

Finest 126

Chapter 126 Display of Strength at the Society (Part 1)

Miss Wanying harbored some affection towards Hou Yuebai. Seeing him embarrassed, especially ridiculed by a mere servant, she couldn't hold her peace. She quickly interjected, "The question posed by Master Hou was filled with elegance, yet your response was utterly crude."

A crab was posed, I replied with a spider; lady they are in their unsightliness, so why does this supposed top scholar proclaim my response to be crude? Rumor had it that this Wanying was some sort of constable. Lin Wanrong held her in low regard. With her pretentious airs, she was likely relying on a bit of authority, playing the part of a fox assuming the grandeur of a tiger.

"Big brother, that can't be allowed." A woman's voice echoed from behind. Lin Wanrong recognized it and turned around to see Luo Ning, the top female scholar of Jinling, slowly approaching. Only then did he remember that he was in her territory. With those fools trying to build their poem chain and ridicule his response, he suspected she had been hiding nearby, chuckling to herself.

Luo Ning cast a smile at Lin Wanrong. "Brother Lin," she said, "your reference is to a spider, does it not also mock us? I might take it lightly, but wasn't Miss Xiao also a famed female scholar in her day? You wouldn't want to drag her into this, would you?" Having said this, a playful smile graced her face, apparently curious about how both Miss Xiao and Lin Wanrong would respond.

"Nice to see you, Miss Luo," Xiao Yuruo greeted her respectfully. It seemed these two women had met before, though they weren't particularly familiar.

Luo Ning laughed, "Where's the need for such formalities, Sister Xiao? Having such a capable man under your command, I must admit, I'm impressed."

Hearing Luo Ning's words, and noting her addressing Lin Wanrong as "Brother Lin", suggesting she was familiar with this Lin San, Miss Xiao cast a curious look at him. This Lin San seemed to have a wide circle of acquaintances, including the son and daughter of the Governor. She couldn't help but wonder how many secrets he was still hiding.

Hou Yuebai, Jinling's top male scholar and a devoted admirer of Luo Ning, noticed Miss Luo's familiarity with this Lin San. Having been ridiculed by Lin Wanrong earlier, he was afraid he had made a bad impression on Miss Luo. Hastily, he interjected, "Miss Luo, this servant lacks

knowledge and manners, skilled only in the art of speech, learnt from God knows where. Please don't take his words to heart."

Damn it, Lin Wanrong had never been too keen on these so-called scholars, male or female. Even the stunningly beautiful Luo Ning couldn't stir his interest. How could he fear this damned top scholar?

Nevertheless, Luo Ning's earlier remark hit the nail on the head. His analogy of the spider was meant for women; by saying it, he had unintentionally offended all the women present, including Miss Xiao. This Luo Ning was indeed clever. With one swift comment, she had him cornered.

With his own thoughts brewing, Lin Wanrong glanced at Miss Xiao, playing to her standing. "In that case," he said, "let me reply with 'Phoenix filled with eloquence', as an explanation for all the beautiful young ladies present."

The couplet proposed by Hou Yuebai had in itself an insulting innuendo. The first response Lin Wanrong provided was a matching insult. While it was brilliant, it couldn't be deemed elegant. But this new response, "Phoenix filled with eloquence," was both neat and filled with imagery, lifting the entire couplet to a higher level.

This response left no one in the gathering able to dismiss this servant any longer, even Miss Wanying, who had been steadfastly defending Hou Yuebai, found herself nodding in agreement. This servant, it seemed, did indeed possess some talent.

Needless to say, Hou Yuebai felt as if he had swallowed two flies. His original intention was to show off his scholarly prowess. However, no sooner had he voiced his verse than Lin Wanrong had returned two, receiving a rebuke and losing face before Miss Luo Ning in the process. He had provided the ammunition for his own humiliation, and the bitterness was indescribable, stuck in his throat with no way to vent his frustration.

Lin Wanrong, ever the showstopper, took great delight in his quick-wittedness. The two couplets he had spun, one crude, one elegant, had showcased his versatility, and he was feeling rather pleased with himself.

Luo Ning looked at Lin Wanrong, reflecting on how she had underestimated him in the past. She had regarded him merely as a crafty merchant, believing his couplet to be something he had learned from elsewhere, but now, it appeared he had genuine skill. The pair of couplets he had crafted in a moments notice held completely different implications, revealing a quick wit not to be taken lightly.

Miss Xiao glanced at him with surprise and delight, saying with a smile, "Lin San, you're in the company of Jinling's renowned scholars and poets, try not to embarrass yourself further."

Despite her words, the smile on her face was one she couldn't hide. She had been a merchant for many years, and while she had met these privileged young ladies from official families a few times, she never quite managed to integrate herself into their circle. At the end of the day, it was due to the lower status of being a merchant. Today, Lin San's entrance had given them a taste of their own medicine, bringing honor to the Xiao family. How could she not be delighted?

For Lin Wanrong, the couplet challenge was nonsense. What truly brought him satisfaction was his previous response in the poem chain, "Cannons boom boom boom." How potent it was! It was a shame these scholars and poets couldn't appreciate his tail-end response that lacked any sense of parallel structure.

Luo Ning nodded at Lin Wanrong, gave a subtle smile, and then turned to Miss Xiao. "Sister Xiao, you used to be a frequent visitor to our society. However, ever since you took over the Xiao family business, your visits have become scarce. Today, on behalf of the sisters, I must impose a penalty upon you and have you recite a poem as a small punishment. And just to remind you, many of the sisters here are waiting for you. They're all curious about the mysterious perfume and its miraculous properties."

This Luo Ning was both threatening and enticing, showing quite a knack. She truly deserved the title of Jinling's top female scholar.

Miss Xiao, too, was a scholar at heart. However, her years in business had pushed this part of her life aside. Now, hearing Luo Ning's invitation, she responded with a gentle laugh, "If Miss Luo invites me, how could I refuse?"

She pondered for a moment, then began to recite softly, "In the tedious night I lay late, with willow green, winds calm, and birds on branches rest. Hard it is to share my heart's affairs, I tell them to the clear sky and the bright moon instead."

Darn, she's talented! Lin Wanrong looked at the Eldest Miss with a face full of admiration. He hadn't expected her to be capable of reciting poetry. She was indeed hiding her abilities well. However, there was a faint sense of melancholy in her poem, lamenting the difficulty in finding someone who understood her. This Eldest Miss truly had a lot on her mind.

Seeing him staring at her intently, Xiao Yuruo blushed, gave him a glare, but then lowered her head.

When Luo Ning had joined this literary society, Miss Xiao had already taken over her family's business, so the two didn't have much interaction. Today, hearing Miss Xiao recite poetry and recognizing her talent, Luo Ning couldn't help but feel a touch of admiration. She reached out and took Miss Xiao's hand, saying, "I'm not as bright, but I'd love to be your confidante and share your thoughts."

Seeing Luo Ning's straightforward approach, Miss Xiao, despite being a powerful woman in the business world, was still a young woman after all and didn't have many friends. She felt a sudden fondness for Luo Ning and took her hand, saying, "You flatter me, Miss Luo. Being able to have heart-to-heart talks with you is what I've been wishing for."

"Me too, me too." A woman named Wanying, a constable masquerading as a poet, hurried forward, taking the two women's hands and saying, "Sisters, I admire you both so much. I hope you'll look after me in the future."

Xiao Yuruo smiled and nodded, then waved at Lin Wanrong. He quickly brought over a small parcel he had with him.

Miss Xiao took out two small bottles from it. She handed one to Wanying and said, "Miss Wanying, this is rose perfume produced by my family's business. It suits your cheerful and lively personality."

