

Finest 211

Chapter 211 The Deceivers and The Righteous

"Bring him down? How do we bring him down? Surely you're not suggesting that we should follow Cheng De's footsteps and ally with those high-seas pirates?" A spark of surprise flashed in Luo Min's eyes as he chuckled.

"If toppling Cheng De requires allying with these high-seas pirates, then I see no problem in doing so," Lin Wanrong laughed, glancing at Luo Min. "Governor Luo, Cheng De has committed numerous atrocities, why haven't you managed to bring him down yet? Logically speaking, even if there are people behind Cheng De, there is an Emperor standing behind you. Regardless of how powerful his backer may be, it could never surpass the Emperor. On the day of the old madam's birthday, the Emperor personally gifted a plaque and arranged numerous palace guards to protect your safety. From what I see, the Emperor greatly values you. So why does he remain indifferent despite the corrupt official whom he values so highly is being constantly reported?"

A gleam flashed in Luo Min's eyes, he said, "Young Master Lin indeed has extraordinary insights. To be honest, Mr. Xu also mentioned the reason behind this to me, although it was quite vague. He even specifically mentioned your name, indicating that Mr. Wenchang had known that you could alleviate my worries. Please, do continue."

Damn, I wondered why Luo Min, this old fox, hastily summoned me. So it turned out Xu Wei had given him some tips. Xu Wei must have things he can't say outright, and that's why he asked me to convey the message. This old man is quite cunning.

Lin Wanrong said, "In that case, have you ever carefully considered the reason behind this, Governor Luo?"

Luo Min sighed, "As officials, how could we not fathom the Emperor's will? Cheng De's corruption and disregard for law are indisputable. Yet, the Emperor pretends not to see it. It's not just me, but many of my peers find it strange too. A few years ago, when the Emperor's power was not yet solidified and the time was not ripe, it made sense not to move against Cheng De. But now, the Emperor is no longer fearful of Cheng De's master. It is the time to cripple him, yet the Emperor doesn't take any action. What's more, Cheng De colludes with the White Lotus cult, threatening the foundation of our Great Hua. If he is not dealt with, it is truly indefensible."

Lin Wanrong paced a few steps, suddenly turned and said, "Governor Luo, I don't think it's because the Emperor is not anxious. This country is his, he cares about it more than anyone else. How could he possibly tolerate the threat posed by Cheng De? We are plagued by domestic traitors and foreign enemies. From what I see, it's not that the Emperor is not anxious, he is more anxious than you are."

Luo Min's eyebrows knitted in surprise, "More anxious than me?" He hurriedly paced two steps, deeply pondering for a moment. His face suddenly brightened, turning around, he said, "I understand now. Young Master Lin, just as you said, the Emperor is not neglecting this matter, instead, he wants to deal with Cheng De more than anyone else. But to take down Cheng De is not the work of a day, my method of reporting is slow to take effect. Dragging on like this is harmful to the court. That's why the Emperor has been dragging " Excitement flashed in Luo Min's eyes, " He wants me to strike a decisive blow."

"So he neither takes action against Cheng De nor stops praising you. His aim is to encourage you to continue your efforts," Lin Wanrong chuckled, "If I'm not wrong, the more ruthless your methods, the more the Emperor will like it. He would probably laugh in his dreams if you could solve Cheng De in one go."

"The more ruthless, the more he likes it? The Emperor wants me to kill" Luo Min suddenly clapped his forehead. "I understand now, no wonder Mr. Xu was reluctant to speak plainly to me."

Luo Min gave a formal bow to Lin Wanrong. "Young Master Lin, your words have truly awakened me from my dream. I'm deeply in awe. If you were to join the court, you'd surely rise rapidly. Your ascension to becoming a king or a high-ranking official is just around the corner."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I have no interest in being an official. As long as I have money to spend my whole life and live peacefully, I'll be content."

Luo Min nodded, "Young Master Lin, your ambition is lofty. I fall short indeed. But, could you please teach me how to deal with Cheng De?"

Lin Wanrong smiled, "What did Mr. Xu Wei bring with him when he came to Jinling this time?"

"Imperial edicts, gold medallions, and military tokens," Luo Min replied.

"Mr. Xu has some things he's not at liberty to say. Actually, these items should be enough to deal with Cheng De," Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Mr. Xu has been moving the troops from Zhejiang and Shandong. He holds heavy troops in his hands and has the golden medallion. As long as Governor

Luo can provide the evidence of the crimes, Mr. Xu will directly take Cheng De. Even if Cheng De controls the Jiangsu Infantry and Cavalry camp, what about it? If he dares to resist, there's no need for excuses, just wipe him out."

"What if he doesn't resist?" Luo Min asked hurriedly.

"Not resist?" Lin Wanrong gave a sinister smile, "Governor Luo, can't you think of a way to provoke him into resisting? Tell me, what's the one thing the Emperor abhors most?"

"Of course, it's rebellion," Luo Min said.

"That's correct," Lin Wanrong clapped his hands, "Cheng De, as the Commander-in-Chief of Jiangsu, must have a large residence, right? I see that you have numerous extraordinary people under your command, Governor Luo. Perhaps if you look around his backyard, you might find some interesting items like golden knives or jade seals. Military men, in control of (the symbol of) military power, would always draw suspicion. If such a thing were to happen, would Cheng De let you take him, or would he fight back desperately?"

Luo Min took a sharp intake of breath. This Young Master Lin, who hasn't even joined the bureaucracy, was playing a deeper game than him.

"Cheng De doesn't have many soldiers, and his military strength is weak. If we accuse him of rebellion, I'm afraid no one in the court will believe it," Luo Min frowned, "Moreover, how do we explain it to the Ministry of Justice and the court if we really kill him?"

Lin Wanrong said, "Governor Luo, whether they believe it or not is one thing, but what needs to be done must be done. You now understand why Mr. Xu can't speak plainly to you, don't you? I think he must also have a message for you"

"What message?" Luo Min asked urgently.

Lin Wanrong said, "I think when he deals with Cheng De, he definitely wants him dead, not alive" He glanced at Luo Min, changed the tone of his voice, and chuckled, "Governor Luo, I'm just saying this casually. Just listen and let it go, don't take it to heart."

