

Soothing the Mind of a King

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Soothing the Mind of a King

by [kinkwriter](#)

Summary

Li Zhong will do most anything to please his king . . . including taking a lover who poses a threat.

Notes

This isn't beta'd. It's literally something I wrote one afternoon after finishing an ep of the show. Li Zhong is one of my favorite characters, so this is my sad attempt to flesh him out a bit more.



See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

The night was quiet save for the occasional rattling of armor as guards patrolled the palace. He sat alone in the darkness gazing at the stars as he thought over what his life had become in so short a period of time. Only a few years ago, he'd been a nomadic student of martial arts under the Wey master Gongsun Yu. Now he was a high ranking soldier and occasional confidant of his Majesty, the King of Qin.

Han Shen took his eyes away from the night sky and looked towards his quarters. He no longer shared a room with a dozen others, instead his domicile was his own. That still made him wonder . . . He was a mere soldier with no official rank and yet he had authority and power within the palace. He knew of others whose official ranks were similar or even higher, but they still shared a barracks room with at least two others.

He sighed and contemplated trying to sleep when a knock came at his door. It was late, and tonight was one of his few personal times. Only a few people would have the necessary standing to even knock on his door

“Who is it?”

“Li Zhong.”

Han Shen immediately rose from his seat beside the window and came to greet the general at the door. It slid open smoothly and Han Shen looked around wildly.

“What is it? Is something wrong with Madam Li?”

Li Zhong did not immediately answer, and so Han Shen finally looked at him, taking in the light night robes . . . and the way his eyes were riveted to Han Shen's own chest.

No . . . not his chest—his scar. Han Shen immediately pulled to robe closed, his eyes averted. The general didn't say anything, instead he stepped through the doorway, walking inside and making his way towards the sleeping chamber. Han Shen felt his lips tighten as he looked around the courtyard one more time before shutting the door.

Li Zhong stood beside the bed, but his attention was on the candle he was currently lighting. The room was then cast in a soft glow while still swathed in shadow.

“Why have you come to my rooms so late at night?” he asked, keeping his distance despite the lack of armor and weapons. He'd never seen the general in such a casual state before—He'd thought the man practically lived and slept in his armor.

“I thought you and I should talk,” Li Zhong began, looking back towards him, his eyes intent. “I want to be sure that we can . . . work together.”

Han Shen felt his brow furrow in confusion. “His Majesty trusts me—”

The general quickly cut him off. “But *I* don't. I know what you are, and while I have no proof, I know what you've *done*. If that wound did not already make it clear, then your disinterest in Qing'er solidified it.”

The soldier looked away. “What do you want?”

Li Zhong’s stoic expression remained in place as his head tilted. “His Majesty wishes to tie you down to this palace so that you may never leave. Qing’er would have been a pleasant diversion for you, had you been smart enough to take up the offer.”

Han Shen kept his silence as Li Zhong came towards him, his features obscured as his body was silhouetted by the candle

“But you aren’t interested in any woman other than Madam Li,” he continued. “No other can possibly catch your eye now that she has crossed your path.”

The general’s words had become almost a whisper by then as he neared. Han Shen looked towards his sword leaning against the far wall, his eyes flickering as he gauged whether tonight was the night he would die.

He moved away, his back hitting the low shelves against the wall. Li Zhong continued to advance until they were nearly touching. Their heights were equal, but Han Shen did not dare meet the general’s gaze.

Li Zhong’s hand came up to grasp Han Shen’s chin, bringing his face up so that he had no choice but to look at the general. “She belongs to the King. Her path takes her towards him. Not you.”

The soldier swallowed. “I know that. I have already told His Majesty that I will never marry. I will be loyal to him and to Madam Li.”

Li Zhong shook his head. “It’s not enough.”

Han Shen felt his lip curl in suspicion. “What more can I give?” he asked, agitation coloring his voice as his fingers searched the shelves discreetly for some kind of weapon to use if needed. “Has he ordered you here to take my life?”

The hand on his jaw softened as the other moved to cover Han Shen’s own as it rested on a small jade statue of a mythical beast. Li Zhong continued to hold his gaze as he pulled Han Shen’s fingers away from the would-be weapon and simply held them by their sides.

“No. He doesn’t know I’m here,” the general said, his demeanor shifting ever so slightly to something else . . . something almost flustered. “I came to give you another option—one that will keep you safe—keep suspicion away from Madam Li, and sooth the mind of the King.”

“What could you possibly do that would—”

Han Shen’s words were cut off as the hand on his jaw tightened again and his chin was raised up. He knew what would happen before it did. He saw Li Zhong’s eyes move from his own to his lips—saw the hesitation there before the man steeled his nerves and leaned in.

