

## Finest 121

### Chapter 121 The Invitation

Seeing the troubled look on Luo Ning's face, Lin Wanrong said, "Miss Luo, do you think my request is unreasonable?"

Luo Ning furrowed her brows lightly, whispering, "Big brother, these conditions indeed pose a challenge."

Lin Wanrong looked serious. "Miss Luo, do you find this challenging? I don't think so. Have you considered that, while you may have a thousand reasons to ask others for charity, it might put them in a difficult position too?"

Luo Ning bit her lower lip, mulling over his words.

"Certainly, there's a justification for charity, but everyone earns their money with hard work and effort," Lin Wanrong continued. "You may not like to hear this, Miss Luo, but you may only see their wealth without acknowledging the hardship they've gone through. Every single penny they earn is carefully calculated. Even if they've earned their money unscrupulously, they still bear the brunt of criticism and pressure. They have paid their dues. Though fundraising is tough, there's no such thing as a free lunch. If you want to gain something without giving anything in return, why would such a good thing fall into your lap?"

Luo Ning carefully considered his words and suddenly chuckled. "Big brother, I concede that your points are valid. However, by giving us an opportunity, isn't our poetry contest also providing you with one? As you said, it's a win-win situation. You're not at a loss here."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, admiring the young woman's sharp wit. Conversations with her were refreshingly straightforward. He asked, "So, Miss Luo, are you agreeing to my conditions?"

Luo Ning smiled, "Big brother, I think your proposal should be feasible. As long as we are clever in our design to highlight your logo, making people recognize it without disturbing the artistic atmosphere of the poetry contest, it should be fine. What do you think?"

Lin Wanrong nodded, realizing that this was the best she could offer. In this era, advertising was a novel concept, and going overboard might cause backlash.

Suddenly, Luo Ning sighed lightly, "Big brother, do you look down on me for going around asking for donations to hold this poetry contest?"

Lin Wanrong replied solemnly, "That depends on your intention. If you're doing this for fame and to flaunt your reputation as the best female scholar in Jinling, then yes, I would find it distasteful. But I believe you're not that kind of person."

With gratitude, Luo Ning smiled, "Big brother, thank you for being honest with me. Everyone has dreams, and I'm no exception. I've loved poetry since I was a child. My wish is to gather the talented scholars across the world, to share amusing stories and compose poetry together. As for the title of 'best female scholar', it's quite a hollow title, more of a burden than a benefit. What good would it do for me?"

Luo Ning was born into a wealthy family, and it wasn't surprising that she held such dreams. What was commendable was her attention to the overlooked orphans. In this regard, she was truly a thoughtful woman.

Lin Wanrong nodded and said, "Everyone has the right to pursue their dreams, Miss Luo, and I admire your courage. However, there's always a gap between dreams and reality. Be careful not to become so engrossed in your dreams that you lose touch with reality."

After saying this, he sighed inwardly. Young girls are all dreamers, always painting a beautiful picture of the future, oblivious to the harsh realities of the world.

Gratefully, Luo Ning replied, "Big brother, thank you for your advice. I will keep it in mind. However..." She paused, a mischievous smile playing on her lips. "Considering the conditions you've set for this poetry contest, could I also make a small request on my behalf?"

Lin Wanrong looked at her in surprise. "You have another request? Let's be clear, a thousand taels of silver is the limit. Not an extra tael will I part with. I'm a miserly man."

Luo Ning laughed, "Big brother, stop teasing me. My request has nothing to do with money. It's a personal one."

"Personal?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, "What personal request could you possibly have? Be sure it's not something inappropriate. I'm a man of principles."

Luo Ning, hearing his light teasing, simply smiled and said, "I'd like to invite big brother to attend our poetry contest."

"Me, attend?" Lin Wanrong jumped, stunned. Wasn't this like forcing a duck onto a perch? He knew his limitations. He could recite some poetry, but beyond that, he was quite helpless. A poetry contest was a showcase of real talent, there was no room for cheating.

"Miss Luo, are you deliberately trying to make a fool of me? With my abilities, reciting poetry and composing verses are beyond me," Lin Wanrong said, showing a rare humility.

Luo Ning shook her head, seriously replying, "Big brother, you underestimate yourself. You may not realize, but the four timeless couplets you've hung on the fourth floor of the 'Food for Immortals' have not only made you famous throughout Jinling, but have also reached far and wide to the counties of Jiangsu. Every day, countless scholars come here to admire your couplets, and none have yet managed to complete the second line. If you aren't qualified to participate in this poetry contest, then who in Jinling would be?"

Sighing in feigned distress, Lin Wanrong shook his head, "Being talented is a curse sometimes. Being invited by Miss Luo is something to be envious of. In that case, I'll go and observe. But let's be clear in advance, don't expect me to compose any poetry. I'm a modest man. While you all engage in versifying, I'll just enjoy my wine and admire the beauties. That sounds enjoyable." His tone shifted, and he laughed, "However, I do have a concern."

"What are you worried about, big brother?" Luo Ning asked, curious.

"I'm worried that, unintentionally, I might steal the title of 'Jinling's Top Scholar'. That would be quite embarrassing," he declared, boasting unashamedly.

Seeing Luo Ning's surprised expression, Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "Am I not the last genius on the rank?"

Covering her smile with a hand, Luo Ning replied, "Brother Lin, you're being too modest. If you're the last, then I fear Jinling would have no scholars left."

Lin Wanrong felt flattered by her high estimation of him. Luckily, he was clear-headed and wouldn't be fooled by such flattery. He nodded and said, "In that case, I'll go enjoy this feast."

When Luo Ning heard him compare the poetry contest to a feast, she was slightly irritated but also found it amusing. She sighed and said, "If all you want is a feast, that can be arranged. Not only will scholars from far and wide be present, but even ladies from wealthy families will be in attendance. You'll have a feast for your eyes, big brother. Every poetry contest produces romantic stories of talented men and beautiful women. This one won't disappoint you."

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, I knew it! This so-called poetry contest is just a collective blind date. But, getting to admire some beauties would indeed be a pleasant experience.

Seeing Luo Ning's serene expression and apparent anticipation for the poetry contest, he couldn't help but chuckle. "I almost forgot. Miss Luo, you're also of marriageable age. Perhaps one of those romantic tales will involve you."

Luo Ning only smiled lightly, "Big brother, you must be joking with me. Although I'm a woman, I've not yet considered such matters. Please, no more teasing."

Seeing her calm demeanor, seemingly undisturbed, Lin Wanrong felt a measure of respect for her. This woman indeed had her own standing.

As Luo Ning was Luo Yuan's sister and he held the principle of not coveting the grass next to his burrow, he didn't tease her excessively. However, he'd long forgotten that he'd already trespassed in Qiaoqiao's territory.

Luo Ning was a very determined woman. After their conversation, she left hastily, claiming that the imminent poetry contest required her attention and she couldn't stay long. Lin Wanrong thought, You didn't mention this when you were asking for my silver. Truly a shrewd one, capable of rivaling me.

Soon, Luo Yuan and Dong Qingshan returned. Upon seeing Lin Wanrong, both paused. Dong Qingshan exclaimed joyfully, "Big Brother, you're back!" Luo Yuan, trailing behind him, also looked pleased.

Grinning, Lin Wanrong replied, "What else should I do? Stay in the bandit lair to celebrate the new year?"

Luo Yuan laughed, "Qingshan and I rushed to the Xiao residence as soon as we heard you were back. But we waited in the guest room for half a day without seeing you. We had poor Young Master Guo to keep us company."

In front of his younger brother-in-law, Lin Wanrong couldn't admit he had been playing truant and flirting in the afternoon. So he just chuckled and said, "Eldest Miss Xiao had some urgent tasks for me this afternoon. She sent me to the Rosy Cloud Temple."

Dong Qingshan looked shocked. "Big Brother, are you really getting along with Eldest Miss Xiao?"

Darn it, Qingshan is still so coarse, thought Lin Wanrong, but he couldn't help but appreciate the clever use of the word 'getting along.' He stifled a laugh and replied, "Not quite there yet, but making progress."

Dong Qingshan had not read many books and his speech was often filled with market-place vulgarities, which oddly enough, fit Lin Wanrong's tastes. Luo Yuan, who was not a traditional scholarly gentleman, also struggled to suppress his laughter as he said to Lin Wanrong, "Big brother, I heard that Eldest Miss Xiao has been travelling abroad for years, and I haven't seen her yet. I only heard she's incredibly beautiful. If there's a chance, please introduce her to me as well."

Speaking of Eldest Miss Xiao, Lin Wanrong could only wryly smile. How could he introduce her to Luo Yuan when they were on such different paths? Seeing Luo Yuan's sneaky gaze, Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "It's true that she's beautiful, but her temper is quite a distance from perfect, not nearly as pleasant as your sister, Miss Luo."

"Right, big brother, what did my sister come to see you about?" Luo Yuan asked. When he had just arrived, he saw Luo Ning leaving without even having a chance to speak.

"Your sister, she came to deliver an invitation to me," Lin Wanrong chuckled and explained Luo Ning's request for his help.

