

Finest 291

Chapter 291 Sweetness

With a soft splash, a vigorous figure burst from the water, conveniently catching her falling form and cradling her in his arms.

The Eldest Miss shrieked in fright, feeling herself being enveloped in a damp embrace, yet the chest she fell against was scorching hot.

Lin Wanrong, holding her, made his way to the shore and laughed heartily, "Eldest Miss, I went down to catch some fish, what were you trying to do?"

The Eldest Miss stood there dumbfounded for a moment, then burst into sudden tears, her fists pounding against his chest. "You scoundrel, you damn man, I hate you, hate you! You scared me! I don't want to live anymore—"

Lin Wanrong held her tighter against the tree trunk and spoke gently, "Eldest Miss, look at me—"

Xiao Yuruo glanced up at him, seeing the intense gaze fixed on her, the passionate flame flickering in his eyes. For reasons she couldn't understand, her heart trembled. She hastily retorted, "Look at you for what! I won't look! What are you going to do—"

As his face drew closer, the Eldest Miss trembled violently, her heartbeat racing. Despite being held in his wet embrace, her body was flushed with heat. "You, don't—"

His warm lips descended on her cherry-like mouth. The coolness of the lake water mixed with their kiss, causing a light explosion in her mind, her heart felt like it would jump out, her senses momentarily fading.

"You—hmm—scoundrel—" the Eldest Miss's tears streamed down, she struggled vehemently, trying to escape, yet she was held firmly in place by his iron-like arms, unable to move.

Feeling his wet clothes pressed against her delicate body, she was flushed with warmth. Recalling their shared past, the Eldest Miss softened, her tears flowing faster, but she clung to his waist tightly, refusing to let go.

Tasting her intoxicating sweetness, Lin Wanrong stopped thinking about anything else. He held the fragile woman in his arms tightly, using his body heat to warm her. Despite it being winter, they melted into each other like two burning flames.

Feeling the unskilled technique of the woman in his arms, Lin Wanrong extended his tongue, guiding her reddened tongue to intertwine with his, savoring the fragrant sweetness in her mouth. Tears stained their faces, Xiao Yuruo could not return to her cold self, her heart was like a feather in the wind, fluctuating between joy and sorrow. She responded shyly and awkwardly to his kiss, a feeling of unprecedented sweetness filled her heart. Although she was soaking wet, she felt a strange sensation, wishing that time could stop at this moment.

This French kiss eventually ended with Lin Wanrong's absolute victory. Under his relentless pursuit, not only a delicate Eldest Miss like her, but even a seductive fox like Sister An couldn't resist.

Slowly and reluctantly leaving her soft lips, Lin Wanrong savored the lingering taste, and said with a sense of satisfaction, "Sweet and delicious, Eldest Miss, from now on, this delicacy is reserved for me."

Xiao Yuruo, her face blushing, buried herself in his chest, not daring to lift her head, she smacked him hard and said, "You dead man, born just to bully me, I hate you!"

"Ah, where there is no love, there can be no hate. Eldest Miss, your deep hatred arises from profound love. I understand fully," Lin Wanrong stated earnestly.

The Eldest Miss felt a mixture of sweetness and bitterness in her heart. Thinking of the intimate scene she had witnessed earlier that evening in his room with that foxy woman, her anger bubbled uncontrollably, tears again started falling. "You've had your fun, and now you throw these insincere words at me. When you were flirting with that woman, I don't know how many sweet nothings you whispered to deceive her, and now you use these words on me."

Damn, it seemed this lass had not forgotten that incident, Lin Wanrong realized. Knowing her stubborn temperament, he couldn't risk offending her at this point and merely laughed it off. "Eldest Miss, please don't misunderstand. My relationship with that lady is innocent. Some things just happened coincidentally, and you happened to witness them. It was nothing more than a series of coincidences, and nothing happened between us. I swear on my honor, I have not behaved improperly with Sister An. My honor, at least, you can trust, right?"

The Eldest Miss snorted and twisted his arm hard, "You make it sound so innocent. Am I blind? I saw with my own eyes how you held and embraced her. Is that your so-called innocence? By your standards, then we must be very innocent at this moment."

Damn, she was sharp. As a businesswoman, she was adept at extrapolating. She had found the crux of the matter immediately. Lin Wanrong sighed, "Ah, as I said, it was a misunderstanding. Don't you think that if I were truly involved with her, I would have locked the door, rather than let you catch us in the act? I am always cautious - oh, no, I mean, I am strongly opposed to such behaviors, extremely opposed."

The Eldest Miss glared at him and said, "You flirt with every woman you meet. Isn't it enough having Qiaoqiao and Yushuang? How many more women do you need to attract?"

"Ah," Lin Wanrong sighed lightly, "I won't deny it, Eldest Miss. Philandering has always been my greatest flaw. I'm trying hard to correct this flaw, to make it less... expansive. But on the other hand, if I weren't a philanderer, I fear I would never have understood your feelings, Eldest Miss. Ah, to lack your company would be a significant regret in life!"

Xiao Yuruo, hit by his sweet-talking, blushed deeply and softly said, "You have such a glib tongue, I don't want to deal with you."

Lin Wanrong silently clenched his fist and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. It wasn't easy; the topic had shifted, the clouds had cleared. This lass was different from Yushuang; she was opinionated and assertive, not readily accommodating. Winning her over was no small feat.

He noticed the ball of thread discarded nearby. It had been instrumental in finding the Eldest Miss that evening. He picked it up and asked with a smile, "Eldest Miss, is this the thread you dropped into the lake?"

Xiao Yuruo's face turned crimson, and she hastily snatched it, saying, "I didn't drop it."

Lin Wanrong looked at her curiously, "You didn't drop it? Then, was it the matchmaker god who intentionally gave it to me to find you? Eldest Miss, let's give thanks. Thank you, matchmaker god."

Hearing him speak, Xiao Yuruo was reminded of their confused bowing at Lingyin Temple, and her cheeks instantly flushed. "Who bowed with you?" she retorted shyly, "If you want to bow, then bow alone!"

Lin Wanrong, however, genuinely knelt and kowtowed. The image of him releasing the red thread lantern that night suddenly softened Miss Xiao's heart, and she moved to kneel beside him.

Xiao Yuruo felt a mix of sadness and joy that night, compounded by the soaking rain. Despite her wet clothes, her heart was filled with soft tenderness. Lin Wanrong, having experienced both terror and surprise, followed by a cold bath in the lake, was somewhat exhausted after all this ordeal.

When asked how she ended up here, Xiao Yuruo's eyes reddened, and her nose tingled. She stared at him and said, "If not for your foolish antics, putting on a good show with that vixen to upset me, I wouldn't be out here, unable to even discern my direction. It was pitch dark, and it was raining. I was cold and hungry, and I didn't know where to go. I remembered Yushuang being here, so I wanted to talk to her. But upon reaching the door, I didn't know what to say. Should I say you're taken with another vixen, about to abandon us..."