Wanying took it, sniffed it, and a blissful expression came over her face. She happily exclaimed, "Sister Yuruo, is this the perfume? Oh my, I've heard about it before, but due to the limited quantity, I haven't been able to buy any."

Xiao Yuruo took out another small bottle and handed it to Luo Ning, "Miss Luo, this is our newly produced orchid perfume. It suits your mild and tranquil character. Try it and see."

Upon uncapping the bottle, a light scent of orchid drifted out. It was subtle and not cloying. Luo Ning smiled and nodded, "Thank you, sister." As she spoke, she glanced at Lin Wanrong, as if she knew something.

The fact that Lin Wanrong was the creator of the perfume was a closely guarded secret, mainly to avoid unnecessary trouble. For example, he had been kidnapped by the White Lotus Cult because of it. But it seemed Luo Ning knew that he was the maker of the perfume, which was why she gave him that special look.

After a moment's thought, Lin Wanrong understood. It must have been Qiaoqiao who told her. When the rose perfume was first produced, he had given a bottle to Qiaoqiao, who was good friends with Luo Ning, so she must have seen the perfume.

Watching Miss Xiao using these two bottles of perfume to win over Luo Ning and Wanying, Lin Wanrong felt a pinch in his heart. Those two bottles were worth two hundred taels of silver! Qiaoqiao had worked so hard in the restaurant all day, only to make a small profit. However, he understood Miss Xiao's intentions. This was a public relations expense, and it was necessary.

Jinling's number one scholar, Hou Yuebai, noticed several women chattering off to the side, while a servant named Lin San seemed to be enjoying himself as if he had no care in the world. Having long pursued Luo Ning, and having just lost some face, he feared that she might overlook him. He quickly suggested, "Miss Luo, shall we go to the Poetry Society?"

Miss Wanying eagerly agreed, "Exactly, exactly, Sister Yuruo, there are many sisters upstairs waiting for us."

The women ascended the steps arm in arm. The two scholars followed behind, while Lin San, carrying a parcel, trailed behind the group. Unable to join in the girls' conversation and finding it fruitless to converse with the scholars, he simply followed at his own pace, comfortably alone.

Upon reaching the top of the stairs, they spotted a garden in the distance with an elegant pavilion nearby. As they entered, Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Inside the pavilion were dozens of women, all apparently from wealthy backgrounds, likely daughters of officials. For a moment, the place was alive with the sound of chirping voices and laughter.

These women were all poetry enthusiasts. They all recognized the two scholars and continuously greeted them. Among them, there were some bold ones who discreetly sent flirtatious glances toward the two scholars, making Lin Wanrong's skin crawl.

Luo Ning slightly nodded, and said to the women with a smile, "Ladies, today's gathering mainly revolves around two topics. First, we have invited Master Hou Yuebai to share with us his experiences from his travels."

Hou Yuebai gave a slight smile, stepped forward, and graciously bowed to the crowd, "Thank you for your kind invitation, Miss Luo. As a humble scholar, I was taught from an early age the wisdom of traveling a thousand miles and reading ten thousand books. Therefore, I am fond of traveling. I

have journeyed across several provinces of our great nation, west to Huangshan, north to Taishan, south to Wuyi, and east to Chongming Island. Throughout these travels, I have taken in the picturesque scenery of our country, and indeed, it is so enchanting..."

True to his reputation as Jinling's top scholar, Hou Yuebai gave a detailed account of his journeys. He recounted his travels, his mountain climbs, and even recited some of the poems he had composed atop those peaks. The women in the hall were enthralled, particularly Wanying, whose eyes shimmered as she listened, lost in his narrative. Even Miss Xiao and Luo Ning nodded frequently, a glint of longing in their eyes.

In this era when travel was inconvenient, these well-bred young ladies rarely ventured beyond their own gates. Therefore, it was natural for them to be fascinated by such stories.

However, Lin Wanrong found it all quite amusing. This Hou Yuebai claimed to have traveled across many provinces, but had merely wandered around a few provinces near Jiangsu. Huangshan is in Anhui, Taishan in Shandong, Wuyi Mountain in Fujian; all just a few provinces away from Jiangsu, never exceeding a thousand miles. Dare he claim to have travelled across the whole country? That was a laugh. To call him a travel enthusiast would have been more accurate.

Hou Yuebai spoke at length, eloquently describing the landscapes of renowned mountains and rivers he had visited. The women listened with rapt attention, but Lin Wanrong had nearly drifted off to sleep.

Seeing Lin Wanrong's disdain, Luo Ning's eyes flickered with mischief. Once Hou Yuebai had finished his presentation to enthusiastic applause, she rose to her feet with a smile. "Today, aside from Master Hou, we also have a distinguished guest, Miss Xiao Yuruo, who is already well-known among the sisters in our academy. Before Miss Xiao introduces us to her perfumes, could we also ask her to share her experiences from her extensive travels? To my knowledge, Miss Xiao has also visited many places."

Xiao Yuruo had come today to promote her products, completely unprepared to discuss any travelogues. Although she had indeed visited many places, they were all for business purposes, leaving no room for sightseeing, let alone time to appreciate any scenery. Luo Ning had deliberately put her in a difficult position.

"Lin San, what should we do?" Miss Xiao gritted her teeth. Right now, it was only the two of them who were on the same side, and the feeling of facing adversity together once again surged in her heart.

Lin Wanrong glanced up at Luo Ning, seeing the sly smile on her face, he knew this young lady intended to put him in a tight spot.

Fine, a speech it is, he thought. Your Brother Lin here has been earning his keep with his tongue since day one, never fearing anyone when it came to verbal sparring. Slowly rising, he gave Miss Xiao a reassuring smile before stepping forward.

Chapter 127 Display of Strength at the Society (Part 2)

Everyone present were daughters from prestigious families. When they saw a decent-looking servant stepping up to the podium, they all found it somewhat peculiar.

Lin Wanrong was a character who, in his managerial days, presided over dozens of subordinates, chatting incessantly daily as if it were a routine affair. How could he fear such a minor scene?

Stepping onto the stage, his gaze swept across the crowd, and he smiled faintly, saying, "Ladies, hello. I am Lin San, a humble servant of the Xiao family. Everyone calls me Brother Lin."

Curiosity etched on their faces, the crowd watched him intently. Luo Ning saw his natural demeanor and cheerful smile, thinking to herself, was this man born without a hint of fear? As the Eldest Miss saw him take the stage, facing the many gazes with not a trace of trepidation, she felt a sense of relief mixed with bewilderment.

Lin Wanrong smiled at Xiao Yuruo and said, "Our Eldest Miss has visited many places, numerous times around Jiangsu and its surrounding provinces. But she has not had the opportunity to share her travel experiences with you all. Why is this? Because she is the head of the Xiao family. She has to work tirelessly for the livelihood of the family. The scenic mountains and rivers are indeed magnificent, but she simply doesn't have the time to appreciate them, as her responsibilities are too heavy, and most of her time is spent on the road."

Lin Wanrong's voice was deep and resonant. The young miss bit her lip, holding back the hot tears threatening to spill. The audience fell silent. Most of the attendees were women. With just a few sentences, Lin Wanrong had elicited their profound sympathy. Considering that Miss Xiao, like themselves, was a delicate woman yet bearing such a tremendous burden, how could they not admire her? Even the reputed number one scholar of Jinling, despite his eloquent tales of travels and fun, was nothing more than living off his parents money. Comparatively, the difference in stature was evident.

Luo Ning also snickered discreetly. The cunning merchant indeed had impressive skills; these few words had subtly lowered the reputation of Young Master Hou without directly maligning him.