Luo Yuan knew about the poetry contest and nodded, "Big brother, my sister is good in many ways, but she can be overly tenacious. It's not appropriate for her, as a woman, to take the lead in this poetry contest. The number one scholar in Jinling, Hou Yuebai, offered to take responsibility for the charity, but she refused him."

Lin Wanrong was aware of the stories about the top male scholar and top talented lady of Jinling. He laughed, "I did hear that this Young Master Hou is quite persistent in pursuing your sister."

Luo Yuan nodded and said, "That's true. They belong to the same poetry society and have many opportunities to meet. Hou Yuebai often finds excuses to discuss poetry with my sister. I've been annoyed just witnessing it, let alone how my sister must feel. I believe this is why she doesn't want Hou Yuebai's help."

Indeed, Luo Ning was a woman of principle. Recalling her words, Lin Wanrong sighed, "Your sister is a person who bravely pursues her dreams. That's not an easy thing to achieve."

Luo Yuan glanced at Lin Wanrong and suddenly laughed, "Big brother, I suggest you not set your sights on my sister."

Lin Wanrong spat out the tea he had just sipped. This Luo Yuan was too straightforward, even Lin Wanrong himself was taken aback. Choosing him as a younger brother seemed to have been a good choice.

"Little Luo, since you're so frank, I'll be equally forthright," Lin Wanrong said, patting Luo Yuan's shoulder, "I'm not interested in your sister. I generally keep my distance from those bearing the title of 'talented lady.' Tell your sister not to take an interest in me. I have quite a charm, those who have met me know."

Qingshan, who was beside them, scoffed, "Big brother, I think Miss Luo is quite nice. She's beautiful and is a close friend of my sister. They get along well and wouldn't fight. Why don't you just marry her? She can keep my sister company."

Damn it, Qingshan, you beast. Are you doing this for my sake or for your sister's? How could you say such a thing? Do you think I am that kind of person? Lin Wanrong thought, taken aback.

Luo Yuan laughed heartily, "Big brother, don't misunderstand. My sister once said the man she fancies should be extraordinary, with a wealth of experiences and a broad mind. He should be educated, excelling both in literary talent and martial arts. No aspect should be lacking."

Lin Wanrong exclaimed in surprise, "How did your sister come to know all of my qualities?"

Luo Yuan laughed out loud. Having spent much time with Lin Wanrong, he was well acquainted with his character. While Lin Wanrong was exceptionally clever, his elegance and martial skills were somewhat lacking. Last time at Miaoyu Pavilion, Lin Wanrong managed to win over Miss Qin Xian'er with some obscure poetry he conjured up. However, Luo Yuan knew Lin Wanrong's martial prowess would hardly impress his sister. Hence, he earnestly advised Lin Wanrong to steer clear of her, having seen too many men fall short in the past.

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, This young lady certainly has high standards. What use is literary talent and martial arts? Can they feed you? I may possess unmatched skills, but I'm still earning a living honestly. You girls have read too many romance novels and dream of a fairytale. If I weren't uninterested in you, I'd surely enchant you with my charm, making you fall head over heels.

The trio burst into laughter, effectively ending the absurd topic.

After sharing his recent encounters with his two friends, Luo Yuan spoke with resentment, "The rebels of the White Lotus Sect are truly rampant, wreaking havoc and committing atrocities in Jinling. My father's guards are incapable of handling them. He has tried several times to persuade the Commander-in-Chief Cheng De to deploy troops, but the old fox always seems to resist. To me, this old man and the White Lotus Sect might be in cahoots."

Ever since Tao Dongcheng led the troops up the mountain that night, Lin Wanrong had suspected that Cheng De, Tao Dongcheng, and the White Lotus Sect were interconnected. Regrettably, he had not seen the true face of their master nor heard their voice without distortion, leaving him somewhat disappointed.

However, if someone could integrate these three forces, the power of their master must be considerable. Lin thought to himself, Little Luo's father, the Governor of Jiangsu, Luo Min, should have some clues. I should find some time to visit this old fox.

"By the way, Qingshan, how is the situation between the Hung Hing Gang and the Black Dragon Association lately?" Lin Wanrong asked, remembering the matter.

Dong Qingshan slapped the table angrily, "That damned Wu Zhenghu is getting more and more out of line. There are more and more disturbances in the southern part of the city. They are all spies planted by Wu Zhenghu. If it wasn't for Luo Yuan constantly advising me, I would have acted a long time ago."

"Oh?" Lin Wanrong looked at Luo Yuan with interest. "Little Luo, what do you make of this situation?"

A glint flashed in Luo Yuan's eyes. "Vengeance is not overdue; its time has yet to come. Let them be arrogant for a few more days. When they're at their most complacent, we will be well-prepared and concentrate our efforts to cut off one of their claws, ensuring they never dare to be arrogant again."

Lin Wanrong chuckled. Knowing that Cheng Ruinian was backing the Black Dragon Association only bolstered Luo Yuan's fighting spirit. While Cheng Ruinian merely lent support to the Black Dragon Association, Luo Yuan was one of the leaders of the Hung Hing Gang. With his status alone, Hung Hing was invincible. With Luo Yuan's astuteness and Dong Qingshan's strength, although Hung Hing was temporarily weaker, they showed great potential.

As for the matters of Hung Hing, Lin Wanrong didn't want to meddle too much. With these two brothers, he was confident enough. He would let them handle these matters. Even if there were some setbacks, that was the price of growth, which would only make them more mature.

"By the way, Little Luo, does your father know you've joined Hung Hing?" Lin Wanrong suddenly asked.

Luo Yuan shook his head. "I'm not sure. My father only instructed me to get closer to you, saying that you're our Luo family's benefactor. He wouldn't answer anything else, even if I asked."

Benefactor, my foot. This old man is a crafty fox. If Lin Wanrong wasn't mistaken, Luo Min had known about Luo Yuan joining Hung Hing. His lack of intervention was partly because of Lin Wanrong being the so-called benefactor, and partly because he probably wanted to use Hung Hing to counter the Black Dragon Association supported by Cheng De.

Having even put his own son into this game, this old fox was really putting a lot on the line. Why did he have so much confidence in me? Lin Wanrong thought for a while but couldn't figure it out. However, one thing was certain: whether willingly or reluctantly, the old fox was now on his side, and there was no escaping that fact.

Having confirmed this, Lin Wanrong had fewer worries. More questions could wait until he had a chance to meet the old fox.

After chatting for a while with his brothers, Lin Wanrong went upstairs, worried about Qiaoqiao's condition. But he found the young girl sleeping soundly, a sweet smile on her face in her dream. Seeing her brought a sense of tranquility and peace to his heart.



A thought suddenly sprang into his mind: What would it be like if he put Yushuang, Qingxuan, and Qiaoqiao together? Would they fight? Alas, this was a troubling question indeed.

## Chapter 122 A Master

When Lin Wanrong left the restaurant, the night had already fallen deep. Initially, according to his plans, he wanted to spend quality time with Qiaoqiao that night. If not, he'd thought of merely passing time in her room. However, old Dong drove him out without any mercy. It seemed that old Dong's mindset still needed further liberation, and it would be best if he could learn to be more like Qingshan.

Today, he had seen two beautiful women, Yushuang and Qiaoqiao, and although this brought him pleasure, there was a twinge of regret. Yushuang had to go to the temple to meditate and eat vegetarian meals, while Qiaoqiao was sick. Additionally, he was driven out by Qiaoqiao's father, which left Lin Wanrong somewhat regretful.

Shaking his head helplessly, he walked a bit before he started to notice something was wrong with his surroundings.

He had walked this small path countless times, and although it was usually quite tranquil, it had never been as deserted as tonightthere was not a single soul in sight.

Lin Wanrong, who had already developed keen senses, was puzzled. As he listened, he heard a few strains of wind noise. Turning back, he saw two shadowy figures, fast as shooting stars, rushing towards him.

After inheriting half of Xiao Qingxuan's skills, his reactions had become quicker, and his eyesight had improved significantly. He saw from afar that the two figures moved with quick, powerful stridesit was clear that they were skilled. Taking in the eerie silence all around, he realized, these two were undoubtedly here for him.

Simultaneously, two more figures appeared silently behind him, surrounding him tightly in a circle along with the other two.

Lin Wanrong looked around and saw that all four men were strong and stout, their arms as thick as thighs. They were intimidating figures standing there with an air of menace.

Darn it, such audacity, just a few thugs acting like they're the city patrol? Lin Wanrong cursed silently in his heart but put on a smile and said, "Gentlemen, stopping me late at night, may I know the purpose?"

One of the men, who appeared to be the leader, said in a loud voice, "Lin San, our young master has requested your presence." His voice was deep and full of vigor, evidently a well-trained individual.

"Young Master? Which Young Master?" Lin Wanrong asked, his mind racing.

The four men's aggressive postures suggested that this "young master" bore a grudge against him. In Jinling City, only Tao Dongcheng had a score to settle with him. Could it be Tao Dongcheng who had sent these men?

"I have no relation or obligation to your Young Master Tao. Why does he summon me at this late hour?" Lin Wanrong ventured.

"Less talk, more walking." The seemingly leader of the four men commanded loudly, reaching out to grab him.

