

Finest 166

Chapter 166 The Red Thread

Sweat. Why should this matter have anything to do with me? I am a faithful supporter of the enlightened policies of the Great Hua Dynasty, where it is absolutely permissible to have more than one wife. Besides, I am much smarter than this old Xu. Xu Wenchang may be smart in many things, but he is quite foolish in this matter. If I were him and Su Qinglian wanted to play such games with me, I would directly tie her up, perform the marriage ceremony, enter the bridal chamber, and then have five, six, seven, eight children with her. Let's see how she can still long for a man who waits for her with the same dedication, thought Lin Wanrong.

"Why would anyone want to imitate him, he's just too dull," said Lin Wanrong. "This old man should learn from me instead."

"Learn what from you?" the Eldest Miss asked, wiping away a tear.

"Learn to be strong, domineering, loving, and to push forward with courage. When facing a woman I like, if I can't win her over directly, I'll try to persuade her, if persuasion doesn't work, I'll persist in myriad ways, never letting go. This old Xu, however, is just stuck in his own problems. He is truly foolish," Lin Wanrong said with a sigh.

The touching mood was thoroughly ruined by Lin Wanrong's nearly rogue remarks. The Eldest Miss was both angry and annoyed. Somehow, whenever he laughed, he could make people cry, and whenever he cried, he could make people laugh. How utterly vexing!

Their conversation was interrupted by a snap. The sound of a string breaking. Looking over, they saw Su Qinglian's pale fingers had forcefully torn a string on the guqin. She looked at Xu Wei and slowly said, "Mr. Xu, this guqin was a gift from you years ago. Today, I return it to you, putting an end to our thirty years of affection."

Xu Wei stuttered, unable to say a word. Su Qinglian gave a wretched smile, rushed out of the cabin, and was about to throw herself into the lake.

But Lin Wanrong, quick as lightning, caught up with her and grabbed her sleeve, saying, "Sister Su, the water is shallow here, you should go over there instead."

"You, what do you mean?" Su Qinglian asked in shock.

Lin Wanrong grinned, "I'm just helping you achieve your wish."

While they were speaking, Xu Wei had caught up. He grabbed Su Qinglian's hand, pleading emotionally, "Qinglian, don't be impulsive. It was my fault in the past. I apologize to you. Please, give me another chance."

Su Qinglian wept, "What use are your words now? Let me go, let me go. Let me die."

Xu Wei held onto Su Qinglian tightly, and the two became entangled.

Lin Wanrong watched, frustrated. These two, clearly in love, were making things so painful. It was truly baffling. They were in their fifties or sixties, and yet they were still acting like this.

The Eldest Miss walked over to him, frowning, "What should we do?"

Lin Wanrong smiled and asked, "Where's that red thread you've hidden in your sleeve?"

The Eldest Miss blushed slightly, "Who's hiding a red thread? What do you need it for?"

Lin Wanrong pointed at Su Qinglian and Xu Wei, smiling, "Look how awkward these two are. I suppose we have to play matchmaker for them."

Understanding his meaning, the Eldest Miss covered her mouth and laughed, "You always have the most mischievous ideas."

"Enough, enough, no more struggling." Lin Wanrong went over to Xu Wei, and while pretending to pull him back, he attached a red thread to his robe with an embroidered needle, then loudly said, "Please listen to me for a moment."

The Eldest Miss, too, held Su Qinglian tightly and fastened the other end of the red thread onto her clothes.

"Who might you be, sir?" asked Su Qinglian through her tears, addressing Lin Wanrong.

"Who am I?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "I am Lin San. Xu Wenchang may be known as the most learned man in the world, but I am the second. Remember that, Sister Su. You'll have to thank me properly when your wishes are fulfilled in the future."

"What wishes can a dying person fulfill?" Su Qinglian replied tearfully.

Lin Wanrong smiled slightly. "Life may be as insignificant as grass, but it has its spring blooms and autumn fruits. How can one speak so casually of life and death? Sister Su, thirty years have passed in the blink of an eye, do you still care so much about this fleeting moment?"

Su Qinglian sighed pensively. Seizing the moment of her hesitation, Lin Wanrong continued, "Mr. Xu, Sister Su, I have a few questions for both of you. Please answer carefully, don't lie. These questions may affect your everlasting future."

Xu Wei, of course, knew that Lin San was on his side and quickly nodded, but Su Qinglian didn't say a word.

"Mr. Wenchang, have you forgotten Sister Su over these years?" Lin Wanrong asked leisurely.

By now, Xu Wenchang had no regard for his pride, he hastily replied, "Where is this coming from? Throughout these thirty cold and hot seasons, I have never once forgotten Qinglian. As for the letters, I don't know how many I have sent."

It turned out that Xu Wenchang had been writing love letters to Su Qinglian all along. This was quite rare, Lin Wanrong thought. "Then why didn't you seek Sister Su earlier?"

Xu Wei sighed. "After Qinglian's letter years ago, the whole world knew. She had closed off the path. Even if I wished to, how could I have the face to see her?"

Lin Wanrong nodded, then turned to Su Qinglian. "Sister Su, do you truly no longer miss Mr. Xu?"

Su Qinglian grunted, her face stern, but a fleeting hint of melancholy flashed across her eyes. Lin Wanrong smiled and said, "I'll answer this one for you. Sister Su has sealed her zither and tied up her hair for more than thirty years. Thinking of him, missing him, yet also worrying and hating him. Your yearning is as long as a river, your hidden bitterness as persistent as a needle. By now, I'm afraid it's hard to tell if it's hate or longing. Is that correct, Sister Su?"

Su Qinglian's face reddened slightly, then she sighed, but in the end, she did not deny it.

Lin Wanrong continued, "Mr. Xu, did your wife at home know that you came looking for Sister Su?"

"She's no longer with us," Xu Wenchang said mournfully.

"She's gone, and now you come looking for me? You heartless and insensitive man!" Su Qinglian began to sob again.

Lin Wanrong gave Xu Wei a glance. This old man, can't he speak more tactfully? He sighed, "Stop arguing. Both of you are unmarried, with feelings for each other, carrying mutual longing for over thirty years. Yet why do you seek death upon meeting? Forgive my blunt words, but how many more years do you both have? Why must you be so reserved, missing this last chance?"