"Missing out on the beauty of the magnificent mountains and rivers is indeed a regret for the Eldest Miss. But it is a blessing for the hundreds of people in the Xiao family. It is due to her hard work that the Xiao family is well managed, that everyone is dressed in beautiful silk, and everyone uses this unique and ancient perfume. She missed a scenic view but propped up a sky. The young miss's regrets cannot be called regrets. She is a typical representative of our Chinese women who are hardworking, tenacious, and indomitable. Who says women are inferior to men? I think women can hold up half the sky."

A torrent of applause erupted. Lin Wanrong's flattery, though a bit blatant, struck a chord with every woman present. In this era, women's status was incredibly low. Even though these young ladies seemed glamorous, no one could make decisions about their own lives. Who would dare say that "women can hold up half the sky"? But this man had done it. Despite his lower status, he was a man after all. The ladies in the audience were immediately filled with gratitude.

After Lin Wanrong finished speaking, he was bathed in cold sweat, goosebumps prickling all over his body. He had flattered people countless times before, but this instance was unbearable even for him. Damn, he was erecting a monument and writing an epic for the Eldest Miss, even though he was typically a staunch advocate of patriarchy. Now he had to come here to champion feminism, the cost to his dignity was high indeed.

Luckily, his skin was thick beyond measure, rivaled by none. He had managed to gather the ardent gazes of all the young ladies onto himself. With a faint smile, he waved to the crowd.

The Eldest Miss stared at the arrogant man, her face flushed red with restrained emotion. She thought, This man has lavished me with endless praises, proclaiming that 'women can hold up half the sky,' uttering falsehoods with a straight face, not even blinking. She didn't know if she could trust him anymore.

Hou Yuebai and Yu Wenpo, the two scholars, wore ghostly pale expressions, looking extremely displeased. This servant showed no respect for propriety, promoting feminism and contradicting ancestral norms. It was an outrage.

Seeing the fervor among the crowd, Lin Wanrong was extremely pleased. Damn, the girls of this era were much easier to deceive than in his time, by at least a hundred or a thousand times.

"As for traveling and sightseeing, it's actually the favorite pastime of idlers, such as myself," Lin Wanrong changed his tone, subtly taunting Hou Yuebai. Dammit, if it weren't for his father being a county magistrate, what could he sightsee? Writing bird poems all day, he was nothing more than a pretty face.

Hearing his self-deprecation, everyone in the room gave a good-natured smile.

"When I was young, my father took me to many places. He once said something that I remember vividly to this day. He said, 'Humans are the most ignorant, for they never know their own ignorance.' I didn't understand it back then. By the time I realized its meaning, I could no longer see him." Lin Wanrong feigned wiping a few tears from his eyes.

A smile hovered at the corners of Luo Ning's mouth. This Brother Lin was born to be a smooth talker. His words were both humorous and profound. Even if they were false, others could understand, far more brilliant than Hou Yuebai's blunt truths.

The young ladies in the room had never seen such a bold and witty servant. Not only was he not timid in front of so many people, but he also spoke humorously and eloquently, uttering such profound words. He far exceeded their expectations. Even Miss Wanying, who always defended Hou Yuebai, had to admit that this servant's words were quite charming and captivating.

"Actually, Great Hua is vast, and so is the world. There are many things we have never seen or even thought about that exist in this world. Let's talk about Great Hua. Everyone knows about Huangshan, Taishan, and Wuyi, but have you ladies ever wondered, what lies beyond these great mountains?"

Lin Wanrong sighed, then continued, "In the far west of Great Hua, there is a towering peak called Mount Everest. Its cliffs rise thousands of feet, perennially covered with snow, reaching three chi and three fen into the clouds. It is the highest peak in the world, revered by all. To the north of Great Hua, there is the Tianshan Mountain range and a snowy sea, which hosts a heavenly lake known as the legendary Yaochi [Jade Lake], a year-round snowy landscape rich in snow lotuses. 'The bright moon rises over Tianshan, amidst the vast sea of clouds. The long wind blows ten thousand li, through the jade gate pass,' that describes the beauty of Tianshan. To the south of Great Hua, it extends thousands of li, reaching the southern sea, commonly known as Hainan. On Hainan Island, there are places like Tianya Haijiao [The end of the sky and the corner of the sea], Five Finger Mountain, Wanquan River, which connects to the vast ocean. On the coast of Great Hua's eastern sea, spanning ten thousand li with abundant resources, it directly faces small nations like Goryeo, Ryukyu, and Dongying. It is the throat of our Great Hua's maritime route."

Having said all that in one breath, Lin Wanrong felt extremely satisfied inside. If he didn't give these young misses a strong dose of reality, they would continue their narrow view of the world for who knows how long.

What he said were things unheard and unseen by everyone present. Mount Everest, bright moon over Tianshan, the edge of the sea, Ryukyu, Dongying, all these names struck them with awe, and silence fell upon the hall.

Even Hou Yuebai wore an uncomfortable expression. He had thought his knowledge was broad enough. Yet, in front of this servant, he felt utterly insignificant. Goryeo, Ryukyu, Dongying - he had heard of these places, but he hadn't expected this servant to possess such knowledge.

"Lin San, have you been to all these places?" a curious voice asked. Lin Wanrong looked over and saw that it was Miss Wanying, who had a fondness for Hou Yuebai. A hint of surprise flashed in her eyes, as though she yearned for these places.

"I've been to Tianshan, Hainan Island, and the Eastern Sea. As for Mount Everest, I wish I could go there, but unfortunately, I lack the capability," Lin Wanrong joked. These were places he had visited in his previous life, so the memories were fresh.

"But life is short. If we wanted to visit all these places, I'm afraid two lifetimes wouldn't be enough," Miss Wanying murmured.

"The length of life isn't the issue. The important thing is to believe in one thing we're always on the road!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed.

The Eldest Miss was both moved and puzzled. How did this bad man know so much? Had he really been to all those places?

Lin Wanrong noticed the puzzled and bewildered looks from the crowd, even from someone as wise as Luo Ning, and he couldn't help but let out a long sigh. He slowly said, "Everyone's focus is on Great Hua, but has anyone ever thought that the world is so vast, could there be only one Great Hua in existence?"

"The answer is no." Knowing that further questioning wouldn't yield anything useful, he decisively stated, "Our Great Hua is just nestled in a tiny corner of this world, in a place called Asia. It is connected to other continents through oceans and lands. Europe, America, and Africa each place has its civilization and nations. The European continent is filled with strong characters, boasting figures

like Napoleon, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Roman Emperors, and events like the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution. They have white skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes. The African continent is mysterious, featuring the endless Sahara Desert, ancient cannibal tribes, and people with dark skin and shining eyes. The American continent is wild and exotic, with the enigmatic Amazon rainforest, countless indigenous tribes, bloody massacres, and people with brown skin that inspire endless longing. The Chinese civilization, Babylonian civilization, Mayan civilization, countless civilizations and languages have emerged in our world. We have, however, been limited by our narrow perspective, never venturing out and losing the courage to explore. This is why we've isolated ourselves, leading to problems that have lasted for thousands of years."

Silence.

Absolute silence.

Lin Wanrong's words were like a heavy bomb, leaving everyone present dizzy and confused. It was a hundred times more complex than any geography of Great Hua they knew. Blonde hair, blue eyes, black skin, brown skin—could such people truly exist? It was difficult to believe. Everyone in the room felt their brains were inadequate.