Han Shen ripped his hand away from the general’s and instead shoved it between them, his fingers spread over Li Zhong’s chest, halting the other man’s intent.

“You—You can’t—The King—” Han Shen began, his head shaking in denial.

“His Majesty has long known of my preferences. He doesn’t care what his people do when they are away from him, so long as they fulfill their duties, and you and I—we are very good at what we

do,” Li Zhong said, his tone brokering no argument.

Han Shen blinked stupidly as the general leaned in once again and this time, the soldier didn’t stop him. Li Zhong’s lips were full and soft as they moved over his own. He was still and frozen for a few seconds, unsure how to react to what was happening to him.

“Wh . . . why?” he asked after they’d parted. This could not be what Li Zhong was seeking. Han Shen could not risk attacking the general—everyone would know if he did—but he wasn’t sure he could be an active participant either.

Li Zhong’s face softened, his fingers continuing to stroke the soldier’s skin. “You and I are the same. We worship at the altar of our rulers, we would die for them—we will fight to *live* for them, but they are only for each other and not for us,” he said quietly and Han Shen could hear the thread of pain in that voice—the same thread that he himself worked so hard to hide. “You and I . . . we have only ourselves, don’t we.”

Han Shen’s lips trembled as Li Zhong leaned in again, his kiss gentle and coaxing as his hand moved slowly down and slipped inside the other man’s robe. As his fingers glided over Han Shen’s ribs and around his back, the soldier could not stop the shiver that raced through him—nor the way his lips began to move with Li Zhong’s, accepting what the general was offering.

Han Shen didn’t protest as the other man pulled away and took hold of his wrist. Li Zhong pulled on him, guiding him in the dim light towards the bed. He hesitated, looking around, unsure of what was about to happen—what he was consenting to. He was lonely, but he’d never even contemplated another man in the way that Li Zhong was pressing for.

The general seemed to sense his indecision and so he came back to stand in front of Han Shen. “Don’t be afraid” he whispered, his fingers soothing the skin of the soldier’s neck and chest.

“I’m not afraid,” Han Shen said with an audible swallow.

Li Zhong leaned in so their foreheads were touching. “You’re trembling, and the night is warm,” he said with a smile. “Be calm. I will not take you tonight. That will come another day.”

Take him? he wondered, before steeling his nerves. “Put out the candle, at least.”

Li Zhong stepped back again. “No. I want to see you.”

Han Shen wasn’t sure what there was to see, but he said nothing else as he was laid back on the bed. His head was propped up on the pillow, giving him a perfect view of Li Zhong as the other man untied the waistband holding his robe closed, exposing himself to Han Shen.

The soldier caught his breath. The general wore no small clothes beneath. He was entirely nude, but for the long pale robe that hung from his shoulders. Han Shen had seen naked men before—that was nothing new to him. But this man—Li Zhong—he was erect as he got up on the bed and crawled over the soldier.

“Don’t think about it. Think about this,” Li Zhong said as his lips brushed over the soldier’s throat, his hands pushing Han Shen’s robes open. Han Shen gasped as nimble fingers began undoing the ties of his small clothes—slipping inside to touch every inch of his skin.

His fingers clenched into the blanket as those lips moved lower, the other man's tongue running along his skin leaving a fire and ice trail as his mouth finally enveloped Han Shen's nipple. Before that moment, Han Shen hadn't touched Li Zhong, but now, his hand flew up and his fingers sank into the general's dark hair.

Li Zhong let out a snort as his lips curved into a satisfied smile. He continued to suck on the skin and nipple there for a while, clearly enjoying the way Han Shen's body twitched, but eventually, he moved away and Han Shen watched him with wide eyes as the tongue ran over the skin of his stomach and then . . . then . . .

Han Shen sat almost completely up with the first swipe of the general's tongue. "You . . ."

Li Zhong looked curious for a few seconds before understanding crossed his face. He sat up himself, his hand coming out to cup Han Shen's face and throat.

"You've been in love with her so long that no one else . . ."

Han Shen swallowed uncomfortably. "There was never . . ."

Li Zhong leaned in and kissed him again and this time Han Shen moved his lips without hesitation, gasping softly at the sensation of the general's tongue entering his mouth.

They eventually pulled apart and Li Zhong smiled—a rare sight. "Lay back. I'll take care of you."

Han Shen nodded slowly, laying back down and watching as the general returned to his initial position. The soldier reached out, his fingers once more running through Li Zhong's hair. The top knot was askew and would need to be re-tied later, but all those absent thoughts flew out of Han Shen's mind as the general finally took his cock into his mouth.