"Mr. Xu, Sister Su, you can't separate anymore, you're already tied by the red thread. You can't just break apart," the Eldest Miss said with a laugh.

Xu Wei and Su Qinglian hurriedly looked down and found a thin red thread, connecting the two of them directly.

Both of them blushed simultaneously, knowing that it was certainly the doing of this young man and woman. Xu Wei, having served as a high-ranking official for many years, still held his imposing air. He took advantage of the situation and took Su Qinglian's hand, saying, "Qinglian, I've truly missed you all this time."

A blush crept across Su Qinglian's pale cheeks, but she didn't know what to say, only allowing her tears to fall.

This old man Xu was good at seizing the moment. He was quite adept at courting women. Lin Wanrong pulled the Eldest Miss aside, laughing, "The following scene may not be suitable for children. We'd better not watch, and not hinder them."

The Eldest Miss walked to the side with him, sitting on the side rail of the ship. She laughed and scolded, "You were being serious for a while, and now you're up to mischief again." She glanced at Su Qinglian in the distance and spoke softly, "Miss Su's devotion is so profound, willing to die to prove her point. She truly is a role model for women."

Lin Wanrong shook his head and laughed, "Eldest Miss, I believe Sister Su has some cunning too."

"What cunning?" The Eldest Miss frowned, "Do you think everyone in the world is as sly as you?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Eldest Miss, think about it. Could Su Qinglian really die by jumping into the river in front of Mr. Xu?"

Xiao Yurao paused. There were several boats nearby, all of them Xu Wei's bodyguards. Even if Miss Su fell into the river, they could quickly rescue her. Considering this, Su Qinglian couldn't really die.

Seeing the Eldest Miss's frowning face, Lin Wanrong laughed, "In my opinion, this was all a performance by Sister Su for Mr. Wenchang. It's a small punishment for his unfaithfulness and a way for Sister Su to step down. Her strategy was indeed extremely effective." Lin Wanrong was all too familiar with the tactics of women: crying, making a fuss, and threatening suicide.

"So you're saying, Miss Su had forgiven Mr. Xu a long time ago?" The Eldest Miss inquired doubtfully.

Lin Wanrong nodded, "Of course. I fear that Sister Su started regretting soon after she wrote that letter. But she has been seen as a role model by you women, so she found herself in a difficult situation. Both Mr. Xu and she couldn't let go of their pride, so they kept dragging it on, and before they knew it, thirty years had passed. In fact, only a thin layer separated them. Once punctured, everything would be fine." Lin Wanrong sighed.

Upon careful thought, it really was as simple as piercing a piece of paper. The Eldest Miss sighed inwardly. She glanced at Lin San and chuckled lightly, "Binding this red thread today, you've indeed done a good deed. However, your technique is truly lacking."

"Where was it lacking?" Lin Wanrong asked, puzzled.

"You tied the red thread in the wrong place."

"Then where should it have been tied?" Lin Wanrong asked curiously.

"Don't you know that the red thread is supposed to be tied around the ankle? You, the second greatest scholar in the world, haven't even heard of this proverb?" The Eldest Miss laughed triumphantly. Like a carefree young girl, she lifted her foot, flaunting it, and casually tied the red thread around her delicate ankle.

Sweat dripping, Lin Wanrong admitted he had not studied this. Taking it as a purely academic inquiry, he tied the other end of the red thread around his own foot and asked, "Would this do? It doesn't seem reliable to me. The Eldest Miss and I don't have that kind of fate. How could we be tied together?"

Xiao Yuruo paused, staring blankly at the red thread tied to their feet. Her face suddenly flushed a deep red. In a soft voice, she said, "Lin San, don't bind it randomly. Quickly undo the one on your foot." As she spoke, her face was flushed, and she turned her head away, not daring to look at him.

"Why should I untie mine?" Lin Wanrong laughed, "Are you trying to shirk this small task?"

Just as he was about to untie the red thread, he heard a rustling noise. Suddenly, several dark figures emerged from the shadows, their blades glinting. One of them shouted, "Kill Xu Wei!"

Another, with an incredibly swift sword, aimed accurately and severed the red thread tied to their feet.

Without a sound, the red thread was cut in half.

Chapter 167 A Fight Brewing?

The figure approached swiftly, the gleam of the sword not aimed to wound, but specifically targeting the red thread. Lin Wanrong was taken aback; this person in black possessed extraordinary martial skills, comparable to those of Qingxuan.

Xiao Yuruo let out a startled cry. She stared dumbstruck at the severed red thread that now danced freely in the wind, as if she had lost her soul.

The person in black, having severed the red thread with a single slash, did not halt the momentum of the sword. The blade continued its course, lunging toward the Eldest Miss. Lin Wanrong hastily positioned himself in front of her, landing a punch on the attacker's wrist. The assailant retreated swiftly, casting a disdainful hum toward the duo.

The Eldest Miss was still in a daze, silent as she watched the severed red thread, seemingly oblivious to the aggression of the person in black. Worried, Lin Wanrong quickly tugged at her sleeve and asked, "Eldest Miss, what's the matter with you?"

Xiao Yuruo came back to her senses. A touch of sorrow in her expression, she cast a glance at him and whispered, "It's nothing, Lin San. Just... please be careful."

The person in black across from them noticed the Eldest Miss's concern and let out another dismissive hum.

The sound was familiar to Lin Wanrong's ears. Taking another look at the figure, he realized it was a woman. His heart skipped a beat. Oh no, wasn't this Xian'er? Last time during the White Lotus Cult's raid on the Xiao family, she wanted to kill Yushuang, and now she was here to kill Yuruo. My goodness, was she really out for the Xiao family?

Meanwhile, the black-clad figure who had ambushed Xu Wei was intercepted by his personal bodyguard. The two engaged in a fierce duel as other guards in the distance sped toward them.

Xu Wei, protecting Su Qinglian behind him, coldly watched the surrounding assailants. His eyes held no fear, only a glint of sharp determination.

Since Xian'er had revealed herself, it was evident that the one who ambushed Xu Wei was also from the White Lotus Sect. Having raided the cult's hideout and killed several members the day before, and having helped the Xiao family topple Tao Dongcheng today, Xu Wei was undoubtedly a thorn in the cult's side. With just a few glances, Lin Wanrong had a pretty clear picture of the situation.