All four men were clearly trained fighters. The leader's hand shot out with lightning speed, so quick that it would bewilder any onlooker.

At first, Lin Wanrong was startled. But when he took a closer look, the man's movements seemed to slow down. A thrill of delight surged in him, I too am a master now, what should I fear?

Understanding the essence of fighting where actions speak louder than words, he decided to throw the first punch. Silently, he aimed at the man's wrist and launched a punch with all his might.

Lin Wanrong, having obtained half of Xiao Qingxuan's abilities, had his vision and reflexes enhanced a hundredfold, and his strength seemed endless. The only thing he lacked was technique. However, all techniques in the world were meant for fighting, and despite their countless variations, they had one sole purpose to harm. He didn't like martial arts training and was an expert at slacking off. He thought to himself, It doesn't matter if I don't know the techniques, I just need to maintain one thought counter every move. As long as I don't let this guy land a hit, that's all that matters.

At this moment, both his strength and vision were of the highest order. His punch towards the man attempting to sneak attack him was perfectly timed, hitting him right on the wrist. His strike was full of strength, surprising the man with its power. It was a testament to the theory that having no technique could indeed trump technique.

The man was taken aback, thinking, "This kid has a lot of strength!" Not daring to block Lin directly, he quickly changed his punch to a kick. The other three men thought their elder brother was going easy on him, and, growing impatient, called out, "Elder brother, quickly subdue this kid!"

As soon as the words fell, they realized something was wrong. The kid they called Lin San not only blocked their elder brother's kick, but he also took the opportunity to throw a punch at his chest, forcing the elder brother to step back.

"Prick the fingers, and go for the shoulders!" The three men shouted together and began to attack.

Lin Wanrong, who had only heard of this technique on television, was far from frightened. Instead, he was pleased. He thought to himself, This clearly indicates that my kung fu skills have been acknowledged by my enemies, and the command sounds so damn good.

Although Xiao Qingxuan was young, due to her mentor's guidance, she was already one of the top fighters in the world. Lin Wanrong, having only half of her skills, was not to be underestimated. Even when encountering top martial artists, he was capable of defending himself.

While he was feeling smug, he suddenly felt a pain in his back he had been hit by a sneak attack. Given his current skills, even if he was slightly lacking in technique, he shouldn't be disadvantaged by these third-rate fighters. The hit he just took was entirely due to his lack of combat experience and his overconfidence.

At this point, his skin was thick, and this hit didn't really bother him. However, it ignited a fury within him. Damn it, I am a master! If I can't beat four of you punks, what the hell am I doing?

He shouted and charged into the fray, battling the four men. He took a couple more hits, but his fighting experience grew rapidly, and his application of his strength became more proficient.

Gradually, in his eyes, the movements of the four men slowed down, their weaknesses glaringly apparent. He was finally beginning to taste the sensation of being a master.

After ten moves, despite being under the siege of four men, Lin Wanrong relied on his superior vision to dodge and weave. He didn't take any more hits. Not only that, his steps became faster, his strikes more ruthless each punch carrying a gust of wind, each move aimed at vital points.

The four burly men were in a state of distress. This Lin San, despite having only a few simple moves like "Black Tiger Steals the Heart" and "Immortal Steals the Peach," executed them in such an unconventional and formless manner, constantly suppressing them. Despite their combined strength, they were unable to overpower him. This scenario truly illustrated the old saying: a master can be defeated by chaos.

However, Lin Wanrong only found the fight more exhilarating and relaxed as it progressed. He firmly believed that truth comes from practice, and the techniques obtained in battle were the most practical. Regardless of what styles, like Arhat Fist or Shaolin Long Fist, were used, the only truth was winning the fight. After acquiring Xiao Qingxuan's abilities, he hadn't had a chance to spar. A rare practice opportunity was before him, and he was battling four-to-one. How could he possibly miss this chance?

Bolstered by abundant stamina, Lin Wanrong was as fierce as if he had taken ten Viagra pills. If not for the purpose of practicing his skills with these four men, the fight would've ended much sooner. Now, he was finally experiencing the thrill of being a master, a sensation that was damn good.

"Four Tigers, stop!" A voice came from behind the men surrounding him. The Four Tigers quickly leaped to the side, halting their assault.

They stopped, but Lin Wanrong didn't. His footwork quickened, and he sent out a rapid flurry of punches, landing them on the chests of the Four Tigers, forcing them to retreat several steps. They all lost their balance and sat down heavily on the ground.

"You...you have no respect for the rules of the martial world?" The leader of the Four Tigers spat out a mouthful of fresh blood, enraged.

"Four of you attacking me, and now you want to lecture me about rules?" Lin Wanrong chuckled coldly. "Four Tigers, right? Do you believe I can turn you into Dead Tigers?"

The four men glared at Lin Wanrong, but they didn't dare to speak.

Lin Wanrong glanced at the man who had intervened. He saw him sitting calmly on a white horse, his thick brows and large eyes making him incredibly annoying. Damn it, will you die if you don't ride a white horse for a day?

In his heart, he held great contempt, but on his face, he smiled, "Young Master Tao, out for a stroll this late?"

Tao Dongcheng glanced at his Four Tigers, thinking, When I first met you four, you had some skills, defeating many good men, which is why I tried so hard to recruit you. But today, you can't even beat a servant from someone's home, bringing shame to me. He turned to Lin Wanrong, "Lin San, I asked someone to fetch you today only to ask you a few questions. Please don't misunderstand."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Misunderstand? Young Master Tao, do you have any letters for me to deliver to the Eldest Miss? You could have simply sent a servant, why send out the Four Tigers?"

Tao Dongcheng, looking annoyed, shot the Four Tigers a glance. He had to swallow this humiliation. Turning to Lin Wanrong, he said, "Lin San, let's be clear. I only want to know why you persistently disrupt my relationship with Yuruo."

"You and the Eldest Miss have a relationship?" Lin Wanrong feigned surprise, "I haven't noticed. Besides, when have I ever interfered with your affairs? I'm not particularly good at such things."

Tao Dongcheng snorted, "Let's not mention the incident on Purple Gold Mountain for now, but after I painstakingly asked Commander Cheng to bring soldiers to rescue Yuruo and you in Dangtu, not only did you show no gratitude, you even knocked me off my horse. Why did you take Yuruo away? What are your intentions?" By the end of his statement, Tao Dongcheng's expression had turned stern.

Playing the victim, are we? Lin Wanrong thought, You're not as good at this game as I am. Feigning surprise, he exclaimed, "So it was Young Master Tao who came to our rescue that day! Oh, what a grave misunderstanding, blaming a good person. That day, the Eldest Miss and I were trapped on the mountain for three days, we were terrified. Seeing soldiers rushing up, how could we distinguish friend from foe? The sight of swords and spears scared us, so we ran as far away as we could. I had no idea you were wronged, Young Master Tao, I'm truly ashamed."

Tao Dongcheng, infuriated by Lin Wanrong's glib words, retorted, "Lin San, do you take me for a child? Why were the bandits so familiar with the Xiao family? Why did they specifically take you? Why did you run when you saw me leading the soldiers up the mountain? If my guess is correct, you must be colluding with the White Lotus Sect's bandits to defraud the Xiao family, and yet Miss Xiao trusts you so much."

This Tao Dongcheng was a true hypocrite, but Lin Wanrong, too, was an unyielding villain. He chuckled, "Young Master Tao, your guess is very reasonable. However, you should be discussing this with the Eldest Miss, not me."

Tao Dongcheng fell silent. Lin Wanrong glanced at him with contempt and sighed, "Compared to your Master, your cunning really falls short."

Tao Dongcheng started, "What did you say? Master and servant?"

Damn it, just keep pretending. Lin Wanrong ignored him, chuckling coldly, "That night you and your Master were together, but have you ever wondered how I escaped from your hands? Who sent someone to save me?"

Tao Dongcheng remained silent, his face ashen.

Lin Wanrong knew he had hit the nail on the head. Only a handful of people knew how he had escaped that day and thwarted their plans. Tao Dongcheng and his Master must have been perplexed.

Since he had thoroughly fallen out with Tao Dongcheng, Lin Wanrong decided to drive the point home. He strolled a few steps, hands behind his back, then suddenly laughed, "Go back and tell your Master, he should behave himself. He's not the number one in the world."

"You, you--" Tao Dongcheng couldn't help but change color, shocked by his words.

"Who could rescue me from the White Lotus Sect and treat the White Lotus Sect and your Master as if they were nothing? How many such people are there in the world?" Lin Wanrong chuckled.

"Who... who exactly are you?" Tao Dongcheng stammered.

This was precisely what was bothering him. Facing this seemingly worthless servant of the Xiao family, he felt a sense of inscrutability.

"It doesn't matter who I am, I just want to advise you, it's best to stay honest," Lin Wanrong said coldly.

Strike the snake on its weakest spot. These words, a mix of truth and falsehood, deceit and persuasion, were Lin Wanrong's psychological warfare weapons.

