

# Finest 101

## Chapter 101 The Meaning of the Rose

Lin Wanrong had no desire to deal with the matters of cheongsams and underwear any longer. He'd let the mother and daughter think about the sanitary napkins themselves. Discussing these topics with these two women could be stimulating, but awkwardness was unavoidable.

His attention was entirely focused on the perfume. Perfume was a wonderful product, and he only claimed fifty percent of the profits purely out of respect for the Second Miss. Thinking of the Second Miss, he felt somewhat strange inside. He hadn't seen the young girl for several days and wondered how she was faring now.

Men are indeed despicable, he thought. When she was around, he didn't want her. But now that she was gone, he felt regret. Lin Wanrong shook his head, chastising himself for being overly sentimental.

With Xiao Yuruo's promise, his perfume business was finally about to take off, filling Lin Wanrong's heart with excitement.

According to his plan, the perfume workshop must have several loyal individuals. The ratios of clover to petals, fragrance, alcohol, water - all these were top secrets. Apart from himself, who knew everything, the rest would each be given a piece of the puzzle. He wouldn't explain the principles to them, just have them follow orders. Even if they all teamed up, they wouldn't necessarily be able to figure out the formula of the perfume. There was no other way in this era lacking patent protection.

As for the choice of people, Fubo was certainly one, as was Changbo, who claimed to rival Lu Ban in woodworking and who had chosen him to enter the mansion with Fubo. Then there was Xiao Feng, an honest man who had entered the mansion with him. Lin Wanrong trusted him quite a bit. With a few more skilled craftsmen selected by Changbo, they could set up the workshop.

Lin Wanrong went to find Xiao Feng. Xiao Feng, having not seen Lin Wanrong for some days, was naturally excited to see him again. Lin Wanrong simply mentioned that the Eldest Miss had ordered him to work on a task, to which Xiao Feng readily agreed.

There was a lot to do that day. For the sake of his money-making venture, Lin Wanrong worked tirelessly, seeking out Fubo and discussing the workshop setup. After hearing Lin Wanrong's ideas, Fubo summoned the other two old men for a discussion. They developed preliminary ideas on how to extract the essence from clover and petals, filter out impurities, purify the mixture, and manage the drainage. Lin Wanrong even drew a schematic of the machinery and presented it to Changbo, who pointed out many deficiencies based on his experience. This gave Lin Wanrong even more confidence.

By evening, Qin Xian'er sent over her business card invitation. Lin Wanrong had been thinking about the opening of the restaurant, so he went to find her.

Having not seen Qin Xian'er for two days, she seemed somewhat worn out. As Lin Wanrong entered, he smiled and said, "Miss Xian'er, have you been well these past few days?"

Qin Xian'er smiled, but it seemed she was weighed down by heavy thoughts. She glanced at Lin Wanrong and said, "Young Master, I have a favor to ask of you."

"What could be so serious, Miss Xian'er?" Seeing that Qin Xian'er's expression was off, Lin Wanrong deliberately tried to lighten the mood with a jest.

Qin Xian'er bit her lip and softly said, "Please leave the Xiao family as soon as possible, Young Master."

"Why so?" Lin Wanrong asked, puzzled. He had just reached an agreement with the Xiao family that day and was preparing to roll out his grand plans. Why would he leave at this moment?

"Young Master, Xian'er can't say much, but it would be best for you to leave the Xiao family as soon as possible. It will only bring you benefits, no harm. Please trust Xian'er." Qin Xian'er said, biting her lip.

Seeing the sincerity in her demeanor, Lin Wanrong asked, puzzled, "Xian'er, has something happened to the Xiao family?"

"No, nothing." Qin Xian'er's eyes flickered, avoiding his gaze. "Young Master, please don't ask too many questions. Xian'er is only thinking of your well-being. You will understand in the future."

Lin Wanrong didn't know her intentions, but he had known Qin Xian'er long enough to know that she held some affection for him and wouldn't harm him. Yet Qin Xian'er hadn't made herself clear, and he was stubborn. He couldn't leave the Xiao family at this time, so he simply shook his head and said nothing.

Qin Xian'er sighed, giving him a glance. Realizing she couldn't convince him, she didn't say any more. She seemed somewhat restless that day. After watching the song and dance performance by the two young maidservants, and informing them of the opening date, Lin Wanrong bid her farewell. As Qin Xian'er saw him out, she looked at him, seemingly wanting to say something but refraining, her expression filled with hesitation.

Xiao Qingxuan was back early that day. Seeing his return, her face lit up for a moment before quickly fading. She looked at him and said lightly, "You're back."

Pondering over Qin Xian'er's words that evening, Lin Wanrong wondered if he should tell Xiao Qingxuan. He knew Xiao Qingxuan was very observant of Qin Xian'er. If he told her, it might cause some trouble. But considering Qin Xian'er's kindness towards him and his promise to keep her secret, if he were to tell Xiao Qingxuan, wouldn't he be a real villain?

He preferred being a hypocrite than a real villain. With a chuckle, he felt relieved.

Seeing his silence, just staring at her, Xiao Qingxuan's face flushed with a hint of joy and a touch of anger. "What are you staring at me for?" she asked.

"Miss Xiao, I haven't seen you for a day or two, and you've become even more beautiful," Lin Wanrong replied with a charming smile.

Xiao Qingxuan's heart skipped a beat, and she retorted, "Why are you suddenly saying such sweet words? Have you done something you shouldn't have?"

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. Even if he had done something wrong, it wouldn't concern her. It would only matter to his beloved. But his beloved, being so obedient and precious, would never speak to him the way Xiao Qingxuan did.

He laughed and said, "I saw the message you left me yesterday. In the future, don't use Yunjin silk to write on. It's too wasteful. Regular paper will do."

Xiao Qingxuan blushed and glared at him, thinking to herself, I wouldn't leave notes for just anyone. It's only because you talk too much, and I don't want to bother talking to you.

Lin Wanrong rummaged through his cabinet to find the newly formulated perfume. He picked out a bottle and said, "This, I suppose, is the first batch of finished product. I'll give it to you."

Xiao Qingxuan's eyes lit up. "Is it ready?" She eagerly took the small perfume bottle from his hand, gently pulling out the stopper. A wave of fragrance wafted out. Its resonance was profound and the scent lingered, exactly the kind of subtle fragrance Xiao Qingxuan preferred.

"It seems to be the scent of jasmine, right?" Xiao Qingxuan held the perfume bottle, unable to let go, her smile as radiant as the March sun.

"Yes, it's a jasmine-scented perfume. You like subtle fragrances, don't you? This suits you well," Lin Wanrong said with a gentle smile. According to the rule of identifying a woman by her preferred scent, Xiao Qingxuan was the type of woman who led a simple life, perfectly matching this light jasmine perfume.

"How did you know? Is this liquid called perfume? Although the name is rather common, it's quite fitting," Xiao Qingxuan asked, her face beaming with a smile.

She had spent a lot of time with Lin Wanrong, chatting daily about everything from astronomy and geography to politics and people's livelihood. Though she enjoyed it, she had never been as happy as she was that day.

Seeing her smile, blooming like a hundred flowers, even surpassing the peonies in the garden, Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat. He wondered if he would become infatuated with her if he saw her more often.

"Yes, it's called perfume. What is truly vulgar is truly elegant. The name is simple and easy to remember; I think it's pretty good." Seeing her so happy made Lin Wanrong feel joyous as well. It seemed as if there were some unspoken feelings between him and Xiao Qingxuan. However, she had never spoken about it, and their interactions were always natural. This left Lin Wanrong somewhat perplexed, unsure of what she was thinking.

"Since there's perfume with jasmine fragrance, other flowers should also be able to be made into perfume. What other scents have you made?" Xiao Qingxuan, being a smart woman, deduced this and asked.

"I can't hide anything from you," Lin Wanrong chuckled. "I've only made three types so far: besides this jasmine, there's also orchid and rose perfume."

"Could you give me another bottle? I would like the rose one," Xiao Qingxuan thought for a moment and then said seriously.

