceful and flourishing age, was like a beautiful flower burst forth into a full blossom. Brightened up for all of their life.