Tao Dongcheng's Master was colluding with the White Lotus Sect, yet didn't dare to reveal his true identity, which surely indicated a grand scheme behind the scenes. At the same time, it suggested that there must be people he greatly feared. Since he was capable of manipulating Cheng De, the Commander-in-chief of Jiangsu, it was certain that he and Lu Min, the Governor of Jiangsu, were not on the same side. And now, Lin Wanrong was in good standing with the son of Lu Min. They were undoubtedly uncertain about Lin Wanrong and dared not act recklessly. So Lin Wanrong let them guess for themselves.

Tao Dongcheng racked his brains and grew increasingly frightened. Judging from Lin San's relationship with Luo Yuan, it was clear that Lin San and the Governor belonged to the same faction. He recalled his Master's instructions not to offend Luo Min at this moment, which meant he couldn't act against Lin San either. Grinding his teeth in frustration, he swung himself onto his horse and motioned to the Four Tigers, "Let's go."

Damn, they're leaving just like that? Lin Wanrong said to the Four Tigers, "Why don't a few of you stay behind? We can continue fighting."

The Four Tigers' eyes flared with anger and a hint of fear, clearly somewhat intimidated by Lin Wanrong's fighting prowess. Lin Wanrong burst out laughing. It was truly exhilarating to be a skilled fighter, and he still had two unused weapons.

Tao Dongcheng could no longer contain himself. He yelled from atop his horse, "Lin San, do not push your luck!"

I just can't stand you, what about it? Lin Wanrong despised these princely types on their white horses. If you've got guts, fight with real weapons like me. Seeing this arrogant young man, he wondered if he had any sisters. If so, Lin Wanrong would certainly flirt with them, then dump them, then flirt again, tormenting them till they wished for death. He thought smugly.

Once Tao Dongcheng and his party had retreated into the distance, Lin Wanrong turned to leave, but was stopped by a soft sigh. He turned around to see a delicate figure standing under the eaves of a distant house, looking at him with an expression of melancholy.

Lin Wanrong was taken aback. After a long pause, he finally said, "How did you get here?"

Chapter 123 In A Dilemma

The woman watched him for a long time before slowly approaching him. In a soft voice, she said, "When did you learn martial arts, Young Master? Why was I not aware of it?"

Lin Wanrong laughed without answering her question. Instead, he asked, "Miss Qin, how did you end up here?"

Qin Xian'er's eyes flashed with embarrassment. "If I'm not here, then where would I be? I haven't seen you for two days, and you've already acquired such extraordinary martial skills. It's truly something to be celebrated."

Her surprise was evident. The day she had rescued him, he hadn't possessed any martial abilities. How could he have obtained such formidable power within just a few days?

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, though he didn't know how to explain. The situation indeed seemed inexplicable. Could it be due to a combination of practice and cultivation?

Seeing his struggle, Qin Xian'er sighed softly. "If you don't wish to speak, how can I force you? Now that I see you have the strength to protect yourself, I feel relieved."

Lin Wanrong nodded, saying, "It's a long story, Miss Qin. But what about you, how did you come to be here?"

Qin Xian'er glanced at him, "After I went back to the well that day, I couldn't find you and was quite worried. These past few days, I've been concerned about your safety. I didn't expect you to have overcome danger already. Young Master, how did you get out initially?"

Lin Wanrong was touched, considering that Qin Xian'er, a member of the White Lotus Sect, had come to aid him, an enemy of the sect. Not only this, but she also went to great lengths to find an excuse to search for him. Her affection was truly profound.

"I was rescued by a friend that day," Lin Wanrong replied, deliberately omitting the name of Xiao Qingxuan, knowing Qin Xian'er wasn't fond of her.

Qin Xian'er sighed suddenly, "Why hide it from me, Young Master? If I'm not wrong, your friend must be Xiao Qingxuan, isn't she?"



Lin Wanrong was taken aback, "How did you know?"

Qin Xian'er snorted, "That vixen has a very unique perfume. I recognized it once I smelled it. Upon returning to the well, I detected the same scent. If not her, then who else could it be?"

Lin Wanrong broke into a cold sweat. The unique powder Xiao Qingxuan had on was probably the jasmine perfume he had given her. It was indeed distinctive, and women were sensitive to such scents. That Qin Xian'er could identify Xiao Qingxuan from the lingering faint fragrance was a testament to a woman's imaginative power.

Seeing Lin Wanrong's surprised expression, Qin Xian'er knew she had guessed correctly. She humphed and gritted her teeth, "I knew it was that vixen. She really knows her ways, being able to find that place. When I went to save you, she sneaked behind me, opportunistically helping you escape, leaving a deeper impression on you. If such stealth and advantage-taking aren't antagonizing me, then what is it?"

Dear lord, Qin Xian'er's logic was indeed childlike, though charming. Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "It's not as dramatic as you imagine. Qingxuan feared I would be in danger there, so she led me out. She even mentioned wanting to thank you."

Qin Xian'er glanced at him, speaking softly, "Young Master, don't fabricate stories. If she ever thanks me, the sun would rise from the west. Humph, with her competing against me like this, I am determined to kill her."

It was hard to recall how many times she had threatened to kill Xiao Qingxuan. Lin Wanrong had become numb to it and sighed, "Xian'er, do you really harbor such intense resentment towards Qingxuan that you're constantly thinking about killing her?"

Qin Xian'er shook her head, "Young Master, you don't understand. My Master and her Master have been adversaries for many years. She and I are naturally incompatible. Moreover, she took away my" Her face reddened as she stole a glance at Lin Wanrong but didn't finish her sentence.

Lin Wanrong feigned confusion, "Even if your Masters are enemies, you don't need to dwell on killing her every day. I see Qingxuan treating you well, and she doesn't seem to want to kill you at every opportunity."

Qin Xian'er smiled bitterly, "That's her hypocrisy. Both her and her Master share the same character."

Xiao Qingxuan was Lin Wanrong's wife, so hearing Qin Xian'er speak so disrespectfully, he couldn't help but retort angrily, "Xian'er, don't randomly slander Qingxuan. She's not the person you think she is."

Tears welled up in Qin Xian'er's eyes, and she bit her lip, "Young Master, is this how you see me? Is Xiao Qingxuan so noble in your eyes that no one can criticize her?"

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, She's my wife, isn't criticizing her the same as criticizing me?

Seeing Qin Xian'er's tearful look, and considering her genuine affection towards him, he didn't have the heart to reproach her further. "Xian'er, the world doesn't revolve around killing. There are many other joyful things. For instance, us conversing and singing little tunes in Miaoyu Pavilion every day. Isn't that also pleasant?"

Qin Xian'er sighed, "Only when I'm speaking with you, Young Master, can I find such joy. If it were anyone else, they couldn't bear even a few words from me. Young Master, Xian'er is a demoness of the White Lotus Sect. This is my true nature. Do you find me repulsive because of this?"

To be honest, Qin Xian'er's character was indeed different and challenging.

Seeing Lin Wanrong silent for a long time, Qin Xian'er smiled sadly, "I know you don't like my nature. It's not innate, but the result of experiencing a tragedy." Her tone shifted, becoming melancholic, "Young Master, if Xian'er weren't a demoness of the White Lotus Sect, but had a different identity, would you like me?"

"What identity?" Lin Wanrong asked subconsciously.

Qin Xian'er gritted her teeth, speaking softly, "For example, if I were a daughter of the Emperor, would you like me?"

"A princess?" Damn, stop joking around. If someone with your temperament could become a princess, then I might as well be the emperor. Seeing Qin Xian'er's sour and bitter expression, Lin Wanrong was unsure whether she was being truthful or not. This demoness of the White Lotus Sect was truly unique.

Noticing the disbelief on his face, Qin Xian'er chuckled, "I'm just joking with you. I, as a demoness of the White Lotus Sect, oppose the imperial court. How could I possibly be the Emperor's daughter? I was only teasing you." With that, she turned away, biting her red lips as her tears began to fall.

This lass was truly full of character, which made Lin Wanrong feel a pang of sympathy for her. He took her small hand and said, "Xian'er, don't speak like that. You're a beautiful and gentle woman, and regardless of your identity, someone would love you."

"Really?" Qin Xian'er looked up at him, a look of surprise and delight on her face.

Lin Wanrong nodded seriously. Qin Xian'er's face turned pink, and she shyly said, "Thank you, Young Master. Then, Young Master, can you only love Xian'er?"

Lin Wanrong's face changed. Love only her? What about Qingxuan, Qiaoqiao, and Yushuang?

Qin Xian'er noticed his expression and realized it wasn't possible. A hint of anger flashed in her eyes as she whispered, "In that case, I will just kill them all. Let's see who you'll love then."

Her voice was soft, but Lin Wanrong heard her clearly. A chill ran down his spine, and he looked at her coldly, "Miss Qin, if you insist on this, we have nothing further to discuss. If anyone dares to harm the women I love, I will make them wish for death."

Anger surged within him, and he swung his palm, smashing a hole in the green brick wall with a punch.

Qin Xian'er was taken aback. In the few days she hadn't seen him, his skills had improved so dramatically. Seeing him become so aggressive for those women, she felt wronged, and a couple of tears fell as she asked, "Young Master, if Xian'er killed them, would you treat Xian'er like this too?"