"Why do you want the rose perfume? It doesn't suit you," Lin Wanrong replied. The rose perfume symbolized the love between lovers. Xiao Qingxuan was noble and elegant, and only the pure scent of jasmine could match her temperament.

"How do you know it doesn't suit me?" Xiao Qingxuan smiled. "When I was a child, I met a Western missionary. He told me that different flowers have different meanings. The meaning of a rose is different from that of jasmine. I'm curious, so I want to ask for a bottle."

"A Western missionary?" Lin Wanrong was taken aback. That would be a foreigner, wouldn't it? Was trade with the West already happening at this time? That was great. He could make underwear and bras to sell to the foreigners. As for the perfume, he could sell it to France and make some foreign money.

"Was the missionary French? British? Portuguese?" Lin Wanrong asked.

Xiao Qingxuan had not expected him to know so many countries. Her face revealed a look of astonishment and delight, "How do you know about Britain and France? Mr. York was British."

Lin Wanrong chuckled bitterly. How could he not know about Britain and France? These foreigners had bullied them for so many years in the past. If he didn't know them, could he still call himself Chinese?

Rather than answering her question, Lin Wanrong retorted, "Since Mr. York was British, he must have been speaking English, right? Could you understand him?"

Hearing him mention English, Xiao Qingxuan knew he wasn't pretending. Her joy increased, "Mr. York had been in Great Hua for several years by then. He spoke Mandarin very well. Lin San, do you know where Britain is? Mr. York said it was across the ocean, thousands of miles away from Great Hua. They had drifted on a merchant ship for more than a year before reaching Great Hua."

Lin Wanrong sighed, "Our world is divided into five continents. Great Hua is located in Asia, while Britain is in Europe. Its area is only a fraction of ours, but it is highly industrialized and is a recognized maritime power. In addition to that, there's France, Spain, Portugal, all maritime powers. Although Great Hua is rich in resources and talent, there's a significant gap in industry, which could become our weakness in the future."

Xiao Qingxuan looked puzzled, apparently unable to comprehend for a moment. Lin Wanrong chuckled to himself. Why was he telling her all this? How could she understand?

"By the way, Miss Xiao, does Great Hua have any trading ports with Britain or France?" Since the foreign missionaries had already reached Great Hua, he planned to dump underwear, bras, and perfume onto them in Europe. Damn it, he was ready to beat them at their own game.

"Great Hua doesn't have official trade ports with them. I've heard that some coastal areas are privately trading with other regions. Their ships often go to Ryukyu (The old name of Okinawa) and Goryeo (Korea), but I haven't heard of them going to Britain. Oh, there's a seaport in Zhenjiang, within Jiangsu Province." Xiao Qingxuan seemed to be quite interested in these state affairs. As soon as Lin Wanrong asked, she answered.

Seeing Lin Wanrong lost in thought, Xiao Qingxuan stopped speaking. She watched him think quietly, feeling a sense of tranquility.

After a long while, Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled at Xiao Qingxuan, "We got a bit off track earlier. You wanted the rose perfume, didn't you?"

"Why? Are you unwilling?" Xiao Qingxuan asked, seeing his hesitant expression.

"Honestly, I've only made one bottle of the rose perfume. And the rose carries some deeper meanings. I want to give this first bottle to a woman I like. In this world, she is incredibly important to me," Lin Wanrong said with utmost sincerity.

Xiao Qingxuan's heart began to race. She thought, He knows the meaning of the rose too, but what does he mean by his words? Is he implying something?

Her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. She dared not look at him, speaking softly, "I see. So, you have a woman you favor?"

Thinking of Qiaoqiao, the adorable girl, a smile naturally spread across Lin Wanrong's face. "Yes, I do. She's a clumsy little girl. The rose perfume is for her."

Seeing his longing expression, Xiao Qingxuan inexplicably felt a slight sense of loss. She was taken aback. What was happening to her? Ever since she met him again, she had been visiting him daily, chatting, occasionally having little squabbles, but she felt an unprecedented sense of fulfillment and joy. Could it be that she had feelings for him?

She came from a noble family, was well-educated, and had been indifferent to worldly desires since childhood. She viewed matters of romantic affection as trifling and therefore shook her head lightly, dismissing her thoughts. She smiled faintly, "Oh, is that so? I should congratulate you then. Which family's miss is she?"

Initially, Lin Wanrong thought she harbored feelings for him. However, seeing her calm demeanor and no signs of displeasure, he wondered, That's strange. Is my charm not enough and only capable of captivating a little girl like Qiaoqiao?

Too lazy to think further, he smiled lightly and replied, "She's not someone else. She's the little girl, Qiaoqiao, who I mentioned to you a few days ago, the one who runs the tavern."

## Chapter 102 The Talented Miss Luo Ning

Lin Wanrong's relationship with Xiao Qingxuan was amicable, not overly passionate, but still close enough to be considered good friends. He hadn't kept the matter of the tavern's opening a secret from her.

Xiao Qingxuan sighed with a profound air, "Treasures are easy to find, a man with genuine feelings, hard to come by. Miss Dong is so deeply attached to you, you mustn't disappoint her."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Do you really see me as that kind of person?"

Xiao Qingxuan chuckled, "You have quite a few women attracted to you. Even Qin Xian'er seems to have taken a liking to you. I wonder how you will handle this in the future?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head helplessly, "Being handsome can be a real nuisance."

Seeing his playful demeanor, Xiao Qingxuan couldn't help but laugh, finding that any worry seemed to disappear after a few words with him.

In the following two days, Lin Wanrong was spinning like a top, working tirelessly, to the point where he felt as if he were a dog chasing its tail.

He had chosen an old, disused mansion from the Xiao family for his perfume factory. The mansion was a family heirloom with ample space, conveniently located near the Xiao family's current residence.

After discussing with Changbo, they began the renovation, following the blueprint of the machinery.

The perfume's proprietary crafting process was not a problem. The real challenge was to mass-produce it. According to Lin Wanrong's plan, the essence was extracted separately using a pressing and drawing method. While this method wasted some raw material, it was the simplest. Further, purifying and filtering the crude juice was not a problem either.

The real issue was determining how to inject the essence, alcohol, and pure water in the correct proportions, and what kind of pipeline to use. In this era, without stainless steel, using common ironware would inevitably rust, and high-temperature glass was not available either. How to construct the pipeline was truly a headache.

In the end, it was Changbo, drawing from his experience, who suggested using mature bamboo. The hollowed-out nodes would be connected to form the pipeline. After testing, this idea proved feasible and solved this significant problem.

Busy for several consecutive days, Lin Wanrong had no time to see Qin Xian'er. Oddly, it seemed as though she was aware of this, and hadn't sought him out in days, which left Lin Wanrong quite amazed.

As the days of relentless work passed, the opening day of the tavern arrived. The day before, Lin Wanrong made a special trip to see Qiaoqiao and Dong Qingshan, ensuring all the preparations for the opening were in order. With this assurance, he could finally relax. Fortunately, he faced no complications in moving in and out of the Xiao residence, ensuring no delay on either end.

Early that morning, Lin Wanrong found an excuse to leave the Xiao residence and head to the tavern.

From a distance, the tavern was a sight to behold, adorned with festive red and green banners, brightly lit, and exuding an impressive air. Hanging high on the main building was a pair of golden plaques. Inscribed in gilded letters were the four characters "Food for Immortals," while four smaller characters underneath read "Luo Min of Jiangsu."

The plaque was personally written by Luo Min, the governor of Jiangsu, a gift from Luo Yuan to his big brother as a congratulatory present. Having these four words as the golden sign, one could say, endowed the tavern "Food for Immortals" with a natural air of nobility from its birth. Luo Yuan's gesture could be considered a grand gift.

However, it was said that the governor of Jiangsu, Luo Min, rarely inscribed words for others. This exception truly caught Lin Wanrong by surprise. Luo Min had never met Lin Wanrong, and even accounting for Luo Yuan's influence, would he be this generous? Lin Wanrong felt that the matter wasn't as simple as it appeared. Nevertheless, it was ultimately a good thing, and though he was confused, he didn't have the luxury of contemplating it further.

