

Finest 176

Chapter 176 An Unexpected Encounter

Lin Wanrong walked over with a smile, saying, "Everyone's here, eh? Why didn't you follow the Eldest Miss back to Jinling?"

Xiao Feng responded, "Brother San, it was the Eldest Miss' instruction to stay and wait for you."

Lin Wanrong felt a little relieved. The girl still had some conscience, not only did she leave the others to wait for him, but she also left her carriage for him to use.

Comforted, he considered himself the highest ranking amongst those present, naturally the carriage should be his to enjoy. He stepped up to enter the carriage, but as he reached to pull back the curtain, he heard a voice from within, a blend of shyness and anger, commanding, "Get down."

Startled, Lin Wanrong found the voice oddly familiar, like that of the Eldest Miss. Hastily pulling the curtain aside, he saw the woman inside frowning at him. If it wasn't Xiao Yuruo, then who else could it be?

"Get down, get down, get down now," the Eldest Miss hadn't expected such impudence from him, climbing into the carriage in front of so many servants. She was naturally upset and hastily spoke out in her soft voice.

With an awkward smile, Lin Wanrong descended from the carriage, wondering, hadn't this girl left? Why did she suddenly appear here? And here he thought she had generously left the carriage for him.

"Brother San," Xiao Cui spoke, "the Eldest Miss says that since we came together, we should leave together."

Upon hearing this, Lin Wanrong felt a warmth in his heart. To come together, and naturally to leave together. He hadn't expected the Eldest Miss to be so considerate, making him feel that his efforts for her family hadn't been in vain.

Initially, Lin Wanrong thought that the Eldest Miss, uttering such heartwarming words, would greet him with a warm smile. However, the reality was quite the contrary. On the return journey to Jinling, the Eldest Miss did not speak a single word to him, as if he was completely nonexistent, her coldness surpassing even that of their journey out.

After their trip to Hangzhou, after their shared experiences and the red thread incident, there had been obvious signs of an improvement in their relationship. However, after the events of the previous day, it seemed to have reverted to its prior state.

Lin Wanrong had tried initiating conversations with the Eldest Miss several times, but she simply ignored him. After a few attempts, he too lost interest and resorted to quietly riding his horse.

When they reached the border region of Zhejiang and Jiangsu, the high mountains and dense forests made for a dangerous journey. On their way there, they had met many merchants, but perhaps due to the rain, there were very few pedestrians on their return.

Feeling depressed, Lin Wanrong was leading on his horse when suddenly, a large stone rolled down from the mountain, blocking their path.

Frightened by the sudden event, Lin Wanrong's horse let out a long neigh and began to spin, nearly throwing him off. He quickly grabbed the saddle, pressing his body against the horse's back, barely maintaining his balance. His heart pounded wildly. Was this a landslide or a mudslide? How could such a large stone fall?

The people behind him were also drenched in cold sweat. If the stone had hit them, it would have been catastrophic.

"Lin San, are you alright?" The Eldest Miss's voice carried a slight tremble, coming from inside the carriage. This was the first time she had spoken to Lin Wanrong since they had left Hangzhou.

"I'm fine, just almost got crushed by a rock," Lin Wanrong replied with a grin.

"You and your silly remarks," the Eldest Miss huffed but did not say anything more.

Lin Wanrong looked around. There was no landslide, but the large stone had come out of nowhere, a complete mystery. As they pondered this, several figures suddenly appeared on the mountainside,

their faces covered with black veils. From afar, the glint of their knives shimmered, radiating a threatening aura. A glance was enough to understand their intentions a robbery was imminent.

This was Lin Wanrong's first encounter with mountain bandits. There was a certain excitement in his heart, but he wondered whether these villains were after wealth or women. Damn it, he thought, I hate bandits claiming authority by blocking paths and robbing people, such a low-class way of survival.

"Mi-miss, it's mountain bandits..." Xiao Cui's face paled as she stammered.

Xiao Feng quickly stepped in front of her, "Don't be afraid, I'll deal with these bandits, ensuring your safety, Sister Cui..."

Sister Cui Lin Wanrong felt a shiver run down his spine, an icy coldness enveloping him. What a pair of immoral lovers.

The Eldest Miss frowned. She had traveled this route countless times, never encountering any mountain bandits. What was happening today?

With a shout, dozens of figures rushed down from the mountains, their physiques and vigor quite intimidating.

Escaping was no longer an option. Lin Wanrong quickly dismounted his horse and picked up a stone, instructing everyone, "Guard the carriage, don't let the bandits harm the Eldest Miss."

In a blink of an eye, the bandits were right before the carriage. One of them shouted, "This mountain is mine, this tree is mine..."

"Shut your mouth," Lin Wanrong yelled in anger, hurling the stone in his hand at the bandit. With his strength and accuracy, the stone hit the bandit square in the face, knocking him down like a split watermelon, cutting his words short.

Everyone was taken aback. The bandits certainly hadn't expected such ferocity from their opponents; one of them had already been felled before they could even make a move.

Si De, Xiao Feng, and the others, shouted in surprise, their voices tinged with excitement.

Lin Wanrong was carrying many treasures. Not to mention his mysterious martial arts prowess, the poisoned needles from Qin Xian'er, and the firearm from Xiao Qingxuan were more than enough to deal with these bandits. He had been itching for a chance to use them, and today, the bandits were indeed out of luck.

Seeing one of his bandits fall, the leader-like figure next to him glared at the stone, anger flashing in his eyes, "Seize them quickly."

Real bandits would have shouted something like, "Brothers, charge," not using a refined phrase like "Seize them." Noticing some bandages on the bandit leader's hand and recognizing the familiar voice, Lin Wanrong had a sudden realization. Damn it, he thought, how did this peaceful place spawn bandits? It turned out to be that rascal Tao Dongcheng playing tricks.

On that day, when Tao Dongcheng had set the scheme to "rescue" Eldest Miss Xiao, it had been foiled by a single stone thrown by Lin Wanrong. Naturally, he remembered it vividly. No wonder he was fuming when he saw Lin Wanrong using the same technique again.

Beside Tao Dongcheng, a petite figure said, "Just capture Lin San, don't make it hard for Miss Xiao." Judging by the voice and appearance, it was Tao Wanying, that fiery little pepper.

Upon hearing this, Lin Wanrong was livid. Damn it, these siblings were not only collaborating to rob, but they also specifically targeted him, as if he was the easy prey. This Tao girl was supposedly a public official, what a waste of food she was.

"Catch them all," Tao Dongcheng ordered loudly. Tao Wanying let out a soft protest, "Brother, you said we would only catch Lin San and not make things difficult for Sister Yuruo"

A glint of malice flashed in Tao Dongcheng's eyes: "Capture them, capture them all."