She paused, her face flushing slightly, as she gave him an unhappy glance.

Lin Wanrong finally understood. He hurriedly said, "You all are my heart, my life, three quarters of me. How could I ever abandon you?"

Such excessively affectionate words were more than the proud and shy Eldest Miss could bear. Her cheeks flushed, and she gave him a dewy-eyed look. Lowering her gaze, she said in a sultry tone, "Disgusting! I don't want to hear it again, remember that!"

'Gosh,' he thought, 'I couldn't bear hearing it once, let alone multiple times!' Indeed, women are the most inconsistent creatures. He merely smiled and said nothing. Suddenly, Eldest Miss said softly, "Lin San, are we doing wrong by Yushuang? I feel as if I've stolen something from her. It's unfair to her!"

"How can you even compare?" Lin Wanrong said with righteous words, "I'm not an object, ah, no, I can't be compared to an object. You should think of it this way. Good things should be shared. Just like a great toy. If you both enjoy playing with it, why not play together? It won't bother either of you, isn't that fine?"

"What nonsense are you talking about? Three people playing together?" The Eldest Miss's face blushed as she lightly spat out in retort.

"Ah, Second Miss would certainly understand your predicament, just as you understand hers. In the future, you won't leave her, she won't leave you, and both of you won't leave me. Wouldn't that be wonderful?" Lin San spoke with a full sense of longing.

The Eldest Miss gave his arm another twist, chastising, "You wish! How will you get past Mother?"

"Haha!" Lin Wanrong laughed arrogantly, "Eldest Miss, is there any river in this world I, Lin San, cannot cross? Just wait for the good news!"

Xiao Yuruo glanced at him, then shyly said, "Lin San, in the future... don't call me Eldest Miss."

Lin Wanrong, surprised, said, "Not call you Eldest Miss? Should I call you my darling instead? That's a good idea."

Eldest Miss swiftly hit him, her face flushing as she chided, "What's this about darling? It's frightening! Can't you use another term? You do know my personal name, don't you?"

Ah, it was indeed nice to call her Eldest Miss. Not only was it stimulating, but it also gave him a sense of achievement. He smirked slightly and said, "How about this? In public, I'll call you Eldest Miss, and when we're alone, I'll call you Yuruo, my darling. How does that sound?"

"Babbling nonsense, I can't be bothered to talk to you." Eldest Miss, blushing with embarrassment, hastily retreated. Lin Wanrong laughed heartily and said, "Lady Buddha, there are demons ahead, allow this humble monk to guide you!"

Chapter 292 The Visit

After a bout of playful frolic, the two shared an unprecedented sense of liberation and joy. With the Eldest Miss's wish fulfilled, she let him lead her by the hand back toward their home. Given the darkness and gusty wind, nobody could discern their figures. Observing her sweet smile, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but sigh with resignation. He needed more experience in the field of love; if he were to lose Yuruo, it would be a lifelong regret.

Upon their return to the mansion, Sister Song and others were anxiously awaiting. The Eldest Miss's face held a light blush, signifying some embarrassment. Fortunately, no one knew what had transpired, and moreover, it was inconceivable for servants to blame their master. Thus, the incident was easily glossed over.

Seeing that the Eldest Miss was slightly damp, Sister Song said compassionately, "Eldest Miss, you should quickly go bathe and change clothes. It's chilly outside; you shouldn't catch a cold."

The Eldest Miss hummed her acknowledgment, glanced at Lin San, and softly said, "You should clean up too."

"Bathe together--" When the others were not looking, Lin Wanrong mouthed, causing the Eldest Miss to chide him with a slightly annoyed glance and a blush before quickly departing.

The idea of bathing together was obviously a jest. There were maids in the Eldest Miss's room; he couldn't possibly intrude. Having just brightened her mood, he decided to restrain himself for a few days to avoid giving her another chance to rebuke him.

For the following two days, Lin Wanrong did indeed keep his wolfish tendencies at bay, busying himself with preparations for the flower-viewing party with the Eldest Miss. He provided ideas, cracked jokes, and took every chance to hug and kiss her, making for a delightful time. An Biru had not made an appearance since that eventful night. Lin Wanrong worried for Xian'er, but knowing the close relationship between master and disciple, he stopped worrying.

Despite the pleasant days, he found himself increasingly missing Qiaoqiao and the talented lady Luo from Jining. The matter of Qingxuan naturally became his heartache, like a stone weighing on his heart. If Qingxuan truly was the princess of Great Hua, he would only be able to see her by going to the palace. But how could he gain entrance?

Remembering the joke he had made when parting with Qingxuan, about plastering her portrait all over the capital if he couldn't find her, he thought it wasn't entirely without merit. In his leisure, he remembered her features and put pen to paper, vividly drawing the woman he missed day and night.

One morning, when everything was nearly prepared, the Eldest Miss instructed Sister Song to bring out the recent account books for copying and verification, followed by a personal check of the income by the Eldest Miss herself.

These days, Xiao Yuruo had grown incredibly affectionate towards him. Seeing him yawning continuously, she remembered his tireless efforts in the past few days, knowing he disliked paperwork, she gently suggested, "Weren't you planning to visit Master Xu? Once we are done with today's tasks, let's pay a visit to Xu Mansion tomorrow. Thinking about it, we haven't visited Master Xu since our arrival in the capital, it's terribly impolite."

Lin Wanrong nodded. Seeing Yuruo considering his needs, he didn't want to wander aimlessly anymore. So, he moved next to the Eldest Miss to watch her record the accounts. He saw her elegant wrist move lightly, her small script flowing like the wind as she meticulously recorded each entry before calculating. He hadn't realized the extent of her work until he saw it for himself, which made him furrow his brows.

It turned out that the shop's accounts were kept using "tally sticks", making not only the counting troublesome, but the calculations even more complicated. Seeing Xiao Yuruo's tender hands constantly copying and calculating, Lin Wanrong could not help but shake his head. At this rate, when would she be done? And what's more, the Eldest Miss's hands would surely be unable to withstand such torment!

He sighed and said, "Eldest Miss, is this how you always calculate?"

Xiao Yuruo charmingly grumbled, "Yes, ever since our ancestors' time, this has been our method of calculation. What's wrong with that? You always have a knack for overreacting."

Lin Wanrong wrote a twisted "0" on the paper, and asked, "Miss, do you recognize this number?"

Yuruo shook her head, "What is this? Why is it so peculiar?"