In front of the tavern, a large platform had been constructed and draped in red cloth. Many onlookers had already gathered, but no one knew its purpose.

From the fifth floor of "Food for Immortals" upward, four long red satin ribbons hung, each tied with large red embroidered balls, looking festive and celebratory.

In front of the main entrance stood more than a dozen workers hired by old Dong, eight men and eight women. At Lin Wanrong's request, all the workers at the tavern wore uniforms: the women in red jackets and lampwick trousers, the men in blue short outfits. The men and women, standing in neat rows on either side of the entrance, presented an imposing air.

Old Dong and his son had donned brand new clothes and stood in front of the tavern. Qiaoqiao, wearing a light red thin jacket, stood behind her father and brother with a smile. Due to identity issues, Lin Wanrong couldn't openly show his face, so the tavern was opened in the name of Old Dong.

Upon seeing Lin Wanrong's arrival, Dong Qiaoqiao rushed up and giggled, "Big brother, you're here?"

Lin Wanrong smiled faintly, taking out the rose perfume from his bosom, "Qiaoqiao, you look beautiful today. This perfume is a gift for you."

Lin Wanrong had recently told Qiaoqiao about his perfume production. Hearing her brother's compliment, a blush crept onto her face. She took the perfume and held it tightly in her hand, "Big brother, thank you."

She noticed Lin Wanrong was still dressed casually in his blue shirt and small hat, typical of a servant. She grabbed his hand and laughed, "Big brother, you're the host today, how could you dress so casually?"

Lin Wanrong simply smiled, "Why should I dress up if I'm not showing my face?"

However, Qiaoqiao wouldn't listen. She pulled him upstairs to the unoccupied fifth floor, "Wealth and Talent". She took out a brand-new suit from the cupboard and handed it to Lin Wanrong, "Big brother, I made this for you. Try it on and see if it fits."

Lin Wanrong responded with a noncommittal hum. Seeing that Qiaoqiao was about to leave, he quickly caught her hand, "Qiaoqiao, where are you going?"

Her face flushed, Qiaoqiao replied, "Big brother, you change here. I'll wait for you downstairs."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Why don't you stay and watch me change? You can help me adjust it if needed." Dong Qiaoqiao glanced at him, bit her lip, lowered her head, and softly responded with a hum.

By then, the weather had turned cold. Lin Wanrong was wearing his underclothes inside, so although Qiaoqiao was a bit shy, she didn't lose her composure. Her heart was entirely focused on Lin Wanrong as she helped him dress, meticulously smoothing out the garment. After inspecting it countless times, she finally reassured herself and said, "Big brother, it's done."

Lin Wanrong, already a good-looking man, appeared even more dashing in his new clothes. Dong Qiaoqiao stared at him, saying, "Big brother, Qiaoqiao feels so happy."

"Silly girl." Lin Wanrong gently took her hand, pinching her cheek lightly, "This is just the beginning. I'm going to make you the happiest woman in the world."

As a pure and innocent young woman, Qiaoqiao was unable to withstand such sweet talk. Her heart filled with warmth, but before she could respond, she felt a warmth on her lips. Her big brother had already pulled her into an embrace and started kissing her.

Only when Qiaoqiao was left panting did Lin Wanrong release her and laugh, "Tomorrow, I'll talk to your father about us. I promise to fulfill my Qiaoqiao's wishes."

With her face flushed, Qiaoqiao softly agreed, "Big brother, your business matters more. As long as I'm in your heart, I'm satisfied. I have to manage this tavern well for you. I must become someone like Eldest Miss Xiao, so I could share your worries and problems."

Although Qiaoqiao was petite and delicate, her expression was resolute when she said these words, holding Lin Wanrong's hand tightly. Lin Wanrong was deeply moved and was about to speak when he heard the master of ceremonies below announcing loudly, "A guest has arrived"

A deafening blast of firecrackers echoed, and the master of ceremonies announced, "Young Master Luo Yuan of Jinling has arrived with a golden gift to congratulate on the grand opening!" Luo Yuan, dressed in festive attire, greeted Dong Rende and Dong Qingshan, "Uncle, Qingshan, congratulations."

Knowing that the man standing before him was the governor's sona person who in the past he could not even dream of invitingDong Rende respectfully greeted him, "Thanks to Young Master Luo's kindness, please, come upstairs for some tea."

Luo Yuan went upstairs just in time to see Lin Wanrong in his new clothes coming downstairs with Qiaoqiao. He cheerfully greeted them, "Big brother, sister-in-law, congratulations!"

Qiaoqiao's face turned red with embarrassment, but Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Congratulations to you too, Little Luo, I didn't expect you to arrive so early."

"Of course, how could I be late for big brother's event?" Luo Yuan chuckled, "I came early today just to catch the first round."

"Miss Qin Xian'er from Miaoyu Pavilion has arrived with a golden gift to congratulate on the grand opening!" Another round of firecrackers sounded.

Before the announcement from the master of ceremonies ended, Lin Wanrong frowned, "Why is she here?"

Luo Yuan glanced at Dong Qiaoqiao and chuckled, "Brother, you do have quite a network!"

Dong Qiaoqiao was well aware of the fame of Qin Xian'er, the enchantress of the Qinhuai River. Seeing her brother's awkward expression, she wondered if he had a past with Qin Xian'er. Being a young woman in the bloom of her first love, she couldn't help but care. Her heart ached, but she forced a smile and said, "Big brother, since you're acquainted with Miss Qin, why not invite her in quickly?"

Seeing Qiaoqiao's understanding, Lin Wanrong was touched and whispered in her ear, "Qiaoqiao, don't worry, you'll always be my favorite." Flushed with both shyness and joy, Qiaoqiao quickly lowered her head to hide her blushing face.

However, Qin Xian'er had already come in accompanied by Dong Qingshan and Little Lian, and Little Cui. Upon seeing Lin Wanrong, she approached and bowed, saying, "Young Master, congratulations on your grand opening."

"You knew?" Lin Wanrong asked with a bitter smile. He hadn't told Qin Xian'er that he owned this tavern and wondered where she had learned this.

Qin Xian'er gave him a glance and coyly responded, "Judging by the layout and decor of this tavern, who else but you could have such talent?" Being a bewitching woman capable of captivating all, her seemingly shy and annoyed demeanor held an irresistible charm, causing the men present to be enthralled.

Looking at Qin Xian'er's charm, Qiaoqiao admitted to herself that she was no match for her in terms of appearance or demeanor. A sense of self-deprecation rose within her, and her eyes dimmed.

Observant as always, Lin Wanrong noticed Qiaoqiao's melancholy expression and hurriedly squeezed her hand, giving her a comforting smile. Qiaoqiao read her big brother's eyes and knew he was comforting and encouraging her. Her heart warmed, and she stepped forward, saying, "Are you Sister Qin? Big brother often mentions you. You're very beautiful, Sister."

After giving Lin Wanrong a deep look, Qin Xian'er took Qiaoqiao's hand and said, "Little sister, you're also very beautiful."

Hearing the two women speak, Lin Wanrong felt a bit uneasy. Just as he was about to find an excuse to slip away, he heard the master of ceremonies outside announce, "Miss Luo Ning of Jinling is here with a golden gift, wishing a great success on the grand opening."

Luo Ning? Lin Wanrong didn't recall hearing this name. As he wondered, he noticed that neither Dong Qiaoqiao, Qingshan, nor Luo Yuan seemed surprised. Could she be a friend of theirs?

Just as he was puzzling over this, a woman entered from outside, smiling and appearing at ease. Upon closer inspection, Lin Wanrong realized it was the 'Sister Ning' he had met before. He had not had a deep conversation with her that day, nor had he asked her name. Only now did he learn her name was Luo Ning.

Luo Ning? Her surname was Luo? Lin Wanrong was startled, looking at Luo Yuan and asked, "This Miss Luo Ning is..."

Luo Yuan gave a bitter smile and said, "Big brother, she's my older sister."