Luo Min's eyes narrowed as he smiled, "I naturally understand that. But, if Cheng De were to be dealt with on the spot, how am I supposed to explain it to the Ministry of Justice?"

Lin Wanrong sighed, "Once a person dies, everything ends. Whether he really rebelled or whether anyone believes it becomes insignificant. Besides, didn't you 'find' certain things in his house? You also have evidence of his corruption and lawbreaking."

Luo Min shook his head, "Young Master Lin, you underestimate his master's determination. If Cheng De dies, his master will not let things rest."

Suddenly, Lin Wanrong asked, "Governor Luo, what's your opinion on the Emperor's favor towards you?"

The question seemed to come from nowhere, and Luo Min was momentarily taken aback. Yet, being a seasoned official, he quickly grasped the implications of the question. Sweat trickled down his forehead, and his face turned pale. He remained silent for a while before finally nodding, "Young Master, I understand."

Lin Wanrong took a breath, "Governor Luo, it may not be as pessimistic as you imagine. You hold evidence of Cheng De's corruption and lawbreaking. There's also 'evidence' of his rebellion. Even if you step slightly out of line, it's not a big deal. The crime is not a capital one; at most, you'll lose your official title. However, consider this, who would be the happiest if you accomplish this deed, disregarding the benefits to the people? Of course, it's the person backing you. Even if you were temporarily dismissed due to circumstances, your position in his eyes would be anything but ordinary."

He sighed softly, "Of course, these are all my speculations, which could be very naive. Having been in the court for a long time, you naturally understand the ins and outs better than me. Take my words as a reference, and don't take them to heart."

Although these were Lin Wanrong's conjectures, such stories had been acted out countless times in novels and on TV. It was not too difficult for him to guess the gist. Luo Min, an old hand at bureaucratic affairs, naturally understood this very well. The more he thought about it, the more it made sense.

"Thank you, Young Master Lin, for your guidance." Luo Min sighed, a determined look in his eyes, "I know what I must do."

Seeing Luo Min's enthusiasm, Lin Wanrong felt a bit guilty. His previous words were somewhat self-serving. However, Cheng De's collusion with the White Lotus cult was undoubtedly true, and by dealing with him, they were indeed doing a good deed for the people of Jiangsu.

"Governor Luo, perhaps you should consult Mr. Xu again." Lin Wanrong said earnestly.

Luo Min laughed heartily, "I've already consulted Mr. Wenchang. Although he didn't say it outright, I could guess part of his meaning from his words. The Emperor has shown me tremendous grace, bestowed lavish gifts upon me, and protected my family. Even at the cost of my life, I must fulfill his task. Moreover, removing Cheng De is for the welfare of the people. Although I, Luo Min, am somewhat cunning, I believe I have some sense of loyalty and righteousness, and it is right to do things for the benefit of the people."

Seeing the clarity and righteousness in his eyes, Lin Wanrong thought to himself that he had indeed underestimated Luo Min in the past. The old man did have some backbone. He chuckled, "Governor Luo, though you are somewhat crafty in your official dealings, you are still a good official."

Luo Min laughed heartily, "Young Master Lin, I love hearing you say that. How can an official not be crafty? The better the official, the more cunning they must be. As for you, Young Master Lin, with such great learning and meticulous thinking, if you were to enter the world of officialdom, you would certainly be a sight to behold."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Why would I become an official, to turn into a crafty man? I'm already crafty enough. But, like Governor Luo, although I am crafty, I am also a good man."

The two men looked at each other, feeling a sense of camaraderie, and suddenly burst into laughter.

Chapter 212 The Visit

Having left Luo Min's place, it was already getting late. Suddenly, Lin Wanrong remembered that he hadn't yet informed Old Luo about Luo Ning's illness. The old man, in these past few days, was so busy discussing important matters with Xu Wei that he certainly didn't have time to take care of domestic affairs. With this thought, he turned to Gao Shou, who was escorting him down the mountain, "Brother Gao, could you please convey the news of Miss Luo's sickness to Governor Luo, and see how he intends to handle it?"

Gao Shou nodded, "Naturally. But given what I know of Governor Luo, he probably won't leave here so readily at such a critical time."

As a close aide of Luo Min, Gao Shou was naturally in the know about his affairs. Old Luo, cunning in appearance but upright at heart, would surely not allow family matters to hinder state affairs. Lin Wanrong sighed, feeling a bit sympathetic for Luo Ning and her sibling. Having such a father might not necessarily be a blessing.

"By the way, why didn't I see Brother Gao Qiu?" Lin Wanrong asked.

"Oh, he followed Master Xu early this morning to coordinate military affairs between the two regions," Gao Shou replied, not concealing anything, knowing the relationship between Lin Wanrong, Xu Wei, and Luo Min.

Xu Wei didn't have it easy either, already in his fifties or sixties, recently took Su Qinglian as his concubine, had barely spent any romantic time with her, and probably hadn't had many wedding nights before he was rushing around again. Being an official was truly troublesome, it was better to be a simple commoner like himself.

After the conversation with Luo Min, Lin Wanrong felt at ease. Moved by Old Luo's integrity, he wished to do something for him. Never mind then, if you old man have no time to care for your own daughter, I will go and visit on your behalf.

As soon as the thought occurred, he turned his horse around and headed directly to the Governor's residence. The sky was dark, and the Luo mansion was quiet. Just as Lin Wanrong was about to enter, he suddenly remembered Teacher Mei, unsure if she was also residing in the Luo mansion. If he were to enter rashly, wouldn't it cause more trouble for Luo Ning? As he hesitated at the gate, a small sedan stopped at the mansion's entrance. A few maids and old women helped an elderly lady out. It was none other than Luo Min's mother - Old Madam Luo.

On the day of her birthday, Lin Wanrong had been especially flattering towards her, even gifting her a diamond and Xu Wei's "Returning Home in Wind and Snow". His couplets were unrivaled, so even if the old lady was dazzled she could still recognize him. Seeing him lingering at the gate, she waved from a distance, "Isn't that Young Master Lin? Come here, let's chat."

Lin Wanrong dismounted and approached, giving his greetings, "Lin San greets Old Madam."

Old Madam Luo looked him up and down, nodded with a smile, "Good, good, has Young Master Lin been well these days?"