"Ah! Oh . . ." Han Shen gasped out, biting his lip as the sensation of something hot and wet on him whited out his mind. Li Zhong was . . . really really good as this, he realized. He met the general's eyes as the man's head moved up and down in a slow but steady rhythm. It was an embarrassingly short amount of time later that Han Shen let out one last gasp as he came. Li Zhong kept his mouth on him, swallowing every bit before pulling off.

Han Shen's breath was fast, his mind fluttering around different thoughts of what he'd just done, what Li Zhong was going to do to him—expect of him in the future. The general moved up the bed so he was laying beside Han Shen. He was still erect and the soldier didn't protest as Li Zhong picked up his hand and wrapped it around the general's cock.

Han Shen took in the sight of his own fingers squeezing and grasping as they moved up and down another man's . . . It was such a foreign concept to him. He'd never thought of intimate relations with men. There had only ever been Li'er.

So why was he . . .

His fingers continued to work over the general's flesh and Li Zhong's face was buried in his neck. Goose bumps rose over his body as the other man's breath ran over the sensitive skin around his ear and he heard the hint of a moan.

Moments later, ropes of white fluid erupted from the general as he shuddered and went silent. Most of the spend was covering Han Shen's fingers and he released the general bringing his hand up to

look at the sticky liquid as it shown in the low light of the room.

He felt the brush of a kiss on his shoulder and he brought his hand up to his mouth, his tongue coming out experimentally to lick a bit of it. He balked at first and felt Li Zhong chuckling against his side.

His nose wrinkled, it was salty, and not altogether pleasant, but it wasn't unpalatable, either. He brought his hand back and took a longer lick, removing the cum from his knuckles. The general watched him, his eyes following every swipe of Han Shen's tongue.

"Hurry and finish that up, or we may have to go again," the general said after a moment and Han Shen hastily licked the rest of his hand clean. Li Zhong's arm was spread out beside the pillow and the soldier was forced to rest his head on the general's shoulder as he laid back.

It was such an intimate position to find himself in. There was someone there beside him, touching him slowly, breathing against his skin. It was unfamiliar . . . but not unwelcome.

Han Shen was quiet for a while, his eyes on the ceiling rather than his companion. "Did you plan this?" he finally asked, because now that the haze of lust and sex had worn away, he could not help thinking of the open window—of how no one would ever know what they did, because no one could even enter their courtyard without orders from the King.

A King who would not care—would perhaps be delighted—about this turn of events.

Li Zhong snorted beside him. "I'll admit, that day when your arms didn't shake even as I pushed on you . . . I wanted you. But no . . . I only put you here to keep an eye on you."

Han Shen looked over at the other man, his eyes narrowed. "You don't trust me, but you—you did that . . . with me." He wondered if this was yet another aspect of Ying Zheng's need to control everyone and everything around him. Perhaps the King had been directly involved, perhaps not, but Li Zhong would do anything for his King . . . perhaps even this.

The general reached over and ran a fingertip down the side of Han Shen's face, his eyes holding an intense quality that the soldier could not readily identify. "If you'd pushed me away," he began softly. "I would have left it at that, but you didn't." Now his tone was curious. "You're so starved for a connection, that you even let me in."

Han Shen shook his head, irritated and humiliated, and made to get up, but Li Zhong grabbed his shoulder and pushed him back down. The soldier didn't want the other man's pity, his manipulation, or condescension.

"What *is* this?" Han Shen asked tiredly. "Are you just looking for something convenient within the palace walls? If so, fine, get your rocks off and then go."

Li Zhong moved then, his body coming over the soldier's, partially covering him and keeping him there. "If I was looking for a warm body, I would just take a eunuch—most of them would fall over themselves to service me."

As if Han Shen didn't know that already. Li Zhong was one of the most powerful officials in the palace—able to make even Zhao Gao, himself obey. "Then what are you doing?"

The general leaned down, brushing an almost chaste kiss over Han Shen's lips. It ran in stark contrast to feeling of Li Zhong's cock as it dragged and rubbed against his own bare thigh.

"I like you Han Shen," he said, resting more of body over the soldier's. "I like your loyalty to your Lady, I like the way your mind makes connections and picks up on the subtleties that escape most men. You could be a great general here in Qin one day, but that's not what you desire. You wish to stay close to the palace and protect your junior. Our King already watches you—waiting for you to cross a line, while hoping you will not. He wishes for you to succeed, but he questions your intentions." Li Zhong paused for a moment, his fingers digging ever so slightly into the other man's skin. "Together, we will give him peace of mind."