Listening to the siblings bickering, Lin Wanrong understood. Tao Wanying held a grudge against him, was close to Eldest Miss Xiao, and therefore wanted only him captured. Tao Dongcheng's intention was as clear as day to everyone but a fool like Tao Wanying.

A dozen bandits charged at once. Lin Wanrong shouted, "Protect Miss Xiao," and promptly picked up two stones to hurl at the attackers. His strength and accuracy were top-notch, especially since he aimed at the faces, giving the bandits no chance to dodge. Two more fell victim to his stones.

Seeing his men being so useless, Tao Dongcheng was agitated. "Attack together. Capture Miss Xiao first"

Although Lin Wanrong was skilled in martial arts, he was inherently lazy. If he could sit, he wouldn't stand; if he could lie down, he wouldn't sit. With his poison darts and firearm, he could easily deal with them. Only a fool would engage in hand-to-hand combat.

It was about time to practice his marksmanship. Lin Wanrong chuckled, about to reach for his firearm in his bosom. Suddenly, he heard a long whistle. A figure came rushing like lightning, and engaged the bandits. This man's martial arts skills were extraordinary. Despite being outnumbered, he held the upper hand, quickly defeating several bandits, causing Tao Dongcheng and his sister to blanch.

Lin Wanrong could see clearly. This man, the one who came to their aid, was Gao Qiu, the bodyguard from Xu Wei's side.

Damn, the bodyguard had arrived. Lin Wanrong was quite excited. It must be Xu Wei who sent him to protect me. The old man was a good friend indeed. It's a pity I missed a great chance to practice my shooting.

Gao Qiu was an elite guard from the palace, his skills far surpassing Tao Dongcheng's men. In a few moments, he had subdued half of the dozen men.

When Tao Dongcheng saw the situation turning unfavorable, he turned to escape. Tao Wanying, however, was braver than her brother. Looking at Lin Wanrong, she said, "I will capture the villain Lin San."

Tao Dongcheng, seeing his sister's determination, urgently grabbed Tao Wanying to escape. Lin Wanrong, however, wouldn't let them leave easily. Damn it, weren't they swaggering just a moment ago, with all their talk about opening mountains and planting trees? If I let them escape today, I might as well write my name backwards.

He always did the unexpected, playing by his own rules. Seizing the opportunity, he dashed forward to catch up with Tao Dongcheng and shouted, "Young Master Tao"

Without thinking, Tao Dongcheng turned his head, only to be met with a blur. Lin Wanrong's heavy fist landed on his temple. Reeling from the blow, Tao Dongcheng silently crumpled to the ground.

"Brother" Seeing her brother fall unconscious, Tao Wanying let out a mournful cry. She tightly clung to Tao Dongcheng's hand and glared at Lin Wanrong. Her eyes were filled with intense fury. "Lin San, what do you want?" she demanded.

"What a joke, Miss Tao. It's clear you came to rob me, but you're asking what I want?" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "Since you brought it up, I might as well tell you. You folks are doing an excellent job as bandits. It's so entertaining that I'm itching to try it out myself, to play the part of a robber."

"You, what do you want to rob" Tao Wanying asked in alarm.

Lin Wanrong smirked and replied flippantly, "I plan to commit a bit of robbery of a romantic kind!"

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"Lin San, you dare?" exclaimed Tao Wanying in a mix of shock and anger. Despite her defiance, she couldn't help but step back in haste.

Ever since she was humiliated by Lin San in the heart of Jinling City, she had developed a certain sense of fear for Lin Wanrong. On top of that, it was this same Lin San who had caused her brother to lose his shop and his dignity at the Sunshine and Rain Restaurant in Hangzhou, and even injured his finger. It was in her burning rage that she dared to confront him.

"You should know, I am a wicked man; there's nothing I wouldn't dare to do," Lin Wanrong replied with a laugh. He found her words lacking in substance. He chuckled smugly, pressing forward toward Tao Wanying.

In terms of fighting, Tao Wanying was never a match for Lin Wanrong, especially under such dire circumstances. She cried out in fear but nonetheless held onto her brother Tao Dongcheng's hands tightly, unwilling to let go. In her fear, she had forgotten all about her elegant martial arts skills and had reverted back to being a terrified little girl.

Looking at her coldly, Lin Wanrong asked, "Miss Tao, are you surrendering, or do you want me to force you?"

Having experienced his might, Tao Wanying knew escape was impossible today. She gritted her teeth and said, "Lin San, I will stay, but you must let my brother go."

Even though Tao Wanying was fraught with faults, she refused to abandon her kin in a crisis. This admirable trait left a somewhat positive impression on Lin Wanrong.

Laughing heartily, Lin Wanrong said, "Miss Tao, do you think you're in a position to negotiate? How amusing. Wasn't it the Tao family that ambushed us today? How come it's your turn to plead with me now?"

Tao Wanying bit her lip and remained silent. Lin Wanrong took a few steps forward, lifted her chin, and with a frivolous touch to her face, he teased, "Miss Tao, aside from your figure, it's hard to say what other parts of you are attractive."

With an exclamation, Tao Wanying recoiled, her eyes welling up with anger and shame. "Lin San, if you dare to bully me, I will haunt you even in death."

"Bully you?" Lin Wanrong laughed, "Forgive me for being blunt, Miss Tao, but even if I were blindfolded by pig fat and the lights were out, I wouldn't lay a finger on you."

"Go to hell!" Tao Wanying blushed and shouted in shame and fury.

"Whether I live or die has nothing to do with you. But you, clinging to me so desperately, could it be that you've taken a fancy to me? Damn, I must be cursed to be sought after by a madwoman like you. I must burn incense when I return to ward off evil spirits," Lin Wanrong teased.

Humiliated beyond endurance, Tao Wanying, disregarding the gap in their strengths, screamed and charged at him.

Her movements were without form in her fury. Seeing her approach, Lin Wanrong neatly chopped his hand on the back of her neck, causing her to faint and collapse limply.

"Lin San, did you kill her?" An anxious voice came from behind. Turning, Lin Wanrong saw Eldest Miss Xiao had arrived.

"Do I look like an executioner?" Lin Wanrong responded with a bitter smile. "Miss Xiao, is your impression of me really so poor?"

Eldest Miss Xiao was relieved to know that he hadn't killed anyone. She glared at him, remarking, "Even if you're not an executioner, taking advantage of others like you did makes you a rogue, a shameless person."

Gao Qiu approached with a smile, "I apologize for my late arrival, causing Miss Xiao and Young Master Lin to be startled."

