

Chapter 63: Attack and Defend (攻防)

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“Send the dog away first. It only just recovered from its illness. Don’t be too intimate with it!” He arrived in front of the desk and observed that Sangyu was blindly following him while hugging Er’ Bao close to her chest. No matter how he looked at it, he found the situation irksome so Emperor Zhou’wu gave out the order in a low voice.

“Understood.” Sensing the man’s hatred towards Er’ Bao, Meng Sangyu didn’t feel that anything was strange at all. She handed over Er’ Bao to Nurse Feng to take away.

The Emperor had always loathed any animal with fur. This was something known to everyone in the palace. Meng Sangyu was indeed quite moved by the fact that he had searched for Er’ Bao and even personally brought him over to Ci’ning Palace. It appeared that this man still held some degree of sincerity towards her, but she didn’t feel overjoyed because of this at all. On the contrary, she coolly began to calculate just how she could make use of his sincere feelings for her own self-interest. Any romantic feelings on her part had long been reduced to nothing during her first lifetime.

Seeing that Sangyu’s arms were finally empty, Emperor Zhou’wu’s outward irritation receded a bit. He picked up his imperial brush and quickly wrote five characters in running script¹: [Bi’xiao Palace’s Er’ Bao (碧霄宮二宝)]. Then, he applied his personal seal.

The characters, which contained a domineering air unique to the Emperor, appeared vividly on the paper.

Such powerful handwriting! With the addition of the Emperor’s seal in the corner, if one brought it outside of the palace, this piece would be considered a priceless treasure! –Yet it’s going to be used as a mere dog tag... Virtuous Consort is really exploiting a piece of heavenly work!
Chang’xi silently expressed his frustrations while he blew the wet ink dry.

¹ 行书 (xíngshū) Running script is a famous style of Chinese calligraphy. [This chapter](#) of Held in the Lonely Castle talks about calligraphy and the different scripts. [Read more](#) about running script and Chinese calligraphy~

“Your Majesty’s calligraphy skills have improved once again!” sighed Meng Sangyu with admiration. She picked up the paper to appreciate it more closely.

“How do you know that Zhen’s calligraphy has improved?” Emperor Zhou’wu hugged her close and jokingly pinched her nose, waiting to see how she would respond. Sangyu had gradually relaxed her guard around him. Sometimes she would even expose one or two hints here and there. He found it extremely amusing.

“Ah, based on intuition. Your Majesty’s handwriting is more flowy compared to last time!” Meng Sangyu’s eyes gleamed briefly for a moment, but her expression showed complete ignorance. That loveable and naive look made the man fall even more deeply in love.

“Haha, last time Zhen wrote in regular script.² The strokes were clear and the composition was balanced. This time, Zhen wrote using running script. The strokes are linked together, unrestrained and elegant. Of course, it would appear more flowy.” Emperor Zhou’wu smiled brightly and pinched Sangyu’s cheek. He pondered dotingly: *What a smart little minx! Fancy that you even thought of a reason like this!*

Meng Sangyu smiled contemptuously, averted her eyes in thought, and changed the subject, “Your Majesty, this concubine finished making the perfume sachet that your honoured self wanted last time. Would you like to take a look?” She walked to the side of the divan and took out two perfume sachets from the needlework case on the narrow table. One was large and the other was small, but both were in the shape of gem clusters.³ The faint scent of plum blossoms emanated from the cloth, refreshing the mind.

Emperor Zhou’wu’s eyes lit up as he took the proffered sachet and brought it to his nose for a sniff. His face broke into a very delighted smile. “Help Zhen fasten it on.”

Meng Sangyu agreed and lowered her head to tie the perfume sachet to his waist. Her neck, white as powder, seemed fragrant and sweet, delicious even! Her incessantly trembling eyelashes were curled and full, making one’s heart itch with desire. Emperor Zhou’wu’s eyes darkened as his Adam’s apple slid up and down. Finally, he couldn’t help himself and extended his hands, embracing her tightly as they laid down on the divan.