"Brother Lin, is everything you said true?" After a long silence, Luo Ning was the first to recover and asked softly. She was deeply shocked by Lin Wanrong's words. She had heard of people with blonde hair and blue eyes but never met them. And black-skinned Africans, were they really that black? It was hard to believe.

"The folly of mankind lies in not realizing its own ignorance," Lin Wanrong sighed, using this phrase to answer Luo Ning's question and conclude his earth-shattering speech.

He felt he had lost control, even a bit sorrowful. He had spoken so much, carried away by his feelings. He didn't know whether this different world had Napoleon, Rome, or Babylon, but the fundamentals never change—a strong Europe must exist. He had so much more to say, but seeing the bewildered eyes below, he wisely stopped. Speaking about world geography to others was like explaining poetry to him—like playing a lute to a cow.

To be honest, looking at these talented men and women hiding in their corners, spending their days crafting romantic poems and songs, he felt a deep sense of sorrow and helplessness. If he were born in their time, would he be one of them?

A sense of loneliness that he had never felt before lingered in his heart. Amid the currents of history, he felt for the first time how insignificant he was.

He sighed. Forget it, he wasn't here to save the world, so why should he care so much? If he could just earn and spend money, find Qingxuan, and marry a dozen or so wives, then he would not have lived in vain in this lifetime. Save the world, save Great Hua? Damn, if your underwear was on the outside, would you think you're a superhero?

"Brother Lin, the people you mentioned with blonde hair and blue eyes I've heard of them. Are they Europeans? And where is Europe?" Luo Ning continued to ask, her question echoing those of the others present.

He had once discussed this topic with Qingxuan because she had Mr. York as a teacher, so she had understood immediately. However, Luo Ning wasn't as fortunate as Qingxuan. Lin Wanrong nodded and said, "Most of them are Europeans. Europe is far away from us, and with our current level of sailing technology, I'm afraid we can't reach Europe. But countries in Europe such as Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal have advanced industries, superior shipbuilding skills, and excellent smelting and forging techniques. If we are not vigilant, Great Hua will suffer in this regard."

Upon hearing this, Hou Yuebai scoffed and said, "These are just bizarre skills and tricks, nothing more. How can they compare to our magnificent empire, endowed with natural treasures and inhabited by talented scholars from generation to generation?"

Exasperated by this pompous scholar who clearly didn't understand the gravity of the situation, Lin Wanrong grew furious and retorted, "What do you mean by 'bizarre skills and tricks'? Young Master Hou, are you overlooking the countless ancestors of our Great Hua? Relying on your modest talent, a mere glowworm's light, how can you compete with the shining moon? To say that there is a vast difference between you two would be a compliment to you."

Upon hearing Lin Wanrong's words, everyone present was astonished, and the women in the audience looked at this remarkable servant with incredulous eyes. He had such a low opinion of the number one scholar? Now, this was going to be interesting.

Chapter 128 Display of Strength at the Society (Part 3)

As expected, Hou Yuebai's face was pale with fury. "You dare to belittle me?" he thundered.

Lin Wanrong replied coolly, "You scorn the countless skilled craftsmen of our nation and dismiss their monumental contributions. Why shouldn't I scorn you in return?"

Hou Yuebai retorted, "The pillars of our dynasty have always been scholars of deep learning, masters of music, chess, calligraphy, and painting, as well as strategy for governing the country. When have we ever seen a mere mechanic ascending to the court as a minister? How can such practical skills possibly govern a nation? Speaking with a vulgar person like you is indeed a disgrace to my refinement."

Damn, does being an official make you so high and mighty? What I hate most is your pretentiousness, thinking you're superior to everyone else, Lin Wanrong sneered. "The practical skills you're dismissing are the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors over thousands of years. They are precious assets of natural science and the driving force of societal progress. The rice you eat, the clothes you wear, the bench you sit on, the writing materials you use, which one wasn't made by these skills? Even your whole being, besides your flesh, what isn't crafted by these skills?"

Damn, even your body was created by this "practical skill," wasn't it?

"As for these so-called scholars you claim to govern the country, it's even more laughable. Without the hard work of the countless craftsmen and ordinary people, how can there be a nation to govern? These craftsmen, with their labor and wisdom, improve production and living tools, create tax revenues, and forge the foundation of our society. But the so-called governing scholars? They can be replaced at any time. However, those ancestors possessing skills are irreplaceable. This is the difference between roots and leaves. I'm sure you are more familiar than I am with the old saying about the sparrows in the eaves of the halls of the ancient kings, entering the homes of ordinary people."

Hou Yuebai's face became even grimmer. He wanted to retort, but didn't know how to begin.

"If one wants to govern the country, one must recognize its foundation. Our ancient sages have taught us, 'the people are the most precious, the state is secondary, the ruler is the least.' If you believe only officials are the pillars of the state, then you are sorely mistaken. Young Master Hou, you need to read more of these books of sages and scholars."

Lin Wanrong's last statement was bold to the point of arrogance. A mere servant daring to advise the city's top scholar to read more? If it got out, it would make people laugh out loud. Yet at this moment, the hall was quiet, no one dared to laugh. This servant's words were striking and thought-provoking, leaving these self-proclaimed talented women deep in thought.

Hou Yuebai was momentarily stunned, then he remembered who he was - the top scholar of Jinling. Master of poetry and painting, why was he arguing with a lowly servant? He was disgracing

himself, and making Miss Luo look down upon him. He snorted, "I won't argue with a crude person like you today. At next month's Jinling Poetry Competition, I'll show you what true talent is."

He hadn't been bothered by the mention of the poetry competition until now, but the moment it was brought up, Lin Wanrong was irked. Who the hell do you think you are? The funds for that competition come from my pockets. At that time, your food, drink, and entertainment will be at my expense. If I were to get angry, you'd be off to the bottom of the Qinhuai River, competing in poetry with the turtles.

Lin Wanrong spat in disdain. Why was he even bothering to argue with this idiot? He was wasting his breath.

From the debate, it was clear to anyone that Young Master Hou was thoroughly defeated. Had his opponent been a scholar from any other province, it might have been tolerable. But his opponent was a mere servant from the Xiao family. This was a significant loss of face for Hou Yuebai.

Seeing Hou Yuebai's discomfiture, Miss Wanying wanted to defend him. However, this Lin San had made valid points, each word a dagger's point, impossible to refute. She contemplated for a moment, unsure of what to say. Hou Yuebai was indeed foolish to dismiss everyone else's intellect in one stroke.

Lin Wanrong felt a profound sense of exhaustion as he looked at these talented men and women. He was, after all, from a different world. He helplessly slumped in his chair, unable to utter a word. The Eldest Miss was sitting next to him, noticing his unusually solemn demeanor. His usual playful grin was gone. She found him then to be desolate and difficult to approach. Comparatively, she preferred the Lin San who would always take advantage of her.

She had seen how Lin San had brilliantly drawn on a wealth of references, rendering the city's top scholar speechless. It was as though he was a completely different person. She wondered how many more hidden talents Lin San had yet to reveal.

"Lin San, are you okay?" she asked gently, her heart fluttering. Somehow, Lin San seemed less familiar, making her feel a hint of fear. She wished she could see the less serious Lin San again.

"I'm fine." Lin Wanrong sighed, thinking, Why bother arguing with that good-for-nothing scholar? Besides knowing a few more complex characters, what use was he?

"As for the soap business, I'll take forty percent of the profits. What do you think?" Seeing his desolate expression, the young lady couldn't resist teasing him, barely suppressing her laughter.

"Alright--"

Before he could finish the word, Lin Wanrong realized what she was up to. Ah, the Eldest Miss was trying to take advantage of him when he was off guard. He quickly changed his answer, "No, you can only take thirty percent."