On the side, Dong Qiaoqiao saw her brother looking foolish and covered her mouth with laughter, "Big brother, you're the only one who didn't know. Sister Ning is Jinling's top talented woman, Luo Ning."

Lin Wanrong smacked his forehead in realization. Qiaoqiao had mentioned that Miss Luo from the Governor's Mansion treated her very well. It was Miss Luo who had arranged for Qiaoqiao's studies in literature. He had never imagined that it was the same 'Sister Ning' he had met that day.

If Luo Ning was Luo Yuan's sister, then wasn't she the daughter of the Governor, known as both the most talented and most beautiful woman in Jinling? The 'Phoenix seeking its mate' scene performed by Jinling's top talent, Hou Yuebai, on Xuanwu Lake that day wasn't Luo Ning the object of it?

Good heavens, he mused, So that's why this girl has such an aura. It turns out she is the 'top talent of Jinling'. He had underestimated her before.

Luo Ning approached them, looking at everyone with a smile, "What are you all chatting about so happily?"

Dong Qiaoqiao, being her closest friend, stepped forward, took her hand, and laughed, "Sister Ning, Big brother only just realized your identity and he's still in shock."

Lin Wanrong gave a bitter smile, "So Miss Luo is the top talent of Jinling. I was kept in the dark for so long."

Luo Ning laughed, "That's because big brother didn't ask. Should I have recommended myself?"

Qin Xian'er had long heard of this Jinling talent's reputation, and upon seeing Luo Ning as such a beautiful and serene woman, she was somewhat surprised. She stepped forward, saying with a smile, "So this is Miss Luo, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance."

Luo Ning, having long heard of Qin Xian'er, was surprised, "You're Miss Xian'er? Your talents far surpass mine. I'm truly in awe. I'll have to learn from you in the future."

Listening to their ceaseless discussion about teaching and learning, Lin Wanrong started to get a headache. Couldn't they just stand there, chat about perfume or fashion? Why did they have to talk about poetry, song, chess, calligraphy, and painting?

Seeing the three women gathered together, each stunning and radiant in their own way, he dared not linger any longer. He walked outside with Qingshan and Luo Yuan.

"Governor of Jiangsu, Luo Min, presents a golden gift..." The announcer's trembling shout brought Lin Wanrong to a halt.

## Chapter 103 Doubts

Governor Luo Min? Wasn't that Little Luo's father? Lin Wanrong was friends with Little Luo, but even if he cared deeply for his son, there was no need for him to curry favor with Lin Wanrong like this. It was strange indeed.

Looking at Luo Yuan and Luo Ning, they too seemed dumbfounded, clearly not expecting their father to make such a move. Luo Yuan managed a sheepish smile, saying, "Big brother, I have no idea what's going on either. When you meet my father one day, you can ask him yourself."

A knot formed in Lin Wanrong's heart. He had a premonition that this Governor Luo Min was not a simple character.

Dong Qingshan and others stepped out to welcome the guests, but the one who entered was a skinny, sharp-eyed secretary, not Governor Luo Min himself. The secretary bowed to Luo Yuan and Luo Ning, saying, "Greetings, Young Master. Greetings, Miss."

Luo Yuan nodded and smiled, saying, "Uncle Liu, did Father send you here specifically to deliver the plaque? This is the host of this place, Young Master Lin."

Lin Wanrong was startled. In front of outsiders, the owner of the restaurant was always known to be Old Dong. Today, Luo Yuan pushed him into the spotlight, clearly indicating something significant. Had Luo Min already figured out that he was the true owner of the restaurant? How did Luo Min get to know him? Why did he value him so much? Lin San was just a small servant of the Xiao family. Luo Min, a prominent governor, was showing an unusual amount of favor towards a mere restaurant owner, and it couldn't be simply because of his friendship with his son Luo Yan. There must be other reasons.

As Lin Wanrong's thoughts raced, he glanced at Luo Yuan. Although Luo Yuan seemed a bit confused as well, he was not as surprised as Lin. Suddenly, a thought struck Lin Wanrong. Little Luo was definitely hiding something from him.

Secretary Liu approached Lin Wanrong, smiling and bowing, "Congratulations, Young Master Lin. My master instructed me before leaving to personally convey his congratulations. Due to his position, it's inconvenient for him to be here personally, so this is the only way he can express his sentiments. I hope you don't mind."

Hearing Secretary Liu's flattery, Lin Wanrong's confusion deepened. Luo Min was the top official in Jiangsu, a powerful figure whose slightest movement could shake the region. But why did he value Lin Wanrong so much? According to Secretary Liu, if not for officialdom etiquette, Luo Min would even personally congratulate Lin Wanrong. Good heavens, a visit from the governor was no small matter. What was Old Luo up to?

Lin Wanrong's head started to spin. There must be hidden reasons unknown to him. If it was related to politics, things could become really complicated. Despite his racing thoughts, Lin Wanrong, being a shrewd man, quickly responded, "Secretary Liu, you're too kind. Today, thanks to your master's magnanimity, our humble establishment is graced with such honor. We are flattered by Governor Luo's regard and couldn't be happier. Please convey to your master that I am deeply grateful for his generous gesture."

Secretary Liu's eyes were filled with deep meaning. Any ordinary person, given a plaque by the Governor of Jiangsu, would immediately express their gratitude and willingness to serve. But this Lin San merely expressed his thanks, highlighting his uniqueness and high degree of alertness.

Lin Wanrong held his own concerns. Until he understood Luo Min's true intentions, he dared not pledge servitude. Politics was a tricky field. Once entangled in it, one could find themselves in peril without even knowing why. Caution was necessary.

Although Luo Min had sent a secretary with the plaque, the presence of a governor's gift elevated the status of the restaurant significantly. Luo Min's sentiment was indeed not a light one.

What followed was a parade of friends specially invited by Luo Yuan and Old Dong, along with some neighbors who came to offer their congratulations.

Seeing Luo Yuan's genuine concern for the restaurant, Lin Wanrong sighed inwardly. This Little Luo, like his father, was no ordinary person. Pulling Luo Yuan aside, he asked directly, "Little Luo, did your father tell you something?"

Luo Yuan nodded, "Big brother, my father told me to get close to you. He said you're extraordinary and destined to soar high. He asked me to follow you closely."

"Did he mention anything else?" Lin Wanrong asked with a frown. What was this Old Luo playing at?

Luo Yuan managed a bitter smile, "Big brother, my father doesn't allow me to meddle in political affairs. He always speaks in half-truths. I can only act according to his words. Besides, I've seen your capabilities with my own eyes. Following you can't be wrong."

Lin Wanrong sighed. So that's why Little Luo agreed so readily to join Hung Hing that day. It turned out Old Luo had given instructions beforehand. Damn, and here I thought I had some irresistible charm.

"And today, your family gave three plaques. What's that about?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, deciding not to dwell on the puzzling matters. It would only strain his brain.

Seeing that Lin Wanrong wasn't blaming him, Luo Yuan happily explained, "Big brother, you don't know our family situation. Although we're just a family of three, we're split into three factions: one for my father, one for me, and another for my sister. Each of us does our own thing without interference. You're my big brother, my sister's friend, and a person my father respects. It's normal for us to give you plaques separately. Besides, my father is very open-minded and never interferes in my sister's and my affairs. Otherwise, do you think I could so easily visit brothels?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled. Old Luo was indeed interesting. In an era of strict education, Luo Min practiced a free-range parenting style, and his children turned out to be quite competent. No wonder Luo Yuan, a young master, could wander outside all day and Luo Ning, the young lady, could enjoy such freedom. Lin Wanrong was growing increasingly interested in this Old Luo.

After a little more conversation, seeing that the auspicious time had arrived, Lin Wanrong nodded at Dong Qingshan, who immediately went to make the arrangements.