Lin Wanrong sighed, throwing down the brush. Apparently, Arabic numerals had not yet been introduced. With his rich mathematical knowledge from his previous life, he knew that Arabic numerals were introduced to China around the 14th century. However, due to the existence of "tally sticks", Arabic numerals were not promptly popularized and used until five hundred years later, a full six hundred years later than Europe.

Damn, six hundred years! It was in these six hundred years that China's technology had fallen far behind Europe. Could this be related to the method of counting and calculating? It was fundamental!

He paced back and forth a few times, and the more he thought about it, the more it made sense. Undoubtedly, Arabic numerals and the various calculation rules built upon them were more concise and effective. The impact this had on the progress of society's technology was self-evident.

He slapped his hands together, damn, he would bring in these Arabic numerals, both simple and effective. These basic sciences were far more useful than those technologies that involved making gunpowder or cannons out of thin air. He believed that with the intelligence of the people of Great

Hua, having this simple and effective method of calculation was not a dream to catch up with Europe.

He grew more excited the more he thought about it. Snatching the brush from Xiao Yuruo's hand, he smiled, "Miss, don't be busy for a moment. Let me teach you a simple and effective counting method, which is guaranteed to be more cost-effective than yours."

He wrote down ten Arabic numerals and four operation symbols, explaining each meaning to the Eldest Miss. Xiao Yuruo was in business, and she had a natural sensitivity to numbers. After a while, she became interested and laughed, "Where did you learn these? It sounds much simpler."

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "The secrets of heaven must not be revealed, but if you promise to let me kiss you, it doesn't matter if I reveal them."

Xiao Yuruo glanced at him and shyly said, "You can't be serious for a moment. If you want a kiss, go find that sly woman named An."

Sweating, this girl was addicted to holding grudges. His face was far thicker than usual, and he was about to force a kiss, when Huan'er, with her blushing face, rushed in and said, "Miss, Brother San, Minister Xu Wei of the Ministry of Revenue, along with his wife and daughter, have come to visit."

Good heavens, just as he was thinking of paying a visit to old Xu, the old man himself showed up, bringing along his wife and daughter. His wife was Su Qinglian, and his daughter, wouldn't that be Xu Zhiqing? The lass wasn't here to visit him, was she? He was in a period of abstinence, it'd be difficult to make good on past promises.

Just as he was fretting, the Eldest Miss had already gleefully said, "Please, hurry in!"

In the middle of her sentence, a hearty laughter could be heard from outside, "Miss Xiao, Little brother Lin, I took the liberty to drop by without an invitation, I hope you two won't mind." Three figures then strolled in from outside. The one leading had a lean and distinguished face, it was the world-renowned number-one scholar Xu Wei. Following beside him was the renowned beauty of Hangzhou with her silver hair, Su Qinglian, and lastly, the well-learned young lady, Xu Zhiqing.

Miss Xiao had already stood up to greet them, giving a respectful salute, "This humble servant, Xiao Yuruo, pays her respects to Master Xu, Lady Xu, and Miss Xu."

Xu Wei laughed heartily, helping her up, "Why such formality, Miss Xiao? Back in Jinling, it was I who was looked after by Miss Guo."

Su Qinglian, who had been betrothed to Xu Wei by the two, was naturally grateful. She also said with a smile, "What my husband says is true. Our marriage is thanks to Young Master Lin and Miss Xiao, I will never forget this kindness."

Xu Zhiqing took Xiao Yuruo's hand, "So you're Miss Xiao? Indeed you're as beautiful and graceful as the rumors say. I've been wanting to speak with you for a while now, but only found the time today. I hope you won't hold it against me."

Miss Xiao hurriedly replied, "Where are these words coming from, sister? As a newcomer to the capital, it's only proper for me to pay my respects to Master Xu and yourself. It's just that I've been caught up in various matters recently and have yet to find the time. I was just planning to visit tomorrow, but it seems that Master Xu beat me to it. I, as the younger one, am really quite embarrassed."

Listening to them casually throw around their learned knowledge, Lin Wanrong, not used to it, made a fist and said with a chuckle, "Mr. Xu, it's been a while, how have you been? Sister Su, how about you? Miss Xu, you as well!"

As if she hadn't heard him, Xu Zhiqing continued her conversation with Xiao Yuruo. Since she had entered, she hadn't spared Lin Wanrong a glance, making him feel quite uneasy. Damn it, it seemed that the gunshot the other day was a waste, wasting ammunition. [TL: Remember the modern slang for shooting a gun.]

These two women, Xu Zhiqing was five or six years older, both were beautiful and intelligent. After a few words, they were already affectionately calling each other sisters. Lin Wanrong shook his head at the sound, the friendship between women was indeed cheap.

He turned his head to look at Su Qinglian, and with a smile said, "Sister Su, it's only been a few days but you seem to be getting younger and more beautiful, I suppose that must be the work of Master Xu. I'd like to congratulate the two of you. When are you inviting me to the wedding banquet? Haha!"

As the matchmaker for Xu Wei and Su Qinglian, and having such a close relationship, a joke here and there wouldn't hurt. But it caused the two ladies chatting to blush and silently curse him for being shameless.

Su Qinglian, having experienced the ups and downs of life, couldn't help but blush at his crude and provocative words. Shyly, she said, "Young Master Lin, stop teasing me. The fortune I have today is all thanks to you, today is specifically to thank the matchmaker."

Xu Wei, stroking his beard with a smile, echoed, "Indeed. Little brother Lin, you are our benefactor!"

The old Xu looked significantly healthier than when they were in Jinling, it seemed that Sister Su had the knack for rejuvenating others. He sniggered, grabbed Xu Wei's arm, and whispered, "Mr. Xu, we can hold the wedding banquet some other time, but there's something I need your help with."

Xu Wei looked surprised, "For Little brother Lin to ask a favor, that's quite rare. Go ahead, if it's within my power, I will certainly comply."

Lin Wanrong gave a sly grin, clenched his teeth, and said, "I need to get into the palace!"

Chapter 293 Seeking Trouble

"Enter the palace?" Xu Wei asked, staring at him in astonishment. "Why would you have such an idea, Little brother Lin? Could it be that you are not getting along with your wives, or they are not satisfying you?"

'Damn it, it's just entering the palace. How did the conversation shift to my wives?' Lin Wanrong smirked, "Where are you going with this, Master Xu? I am getting along splendidly with my wives. Every night we show each other respect and consideration. How could we possibly be at odds? You're overthinking it, Master Xu!"

Xu Wei wondered aloud, "That's odd then. If your life is blissful and you're happily married, why would you want to enter the palace? You must know that there are hundreds, even thousands of eunuchs inside the palace. Even with your understanding of the world and your talents, you won't be more or less significant there. Even if you become a eunuch and enter the palace, it's doubtful that it would be more enjoyable than your free life outside – not to mention, if you were to become a eunuch, what would you do about your wives? Where would they stand?"

