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[drabble]

Li Juyao is to be betrothed. To whoever the heck it is, he doesn't know. What he does know is that the caravan of the royal he's supposed to marry is nearly at Taiyuan's gate.

He must escape.

He puts on his bounty hunter clothes, and sneaks out.

But alas, Butler Shi seems to have predicted that this would happen, and has scouted outside of the prince's manor. With the help of a few giggling maids, he captures Ji Chong, ties him tightly with a strong rope, the prince's hands at his back, and throws him in an empty room.

"Behave! You will be let out when the king summons you!" Butler Shi hisses, and shuts the door.

Ji Chong can only grumble and accept his fate. He, too, has suspected that this will happen after all. He'll have to personally let down his to-be-betrothed, then.

Meanwhile, Anzhi is grateful that Zichen had agreed to represent him in his audience with the King of Jin. Maybe if it's viewed to be rude enough, whoever it is that he shall marry will be put off by this behavior. Maybe they'll withdraw. He hopes they'll withdraw.

So here Anzhi is, disguised as an attendant, even though everyone in the caravan knew of his identity. He doesn't tag along in the main hall however, lest Zichen fail and be forced to bring him out.

Anzhi slips away into one of the manors. In this way, he'll buy himself some time and maybe even offend the king and be kicked out of the palace and out of the marriage agreement. He hopes it won't be a grave offense, though.

As he walks alone in an empty hallway, he hears faint rustling noises in one of the rooms. When he goes near it and presses his ear against the door, the person inside shouts a muffled cry.

Anzhi slides the door open. There is a rugged man in worn-out hunting clothes on the floor, mouth covered with cloth, and body bound with a thick rope. Suspiciously and funny enough, the rope is knotted into a bow.

Anzhi tries to suppress his laughter, but he snorts anyway.

The (handsome) man on the floor glares up at him and protests what he can through that offending cloth over his mouth. Anzhi yanks it off.

"Don't laugh! Let me go!"

Anzhi crosses his arms. "Why should I let you go? You're obviously tied up for a reason."

He continues, "Who even are you? Why is a prisoner locked up in a room in the royals' manor?"

"Who are YOU?" the man shoots back. "Why are you alone? If anyone should be tied up, it should be you."

Anzhi puts his hands on his hips, tilts his head. "And yet here //you// are."

The man scoffs. "Hey. If you learn who I actually am, you will be apologetic of your behavior."

Anzhi squats to his level. "Oooh, I'm so scared."

The man looks at him in further disbelief. "Untie me."

"No."

"Come on."

"No."

"Please?"

Anzhi considers.

"Why should I risk angering the king for you?"

The man laughs loudly, but there's no heart to it. "Oh, I can swear to you that //I// am the title holder when it comes to angering that old man."

Anzhi blinks. Oh.

Oh.

He lets his knees touch the floor so he's kneeling, and begins to untie the rope that binds the man. Under normal circumstances, one musn't unbind a stranger in another royal's house, but this isn't a normal circumstance.

"Why the sudden change of heart?" the man asks as they stand up together, and oh wow...he's tall.

Before Anzhi could even reply, the man is already moving, blocking the door. "Who are you? Why are you here?"

"Ah, da-ge, show some gratitude!"

But the man doesn't budge.

Anzhi shakes his head. This is ridiculous to the point of hilarity. He smiles.

"Ah, how have the tables turned." He says. "Come on. They might be looking for us soon. Weren't we escaping?"

"We?"

"We."

Li Juyao is stumped. Then laughs. They both do.

"Let's go, then."

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