The Eldest Miss smiled, covering her lips with her hand. She glanced at him, as if to say, I knew you'd respond like that.

Seeing her expression, Lin Wanrong realized that she was deliberately stirring him up to distract him from his desolation. He hadn't expected the Eldest Miss to have such a considerate side. His impression of her significantly improved. He thanked her sincerely, "Eldest Miss, thank you. I'm alright."

The Eldest Miss turned her head and said, "Why are you thanking me? I'm taking advantage of you."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I won't budge on the money, but you can take advantage of me in other ways."

The young lady's face flushed a deep crimson. "You're an incorrigible rogue," she scoffed. "Fine, thirty percent it is, hmph! It seems my family is in your debt."

Lin Wanrong slumped in surprise. This wily vixen, he mused, somehow twisted it so she seemed the aggrieved one even while benefiting herself. Truthfully, their business arrangement was mutually beneficial. He had the technical expertise, while she had the distribution channels. Their union ignited like dry wood catching fire.

A bit dazed, Lin Wanrong noticed a young lady from some unknown family, face flushed and head down, rushing towards him. She lifted her gaze for a brief moment before dropping it once again, stuttering, "Lin...Lin San, Brother San. You..." She mumbled on, failing to articulate a complete sentence.

Lin Wanrong felt a surge of confusion. Could it be that she wanted his autograph? Astonishing! How courageous she was to defy the shackles of feudal family traditions. The pitfalls of being too charming, he sighed.

"Brother San, where is that heavenly lake? Is it truly the Jade Lake? Can I seek it out?" After stammering for a while, she finally mustered the courage to ask her question in a breath.

"Brother Lin San, is there truly a place called the end of the sky and the corner of the sea on Hainan Island?" Another lady, emboldened by her predecessor's example, approached with her question.

"Brother Lin San, is there really a Penglai fairyland on the coast of the Eastern Sea..."

"Brother Lin San..."

Suddenly, these young ladies, usually confined to their homes, swarmed around the fascinating servant with utmost interest. Using their collective courage as armor, no one laughed at another, and they encircled Lin San.

When women go wild, there was no way to predict their actions. Even these reticent ladies, in their hearts, held extraordinary fervor. Brother San having spoke of mountains and sea, fairylands and far-off islands, felt as though he were besieged by thousands of buzzing flies, causing his head to spin.

Unable to watch any longer, the Eldest Miss stood and addressed the crowd, "Ladies, if you are all interested, I shall ask our Lin San to write travel journals tomorrow. That should satisfy everyone's curiosity."

After sharing a glance with Brother San, the ladies blushed and dispersed. Lin Wanrong bowed towards Xiao Yuruo, "Eldest Miss, you truly are my savior, a real Guanyin Bodhisattva."

Her cheeks flushed at his words, she thought, Serves you right for showing off and attracting these fluttering butterflies. Now you know what it's like to be afraid.

Next, it was time for the Eldest Miss to promote her perfumes and soaps. Following Lin San's performance, these privileged young ladies would no longer dare to underestimate the Xiao family. Imagine, a man of such talent as Lin San was merely a servant in the Xiao household - the family's might was indeed daunting.

The perfume already had a good reputation in Jinling, and the ladies had heard of it. However, due to supply constraints, it was seldom seen. The Eldest Miss' arrival today had piqued their interest greatly. After a mere whiff, they were reluctant to part with it. Xiao Yurao then introduced the soap - a product she herself had personally experienced. Not only did it clean effectively, but it also left a faint fragrance. It would indeed be strange if these ladies didn't find it appealing.

Seeing the perfume and soap become highly sought-after, Lin Wanrong sighed deeply. Making a few small inventions, earning a bit of money was it really so easy? If he didn't make a profit, how could he justify his hard work?

Luo Ning walked up to him and asked, "Brother Lin, what are you thinking about?"

"Oh, I was just thinking about how many suitors Miss Luo has," Lin Wanrong said with a smile, nodding towards Hou Yuebai who was staring at them from afar.

Luo Ning's expression sobered. "So, Brother Lin, you're also one for such idle chatter. I'll leave you to it then." With that, she turned to leave.

Lin Wanrong shook his head in resignation. This young lady, with her distinctive temperament, was quite interesting. She might not be his type, but she was amusing to observe.

Luo Ning took a few steps, then abruptly halted and turned back, smiling. "Brother Lin, why didn't you call after me?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head and laughed. "If I had stopped you, I would have simply fulfilled your expectations. Then you would have truly looked down on me."

Luo Ning sighed softly. "Brother Lin, you truly are a unique person. It seems you always see through my intentions."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. "Miss Luo, you're mistaken. I've never paid attention to your intentions. You might consider yourself a friend, but that's all you are." If you're trying to act proud, he thought, I can act even prouder.

Unperturbed, Luo Ning laughed, "So, in Brother Lin's heart, I'm already a friend? I didn't feel that at all when we were conducting business that day."

Lin Wanrong understood that she was using this opportunity to retaliate for being forced to advertise for him that day. But he had no regrets; business was like that if you cared about face, then don't think about earning money.

Seeing Lin Wanrong remaining silent, Luo Ning looked at him and softly asked, "Brother Lin, did I upset you by saying that?"

This lady is quite imaginative, thought Lin Wanrong, laughing. "I'm not upset. I just wanted to tell you that if it happened again, my price would be even higher."

Luo Ning laughed sweetly. "Brother Lin, you always make me nervous when you speak."

This Luo Ning was Luo Yuan's sister, and some kind of talented lady. I have no interest in talented ladies, he thought, Better to avoid her and prevent little Luo from advising me to give up again. Remembering Luo Yuan's advice, Lin Wanrong chuckled to himself, gave Luo Ning a glance, and didn't respond.

Noticing he had no intention of initiating conversation, Luo Ning said, "Brother Lin, those places you spoke of Europe, Africa, America where are they, exactly? Could you draw me a map? I'm genuinely curious."

"Miss Luo, why the sudden interest in these places? Are you planning to become a navigator?" Lin Wanrong laughed, but inwardly he admired Luo Ning. Despite being a woman, she possessed more wisdom than many men. Not only was she incredibly curious, she also had a strong desire to learn she would make an excellent student.

He took out the pencil he always carried with him, found a sheet of white paper, and drew a large circle on it. "The place we're in now is called Earth, which is round and divided into two hemispheres, north and south..."

As Lin Wanrong guided Luo Ning through his rudimentary sketch of the Earth, her curiosity was piqued. She was new to this strange world, naturally raising a flurry of questions. Lin Wanrong answered what he could, but glossed over anything he was unsure of.

Stunned, Luo Ning exclaimed, "Brother Lin, if it weren't for your guidance today, I fear I would remain a frog at the bottom of a well for my entire life. This world is truly amazing! I long to visit these places you mentioned: Europe, Africa, America."

Hearing her enthusiasm, Lin Wanrong was reminded of Xiao Qingxuan. When he had spoken about such matters with her, hadn't she too expressed the same yearning? The day of the seventh of July seemed still distant, and he wondered where she was now. That girl, making him worry so much. When the time came, he was sure to give her a good spanking.

"Brother Lin, Brother Lin" Luo Ning's call pulled Lin Wanrong back from his memories. He uttered an acknowledgment and asked, "What did you say, Miss Luo?"

Luo Ning bit her lip gently and said, "I was asking, could you... could you take me with you"

The pencil in Lin Wanrong's hand clattered to the ground.

Chapter 129 The Eldest Miss Cried

Hell, was it an elopement? He'd never done such a thing, and didn't know if it was dangerous or not. But Old Luo was her father, and Little Luo her brother, was there any need to elope?