A eunuch? Lin Wanrong stared at Xu Wei in horror. 'When I said I wanted to enter the palace, this old man actually thought I wanted to be a eunuch. Damn, I don't know what he's thinking all day, it's utterly disgusting! Any man can do anything, but never become a eunuch.'

He forced out a dry laugh and replied, "Where are you going with this, Mr. Xu? I'm in the prime of my life, full of needs, and my marital life is blissful and harmonious. How could I possibly become a eunuch?"

Xu Wei suddenly understood and laughed heartily, "So, it was all a misunderstanding on my part, my apologies. It seems Little brother Lin intends to join the government. In that case, I might have some ways to help. However, it strikes me as strange; with your distinguished military service, you've always refused when I proposed to recommend you to the Emperor. Why the sudden change of heart?"

Lin Wanrong was both amused and frustrated. How could this shrewd old Xu become so muddled? 'When I say I want to enter the palace, he either thinks I want to become a eunuch or join the government. Damn it, are there no other possibilities? Can't I go to secretly meet the princess?'

He sighed and said, "Mr. Xu, you've misunderstood again. I neither want to become a eunuch nor join the government. Let's just say I want to go into the inner court of the palace to find someone."

Xu Wei looked at him with suspicion but shook his head more resolutely, "Little brother Lin, that's absolutely impossible. The inner court of the palace is where the princesses and concubines reside. Besides the Emperor, the only men allowed in are eunuchs and palace maids, outsiders are not permitted entry. If you were willing to become a eunuch, this could be up for discussion. Otherwise, I see no other way."

Lin Wanrong responded with a forced smile, "It's precisely because of this difficulty that I need Master Xu's help. If I truly wished to become a eunuch with one cut, then there would be no need for Master Xu to worry."

Seeing Lin San's determined demeanor, Xu Wei knew he genuinely wished to enter the inner court of the palace. Although he didn't know whom Lin San was looking for, he could tell from Lin San's willingness to take this risk that the person was undoubtedly of great significance to him.

Xu Wei furrowed his brow, his face grave. Without responding, he began to pace slowly in the hall.

Lin Wanrong was also aware of the difficulty of the matter at hand. Seeing Old Xu in deep thought, he too fell silent, quietly waiting for a resolution. At the other side of the room, Su Qinglian, as well

as Miss Xiao and Miss Xu, who were deep in conversation, noticed the sudden silence of the two men. The three of them looked curiously in their direction.

Xu Wei pondered for a while, but still shook his head in frustration. "Little brother Lin," he said, "for a man to intrude the imperial harem is a grave crime punishable by beheading, even to the extent of having his clan exterminated. However, owing to your kindness to me, I would be willing to risk this crime for your sake. But I fear that even after our sacrifice, if you were to be discovered, it would be a great loss."

The sincerity in Old Xu's voice resonated with Lin Wanrong. Considering his words, Lin Wanrong could not deny their validity, and he sighed, "So, according to Master Xu, there's really no solution?"

Seeing his disappointed expression, Xu Wei laughed, "Don't be pessimistic, little brother. There is a solution, but it depends on whether you're willing to carry it out."

"What solution?" Lin Wanrong asked excitedly. "For Qingxuan, there is nothing in this world I wouldn't dare to do."

Xu Wei gave him a small smile. "The solution sounds simple but is quite difficult to implement. The imperial harem forbids men to enter, but if someone spoke up for you, you could walk right in, quite openly."

"Do you mean the Emperor?" Lin Wanrong asked, surprised.

Xu Wei nodded. "Indeed, Little brother Lin, you are remarkably astute. The harem belongs to the Emperor. If he invites you in, you'd be perfectly within your rights to go there. No one would dare to stop you."

Damn, this Old Xu. His words seemed unreliable. The imperial harem was the Emperor's household, and his imperial power was more significant than heaven. Who would dare to trespass into the Emperor's house? Even if he were to tell the Emperor that he defeated the White Lotus Sect thanks to his power, at most he would reward him with the title of a great general, a few hundred East Pearls, and several thousand taels of gold. The idea of strolling into his harem was pure fantasy.

Old Xu, cunning as he was, had seen through Lin San's thoughts and chuckled, "Little brother, don't be in such a hurry. To the Emperor, you're far from a nobody. During the suppression of the White

Lotus Sect, you were the greatest contributor. Despite your tremendous achievements, you neither sought rewards nor a chance to meet the Emperor, earning you his admiration. He praised you for your hermit-like demeanor and your proud and aloof character, like an evergreen pine. His impression of you is most favorable!"

Old Xu's flattery made Lin San chuckle, "Master Xu, we can save these sweet words for another day. What I really want to know is how I can enter the palace."

Xu Wei responded, "Little brother Lin, be patient. I'm getting to that. At the moment, you've already established a positive reputation in front of the Emperor. If you accomplish more great deeds for our Great Hua, with my recommendation, you could suddenly appear before the Emperor. He would surely be delighted at your impressive demeanor and exceptional knowledge. At that time, not only would he allow you to find the person you seek within the harem, but he might even agree to marry his daughter to you."

Damn it, that was exactly what Lin Wanrong wanted, if Qingxuan was indeed the princess. This thought stirred excitement within him. Seeing Xu Wei's gleaming eyes, as though he had just accomplished a sly plan, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but give him a once-over. He nodded and laughed, "I see, I understand now. It seems that Master Xu, you have some business to attend to today as well."

Seeing his intentions uncovered, Xu Wei gave an awkward laugh, saying, "Oh, not at all. My primary reason for visiting today was merely to reminisce about old times with you and the young lady. Everything else was simply an afterthought, nothing more."

Lin Wanrong chuckled sarcastically at the notion, retorting, "Mr. Xu, we have been old acquaintances for a long time. If there is anything you need, just say it directly. We can negotiate."

Nodding with a smile, Xu Wei admitted, "You are an insightful young man, so there is no need for me to beat around the bush. The other day, when I visited General Li's mansion, we discussed military affairs. The general had high praise for your subordinates Hu Bugui, Du Xiuyuan, Li Sheng, and Xu Zhen, but he had quite a few criticisms for you, as the Commanding General."

Interrupting him, Lin Wanrong waved his hand dismissively, "Mr. Xu, my time as General is in the past. Nowadays, I am a simple man, spending my days conversing with the Eldest Miss and finding joy in our daily activities. Let the old general say whatever he wishes."

Slightly embarrassed, Xu Wei responded, "While that may be true, I did recommend you to General Li, and he personally evaluated you. He praised your knowledge and bravery but criticized your

selfishness and your refusal to serve the nation. From my interactions with you, I believe you are not that kind of person. So, what are you really thinking?"