Lin Wanrong glanced at her, "It would be the same for anyone. Xian'er, if you were hurt like this, I would also feel the same pain."

Initially, Qin Xian'er was frightened by his intimidating demeanor. But after hearing his subsequent words, she felt a strange mix of surprise and joy, unsure whether to be happy or worried. After a long pause, she gritted her teeth and said, "Young Master, no matter what, I am determined to kill Xiao Qingxuan. When the time comes, Xian'er will die by your hand."

This lass had truly locked horns with Xiao Qingxuan. Lin Wanrong was touched by her stubbornness, yet helpless regarding her obstinacy. Sighing, he said, "Don't speak like this. Although you hate Qingxuan now, after spending more time together, you'll see her good qualities. I feel that, despite your differing temperaments, you two could be like close sisters."

Qin Xian'er felt both shy and delighted, thinking to herself, Who wants to be her sister? Only a fickle man like you could come up with such an idea. She remained silent for a moment before asking, "Young Master, did Xiao Qingxuan teach you these martial arts skills? I can't think of any method that could have enabled you to attain such high-level skills in just two days."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Well, I did indeed use some special methods." He felt somewhat embarrassed mentioning the double cultivation technique.

Qin Xian'er was incredibly curious. What method had Xiao Qingxuan employed that turned him from a weak scholar into a martial arts master so quickly? However, as Lin Wanrong was unwilling to divulge, she could only sigh dejectedly, thinking to herself that she was still different from Xiao Qingxuan in his heart. Being naturally strong-willed, she hated losing in anything. Now, she didn't even know how her rival had won, which was quite a bitter pill to swallow.

"If I knew the method, I would certainly help the Young Master acquire these skills," Qin Xian'er said in a low voice.

Lin Wanrong shook his head helplessly. This girl was incredibly competitive, even unwilling to lose to Xiao Qingxuan in this matter.

"I know Young Master doesn't wish to discuss this with me, but whatever Xiao Qingxuan can do, I, Qin Xian'er, can certainly do as well. You must believe me, Young Master."

Seeing her tearful eyes and genuine sincerity, Lin Wanrong felt both touched and amused. This stubborn lass didn't understand that it wasn't that he didn't want to tell her; it was the cultivation technique that was rather intimate. He wouldn't mind repeating it, but he feared she might not be willing.

He laughed heartily and took Xian'er's hand, saying, "This matter is quite private. If an opportunity presents itself in the future, we can experience it firsthand."

On hearing this, Qin Xian'er exclaimed in surprise and delight, "Really?"

Lin Wanrong nodded seriously, while inwardly he was overjoyed. He thought to himself that this girl was quite gullible. As the demoness of the White Lotus Sect, she was usually the one deceiving others. However, she was completely disarmed when dealing with Lin Wanrong. The saying 'every creature has its nemesis' seemed apt.

After a period of silence, Qin Xian'er noticed that it was getting late. She finally gathered the courage to say, "Young Master, I sneaked out without their knowledge to find you. It's getting late, and I need to leave now."

Lin Wanrong asked, "Where are you going?"

Qin Xian'er shook her head, "My master has summoned me back to Jining. I don't know when I'll be able to see Young Master again."

Lin Wanrong heaved a sigh of relief. Finally, this troublesome girl was leaving. Who knew when she might act on a whim and try to kill Yushuang and Qiaoqiao? However, due to her deep affection, he couldn't hit or scold her, leaving him in quite a predicament. Now that she was leaving, it would give Lin Wanrong some time to figure out a solution.

Qin Xian'er sighed softly, pulling out a small, black object about the size of a bamboo tube from her bosom. In a gentle voice, she said, "Initially, I was worried about Young Master without martial arts skills, fearing that you might face a disaster like last time. I specifically found this for you as a gift. I didn't expect that you would now become a martial arts master who can compete with the best. It seems my thoughts were in vain."

Hearing Qin Xian'er praise him as a top-notch expert, Lin Wanrong thought to himself, this girl's skills were comparable to Qingxuan's. If she said as much, his martial arts must not be lacking. However, he was rather curious. This dark object that Qin Xian'er had gone to great lengths to collect, what on earth was it that made her treat it so seriously?

"What is this?" Lin Wanrong asked.

A slight smile appeared on Qin Xian'er's face. She opened the black tube to reveal hundreds of densely packed silver needles inside, their tips gleaming with a blue light. It was apparent they had been coated in poison. She said with a smile, "This is called a Bee Needle, specially designed to penetrate the aura of expert martial artists. Just pull this small mechanism, and hundreds of bee

needles can shoot out, catching people off guard. The poison on this needle is something I personally concocted. Without the unique antidote, anyone touched by it would die."

"I want it, I want it," Lin Wanrong immediately declared loudly. Damn, with such a great tool, only a fool wouldn't want it. His own martial arts were not weak, yet he lacked any sense of responsibility as an expert martial artist. Anything that was beneficial to him, be it poison needles or firearms, he would take it all.

The poison needles that Qin Xian'er had created were tools for sneak attacks and incredibly toxic. Real experts would definitely disdain to use such methods. Yet Lin Wanrong was an exception. He welcomed anything that was advantageous to him.

A smile spread across Qin Xian'er's face, and she said with joy, "Young Master, do you really want this? Aren't you afraid people will say you're ruthless?" She was the Demoness of the White Lotus, used to being criticized, so naturally she felt elated when Lin Wanrong so readily accepted her gift.

Damn it, I fear I'm not ruthless enough, Lin Wanrong thought, feeling for the first time a sense of kinship with this demoness. He laughed and said, "Martial arts are used for killing, and so is this poison needle. There is no difference between the two. Besides, this is a token of your affection, Xian'er. How could I reject it?"

Qin Xian'er blushed, saying with a shy smile, "Young Master, you are so kind to me." Lin Wanrong benefited but also managed to earn Qin Xian'er's deep gratitude. He really knew how to make a good deal.

Qin Xian'er handed the poison needles to Lin Wanrong and taught him how to use them. Lin Wanrong, moved, took advantage of the moment to hold Qin Xian'er's hand, stroking it delicately as he said in his carefree manner, "Xian'er, why don't you stay today? The method to use these needles is too complex. Let's find an inn, where you can teach me properly. I can also detail my cultivation process for you"

Qin Xian'er blushed to her ears, gave him a deep look, bit her lip, and like a light leaf, she drifted off into the distance.

"Once I've killed Xiao Qingxuan, Xian'er will devote everything to you, Young Master," Qin Xian'er's shy yet joyous murmur echoed in the wind. The words fell on Lin Wanrong's ears, sending a chill from the top of his head down to his toes.

## Chapter 124 A Great Invention

Lin Wanrong was quite concerned about Qin Xian'er's words. Now, Xiao Qingxuan had become the person closest to him in this world, and he was unwilling to let her face any danger.

He had to figure out a solution. If all else failed, he would strike at Qin Xian'er when chaos ensued. He didn't believe that this little girl, despite her extraordinary skills, could withstand his dual golden guns. A mischievous smile graced his face.

Returning to his little nest in the Xiao family, he couldn't fall asleep for a long time. The image of Xiao Qingxuan continually lingered in his mind. It seemed that Xiao Qingxuan's family was undoubtedly wealthy or noble. To reduce the resistance between them, he needed to further strengthen his capabilities.

His martial arts skills were impressive, combined with his poisoned needles and firearms, even if he encountered the unbeatable Dongfang Bubai, he could put up a good fight. At present, the restaurant Food for Immortals managed by old Dong and Qiaoqiao was doing great, earning a fortune every day. The lingerie and perfume business of the Xiao family was also exceptionally successful, particularly the perfume business, which was incredibly profitable.

Unfortunately, due to production capacity issues, the volume of perfume production was still not up to par. There was money to be made, but he couldn't seize the opportunity, which frustrated him. Moreover, relying solely on the perfume business seemed too simplistic. He thought of diversifying into other related businesses, gradually perfecting his product line. With a wider variety of products, there would be more opportunities to earn money.

In fact, ever since the birth of the perfume, he had an idea. Since he was making perfume, why not make other daily necessities as well? With perfume, he could also make soap.

Soap, a simple product with straightforward ingredients that were taught in middle school chemistry textbooks. Lin Wanrong even conducted an experiment during class, just mix fats with caustic soda and heat them at a high temperature, the process wasn't complicated, which was conducive to mass production.

There were two types of soap, laundry soap and bathroom soap. The process of making laundry soap was crude; it could be directly extracted by mixing animal fats with caustic soda. To save costs, one could add ten to twenty percent of rosin. As for bathroom soap, the principle was the same, but the process was slightly more complex. It required vegetable oils and caustic soda, then purification, and finally, perfume was added.

The perfume wasn't an issue, as the perfume making process left a lot of floral residue, which could be effectively recycled.

With the experience of making perfume, Lin Wanrong's confidence had increased a lot. Once this soap was produced, it would become another highly profitable product like perfume. A single perfume and restaurant were enough, and with this soap industry, he would instantly possess three golden geese laying eggs, two of which were his exclusive property. It would be hard not to prosper.

