

SHIH

I can tell...

CHENG AI

You like me...And marriage starts there, doesn't it?

SHIH

It does...and...?

START

CHENG AI

I would offer fine perfumes, beautiful jewels--

SHIH

I don't want that. Offer what I REALLY want.

CHENG AI

I would give the world for you!

SHIH

Figuratively. Make it literally.

CHENG AI

What?

SHIH

You boast of the biggest fleet. You've beaten Imperial and European navies. You rule the China Seas. Your forefathers fought the Emperor. Do the same.

CHENG AI

You know me. You know my dreams. But your dream--

SHIH

Foreign devils slaughtered my family. The Imperials let it happen. I WANT THAT AVENGED.

CHEN AI

How?

SHIH

Uniting the fleets will take more than you. You want to rule, as a sovereign. You need an heir. From a partner who extends your reach and speaks with your voice and words. That means... ME.

CHENG AI

Mayyyybeee...

SHIH

Don't play hard to get; you're not good at it. I won't take leftovers when you dream of a feast for yourself. Make the best deal!

CHENG AI

Indeed. A challenge. Let's see how well I know YOUR mind? Let me guess...you want a place for you.

SHIH

Yes.

CHENG AI

AND a place for your sister. That can't be shaken no matter what happens between us.

SHIH

Good boy. Yes.

CHENG AI

And you want a role beyond Cheng Ai's woman. You want skills as a sailor that nobody can take from you.

SHIH

VERY good....And?

CHENG AI

And?!?

SHIH

A path for a true partner. I want to command.

AI

(After a pause)

You think highly of yourself.

SHIH

You think highly of me. I should do no less.

CHENG AI

Command isn't given out lightly. It must be earned.

SHIH

A chance must be given before it's earned.

CHENG AI

Do you even know what command means?

SHIH

No one's born knowing that. Everyone needs to learn.
You did. Let me do the same.

(Beat)

You've not said, "No."

END

CHENG AI

A chance. But a chance only.

SHIH

Yes. So think of it as...a dowry. A dowry that will
enrich you ONLY after you teach me. No training, no
dowry. No dowry...NO WEDDING BED.

CHENG AI

Is that an incentive?

SHIH

I've made men wait for their reward.

CHENG AI

No down payment?

SHIH

Work first! Reward later!

(Lights shift into a scene change....)