So that was it, Lin Wanrong thought. Old man Li Tai was making a mountain out of a molehill. Everyone had their own thoughts and ambitions; coercion was pointless.

"Mr. Xu, you know very well, I lead a contented life in the Xiao family. If it hadn't been for your previous invitation, I would have no connection to these military affairs. Even though we fought in a battle, it was all due to luck. I know my own strengths and weaknesses. Rather than going to war and risking lives, including my own, it is better to be realistic, stay grounded and do what I can."

As Lin Wanrong finished speaking, he heard a female voice sigh, "There are many selfish people in this world who only care for their personal interests and disregard their duty to their country. They come up with all sorts of specious arguments. It's truly ridiculous. Yuruo, do you despise people like that?"

The speaker was Xu Zhiqing. She had been talking with the Eldest Miss but had raised her voice at the end of her statement, as if she wanted someone else to hear her words.

Curious, Xu Wei glanced at his daughter, a mysterious smile on his face.

Seems like the young lady was trying to provoke a response, thought Lin Wanrong, glancing at Xu Zhiqing. He chuckled, "In Miss Xu's opinion, what kind of person would be truly intelligent?"

Feigning surprise, Xu Zhiqing looked at him and replied with a smile, "Oh, I didn't expect you to overhear my conversation with Yuruo. The people I was criticizing were those who are selfish. Those with real knowledge and insight would never let their talents go to waste. Their lifelong dream is to seek the welfare of the people and the country. On the other hand, those who spout excuses, in reality, lack confidence in their abilities and are the epitome of selfishness."

"Miss Xu is indeed wise," Lin Wanrong responded with a hint of mockery in his eyes. He clapped and laughed, "I wonder, who are these knowledgeable and insightful people in Miss Xu's opinion? Are they the ones who shout about going to the frontline and fighting the enemy all day long? That's quite a slogan! If that's the case, consider my question withdrawn. It seems we do not tread the same path."

"What an eloquent speaker you are," said Xu Zhiqing with a faint smile. "So in your opinion, who would be considered an intelligent, insightful person? You're not referring to yourself, are you?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled and said, "Speaking of myself wouldn't be a bad idea."

Xu Zhiqing shook her head helplessly. This man was truly shameless to the core.

Lin Wanrong didn't care about her thoughts. He smiled slightly, pointing to Xiao Yuruo and said, "If not me, then let's talk about our Eldest Miss here. Just by being who she is, she's intelligent, insightful, and extraordinary."

"Me?" Xiao Yuruo blushed, she glanced at him shyly, and said softly, "Don't talk nonsense, we have guests!"

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "I'm not talking nonsense. Miss Xu asked what it means to be intelligent and insightful, didn't she? I just used the young lady as an example. Education and insight are not as she imagines. In my opinion, there are countless intelligent and insightful people. Not only our Eldest Miss, but also those who till the fields, those who sell tofu on the streets, the blacksmiths in their shops, any ordinary and kind citizen of Great Hua, they are all intelligent, insightful, and extraordinary."

Upon hearing this, not only Xiao Yuruo but also Su Qinglian showed interest. How could this man keep saying things others don't understand, Xu Zhiqing wondered.

Xu Wei knew Xu Zhiqing was deliberately challenging Lin San. However, he found the debate between the two young people quite interesting. When Lin San mentioned the ordinary citizens, his interest was even more piqued. He hurriedly said, "Little brother Lin, do share your insights quickly."

Looking at the frowning Xu Zhiqing, Lin Wanrong shook his head, laughed through his nose, and said dismissively, "I don't mind sharing, but I'm afraid people like Miss Xu may not understand."

Xu Zhiqing, being candid, nodded and said, "I'm eager to hear your insights."

Lin Wanrong laughed loudly, his voice tinged with a hint of defiance, "Miss Xu, it's normal if you don't understand. Look around the world, how many people can understand what I'm saying?"

"My fellow ordinary citizens of Great Hua, whether they're farmers, blacksmiths, or vegetable sellers, even though they have modest income and lead austere lives, they earn their living with their own hands, more honorable than anyone. These people may be illiterate, can't recite poetry, and don't understand national affairs, yet they dutifully pay their taxes, never missing a cent. They do all they can for our nation. The taxes they pay provide the foundation of our country's prosperity. They are the silent pillars supporting the nation, nourishing countless intelligent and insightful people, like those Miss Xu speaks of, with their hard-earned sweat."

"They might not understand national affairs, never utter grand statements, or cry out 'I want to serve in the court' or 'I want to fight at the front line'. But without them, Great Hua would be an empty shell, and all the so-called court officials and military generals would be worth nothing. I ask you, Miss Xu, do you dare say they lack education and insight?" Seeing Xu Zhiqing bite her lip without responding, Lin Wanrong snorted angrily, "What scholars and wise men you speak of, they're all bloody nonsense! Only the countless ordinary citizens possess great knowledge and wisdom. Their understated brilliance, their wisdom in appearing simple, who in the world could truly understand that?"

Xu Zhiqing's face turned pale, and she remained silent. A fire ignited within Lin Wanrong, and with a derisive laugh, he said, "All the taxes collected, they're dug out of the earth and sweat of the people. Whatever the officials want, the common folk give. But look at what these so-called 'scholarly' and 'insightful' people have done? They recite poems, drink fine wine, and hold maps, boasting about our vast lands and resources, claiming we are the foremost in the world. Foremost in the world? Bullshit!"

His face reddened in anger, he slammed his cup down on the table, declaring fiercely, "They use the people's money for their pleasures, even their visits to brothels are publicly funded. They exploit the people at home and grovel to foreigners. When the enemy attacks, is that when your knowledge and insight shine? How wonderful! But I have a question, why does the enemy dare to attack? Where did all the billions of taxes collected each year go? Were they fed to the dogs or thrown in the water? A few hundred thousand northern nomads can destroy our Great Wall and reach our heartland? What has been achieved in national construction and defense? When the northern nomads attack, you start to shout, but where the hell were you before? Has your great knowledge and insight been eaten by dogs?"

He spouted profanities, his spittle flying. Despite his vulgar language, his words resonated profoundly and deeply.

Xu Zhiqing, turning green in the face, stayed silent. As a proud woman blessed with extraordinary talents, when had anyone ever dared to speak so crudely in front of her? Or admonished her so? Lin

San's coarse language was offensive and lacking any decorum. Her eyes welled up with tears. If she wasn't so strong-willed, she would have already run out crying.

Xiao Yuruo, seeing his fury, felt a mix of amusement and sadness. She quickly tugged at his sleeve, pleading, "Stop, you've upset Sister Xu to tears."

'Let her cry. I'm not afraid of her,' he thought, 'I'm going to win her affection and then leave her anyway. It just saves me a step.' He didn't bother to look at Xu Zhiqing, instead, he grabbed Xiao Yuruo's hand and smiled gently at her, "Do you understand what I've been saying?"