With this idea, he became excited, his heart itching with anticipation. This invention was entirely his own. If this era had an Academy of Sciences, he would have been the president long ago.

He also wanted to make products like shampoo and facial cleanser, but unfortunately, he wasn't very familiar with these things. His greatest regret was that he hadn't thoroughly studied the composition of Viagra in the past. If he had the patent for Viagra, by heaven, manufacturing a few hundred of those blue little pills and exclusively selling them to emperors and ministers, he'd become obscenely rich, and it would be an injustice if he didn't.

That night, he was restless, thrilled and jubilant over his great invention, and as a result, he didn't sleep a wink. The next morning, he got up early and hurriedly left.

Walking into the center of the courtyard, he saw the Eldest Miss swaying gracefully as she entered from outside. It turned out she had stayed overnight at the Rosy Cloud Temple with the Second Miss. The sisters talked all night and she only returned this morning.

Upon seeing Lin San heading out with a joyful smile on his face, not even sparing her a glance, Xiao Yuruo stopped him, "Lin San, where are you going?"

Lin Wanrong halted, recognized the person, and smiled, "Oh, it's the Eldest Miss. I'm off to buy some lard."

Xiao Yuruo looked at him in surprise, "You're not a cook, why do you need that?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Some things are better left a secret."



Seeing his mysterious behavior, the Eldest Miss thought, 'This guy must be up to something again.' Having witnessed the power of the perfume, she was quite curious about him, and said, "I have nothing to do this morning, so I'll go with you."

The Eldest Miss accompanying him to buy lard? That didn't sound right. Lin Wanrong made a bitter face, "Eldest Miss, please don't torment me. You're a dignitary; you shouldn't be messing around with me. How is the promotion of the perfume going?"

Xiao Yuruo nodded, "The promotion is going very well. Right, we are going to visit Jinling Poetry Society the day after tomorrow. You should come with me; it'll be a good experience for you and might be useful in the future."

Upon hearing this, Lin Wanrong understood. The Eldest Miss was grooming him. She probably wanted to turn him into a white-collar backbone of the Xiao family. Interesting, he thought.

Humbly, for once, he smiled and said, "If it's the Eldest Miss's order, I will naturally follow. But what exactly is this Jinling Poetry Society?"

The Eldest Miss nodded, thinking, 'If you had this humble attitude every day, I wouldn't always give you the cold shoulder.'

"The Jinling Poetry Society is the largest reading institution in Jinling, gathering many famous talents. If our perfume can be successfully promoted among them, it would be a huge success."

Lin Wanrong nodded. He understood the logic; it was the star effect. The talents of this era were comparable to the posturing celebrities in his previous life. If he could find a beautiful and talented woman to say, "Cleanliness is next to healthiness," it would be difficult for it not to become a sensation throughout the Great Hua.

Lost in his thoughts, he heard the Eldest Miss continue, "The Jinling Poetry Society is a gathering place for the most influential figures in Jinling. It's not just the most talented man in Jinling, Hou Yuebai, and Yangzhou's number one talent, Yu Wenpo, but also the most talented woman in Jinling, Miss Luo Ning, and many ladies of prestigious families under her. If we can find opportunities among them, our perfume will be firmly established in Jinling."

The Eldest Miss seemed to be in a good mood today. She was uncharacteristically patient, taking the time to explain the business intricacies to him. It was clear that she was serious about grooming him to be a core member of the Xiao family.

With a dismissive smirk, Lin Wanrong realized that the Jinling Poetry Society was merely a front maintained by Luo Ning and others. However, the Eldest Miss had chosen this elite path well; it was a gathering place for literate young ladies from official families, and should indeed be the focus of their attack.

After the Eldest Miss spoke for a while and saw his relaxed expression, she wasn't sure how much he had actually taken in. With a soft snort, she dismissed him with a wave of her hand.

Lin Wanrong was notorious for his laziness. Buying lard was not a task that required his personal attention. He was now a senior servant in the Xiao family, favored by the Ladies of the Xiao family, and had even surpassed the two stewards in rank. Now that his status had soared, if he didn't know how to use it to his advantage, he wouldn't be the infamous Lin San in the Xiao residence.

He chose a young lad to run errands for him. The boy was the one who had earned a tael of silver as a tip when Lin Wanrong accompanied Young Master Guo to a brothel. The lad was named San De.

"Listen, San De..." Lin Wanrong began.

The lad hurriedly responded, "Brother San, please don't mock me. You are the Brother San, I wouldn't dare to use your title. From now on, I'll be known as Si De."

Ah, look at this sycophant, even knowing how to avoid potential trouble. No wonder this lad had potential. This feeling of borrowing the tiger's fierceness was extremely satisfying to Lin Wanrong. Nodding, Lin Wanrong ordered, "Listen, Si De, hurry to the butcher's and buy four pounds of lard. Also, get me some pure caustic soda, and call Fubo back. Tell him I need to discuss something with him."

Having a runner was liberating. Lin Wanrong was able to assign three tasks with a single breath, and Si De completed them efficiently. When Fubo returned, he saw Lin Wanrong directing Si De to stoke the fierce fire in the stove, where the white lard was boiling, filling the air with a faint smell of grease.

"Fubo, you've returned at the right time." Seeing more labor available, Lin Wanrong wasn't about to be polite. Regardless of age, if they could do work, that was enough.

He took a large piece of fine sandcloth prepared earlier and directed methodically, "Fubo, you have experience. After Si De cleans off the surface dirt, use this filter cloth to filter the grease, then clean it again."

Fubo asked curiously, "Lin San, what are you up to now?" Both Fubo and Changbo admired Lin San genuinely, despite his half-baked skills in floral arts and mechanics, his occasional creative ideas left them both impressed and amazed.

Lin Wanrong, naturally, would not divulge his plan. He chuckled and said, "Fubo, we go way back. Don't you trust me?"

Fubo snorted, thinking that this young man didn't have an ounce of respect for his elders. However, he did trust Lin Wanrong and seeing him in all seriousness, he decided to follow his instructions.

With his specially crafted pencil, Lin Wanrong was constantly writing and drawing on the paper, symbols that the other two could not understand. After a while, he put down the pencil, breathed a sigh of relief, and exclaimed, "Dear chemistry teacher, I will always love you."

Excited, he instructed Fubo to pour all the cleaned fat into the pot and boil it over high heat. As the temperature rose, Si De, following Lin Wanrong's instructions, kept stirring. Lin Wanrong then took one-third of the weight of the fat in lye and threw it into the pot.

After boiling for less than half an hour, he told Si De to pour a large amount of coarse salt into the pot and stir evenly. Those who had studied chemistry would know this process is called "salting out."

About half an hour later, Fubo and Si De were amazed to see a layer of pale yellow ointment-like substance rising to the surface of the pot, which was originally boiling with lard.

Lin Wanrong was overjoyed. This was soap! I am a genius, he thought. "Dear chemistry teacher, be proud of me. I will always remember your teaching: study well in physics and chemistry, and fear nothing in the world."

This was, in fact, a very simple chemical experiment. Fats under high temperatures, with the presence of alkali, would hydrolyze to form higher fatty acid salts and glycerol. Fatty acid salts are what we commonly call soap, and glycerol, when mixed with nitric acid, can create nitroglycerin, an explosive. Because soap does not dissolve in concentrated saltwater and glycerol has a high solubility in saltwater, they can be separated by adding salt.

After his moment of joy, Lin Wanrong instructed Si De to scrape the pale yellow paste into a large wooden box. Once it cooled down, it would turn into a large chunk of soap.

As for the byproduct glycerol, Lin Wanrong was tempted to create a few bombs for fun. However, he was also well aware of its danger. Nitroglycerin was extremely unstable and could explode with just a slight shock. After some hesitation, he decided to abandon this idea for the time being. It was too dangerous, and his own life was more important.

Looking at the large chunk of soap, Lin Wanrong was calculating in his mind. What would be the cost of making soap from this animal fat?

The four pounds of lard probably cost about eight taels of silver. The soap made from it could be cut into thirty to forty small fist-sized pieces. Each piece of soap should sell for at least eight taels of silver. That would be a profit of thirty to forty taels of silver. The profit was considerable. Furthermore, this lard was just a test product with high cost, and it was possible to further reduce the cost by using other animal or vegetable oils.

After an hour, the soap finally cooled down. Lin Wanrong instructed Si De to bring a basin of clean water and soak their soiled clothes of the past few days in it. He scraped off a small piece of soap and gently rubbed it onto the clothes. After a rinse with clear water, the stains disappeared without a trace.

Fubo was dumbfounded. "Lin San, what is this? It's miraculous!"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Fubo, you're in for a treat today. This is called soap, and I invented it myself."

Fubo exclaimed, "Lin San, with this invention, the lives of all the young women will be so much easier. They will have to thank you for this."

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter. "Fubo, you give me too much credit. My mission has always been to benefit countless women and set a new trend in society. But I feel guilty whenever I think that this goal is still far from being achieved."

Fubo chose to ignore his words. He carefully touched the newly formed soap, which felt smooth and fine. He couldn't help but marvel at how miraculous this invention was.