“Zhen will help you tie yours on too.” He spoke in a rugged voice while picking up the other smaller perfume sachet and tied it firmly to the woman’s waist. Finally, he blocked the woman’s fragrant little mouth with his lips and kissed her thoroughly.

² 楷书 (kǎishū) Another Chinese calligraphic style, like Running Script mentioned above. [Read more](#) about regular script and [other Chinese calligraphic styles](#)~

³Here is [a great article about the history of the traditional Chinese perfumed sachet!](#) Take a look if you’re interested~

“Your Majesty, it’s still daytime and this is Ci’ning Palace!” She noticed that the man’s breathing was becoming heavier, his movements more lecherous, and that his lower half had stiffened and was pressing against her legs, throbbing. Meng Sangyu recovered her wits and promptly called out a soft reminder. She raised her body to look around, but the servants in the hall had long since been dismissed by Chang’xi.

“Tomorrow you’ll return to Bi’xiao Palace!” The man pressed her down under his body and ordered with red eyes. His voice was rough beyond recognition.

What gives you the right to change your mind on a whim? Suppressing her lust, Meng Sangyu suddenly thought of some reverse psychology. *As expected, this man’s honeyed words and tender care were all just to lay the final groundwork to obtain her body!*

She silently cursed in her heart, but her face showed a bewitching expression. She tugged at the man’s lapel and said coquettishly, “But this concubine still hasn’t finished learning so many things~ This concubine is terrified of managing such a big Inner Palace. Can Your Majesty please give this concubine a few days extension?”

Emperor Zhou’wu’s eyes darkened in an instant. He took a deep breath before sitting upright. He hugged the woman on his lap, helping her straighten her disheveled clothes while carelessly remarking, “Your father beheaded a hundred thousand prisoners of war at the frontier. The shed blood dyed the entire white grasslands red. The reeking stench of blood attracted vultures from the plateau thousands of miles away and they lingered like a dark cloud. Today Zhen received many memorials impeaching him.”

Meng Sangyu’s hands balled into tight fists as she looked straight at him.

“Many ministers protested against his heartless injustice and brutal cruelty, deeming him unfit to wield the Commander’s seal. If We don’t suppress them, Zhen fears that someday this will give rise to dissent. How do you see it?” Emperor Zhou’wu fiddled with her pale and delicate fingertips, pretending to ask nonchalantly.

Hearing the four words, ‘give rise to dissent’, Meng Sangyu’s chest tightened and the wheels in her brain began spinning. Briefly choosing her words, she said probingly, “How could this concubine presume to comment on governmental affairs and politics?”⁴

“You are Imperial Duke Meng’s daughter. Zhen wants to hear your perspective. It’s fine, there are only the two of us here. You can speak freely. Zhen will absolutely not punish you!” Emperor Zhou’wu kissed her fingertips and showed an indulgent expression.

⁴ FYI It was taboo for any imperial wives to comment on governmental affairs. Women weren’t permitted to participate in the public sphere.

This man had always kept his word. Having obtained his guarantee, Meng Sangyu refocused and spoke in an unhurried manner, "This concubine ventures to ask Your Majesty, if these hundred thousand prisoners of war were not killed, would your honoured self have a surefire way to settle them? Would they become slaves? Would they be allotted a piece of land to cultivate? Also, if they were to mix with Great Zhou's citizens, would Great Zhou's benevolence, righteousness, and ethics be used to inspire and assimilate them?"

Seeing the man's knit brows and worried look, she confidently and unhurriedly said, "These are all not the answer. The Barbarians are a warlike people who lived a very primitive lifestyle and this wildness has long since seeped into their very bones. With the humiliation of losing a war in addition to hatred due to the subjugation of their nation, they have a deep-rooted hostility towards the people of Great Zhou that can't be erased. These hundred thousand prisoners of war are all males in the prime of their life. How would letting them go be any different from asking for trouble? In a few years, it is certain that they would cause a disturbance from within and war would start again! Could it be that Your Majesty has forgotten the chaos that happened in Paulownia City ten years ago? Several thousand settled prisoners of war in Paulownia City suddenly rebelled and coordinated with outside forces, allowing the Barbarians to enter the city and massacre thousands of citizens, including their own people and children. As fierce as they are, even tigers don't harm their own young. From this, it can be seen that the Barbarians are innately ruthless and are unwilling to become civilized. They cannot be left alive!"