The crowd waiting outside the restaurant grew restless until, with a clang of a gong, the doors behind the stage opened. A bright-eyed young man of about eighteen or nineteen stepped forward. He clasped his hands in greeting to the crowd, "Friends, esteemed elders, and fellow villagers, hello. Today marks the grand opening of our restaurant, Food for Immortals.' To express our gratitude for your generous support, we've designed the best promotional policy to welcome your patronage. Within this month, anyone who spends ten taels of silver at our establishment will receive a voucher worth two taels. This voucher cannot be used as cash but can be used for any purchase within the restaurant. If you accumulate a hundred taels of expenses within the month, you'll receive a VIP card from us. With this card, you can enjoy a 20% discount at our restaurant. Moreover, we also have a plethora of discount coupons, with which you can enjoy our meal sets at a discounted price..."

The young man spoke eloquently, and the staff of Food for Immortals' had already posted various promotional signs around the place. These enticing offers, such as spending ten taels to get two taels back and various coupon-related promotions, immediately sent the crowd into a frenzy.

"Young Master, this is another one of your arrangements, isn't it?" Qin Xian'er asked, looking at the excited crowd with a smile.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I'm just making a small fortune. Miss Xian'er, there's no need to expose me."

Luo Ning laughed lightly, "Big brother, I don't know how you come up with these ideas. They're quite amusing. And the best part is, people don't even realize they're being tricked."

Luo Yuan was still puzzled, "How is this tricking people?"

Luo Ning looked at her younger brother with amusement, "Take the promotion of spending ten taels to get a two-ael voucher. If one fully utilizes it, they're essentially using ten taels to buy twelve taels worth of goods, all of which are spent in the store. It's barely a 10% discount, yet everyone thinks they've gained an extra two taels for nothing. And the meal sets are even more cunning. A tea egg, a bowl of Yangchun noodles, and a portion of stewed beef, sold separately, would each cost four maces of silver. With the discount coupon, they total up to just one tael of silver [1 mace = 1/10 tael]. It seems like a bargain, but it's not. Those who originally only wanted to eat the noodles will end up spending more to get the beef and tea egg just for the discount. Isn't this cunning?"

Upon hearing this, Luo Yuan had an epiphany and gave Lin Wanrong a thumbs up, "Big brother, you're really something."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Miss Luo Ning, if you were to go into business, I'm sure you'd be an even more cunning merchant than me."

Luo Ning blushed and said nothing.

By this time, people had started to enter the restaurant, eager to take advantage of the discounts. The power of example was infinite. Seeing others clutching their discount coupons and buying "bargain" items, the crowd surged forward.

There were still quite a few people gathered in front of the stage. Judging from their attire, most of them were scholars with a somewhat lofty demeanor, not stooping to rush into the fray for discounted items like the others.

The young man on the stage was carefully chosen by Lin Wanrong from among the hundreds of brothers in Hung Hing, as instructed by Dong Qingshan. He was a quick-witted and eloquent brother, much like a DJ in a bar.

The young man clasped his hands and said, "To express our gratitude for the generous love you've shown our establishment, we have specially invited two talented singers from Miaoyu Pavilion, Miss Lian and Miss Cui. They will perform a new song 'West Chamber' composed by Miss Qin Xian'er."

The mention of Miaoyu Pavilion and Qin Xian'er was enough to pique the interest of these scholars, who were all men of the world. Upon hearing these names, they cheered loudly.

Little Cui and Little Lian, one in a purple-red long skirt and the other in a light yellow shirt, took dainty steps and slowly walked onto the stage. Though young, these two girls were already becoming attractive, with a touch of coquettish charm. They held hands and bowed to the audience, eliciting a wave of applause.

With a gentle strum of the strings, the musicians brought over by Qin Xian'er from Miaoyu Pavilion, who had been rehearsing 'West Chamber' for a while, started to play.

"Passing the West Chamber, a fragrant scent fills the air. The lady next door is still in the midst of flowers" Little Lian, holding Little Cui's hand, swayed gently from side to side in time with the rhythm. As the singing began, there was a sense of surprise among the crowd. The melody was fresh, catchy, and different from the usual tunes. Moreover, the girl's natural swaying, devoid of any coquettish affectations, and the lively tune made people want to sway along.

By the time the girls reached the rap-like part of the song, the crowd fell silent. This half-spoken, half-sung melody was so novel that it was hard for people to accept, yet it was so catchy that they couldn't resist learning it even if they wanted to.

"I passed the West Chamber again, a daydream from twelve years ago, writing about you and me back then, a tune with the lyrics of a poem"

The two girls hand in hand, walking and singing on the stage, had quickly whipped the atmosphere into a frenzy. The literati downstairs prided themselves on their elegance, yet they had never seen such a fresh and natural performance. Unable to voice their admiration, they could only express their appreciation through enthusiastic applause.

Among the spectators upstairs, Lin Wanrong was the most nervous. To be honest, he wasn't entirely sure whether this R&B-style song would be accepted in this era. But Qin Xian'er was the expert here. She was confident that this tune would cause a sensation and had made many improvements to the arrangement, leading to the excellent effect seen today.

Seeing Qin Xian'er smiling at him, seemingly asking for his opinion, Lin Wanrong gave a thumbs up. Qin Xian'er covered her mouth and giggled, glanced at him, and fell silent.

The scholars' excitement had been fully stirred. Upon hearing that the fourth and fifth stories of this restaurant, known as "Wealth and Talent," would welcome anyone who could solve a couplet onto the premises to enjoy VIP treatment, beyond just the rich and powerful, these self-confident men of letters became somewhat tempted.

Seeing the crowd's growing excitement, the "DJ" dropped his final bombshell at the right moment: "I have some good news for everyone. Today, the couplets for 'Wealth and Talent' will be revealed by none other than Jinling's number one talented female, Miss Luo Ning."

A collective gasp ran through the crowd. Having heard of this, the aspiring scholars surged toward the building like a wave. The idea of having Jinling's top female scholar reveal the couplets wasn't Lin Wanrong's, he asked with a smile, "This idea is good, very interesting, Qiaoqiao. Was it your idea?"

Qiaoqiao smiled and replied, "Big brother, I learned from you."

Lin Wanrong roared with laughter. Ah, this Qiaoqiao truly knew him inside and out. He pulled Qiaoqiao into his arms, looking at her blushing face, he wished he could plant a big kiss on it.

Luo Ning's appearance attracted everyone's attention. She smiled and gave a slight bow to the crowd, picked up the festive pole, and revealed each of the four upper couplets.

Seeing everyone deep in thought, Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Alright, our grand opening is a great success. Today, as the owner, I invite everyone to enjoy a banquet. Here's to our restaurant thriving and prospering."

Launching such a grand opening in this era was indeed sensational. The promotional tactics employed by Lin Wanrong had spread throughout the city of Jinling in a matter of days, especially the four peerless couplets of "Wealth and Talent," which had caught the eye of all the scholars in the city.

As a result, all of Jinling knew about the newly opened restaurant called "Food for Immortals," with its fresh ambiance and elegant style. Even the governor had personally inscribed a plaque, and the unveiling had been done by the top female scholar of Jinling, drawing a crowd of literati and poets.

The restaurant was bound to do well. After three days of operation, the gross profit astonishingly reached a thousand taels of silver.

However, at this point, Lin Wanrong had no time to manage the restaurant because the perfume workshop had been completely renovated and was about to produce the first batch of test products.

## Chapter 104 Ingenious Ideas

The pressed rose and trifoliate (Sanhuacao) juices had been purified and filtered for two days, leaving no residue behind. Just then, they were mixed according to the formula for a light fragrance, creating a perfume essence.

A worker gently turned the wind wheel, slowly pressing the filtered perfume essence into a bamboo tube. Another worker added alcohol through the tube, while a third one added water. Lin Wanrong watched the liquid flowing slowly in the bamboo tube with a tight focus, his palms sweaty with tension. He grabbed Fubo's arm and asked, "Fubo, you've tested this, haven't you? There's no problem with this bamboo tube, right?"

Changbo responded confidently, "Lin San, rest assured, with my years of experience in woodworking, this bamboo pipeline structure is stable. It can easily last for three to five years."

When the three solutions mixed in a large container, gradually turning a lighter shade, Lin Wanrong finally let out a long sigh of relief. The fresh fragrance wafting in the air said it all - the first batch of perfume had been successfully produced.