"Miss Luo, have you considered this? This matter of elopement... it's not so simple," Lin Wanrong carefully suggested, thinking about what was best for her.

Luo Ning's face turned red in an instant. Annoyed, she replied, "Brother Lin, what are you talking nonsense about? What elopement?"

Lin Wanrong raised a confused voice, "Then what were you talking to me about just now?"

Luo Ning laughed shyly, "I was asking if you could take me to places like the Tianshan mountains or Hainan Island? After hearing you talk about them, I'm quite longing for it. You've been there before, so can't we travel together?"

Oh, so that's what it was! He thought women of this era had become quite bold, making such assumptions. He realized it was he who had misunderstood.

Seeing that he didn't respond for a while, Luo Ning anxiously added, "Brother Lin, I really want to go."

Lin Wanrong responded seriously, "Miss Luo, I can understand your feelings. But I'm different from you. I have many things to do, to make a living, to raise a family... Leisurely traveling might have to wait for decades."

Luo Ning's expression darkened, "Brother Lin, I know you're a man of ambition. You can wait decades until you've made your name, then retire and travel the world. But I'm a woman, even if I pride myself on my talents, I can't escape the fate of a woman. In decades, I'm afraid I'll be married off, and where would I find the time for leisure then?"

Although Luo Ning was a cheerful woman, facing an uncertain future, she also felt a bit scared.

She made a valid point. Even if her father was open-minded, Miss Luo was bound to get married someday, and she would no longer have the freedom she enjoyed now. Lin Wanrong smiled helplessly. He didn't have the time to travel leisurely now; he had a pile of things waiting to be done.

"Sister Luo" Luo Ning was feeling melancholic when a girl named Wanying came over, took Luo Ning's hand, curiously glanced at Lin Wanrong and asked, "Lin San, what are you drawing?"

She was referring to the sketch Lin Wanrong had just drawn on a piece of white paper. Lin Wanrong didn't have a good impression of this Miss Wanying, so he simply shook his head without saying a word.

Luo Ning laughed, "Wanying, why don't you go check on the Young Master Hou? He's probably not in a good mood right now."

Wanying's face reddened a bit, and she angrily glanced at Lin Wanrong, "You, why do you speak so insensitively? Young Master Hou has been studying hard for many years, your discouragement might harm him!"

What the hell! Who was this uncouth girl? According to her, it was alright for Young Master Hou to discourage him, but if he discouraged Young Master Hou, it was harmful? What kind of absurd

logic was that? Lin Wanrong couldn't be bothered to argue with this girl, and he closed his eyes to rest.

Wanying, fuming, suddenly slapped the table, "Lin San, what do you mean by this?"

Lin Wanrong opened his eyes, glanced at her indifferently, "Miss Wanying, I heard you work in the yamen."

Wanying glared back, "Yeah, so what?"

Lin Wanrong retorted coldly, "You're on the government payroll, you should be working honestly at the yamen. Instead, you've abandoned your duties to mess around here. Do you think that's appropriate?"

Miss Wanying was taken aback, "What business is it of yours?"

Lin Wanrong glanced at her disdainfully, "Given your attitude, you're indeed wasting public resources. The court's tax revenue includes my contribution, and the salary you draw is partly from me. Any taxpayer has the right to question this. Frankly speaking, we taxpayers, are essentially your bread and butter. You public servants should be serving us. I don't know where you get the audacity to openly skip work and treat your benefactors so poorly. Have my taxes been paid in vain?"

"You, you" Miss Wanying was too flustered to respond.

Luo Ning quickly interjected, "Brother Lin, Wanying is usually very diligent. She only came here today at the invitation of Young Master Hou."

Lin Wanrong shook his head, "That's not my concern. I'm just worried about whether my taxes are being put to good use."

Luo Ning understood his point, but being friends with Wanying, she found herself in an awkward position.

Huffing, Wanying threatened, "Remember this, Lin San. I'll make sure you pay for your words today." With that, she turned and walked away.

Lin Wanrong shook his head, chuckling, "This girl, she's just like Young Master Hou."

Luo Ning laughed, "Her family and the Hou family have been friends for generations. Young Master Hou is scholarly and admired by her. If you belittle him, she's naturally going to give you a hard time."

Lin Wanrong grinned, "I'm not bad in terms of scholarly attainment. How come she doesn't admire me?"

Luo Ning shot him a glance, thinking, You've only just met her, even if she wanted to admire you, she wouldn't have had the chance. Interrupted by Wanying, Luo Ning almost forgot about the topic at hand. Her gaze fell on the map and she sighed softly, realizing her dreams might forever remain dreams. She asked, "Brother Lin, could you give me this map?"

"No problem," Lin Wanrong generously laughed, It was just a sketch after all, I can draw as many as you want.

Luo Ning tucked the sketch into her clothing, carefully stowed it away, then smiled at Lin Wanrong's pencil, "So this is the pencil Qiaoqiao mentioned? It really is very different from our writing brushes, even the way you hold it is peculiar."

Lin Wanrong answered honestly, "I don't even know how to use a writing brush."

Luo Ning covered her mouth, laughing, "If you don't mind my bad handwriting, I could teach you."

Luo Ning wore a pale pink robe that day, enhancing her skin's snow-like whiteness and the rosy hue of her cheeks. Her tall stature was close to Lin Wanrong, who was assailed by the faint fragrance that she emitted, causing his heart to flutter. This girl, naturally fragrant without the aid of perfume, was truly remarkable. Though he wasn't particularly interested in Luo Ning, her beauty could rival that of Xiao Qingxuan and Qin Xianer. One light laugh from her was like a blooming garden, inspiring a whirlwind of thoughts, making it hard to remain indifferent.

Lin Wanrong chuckled. This girl probably wants to take advantage of me under the pretense of teaching me how to write. Darn, I would be in danger if she has ill intentions.

The atmosphere between them was somewhat awkward, but Eldest Miss Xiao showed up in time. Her gains for the day were considerable. Perfume and soap had caused quite a stir among the ladies. In a blink of an eye, she received numerous orders, and even Lin San became the topic of conversation amongst the ladies, making this venture for the Xiao family both profitable and famous.

Eldest Miss Xiao, accompanied by Lin Wanrong, remained at the Society until the afternoon. Her conversations with Luo Ning conveyed an intimate understanding. Both of them had wide social circles, and their casual chat brought them closer.

Lin Wanrong felt uncomfortable. He was relentlessly questioned by the ladies and had to face the angry gaze of Hou Yuebai. He was in such distress that he excused himself to the restroom four times. Any more, and they would start suspecting kidney issues.

By evening, Eldest Miss Xiao held Luo Ning's hand, "Miss Luo, we've troubled you for an entire day. It's time for us to take our leave."

Luo Ning laughed generously, "Where's the need for such formalities, Sister Xiao? I'm doing this for the benefit of our friends. Besides, the price of this bottle of perfume is not insignificant. I truly feel undeserving."

Lin Wanrong had heard from Luo Yuan that Miss Luo never casually accepted gifts from others. It was extraordinary that she accepted the perfume this time. Perhaps the allure of perfume was indeed extraordinary.

"Brother Lin, in a few days, it will be my grandmother's birthday. I hope you and Sister Xiao will be able to attend," Luo Ning repeatedly reminded them as she was about to leave.

Darn, I'd totally forgotten about that! Luo Yuan had mentioned it once. If Luo Ning hadn't reminded him, Lin Wanrong would have completely forgotten. He had been planning to visit the cunning Luo Min, and readily replied, "Don't worry, I'll definitely be there."