Xiao Yuruo thanked him, "I appreciate your timely assistance, Mister Gao."

Lin Wanrong also expressed his gratitude, "Where's the need for such formality, Brother Gao? We are more than grateful for your rescue. Had we known you were watching over us, our journey would have been much less tense."

Gao Qiu responded, "Young Master Lin, you're quite skilled yourself. The stone you threw was precise, your technique and strength first-rate. Even if I hadn't come, you could have handled the situation alone. Before I left, Minister Xu repeatedly instructed me to protect everyone discreetly, not to alarm anyone. Were it not for the boldness of the bandits, I would have escorted everyone to Jinling without revealing myself."

Having dealt with the band of bandits from the Tao family, the dilemma was how to handle the Tao siblings before them.

Miss Xiao pondered for a moment before saying, "Tao Dongcheng and Miss Wanying should be treated separately. Tao Dongcheng, having made multiple attempts on our lives, is undoubtedly guilty. Wanying, although complicit in sheltering Dongcheng, was ultimately motivated by sibling affection. Moreover, she hasn't committed any grave crimes, so we shouldn't pressure her unduly. In my opinion, we should apprehend them and bring them before the law. I don't believe anyone would dare shield them then."

Hearing this, Lin Wanrong's brows furrowed in thought. She was indeed naive. Report to the authorities? Was this a matter to be dealt with in that manner? Women tended to lack political sensitivity - it was a natural limitation, something that couldn't be rushed.

He sighed and replied, "Miss Xiao, I agree that we should treat the Tao siblings differently. But as for turning them in, I'm afraid that's going to be difficult. Have you taken a good look at where we are?"

Eldest Miss Xiao answered, "We're at the border between Jiangsu and Zhejiang, is there a problem?"

Lin Wanrong questioned, "To whom would you turn them over, Jiangsu or Zhejiang?"

Her mind whirled at this reminder. Tao Dongcheng was cunning indeed. Their choice to strike at the border between two provinces was intentional, taking advantage of the ambiguity of jurisdiction. In case of an incident, both provinces could easily pass the buck. Given (Tao Dongcheng's father) Tao Yu's standing in Suzhou and his influence, it wouldn't be easy to resolve this matter in either province. Not to mention, only the Xiao family witnessed the robbery, making it difficult to prove in court. She realized that her initial idea was naive.

Seeing Lin San's faint smile, Eldest Miss Xiao thought, 'So, he had a plan all along and deliberately made me look foolish.' She snorted and shot him a reproachful glance, then fell silent.

Gao Qiu pulled Lin Wanrong aside and whispered, "Young Master Lin, how do you propose we handle this?"

Lin Wanrong smirked, rubbing his neck, and said slyly, "This place is surrounded by dense forest and tall mountains"

Gao Qiu, startled, cut him off, "Young Master, you mustn't"

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Why? Did Minister Xu leave any instructions before he left?"

Gao Qiu hurriedly said, "The Tao siblings being here would undoubtedly have been noticed by some. If we were to end them here and now, the trouble that the Xiao family would attract would be immense."

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, The trouble we've attracted is already far from small. After all, our relations with the Tao family have already deteriorated beyond repair, what's a dead pig to fear from boiling water?

"If the Tao siblings were to die, Tao Yu and his allies would surely retaliate desperately, resulting in a bloodbath in Jinling. Minister Xu had a message for you, Young Master Lin. If there is trouble in Jinling, the Xiao family will certainly be the first to bear the brunt. Please consider your actions carefully," Gao Qiu pleaded, folding his hands in front of him.

Xu Wei, deeply immersed in the political field for many years, had a clear understanding of power struggles. If Tao Yu and Cheng De were to join forces and flex their power, while the crafty Luo Min might manage, but the Xiao family, given their standing, would inevitably bear the brunt. The only way for the Xiao family to survive was either to maintain the current equilibrium or help Luo Min completely bring down Cheng De. This was something Lin Wanrong understood very well.

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily and slapped Gao Qiu's shoulder, "Brother Gao, I was just joking with you. Do you think I'm that cruel?"

Recalling Lin Wanrong's interrogation methods that morning, Gao Qiu shivered. Although Lin Wanrong himself wasn't cruel, his tactics were the cruelest in the world.

"However, as you know, I'm not one to easily tolerate being bullied. Tao Dongcheng has repeatedly used underhanded tricks against our Xiao family. If I don't retaliate, I'd be letting myself down. Don't you agree, Brother Gao?" Lin Wanrong asked.

"Of course, a real man must return grievances and avenge wrongs," Gao Qiu replied.

Lin Wanrong nodded and asked, "I like to hear that. Brother Gao, in your opinion, when is a man happiest?"

After a moment's thought, Gao Qiu replied, "Visiting a brothel."

Stunned, Lin Wanrong thought, 'Old Gao has no ambition, he's just the type to frequent brothels.' He chuckled, "Brother Gao, your insight is indeed profound. Now, what would be the best way to ensure a man can't visit brothels or enjoy women for the rest of his life?"

"Castrate him?" Gao Qiu blurted out, then recoiled in shock at his own words. 'Was Young Master Lin planning to castrate Young Master Tao?' He quickly added, "Young Master Lin, that's not right. It's practically the same as killing him."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Brother Gao, where are your thoughts going? I'm someone who can't even bear to kill a chicken, let alone engage in such bloody business as castration. If I were to do something, it would be much more subtle. You, Brother Gao, are a martial arts master. Is there a technique that can cut off a certain part of him without him noticing immediately, only to gradually realize over time, rendering him impotent for life?"

Gao Qiu hesitated and said, "There are some methods, but they're somewhat sinister."

Gao Qiu was somewhat helpless. Encountering this astonishing Young Master Lin, anyone who dared to match his cunning was simply courting death. He could only nod in agreement to employ a certain technique.

Lin Wanrong dragged Tao Dongcheng over, tossing him onto the ground. Gao Qiu said, "The pain caused by this technique is quite severe. I'm afraid it might rouse Young Master Tao to consciousness."

"That's easily solved." Lin Wanrong smiled, producing from his pocket a dose of knockout drug that had been gifted to him by Xiao Qingxuan. Fortunately, the drug had been wrapped in parchment and hadn't gotten wet when he'd fallen into the water the day before.

Gao Qiu, who had roamed the Jianghu for many years, recognized the substance at a glance. He wondered about Lin Wanrong's origins. He carried such valuable items with him that he seemed more like a thief than Tao Dongcheng did.