Lin Wanrong responded with a smile, "Thanks to your blessings, Old Madam, I eat well, sleep well, and play well."

Old Madam chuckled, "Young Master Lin is truly eloquent, and so talented. I wonder which fortunate girl is promised to you."

"Old Madam, you're joking. I'm just a small servant in the Xiao family, without wealth or power, no young lady would look favorably upon me," Lin Wanrong humbly replied.

Old Madam Luo shook her head, saying, "Young Master Lin, a hero doesn't fear humble beginnings, you must not underestimate yourself. My ancestor was once a mere cowherd, but he followed the Founding Emperor in battles to conquer the world, eventually being conferred as Marquis. You are young now, as long as you're willing to work hard, success is only a matter of time."

"You are the descendant of a noble family, Old Madam. My apologies for my ignorance." Lin Wanrong exclaimed in surprise. No wonder the old lady seemed so distinguished and poised, she was a descendant of a founding general. Luo Min, the fat old man, surprisingly had such a glorious ancestor.

The old lady took his hand and said, "All of that is due to the grace of my ancestor, I merely bask in his glory."

Seeing the maids carrying incense burners and Buddhist scriptures by her side, Lin Wanrong curiously asked, "Old Madam, where were you from?"

Old Madam Luo sighed, "It's all because of my poor Ning. I don't know what kind of grievance she suffered yesterday, but she came home weeping bitterly. I tried to ask her about it, but she wouldn't talk. I don't know who the damned person is who made my Ning so sad, if I find him, I'll make him pay."

Despite the old lady's aggressive words, Lin Wanrong felt a strange comfort. He lacked nothing at the moment, but he was missing this kind of familial affection, like that of a doting grandmother.

"Ning is very heartbroken. She started talking deliriously in her fever. The siblings lost their mother when they were young, and I, this old woman, personally raised them. Especially Ning, she has always been strong since childhood. She not only had to take care of her brother, but also me, a lonely old woman. She also had to study hard. She has truly suffered a lot. Yesterday, when she fell

ill like that, it was heartbreaking for me to see. I woke up early today, went to the temple, and prayed all day to the Bodhisattva to bless my little Ning to recover soon." The old lady wiped away two tears.

Lin Wanrong sighed, "Old Madam, may I ask you something? Miss Luo has a mentor named Mei Yanqiu, does she also live in your mansion?"

The old lady snorted, "That Mei is Ning's childhood teacher. Unlike other scholars who grow in wisdom with age, this Mei is going the opposite direction. Over the years, she's been acting more and more out of line, neglecting scholarship, busy recruiting rich students, but making no progress in her learning. In my view, she falls far short compared to you, Young Master Lin. How could she live in my mansion?"

Lin Wanrong thought to himself, It's quite normal for a teacher to build connections and attract funding for projects. It's just unfortunate that this Teacher Mei has touched my sore spot. If I don't deal with you, I would not be doing justice to my burning heart.

"Young Master Lin, I've noticed that Ning is fond of you and treats you quite differently. Please go see her and comfort her. I, as her grandmother, am just wishing for my dear girl to get better soon." The old lady grabbed Lin Wanrong's sleeve without any further ado and walked into the mansion, her steps filled with urgency.

Lin Wanrong felt a sense of admiration in his heart. While Luo Ning's father might not be up to par, her grandmother was an object of envy. Every loss has its compensation; this girl hadn't been treated unfairly after all.

As the elderly lady walked a few steps ahead, Old Madame Luo pointed to a small building aglow with dim lights and said, "That is Ning's boudoir, Young Master Lin, you should go up and see her."

The boudoir of a maiden, can I simply waltz in? Lin Wanrong hesitated for a moment. Turning around, he found the old lady had already walked off into the distance. Wasn't she a maiden once, too, not taking such things into account? To go or not to go, Lin Wanrong loitered beneath the building for a while, finally gritting his teeth and declaring, "Hesitation isn't my style, it's just entering a girl's room. What's there to fear? If I want to go in, I need to do it confidently and admire my bravery."

With a mischievous chuckle, he climbed the stairs, just about to push the door, when, with a squeak, the door was opened from within, and a beautiful figure emerged from the room.

Lin Wanrong was taken aback for a moment and called out, "Qiaoqiao"

Upon lifting her head and seeing that familiar face, Dong Qiaoqiao couldn't help but exclaim with joy, "Big brother, why are you here too"

Lin Wanrong pointed to the room and whispered, "Is Miss Luo inside? Did you rush over to take care of her?"

Qiaoqiao nodded and gently replied, "She just drank some medicine and fell asleep. Sister Ning treats me like her own sibling; it's only right for me to take care of her. Big brother, did you come to see Sister Ning?"

The bond between these two girls is truly remarkable, Lin Wanrong thought, taking Qiaoqiao's hand and smiling, "What else do you think I came for? How is Miss Luo's condition? Has she improved at all?"

Qiaoqiao sat next to him, shaking her head with a sigh, "There's no improvement, the doctor says she's suffering from an anxiety disorder, and that she needs rest and recovery."

"Anxiety disorder?" Lin Wanrong furrowed his brows. "Then let her rest properly. The poetry event and such laborious tasks should be delegated to others."

Qiaoqiao shook her head, "Big brother, you don't understand Sister Ning. Though she may be a frail woman, she's high-spirited. She's been managing the poetry event single-handedly, she wouldn't trust anyone else with it. If Sister Ning ever felt unwell in the past, she would tell me, but this time, I don't know what upset her. She's been crying, talking nonsense in her sleep, but when asked, she refuses to say anything. I've known her for a while, but I've never seen Sister Ning like this."

Seeing the worried look on her face, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but smile, pulling her into his arms, "Silly girl, everyone has their own worries. Even if you are close sisters, she can't share everything with you. On the other hand, little darling, you've been working so hard these days without taking care of yourself, you've lost quite a bit of weight."

"Big brother" Qiaoqiao blushed, snuggling into his arms, "I'm not tired at all. I feel content having things to do every day. I don't want to be a burden to you, I will manage the restaurant well so you won't have to worry."

Lin Wanrong pinched her nose, planting a kiss on her rosy lips, and laughed, "What burden, stop talking nonsense. You're my treasure, and also the lady boss of the restaurant. If you don't manage it, who will?"