Lin Wanrong had already purchased a batch of small glass bottles through the Xiao family, at a considerable discount, of course.

The perfume was incredibly precious, worth its weight in gold. There were no automatic filling machines in this era, so they had to rely on funnels for manual bottling. Although this was less efficient, it could meet the demand.

The first batch of perfume filled more than three hundred bottles. Lin Wanrong was very satisfied with the ratio and was about to meet Eldest Miss Xiao, when a maid arrived to report that the Eldest Miss urgently needed him.

Upon reaching the location, he found the room empty. In a hurry, Lin Wanrong asked the maid, "Sister Xiao Tao, where is the Eldest Miss?"

Xiao Tao replied, "The Eldest Miss instructed that you wait for her here, Brother Lin."

As Lin Wanrong sat in the room, just when he was starting to feel bored, a soft noise echoed as the door was pushed open, and a woman walked in from outside. He looked up and was taken aback.

The woman in front of him was Xiao Yuruo. What surprised Lin Wanrong was her attire. She was wearing a dress Lin Wanrong was very familiar with a cheongsam.

With her hair coiled high, her slender shoulders, and a long lotus-colored cheongsam tightly wrapped around Xiao Yuruo's body, her curvy figure, slender waist, and long legs sketched out an exquisite silhouette. Her graceful steps only added to her charm. The beauty of a woman was fully displayed.

At the high slit of the cheongsam, Miss Xiao had made some modifications. It only extended to the bend of her calf, and she wore a pair of light yellow thin trousers underneath, implying more than revealing, which better fit the aesthetic taste of this era.

Lin Wanrong was taken aback, thinking to himself, Goodness, this headstrong girl really does have a certain aura in this cheongsam. I wonder what Madam Xiao would look like in this dress.

Seeing Lin Wanrong's gaze fixed on her, Xiao Yuruo felt quite shy and quickly asked, "Lin San, is the cheongsam supposed to look like this? How do I look in it?"

Lin Wanrong nodded and laughed, "Miss, you look absolutely stunning in this cheongsam."

Xiao Yuruo snorted, but her face showed a hint of surprise, "I consulted with my mother for a long time before making this cheongsam. I wonder if it's as good as the ones you've seen?"

Lin Wanrong said, "Cultural customs differ from place to place, so comparisons aren't meaningful. However, it's undeniable that this robe is very suitable for the women of our Great Hua."

Hearing his praise, Xiao Yuruo breathed a sigh of relief. This cheongsam was something only Lin Wanrong had seen before. After making it, the young lady had to show it to him first, despite her reluctance.

Lin Wanrong's gaze shifted downwards, noticing that the shoes she wore were not the usual embroidered ones. They were significantly taller than the average women's shoes. The young lady's face flushed as she said, "After making this cheongsam, I felt good wearing it. But my shoes seemed too short, so I made a pair of taller ones. I'm not sure if it's appropriate?"

Lin Wanrong slapped his forehead, realizing he had overlooked the fact that the cheongsam should be paired with high heels to better showcase the figure. He gave her a thumbs up and said, "Miss, your attention to detail is admirable. You're right, the cheongsam does look better with high heels."

The young lady hummed to herself. It was the first time she'd heard him praise her in all this time. She felt a surge of pride, and her smile brightened.

Since the cheongsam was done, had the undergarments also been completed? Lin Wanrong looked at the young lady in puzzlement, hoping to glean some hint from her. The young lady blushed and snapped, "What are you looking at with those thieving eyes?"

Lin Wanrong asked, "Now that this cheongsam is done, have the undergarments taken shape?"

Her face reddened, she lowered her head and said softly, "It's none of your business..."

Seeing her extreme shyness, Lin Wanrong was puzzled. But noticing the rise of her chest, he suddenly understood and couldn't help but feel amused. He thought, So that's why she appears so shapely today. She's using the new product. The bra needs a structure for support, I wonder what this young lady has thought of. From the outside, the effect seems to be not bad. Women indeed have a natural talent in this area. I, a half-baked designer of women's underwear, should step aside.

Seeing the laughter in his eyes, the young lady knew he had figured it out. She felt both embarrassed and angry, thinking it was infuriating to be so compromised in front of this man. She composed herself and said, "Lin San, I asked you here today to discuss something. Now that we have made the cheongsam and the undergarments, how do we promote them? Going door-to-door seems too cumbersome. Do you have any ideas?"

Lin Wanrong grinned and said, "That can be easily managed, it just depends on whether you have the courage, Miss."

Xiao Yuruo was taken aback and asked, "What does this have to do with courage? Tell me, what are your ideas?"

Lin Wanrong gave a mysterious smile and said, "Promoting this isn't difficult, Miss. You should have some connections with the ladies and young misses of this city."

Xiao Yuruo replied, "Of course. My family has been doing business for many years, so we have extensive connections in this city."

"In that case, it's easy. Miss, you could find a free moment, gather these ladies and young misses, and hold a small fashion show," Lin Wanrong suggested with a smile.

"A fashion show? What's that?" the Eldest Miss asked in surprise.

"A fashion show is simply a display of the new clothes you've made, worn by real people for the ladies to inspect. For example, you could find some well-shaped women to model the cheongsam and walk around, and for the undergarments, you could find some fuller women to showcase them," he explained.

Lin Wanrong's idea was novel, and the Eldest Miss blushed slightly, saying, "Your idea is quite innovative. The cheongsam is fine, but for the undergarments, where do we find real people to model them? Wouldn't that be too embarrassing?"

Lin Wanrong seriously replied, "Miss, you're mistaken. All the ladies you're inviting are women, and only women can participate in this fashion show. It's not embarrassing to discuss body-related topics among women. As for finding models, it's not difficult. You could choose some well-shaped girls from the Qinhuai River, pay them a little extra, and have them wear masks during the show to conceal their identities. Since they'll be facing only women, I think they won't refuse."

Lin Wanrong was secretly sweating. If this were successful, the first underwear models in the world would be the girls from the Qinhuai River. What a great victory that would be!

The Eldest Miss pondered for a while. As a businesswoman, although her mindset was conservative like others of her time, she did have a certain degree of open-mindedness. Lin San's idea made sense. All the attendees would be women, which wouldn't harm their dignity, and as courtesans, they should be amenable to the idea with additional payment.

However, the thought of approaching these courtesans herself was daunting for a lady of her status. She glanced at Lin San, noticing his confident demeanor, and thought that this scoundrel seemed rather familiar with such places, so it might be best to leave this task to him.

Noticing the young lady's thoughtful look, Lin Wanrong felt a sense of unease. He had gotten himself entangled in this. He hurriedly said, "Considering your status, Miss, it might not be appropriate for you to go to the brothel to find women. I believe there is someone who can handle this."

"Who?" The Eldest Miss quickly asked.

"Your cousin, Guo Wuchang," Lin Wanrong replied, silently praying to Buddha. Young Master Guo, you've benefited so much from me; it's time for you to help out.

"My cousin?" The Eldest Miss frowned.

"Yes," Lin Wanrong confirmed. "Your cousin has some connections with Qin Xian'er. It wouldn't be difficult for him to find some well-shaped women through her."

This wasn't because Lin Wanrong wanted to shirk his responsibilities; it was just that he had been busy making perfume and developing his third venture, the Food for Immortals restaurant. Where would he find the time to personally look for models? Besides, Guo Wuchang was naturally inclined towards brothels, so this task was perfectly suited to his tastes.

The Eldest Miss knew very well what kind of person her cousin was. She didn't believe that Qin Xian'er would take a liking to Guo Wuchang. Seeing Lin San's mischievous grin, she couldn't help but scoff, "Are you trying to tarnish my cousin's reputation with your scheme?"

Ah, was Guo Wuchang's reputation something he needed to tarnish? Everyone near the Qinhuai River knew about this unpredictable young master. It was only this Eldest Miss who thought her cousin was such a noble person. Of course, Lin Wanrong wouldn't voice these thoughts out loud. He chuckled and said, "Although the young master doesn't enjoy reading or learning, he has a keen eye for people. I don't think there will be any problems with him choosing a few women from the brothel."