Lin Wanrong instructed Si De to bring a water bottle and a small bowl, poured clear water into it, and sprinkled half a bag of the knockout drug in. Being his first time employing such methods, he wasn't sure how much to use. Gao Qiu was secretly shocked; this dosage could knock out a bull. Once Tao Dongcheng drank it, he wouldn't wake up for at least three days.

Lin Wanrong found a twig on the ground, stirred the mixture nonchalantly, and said, "Done. This is a top-notch potion, an essential for wanderers and playboys of the Jianghu. I wouldn't typically use it so freely."

Gao Qiu used a technique to open Tao Dongcheng's throat, and Lin Wanrong poured down the bubbling brew into Tao Dongcheng's throat, laughing, "Alright, Brother Gao, you may begin."

Chapter 178 Better to Cross the King of Hell than Cross Brother San (Part 2)

Gao Qiu said, "Young Master Lin, the method I employed is a unique one, deeply insidious and malevolent. It targets and damages his meridians. This Tao fellow won't notice for a month, and then the symptoms will gradually start to appear. He will have no idea what's happening to him. Even if a great deity descended to help him, he would still be left impotent. This technique is highly despised among our peers, I ask that you keep this confidential."

This must have been a method of damaging the penile spongiosum, a genius solution, permanent and effective. Lin Wanrong chuckled with delight, and said solemnly, "Brother Gao, rest assured, our actions are in the service of justice and we fear no gossip. Speaking of which, no matter how cunning we are, could we be more so than this Tao fellow? He simply reaps what he sows, we are merely agents of karma."

Gao Qiu nodded without saying another word. He retrieved two long needles from his person, found the right spot, and swiftly inserted them into Tao Dongcheng's groin. Tao Dongcheng's abdomen started to swell gradually. Gao Qiu gathered his strength and slapped Tao Dongcheng's stomach hard. A pained expression crossed Tao Dongcheng's face, before he returned to slumber.

Wiping away his sweat, Gao Qiu chuckled, "There, in a month, he will probably no longer be a man."

Lin Wanrong suddenly asked, "Brother Gao, do you have any aphrodisiacs on you?"

A blush crept onto Gao Qiu's face as he asked, "What does Young Master Lin want with an aphrodisiac?"

Grinning wickedly, Lin Wanrong replied, "I fear Young Master Tao hasn't had enough fun. Let's give him another round."

A shiver ran through Gao Qiu. Tao Dongcheng's penile meridians were already broken. Adding an aphrodisiac might cause them to burst immediately. Young Master Lin was indeed a man who could play a person like a god.

Gao Qiu, embarrassed, took out a packet of powder and said, "This is all that's left, 'The Buddha's Big Stick'. I used up 'The Guanyin Disrobing' the other day at a brothel."

Taking the powder, Lin Wanrong laughed, "Oh? Brother Gao, you have such interests? You must have had a blast the other day, haha."

Tao Dongcheng had conspired with Lu Zhongping to ruin the Eldest Miss's innocence with an aphrodisiac. Little did he know that he would be receiving retribution so soon. Lin Wanrong fed Tao Dongcheng 'The Buddha's Big Stick'. In his unconscious state, he would experience three days of implosion, followed by three days of explosion. With the aphrodisiac working on his already damaged penile spongiosum, he wouldn't even last a month, half a month at most, before he would be impotent.

The aphrodisiac certainly lived up to its reputation. Even in his unconscious state, Tao Dongcheng responded immediately. Lin Wanrong glanced at Tao Dongcheng's groin and sneered disdainfully. "Damn, with that little thing of yours, you dare to call yourself a man?"

Once they had completed their mission, Lin Wanrong and Gao Qiu shared a glance and burst into laughter. Gao Qiu thought, after spending only a few hours with Young Master Lin, he had somehow become more wicked.

Upon seeing Lin Wanrong and Gao Qiu return, the Eldest Miss noticed that Tao Dongcheng was lying stiffly halfway up the hill. Unaware of their scheme, she asked, "Lin San, have you and Gao Qiu come up with a plan?"

Lin Wanrong nodded and said, "Guided by a principle of compassion, we don't want to make things difficult for Young Master Tao. Let him live or die here on his own."

The Eldest Miss looked at him in disbelief. Letting Tao Dongcheng off so easily wasn't his style. Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "A dog can bite a man, but a man shouldn't bite a dog."

The Eldest Miss scoffed, wrinkling her little nose. She knew him well enough, that he was born to never take a loss. If a dog bit him, he would hit back with even greater force than the bite. With this thought, she burst into soft laughter. She looked at him crossly, but her heart was filled with an indescribable emotion.

After calming her feelings, she saw that Lin Wanrong really wasn't going to do anything more to Tao Dongcheng. Saying that he would leave and then doing it only made her more puzzled.

Traveling with Tao Wanying, who had been knocked unconscious, was a burden. According to Lin Wanrong's suggestion, they just put her on a horse. However, the Eldest Miss had some affection for

Tao Wanying and insisted on placing her in the carriage. Lin Wanrong was somewhat uneasy, unsure of when this young woman would wake up and what she might do.

After they had been traveling for the length of a tea ceremony, Lin Wanrong surmised that Tao Wanying was about to wake up. He chuckled, saying to Xiao Yuruo, "Miss, let me deal with that Tao's girl."

Seeing his lecherous smile, the Eldest Miss hurriedly said, "Lin San, I'm warning you, don't think of doing anything bad."

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "Miss, don't you trust me, or your own judgment? I was the one you personally chose, how could you be wrong?"

Seeing the Eldest Miss's puzzled expression, Lin Wanrong added, "Rest assured, Miss. This Tao Wanying is a fiery little pepper, I would never be so unrefined. Xiao Cui, you come with me too."

Carrying Tao Wanying and accompanied by Xiao Cui, Lin Wanrong climbed up the hillside and found a pile of dry grass in the bushes. He threw the fiery girl onto the ground and said to Xiao Cui, "Xiao Cui, undress."

Xiao Cui was startled, her face flushing with embarrassment. She said in a cutesy voice, "Brother San, why are you telling me this now? Don't you know how much I like you? But now, it's too late, I've already given myself to Brother Feng."

Chills ran down Lin Wanrong's spine. It's troublesome being too attractive, he thought. He stopped Xiao Cui who was acting coquettishly and said, "Sister Xiao Cui, I want you to undress Miss Tao."

"Ahh!" Xiao Cui let out a shriek, not daring to look at Brother San. She hurriedly and clumsily began to undress Tao Wanying.

Lin Wanrong directed from the side, "Don't undo it, tear it. Tear half, leave half. Use strength, be wild"

Startled and embarrassed, Xiao Cui finished undressing Tao Wanying. She had torn off half of Miss Tao's clothing, leaving her half-exposed. With a bashful attempt to cover herself, she used the torn robe to cover her body.