Seeing Luo Ning walk quite a distance before stopping, Eldest Miss Xiao urged the carriage to move along. Suddenly, she lifted the curtain from inside and asked Lin Wanrong who was riding a black horse, "Lin San, are you close with Miss Luo?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head, "Not particularly close with her, but I'm good friends with her brother."

"I doubt it," Eldest Miss Xiao said with hidden implications, "We've gone such a distance, and she's still watching us like that. It doesn't seem so simple."

Lin Wanrong looked back, and sure enough, there was a figure standing atop the stone steps in the distance. It indeed seemed like Luo Ning. He was self-aware; he knew that Luo Ning had lofty aspirations and wouldn't develop feelings for him over a few simple words. Darn, it was strange, though, who was this lady performing this "waiting for husband" scene for?

"Miss, she's probably watching you. I noticed that you two seemed to be having a great time today. I presume Miss Luo is somewhat attached to her good friend, you," Lin Wanrong bluffed. Speaking of "waiting for husband," it reminded him of Qiaoqiao. Since he visited her the day before yesterday, he'd been busy experimenting with soap making and hadn't visited the restaurant. He wondered if she'd been taking her medicine on time, and whether her condition had improved?

Xiao Yuruo snorted, noticing that Lin San's mind seemed to be elsewhere, his mood seemingly dampened. She gritted her teeth and said, "Lin San, just get in the carriage."

Lin Wanrong was taken aback, "Well, that's not quite right. I'm a respectable man, you know."

Eldest Miss Xiao was both embarrassed and angry. 'So you're a decent man, and I'm not?' She glared at Lin Wanrong, "I noticed you seemed a bit weary. Considering your substantial contributions to my family today, I thought you could ride the carriage, and I would ride the horse. It's not as improper as you think!"

"I ride in the carriage, and you ride the horse?" Lin Wanrong echoed. That was unusual; men usually gave way to women, why was it the other way around today? Could it be because of his earlier flattery?

"Are you sure?" Lin Wanrong asked, looking at Miss Xiao.

Xiao Yuruo huffed, "If you're coming, just come. Why so many questions?"

Lin Wanrong wasn't one for pleasantries. He dismounted smoothly and saw Eldest Miss Xiao lift her long skirt, hop down from the carriage, and do exactly as she said she would.

Once inside the carriage, he smelled a faint fragrance. Lin Wanrong had a keen nose, and he recognized it as rose perfume. It seemed that Eldest Miss Xiao indeed favored this scent.

Inside, a small table was set with a freshly brewed cup of fragrant tea, steaming hot. He was moved; the miss was so caring for her subordinates, personally making tea and offering her carriage seat. It was quite the leadership style.

Lin Wanrong took a sip of tea. Its delightful aroma filled his mouth. It seemed like a fine Longjing tea or perhaps a Da Hong Pao tea, but he wasn't an expert in tea, so he made do.

Lifting the curtain, he saw Eldest Miss Xiao deftly mount the horse. She spurred it forward in one swift, fluid motion. Far from the image of a dainty heiress, she was a skilled horsewoman, her movements more agile than Lin Wanrong's.

"Eldest Miss, I never expected you to be so skilled. I'm genuinely impressed," Lin Wanrong praised.

A smile surfaced on Xiao Yuruo's face. She responded, "Didn't you say women could hold up half the sky? If I didn't even have this much ability, wouldn't that be a disgrace to us women?"

As expected, it wasn't like this lady to be so kind. It seemed the effect of his flattery indeed played a role.

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Eldest Miss, I suspect that your bones must have ached from sitting in this carriage, so you found an excuse to ride a horse and stretch a little. And here I was, moved by your kindness. I didn't realize I had fallen for your ruse."

Xiao Yuruo's face darkened, and with a tug of the reins, the black horse let out a wild neigh and charged towards the carriage. Xiao Yuruo waved her whip, aimed straight at Lin Wanrong's head.

Startled, Lin Wanrong thought, 'What is she up to? We were just fine a moment ago, but she resorted to violence at the drop of a hat. Can't we even joke around?' However, when Xiao Yuruo spurred her horse and swung her whip, her movements were stunning, and coupled with her graceful figure, it was visually striking. It showed that Eldest Miss Xiao was not as delicate as she seemed. At the very least, her skills on horseback were far superior to his.

Lin Wanrong dodged her whip and protested, "What are you doing?"

Xiao Yuruo dismounted the black horse wordlessly, looked at him, and commanded in a stoic tone, "Get out of the carriage."

Lin Wanrong retorted, "Eldest Miss, I haven't even warmed the seat yet."

However, Xiao Yuruo lifted her long skirt, hopped into the carriage, and glared at him fiercely, "Get down right now."

'Damn, why do I have to roll down? Can't I just jump down?'

Feeling aggrieved, Lin Wanrong hopped off the carriage. It wasn't fear of Eldest Miss Xiao that moved him; it was her demeanor he couldn't stand.

Because Eldest Miss Xiao was crying.

Chapter 130 Seeking Help

Xiao Yuruo didn't know what was happening. Seeing him tease her with that demeanor, she felt an immense sense of injustice, pushing him off the carriage, and the tears began to flow. As Lin San jumped down from the carriage dejectedly, the Eldest Miss angrily flung aside the curtain. With a kick, she flung off her embroidered shoes.

Feeling both embarrassed and angry, she picked up a cup of aromatic tea from the table and took a sip. Suddenly remembering something, she gasped and tossed the tea cup onto the ground.

Lin Wanrong saw the cup he had just drank from being tossed onto the ground forcefully. He sighed inwardly, knowing that the Eldest Miss must have grown to despise him thoroughly.

Xiao Yuruo felt a mix of embarrassment, anger, and injustice. She stared blankly at the small plate left with the tea bowl and couldn't help but fall onto her bed, whimpering and crying.

Listening to the faint cries from inside, Lin Wanrong was unsure of what to do. Sigh, this Eldest Miss was seriously lacking a sense of humor, her tear ducts were overly active. All because of a small joke, she was this upset?

He stood by his black horse, flipping onto it, then down again, up and down repeatedly.

The servant who was instructed by the Eldest Miss to trail behind them watched Lin Wanrong's strange actions and thought to himself, Young Master Lin is truly hardworking, practicing his horse riding skills even on the road.

Hearing that the Eldest Miss' crying seemed unstoppable, Lin Wanrong felt helpless. Women indeed have a knack for making mountains out of molehills. He didn't understand the concept of not peeking when not permitted. Quietly, he lifted the curtain of the carriage window to look inside, only to see the Eldest Miss lying on her bed, her shoulders shaking, even her pillow was soaked through.

It was just a joke, was it necessary to cry a river over it? Lin Wanrong watched helplessly and could only call out softly, "Eldest Miss, Eldest Miss"

When Xiao Yuruo heard the annoying person calling her, his voice seemed quite close. She quietly lifted her head to see a smiling face stretching into the carriage through the window. Tan skin, sly eyes, if it wasn't the bad guy, who else could it be?

"You, what are you doing here?" The Eldest Miss rushed forward, trying to pull down the curtain to cover that annoying face. Lin Wanrong hurriedly lifted the curtain. The two of them pulled in opposite directions, resulting in a stalemate.

The Eldest Miss was both embarrassed and angry, no longer caring about her crying. She extended her small fist and punched him, "You bad person, let go." Lin San yelped, and the curtain fell down. There was no further sound from him.

Xiao Yuruo looked at her own small hand doubtfully. She hadn't touched him just now, what happened to him? After waiting for a while without hearing any movement, she lightly lifted the curtain, only to see the black horse standing quietly in the distance, but there was no sign of Lin San.