Qiaoqiao gave a soft hum, burying her head in his chest with immense joy.

Seeing her adorable demeanor, how could Lin Wanrong resist? He gently unbuttoned her small coat, his hands venturing to her chest, beginning a tender exploration. Her delicate skin was silky smooth, exuding a faint fragrance. Lin Wanrong held her tightly, letting her curves transform into various enticing shapes in his hands. Qiaoqiao was panting, too embarrassed to utter a word.

With a gentle touch on her pink bud, Qiaoqiao immediately breathed out hot air from her nose, her face flushing, and she collapsed weakly into his arms, panting, "Big brother, not here, Sister Ning is still in the room"

Her words only fueled Lin Wanrong's desire. How stimulating was it to be in someone else's room with a maiden inside and such an enticingly sweet girl outside? He knew that this kind of thought was beastly, but weren't all humans evolved from beasts? Pretending to be pure would probably earn the contempt of even God.

Lin Wanrong gave Qiaoqiao a lustful smile and said, "Little darling, let's give it a try."

Chapter 213 Almost Impotent

As the evening deepened, the oil lamp glowed dimly. In Lin Wanrong's heart surged a burning desire. The thought of the beautiful woman asleep inside, Qiaoqiao's intimate friend, and this being her boudoir made him chuckle. Unconsciously, that desire began to hint at a seductive darkness.

"What are you trying?" Qiaoqiao asked shyly. She felt weak and limp. Her brother's hands gently teased and caressed her, as if intending to melt her body.

Lin Wanrong slid her small jacket aside, revealing the fiery red lingerie beneath. He whispered softly, "Just trying some interesting things"

"Big brother, don't" Qiaoqiao cried out, her breath hitching. Her voice trembled with fear and carried a hint of enchantment that even she struggled to comprehend. "This is sister Ning's boudoir"

'If it wasn't her boudoir, I wouldn't bother. We men, don't we all like this?' Lin Wanrong's heart itched like a cat's scratch. Damn, sneaking around is exciting. With a gentle push, he raised Qiaoqiao's lingerie, exposing a piece of crystal-clear skin and her trembling delicate breasts.

Qiaoqiao let out a soft cry, her face burning like fire. She buried her head in her brother's chest, not daring to look at him. Although this wasn't the first time her brother had taken advantage of her, it was the first time she had been so openly exposed to him, especially in the bedroom of her best friend. She was both scared and embarrassed, a strange feeling rising within her, and she didn't dare to raise her head again.

In the dim light, Qiaoqiao's tender skin appeared even whiter. The bright tips of her breasts trembled slightly, and her red lips panted lightly, slightly parted, as if saying something, incredibly tempting.

The roaring desire in his heart made Lin Wanrong's breathing more hurried. He swallowed hard and thought, 'My little darling, you're killing me.' He gathered strength and lifted Qiaoqiao onto his lap. Out of modesty, Qiaoqiao tightly wrapped her arms around his neck, her eyes dared not open, her delicate legs slightly bent. Her knees, whether intentionally or not, pressed against Lin Wanrong's crotch.

'Teasing, this is definitely teasing,' Lin Wanrong screamed inwardly. 'My little darling is teasing me. And in another beauty's room. Damn, it feels so good to be a beast. Should I be even more beastly and take her right here in Luo Ning's room? The thought is too tempting.'

Qiaoqiao's body was hot all over, her breasts exposed, and a faint pink flush spread over the white skin of her chest. Having never experienced such a situation, she trembled slightly and said, "Big brother, you're the worst. What if sister Ning wakes up and sees us?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled and said softly, "My darling, what do you think I want to do? I just have a very pure idea to try something interesting with you."

How could Qiaoqiao dare to answer him? What he called pure, in Qiaoqiao's eyes, was something not even a loose woman would dare to do easily.

Lin Wanrong gently caressed her chest and said, "My darling, do you remember the wish you made the last time I was drawing a portrait for Eldest Miss Xiao?"

Qiaoqiao blushed and said, "How could I forget? I wished for big brother to paint a portrait of me too."

Lin Wanrong replied with a mysterious smile, "Today, I will fulfill your wish."

"Really, big brother?" Qiaoqiao asked, surprised. She was so overjoyed that she didn't even try to cover the blossoms on her chest. Her cherry-like peaks quivered, causing Lin Wanrong to have a dry mouth.

Using his immense self-control, he replied, "Indeed. I want to create a masterpiece for my darling, a painting that is unparalleled in history and will be unforgettable for us. However, tonight, you must listen to everything I say."

Qiaoqiao had no idea what Lin Wanrong was planning, but she had no thought of resisting in front of him. She would do as he said.

Lin Wanrong quickly fetched a blank piece of paper and a pencil, and then said, "Darling, I'm going to start now. Sit properly and don't move."

"Like this?" Qiaoqiao asked in surprise. Her bare bosom was exposed at the most delicate moment for a woman. How could she be portrayed in a painting like this?

"Just like that," Lin Wanrong affirmed. He kissed her cheek lightly and said, "I'm going to create an incredible masterpiece that only we can appreciate."

Qiaoqiao was such an obedient girl that she instantly understood his intent. Her face flushed, and her body felt weak. Big brother intended to capture her current appearance in a painting. The thought of being observed by him in her friend's room, with her half-exposed breasts, was truly as he said - a scene unparalleled in history, truly extraordinary, and unforgettable. Only they, as a couple, could appreciate this painting.

"Big brother," Qiaoqiao began, surprised and shy all at once. She didn't have any intention of resisting. Biting her lower lip gently, she murmured, "Then please make it quick, so as not to wake sister Ning. Ah, this is too embarrassing."

In ancient times, the chastity of a woman was as important as her life. If Qiaoqiao didn't deeply love him, she would never agree to his audacious request.

Lin Wanrong's thoughts were somewhat dark that day, but seeing Qiaoqiao's softness, he felt gratitude. With this painting, their bond truly felt solidified.

Qiaoqiao's bare chest was exposed. Her face was a deep shade of red from embarrassment, and her heart was worried about Ning waking up. As she grew weak from her mixed emotions of shyness and concern, a feeling of enchantment emerged from her heart, and her face was gradually flushed with color.