"Pinch hard on her neck, chest, and inner thigh" Lin Wanrong instructed again, "Especially the inner thigh, it must hurt when she wakes up"

Xiao Cui had no idea what Brother San was up to, but she followed his instructions and pinched hard until Miss Tao's legs were black and blue. Only then did she stop.

Seeing that everything was set up, Lin Wanrong smirked, about to leave, when he suddenly felt that the scene wasn't convincing enough. There was something missing. He pondered a moment, returned to Miss Tao, and taking a needle, pricked her finger. He squeezed a few drops of blood to fall beneath her.

"Little girl, I've been nothing but merciful to you, yet you keep provoking me. It's better to mess with the King of Hell than to mess with me, Brother San. The wicked have their own retribution. If this doesn't scare the life out of you, you won't realize that Lord Horse has three eyes." Lin Wanrong chuckled, then left the hillside with Xiao Cui.

Xiao Yuruo, seeing him descend after such a long time, couldn't resist looking at him and saying, "I have no idea what scheme you've been hatching."

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "Eldest Miss, I'm being wronged. I really didn't do anything. If you don't believe me, you can ask Sister Xiao Cui."

Xiao Cui blushed as she relayed what Lin Wanrong had told her to do. Xiao Yuruo listened, her face turning red. Though it was a small trick, it was incredibly cunning. With Wanying's stubborn personality, she would certainly fall for it, and she would likely be scared to death.

However, Lin Wanrong had not actually touched Wanying, he had simply exploited a universal female fear. There was no way to blame him; if anyone was at fault, it was Wanying for provoking Lin Wanrong. Eldest Miss sighed internally, waved her hand, and the carriage continued to move forward.

Gao Qiu rode alongside Lin Wanrong, curiously asking, "Young Master Lin, what did you do to that Miss Tao? You didn't feed her the 'Buddha's Big Stick', did you?"

The Buddha's Big Stick? Lin Wanrong thought, None can match your lewdness. He was about to speak when they heard a high-pitched scream from the distance, "Ah". It was the voice of a woman, incredibly bleak and terrifying.

Eldest Miss knew that it was Tao Wanying waking up. Hearing her cries, she felt a pang of guilt, and she couldn't help but glare at Lin Wanrong.

Lin Wanrong spread his hands, saying helplessly, "I am innocent, truly innocent."

This time, Lin Wanrong had thoroughly messed with the Tao family. He had been holding this grudge for quite some time. Today, it was Miss Tao who had come looking for him, so she could only blame herself.

On the way back to Jinling, with Gao Qiu as an escort, their journey was very peaceful, even mosquitoes dared not bite them.

As Jinling city was just within sight, Lin Wanrong let out a long sigh of relief. Going out was indeed tiring, home was much better. He could eat when he wanted, sleep when he wanted, and after a good meal, he could flirt with the Second Miss, chat with Qiaoqiao, and have a tea party with Luo Yuan, Qingshan, and Young Master Guo, what a delight.

It was past midnight when they entered the city. The streets were extremely quiet. Gao Qiu, worried about his elder brother, made plans to meet Lin Wanrong later and went straight to the governor's office.

Once inside Jinling city, Lin Wanrong felt like he was back on his own turf, feeling completely at ease. Eldest Miss instructed the driver to slow down. When Lin Wanrong walked up to the carriage, she leaned out of the window and said, "Lin San, you should rest early today. Get up early tomorrow, and we can discuss how to take over the Tao family's shop."

Having traveled all day, he had forgotten about this matter. Now that Eldest Miss had brought it up, Lin Wanrong suddenly realized, Aiyo, the Xiao family is going to make a fortune this time. In any case, they had already fallen out with the Tao family. Tao Dongcheng was probably still lying erect on the hillside. Tomorrow, he would take his men to take over the Tao family's shop. "Damn, today was truly a fantastic day."

Lin Wanrong grinned at Xiao Yuruo and said, "Eldest Miss, it's all well and good to take over the shop, but don't forget about the bet we made that day on the top floor of Sunshine and Rain Restaurant."

Eldest Miss blushed and huffed, "Who remembers any bet, I've forgotten it long ago." With that, she pulled the curtain down and wouldn't look at him again.

"Aiyo, you're using your authority to bully people, right? Despicable." Lin Wanrong huffed as the carriage entered the Xiao residence. Servants came to welcome them. It was not worth mentioning.

Just as Lin Wanrong, with a sore waist and aching back, was about to return to his own humble abode for sleep, he saw Xiao Cui come over and say, "Brother San, Eldest Miss said that if you have any dirty clothes that haven't been washed, you can pack them up. She will send someone to get them tomorrow and have the maids wash them."

Lin Wanrong looked at Eldest Miss, but saw her face flushed, pretending not to see him, conversing with the others. Damn, this little girl, you're deliberately trying to provoke me, right? What was the original wording of the bet again?

He returned to his small room, pushed the door open, only to be taken aback by the sight. The room was bright and clean, dust-free, with the bed tidied neatly. In the room, a sliver of sandalwood incense burned, emitting a serene and transcendent aroma.

Chapter 179 Dispute (Part 1)

Was this really his dwelling? How had it transformed so drastically in just a few days of his absence? Lin Wanrong took a stroll around the room, only to spot several thread-bound books on the table. Picking one up, he found them to be copies of the Diamond Sutra.

A faint smile touched his lips. Who else but the Second Miss could have been reciting sutras in this Xiao mansion? Without question, she must have sneaked in to tidy up his room.

This young lady, so devoted to her Buddhist practice, naturally hoped that Lin Wanrong would join her in reciting scriptures. Little did she know that Lin Wanrong held no interest in the Diamond Sutra. Perhaps he might have been intrigued had it been the Jade Maiden Heart Sutra [TL: From one of Jin Yong's novels, Return of the Condor Heroes].

The next day, Lin Wanrong indulged in a long, leisurely sleep. He was now the favored one in the eyes of the Madam and her daughters. His gardening duties had long been discarded. Apart from the Madam and her two daughters, no one dared order him around, allowing him complete freedom. To sleep until naturally awakened, to count money until his fingers cramped truly, this was a life he'd always dreamed of.

"Brother San, Brother San, the Eldest Miss invites you to the council hall for a meeting," he heard the maid's familiar voice calling from outside, still half-asleep.

Unconcerned, Lin Wanrong yawned and asked, "What time, oh, what hour is it, sister outside?"

"It's noon," the maid outside giggled.

"It's still daylight, let me sleep a little longer," Lin Wanrong muttered to himself.

The maid outside grew impatient at his words and huffed, barging in to say, "Lin San, hurry up and get out of bed."