Seeing more and more guards flocking around Xu Wei, a voice from the White Lotus Cult yelled, "Kill Xu Wei quickly. No delays!" The assailants abandoned their respective opponents and rushed toward Xu Wei.

Qin Xian'er glanced once more at the Eldest Miss shielded behind Lin Wanrong, let out a cold hum, and readied her sword to attack Xu Wei.

Seeing this, Lin Wanrong broke into a cold sweat. This girl, previously helping the White Lotus Cult raid the Xiao family and acting like a bandit, was already questionable, but now she intended to murder a government official, a rebellious act. She had some spirit. How had he not noticed this when they were at Miaoyu Pavilion?

"Xian'er" Lin Wanrong quickly stepped forward and grabbed her fair wrist, "Why are you here?"

Qin Xian'er's face was concealed behind a veil, her expression unreadable, but the hum that followed conveyed her dissatisfaction. "What are you stopping me for? Go on with your red thread game." The strong hint of jealousy in her voice was unmistakable.

Lin Wanrong found it amusing. This girl had quite the temper. The Eldest Miss and he were just fooling around, yet she had rushed in, ready to kill without distinguishing right from wrong. This temper of hers, he really might need to help her correct it.

Pretending not to have heard her words, Lin Wanrong gently asked, "Didn't you all return to Jining? Why have you come to Hangzhou?"

Xian'er glanced at him and snorted, "I won't tell you."

Lin Wanrong pulled her behind a column in the hallway, out of sight of her companions. He then lightly chuckled, "Did you miss me and sneak over to Hangzhou?"

Qin Xian'er's face, hidden behind the veil, did not reveal a blush. All he heard was a soft retort, "Who misses you? You have a thick face."

The White Lotus cult members and Xu Wei's guards were fighting fiercely. Several people had already died at the hands of the guards, but Lin Wanrong held Qin Xian'er back, preventing her

from joining the fray. She tried to break free, but he held her wrist, draining her strength. Annoyed, she glared at him, "Why are you holding me back? I ruined your good deed just now. You can continue."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "You've ruined my plans more than once or twice. Speaking of which, I should give your little behind a few smacks."

Qin Xian'er shyly retorted, "You're a terrible person."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Did you come looking for me specifically?"

"No one came looking for you specifically," Xian'er huffed. "We only arrived in Hangzhou yesterday and had no idea you were here."

"Did you come specifically for Xu Wei?" Lin Wanrong asked.

Qin Xian'er glanced at him, "Naturally. He killed many of my White Lotus sect brothers and sisters. The whole sect won't let him off. We've been hiding here in the lake for a long time."

Hiding for a long time, just to sever this red thread? Lin Wanrong was speechless. He thought to himself, your White Lotus sect has harmed so many people, what does it matter if Xu Wei killed a few of you? But it was pointless to argue with a little demoness from the White Lotus cult, so he sighed, "Miss Xiao has not offended you, why do you want to kill her?"

"Who said she didn't offend me?" Qin Xian'er glanced at Xiao Yuruo and snorted.

Xiao Yuruo, hidden behind Lin Wanrong, was surprised to hear that the assassin was a woman. Hearing the familiar way she spoke to Lin Wanrong and that she was from the White Lotus cult, she was even more shocked. How did Lin San know the White Lotus cult? Could Lin San be a part of it too? Had all the past events been him deceiving her?

Her mind was a whirl after the red thread was severed, her judgment severely impaired. With a heart full of sorrow, she pointed at Lin Wanrong, "Lin San, you... you're colluding with the White Lotus cult?"

Sweating, Lin Wanrong had forgotten that Xiao Yuruo was still present after talking to Xian'er. Seeing Xiao Yuruo's tear-filled eyes, he smiled bitterly, "Miss Xiao, how could I be in league with the White Lotus cult? Please think about it."

Although Xiao Yuruo had been shocked today and felt uncomfortable, when she thought about it carefully, everything that Lin San had done, although sometimes naughty, had never harmed the Xiao family. He had rescued her from the White Lotus cult and had acted out of anger on her behalf today. All his actions were genuine.

Xiao Yuruo felt embarrassed. What was wrong with her today? She had completely lost her composure and had even started suspecting Lin San, this rogue.

Although she admitted her mistake inwardly, she was too embarrassed to acknowledge it out loud. Further irritated and hurt by Qin Xian'er's actions that day, she whimpered, "If you have no association with the White Lotus cult, then why are you engaging so intimately with this demoness?"

Before Lin Wanrong could respond, Qin Xian'er retorted angrily, "Who are you calling a demoness? Explain yourself!"

The Eldest Miss harbored a deep hatred for the White Lotus cult and responded fearlessly, "The White Lotus cult is full of evil beings who kill and pillage. If you're not a demoness, what are you?"

Qin Xian'er, offended, stamped her foot and exclaimed, "You call me a demoness, then I, this demoness, will kill you today!" The term 'demoness' was one only Lin Wanrong was allowed to use; its usage by anyone else touched a raw nerve for Qin Xian'er.

"Just because you know martial arts doesn't mean I'm afraid of you," the Eldest Miss huffed, looking at the severed red thread. For some reason, her heart ached more and more.

"I won't use martial arts today; instead, let me show you just how formidable a 'demoness' can be." Qin Xian'er gritted her teeth and, incredibly, tossed away her long sword, seemingly prepared to engage in a scuffle, much like a street woman would.

Xiao Yuruo was usually strong and gentle, but today she seemed bewitched. Staring at Qin Xian'er, she declared indignantly, "I'm not afraid of you, demoness!"

Lin Wanrong sighed. These two girls were more stubborn than the other. They had just met and already they were squabbling and even preparing to fight. Did they not regard him at all?

"Had enough yet?" he grunted, looking at the pair.

His voice held an undeniable authority. At his words, Qin Xian'er dared not argue, and the Eldest Miss shot him a look but remained silent.

Seeing the two girls silenced, Lin Wanrong thought to himself, Now that's more like it. From now on, you're not allowed to interrupt when I'm speaking." He sternly told them, "You're both young ladies. Instead of learning to fight, why not do something more constructive? Xian'er, continue your mission to kill Xu Wenchang. As for you, Eldest Miss, let's get back to tying the red thread."