She glanced at him, "What's there not to understand? It's not the first time I've listened to your nonsense. Each time it scares the life out of me. Whatever trouble you stir up, I'll just deal with it."

He felt touched, and gripped her hand tightly, laughing, "Let me recite a poem for you. It's a bit adult-themed."

"In this mess you've created, you still want to recite a poem? What adult-themed nonsense, it sounds terrible," Xiao Yuruo sighed, glancing at him with a blush on her face.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, looking at her and said softly, "Together in life and death, I promise to you. Holding your hand, growing old with you. A wonderful poem, such a fucking wonderful poem!"

She realized his intentions. Her heart trembled, and she gripped his hand, causing him to wince in pain. Covering her mouth, she turned her head, her shoulders shaking with quiet sobs. "What wonderful poem, you just love to torment others, tricking them into shedding tears, making a fool of them. You're a horrible person, I hate you—"

"Hate me all you want, hate me for a lifetime if you wish," Lin Wanrong chuckled.

"You wish!" Eldest Miss responded softly through her tears, "A lifetime isn't nearly enough. Not even ten lifetimes would let me forgive you."

Their hands gripped tighter, instantly sharing a mutual understanding, an abundance of affection, with joy filling their hearts. Meanwhile, the shock kept resurfacing among the three of the Xu family.

"Well said!" The first to voice approval was the famous performer from Hangzhou, Su Qinglian. Having experienced numerous ups and downs in the secular world, she had seen countless rises and falls, partings and reunions, and felt the sentiments deeply.

She stood up slowly, clapped, and said with a smile, "Young Master Lin, your words today were invigorating. These are golden sayings that haven't been heard in the Great Hua for centuries, making one deeply reflective. Those so-called highly-intelligent scholars, they are merely hindsight strategists, loud in their clamor, but how many really take action? Nothing more than deceivers and name thieves."

Xu Wei sighed and shook his head slightly, "Little brother Lin, I have lived for over fifty or sixty years, been an official for thirty or forty years. When it comes to vision, I am far behind your depth and breadth."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Please forgive me, Mr. Xu. I am just a hot-headed youth, spouting empty talk. Don't laugh at me."

Xu Wei laughed out loud, "Hot-headed youth! That's a good term. I wish I could have been like you in my youth. If Great Hua had a few more of such passionate youths, how could we let the northern nomads bully us to this extent?"

Seeing Xu Zhiqing's pale face, sitting silently, Lin Wanrong marveled inwardly. Any ordinary woman would have stormed out after hearing his words. While this girl's complexion was far from good, she remained seated, showing an extraordinary fortitude.

"Mr. Xu may feel that my words resonated with him, but I'm afraid Miss Xu may not feel the same. I may have terribly offended her," Lin Wanrong said with a bitter smile.

Xu Wei laughed heartily, "That's quite alright. Little brother Lin, do you remember the conversation we had in Hangzhou? I said that I only admire two people in this world. One is you, and the other is my daughter. This is no exaggeration. Since her childhood, Zhiqing has been smart and clever. She could recite poetry fluently at the age of three, and express her thoughts articulately by six. More interestingly, not only does she have a passion for literature, she's also interested in extraordinary skills and geography. She spent five years observing and drawing the star maps, and her predictions of the movements of the sun, moon, and stars were mostly accurate."

'Wow, an astronomer? Incredible!' Xu Wei, seeing the astonishment on Lin San's face, couldn't help but boast, "My daughter has a wide range of interests. She knows that swallows fly low before rain, fish rise to the surface of water, and what shape of dam can best resist water flow. Her flood control

plan was used by Luo Min in Jiangsu. She also has a knack for mathematics. Moreover, she is very skilled in military tactics. Five years ago, she started following General Li to the front lines against the northern nomads, accumulating countless battle experiences. Even Li Tai concedes defeat to her knowledge of military formations."

'Sweat, so this girl is an astronomer, physicist, hydraulic engineer, mathematician, and a military strategist? What a damn prodigy,' he couldn't help but glance at Xu Zhiqing, who was sitting pale-faced, with a stubborn curve hanging at the corner of her mouth. It was a testament to her resilience and defiance.

'Ah, I oversimplified someone again,' he shook his head in resignation, only to hear Xu Wei sigh, "Before you came along, it wouldn't be too much to call my Zhi'er the best in the world. Unfortunately, this old fool has ruined her life."

Xu Wei's eyes were filled with tears, and he shook his head in pain. Lin Wanrong was shocked and asked, "Mr. Xu, why do you say that?"

Xu Wei sighed deeply, "My Zhi'er is clever and well-intelligent. Young man, think about it, which man in this world could match her?"

Indeed, with Xu Zhiqing's knowledge, she was simply a national treasure, and furthermore, she was an extraordinarily beautiful woman. It must be exceedingly hard for any man to be considered worthy of her.

Xu Wei shook his head repeatedly, expressing regret, "Ever since Zhi'er turned ten, there has been an unending stream of young men coming to propose marriage. Unfortunately, Zhi'er has high ambitions, and the men worthy of her in this world are as rare as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns. She could hardly find any of them suitable. However, in my drunken stupor, I made a terrible mistake and ruined my dear Zhi'er's life."

Lin Wanrong furrowed his brows. According to what Old Xu was saying, was Xu Zhiqing's betrothal to Li Tai's son not her own will? Were there complications? Damn, how intriguing. But a man, though rough, occasionally indulging in a bit of gossip, was not such a terrible thing.

He laughed heartily, feigning confusion, "Ruined Miss Xu's life? What do you mean? I noticed Miss Xu's hair done up in a married woman's style. It seems like she is already married."

Xu Wei gave him a glare, thinking 'You little rogue, pretending to be confused when you clearly know what's going on. Everyone in the capital knows about my daughter's affairs, how could you not know?' He sighed, "Everyone in the capital knows that my daughter is betrothed to Li Tai's second son. That's true. Although Zhi'er has never blamed me, it's also true that I've ruined her life. At my eldest son's wedding, Zhi'er was just twelve. That year coincided with a truce on the border, and Li Tai came to congratulate us. Having not seen him for many years, and being overjoyed at my son's marriage, I unfortunately had a few drinks too many and mentioned the matter of marriage between our children. Coincidentally, he had a young son, three years older than Zhi'er, already capable of fighting in battles. Under the encouragement of the others and in my drunken stupor, I carelessly promised Zhi'er to his second son."

Lin Wanrong was drenched in sweat. A girl like Xu Zhiqing would certainly be one with strong opinions. Xu Wei making decisions for her was a mistake upon mistake. He had not expected that even the most famous scholar in the world could have such a moment of folly.