Gazing at Xiao Yushuang's face, Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Second Miss, why are you in such high spirits today, pretending to be a maid? I'm not sure I can handle it."

Xiao Yushuang knew he had recognized her voice long ago. Obviously, he was teasing her on purpose. Her face flushed with embarrassment, she huffed, "You, you returned last night and didn't even tell me. You made me worry all day."

Lin Wanrong had already risen from bed, chuckling, "When we returned yesterday, everyone in the mansion knew. With such commotion, how come no one informed you?"

Embarrassed, the Second Miss admitted, "I've been reciting Buddhist scriptures for the past few days, not allowing anyone to disturb me. I was tidying up your room last night and fell asleep reciting, unaware that you had returned."

This girl, she was truly devout. Ultimately, all for his sake. Touched, Lin Wanrong took her small hand and said, "Don't worry. If you're tired, rest. You don't have to read those scriptures. The Bodhisattva in heaven feeds on incense and requires silver, not sutras. I'll earn more silver and offer more incense, that should suffice."

Quickly, the Second Miss covered his mouth with her hand, "Lin San, don't say such things. Last time you and my sister were safe and sound, it was the Bodhisattva showing mercy. We must not disrespect them. Reciting sutras for a month for your sake is nothing. I'd be willing to recite for a lifetime."

Smelling the faint fragrance on her fingertips, Lin Wanrong felt a jolt in his heart and in surprise, asked, "Second Miss, are you using perfume?"

Xiao Yushuang's face flushed red. "I used some of Mother's rose perfume. Lin San, does it smell good?"

Good? It was intoxicatingly delightful. The fact that all three Xiao women had a fondness for rose perfume was incredibly amusing.

Pulling her hand towards him, Lin Wanrong said, "It smells wonderful, absolutely heavenly. Second Miss, you seem to have lost some weight these past few days."

Xiao Yushuang nodded, "I've been eating vegetarian dishes lately, so naturally, I have slimmed down a bit."

Fixing his gaze on the blossoming form of her chest, Lin Wanrong seriously advised, "Second Miss, you are in the prime of your adolescence. Many parts of you are growing rapidly. Relying solely on a vegetarian diet won't suffice. You must balance your diet with meat, which can promote the growth of your chest, ahem, your entire body. Come, let me embrace you and see how many pounds you have lost."

The Second Miss fled, her cheeks blushing crimson. "You're such a tease. I hate you so much. My sister told me that a woman's body is precious as her life, and shouldn't be touched by others."

Lin Wanrong recalled the night he had overheard the Eldest Miss teaching Yushuang self-defense in her room. He chuckled, "Second Miss, carrying that dagger on you is quite dangerous. Why don't you let me keep it safe for you? I'm a very proper man and never take advantage of others."

The Second Miss mumbled an acknowledgment, a blush creeping up her cheeks. She lowered her head slowly and said, "Lin San, you don't need to be afraid. The dagger is for my self-defense,

against others, not you. Even though you're a rogue, I'm used to being bullied by you. Even if you bully me to death, I won't hold any grudges."

Feeling deeply touched, Lin Wanrong could only marvel. Who said this girl was only sixteen or seventeen? The words she spoke were so profound that not even a woman of twenty-six or twenty-seven could necessarily utter them. She moved him deeply.

After all, Xiao Yushuang was still young, like a blooming bud. Lin Wanrong, with the intent of 'fattening the pig before slaughtering,' did not overly tease her. They talked, he occasionally flirted, and they enjoyed their time together.

Lin Wanrong regaled Yushuang with the tales of his journey to Hangzhou. Being a master storyteller, his voice ebbed and flowed with the twists and turns of the narrative. The Second Miss listened with rapt attention. "Had I known it was so exciting, I would have gone too. Yesterday morning, Sister had sent people ahead to report what had happened. Lin San, you've done a great deed this time. Mother can't stop praising you, calling you the pillar of the Xiao family, destined for great achievements."

Hearing this, Lin Wanrong chuckled inwardly. The Xiao household was run by women, and yet, this time, he, a man, had become the 'half the sky.' He became increasingly curious about Madam Xiao. From what Xu Wei had said, Madam Xiao was a figure of importance in the capital years ago. Even a personage like Xu Wenchang held her in high regard. He wondered what her story was.

"Oh no" Xiao Yushuang, who had been chatting with him, suddenly cried out. "What a disaster. Lin San, my sister is waiting for you in the council hall for the meeting. I forgot about it when I saw you. Hurry to the council hall."

However, Xiao Yushuang seemed to understand his thoughts. She looked at him with a shy smile, whispering, "You should speak nicely to Sister and Mother when you go there. Don't be as reckless as last time. If you get punished again, there won't be anyone to plead for you."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily and left the cottage, heading towards the council hall. On the way, he bumped into the long-absent Young Master Guo Wuchang. Guo Wuchang was heading out, accompanied by Si De and a few tall and sturdy servants, looking rather enthusiastic. Seeing Lin San, Guo Wuchang immediately beamed, "Lin San, what you did this time was really satisfying!"

Confused, Lin Wanrong observed the spring-like enthusiasm on Guo Wuchang's face, wondering what he was up to. He jokingly said, "Young Master, it's still early. The Miaoyu Pavilion hasn't opened yet. You'll have to wait until evening for your... 'exchange'."

Guo Wuchang chuckled awkwardly, "Lin San, I'm not going for an 'exchange'. I'm going to browse the Tao family's store. Oh, I'm sorry, it should be the Xiao family's store now. Very satisfying, really satisfying! Let's see how that turtle Tao can boast now."

So, the Young Master was eager to seize the Tao family's property, Lin Wanrong thought, amused. He knew Guo Wuchang held no goodwill towards Tao Dongcheng. Naturally, Guo Wuchang couldn't wait to kick someone when they were down.

He wondered if someone had saved Tao Dongcheng. Experiencing the Sky-Holding Pillar was no fun. At least, Tao Dongcheng would need to visit the brothel to find three girls to solve the issue. Lin Wanrong smirked, concerned for Tao Dongcheng's delicate corpus cavernosum.

When Lin Wanrong arrived at the council hall, both the Eldest Miss and Madam Xiao were present, and the stewards from all over the Xiao estate were also sitting upright, seemingly waiting for his arrival. Upon seeing him, Madam Xiao stood up with a smile, "Lin San, you've worked hard."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Madam, you're too kind. I'm just a messenger. The hardest work has been done by the Eldest Miss." Xiao Yuruo glanced at him, saying nothing.