Both women were momentarily stunned. What a unique way to defuse the situation! Despite themselves, they both burst out laughing, then realizing the awkwardness of their shared mirth, they exchanged glances and huffed dismissively through their nostrils.

The Eldest Miss blushed and retorted, "Who said I'm going to tie the red thread with you? You're so shameless."

Qin Xian'er clenched her little fists, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, and said, "You two go ahead and tie your red thread, I'll go do my killing."

From somewhere nearby, a voice called out, "Where's junior sister? Where is she? We need her help."

Their eyes turned in the direction of the call, only to see the fight had intensified. The White Lotus cult was launching fierce attacks, but Xu Wenchang's numerous guards were steadily arriving to surround them.

"This White Lotus cult is really loosely organized," Lin Wanrong sighed. Qin Xian'er bit her lip and said, "Young Master, I must go now, take care."

Seeing her pitiful expression, Lin Wanrong took her hand and advised, "Xu Wenchang is not easy to kill. You should just try to intimidate him. Don't actually kill him, and don't get yourself hurt either. If you can't beat them, run." He was well aware that with Xu Wenchang's numerous skilled guards,

the White Lotus cult stood little chance of success, but he was also confident in Xian'er's formidable martial arts skills to protect herself.

Joy appeared on Qin Xian'er's face, but tears began to fall steadily. "Young Master," she said, "there's no red thread binding us. Will you remember Xian'er?"

Upon hearing these words, the Eldest Miss felt a mixture of embarrassment and irritation. How could this demoness from the White Lotus cult utter such words so brazenly, truly shameless!

Having spoken, Qin Xian'er gazed deeply into Lin Wanrong's eyes, turned on her heel, and with a light tap of her lotus feet, she dashed off into the distance.

Chapter 168 Deceiver

Upon observing a touch of melancholy in Qin Xian'er's countenance, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but sigh. This Xian'er, when not constantly engaged in fights and skirmishes, was incredibly gentle and endearing. If only she would change her fiery temperament, it would be such a wonderful thing. Yet, he soon pondered, if she did change, would she still be Qin Xian'er? It was quite a contradiction.

Seeing Lin Wanrong and the demoness from the White Lotus cult whispering together and the severed red thread, the Eldest Miss felt rather disquieted. She blurted out angrily, "You demoness, you are so detestable."

Lin Wanrong sighed, "Eldest Miss, don't blame her. She too is a person with a sad fate."

The Eldest Miss snorted and retorted, "She's your sweetheart, naturally you would take her side."

Surprised, Lin Wanrong looked at Xiao Yuruo and said, "Eldest Miss, I didn't expect you to use such crude words as sweetheart."

The Eldest Miss blushed and retorted softly, "Why do you care? I'll say what I want. This demoness, whatever her enchanting tricks, has managed to bewitch you, the scoundrel."

In his heart, Lin Wanrong thought, Isn't she Qin Xian'er, the most famous courtesan in Jinling? Just an enchantress indeed. But he decided to keep this secret to himself.

With Qin Xian'er's support, the situation was vastly different for the White Lotus cult. Qin Xian'er was a master martial artist, worth ten regular fighters. She single-handedly took down several guards, rapidly tilting the balance back in favor of the White Lotus cult.

Seeing Qin Xian'er risking her life in such a manner, Lin Wanrong began to worry. You foolish girl, are you not concerned about your own life? Xu Wei's aggressive approach to dealing with the White Lotus cult was well-known. Why persist like this? Have your fellow disciples hold them off while you escape. Among the White Lotus Sect, Lin Wanrong only had affection for Qin Xian'er, as for the others... whatever happens, happens.

The Eldest Miss was witnessing a person being killed for the first time. With a shriek, she hastily turned her head, unable to bear the sight of the bloodshed.

"Quickly turn around, don't look," Lin Wanrong said, rushing to shield her with his body.

The Eldest Miss gave a faint nod, feeling significantly relieved with his body shielding her. However, upon seeing the half-severed red thread still tied around his foot, she couldn't help but tremble slightly. She glanced at Qin Xian'er who was still in the midst of battle, bit her lip, and huffed angrily. Her gaze was so mixed with emotions that even she could not understand.

The number of guards surrounding Xu Wei continued to grow, and several large ships quickly approached. Countless soldiers aimed their arrows at the ship, ready to fire at the signal.

Xu Wei yelled, "White Lotus Cult rebels, lay down your weapons and surrender, I will spare your lives."

As he spoke, several more of the rebels fell. Out of the dozens, only four or five remained to fight. These few, however, fought fearlessly, retreating while resisting, and even made their way toward Lin Wanrong.

The man in the front was the same who had earlier attempted to assassinate Xu Wei. Lin Wanrong recognized him immediately as Lu Zhongping, the youngster whom he had once thoroughly humiliated.

In the midst of the chaos, Lu Zhongping had no time to deal with Lin Wanrong. He shouted, "We are defeated today, flee immediately!" The other four followed, leaping towards the lake in an attempt to escape.

Only Qin Xian'er seemed to have not heard the call. She gave Lin Wanrong a glance, her expression somewhat desolate. Then, with a long, piercing yell, her beautiful figure vaulted into the air, charging directly at the archers.

"Fire the arrows!" At Xu Wei's command, countless arrows shot towards Qin Xian'er who was twirling in mid-air.

Even though Qin Xian'er was an unparalleled martial artist, she was helpless against the dense shower of arrows. This move was like a moth flying into a flame, surely a one-way journey.

She suddenly turned her head, giving Lin Wanrong a smile. Her eyes were filled with helplessness, infatuation, but also, a great deal of hope.

Lin Wanrong saw it all too clearly. Ah, this is bad, he thought, this girl is seeking death. Damn it, at such a young age, why not learn something useful instead of learning how to commit suicide? Recalling the times when Qin Xian'er risked her life to warn him and saved him several times in the lair of the White Lotus cult, he knew she had deep feelings for him. He couldn't just stand by and watch her suffer.

In his urgency, he had no other plans. He had a sudden inspiration, yelled, "The demon of the White Lotus Cult, prepare to meet your death!" With these words, he rushed forward.

The Eldest Miss saw him running into the shower of arrows and cried out in alarm, "Lin San, no"

But Lin Wanrong had already rushed to the front, too far to hear her cry. The Eldest Miss wondered, who was this masked woman to make him disregard even his own life? Seeing Lin Wanrong rushing forward without any hesitation, the Eldest Miss clenched her teeth, took a light step, and followed him.