Lin Wanrong patted his shoulder sympathetically, "Old Xu, I deeply sympathize with you."

Xu Wei spoke with immense regret, "My Zhi'er is naturally clever. Even at only twelve, what is there in this world that she does not know? How could she willingly give herself to a stranger so easily? But she is a filial child, she never mentions it in front of me, preserving my dignity. Later on, when Li Tai's second son died in battle, Zhi'er, who had never even met her betrothed, became a widow. I, Xu Wei, who was smart all my life, have ruined my daughter's life. Tell me, am I not the most foolish person in this world?"

Foolish, indeed utterly foolish! Lin Wanrong shook his head secretly, only to hear Xu Wei say, "Zhi'er is clever and intelligent. Speaking of which, there is no man in this world who can compare to her. Of course—except for you!"

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Oh? What else besides him? Lin Wanrong couldn't help but draw in a cold breath. Was Old Xu hinting at something? 'If you want to court me, that's fine, but the problem lies in the fact that your young daughter and I aren't exactly on the same wavelength.'

Upon noticing Xu Wei and Lin San conversing, the Eldest Miss saw Miss Xu's face pallid with despair. She reached for her hand, consoling, "Miss Xu, Madam Xu, don't mind Lin San. He's all bark and no bite. Ignore his nonsense. Come with me; I have gifts for you both."

Lin Wanrong knew the Eldest Miss intended to give out perfumes. He couldn't help but let out a couple of chuckles, which made the Eldest Miss blush. She glared at him, then, with the account book in hand, led the two women into the inner courtyard.

"Little brother Lin, Little brother Lin, did you hear me?" Xu Wei's voice resonated in his ear.

"Huh? Ah, yes, I heard, I heard...what was it?" Lin Wanrong responded with a laugh. "Mr. Xu, we can discuss these matters later. First, take a look at this portrait. Do you recognize this woman?"

He pulled out a portrait from his pocket and handed it to Xu Wei. Upon receiving it, Xu Wei saw a uniquely styled painting of a woman who looked like a celestial being - both her posture and her appearance were breathtaking. He studied it for a while before furrowing his brows. "This seems vaguely familiar, but I can't recall where I've seen her."

Overjoyed, Lin Wanrong seized his arm, asking, "Mr. Xu, can you remember seeing her in the palace?"

Xu Wei shook his head. "I can only say she seems familiar. As to whether I've seen her or not, I can't say for sure."

Lin Wanrong queried further, "Has Mr. Xu seen the Emperor's second daughter?"

Xu Wei gave a wry smile, "The second princess? I saw her when she was very young. For more than a decade now, she has been very private and modest. Apart from the Emperor, few have seen her. I'm quite familiar with the eldest princess, but even she has seldom seen the second princess. Ah, it all ties back to a secret from when the Emperor ascended to the throne. Let's not talk about that."

Lin Wanrong persisted, "Could Mr. Xu take another look and see if this lady resembles the eldest princess or the Emperor?"

Xu Wei glanced at the painting, chuckling, "Little brother Lin, you're asking me quite a lot of questions. Is this lady in the portrait the second princess?"

Lin Wanrong nodded, "I'm not quite sure, just a suspicion. If she is the second princess, she should bear some resemblance to either the Emperor or the eldest princess."

Xu Wei shook his head, "Although a person's appearance is inherited from their parents, it can significantly differ. Determining familial relationships based solely on appearances can be misleading. Especially when it comes to the royal family. Throughout history, no princess has been unattractive. Why is that? Because anyone who becomes an Emperor naturally possesses a certain dignified aura and their appearance won't be too unattractive. The consorts are even more stunning, and their daughters, the princesses, often inherit the best features of both, making them exceptionally beautiful. Because an Emperor's majesty isn't befitting for a woman, most princesses inherit their mother's appearance. For instance, the eldest princess inherited her mother's looks, as did the second princess. It's not unusual for these half-sisters to look nothing alike."

Lin Wanrong was suddenly somewhat disappointed. If Qingxuan's appearance resembled that of the eldest princess or the Emperor, then it would be easier to determine her identity. Regrettably, Old Xu had thrown out the theory that "a royal princess often resembles her mother." It seemed that it would indeed be difficult to identify Qingxuan's status simply by her appearance. Was he really supposed to garner more merit, and wait for the Emperor's decree inviting him into the palace?

Seeing that he couldn't find a breakthrough from Old Xu, Lin Wanrong was rather helpless. Qingxuan, Qingxuan, was she really a princess?

After exchanging some idle chatter, Lin Wanrong beat around the bush about the matter of joining the army. Sometimes he would say that the border was so far away, other times he would remark how strong their army was, dragging in unrelated matters. Xu Wei was immensely frustrated; he had talked to this young man for quite a while and still had not figured out if he wanted to go or not. The top scholar had truly met his match in this cunning character.

When Lin Wanrong and Old Xu entered the inner courtyard, they saw Su Qinglian and Xu Zhiqing each holding a bottle of perfume, playing with them curiously. Miss Xu seemed much happier, applying some perfume to her jade-like wrist, sniffing it lightly. A trace of delight appeared on her face, "It's fragrant but not too heavy, charming yet not vulgar. My dear sister, this is truly a wonderful thing, I love it very much. Do you have more? I'd like another bottle of the orchid one."

Lin Wanrong was sweating. She was holding a rose one and wanted another orchid one. Which scent did she actually prefer? Was she sometimes innocent, sometimes coquettish? Such an intriguing woman indeed had a unique taste, quite similar to his.

Su Qinglian laughed, "Zhiqing, this perfume is so sought after in Hangzhou that it's nearly impossible to acquire, and the price has already doubled several times. A tiny bottle like this has been speculated to be worth three hundred taels of silver. Ladies in the capital have already started circulating it, but the quantity is limited, and few people know about it. Everyone treasures their own. By asking for one, you're spending several hundred taels."

Xu Zhiqing laughed, "Auntie, I naturally understand. When I met with sister Yuruo for the first time, she was so generous. If I didn't ask for another one, wouldn't I be at a loss? Besides, sister Yuruo is smart. She wants us to advertise for her."

The Eldest Miss was delighted to see that even a lofty lady like Xu Zhiqing loved this perfume. She laughed, "No worries at all. I'll give Miss Xu and Madam Xu another bottle of the orchid one each. This is our Lin family's secret recipe, impossible to find anywhere else."

Miss Xu glanced at Lin San, murmuring an indifferent 'oh'. Lin Wanrong touched his nose, thinking that she would return these two bottles to the Eldest Miss when she heard that he made the perfume. According to the black market price, this was worth six hundred taels of silver.

As he was deep in thought, he saw Xu Zhiqing carrying the Eldest Miss's account book and slowly walked over, "Young Master Lin, I have a matter to consult you on."