"I've heard about the whole incident from Yuruo. This trip to Hangzhou not only allowed our Xiao family to reclaim the leading position in the Jinling Chamber of Commerce, but also to acquire the Tao family's cloth shop. Lin San, you have made the greatest contribution, and I will certainly reward you handsomely," Madam Xiao said with a smile.

"Oh, not at all, Madam. You're too kind. It's because of your strategic insight, combined with the Eldest Miss's pragmatic and diligent style, that we've achieved such significant success. I just played a tinytiny role in this, insignificant really," Lin Wanrong responded, with faux modesty.

Struggling to contain her laughter at Lin Wanrong's antics, the Eldest Miss addressed the managers in the hall, "Lin San has made the greatest contribution this time. After discussing with Mother, we have decided that from now on, Lin San can freely participate in discussions in this council hall. Does anyone object?"

Those present were all relatives of the Xiao family. Seeing a lowly servant on equal footing with them naturally caused some discontent. However, the story of Lin San's duel with Tao Dongcheng in the Sunshine and Rain Restaurant had already circulated widely. Especially the mysterious technique of 'oil pan hand washing', which had startled them, hence, no one voiced opposition.

Lin Wanrong found a seat and sat down. Glancing around, he thought to himself, 'Have I, old Lin, finally joined the Xiao family's board of directors? I wonder when I can become the chairman of the Xiao family board?'

Seeing Lin Wanrong settled, the Eldest Miss slightly nodded and said to the crowd, "Regarding the takeover of the Tao family's cloth shop, I would like to hear your opinions on how to proceed smoothly." The managers present were all related to the Xiao family, but the Eldest Miss was assertive in business matters, referring to them simply as managers, not uncles.

One of the managers stood up and said, "Niece Yuruo, taking over the cloth shop of Master Tao is absolutely not acceptable."

Lin Wanrong recognized this man. He was the one who had obstructed him when he heroically saved the Second Miss. He remembered having a verbal spat with this man, who seemed to be the patriarch's cousin, as Madam Xiao had once referred to him as "Fourth Brother."

Sure enough, upon hearing his words, the Eldest Miss's expression changed, and she coldly retorted, "Why is it unacceptable? I'd like to hear your reasons, Fourth Uncle."

Chapter 180 Dispute (Part 2)

Fourth Uncle argued persuasively, "Niece Yuruo, Tao Yu, the Tao family's patriarch, is the Chief Weaving Officer in Suzhou, in charge of all textile affairs in Jiangsu Province. Our Xiao family has operated textile shops for years, and our relationship with the Weaving Officer of Suzhou is of great significance, allowing us to coexist peacefully all these years. Our business still relies heavily on Tao Family's favor; how could we possibly go against them? Now, because of this incident, not only have we offended Young Master Tao, but we have also displeased Tao Yu himself. If the Chief Weaving Officer makes a decision against us, the survival of our textile shops will be in jeopardy. This could be disastrous for the Xiao family."

Survival? If it weren't for Lin San, they would have been swallowed by the Tao family long ago. Where was the room to talk about survival? Xiao Yuruo scoffed and bit her lip, asking, "So, according to Fourth Uncle, what is the best way to handle this?"

Fourth Uncle replied, "Miss, I have lived longer and seen more than you. In my humble opinion, it might be best to return the textile shop to the Tao family. This would show the sincerity of our Xiao family and our desire for reconciliation."

So shallow, ridiculously shallow. According to this old man, it seems he'd like nothing more than for Miss Xiao to enter into a marital alliance with the Tao family, all in the name of "reconciliation." Lin Wanrong despised this so-called distant relative of the Xiao family, Fourth Uncle. A typical appeasement policy, yet delivered so grandiosely.

The Eldest Miss suppressed her anger and said, "Fourth Uncle, since the Tao family started operating the textile shop, we've had more than one or two conflicts with them. You speak of reconciliation with the Tao family, but I must ask, when have they ever sought reconciliation with us? The last time, they forced us into a joint operation. This trip to Hangzhou, taking advantage of their status as the leader of the Jinling Chamber of Commerce, they colluded with the Hangzhou Chamber of Commerce to target our Xiao family. If it were not for Lin San's assistance, I fear I would have already"

The Eldest Miss gritted her teeth and said no more. Lin Wanrong knew what she meant. These relatives of the Xiao family just sat around, only waiting for their silver to roll in. How could they understand the hardships a weak woman had to go through while struggling abroad? If it were not for his cunning, the Xiao family would have been ruined by Tao Dongcheng this time.

As Fourth Uncle was about to speak again, Lin Wanrong suddenly stood up and laughed, "May I know your esteemed surname?"

Fourth Uncle arrogantly replied, "I am the fourth in the Xiao family's genealogy, you may call me Fourth Master."

"Ah, so you're surnamed Xiao. After listening to you speak for so long, I thought your surname was Tao," Lin Wanrong chuckled.

Fourth Master Xiao's face changed color, and he angrily retorted, "How dare you, this is no place for your insolence."

Seeing Lin San taking the lead, the Eldest Miss looked at him gratefully. She said bluntly to Fourth Uncle, "Fourth Uncle, your words are inappropriate. Allowing Lin San to participate in the meeting was a decision made by my mother and me. As the managers have already accepted him, his status is now equal to yours. What's wrong with him speaking here?"

The manager rolled his eyes in frustration, unable to counter. He recognized Lin Wanrong and glared at him angrily but remained silent.

Arguing was something Lin Wanrong had never been afraid of. He gave a cold laugh and said, "Fourth Master Xiao was just proclaiming his intent for reconciliation with the Tao family, looking out for their interests. I had assumed that Fourth Master was a part of the Tao family, but it turns out you are one of us, from the Xiao family. As a member of the Xiao family, eating and drinking of the Xiao family, instead of thinking about how to serve the Xiao family, you spend your days defending others, willing to harm the interests of the Xiao family to please others. This is truly astonishing."

Fourth Master Xiao said in an angry tone, "I'm considering the long-term interests of the Xiao family, unwilling to watch the ancestral legacy be ruined in your hands."

Damn it, you're just a distant relative of the Xiao family, someone we had to look up in the family tree, barely related at all, yet you dare speak about considering the ancestral legacy of the Xiao family. It seems more likely that you covet the Xiao family's wealth. Lin Wanrong had a discerning eye. This Fourth Master Xiao had several times spoken up in favor of the Tao family, nearly causing trouble for Yushuang and himself last time. Everyone else remained quiet, but he spoke up again. Was he truly just an outspoken individual? Bullshit. With a glance at his triangular eyes, it was clear he was no good, either accepting benefits from the Tao family or eyeing the wealth of the Xiao family.