Xu Wei, who had a high opinion of Lin Wanrong, was shocked to see him rushing out. He quickly waved his hand and commanded, "Stop" The rain of arrows immediately halted.

Qin Xian'er, still in the air, saw Lin Wanrong rush out disregarding his own life. Her eyes filled with tears, but a smile broke across her face. She seemed to suddenly gain strength, her long sword swung swiftly, deflecting the arrows. She quickly landed, standing unharmed at the bow of the ship, directly across from Lin Wanrong.

"We've caught them, we've caught them" A burst of shouting came, and Lin Wanrong turned back to see the few bandits who had escaped earlier, including Lu Zhongping, were trapped in a huge fishing net. They jumped around on the net, all dressed in black, looking from a distance like a few big black fish.

A faint smile appeared on Xu Wei's face. Lin Wanrong thought, this old man has good tactics. Judging by the current situation, this must have been his plan all along. The reputation of Xu Wenchang was indeed well-deserved. He never had a good impression of the White Lotus cult, so seeing the people in the net made him happy. However, with Xu Wei's tactics, he wouldn't let Qin Xian'er off easily, which made him worry.

"Little brother Lin, come back quickly," Xu Wei, seeing Lin Wanrong so close to the last bandit of the White Lotus cult, called out anxiously.

Lin Wanrong glanced at Qin Xian'er and said softly, "Why are you so desperate, even willing to risk your life?"

Qin Xian'er's beautiful eyes welled up with tears, yet a smile appeared on her face. "I wanted to see if I was in your heart, to see if you would worry about me. If you care about me, you would save me. If I don't matter to you, then living in this world is no longer interesting to me. It would be better to die."

God, this girl has more character than I do, thought Lin Wanrong. All this reckless behavior, only to test me, to see if I would save her. Darn it, is it worth risking your life for such a trivial matter? This is just too much.

"Do you know now?" Lin Wanrong asked, half amused and half annoyed. Dealing with a woman as gentle yet stubborn as Qin Xian'er left him feeling quite helpless.

"I treat you as you treat me," Qin Xian'er replied with a sweet smile. Even through the light veil, he could sense her radiant smile. Seeing Lin Wanrong rush into the rain of arrows, she had felt relieved. Her heartfelt words came naturally.

It's over, it's over. The words of this girl moved me greatly. What can I do, her charm is just too irresistible.

Qin Xian'er's eyes were filled with tenderness as she stared at him. If they weren't surrounded by people, she might have already thrown herself into his arms. They were whispering to each other in front of everyone, but to the outsiders, they were still enemies. The thrill of it was like having a secret affair.

At this moment, apart from feeling touched, Lin Wanrong also felt a strange sense of joy. Having such a girl who cares about you, gets a little jealous from time to time, can be quite appealing to a man. Of course, it would be even better if she only gets jealous and doesn't kill. Men's thoughts can be so cheap.

"Little brother Lin, don't risk your life. Come back quickly," Xu Wei called out loudly. The Eldest Miss Xiao had been moving slowly and wanted to follow Lin San, but she was immediately stopped by Xu Wei's guards.

Ah, this is not the time for romance. Lin Wanrong thought. Now that Lu Zhongping and his companions were caught by Xu Wei, the priority was to find a way to help Xian'er escape.

Xu Wei's words reminded him. He winked at Qin Xian'er and shouted, "The demon of the White Lotus cult, you plundered our Xiao family in the past, today I won't spare you."

Upon hearing this, Qin Xian'er let out a soft giggle. Quickly, she pulled a stern face to play along, "If you want to fight, then fight. Why so much talk?" After saying this, she thrust her long sword towards Lin Wanrong, but her aim was miles off.

Lin Wanrong quickly sidestepped, retreating to stand at the edge of the ship.

Eldest Miss Xiao knew what was going on. These two were definitely putting on a show. How could that woman harm Lin San when she was so infatuated with him? "You liar," Eldest Miss Xiao muttered under her breath, stamping her foot in frustration.

"Little brother Lin, do not engage! Come back quickly!" Xu Wei urgently shouted.

But his warning came a moment too late. The last remaining bandit of the White Lotus cult had swiftly closed the distance to Lin San. With a swift move, she wrapped her arms around Lin San. Lin San let out a startled shout as they both plummeted into the lake.

"Where is the felt net?" Xu Wei hurried to the edge of the boat and yelled. The felt net, initially prepared for the capture, had already been used to arrest the other White Lotus cult bandits. Where could they find it now? Seeing the soldiers about to shoot arrows into the water, Xu Wei quickly waved them off, "No!"

Eldest Miss Xiao saw the White Lotus demoness nestled in Lin San's arms as they fell into the water together. It didn't look like a hostage situation, but rather an intimate moment. "Liars, all liars," she muttered through gritted teeth, her heart filled with resentment.

However, seeing Lin San fall into the water still triggered an involuntary surge of concern in her heart. This scoundrel, she wondered, does he even know how to swim? And if he doesn't... did he risk his life just for her?

The more Eldest Miss Xiao thought about it, the more frightened she became. She focused her gaze on the lake, scanning the calm water for any signs of the two. But the surface was serene, revealing no trace of their figures.

Chapter 169 I'm Not One to Be Taken Lightly

In a state of urgency, Xu Wei instructed those around him, "Deploy all our best swimmers to search for Little brother Lin in the lake. We must conduct a thorough search along the lakes shores. We must find him alive" Noticing the Eldest Miss' troubled expression, Xu Wei quickly halted his words, asserting, "We must find him."

The Eldest Miss heaved a sigh, her gaze lingering on the broken red thread in her hand. Her demeanor was profoundly somber, and no one could discern her thoughts.

As soon as Lin Wanrong hit the water, he knew something was amiss. Qin Xianer clung to him like a mermaid, limiting his movements.

He hastily opened his eyes underwater, only to see Qin Xianer tightly embracing him, her eyes shut, her face colored with a hint of shyness.

He was sweating, worried if this young girl couldn't swim well. Carrying such a large person, she might very well drown. As he mulled over this, he suddenly remembered that Qin Xianer had been lurking underwater for quite a while, suggesting she was capable of swimming.