Han Shen blinked up at him, his own emotions freezing before falling away. "So that's it. You're sleeping with me to make the King happy," he said, turning his face away.

But Li Zhong seemed to be of another mind. His hand came up and gripped Han Shen's throat and jaw, pulling his face back so their eyes met once more. "Partially, but I will also admit . . . it's not exactly a sacrifice for me to be with you."

Han Shen sighed. "Could I not . . . just continue as I have been. I won't—I won't try to take her from the palace again. I swore to him that I would serve him."

The general shook his head. "You swear such things to his face while conspiring with his concubine behind closed doors."

Han Shen attempted to push the other man off. "Nothing that would harm Qin. She deals with harem politics and I help her as I can," he said, his hands on the general's chest and he attempted to move the other man away. He needed air.

The struggling seemed to only spur Li Zhong on, as his leg came between Han Shen's and their pelvises slotted together. A spark of lightning ran through the soldier and he swallowed as Li Zhong smiled again.

"An answer for every question, an excuse and a reason," he said, his hand running over the scar from the King's blade. "Our King tolerates you because of Madam Li, but if you wish to stay by her side, then you'll stay with me," Li Zhong said softly.

Han Shen felt his brow furrow as his movements stopped. The general's kisses and fingers were so gentle with him—completely incongruent with the harsh words of a man who didn't trust him.

"Until you get tired of me . . . will you kill me then?" he asked, his chin rising and his throat exposed

Li Zhong snorted. "I won't kill you—not unless you give me a reason, and as for tiring of you . . ." he began before moving his lower body sinuously . . . seductively. It was becoming harder for Han Zhen to concentrate on anything outside the places where their skin touched.

The general kept one hand on his body while the other held his face stationary as he moved down and kissed him again. Han Shen could count on one hand the number of kisses he'd received throughout his life . . . until tonight anyway.

Li Zhong seemed to enjoy the act, and as the kiss deepened and Han Shen felt the man's tongue against his lips, he couldn't stop the quiet moan that escaped him. His cock twitched as Li Zhong

continued to move against him and he could not help shifting his hips so that their bodies were better positioned against one another. The general smiled at that, moving again and clearly enjoying the way Han Shen hissed out his pleasure.

“As for tiring of you . . . I don’t foresee that being a problem.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Li Zhong couldn't help the smug smile that crossed his lips as he pulled on the last of his armor. Han Shen was still entirely passed out, one arm splayed above him while the other curled into the spot the general had occupied only a short time ago.

He sighed, wishing he could stay in bed with the other man, but while today was Han Shen's personal day, it was far from Li Zhong's. He gave one last lingering look as the small bruise on the side of Han Shen's neck before leaving the room and the house. He was quiet as he shut the door and made his way towards the King's bedroom to report for duty upon his ruler's awakening. It was still dark out—only a tinge of morning light edged against the sky and he kept close to the lanterns that lined the various corridors as he approached the royal bedchamber.

After what had happened with Han Fei, Madam Li wasn't too happy with the emperor so Ying Zheng was sleeping alone this evening. Li Zhong had never felt any envy for the Qin ruler—now especially. Some men may vie for power, but with it, came far too many complications and responsibilities.

He and Han Shen had been together for nearly six months and he knew the other man had begun to develop feelings for him. The first time Han Shen had come to his quarters to apologize after their first—and so far only—fight . . . the way he'd rubbed Li Zhong's fingers in supplication before leaning in and initiating a kiss . . .

The general couldn't help but lick his lips. Even after so many months, they'd yet to cross the last threshold of their relationship, but Li Zhong found that he didn't care much about that. For now, he was more than content with the fact that they spent their off hours together, sleeping in each other's beds and sharing their meals.

Li Zhong schooled his expression as he entered the king's outer chambers. He spotted Zhao Gao already there and the two nodded to one another. He was about to take his place beside the door when Qing'er nearly burst through the side doors. She was panting harshly as though she'd been running at break-neck speed.

"What is it?" he asked quickly as Zhao Gao and the other eunuchs began crowding around the girl.

Qing'er shook her head and there were tears in her eyes. "Madam Li—She's gone! The room is a mess and—"

Li Zhong froze. "Gone? When?"

She swallowed, fear clouding her face. "I don't know! I left her to sleep last night but when I went in this morning to begin morning preparations, I found the place destroyed and she was nowhere to be found. I looked and looked before coming here."

The general turned away from the girl and his eyes met the head eunuch's. "Wake him up," he said.

Zhao Gao's eyes widened in shocked offense. "The king is not due to rise for another hour—"

“He will butcher *all* of us if we don’t inform him of this immediately!” Li Zhong barked out.