Lin Wanrong, filled with gratitude, worked enthusiastically with his brush. In no time, the shy and partly concealed beauty of a woman was portrayed on the paper. The woman in the painting had her robe half undone and her hairpin in disarray. The fresh cherry-like peaks on her chest were tantalizing. The entire image was shy and beautiful, with an underlying sensual tone. It was truly a masterpiece that could spice up the mood in a boudoir.

Qiaoqiao sat uncomfortably, unable to hide her enchanted thoughts. She wanted to look but dared not. She bowed her head low, her face flush with a light pink. Her exposed breasts were tinged with a light pink hue. Her delicate fingers held her chest, revealing a peek of her tender peak through her fingers. It was an enticing image of a shy girl's springtime.

Lin Wanrong finished his last stroke, flung his pen with a sharp snap, and before Qiaoqiao could even say, "Big brother", she found herself engulfed in the warmth of her big brother's embrace.

Lin Wanrong gently caressed her back, savoring the smooth sensation her delicate chest created against his body. He lowered his head and tenderly kissed her supple breast, swallowing hard before saying, "Qiaoqiao, let's consummate our marriage here"

Under his influence, Qiaoqiao was already on the verge of submission, overwhelmed by his fiery passion. She had forgotten where they were, whimpering in reply and daring not to speak.

Already overcome by desire, Lin Wanrong moved his hands towards her pert buttocks, just about to fulfill his lust, when he heard a startled cry from within, "Brother Lin"

The shout was like a sudden clap of thunder that exploded beside Lin Wanrong's ears. He was in the throes of intense passion, and the shock nearly robbed him of his vigour. Recognizing the voice as

Luo Ning's, he thought, "Has Luo Ning woken up? Damn, that scare nearly left me impotent. Even in an affair, one couldn't handle such a fright."

Qiaoqiao quickly sprang off him, her face flushing a deep red. She hurriedly adjusted her clothes, sneaking a glance at him, shyly saying, "Big brother, you're naughty! What if Sister Ning saw us?"

I wouldn't mind if Luo Ning saw me, but it would be disadvantageous for my Qiaoqiao. I must think of a way to get even, he thought, utterly unaware of his own imprudence. He turned back to see the door slightly closed, with no sign of Luo Ning.

I definitely heard Luo Ning's voice just now. What's going on? Lin Wanrong cast a puzzled glance at Qiaoqiao. The young girl, her face still a brilliant red, explained, "Sister Ning was talking in her sleep."

Damn, even in her sleep, she's calling out my name? That nearly left me impotent! Lin Wanrong chided himself. He wanted to suggest they continue, but Qiaoqiao's gaze had already drifted toward the painting they had just finished.

The woman depicted in the painting, blushing and filled with the vigor of spring, was that really her? Qiaoqiao blushed, lowering her head, yet her eyes sneakily observed the painting. They held a mix of embarrassment and joy; such a painting of bedroom delights would surely become the sweetest memory for them both.

Today I paint a boudoir scene for Qiaoqiao in Luo Ning's room, tomorrow, I'll paint one for Yushuang in Qiaoqiao's room, and another for Qingxuan in Yushuang's room, he thought, the beastly blood boiling within him.

A dark wave of desire rose in Lin Wanrong's heart. Qiaoqiao seemed to sense it, as she bashfully rolled up the painting, gripping it tightly in her hand and nestling into Lin Wanrong's embrace, saying, "Big brother, Qiaoqiao is yours. You can paint as many pictures as you wish."

To paint while consummating the marriageLin Wanrong only thought about it and he already felt a nosebleed coming on. The wedding night, the wedding night, I want the wedding night! He pulled Qiaoqiao back into his arms, shouting in his heart, I must take care of this little girl before leaving for the capital. I can't let my precious darling spend her nights alone, nor can I let my little brother do the same.

Qiaoqiao nestled in his embrace for a while before whispering, "Big brother, let's go in and check on Sister Ning. I don't know what kind of dream she was having, but she called your name."

"It must have been a dream about a prince on a white horse," Lin Wanrong replied seriously.

Qiaoqiao covered her mouth, giggling. She shot him a glance, her cheeks, still flushed from their intimate moment, blushing a deeper red. Lin Wanrong watched, his eyes practically glowing green, as he took her hand and whispered in her ear, "My darling, where should we spend our wedding night?"

At his words, Qiaoqiao felt weak in her knees, and she hurriedly ran into the house. All Lin Wanrong heard was her playful scolding, "Big brother is so naughty"

Lin Wanrong chuckled and followed her inside. Luo Ning was lying on the elegant bed, her eyes tightly shut. Tiny beads of sweat covered her forehead, and her cheeks were pallid with an unhealthy flush. She looked incredibly weak.

Just one day apart, and she's already like this, Lin Wanrong sighed inwardly, feeling a wave of pity rise within him. Even the scare that nearly left him impotent didn't seem worth blaming her for anymore.

Chapter 214 Deep Affection (Part 1)

Luo Ning's boudoir was simply furnished. There was a small dressing table by the window, on which were placed various items typical of a lady, such as rouge and powder. Most noticeable was a petite glass bottle, a perfume gifted to her by the Eldest Miss. The fluid level had lowered slightly, indicating Luo Ning's frequent use.

Next to the dressing table stood a desk, neatly arranged with the 'four treasures of the study': brush, ink, paper, and inkstone. A bookshelf was also placed on the desk, piled high with thick volumes of classics, historical works, anthologies, and various written excerpts. Each book was lightly creased, clear evidence of frequent perusal, manifesting Luo Ning's diligence.

Beside the bookshelf lay an immaculate zither, wiped clean of dust, exuding a sense of antiquity and simple elegance.

A lady's boudoir was traditionally her last line of defense, a sanctuary that no strange man could casually enter. However, Lin Wanrong disregarded this rule. After all, it was Old Madam Luo who had invited him up. He considered his visit as carrying out an order. It was his first time in Luo Ning's boudoir, and even a brief glance around made him feel rather emotional. The classics, the zither, painting, and calligraphy - Luo Ning had studied it all. Her reputation as a talented lady was indeed well-earned.