There weren't any suitable men in the Xiao family who could take on this task. While the man before her was somewhat competent, he was as slippery as an eel. If he said her cousin could handle

it, then she would let her cousin do it, hoping he wouldn't disappoint her. Xiao Yuruo sighed softly and nodded her agreement.

Seeing her melancholy, Lin Wanrong could guess some of her thoughts. He didn't want to dwell on the matter any longer, so he took out the perfume from his pocket and said, "Miss, this is the first batch of rose perfume I've produced. You can promote it alongside the cheongsam and undergarments. I guarantee you'll be incredibly popular and successful."

Xiao Yuruo took the perfume, her heart filled with joy. She sniffed it, inhaling deeply, and asked with anticipation, "Lin San, can you give me this bottle?"

Lin Wanrong paused before replying, "We will be making a lot more of this perfume in the future. I can give you as much as you want. But this one is a strong scent. Do you like it?"

Hearing his agreement, the Eldess Miss nodded joyfully, "I like stronger scents, and so does my mother."

Even Madam Xiao liked strong scents? According to the rule of understanding women through their choice of perfume, women who liked strong scents... Lin Wanrong didn't dare to continue his thought. This was too stimulating. He chuckled, his mind filled with naughty thoughts that he couldn't get rid of.

Seeing the odd smile on his face, as if he could see right through her, Xiao Yuruo suddenly felt shy. Suppressing her embarrassment, she said, "Lin San, go and find my cousin. I will discuss this matter with him."

Hearing that his cousin wanted him to visit the brothels, Guo Wuchang was so scared he nearly wet himself. He quickly said, "Cousin, as you know, I am a scholar who only knows how to compose poetry. I've only met Miss Qin Xian'er a few times. I have no connection with the brothels at all."

Lin Wanrong struggled to suppress his laughter. The face of this young master Guo truly knew no shame.

Xiao Yuruo said, "Cousin, you've misunderstood. I want you to find some pleasant-looking and charismatic women and invite them to the inn in town. Then I will talk to them." Xiao Yuruo had thought everything through. It would be disgraceful to invite the women from the brothels directly to the Xiao household, so meeting at the inn was a much more convenient alternative.

"Yes, indeed." Lin Wanrong said in a solemn voice, "Young master, you are a proper scholar. We all know that. The Eldest Miss just wants to invite a few girls to help out. She believes you are the most trustworthy person in our Xiao family, so she has asked you to do this. I believe, considering your relationship with Miss Qin, these tasks shouldn't be too difficult."

Young Master Guo was unaware that Lin San was in a relationship with Qin Xian'er. Seeing that Lin San was speaking in this manner and considering his cousin's request, he had no choice but to say, "If that's the case, I will go. However, I'm not familiar with the brothels. If anything goes wrong, cousin, you mustn't blame me."

Xiao Yuruo gently nodded. Lin Wanrong gave the young master a meaningful glance and smiled, "I've heard that there's a woman named Dong Mei at Miaoyu Pavilion. She is said to be quite attractive. Young master, you might want to consider visiting her."

The young master was secretly pleased to hear this, though he maintained a serious expression, "Hmm, I will have to see for myself."

Seeing that everything was arranged, the young master took on his task and left with a sense of purpose. Just as Lin Wanrong was about to leave, he heard the Eldest Miss say, "Lin San, wait a moment."

She took out a small booklet from her bosom, looked at Lin Wanrong, and said with a teasing smile, "Do you recognize this?"

## Chapter 105 Reunion with Yushuang

Lin Wanrong glanced down and recognized the item in her hand; it was the original copy of the third-page magazine, the very first thing he had sold to earn his gold in this world. Xiao Yushuang had taken it once, and now, somehow, it had fallen into this Eldest Miss' hands.

Why had she suddenly brought up this subject? Could Xiao Yushuang have told her? Lin Wanrong had a certain degree of trust in Xiao Yushuang. That girl was far more obedient than her sister; it couldn't have been her who divulged this.

Curious indeed, Lin Wanrong mused, wondering how she had come to associate him with this matter.

His relationship with this Eldest Miss was largely confrontational, and their encounters were often filled with arguments. If she knew that he had profited five thousand taels of silver by selling her portrait, who could predict what chaos would ensue?

"What's this? Oh, isn't this a picture of the Eldest Miss? But it's not as beautiful as the real person. Could it be a picture from her underage years? Remarkable! I had no idea that the Eldest Miss was so stunning in her youth." Lin Wanrong accepted the booklet and chattered nonsense.

Xiao Yurao watched him put on his act, thinking, You underestimate me. Your unique style of painting cannot be easily imitated. Despite peeling back your disguise, you still remain dishonest.

She smiled and said, "I don't know who this thief is, learning half of someone else's painting style and creating this picture book to slander me. If I find out, I certainly won't let him off easily."

"Yes, yes, he shouldn't be let off lightly," Lin Wanrong agreed. Both of them had their own ulterior motives, and their words were full of implications. Yet, they both pretended ignorance, creating an eerily strange atmosphere.

The Eldest Miss laughed, "I heard that this little book sold for ten taels of silver each. Since he used me in it, I should be entitled to eight taels per copy. It wouldn't be unreasonable. I'd better not find him, or I'll certainly demand my silver."

Damn, the Eldest Miss Xiao even had someone investigate this. It seemed she was prepared. Now, she was clearly chastising him indirectly. Damn it, he couldn't even admit it. Lin Wanrong laughed hollowly, "Eldest Miss, with your wealth, you surely wouldn't be bothered by such a trivial sum. Besides, once the lingerie and perfume businesses take off, they'll easily make up for this minor loss."

What he meant was, don't hold onto this matter so tightly. The profits from the lingerie and perfume businesses he had created for her were countless times larger than this little booklet.

The Eldest Miss' lips curled into a smile. She had sparred with this rogue for many days, yet today was the first time she had scored such a victory. Naturally, she felt a great sense of satisfaction. Seeing Lin Wanrong's discomfort only added to her joy. A hint of color rose in her cheeks as she gazed at him with interest, "Lin San, to be honest, this little book is quite unique, unlike anything I've seen before. I'd actually like to meet this cheeky thief with so many ideas."

Biting his lip, Lin Wanrong responded, "There will be such a day. Maybe he's also thinking about meeting you."

The Eldest Miss could no longer hold back her laughter, and she bent over, chuckling delightfully. Her heart was filled with unparalleled satisfaction. She thought, Let's see how this rogue will bully me again, leaving me constantly off balance; I'm not so easy to provoke.

Strangely enough, the more she interacted with Lin San, the more she despised him. Sometimes she even ground her teeth in her sleep over him, yet daily banter with him was what eased her spirit. It was indeed peculiar.

Seeing Lin Wanrong's discomposed face, Xiao Yuruo's lips curved into a smile. She opened another small package she had brought with her and pulled out a shirt, saying, "This is for you."

"What's this?" Lin Wanrong asked curiously. Upon closer inspection, he realized it was the shirt that Xiao Yuruo had washed for him on the day she visited him thrice. The Eldest Miss had taken it away, and he hadn't expected her to remember this.

"Thank you," Lin Wanrong laughed, accepting the shirt. After inspecting it, he furrowed his brows, "Eldest Miss, your maids seem to be slacking off."

"What happened?" Xiao Yuruo asked, puzzled.

"Look at this. The shirt isn't fully clean in several places. If that's not slacking off, what is it?" Lin Wanrong said with a laugh.

Xiao Yuruo looked and indeed, several dirty spots hadn't been cleaned off. She felt a rush of heat to her face, glaring at him in annoyance, "I've already washed it. Where did you get all these demands from? I promised to wash this shirt and give it back to you, and I've done that. At least, I haven't broken my word."

Lin Wanrong gave her a thumbs up, "Indeed, Eldest Miss, you are a woman of your word. I'm truly impressed. I'll just make do with this then. After all, it's bound to get dirty, so a couple more spots don't matter."

With a rustle, the Eldest Miss, in her irritation, flung the little booklet at him. Lin Wanrong, laughing, dodged it and exited the room.