The other man hesitated only a second before realizing the truth in his words and scurrying off. Only a moment passed before Li Zhong heard a thunderous, “What?!” coming from inside the royal bedchamber.

The doors were thrown open and the king stood there in just his dark night clothes. Zhao Gao hurried to drape a golden robe over his shoulders while Li Zhong turned to Qing’er

“What time did you last see her?” he asked

The girl had fallen into full bow of supplication with her forehead pressed to the floor. “Just past the tenth double hour!”

Li Zhong met the king’s eyes as he spoke his next question. “How did she seem to you?”

The girl’s fingers clenched in terror and her words were as shuddering as her body. “She—she visited Han Fei and was unhappy about the state he was in, but she—she wouldn’t have just left—not—not again.”

The last part was whispered sadly as the girl no doubt remembered the days of torture she’d endured the last time Madam Li had gone missing. Li Zhong was inclined to agree. Madam Li wouldn’t intentionally put others in danger again.

“Send someone to check on Tian Ming!” the king ordered, before pushing past them and walking swiftly from the room in the direction of the harem. Various servants darted out of the way, clearly surprised to see the king about at such an early hour. Gossip would fill the palace within the hour. When they arrived, the rest of the maids and guards were already on their knees awaiting judgement. The king stepped past them, his eyes moving over remains of an apparent struggle.

The consort’s favorite purple scarf and her quilt laid haphazardly on the floor along with . . .

Li Zhong bent down and picked up the Gongsun sword. It was partially unsheathed as though its owner hadn’t had a chance to finish pulling it free. He offered it up as the king turned to face him. Ying Zheng’s fingers ran over the hilt and scabbard, his eyes nearly wild.

The Qin ruler suddenly looked up. “Where is Han Shen? Find him.”

Li Zhong wet his lips before suddenly falling to his own knees. He put his hands together and looked up towards the king. “Han Shen was not involved, your grace.”

Confusion fell over the other man’s face. “Where is he, then? Why is he not here as well?”

The general’s eyes lowered to the floor. “Your grace . . . I am at fault for Han Shen’s absence.”

Ying Zheng’s brow furrowed. “You?” the ruler asked.

Li Zhong swallowed uncomfortably. “Last night I . . . We drank rather heavily. Today is his assigned personal day and so I—I left him to sleep it off.”

Silence reigned over the room as the implications of so simple a sentence sank in. The king had long been aware of his preferences, but he’d never seemed to care one way or another. The only

outcome of the knowledge had come in the form of an end to suggestions of noble women with whom he could marry.

Li Zhong was the second son of his family, and his older brother already had several children for the family legacy to live on. So he did not experience the familial pressure that many sons faced. Finding a companion in Han Shen was . . . a stroke of luck that he never thought to encounter.

The king had obviously noticed something different about Han Shen when he'd invited the other man to play chess with him, but Li Zhong had never openly spoken to the king about his ongoing affair with the guardsman.

"You two were . . . *together* the entire night?" the king asked carefully, but there was no judgment or disgust, only genuine curiosity.

Despite the lack of condemnation, he still did not dare to meet the king's eyes. "Yes, your grace," he said evenly.

The room was silent for a moment before the Qin ruler spoke again. "Get up, Li Zhong," he said softly.

As the general got to his feet, he felt Zhao Gao's eyes on his back, but he couldn't bring himself to care. The only opinion that mattered was the king's and Ying Zheng did not seem unhappy to hear about his general and Madam Li's senior. He was about to say something else when another person entered the inner chamber. The general felt his lips tighten as Han Shen stepped beside him.

"I am at fault for not being by Madam Li's side," Han Shen said as he bowed deeply.

The king waved a hand dismissively. "Li Zhong has already told me that today was your personal day and you were otherwise engaged."

Han Shen's head snapped to the side and the general could not meet his lover's glare. For all that the king didn't care about their affair, he still would not have wanted to reveal it in such a way—or at all.

The king continued to examine the scarf and sword as a eunuch stepped into the room and whispered something to Zhao Gou before being dismissed.

The head eunuch stepped forward with a bow. "Sire, Tian Ming is fine. There is nothing amiss with the prince."

Han Shen straightened and finally spoke up. "Sire, Madam Li would not have left without a word. She left both her family treasure and her son. She would never have done so."

The king nodded. "Someone far too bold came into my pace and stole my concubine."

The guardsman stepped forward and bowed once more, his sword clasped between his hands. "Sire, please allow me to leave the palace to search for her."

Li Zhong grimaced before speaking. "Guard Han is speaking before we have all the facts. He is merely one man—"

Han Shen hurriedly interrupted. "I am well versed in the workings of the pugilistic world. Whoever kidnapped Madam Li is obviously a skilled warrior to have come into the palace and defeated her.