Saying this, upon seeing the man's pensive expression, Meng Sangyu pursed her lips and continued, "Towards such callous rabble, the only method is to use violence to prevent violence, kill to prevent more killing, and thoroughly instill fear! Killing these hundred thousand prisoners of war is a major blow to the Barbarians' strength. It will be hard to rebuild within a century, thereby sparing our Great Zhou's citizens from bitter losses due to war. Just how many families could be left whole? Father's actions were also for the sake of the nation. May Your Majesty be understanding!"

If there is war, then there will be slaughter. This was certain. Meng Sangyu wasn't a saint and wouldn't become estranged, disgusted, or even revile her father just because his hands were dyed with blood. Her father was the one who gave her life and raised her. In her heart, a hundred thousand lives didn't hold a candle to his. Was it wrong for a child to protect their parents? She didn't think so.

Emperor Zhou'wu played with Sangyu's black hair and didn't say anything for a long time. Only once he noticed the glint in her eyes as she repeatedly stole glances at his expression did he faintly smile, "Well said! It's almost as if your words came from Zhen's heart! Sangyu can even see through the world's major powers, how could you not be able to manage such a small Inner Palace? How do you feel about receiving the phoenix seal and moving back to Bi'xiao Palace tomorrow?"

The man's sharp eyes, which were as dark and deep as the night sky, seemed to be able to see through a person's innermost thoughts. Only at this point did Meng Sangyu notice that in order to defend her father's actions, she accidentally revealed her talents that she had hid with much effort. Looking at the man's unsurprised expression, she knew that she could not continue acting dull and could only agree while smiling stiffly. Damn, it was as if she had been cornered into a cage by this man!

The woman's clear annoyance that she did not dare express and her unconsciously pouting pink lips represented unspeakably charming cuteness. Emperor Zhou'wu smiled widely, firmly held her chin, and harshly bit down upon her lips. Since Sangyu liked to put on a facade, then he would purposefully set traps to peel off her facade layer by layer and little by little, letting her show her true temperament. This would also be an amusing way to get to understand each other, wouldn't it?

"Zhen will inform the Empress Dowager immediately. You go pack and prepare to leave tomorrow morning." After using his finger to rub the teeth-marks that he left, Emperor Zhou'wu left with a face full of triumph.

Meng Sangyu fixed her gaze on his lofty back view with a fluctuating expression. She wasn't a fool: she could feel the man's care for her. However, this feeling was too out of the blue, causing her to feel uneasy. *Forget it, it's fine as long as the situation is advantageous for me. Why should I put so much thought into this?*

She shook her head and pulled out the previously hidden account book to continue reviewing.

The next day, in the Imperial Court, the memorials denouncing Imperial Duke Meng on the Emperor's table increased by a dozen or more. Emperor Zhou'wu picked up a memorial and skimmed it, and inquired in an indifferent voice, "What do you all think Zhen should do about Imperial Duke Meng?"

"This subject thinks that Imperial Duke Meng regards human life as grass and massacred the prisoners of war, trampling on Great Zhou's righteousness and benevolence. Moreover, he has a brutal temperament and vicious methods. He wields the power of troops one-million strong, threatening the foundation of his master through his meritorious achievements. In the future, it is possible that he could become a great thorn in the Emperor's side!" An Imperial Censor stepped forward to speak, his words full of criticism. Previously, the Emperor intentionally suppressed Imperial Duke Meng. The Censor felt that Imperial Duke Meng's reputation had increased dramatically after the campaign and acted this way based on his understanding of the Emperor's intentions.

Many civil court officials spoke out one after the other, listing Imperial Duke Meng's various charges. Within the military officials, Meng Yan'zhou was long angered to the point of having

bloodshot eyes and was audibly grinding his teeth. If it wasn't for Yan Jun'wei holding him back, he would have long charged out to defend his father.