The room carried a faint fragrance, not that of sandalwood, but a natural scent unique to a girl. This aroma was different from Qiaoqiao's, it was a refreshing scent that lifted his spirits.

To know a woman by her scent was indeed a true statement, Lin Wanrong mused with a sigh. Every girl had a different scent, and it was for the discerning to discover and experience.

Within the pink mosquito net, Luo Ning lay quietly on the bed. Her complexion was pale, with a hint of pink, and her breathing was faint yet steady. From a distance, she resembled a sleeping beauty, awaiting the prince's summons.

Lin Wanrong glanced at Luo Ning and thought to himself, this girl looked beautiful even in sleep, truly deserving the title of the most beautiful lady in Jinling. Being in Luo Ning's boudoir gave him a strange sensation, as if he was the master of this place. This feeling was especially pronounced after the covert intimacy with Qiaoqiao, stirring up his emotions and bringing about a special sentiment towards this place.

"Poor sister Ning..." Qiaoqiao sighed softly, "If I were ill, I would have my big brother caring for me. When she is ill, she doesn't even have a person to speak kindly to her. Compared to her, I am far luckier. Big brother, you are so good to me."

Lin Wanrong gently squeezed Qiaoqiao's hand, at a loss for words. With Luo Ning's intelligence, talent, and beauty, the number of gentlemen pursuing her could block the Qinhuai River. From the distant Hou Yuebai to the recently emerged Zhao Kangning, if she held no feelings for Hou Yuebai, why wasn't she moved by Zhao Kangning, who was both talented in literature and skilled in martial arts? Recalling the words Luo Ning had shared with him on the old lady's birthday, Lin Wanrong could only smile helplessly. The thoughts of a woman were indeed hard to fathom.

His eyes scanned the room and eventually landed on a pair of embroidered shoes under Luo Ning's bed. The shoes were scattered, suggesting a hint of disarray.

Qiaoqiao frowned and said, "Strange. When I left earlier, sister Ning's shoes were well-placed. I wonder who moved them." She bent down and put the shoes back in order.

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Perhaps the wind blew them."

In the bed, Luo Ning murmured and twisted slowly, showing signs of regaining consciousness. Qiaoqiao said with joy, "Sister Ning is about to wake up."

As she spoke, Luo Ning slowly opened her eyes, looked around, glanced at Qiaoqiao, gave a faint smile, and softly said to Lin Wanrong, "Brother Lin, you are here."

Qiaoqiao exclaimed with surprise, "Sister Ning, are you awake?"

Luo Ning's face flushed as she shyly responded, "I just woke up. I heard you and Brother Lin talking."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I learned this morning that Miss Luo was ill, and I wanted to come and visit. I just got here and saw Qiaoqiao, so we exchanged a few words. I fear our voices might have awakened Miss Luo. My apologies."

His lie came out so naturally that it didn't need a second thought. He had clearly done unspeakable things in her room, but claimed he had just arrived. Qiaoqiao felt her heart pounding, she lowered her head, daring not to look at him.

Luo Ning blushed even more, seemingly lost in her thoughts. She quietly said, "Your voices were not loud. I didn't hear much, and you didn't wake me. I was just tired and woke up on my own."

Seeing Luo Ning regain some color and strength, Qiaoqiao asked, "Sister Ning, are you hungry? I can make you some lotus seed porridge, your favorite."

Luo Ning nodded lightly, "Qiaoqiao, thank you so much."

Qiaoqiao smiled warmly, "Why be so formal with me, sister Ning? Big brother, can you stay with sister Ning? I will go make some porridge."

Lin Wanrong nodded in agreement. Qiaoqiao gave him a small smile and rushed out.

"Qiaoqiao is such a good girl." Luo Ning gazed at Qiaoqiao's retreating figure and sighed softly, "Brother Lin, you must treat her well."

"Of course," Lin Wanrong said with a smile. "This girl, she's so endearing. If I don't treat her well, who else would I treat well?"

Seeing his affectionate words for Qiaoqiao, Luo Ning bit her red lips, a flash of sadness in her eyes. She turned her head away, not speaking anymore.

Once Qiaoqiao left, only Lin Wanrong and Luo Ning remained in the room. It was Luo Ning's boudoir, and it was somewhat inappropriate for Lin Wanrong to linger there, especially given his actions outside. He didn't know what to say, and the atmosphere quickly became awkward.

Seeing his discomfort, Luo Ning said slowly, "Brother Lin, thank you for visiting me. I thought you wouldn't come."

"How could I not come?" Lin Wanrong said with a smile. "When I heard you were sick, I was really worried. But I was too busy during the day and only managed to come now. Governor Luo treats me well, Luo Yuan is my brother, and Miss Luo got sick because of me. How could I not visit you? That wouldn't be human."

Luo Ning's face flushed a delicate pink, and she softly asked, "What are you talking about, Brother Lin? How did I fall ill because of you? I don't quite understand."

Lin Wanrong sighed, "Miss Luo, I know you're proud and hate to see your mentor outdone. However, the situation between your mentor and me is genuinely irreconcilable. Frankly, she and I are not cut from the same cloth. Your illness, induced by this situation, is truly unwarranted."

Casting him a glance, Luo Ning lightly bit her lip and somberly said, "Brother Lin, you're right. It is indeed unwarranted for me to fall ill over this matter." She sighed, adding softly, "Today's sickness has sapped all my strength, like drawing out threads from a cocoon. I feel an emptiness inside and don't know who to talk to."

Luo Ning seemed burdened by heavy thoughts. Lin Wanrong said, "Miss Luo, if I may be so bold, you have very few friends. Apart from Qiaoqiao, I fear there isn't anyone else you can chat with."

Luo Ning looked at him and said softly, "And aren't you in the same boat, Brother Lin? You're exceptionally talented, but there are not many people you can converse with either. I suspect your burdens are even heavier than mine."

Surprised, Lin Wanrong gave her a long look. This Luo Ning, she understood him so well. Since arriving in this world, though he seemed to ride high and be cocky, there were few people with whom he could actually talk. Considering his past, it seemed his only friend could be God.

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Miss Luo, my situation is different from yours. My experiences are unique, something no one could comprehend. It's quite normal for me to have few friends."