If he moves quickly enough, he can have her outside of Qin in under two days.”

“Han Shen—” Li Zhong began but the king waved his hand dramatically, halting his words.

“Li Zhong, have three thousand members of the tiger valor army search the city and another three thousand search beyond the wall. Han Shen, you may go search for her, but you will send word the second you have news of her.”

“Yes, sire,” they both said with a bow before leaving. Neither said anything as they walked through the long corridors towards their destination. Soon their paths would have parted them and Li Zhong paused while Han Shen continued on.

He only hesitated a second. “Han Shen!” he called, anger tingeing his voice. The guardsmen halted but didn’t turn around. “Must you leave the palace to go wandering around the woods every time she scrapes her knee?”

The guard whirled around. “She’s missing—I would hardly call this a small thing.”

Li Zhong raised a brow. “For her it might as well be. She finds herself in the center of every palace plot and scheme time and again.”

“She is hardly at fault—” Han Shen began with a shake of his head.

The general waved a hand dismissively. “And yet it is *always* about her—you’re leaving because of *her!*”

Han Shen blinked, clearly taken aback by the words. A strange look came over his face before he moved closer. The guardsman looked around before taking his hand. Li Zhong felt the subtle glide of calloused fingers over his palm before Han Shen leaned in.

“I will come back,” he whispered. “I’ll find her and come back.”

To you.

The words were unspoken but Li Zhong heard them all the same. He met Han Shen’s eyes before doing his own quick survey of their surroundings. They were alone and unnoticed so he quickly leaned in and his lips met Han Shen’s. The other man froze for a second before relaxing into the kiss. They only stayed like that for a moment before pulling away. Li Zhong swallowed, savoring the last taste of the other man on his lips before letting go of Han Shen’s fingers.

It was weeks before he heard from Han Shen again. He clutched the missive in his hands as he read over the details of the guard’s journey and location of the missing concubine. She’d been kidnapped by a rogue group and as far as he could tell, the bandits were trying to blackmail whoever it was that hired them to give them more money to finish the job and kill her.

She was worth more to them alive than dead, it seemed.

Han Shen had sent this a day ago and he was going to attempt to rescue her. The paper crumpled further in his hand as he hurried to the throne room and reported to the king.

“Han Shen has found her?” Ying Zheng asked, physically getting up from his throne in excitement.

Li Zhong nodded. “It would appear so, your grace. She is thirty miles outside the city being held by a group of warrior bandits. Han Shen . . .” He trailed off, unsure if he should reveal more.

“Spit it out!”

The general swallowed, his eyes downcast. “Han Shen believes that someone in the palace paid them to kill her, but the bandits spared her life in order to extort more money from whoever it was that hired them.”

Scrolls and inkwells went flying as the king’s rage boiled over. “*What?* Someone within my own palace!” he yelled in a thunderous roar.

“These are merely Han Shen’s suspicions, your grace,” Li Zhong hurried to say.

Ying Zheng raised a brow. “Have you ever known Han Shen to be wrong?” The king asked wryly.

The general grimaced, but said nothing—which was answer enough as the king snorted.

“Ready my men and horse. I will ride out to them today and retrieve her!”

“Yes, sire!” Li Zhong answered before turning and walking swiftly from the throne room. He hoped for the sake of everyone inside the palace that Han Shen was wrong—though he doubted it. They set off within the hour and Li Zhong could not help but feel unease curl up within him. Things always went awry when the king was away. Someone always seemed to end up dead.

Such thoughts filled his mind as they made the long journey to the location Han Shen had given them, but all thoughts flew from his mind when he spotted them in the distance.

“Your majesty!” Madam Li called as she ran towards the king, her hair loose and wild behind her as she embraced the Qin ruler. Li Zhong watched them only a second before his gaze turned towards Han Shen.

His lover watched them as well, but soon enough his gaze moved and their eyes met. Li Zhong held his hand out and Han Shen hesitated only a fraction of a second before approaching him. He stretched out his own hand as well and they clasped fingers in a common gesture of greeting. The guard’s hand was cold against his and he wished he could draw the other man close to warm him up. The only thing he could do however was lean in.

“Where have you been?” he whispered.

“Everywhere but where I wanted to be,” Han Shen said in response and Li Zhong felt the corner of his mouth quirk up in a smile—one that Han Shen returned.

“Tell me what happened, Li’Er,” the king asked, but the concubine shook her head.

“I’ll explain later, but Han Fei—what happened to him?”