"Are you all finished?" After everyone quieted down, Emperor Zhou'wu spoke unhurriedly, with a smile on his face. However, the smile did not reach his chillingly cold eyes, causing the hearts of several ministers standing in the front row to pound in fear and trepidation.

"When the Late Emperor was alive, our Great Zhou was in constant conflict with the Barbarians. Afterwards, we exchanged prisoners of war and signed an armistice treaty. We even sent out a princess to form a marriage alliance to ensure the peace of the borderlands. However, were the borderlands truly at peace? When did the Barbarians ever not renege on their words? They arbitrarily burnt, looted, and slaughtered Our Great Zhou's people. In these last few decades, did they not slaughter countless citizens of Great Zhou? It's useless to treat these cruel-natured ruffians with kindness and goodwill; the only way is to exterminate them all! Imperial Duke Meng's actions this time were actually done under Zhen's orders." Speaking thus, he paused and gazed upon the hundreds of ministers below him.

The Imperial Court was dead silent. Those who participated in impeaching Imperial Duke Meng were deathly pale. Meng Yan'zhou was stunned, and stared at the Emperor in disbelief.

Emperor Zhou'wu slammed his hand down on the imperial desk. The forceful sound resonated throughout the hall. "After inflicting such serious damage, the Barbarians will be hard-pressed to make a comeback within the next century. In Zhen's eyes the price of using a trifling hundred thousand lives to exchange for a hundred years of Great Zhou's peace and posterity is nothing! Those of you who object, stand out, and Zhen will hand over the remaining sixty thousand prisoners of war for you to manage. If you can guarantee that they will transform from beasts to harmless sheep, and not have any incidents within five years, Zhen will proclaim our sins to the world!"

The hall was as deathly silent and no one was willing to stand out to object. The Rebellion of Paulownia City was still fresh in their minds. The Barbarians' savagery caused one to tremble. Who had the courage and confidence to civilize them? Those who had a brain in their head knew that this hot potato could not be touched!

"Hmph! Always discussing righteousness and ethics⁵ and the Four Social Bonds⁶, but completely ignorant of even the most basic concepts of National Duty! What a myopic group of

⁵ 仁义道德 (rén yì dào dé) Is a Chinese idiom referring to traditional virtues of compassion, duty, propriety, and integrity. It's mainly used sarcastically when referring to a hypocrite.

⁶ 礼义廉耻 (lǐ yì lián chǐ) are the Four Social Bonds/Four Cardinal Principles (四維 sì wéi) that describe the fundamental principles of conduct. These refer to propriety (礼/禮), justice (义/義), integrity (廉) and honour/shame (耻/恥). Sometimes combined as a set with the Eight Virtues by Chinese Nationalist statesman, Dr. Sun Yat-sen as '四維八德'.

people with eyes higher than their hands⁷! Take back your memorials and go home to carefully reflect on whether or not you still have the qualifications to serve as court officials!”

The man sitting on the Emperor’s throne threw down the pile of memorials onto the ground, in front of the hundreds of ministers who were as silent as cicadas in winter.

“Commander Yan, report the recent cases that the Embroidered Uniform Guard investigated.” The man leaned against the back of his throne and slightly reined in his powerful aura.

“Reporting to Your Majesty. In accordance with the law, the Shen Clan’s crime of forming party factions has proved to be true and they have been thrown into the Imperial Prison to await their execution. Luo Bing’zhong’s⁸ crime of leaving his post without authorization has been verified and he is now in the Imperial Prison ...” Commander Yan stepped out of the ranks and gave a cupped hand salute as he replied. His words of “verification” and “awaiting execution” caused the hundreds of officials in the hall to shiver.

“Replying to Your Majesty. In addition to Shen Zhong’liang’s twenty-three crimes, this subject also reports his crime of colluding with enemies and betraying the nation. Here is the proof. May Your Majesty please take a look.” Yan Jun’wei ended with another shocking piece of news, causing officials associated with Grand Preceptor Shen to tremble and sweat profusely.