Gently, Luo Ning said, "Brother Lin, I would like to listen to you. Would you be willing to share your burdens with me?"

Determined, Luo Ning's face flushed a faint pink as she bravely met his gaze. Lin Wanrong gave a bitter smile. Tell you? How could I tell you? You would think me mad. He shook his head, "Everyone has secrets in their heart, secrets that can't be shared. This privacy is not meant for others."

Seeing his polite rejection, Luo Ning's expression fell, "Brother Lin, do you remember what you said during our outing?"

"What did I say?" asked Lin Wanrong.

"You said, you and I belong to two different worlds" Tears trickled down Luo Ning's cheeks, "Do I really mean so little to you, Brother Lin? Am I so undeserving, even unfit to talk with you? Do you know how it felt to hear you say that? I felt like dying."

Strictly speaking, they indeed belonged to two different worlds, Lin Wanrong said pensively, "Miss Luo, if you were in my shoes, what would you have said? Your mentor, your friends, they mocked and humiliated a helpless peasant woman. What was I supposed to do? I don't have many talents, but when something needs to be done, I do it. I can never belong to their world."

Tears streamed down Luo Ning's face as she choked, "Brother Lin, my mentor and friends were indeed wrong. But you know me; I've never looked down on anyone. Even if sometimes my ideas are unrealistic, I've never wished harm upon anyone. I want everyone to be well. Why can't you forgive me just this once? I've never done anything wrong. Brother Lin, I don't want to exist in a world separate from you"

As Luo Ning spoke, her voice quickened, and a passionate flush spread across her face, inducing a fit of soft coughing.

Seeing her so distressed, Lin Wanrong's heart ached. He hurriedly patted her back gently.

Despite her weakness, Luo Ning found strength from somewhere. She suddenly reached out her arms and tightly embraced him, whispering, "Brother Lin, Brother Lin, I like you, I really like you"

Chapter 215 Deep Affection (Part 2)

Lin Wanrong was taken aback. This girl couldn't possibly be delirious, he wasn't the object of her affection, was he?

Luo Ning was as if aflame. Her face was flushed, her eyes tightly shut, but she was clinging to him and wouldn't let go. She whispered, "Brother Lin, I like you."

Cold sweat ran down Lin Wanrong's body. This young miss didn't seem to be joking. Oh no, he had unintentionally charmed another woman related to him. How was he going to explain this to little Luo?

Luo Ning's body was hot and clung tightly to him, surrounding him like a fiery sphere. Her figure was rather appealing. Given the chance, why wouldn't he hold her? Lin Wanrong pulled her closer into his embrace and said, "Miss Luo, please let go of me. Let's talk properly."

Listening to him, Luo Ning felt both embarrassed and annoyed. It was clearly him who wouldn't let her go, but he was asking her to release him. How infuriating! The words she had just spoken had drained her of all her energy. She dared not say another word. She hastily slipped out of his arms, dived under the quilt, and wrapped it tightly around her face, not uttering a single word.

Seeing her blush so vividly, Lin Wanrong couldn't help but cough awkwardly twice. "Uh, Miss Luo, I think you might be mistaken. Don't worry, I won't remember anything you've just said."

Luo Ning's heart pounded in anxiety. As she pressed the embroidered quilt against her face, her little leg kicked out in irritation. She uttered in an embarrassed whisper, "Brother Lin..."

Oh damn, it seemed like this was indeed real. Lin Wanrong couldn't believe his ears. Based on his understanding of Luo Ning, this gifted woman was haughty and had high standards. She once said she wanted a husband who could serve as a minister in court and also be a warrior on the battlefield. Lin Wanrong knew he was neither. How could she possibly like him? Then he remembered what Luo Ning had said during the old madam's birthday, that her criteria for choosing a husband had changed and that she even had someone in mind. Could she have been referring to him?

As Lin Wanrong stayed silent for a while, Luo Ning anxiously peeked out from under the quilt. She found him in a daze, disbelief written all over his face. Luo Ning felt a mix of embarrassment and sweetness. She bit her silver teeth and said, "Brother Lin, please put out the lamp."

"Put out the lamp?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, his voice trembling. Was this girl planning to take advantage of him in the dark? He had never been in such a situation. He wasn't prepared, neither physically nor psychologically.

"Brother Lin," Luo Ning's voice trembled, "I will feel more comfortable speaking with you once the light is out."

He broke into a sweat. If she was so timid, where did her courage from earlier go? Lin Wanrong had no choice but to put out the lamp. The room was plunged into darkness, and they could no longer see each other clearly.

Luo Ning whispered softly, "Brother Lin, a gentleman would not take advantage of someone in the dark. I trust your integrity."

A gentleman would not take advantage of someone in the dark? More like a fool wouldn't. He replied sternly, "Miss Luo, you know very well that I despise the gentlemanly conduct. To avoid any unintended wrongdoings, I think I should leave."

Luo Ning quickly stopped him, her voice filled with embarrassment, "Brother Lin, you I just wanted to share my feelings with you. Are you going to ridicule me for it too? Haven't you had enough of toying with Qiaoqiao in the outer room earlier?"

Sweat dripped down his body. He had indeed been caught in the act, and Luo Ning had witnessed it. No wonder the embroidered shoes had been scattered around. He couldn't let Qiaoqiao know about this; otherwise, she'd never let him try anything interesting ever again.

"Um, Miss Luo, aren't you angry about it?" Lin Wanrong chuckled sheepishly.

"And what good would that do? I have long known what kind of man you are. Wild and unconventional, there's hardly anyone in this world who would dare to offend you. If it weren't for that, how could I possibly like you?" Luo Ning whispered softly. The last few words were so faint he could barely hear them.

"Miss Luo," he began, feeling the urgency of the situation, "I must clarify. What you saw earlier was real but also wasn't. You see, I am a painter, and I used to have a nickname - Touch-and-Grab. Everything I did earlier was merely for the purpose of completing a unique and unparalleled painting. As an expert in painting yourself, you should know that it's crucial for both parties to be in character to create the perfect piece. Earlier, Qiaoqiao and I were playing an intriguing game, just so we could quickly get into character. The ultimate goal was to complete that wonderful painting." He said without a hint of shame.