The king tried to reassure her. “He’s not been harmed. Li Si is gathering evidence on the subject but there hasn’t yet been a final decision made about him.”

She took the ruler’s hands into her own. “I know he was framed—by whoever paid the Dan Ding to kidnap me . . . and now that you’ve left the palace . . .” she trailed off and Li Zhong watched as the king’s eyes went wide before he turned back to his men.

“We return to the palace!” he called, taking Madam Li with him to his horse. He got up into the saddle before pulling her up with him.

Li Zhong looked back at Han Shen, who was on foot but the other man shook his head.

“Go on, I’ll catch up.”

The general hesitated a beat but nodded and took off after the king. He didn’t look back, but instead kept his eyes on the king’s back. Han Shen would make it back to the palace shortly, he was sure. They were only gone half a day, but apparently that was enough time for someone to slip poison to Han Fei and Li Zhong grimaced as Madam Li cried into the king’s arms.

The rest of his day was filled with glances out over the grand courtyard as he waited for Han Shen’s return as well as taking care of the usual swarm of officials and servants that oversaw the running of the palace. The king had shut himself up inside Madam Li’s chambers since his return and the discovery of Han Fei.

Li Zhong shook his head as he looked over the roster of guards on duty and knew there was something not quite adding up. The king would demand answers and the general hated that he had none to provide.

“Sir,” a guard outside said and Li Zhong looked up from a report.

“Yes?”

“Guard Han has returned.”

The general stood up. “Where is he?”

“He gave a report to the king and was relieved of duty for the next two days. He is in his quarters.”

Li Zhong nodded and headed out. He kept his pace sedate and unhurried as he walked through the palace halls. Everything was quiet and night had long since fallen. Several candles burned in Han Shen’s rooms and there were the tell tale puddles outside the door that indicated that water had been brought in for a bath—a luxury that the king would have had to bestow.

He contemplated several scenarios before turning away and heading for his own quarters. His armor came off along with the sweat-soaked robes beneath. Li Zhong did not have the benefit of a bath, but he did take time to wipe himself down before redressing in loose fitting nightclothes. A nondescript bottle was shoved into his pocket as well.

The general was about to step back out again when he had a thought. He’d not received any orders from the king, but he was certain that Ying Zheng would allow this. He walked back towards his bed and knelt down in front of it. A large trunk was pulled out from beneath it and he wiped the thin layer of dust away. The trunk was not heavy so much as a bit clumsy in its size, but he managed to carry it across the courtyard with little difficulty.

Li Zhong did not knock as he entered—he hadn’t done so for months, and he shut the door behind him, dropping the trunk down onto the floor. The sound drew the other man’s attention and the general watched as Han Shen carefully peer around the screen he was standing behind.

“Li Zhong?” he asked, blinking in confusion as the general tilted his head.

Han Shen's hair was a wild wet mess over his shoulder and he wore only a robe and his small clothes. The guardsman approached him and Li Zhong pulled him close before turning his face and kissing him.

"Weeks," he whispered. "I was beginning to think you were dead."

"I won't leave this world so easily," Han Shen said against his lips as he began pulled Li Zhong's robes from his shoulders. They moved as one through the room and into the bed chamber, laughing slightly as they stumbled over the pile of clothes Han Shen had left in the middle of the floor. The bed groaned as they all but tumbled onto it and Li Zhong mouthed along Han Shen's neck just the way the other man liked it. They were hard against each other as their pelvises ground together.

"Let me have you," Li Zhong said quietly, heart hammering in his chest as he waited for the answer. He watched as Han Shen bit his lips, uncertainty clouding his features. When he eventually nodded, Li Zhong leaned down and kissed him again.

"I'm going to make this so good for you," he breathed out.

"You better."

The general snorted as he reached down onto the floor and pulled the tiny glass jar from his discarded robe. He uncorked it with his teeth as the guardsman laid back and watched him through heavily hooded eyes.

He coated his fingers as he leaned down and licked a fiery stripe up Han Shen's erection. The other man hissed in pleasure as Li Zhong ran slick fingers over the crack of his lover's ass. He felt Han Shen tense up slightly, but he doubled down and took the other man deeply into his mouth as the first finger pushed inside.

There was confusion on the guard's face as though he couldn't quite seem to figure out how he should feel about what was happening. His erection had not started to flag as happened with many men while being breeched so Li Zhong pushed ahead and moved his finger in and out several times. His calloused finger searched for that place that would make Han Shen forget everything.

"Ah!" Han Shen groaned and Li Zhong smiled. He pushed in a second finger then and began massaging the area. If anything, Han Shen began to get harder against Li Zhong's tongue and he pulled off.