This realization brought him considerable relief. Knowing his own underwater skills were commendable, he gently tapped Qin Xianer's shoulder. Realizing his intent, she quickly let him go, flashed an embarrassed smile, then spun around and took off, swimming ahead like a nimble mermaid.

He hadn't expected the girl to have such underwater skills. He wondered how she'd look in a swimsuit. Smirking at the thought, Lin Wanrong noticed Qin Xianer signaling him to keep up. It appeared as if she was quite familiar with the currents of the West Lake.

The light rain scattered across the lake, much like a gentle maiden's touch, soothingly caressing his face.

Having swum a considerable distance, Qin Xianer signaled again. They were touching the sandy lake bed, indicating they were about to surface.

Emerging from the water, Lin Wanrong took a deep breath. The long underwater journey had been exhausting, only occasionally interrupted by a few secretive breaths at the surface.

However, the lake shore was densely forested. Lin Wanrong was perplexed. "Xian'er, is this the gathering place of your White Lotus Sect?" He needed to ascertain this. He certainly didn't want to unwittingly stumble into a den of the White Lotus Sect. It would be a death wish, an act of impatience with life.

Xianer turned to him with a smile. "Don't worry, Young Master. Only I know this path, how could I harm you? I noticed that you are an excellent swimmer, much better than me. Where did you learn to swim?"

With a cheeky grin, Lin Wanrong replied, "I used to have a nickname, 'Tiger on Land, White Dragon in the River'. It wasn't for nothing."

Covering her mouth, Qin Xianer chuckled gracefully, "Young Master, you speak in such a playful manner. It's hard to tell which of your words are true and which are false."

Seeing her radiant, joyful countenance, Lin Wanrong vaguely remembered their first encounter. She was undercover as a courtesan, adept at poetry and music, full of charm, and seemingly indifferent to everyone. But now, she was genuinely warm and moving. The most unpredictable and multifaceted thing in the world, he thought, was indeed a woman.

Qin Xian'er's veiled scarf had long been lost in the water. Laughing, she stripped off her soaked robe, revealing the graceful curves of her body. Though she was dressed, her form was alluringly pronounced - both the prominent and the pert, exceptionally tempting. This girl, so pure and shy in the bawdy atmosphere of Miaoyu Pavilion, had returned to the White Lotus cult and was suddenly unrestrained and bold. It seemed she was indeed a natural siren.

Lin Wanrong found himself swallowing hard. Damn it, was he a gentleman after all? How else could he resist the urge to pounce upon seeing such tantalizing beauty?

Qin Xian'er noticed his intense gaze and felt her heart race. Her pretty face flushed crimson and she squealed, "Young Master, what... what are you looking at?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Xian'er, are you cold?"

Although Qin Xian'er was still in her soaked robe, Lin Wanrong had plunged directly into the water without even removing his clothes, the sticky dampness uncomfortable against his skin. Even a skilled warrior like him couldn't withstand such torment. He silently cursed his luck.

"I'm not cold," Qin Xian'er replied quietly.

"You may not be, but I am feeling a bit chilly," Lin Wanrong replied with a grin.

Qin Xian'er gasped, suddenly remembering she wore her water garment while he did not. Seeing him drenched from head to toe, she hurriedly suggested, "Young Master, we need to find a place to change into dry clothes."

Lin Wanrong laughed off her concern, "Don't worry about it. This minor issue won't get the best of me. All I need is for you to agree to one little condition, a simple one, and I won't be cold anymore."

"What condition?" Qin Xian'er asked anxiously.

Lin Wanrong revealed his wolfish intentions, "Give me a hug, Xian'er. If you hug me, I won't be cold."

Qin Xian'er lowered her head shyly, her face flushed. This Young Master, she thought, he turns wicked as soon as he opens his mouth.

Though she had been exceptionally bold in Miaoyu Pavilion as part of her cover, upon returning to the White Lotus Sect, she had become a free and wilful little witch. Her nature, however, was shy and passionate, a combination that left Lin Wanrong itching for more.

"Young Master, I am not a frivolous woman," Qin Xian'er said, her face reddening. When they had fallen into the water, it was a life-and-death situation, but now that they were safe, she felt the need to be a bit more reserved.

"Of course, and I'm not a casual person either," Lin Wanrong replied, grinning mischievously as he took her small hand and whispered into her ear, "When I become casual, I'm not myself anymore."

Qin Xian'er's face turned redder at his teasing. Her heart was racing and she couldn't break free from his grip. Seeing him smiling at her made her even more flustered, all her poise as a skilled warrior lost.

It was now winter, and Lin Wanrong, soaked to the skin, shivered as a light breeze swept over him.

Qin Xian'er was taken aback. Although he had always been smooth-talking, his words were frivolous, he never truly overstepped the boundary. She was filled with gratitude and emotion, and lightly supported herself against his arm. Surprisingly, she leaned her delicate body into his embrace willingly, utterly unconcerned with his soaked clothes, and softly cried, "Young Master, you risked your life to save me earlier. Xian'er is eternally grateful."

Sweat, he thought. There was no need for him to risk his life to save her, she was the one testing him, and taking credit for it was somewhat embarrassing. He quickly patted her shoulder and said, "It wasn't me who saved you, actually, I haven't thanked you yet for the several times you saved me."

Qin Xian'er rubbed her head against his chest gently and murmured, "Earlier, seeing you and Miss Xiao getting along so warmly, Xian'er was prepared to die. Who would've thought that you, Young Master, would risk your life for Xian'er? If you treat Xian'er so kindly, even if I were to die, I would want to repay the grace of your acquaintance."

Lin Wanrong was taken aback, he and Miss Xiao were cozy with each other? Where did this come from? The next time she saw him in the same carriage with her, would she immediately slander him for having spent the wedding night with her? This girl loved to be jealous unnecessarily and even liked to throw tantrums. This was absolutely intolerable.

At that moment, with a beautiful woman in his arms, Lin Wanrong was invigorated. He reflected on Qin Xian'er's past as a courtesan who captivated thousands, compared to the gentle beauty in his arms now, she seemed like two completely different people.

Qin Xian'er had a perfect figure, well-proportioned and curvy. Her full, soft bosom was pressed against Lin Wanrong's chest, the faint warmth emanating from her body subtly stirred his heart, as if it could dry his soaked clothes.

