

SHIH

So pleased the fleet finds me entertaining.

PAO

More relaxing than when the fleet thinks you're finding sport with them.

(he stifles a groan.)

START

SHIH

Are you well enough to be on your feet?

PAO

I need to be here. Thanks to your sister, I can be.

SHIH

Pao...

(takes a deep breath)

Before we go further, I must clear the air. You...hold my sister's heart. Does she hold yours?

PAO

What-what makes you think--

SHIH

Maybe it's the looks you give each other...or the way you turn to mush when the other passes.

PAO

I do not turn to mush--

SHIH

She does--and you're both terrible at hiding it.

PAO

I've acted honorably around her--!

SHIH

What do you see in my sister?

PAO

What any man SHOULD see---a strong, and gentle heart, still kind after a life of hardship.

(Mutters)

Gods knows I've seen little of that myself.

SHIH

You'd cement your place in the fleet if you wed the sister of the captain's bride.

PAO

That sounds very calculating.

SHIH

So...is this a game of the heart? Or politics?

PAO

How could you think I scheme with Xi---

SHIH

A lovely girl who is highly vulnerable.

PAO

A lovely girl who is both kind AND strong despite what's happened to her.

SHIH

I care for my sister.

PAO

So do I. And I want to make her happy.

(Beat)

SHIH

I believe you do. I don't want to play evil stepmother. Just...be good to Xi.

PAO

Thank you. For clearing the air.

SHIH

But...I AM an older sister. A mother-in-law's wrath pales next to ours. Cross me at your peril!

PAO

Duly noted, oh future sister in law.

(glances at SHIH)

But some family advice? You chafe at his hand?

SHIH

I need to grow, Pao.

END