"Considering the interests of the Xiao family? Fourth Master, the Madam is the daughter-in-law of the old patriarch, and the young ladies are the direct granddaughters of the old patriarch. When you claim to act in the interest of the Xiao family, are you implying they deliberately make things difficult for the Xiao family? Returning the shops as a gesture of reconciliation? These are easy words to say, but they would bring great shame upon Old Master Xiao. The Tao family's ambitions are clear, always making life difficult for the Xiao family. Their forced alliance last time, and even more so this trip to Hangzhou. Their alliance with Zhejiang merchants, their bullying of the Xiao family, were witnessed by the entire Jinling Chamber of Commerce. Everyone was outraged on behalf of the Xiao family. Did you, Fourth Master, not hear of this? Everyone knows that the Tao family wants to exterminate the Xiao family, yet someone here continually speaks up for the Tao family. Their strange actions and inscrutable intentions suggest they might be hoping to gain some advantage." Lin Wanrong stared at Fourth Master, making his point emphatically.

In recent days, the matter of the Sunshine and Rain Restaurant in Hangzhou had circulated throughout the Jinling business world. The Xiao family, by their sole power, had resisted the combined pressure of the leaders of the Jinling and Hangzhou Chambers of Commerce. This was widely known. Although the merchants did not openly discuss it, they secretly admired the Xiao family's resistance and welcomed them once again as the leader of the Jinling Chamber of Commerce. Those present were all business people who had certainly heard a great deal about these matters. Lin San's words made perfect sense, while Fourth Master Xiao's continued defense of the Tao family aroused suspicion.

"You're talking nonsense. When have I ever received any benefits?" Distant relative Fourth Master Xiao suddenly jumped up, a flash of darkness in his eyes, shouting, "Yuruo is a fatherless young girl with a helpless widow as a mother, easily exploited. You, a mere servant, have entered the inner chamber. If it's not you bewitching them, then what is it?"

"How dare you." Before the Eldest Miss could respond, Madame Xiao, who had not spoken for a long time, slammed the table and stood up.

Madame Xiao's face was icy, her eyes swept across the room, and everyone fell silent as if a chill had crept over them. The Fourth Master Xiao darted a quick glance at her before quickly bowing his head, daring not to utter a word.

Madame Xiao coldly stated, "We of the Xiao family, a widow, and an orphan, focus on our business without courting trouble. However, if anyone presumes we are afraid, they are sadly mistaken. Though I am but a woman, I have been to the imperial court in the past, held meetings with the six ministries, and even met the emperor. Who have I ever feared? Although the Xiao family may consist of women, we are not at everyone's disposal. Today, in this assembly hall, before the ancestors of the Xiao family, if anyone dares to belittle the Xiao family, I will certainly not let them off lightly."

At the Madam's words, the remaining elder and junior members of the Xiao family no longer dared to make a sound. Although the Eldest Miss Xiao had some spirit, her youth meant her prestige could not match that of her mother. Madame Xiao's expression was as still as water, her gaze sweeping over everyone present. No one dared to meet her eye, a testament to her formidable reputation.

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, Madame Xiao indeed had an air of authority. From her words, she claimed to have been to the imperial court in the capital in her younger days, though he wondered whether this was true. Given her age, she would have been less than twenty years old when she was in the capital. How could she have been presented at court? This Miss Guo was not as simple as she seemed.

Seeing that no one else dared to speak, Lin Wanrong could not help but laugh inside. In a society where men are superior to women, this group of grown men had been silenced by a few words from mother and daughter, making them too scared to even lift their heads. It was quite the dull scene.

Of the dozens present, only Lin Wanrong appeared at ease. He had met all sorts of people, from high-ranking imperial officials to regional leaders. He was not intimidated by anyone.

While Madame Xiao was observing others, Lin Wanrong was observing her. Despite being in her late thirties, she had a radiant complexion, rosy cheeks, and a slim figure. She was enchanting, appearing like a woman not yet thirty. Under the influence of her anger, her phoenix eyes and slightly trembling bosom gave her an elegant and exquisite demeanor, which was extremely refined.

Madame Xiao's gaze was sharp as she scanned the room. When her eyes landed on Lin Wanrong, however, they softened considerably. A hint of a smile appeared on her face as she gave him a slight nod of approval.

She snorted, saying, "Today, in the hall of discussion, in front of the ancestors of the Xiao family, someone dared to speak out of turn, insult my daughter and me, and insult the Xiao family. I will not forgive him."

At Madame Xiao's words, everyone's gaze fell on the Fourth Uncle Xiao. When Second Miss Xiao had brazenly burst into the assembly hall, Madame Xiao had been ready to have her own daughter beaten with a rod. Let alone a distant relative.

"Fourth Brother," she began, addressing Fourth Uncle, "Your father and our elder master were of the same clan. According to our family tree, I invited you to participate in Xiao family affairs and appointed you as a steward in the hope that you would put your heart and soul into the family's affairs out of respect for our shared clan. However, you've shown no ambition, you have been reckless in your conduct, and you even took silver from others behind our backs. You replaced our high-quality silk with substandard fabric, tarnishing the reputation of the Xiao family. Out of respect for your father, I have spared you several times in the hope that you would mend your ways. But your actions are truly disappointing. Today, you even insulted me, my daughter, and the ancestors of the Xiao family. It would be unjust if I did not punish you. Today, I relieve you of your duties as a steward and order you to be flogged a hundred times. Do you have anything to say?" Madame Xiao sternly asked the Fourth Uncle.

The Fourth Uncle of the Xiao family had a pale face as he shouted, "How dare you? I am a kinsman of the Xiao family, nobody can treat me like this. You ignore my words, to your own detriment. Today, Lord Tao has arrived in Jinling, cooperating with him is the right path. Otherwise, the only way is death "

"Take him away, punish him with a hundred severe lashes and expel him from the family," Madam Xiao retorted angrily.

Several brawny servants rushed in, dragged Fourth Uncle out, and before long, bloodcurdling screams echoed throughout.

So he really was a traitor. Lin Wanrong shook his head helplessly. This man had long been notorious for his vile deeds, Madam Xiao had shown remarkable patience to tolerate him. If it were up to him, he would've sent the man packing a long time ago.

Madam Xiao's face hardened as she addressed everyone in the hall, "The Xiao family is already cornered, where else can we retreat? All of you in charge should think of a solution to assist Yuruo in taking over the Tao family's textile shop. Disregard everything else."

She glanced at Lin Wanrong, a gratified smile creeping onto her face. Her red lips parted slightly as she whispered, "Lin San, come with me."

Once the two of them had entered an adjoining room, Madam Xiao smiled at him and said, "Lin San, what do you think of Yushuang?"