When a beauty was in his arms, he could hardly contain himself, this was Lin Wanrong's creed. He gently extended a hand to stroke her back a few times and said, "Xian'er, you've become even more beautiful."

Xian'er blushed deeply and softly replied, "Young Master sure knows how to flatter. You have Qiaoqiao and Xiao Qingxuan, why would you ever think of me, a pitiful creature? If it weren't for our chance encounter today, I fear you would've forgotten who Xian'er was long ago." As she spoke, her expression turned melancholic, on the brink of tears.

Sweat, he thought, this girl was hard to appease. Qin Xian'er's words were true to the core. Lin Wanrong remembered Qiaoqiao, Qingxuan, the Second Miss, but he just couldn't recall Qin Xian'er. Could it be that he wasn't passionate enough? Heaven, how could he have such a flaw? It seemed that he had to work harder to become more affectionate.

There was no need to ponder over how to flatter a girl. Lin Wanrong solemnly said, "Xian'er, you're mistaken. Although we've been apart more than together, our hearts are close, even if we're worlds apart. Once a person leaves a mark in your heart, you can miss them daily even without seeing them. Don't you think that's true?"

Being held by him, Qin Xian'er was already somewhat bewildered, unable to pay attention to the flaws in his words. She lightly said, "Whatever Young Master says, Xian'er believes."

The more he said these words, the harder it became to deceive her. Lin Wanrong decided to ignore her words, and instead just held her tightly in his embrace. Xian'er's body trembled lightly, her petite figure burning hot, as if unable to withstand the intensity of his embrace.

Lin Wanrong, on the other hand, felt increasingly uncomfortable. His clothes were soaking wet, and his whole body felt icy cold, except for the burning heat in his arms. The searing heat in his lower abdomen felt like he was experiencing both ice and fire simultaneously.

"Young Master" Xian'er murmured shyly in his arms, her bashful and gentle demeanor made Lin Wanrong feel as if his entire body was ignited with fire. He extended his arm, hugging her petite figure tightly, as if wishing to melt her entire being into his embrace.

Qin Xian'er's heart thumped wildly, her body weak without any strength. Before she could utter a word, she felt something hot touching her lower abdomen.

Though she was an innocent woman, she had heard quite a few things from Miaoyu Pavilion. Naturally, she knew what it was. Her breathing became more rapid and heated. Subconsciously, she wanted to pull away from his embrace, her mouth slightly ajar, she said shyly, "Young Master, you are so wicked."

There was no aphrodisiac better than these words in this world. Lin Wanrong was overcome with lust, tightly hugging her full and delicate body. He breathed into her ear and chuckled, "Xian'er, I'm innocent. It's it that has betrayed me"

Qin Xian'er couldn't bear to hear any more, her whole body trembling lightly. As she was about to struggle away, she felt his embrace tighten, and that wicked thing became even larger, pressing against her lower abdomen.

"Ah" Qin Xian'er let out a soft gasp, her face as red as fire, her entire body trembling violently. Even her breath lacked strength as she collapsed weakly into his arms.

Chapter 170 The Temptation of Qin Xian'er

Qin Xian'er had risked her life to save him time and again, with deep affection and profound sincerity. Even if he were as emotionless as a rock, he would have been moved by her actions, let alone that Lin Wanrong was such a mischievous man, who wouldn't pass up an opportunity for a bargain? This was like a spark to dry kindling, igniting immediately.

Lin Wanrong's large hand gently explored her back, although separated by clothing, he could still appreciate the softness and smoothness of her skin. He wondered what kind of skin care method this girl used, as her skin was as tender as water. Lin Wanrong sighed inwardly while his hands playfully unfastened the row of clasps on her clothing, allowing his hand to slide in.

Qin Xian'er's body trembled. She gave him a gentle glance, her eyes as soft as water, her face flushing with an infinite bashfulness. Her lips parted slightly, exhaling a breath as fragrant as an orchid, a faint scent that made Lin Wanrong's heart itch with anticipation.

He slowly traced his hand down Xian'er's shoulder, experiencing a sensation as delicate and smooth as silk. Her skin was translucent like jade, incredibly smooth, without a single flaw. Touching her felt like caressing the softest silk, an utterly soothing sensation.

Darn it, I've hit the jackpot, Lin Wanrong thought. Even if one put aside Xian'er's incomparable beauty, her exquisite skin alone was a rare treasure, something that few could match, and could even compete with Qingxuan. This Xian'er was indeed a great treasure. Lin Wanrong swallowed, feeling entirely justified in his attraction toward her. His hand gently stroked her back, slowly sliding down, touching her soft and slender waist.

The moment he touched her waist, Qin Xian'er froze, unable to move, her body trembling slightly. Her face turned as red as the sunset, her luscious lips parted slightly, releasing a soft moan, like a barely audible whisper. A sensation as hot as fire quickly spread throughout her body.

Her eyes shimmered like water, her face tinged with an unusual pink blush. She gazed at Lin Wanrong in a daze, her lips parted slightly, even her breath was hot.

"Young Master" Qin Xian'er's voice came in a breathy moan. Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat, he pulled her tightly into his embrace, feeling the pressure of her chest against his own through the fabric. His heart burned with desire, his hands instinctively moving forward, just about to reach under Xian'er's intimate clothing, when he spotted a large official ship slowly approaching from the distant lake.

Lin Wanrong quickly came back to his senses from the heat of desire. What's going on with me? he thought, Getting carried away in the heat of passion, all while still in wet clothes? Xian'er is still in danger. Recently, his resistance to beauty was declining, and he was letting his lower body command his upper body - truly shameful.

However, the scenery in this forest was indeed good. Next time, when the mood strikes, he would bring Xian'er here with all the necessary preparations, to do what lovers do - surely that would be a marvelous feeling. He chuckled to himself twice, somewhat admiring his own lewdness.

Qin Xian'er felt the wandering hand on her body abruptly stop. In a rush, she stole a glance at him and found his eyes slightly squinted, a smirk of satisfaction surfacing on his face. She couldn't fathom what wicked idea was brewing in his mind.

Even though Qin Xian'er was filled with countless affections for him, she couldn't allow herself to surrender to him so recklessly in the wilderness. What on earth would that lead to?

Heat flushed her face, a mix of embarrassment and joy. At least the Young Master knows to show me some consideration, she thought to herself, oblivious to the fact that Young Master Lin was contemplating their next fun-filled rendezvous in this familiar spot.