Luo Ning was too embarrassed to speak. Were you planning on having Qiaoqiao strip for your so-called painting and then touch and grab her? Not only did you dare to do such a thing, but you also had the audacity to do it in my room. It's absolutely mortifying! Qiaoqiao, who followed you around, must have been led astray by you.

"Brother Lin," Luo Ning stammered, "please don't say such frivolous things anymore. I can't bear it."

"But Miss Luo," Lin Wanrong felt wronged, "I haven't said anything frivolous yet."

Hearing this, Luo Ning dove back under the quilt, her face burning. This girl, she was too shy. Lin Wanrong found it rather amusing.

With the lights out and a shy beauty lying on the bed, while a confused man sat on the edge, the ambiance in Luo Ning's room was palpably charged.

Lin Wanrong felt stifled. You little minx, if you're chasing after me, then speak up. Do you expect me to make the first move? What a world we live in, he thought indignantly.

"Brother Lin, there are things I dare not say in front of you. Only when the lights are off, and I cannot see you, can I find the courage to speak. Please don't laugh at me." Luo Ning spoke softly, but her words were filled with an indescribable tenderness.

"Do you remember the first time we met, Brother Lin?" Luo Ning said, her voice soft. Perhaps it was the darkness that allowed her to express her deepest feelings. There was a tremor in her voice that was tinged with an affectionate tone, "The way you treated Qiaoqiao that day, in front of everyone, made me realize that you are a man who is fearless and sentimental. Any woman would be envious of Qiaoqiao to have you by her side. Although, you were indeed a bit impolite that day."

"When I saw the couplets you presented, I was naturally overjoyed. Although you openly admitted they were not your own work, I found it strangely fascinating. I thought, 'This man may not have any remarkable talents, but he possesses an admirable honesty and straightforwardness.'" Luo Ning's voice was calm, laced with a hint of joy, as if she was reliving the day they first met.

"Later, when planning the poetry contest, I came to you for help. You, however, made so many outrageous demands that I was both furious and resentful, considering you the most cunning and shameless man in the world. Considering the four virtues propriety, justice, integrity, and honor you seemed to lack at least two of them," she said. Despite her words, Luo Ning chuckled softly, shooting him a glance.

"But then you shared with me many insights on management and strategy, which made me see that you did have some abilities. Later, when you stood alone in Hangzhou's Sunshine and Rain Restaurant, you crushed the Tao family single-handedly. I heard about your fascinating schemes and even Mr. Xu Wenchang saw you in a new light. Given that Mr. Wenchang's wisdom is the best in the world, and his ability to judge character is unmatched, my curiosity grew. Every day, I hoped for your return. I visited Qiaoqiao several times. Sometimes, I even dreamed about you."

Even though the darkness shrouded her features, Lin Wanrong could sense the happiness and shyness on Luo Ning's face. Ah, such was the power of his charm, he thought wryly.

"Then at grandmother's birthday, you shocked everyone. You defeated Shen Banshan in the couplet contest and exposed the tricks of the fake Taoist. My heart was filled with wonder and delight. When grandmother gave me the diamond, I took it as a gift from you. I was so happy that I had it set in a necklace by Sister Liu (Liu Yuee), just so you could see it," Luo Ning admitted, blushing.

Ah, so this young lady had been secretly in love with me all along, Lin Wanrong thought, a teasing smile playing on his lips. "Miss Luo, I'm not as good as you think I am. I have many flaws. For example, I'm eager to do good, I'm selfless, I sympathize with the weak, and I love and respect women. I've been trying to correct these shortcomings for years, but I just can't seem to manage it."

Shyly, Luo Ning replied, "Brother Lin, I love hearing you talk. And I would love to have your 'shortcomings.'"

Laughing heartily, Lin Wanrong thought, This girl is learning to tease, just like me. That's quite impressive.

Softly, Luo Ning continued, "Brother Lin, I told you before that the husband I dreamed of would be a well-rounded scholar and warrior, a man above all others. But after meeting you, for some reason, I always find you lingering in my thoughts. You're unlike anyone else you speak your mind, yet your words carry a wisdom, a knowledge and insight that sets you apart. No one can compare to you. I don't know what's happening to me. I just want to hear you talk, to see you. The nonsensical things you've said to me have sometimes infuriated me, other times delighted me."

"I invited you to the outing with the idea of introducing you to my mentor. Little did I know it would end in such a disaster. You and my mentor had such a terrible falling out that I was filled with regret. When I heard the things you said to me, I wished I could just die. When I returned home, I felt so miserable that I became like this." By the end of her confession, Luo Ning was softly sobbing.

Having listened to Luo Ning's heartfelt confession, Lin Wanrong was somewhat dumbfounded. So, her illness was indeed because of him. Who said that ancient women were always demure and shy? Once their feelings were ignited, they could be as passionate as a raging fire.

As a flirtatious man, he was naturally overjoyed to be pursued by a beautiful and talented woman like Luo Ning. But to be honest, he had never been particularly attracted to aloof women, let alone thought about having a romantic relationship with Luo Ning. Her sudden confession had left him at a loss.

Once Luo Ning finished speaking, she fell silent, waiting for his response.

Clearing his throat, Lin Wanrong cautiously said, "Miss Luo, as you know, I'm not a frivolous man. This matter requires serious consideration."

Softly, Luo Ning replied, "Brother Lin, I will wait for you. In this lifetime, it's you or no one else for me."

Both of them remained silent. In the quietness of the boudoir, the soft sound of footsteps came from the stairs. Judging by the time, it should be Qiaoqiao returning.

Startled, Luo Ning quickly said, "Brother Lin, you mustn't tell Qiaoqiao about what I told you today. If she knew, I, I would die of embarrassment"

Perspiring, Lin Wanrong thought, Not tell Qiaoqiao? Does that mean we'd have to carry on a secret affair behind Qiaoqiao's back? An affair with the talented Miss Luo? This was getting more and more thrilling.

Uneasily, Lin Wanrong said, "Well, well, Qiaoqiao will find out sooner or later."

Luo Ning's body jerked slightly, too embarrassed to lift her head. She whispered, "Let's tell her later, okay?"

"Tell her what?" Qiaoqiao's voice came from outside the door. "Oh, Brother Lin, Sister Ning, why have the lights been extinguished?"