The soap they made was the most basic type of laundry soap. The process for making scented soap was the same, but it required replacing the animal fat with vegetable oils such as coconut oil or tung oil, purifying it a few more times, and adding some color and fragrance. The leftover flower scraps from making perfume, which Lin Wanrong always thought were a waste, could finally be put to good use.

He followed this method and conducted another experiment, this time using tung oil and adding more pressed flower scraps. Lin Wanrong took the creation of this scented soap even more seriously. He did not let Si De help, but did it himself, pouring the paste into another box.

As the scented soap slowly cooled, Fubo and Si De were left in awe. The soap was a beautiful shade of light pink with a hint of yellow, and the air was filled with a light, floral fragrance. One whiff and they were captivated.

Success! Lin Wanrong was ecstatic. He couldn't help but let out a roar of laughter. Beautiful women of the world, await the use of my great invention! I will make you all more beautiful, fragrant, and attractive.

The two experiments took two full days, but they were much easier and simpler than the perfume-making process. Fubo and Si De both witnessed the birth of this miracle.

If the perfume was a happy accident, the soap was a deliberate invention. Benefiting the people? Lin Wanrong didn't have such lofty ideals. Making a hefty profit, that was his real motivation.

Soap was a new product, and naturally, its initial pricing would cater to the higher end of the market, ensuring profits no less than that of perfume. With these inventions—undergarments, perfume, and soap—especially the latter two, he would monopolize the market. The money would surely come rolling in. In the future, he planned to produce medicinal soap and establish an all-inclusive chemical industry. At that moment, he felt on top of the world, as if he had achieved great success.

It was already time to light the lamps. Fubo had his eyes opened over the past two days. After a long sigh, he finally spoke, "Lin San, do you think we should show this to the Eldest Miss?"

Lin Wanrong had also been pondering this. Handing over the perfume business to the Xiao family was partly due to Xiao Yushuang's influence and partly because the Xiao family had a comprehensive marketing network. Although Lin Wanrong had the skills and products, he was severely lacking in marketing. If he were to build it from scratch, he didn't have enough money or

energy. Letting the Xiao family handle the exclusive distribution was a viable approach, a business model he'd seen plenty of in his previous life.

After some consideration, he said to Fubo, "We can let the Eldest Miss take a look. Alas, I am such a failure. I always end up being exploited by her."

The Eldest Miss's arrival was much swifter than Lin Wanrong had anticipated. Perhaps in her eyes, Fubo was an honest man who wouldn't lie, so she readily believed what Fubo had seen with his own eyes. If Lin San were to report it, she would probably only believe one out of ten things he said.

When Xiao Yuruo entered the room and saw Lin Wanrong grinning at her, she blushed and said, "Are you always so frivolous?"

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. "Eldest Miss, I have never been serious."

She shot him a glance and snorted, her attention quickly shifting to the objects behind him.

So, this was the thing called soap? Xiao Yuruo curiously looked at the two large pieces of soap in front of her. They weren't finely crafted and still retained a roughness, yet they felt smooth and slick to the touch. Especially the scented soap, with its light pink hue and a faint, pleasant fragrance, it instantly captured her interest.

"Lin San, did you really make all of this?" The Eldest Miss's excited voice quivered slightly.

## Chapter 125 Witty Poems and Clever Retorts

"Of course." Lin Wanrong smiled, handing her a freshly cut bar of soap. "Next time you wash my clothes, don't forget to use this soap."

Xiao Yuruo blushed, remembering how he had persuaded her to wash his clothes during her three visits to his humble abode. The memory left a peculiar taste in her heart.

"How does one use this soap?" Xiao Yuruo asked, her fingers tracing over the smooth soap, finding it hard to let go.

"This is for bathingah, showering," Lin Wanrong corrected himself, choosing a more refined word. He studied Eldest Miss up and down before commenting, "Eldest Miss, you haven't bathed yet today, have you? Here, take this home and give it a try. I made this soap myself, and no other man has touched it, so you don't have to worry."

The Eldest Miss gave him a flushed look. If no other man has touched it, then what does it mean that you have? She responded with a soft hum, breaking off a small piece. After giving Lin Wanrong a look, she quietly said, "You must be tired today too. You should rest soon. We need to go to the Jinling Poetry Society tomorrow."

Lin Wanrong feigned surprise, "Thank you for your concern, Eldest Miss. But if this soap works well, why don't you bring it along tomorrow? You could promote it along with the perfume."

The Eldest Miss nodded, "I will indeed. If this soap is good, like the perfume, I will cover the workshop and operating costs. However, how we split the profits still needs further discussion."

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter, "Eldest Miss, you are a smart woman, and I'm an honest man. If you handle the marketing of this soap, I won't treat you unfairly. You will get thirty percent of the profits."

The Eldest Miss gave a noncommittal grunt, not responding directly. She then walked away, her voice softening, "Rest early. I'll decide about the soap once I've used it."

Lin Wanrong was brimming with confidence. The soap-making process was straightforward and ideally suited for workshop-style production. The coarse salt was naturally formed, so there was no need to worry about raw material supply. It truly seemed like a profitable venture.

In fact, Lin Wanrong had given deeper thought to the soap-making venture. No ambitious manufacturer would only offer a single product. No matter how good the perfume, its supply was heavily influenced by the availability of flowers. In case of a natural disaster or similar unexpected event, there would be no other product to fill the gap, making sole reliance on perfume risky.

Now, with the addition of this soap, the two products complemented each other. Even if one faltered, they wouldn't be completely out of options. In the spring, when the flowers were withering, soap was indeed a rising star, shining alongside perfume.

After having a thorough discussion about soap-making with Fubo, Lin Wanrong felt reassured. Although Fubo had witnessed the birth of the soap, his knowledge of the recipe and process was

limited, mitigating any concerns about confidentiality. The production of soap was much simpler than perfume, and a few words from Lin Wanrong was all Fubo needed to understand the process.

Early the next morning, Fubo went off to carry out Lin Wanrong's instructions. Recalling the Eldest Miss' plans to promote the perfume and soap at the Jinling Poetry Society today, Lin Wanrong arrived at the mansion's front door bright and early. It was the dead of winter, and the weather was bitterly cold. He had dressed heavily to avoid freezing in the chilling wind.

Before long, the Eldest Miss emerged from the inner rooms. Today, Xiao Yuruo was dressed in a long, purple skirt, a continuous smile dancing on her face, her eyes as beautiful as blooming flowers.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Eldest Miss, did something good happen today? You seem exceptionally cheerful."

Xiao Yuruo approached him, snorting, "Cut the chatter. Let's depart." As she neared, a faint fragrance wafted from her body, a blend of a woman's natural scent and a hint of the soap.

A surge of delight rose in Lin Wanrong's heart. "Eldest Miss, did you use the soap yesterday? How was it?"

Xiao Yuruo's face flushed, she spoke softly, "Not bad. I've brought some today to promote it along with the perfume."

As they left the mansion, Xiao Yuruo climbed into the carriage. Lin Wanrong, unashamedly prepared to follow suit, but the Eldest Miss huffed, "Lin San, I've prepared a fine horse for you. You can ride it and follow the carriage."

Ride a horse? Lin Wanrong glanced sideways to see a towering black horse, panting and snorting next to them. The black horse complemented Lin Wanrong's robust complexion, fostering a harmonious union of man and beast.

Lin Wanrong had ridden a horse before, but that was in a park with a handler nearby. Now, he was expected to manage the horse alone, and this massive black beast didn't seem easy to handle.

"Haven't you ridden a horse before?" Seeing his furrowed brow, the Eldest Miss couldn't suppress her amusement at his rare display of uncertainty.



Lin Wanrong nodded, "I'm afraid I might fall and end up being ridden by this black horse."

The Eldest Miss laughed, thinking to herself how unusually honest he was being. She knew that Lin San, with his scoundrel nature, would inevitably try to share her carriage on their journey to the academy. Even though he had already done so multiple times and she had become numb to it, it would be utterly damaging to her reputation if he were to join her in the carriage in full public view. So, she had devised this plan, leaving him with no excuse. She had personally selected this black horse, a creature befitting Lin Wanrong's stature.

The Eldest Miss summoned a horse-handling boy from the mansion to provide guidance for Lin Wanrong. Recognizing Lin Wanrong, the boy, Little Sheng, bowed respectfully, "Brother San, riding a horse is straightforward. Once you mount the horse, you need to clamp your legs tightly around its back and hold the reins firmly for direction. That's all there is to it."

He led Lin Wanrong around for a few laps, imparting the essentials of horsemanship. Now a man of martial prowess, Lin Wanrong found it far easier to grasp horse riding than most. He wasn't entirely resistant to the idea. After getting used to the motions, his courage swelled, and he even trotted the horse a few steps.

The Eldest Miss watched, her brow furrowing. 'Such boldness for a beginner,' she thought. Unsettled, she ordered the horse handler to mount another horse and keep an eye on Lin Wanrong.

Seated atop the black horse, Lin Wanrong patted its mane, smiling, "Mate, how did you manage to be even darker than me? Got any secrets? It took me a lot of running around and sunbathing to develop this healthy complexion."