After looking at the secret missives in his hand, Emperor Zhou’wu handed the letter to Chang’xi, and murderously spoke, “Let all of the ministers take a good look!”

The contents of the letters were very detailed and shocking, and they contained Grand Preceptor Shen’s personal seal. There were even a few letters with Yeluhan Wang’s Imperial Seal. The contents contained information on how Grand Preceptor Shen harmed Imperial Duke Meng, how he colluded with Xie Zheng’hao to pretend to have been defeated, and how he slaughtered innocents and ceded cities. When all of the officials finished reading and passing along the letter, there was no one who did not have a layer of cold sweat covering their palms. Those who had no connections with Grand Preceptor Shen secretly rejoiced while those who were even slightly involved with Grand Preceptor Shen nearly fainted on the spot! How was this just the simple crime of creating party factions? The more they read, the more it seemed like the crime of conspiring to seize the throne!

“Shen Zhong’liang’s list of twenty-four crimes have already been confirmed as true, and he has also been thrown into the Imperial Prison to await execution. The Shen Clan’s nine degrees of kin should be completely eradicated and their family property should be confiscated. This is this

⁷ 眼高手低 (yǎn gāo shǒu dī) A Chinese idiom meaning to have high standards but little ability or to be fastidious but incompetent.

⁸ I seriously don’t remember this character ever being mentioned. Probably someone minor but if anyone remembers, do leave a comment!

official's judgement. May Your Majesty make the final decision.”⁹ Presenting the evidence that had been passed around the hall once more, Yan Jun'wei spoke with murderous intent.

“Only killing nine degrees of kin? It's not enough!” The man on the Imperial Throne spoke slowly and rationalized: “Zhen will add another degree of kin, to exterminate up to ten degrees of kin. Let the Embroidered Uniform Guards be responsible for this. Today's court will end here, disperse!” Leaving behind the pale-faced officials, the man adjourned court and departed.

Since the founding of Great Zhou, there had only been the extermination of nine degrees of kin; there was no precedent of exterminating ten degrees of kin. The tenth degree of kin included one's students and retainers. This was equivalent to removing any trace of the Shen Clan.

The officials muddle-headedly went outside, and upon meeting the chilly wind, they began to tremble and shiver. The Emperor's methods were becoming more and more violent and bloody, but looking at Great Zhou's current circumstances, this may well be a good thing!

Yan Jun'wei caught up to the soulless Meng Yan'zhou and patted him on the shoulder, wanting to console him. After all, he was new and had not experienced the turbulence of the Imperial Court. It was inevitable that he was frightened.

Meng Yan'zhou came back to his senses. The light in his eyes was so bright that Yan Jun'wei couldn't stand to look straight at him. “What expression are you making?” he hesitantly asked.

“To kill one person is criminal. To kill ten thousand people is heroic. To kill ten thousand upon ten thousand people is heroic beyond comparison! I previously always considered Father as a great hero, I didn't expect that the Emperor was the ultimate hero!” Meng Yan'zhou spoke excitedly to the point of flushed cheeks.

Her Ladyship Virtuous Consort was right! This child's brain really did only contain muscle! The corner of Yan Jun'wei's mouth twitched. He patted Meng Yan'zhou's head as though patting a dog, and pondered secretly and helplessly.

⁹ Present tense or past tense was difficult to decipher in this paragraph. This is our best guess.

TL Thoughts:

Hello dear readers~

I hope life is treating you well! Thank you for your patience in waiting for this chapter. We've had a busy couple of months.

I'm delighted to introduce our new team member, **247Reader**. She's joining us as a translation assistant and proofreader! Please welcome her <3

I wish everyone a safe Halloween~ On that note, it's been a year since **[redacted]** joined our team~ :3 Please take care and enjoy all the delicious treats!

Until next time,

Nyamachi

Thank you for reading!

[Head back to Nyanovels](#) to continue Why Harem Intrigue.

Please leave a like or comment for this chapter if you enjoyed it!