"What?" Han Shen asked, a note of pleading in his voice. "Why did you stop?"

"I want you to come when I'm inside you," Li Zhong said, his voice rough with barely restrained lust.

A third finger was added and Han Shen again fell back with a bitten off cry. The guard's cock was angry and red and Li Zhong wanted to take it back in his mouth but he forced himself to stick to his goals. Li Zhong was not by nature a possessive man. He'd watched far too many people fall to petty jealousies and greed, but he wanted Han Shen. He wanted Han Shen to desire him. That would only come if Han Shen equated this searing pleasure with Li Zhong.

Only then would the guardsman come to him as a true lover and forget about Madam Li.

He eventually pulled his finger out, watching as Han Shen panted heavily before situating himself over the other man. Li Zhong slotted his hips between his lover's spread legs and sat back. He looked down at that wet and somewhat gaping hole before looking back up at the other man.

"Do it," Han Shen whispered and Li Zhong nodded before leaning over and guiding himself inside.

It was hot and tight and Li Zhong hissed. He'd not taken another man since setting eyes on Han Shen more than two years ago. It was not for anything as fanciful as love at first sight, but rather because with Han Shen and Madam Li arrival, Li Zhong rarely got the opportunity to even leave the palace for some personal time—and he had little interest in eunuchs.

The celibacy coupled with his want for Han Shen had him biting his lip as he forced himself back under control lest he come too quickly. He panted and found that his lover did not seem to be faring much better as his back arched slightly and his mouth dropped open. Li Zhong was painfully aware that this was Han Shen's first time having sex with anyone—male or female—and he was going to make it last.

The general slowly allowed himself to lean down until their chests were touching. Han Shen's arms came up and wrapped around his body. The general could not help the smile that pulled on his lips as he too wrapped it arms around the other man. They held each other close and rather than the showy long strokes he usually engaged in, his body barely moved at all.

They seemed to move together in slow shallow thrusts that were more about how much of their skin could they plaster against one another—of how much of the other's air could they breathe in.

"I hate it when you leave," he whispered.

"I'm sorry," Han Shen murmured after a few seconds which wasn't what Li Zhong wanted to hear, but he supposed it was all he would get . . . for now.

It was almost an afterthought when they both came—Han Shen first followed closely by Li Zhong. He almost wished it hadn't happened if only so they could be tied together longer. Eventually he pulled out and fell over to the side. Neither of them were breathing terribly heavily, but that was still the only sound that filled the general's ears.

"What is that out in the front room?" Han Shen asked suddenly.

Li Zhong blinked at the question, unable to think quite clearly yet. "What?"

"That box you brought. What is it?" the guardsman asked.

The general sighed. "It's a gift for you."

Han Shen turned his head and regarded him curiously. "A gift? What for?"

"I assume the king elevated your rank in return for your service to Madam Li," Li Zhong said as he pushed himself up a bit to lean against the sideboard of the bed. Han Shen nodded so Li Zhong continued. "It's new armor for you to wear to signify your rank within the palace."

The guard blinked before fully turning onto his side. "I don't need rewards," he said softly. "I'm just fulfilling my duty. I told the king as much."

“Humor me,” Li Zhong said as he reached over and brushed some of Han Shen’s hair away from his face. “It’ll help you do your job—fewer people will question you.”

The guard was quiet for a moment before replying. “I’ll accept it one condition.”

“Name it.”

Han Shen hesitated, his voice soft. “Promise me that if I’m not able to do it—that you’ll protect Junior Li.”

Li Zhong made a sound of disgust. “You extract a promise from me . . . on *her* behalf,” he said, suddenly feeling cold. The general sat up, but Han Shen’s hand reached out and stopped him from getting up any further.

“I don’t mean it like that, Li Zhong.”

“Then what do you mean,” he asked, his good mood slowly unraveling.

Han Shen took his hand and rubbed his palm. “I—I do like you, but I can never forget my promise to Junior Li’s grandfather . . . it would help me to . . . to focus on other things if—if I know someone else will help me look after her.”

Li Zhong blinked at him, slowly processing the words and the significance therein.

He sighed before nodding. “I promise that I will do everything in my power to keep her safe if you are unable to fulfil your promise.”

Han Shen nodded before reaching over and pulling Li Zhong to him. They kissed slowly and laid back down, their arms around one another.

“Don’t leave until morning,” Han Shen whispered.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Chapter End Notes

Written in an afternoon so please don't judge me too harshly.

End Notes

Yeah, the fanfic that no one asked for, but I wrote anyway. lol. I actually have outlines for another 3 to 4 parts if there is any interest, but for now this is a stand alone one shot.

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