Hearing him from the carriage, the Eldest Miss chuckled at his absurd banter, sparing not even the horse. Sneaking a peek behind the curtain, she saw his handsome face and robust figure. Both the man and the horse looked striking, creating quite an impact. Her heart throbbed. 'He and this black horse do complement each other. In this posture, he is rather pleasing to the eye,' she thought.

Lin Wanrong was quite pleased with his current 'Black Horse Prince' image. Seeing the Eldest Miss peering at him from behind the curtain, he grinned, "Thank you, Eldest Miss. From now on, I'll ride the horse while you ride in the carriage."

The Eldest Miss nodded, cautioning, "Take it slow. It's your first time riding. Don't show off and fall." She then lowered the curtain. Puzzled, Lin Wanrong wondered when the Eldest Miss had

started to show concern for him. He burst into laughter. Overjoyed, he swayed on the horse's back, almost falling off.

The horse handler quickly steadied him. Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "This black horse is quite spirited, matching my temperament. Little Sheng, let's go for a ride." No sooner had he spoken than he pulled the reins, patted the horse's hindquarters, and trotted off.

Little Sheng was startled and hurriedly followed. Lin San was a cherished figure in the Xiao family. If he fell, Little Sheng would bear the blame.

At first, Lin Wanrong was a bit nervous, nearly losing control and falling a few times. However, his martial prowess had significantly enhanced his agility. After riding for a while, his skills improved remarkably. Luckily, the road out of the city was not crowded, allowing a smooth trotting journey.

Seeing Lin Wanrong become increasingly adept, Little Sheng raced to catch up, giving Lin Wanrong a thumbs-up, "Brother San, you're amazing."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. 'From today on, I can claim another skill,' he thought. In this era of scarce transportation, learning to ride was extremely beneficial, potentially proving to be of great utility in the future.

Upon hearing the sound of hooves, Xiao Yuruo quickly pulled back the curtain only to see Lin San riding far away on the black horse. She felt both irritated and worried. He was showing off before he even knew how to ride properly. If he fell, he had only himself to blame. Anxious, she hurriedly ordered the coachman to speed up.

Lin Wanrong had heard the Eldest Miss mention the Jinling Poetry Society, but he didn't know where it was located. Judging by its name, it should be a permanent institution with a fixed venue.

The carriage headed north and as it approached the city gate, a grand entrance came into view, framed by green bricks and red pillars. Above it, three bold vermilion characters announced - Jinling Poetry Society.

The Eldest Miss dismounted the carriage and proceeded forward without uttering a word. Lin Wanrong hastily handed the reins to Little Sheng and followed her. Just as he was about to speak, he noticed her upset expression. 'This lady can change her mood so quickly,' he thought. 'She was so cheerful when we left, and now she looks like ice.'

He wanted to ask if the Jinling Poetry Society was part of the Jinling Book Society, but seeing her demeanor, he kept his questions to himself.

After a few steps, he saw more and more scholars. Some held small books, reading aloud as they walked. Others gazed thoughtfully at the lakeside, rapidly scribing on sheets of paper. Still, others were clustered in small groups discussing among themselves. To his surprise, many were women.

This exceeded Lin Wanrong's expectations. Wasn't it said that a woman's virtue lay in her lack of talent? Then why were so many young ladies studying poetry?

Seeing his constant gawking, the Eldest Miss felt both annoyed and amused. However, as his eyes lingered on the women, she became irritated. "Stop ogling other people's daughters," she huffed. "If someone sees you, they'll think I instructed you to do so."

Lin Wanrong protested his innocence. He was merely interested in the women's passion for literature and had no personal interest in them. Seeing his aggrieved expression, the Eldest Miss snorted again, "What? Are you saying I'm accusing you unjustly?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head with a wry smile, "Eldest Miss, I'm just surprised to see so many women interested in poetry. I wasn't ogling anyone. If I were to look at anyone, it'd be you, Eldest Miss. You're a hundred times more beautiful than them."

"Flatterer!" Xiao Yuruo blushed, her voice barely audible, "Don't speak like that again."

Seeing her lower her gaze, her blush accentuating her snow-white neck, Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Good heavens, the Eldest Miss looked stunning when she was gentle and demure.

Seeing him staring at her, Xiao Yuruo felt a mix of embarrassment and anger, yet also a strange sensation. She gritted her teeth, lifted her head, and huffed, "What are you staring at?"

Seeing her icy demeanor return, Lin Wanrong could find no trace of her previously enchanting allure. He shook his head uncontrollably. It must have been an illusion, he reasoned. The Eldest Miss was always an iceberg, she never changed.

Neither of them spoke until a woman's voice filled with joy came from the front, "Isn't that Sister Yuruo?"

Lin Wanrong quickly looked up to see two men and a woman approaching. Leading was a young woman around seventeen or eighteen. A trace of a smile lingered on her beautiful face, hinting at a touch of untamed wildness. Anyone could tell she was not to be trifled with. The two men following her were opposites: one was tall and handsome, while the other was slightly chubby, with a face full of affluence.

The young woman ran over, taking Xiao Yuruo's hand and exclaimed, "Sister Yuruo, it really is you! I thought I was mistaken."

Xiao Yuruo forced a smile, "Miss Wanying, you're here too? Why aren't you on duty at the Yamen today?"

Miss Wanying seemed thrilled to see the Eldest Miss. "There's not much to do at the Yamen," she explained, "so I came to this place." As she spoke, she glanced at the handsome man standing in front, a faint blush creeping onto her face.

After one glance, Lin Wanrong understood. This girl seemed to fancy the dashing gentleman and had probably skipped work to be here. But what did the Eldest Miss mean about her being on duty at the Yamen?

"Sister Yuruo, let me introduce you," Miss Wanying pointed to the slightly chubby man and said, "This is Yu Wenpo, the top scholar in Yangzhou."

Yu Wenpo bowed in respect, "So, it's Miss Xiao. I'm Yu Wenpo from Yangzhou. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

The Eldest Miss returned the bow, and then Miss Wanying pointed to the man in front, "This is Mr. Hou Yuebai."

"Jinling's Hou Yuebai, at your service, Miss Xiao," the handsome man greeted with a smile.

So this was Jinling's top scholar, Hou Yuebai? The one who was pursuing Luo Ning? Not bad-looking, Lin Wanrong evaluated, but a bit too pale, almost effeminate.

"So, it's Jinling's top scholar, Mr. Hou. My apologies for not recognizing you sooner," the Eldest Miss replied.

Miss Wanying took hold of the Eldest Miss's hand and said, "Sister Yuruo, when I heard that you were kidnapped by the White Lotus Sect, I was terribly worried. My brother wouldn't let me leave the city for fear of danger. He worried for nothing; I wouldn't be scared of those thieves. I searched for days without a single lead. I was relieved when Commander Cheng sent soldiers and you returned safely. Rest assured, I'll find the White Lotus Sect and avenge you." Miss Wanying declared solemnly.

Hearing this, Lin Wanrong was dumbfounded. This Miss Wanying, she was a city constable? Who could have guessed? He wasn't sure whether she was a poet moonlighting as a constable or a constable moonlighting as a poet.

The Eldest Miss laughed, "Miss Wanying, it's been a while. Your hatred for evil remains unchanged, I see."

A blush appeared on Miss Wanying's face as she sneaked a glance at Hou Yuebai. "Sister Yuruo," she asked, "What brings you here today?"

Xiao Yuruo simply stated her purpose for being there, to which Miss Wanying chuckled, "I've heard of that perfume. I was planning to ask you for some. However, the rules of our poetry society are to recite first, gift later. You must know that."

Xiao Yuruo smiled lightly, "Of course, I know. Please, Miss Wanying, propose the topic."

Miss Wanying glanced at Hou Yuebai, saying, "Mr. Hou, why don't you start?"

Hou Yuebai nodded, paused for a moment in thought, and then recited, "The general stands east of the city"

Yangzhou's top scholar, Yu Wenpo, thought for a moment and continued, "The warrior prepares to draw his bow"

Miss Wanying added, "The flag unfurls in the wind"

"Big cannons boom boom boom"

Before the Eldest Miss could respond, a murmur came from the side. She turned to see it was their servant, Lin San.

It turned out that Lin Wanrong was standing nearby, listening to their sequential poetry. He found it amusing, wondering if this was considered poetry. He could join in and probably shock them, he mused. Lost in thought, he unexpectedly mumbled it out loud.

Although his voice was soft, those nearby heard him clearly. Miss Wanying giggled, "Sister Yuruo, is this your servant? He's quite interesting."

Jinling's top scholar, Hou Yuebai, shot Lin Wanrong a contemptuous glance. Seeing Lin Wanrong thickly dressed as a servant, he opened his mouth to say, "The crab wears full armor."

Upon hearing this, Lin Wanrong was livid. This guy is insulting me, he thought. A swift thought came to his mind, and he chuckled, replying, "The spider is full of wisdom."

When these words were spoken, everyone in front was taken aback. Hou Yuebai had insulted this servant, but he had retorted back smartly.

The Eldest Miss covered her mouth, looking at Lin San with a soft laugh. This man, she thought, Is indeed somewhat talented in an unconventional way.