Upon seeing his daughter speaking with Lin San, Xu Wei immediately laughed heartily, "You two are both extraordinary, you should talk more. Miss, I will impose myself on your mansion today and ask for a cup of wine. Qinglian, bring the zither. Today I'm in a good mood. Let's sing a song and have some fun with Miss and Young Master Lin."

'Good heavens, every time I spoke to your lady, you started singing and dancing, enjoying fine food and wine. I did all the work and you took all the pleasures. Was there any justice in this?' Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "Ah, Miss Xu, you wish to learn from me? Perhaps later. I was hoping to listen to Miss Su play the zither. I must say, I'm quite fond of romancing, it's just that I'm not very good at it, and haven't courted many."

Xu Zhiqing gave a nonchalant nod, saying, "I was intending to seek your instruction about Arabic numerals, but if you are occupied, then never mind."

Lin Wanrong exclaimed in astonishment, "You know about Arabic numerals?"

A cunning light flickered in Xu Zhiqing's eyes as she smiled, "Let's first listen to Aunt Su play the zither. You seemed quite eager, didn't you?"

Damn, this girl was seeking revenge. 'I will romance you today,' he thought with a grin. "If that's the case, then never mind—I was planning on discussing the calculation methods of these Arabic numerals with Miss Xu. Oh well, let's talk about love!"

Both of them were playing games, locked in a quiet battle of patience to see who would yield first.

As Lin Wanrong moved away, he recalled his ambition to spread Arabic numerals in this world. While this was foundational, if done right, it would be a great contribution to the nation. Perhaps it would mark the beginning of the Great Hua catching up with Europe?

He didn't know how to make cannons and he refused to manufacture gunpowder, but this foundation in mathematics and physics—if he managed to spread it, that would be a benefit to countless future generations. 'So be it, I'll take on the role of the anonymous hero. Xu Zhiqing is patient and determined, and she knows about these Arabic numerals. Why should I miss this opportunity out of sheer stubbornness?'

Having thought this, he suddenly halted and, with a serious expression, addressed her: "Miss Xu, I won't hold a grudge against you. Let's talk frankly. Regardless of your opinion of me, whether you think I'm babbling nonsense or I'm ignorant, I must say, Arabic numerals and the calculation methods based on them are an extremely great invention. Without them, the Westerners wouldn't be so powerful. Mastering them, the Great Hua might enter a brand-new era."

Xu Zhiqing noticed his grave demeanor, quite different from the frustrated young man moments earlier. She couldn't help but sigh, "How you change so swiftly! Arabic numerals were introduced by the Westerners and recorded in the coastal areas. I came across a brief note about them in a translated book by missionary York. I saw you using them for counting in Miss's account book and out of curiosity wanted to ask. Do these Arabic numerals really hold the significance you claim?"

"Whether they are significant or not, it's not up to me to decide. Let's do this: You give me a math problem, and we'll solve it together. Let the facts prove themselves," Lin Wanrong proposed.

That seemed fair. Xu Zhiqing nodded, thought for a moment, and said, "Then, I will set a problem. A chessboard with five squares across and two squares down, making ten squares in total. Put one tael of silver in the first square, two taels in the second, four taels in the third, and so on. To fill all ten squares, how many taels of silver are required in total?"

Seeing Miss Xu reach for paper and brush to calculate, Lin Wanrong, after a brief mental calculation, laughed, "There's no need for that, it's one thousand and twenty-three taels."

She had posed the question herself, so there was no way he could have cheated. Miss Xu, in awe, asked, "How did you calculate that? Is this how Arabic numerals are calculated?"

Lin Wanrong laughed and replied, "I can't tell you now. Once you have mastered Arabic numerals, you can deduce these formulas yourself. Miss Xu, you are knowledgeable. Can you tell me, do you find the current calculation methods you use convenient?"

Xu Zhiqing pondered and said, "I never found them complicated before, but after seeing you do the calculations, it seems I need to reconsider."

Lin Wanrong nodded, "I'll tell you, whether it's astronomy, calendars, or engineering calculations, Arabic numerals are the most useful means of calculation. If you want to learn, I'll teach you. I don't expect you to remember my good deeds. I just hope that once you've learned, you can pass this knowledge on, invite more people interested in mathematics and engineering to join, and collectively develop this field of mathematics. If possible, compile them into books for continued circulation. With these, I'll be content. What are you looking at? Do you think I'm great? Let me tell you, do not worship individuals; I'm afraid it would cause problems."

Xu Zhiqing shook her head and chuckled, "You... Just when I thought you were getting serious, you change again. I will remember what you said. In fact, it's what I've been doing all along." Lin Wanrong was determined to pass on this calculation method. As he taught Xu Zhiqing, he was meticulous in his explanations. Unfortunately, having never been a teacher before, teaching elementary mathematics felt somewhat challenging. Thankfully, his knack for conversing helped him muddle through.

Indeed, Xu Zhiqing was exceptionally bright. She quickly became familiar with the Arabic numerals. Lin Wanrong only had to explain the four arithmetic operations once, and she understood, impressing him - she was far more intelligent than he was in primary school.

Seeing her enthusiasm for learning, Lin Wanrong went all out, teaching her the concepts of exponential operations. Whether she understood or not, he went ahead anyway. In this situation, he could only resort to rote learning; if she wanted to understand, she could study it in her own time.

After an hour of teaching, Lin Wanrong was parched. Xu Zhiqing sighed, "These Arabic numerals are truly ingenious. With these calculation methods, our Great Hua craftwork will undoubtedly advance further."

Lin Wanrong nodded and asked, "Miss Xu, how much did you manage to remember?"

Xu Zhiqing lowered her head, her face reddening slightly as she whispered, "I remembered about ninety percent, but I didn't quite grasp the last part about exponents."

'Sweat, she's a real genius. If I keep going, I'll end up proving the Pythagorean theorem to her. Enough is enough, I've done my part. The rest is up to her to understand.'

He had met Xu Zhiqing several times before, but it was the first time he saw her blush. Unable to contain his amusement, he maintained a stern face and sighed, "Alas, I suppose it will have to do. Among all the students I have taught, you're the slowest to grasp the concepts."

However, Xu Zhiqing wasn't easily intimidated. She looked up and chuckled, "You don't even blush when you lie. But, I am curious. You aren't particularly clever. Where did you learn about these Arabic numerals?"

'Damn it, she thinks I'm not clever enough? Which eye of hers saw that?' Lin Wanrong indignantly replied, "When you think I'm clever enough, I'll tell you then. I'm hungry, let's go eat."

Xu Zhiqing paused for a moment, then burst into a delicate laughter. Her voluptuous body shook violently from her amusement to the point where she couldn't even stand straight...