"Lin San, Lin San" The Eldest Miss softly called out a couple of times, but there was still no answer. Seeing that it was getting late, the Eldest Miss grew anxious, calling out several more times, but still there was no reply.

Xiao Yuruo was getting anxious. She was about to step down from the carriage to search for him when she heard the distant call of the young servant, "Young Master Lin, what are you doing under the carriage wheel?"

Taken aback, the Eldest Miss hurriedly leaned over to look down, only to see Lin San winking at her from beneath the carriage wheel.

The Eldest Miss anger surged like a tide. Lifting her small foot, she stomped viciously on the two hands clinging to the carriage shaft.

Lin San hastily let go. The Eldest Miss shouted, "Go!" in a delicate voice, and the carriage bolted forward.

Lin Wanrong was left behind, tasting a mouthful of dirt. Anger swelled within him. It seemed the words 'on the verge of success, yet doomed to failure' could indeed apply to him.

The servant who had spoiled Lin Wanrong's plans hurriedly spurred his horse to catch up, pulling Lin Wanrong up and asking, "Young Master Lin, what happened? Did the Eldest Miss horse get startled?"

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, it wasn't the horse that was startled, but the Eldest Miss. He forced a smile and said, "No, the carriage wheel of the Eldest Miss was a little crooked, so I went to adjust it. Just happened that the Eldest Miss had some urgent matters and left first."

The servant, who had received instructions from the Eldest Miss to keep a distance and was thus ignorant of the incident between them, admired Lin Wanrong's selflessness in his contribution to the Xiao family. He gave a thumbs up and said, "No wonder the Madam and the Eldest Miss trust Young Master Lin so much. You truly stand out from the rest."

Lin Wanrong brushed off the dust from his clothes, feeling more embarrassed than he ever had since his record of wooing women. Riding his black horse, he thought, The Eldest Miss has a peculiar temper, it's best to keep a distance in the future. If this were in the previous era and the carriage was replaced with a Mercedes, one move from her and his life would be forfeit.

With the young servant, Lin Wanrong spurred his horse to catch up with the carriage. But he noticed a white horse that hadn't been there before, ridden by a petite figure that seemed vaguely familiar from a distance.

Hastily urging his horse forward, he saw that the one accompanying the carriage was Miss Wanying. This delicate looking woman was surprisingly skilled at riding a horse, no wonder she was able to become a constable.

The Eldest Miss was chatting with Miss Wanying through the carriage curtain. Seeing Lin Wanrong catch up, she nodded at him. Her face bore no trace of anger or embarrassment, as though she had completely forgotten the incident just moments ago.

She looked expressionlessly at Lin Wanrong and said, "Lin San, it's getting late. Let's hurry up."

Seeing her resume her usual calm demeanor, Lin Wanrong sighed inwardly, Women are indeed masters of changing faces. Thinking of the Eldest Miss's unpredictable attitude, he felt a headache coming on. Well, if he couldn't deal with her, he could always avoid her. Cherish life, keep distance from the Eldest Miss.

Making up his mind, he steered his horse aside, keeping a distance of about four to five meters from the carriage, quietly following along.

Upon hearing Xiao Yuruo's words, Miss Wanying grew anxious and hurriedly held onto the Eldest Miss's hand. "Sister Yuruo, whenever you have the time, you must visit my house. My brother thinks of you every day."

Miss Wanying, skilled at horse riding, held the Eldest Miss with one hand and the reins with the other, showing remarkable stability. Lin Wanrong, watching the scene, could not help but marvel at his need to improve his own riding skills.

The Eldest Miss blushed at Miss Wanying's words and quickly replied, "Miss Wanying, I have been quite busy lately. However, I promise to visit your esteemed father in your residence soon."

Lin Wanrong wondered from where this young lady had appeared, and how she had materialized so swiftly in front of the Eldest Miss's carriage. From her words, it seemed her brother harbored romantic feelings for the Eldest Miss. Lin Wanrong scoffed inwardly at this idea. Was her brother not man enough to express his feelings himself? Why send his sister to do his bidding?

Miss Wanying seemed disappointed and asked Xiao Yuruo, "Sister Yuruo, did my brother do something wrong? He used to come home happy every day, but lately he always wears a frown. Did he do something to upset you?"

Xiao Yuruo seemed flustered and unsure of how to respond to Wanying. She glanced at Lin Wanrong, seeking help.

Lin Wanrong, oblivious to who Miss Wanying's brother was and not particularly caring, decided to change the subject. He pretended to check the time and suggested, "Eldest Miss, it's getting late. The Madam has prepared a special swallow's nest soup for you. She wishes you to return home soon and strengthen your constitution."

Miss Wanying immediately interjected, "We have plenty of swallow's nest at home, even blood swallow's nest. Sister Yuruo, why not come to my house now? I'll personally cook for you and ensure you're well-nourished."

Irritated, Lin Wanrong tried to divert the conversation, pointing ahead and exclaiming, "Isn't that Young Master Hou Yuebai?"

Miss Wanying quickly turned her head, asking anxiously, "Where is Young Master Hou?"

Lin Wanrong took this opportunity to steer his horse in between Miss Wanying and the Eldest Miss, grinning, "Young Master Hou is waiting for you to cook blood swallow's nest for him."

Only then did Miss Wanying realize she'd been tricked. Blushing with a mix of embarrassment and anger, she pointed at Lin Wanrong, "Lin San, are you intentionally opposing me?"

With a helpless shake of his head, Lin Wanrong dismissed her accusation. Ignoring Miss Wanying, he pulled the curtains on the Eldest Miss's carriage. The Eldest Miss merely gave him a glance, remaining silent.

Miss Wanying, seeing Lin San ignoring her, huffed and tried to steer her white horse to edge out Lin Wanrong's black horse. However, Lin's black horse was taller and more majestic. A few rubs of his head on the white horse's face was enough to quiet it down.

Confused about her horse's behaviour, Miss Wanying tried to spur it on twice but to no avail. Laughing, Lin Wanrong commented, "Miss Wanying, it's natural for opposites to attract. Don't be upset."

Wanying seemed puzzled. "What do you mean by 'opposites attracting'?"

Lin Wanrong explained, "My black brother here is a stallion, and your little white one is a mare. They have fallen in love at first sight."

"Disgusting!" Two female voices chorused from inside and outside the carriage. Wanying's face turned beet red as she snapped, "You vulgar lout!" With the conversation having taken such a turn, even her thick skin could not withstand the embarrassment, and she urged her white horse into a gallop, quickly leaving the scene.

The Eldest Miss sighed softly. No matter who dealt with this Lin San, no one seemed to come off any better.

"Lin San, in the future, refrain from casually disrespecting decent young ladies," the Eldest Miss advised from behind the curtain.

Lin Wanrong did not heed her words, simply muttering, "That Wanying, I don't know which family's young lady she is, but she's quite troublesome."

Xiao Yuruo grunted in agreement, quietly adding, "Her surname is Tao."

Unfortunately, at that moment, Lin Wanrong had already turned his horse away from the Eldest Miss, adhering to his principle of keeping a safe distance. As such, he did not hear her words.

Upon reaching the entrance of the Xiao residence, Lin Wanrong had just dismounted when he noticed a graceful figure anxiously pacing in the distance. As soon as the woman spotted Lin Wanrong, tears welled up in her eyes and she rushed over, crying, "Big brother, quickly, save Qingshan"

The Eldest Miss had just alighted from the carriage when her gaze fell upon an exceptionally beautiful woman leaping into Lin San's arms.