The Eldest Miss sat there dazed for a moment, then picked up the booklet, gently brushing off the dust. As she looked at the familiar face on the cover, she huffed softly. Despite herself, a smile broke onto her face. Half annoyed, half amused, she found her feelings at that moment perplexing, even to herself.

In the following days, Lin Wanrong was as busy as a pack mule. The perfume workshop had added two more production lines, specializing in jasmine and orchid perfumes, all of which required his personal adjustment before production.

"Food for Immortals" had been swamped with business since its opening, and they were desperately understaffed. With the Xiao family's help in managing the perfume business, managing the restaurant was like taking care of his own child. Seeing how hard Qiaoqiao worked until late at night every day, Lin Wanrong felt a heartache like no other.

Whenever he had free time, he would help Qiaoqiao. He didn't even have time to chat with Xiao Qingxuan anymore. Xiao Qingxuan waited for him daily, and aside from a silent sigh, she expressed nothing. As for Qin Xian'er, despite her several attempts to arrange a meeting, he never seemed to find the time.

Lin Wanrong exhausted all his tricks: special feasts, wild game dinners, whole fish banquets, each aimed at different classes of diners at Food for Immortals. He brought forth every promotional strategy from his past life: limited time half-price sales, VIP cards, platinum VIP cards, endless promotions popping up every other day, enough to dazzle anyone. The song "West Chamber" drew criticism from some but much more praise from others. With the two girls, Little Lian and Little Cui, performing on stage for several days, the ambiance of the restaurant was greatly enhanced. Plus, the four unprecedented, unmatched couplets that remained unsolved. For a time, Food for Immortals was unrivaled in prestige, with daily income surpassing a thousand taels, and a net profit of around four to five hundred taels. It had truly become a golden goose.

As the saying goes, "People fear fame as pigs fear fatness." Lin Wanrong knew this deeply. Food for Immortals was so well-known it was bound to draw envy. Although they had Luo Min's endorsement and Hung Hing's secret protection, they had to stay cautious. The ordinary person wouldn't dare cause trouble, but hidden threats were harder to guard against. Not to mention the increasingly restless Black Dragon Association, he warned Dong Qingshan and Luo Yuan to never let their guard down.

Seeing the daily income, Old Dong was eager to repay the remaining debt to Boss Wang. Lin Wanrong neither agreed nor disagreed, instead asking Dong Qiaoqiao, "Qiaoqiao, what do you think about this matter?"

With the business growing larger and the perfume venture about to start, Lin Wanrong couldn't stay here all the time. Qiaoqiao was smart and capable. Although she was gentle and considerate around him, she was also shrewd and competent. Lin Wanrong was keen to cultivate Qiaoqiao into a woman even more outstanding than Xiao Yuruo.

Qiaoqiao thought for a moment and said, "Dad, I don't think we should pay back the money just yet."

Seeing her big brother smiling encouragingly at her, Qiaoqiao became even more confident about her thoughts. "Although we have some cash on hand now, our cash flow is large. Part of it needs to be used for operational costs. Moreover, we shouldn't get complacent because of our current success. Now that Food for Immortals has some reputation in Jinling City, I think we should consider using this fame to set up a branch?"

A smile flashed in Lin Wanrong's heart. This girl truly had the makings of a strong woman. He nodded and said with a laugh, "Go on, Qiaoqiao. Uncle Dong, let's listen to Qiaoqiao's opinion before we decide."

Qiaoqiao smiled at Lin Wanrong, a soft light flickering in her eyes, "We have a good reputation in the city now. Also, with the endorsement from the governor, if we plan to open a branch, we would have the upper hand in terms of location and price. The cash we have on hand could be put to good use. If we repay Boss Wang now, not only will he lose interest income, but we'll also lose a chance to expand."

This girl, she really had some ability, Lin Wanrong thought to himself. Developers in his previous life accumulated their capital by leveraging loans. He hadn't expected Qiaoqiao to grasp that concept. He wanted to test her further, and with a slight frown, he asked, "Qiaoqiao, you make some valid points. But have you considered that we have just found our footing, and we're already planning to expand. Isn't that a bit hasty?"

Seeing her big brother's furrowed brows, Qiaoqiao panicked. After pondering over her words, she realized they indeed had the risk of expanding too quickly. Her face flushed, and she quickly said, "Big brother, I didn't consider it thoroughly."

Knowing that Qiaoqiao was overly concerned about him, which led to her panic, he shook his head and said with a smile, "Qiaoqiao, I asked you that question on purpose. You must trust yourself. I have never met a girl as smart as you."

Her face turned red, but her heart felt sweet. She glanced at him, her deep affection evident without words.

"Your expansion plan is actually feasible. We can start selecting locations and negotiating prices. If we can't agree on the price, we can wait; we have time. Once the price is agreed upon, we can buy it for storage, what is commonly referred to as land banking. Even if we don't build a restaurant, we can start other businesses. Worst comes to worst, we can resell the land and earn the price difference, which is better than letting the money rot in our hands."

This was the so-called land speculation. Although this concept didn't exist in this era, once a good location was chosen, it couldn't possibly make a loss. Food for Immortals was a good example. Compared to the original restaurant, its value had increased by at least forty percent.

Qiaoqiao's eyes lit up. She had been regretting a bit earlier, but now she felt more joyous hearing her big brother support her and offering many perspectives she hadn't thought of. She felt even more enamored with him, marveling at his insight and knowledge.

"Qiaoqiao, don't underestimate yourself, nor doubt your abilities. Whatever you want to do, you can do well. Big brother will always support you."

"Big brother" Qiaoqiao, moved, tightly grasped Lin Wanrong's hand. If her father hadn't been present, she would have thrown herself into his arms already.

Ahem, Old Dong feigned a cough to interrupt the two, seeing that his daughter had completely turned into someone else's housewife. He sighed, "Once a girl grows up, she doesn't belong to her father anymore. I won't meddle anymore. But, Little Lin, when are you going to settle things with Qiaoqiao? This girl is so stubborn; she'll never speak up if you don't."

"Dad" Dong Qiaoqiao called out, her cheeks flushed, lowering her head and said softly, "Big brother still has things to deal with right now, Qiaoqiao is not in a rush."

The matter wasn't settled yet? Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Initially, he had agreed to Uncle Wei's proposition to go to the Xiao family simply in a playful spirit. Who would have thought that he'd indeed become entangled in the affairs of the Xiao family, and was now supposed to help them establish a business. Could it really be a twist of fate? As an educated modern man, he didn't want to believe in the idea of destiny, but how else could he explain the current situation?

"Big brother, big brother, what's the matter?" Qiaoqiao anxiously gripped his arm, causing him to snap out of his thoughts. He noticed that Old Dong had already left, and only Qiaoqiao stood in front of him, tears welling in her eyes. "Big brother, are you unhappy about something? You must tell Qiaoqiao. I can't bear to see you upset."

"You silly girl," Lin Wanrong gently pinched her nose, "As long as you are by my side every day, there's nothing that can make me unhappy."

Qiaoqiao softly responded with a nod, tears in her eyes, and shyly buried her head in his chest.

He truly wished to devour this adorable girl, Qiaoqiao, but seeing her tirelessly bustling about every day, he felt somewhat ignoble for such thoughts. Qiaoqiao was content with just a few moments in his arms each day, how could he take advantage of her? He still lacked enough shamelessness, and needed to cultivate more.

One day, he returned to the Xiao residence quite late and ran into a maid in the garden, "Brother Lin, you're finally back. Miss Qin Xian'er sent several notes today. It seems like she has some urgent business with you. She insisted that we give you the note as soon as you returned."

Only then did Lin Wanrong remember that Qiaoqiao had mentioned at Food for Immortals today that Qin Xian'er had been trying to find him several times but was unsuccessful. What could be so urgent?

Lin Wanrong had just received the note and hadn't even gotten a chance to read it when he saw a delicate figure standing in the middle of the garden. Her gaunt face appeared particularly pale under the moonlight.

"Second Miss?" Lin Wanrong was immediately taken aback.