"Xian'er, quickly get dressed. Don't catch a cold," Lin Wanrong said with a grave face, as if it was someone else who had unbuttoned her just moments ago. He wore the soaking wet clothes of a household servant, yet managed to look so decent and refined, which was quite amusing.

Inwardly blushing, Xian'er sneaked another glance at him, wondering how thick-skinned he could be, so effortlessly shrugging off his recent actions. But what she found most endearing about Lin Wanrong was this very character of his, seemingly never serious, yet exceedingly comforting. Talking to him, one could hardly know what sorrow was. In contrast, she could not find the same appeal in any of the prim and proper Young Masters who often appeared before her.

Qin Xian'er lowered her gaze, her face was as red as a beet. Lin Wanrong, knowing her shyness, grinned cheekily, "Let me help you." She let out a soft hum in response, her head still bowed low. He started fastening the buttons he had undone.

However, the buttons on a woman's attire of this era were not easy to unfasten and even more difficult to re-fasten. Without knowing the knack, he expended a tremendous effort to fasten just one button, which was quite an embarrassment.

Watching his clumsy actions, Qin Xian'er wanted to laugh but managed to hold it back. Her heart was filled with warmth and joy. If no other woman was to entangle with him, spending her entire life in this manner wouldn't be a waste of her existence.

Lin Wanrong was frustrated by these confounding buttons, he complained, "Xian'er, where did you buy this dress? Its quality isn't very good."

Holding back her laughter, Qin Xian'er replied, "It's made by Xiao's tailor shop, the material isn't really the best."

Embarrassed at his own remark, Lin Wanrong grumbled, "Forget about what I just said." Seeing him deflate for once, Qin Xian'er covered her mouth, giggling delightfully.

Lin Wanrong was slightly flustered by her laughter. He thought to himself, 'Didn't the lady who designed this dress ever consider us men? Is it not deliberately making things difficult for all men? This is a serious issue. I'll have to suggest to the designer when I get back. Women's clothing should be vastly improved. All women should know, not only are they understanding, but us men can also "understand clothing".'

In the end, it was Qin Xian'er who had to do up all the buttons herself. Blushing, she looked at him and said, "Young Master, the official ship will catch up with us soon. We should leave quickly."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Well then, let's go. But I must declare in advance that I absolutely won't be visiting the stronghold of the White Lotus Cult." Qin Xian'er giggled and took the lead, guiding Lin Wanrong along their path.

They ventured out of the dense forest, walked for a good half hour, and as the path twisted and turned around the mountains, the landscape suddenly opened up. An endless expanse of fields lay before them, soothing to the heart and the soul. Nestled within was a narrow path, flanked by a smattering of burnt wild grass. The path, however, led straight to a serene and peaceful village. The intersecting lanes of the fields, the green willows, the red mulberries, the crows of roosters, the barks of dogs, fishing, and farming activities, a few tendrils of cooking smoke gently curling up in the fine drizzle, all presented a picture of tranquil idyll.

Lin Wanrong, puzzled, inquired, "Xian'er, where are we?"

Qin Xian'er gave him a sidelong glance and answered with a faint smile, "This is Longhong Village."

"Longhong Village?" Lin Wanrong queried, unfamiliar with the name.

"This is my hometown," Qin Xian'er softly stated.

"Your hometown?" Lin Wanrong was genuinely surprised. He had interacted with Qin Xian'er numerous times at Miaoyu Pavilion and had been impressed by her refined manners, scholarship, and perception. He had assumed that she was from a wealthy family, not from a small village.

"I was born by the Yangtze River, Xian'er was born by the West Lake. We're quite a match, I guess," Lin Wanrong grinned cheekily.

Qin Xian'er responded with a slight nod, "This is my mother's hometown. Although I wasn't born here, my mother's hometown is also my hometown."

Xian'er's mother? That would be my mother-in-law, then. Is Xian'er bringing me here to meet her parents? he pondered.

Sweat, I've met so many aunts since coming to this world, but I've never officially visited my mother-in-law. Xian'er is rushing things a bit too much, isn't she? We haven't even sealed the deal yet. After we've consummated our marriage and the rice has been cooked, then I can pay a visit to my mother-in-law in a dignified manner.

"Xian'er, is your mother at home now?" Lin Wanrong inquired.

"My mother passed away many years ago," Qin Xian'er's eyes brimmed with unshed tears as she spoke softly.

Lin Wanrong gently took her hand, "Don't be sad. Your mother's spirit must be watching over you from heaven. Otherwise, how could you have met me?"

Qin Xian'er, teary-eyed, chuckled, "You really do have a thick skin."

Seeing her cry and laugh simultaneously, with a delicate charm in her demeanor, Lin Wanrong's heart fluttered slightly, prompting him to ask, "Is your father home then?"

Qin Xian'er's face turned stern as she fiercely responded, "I have no father."

Her determined expression, the rage blazing in her eyes, took Lin Wanrong aback. Xian'er had always been gentle and pleasing; why would she change so drastically upon the mention of her father?

Seeing Qin Xian'er gritting her teeth, her face pale, tears trickling down her cheeks, Lin Wanrong understood that there must have been some distressing matter involved. He tenderly stroked her hand, "Xian'er, I was wrong to ask about this, I apologize."

Qin Xian'er, however, swiftly covered his mouth, "Young Master, it's not your fault. I'm the one who is wrong, please don't be upset with me." Seeing Lin Wanrong nod with a gentle smile, Qin Xian'er continued, "I have never had a father, only my mother. This Longhong Village is my mother's old residence, and it's the only home I have. Every year, I return to stay for some time. Over the years, you are the first guest to visit here."

Lin Wanrong nodded with a slight smile, "So you're saying, this house, it only has you living in it?"

Qin Xian'er hummed in affirmation, her face blushing slightly, as if she had thought of something.

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, 'If it's just Xian'er living there, then wouldn't it be a case of a lone man and woman, like dry tinder meeting a raging flame, like an adulterous couple? 'Heavens above, it seems you've destined me to finish the work left undone by the lake.'

Qin Xian'er's face turned bright red, and she darted forward a few steps. Suddenly, she turned back, flashing a charming smile at Lin Wanrong, "Young Master, come quickly!"