

Finest 281

Chapter 281 Liar

"Early to bed and early to rise makes a body good; all who follow my path enjoy a carefree life." Lin Wanrong hummed to himself as he got up from bed, having slept soundly after the previous night's fatigue. When he stepped outside, he noticed the rooms opposite were vacant; the two young ladies had already risen and were nowhere in sight.

Bored and in the middle of his morning exercise, a petite maid, her cheeks pink with cold, came running towards him. "Brother San, Brother San—" she called out.

Lin Wanrong recognized her. She was the maid Sister Song had assigned to serve the young ladies the night before, a delicate and adorable little creature named Huan'er.

"What's the matter, little sister Huan'er?" He feigned surprise. "Oh, there's a cockroach on your head! Let me get it for you."

Huan'er, taken aback, jumped to his side, clutching his arm. "Brother San, where, where is it?"

"I'm right here!" Lin Wanrong laughed cheekily. Teasing the young maid early in the morning – what a damn good life it was.

Realizing she'd been duped, Huan'er flushed and released his arm, whispering, "Brother San, the young ladies asked me to check on you. If you're up, they invite you to join them for breakfast."

Yawning, Lin Wanrong responded, "Go tell them I'm still asleep. Last night I fell asleep so hastily, it wasn't really restful. I didn't even have time to bathe. I plan to take a good bath later, and then take another nap. Oh, little sister Huan'er, I see you're not so young anymore, how old are you now?"

"Sixteen, almost seventeen," Huan'er replied softly.

"Is that so? So young? I guess I shouldn't make a big mistake then. Huan'er, come back later to help me scrub my back."

With a startled 'ah', the little maid fled like a gust of wind, leaving Lin Wanrong laughing boisterously behind. If it weren't for his search for Qingxuan, he would gladly spend his days teasing maids and cuddling with his wife, living such a carefree life.

He had come to the capital for two reasons. One was to help the young ladies manage their business, and the other was to find Qingxuan. The mysterious encounter from last night gave him renewed confidence – if he could bump into her by chance, surely he'd find her if he was actually looking?

After a long journey and a restless sleep, a morning bath was indeed necessary. The inner courtyard was occupied by women, and he felt somewhat embarrassed to trouble the maids with fetching his bath water.

Eventually, he filled the large wooden tub with hot water, fetched some soap, and stripped to take a bath. The slightly hot sensation was refreshing, making his whole body feel utterly comfortable.

After the languid bath, he let out a sigh of contentment. With a few gentle strokes, he hummed in amusement, "I swim, I swim, I swim, swim, swim!"

Just as he was enjoying the bath, the sound of light footsteps approached from outside, and a woman's voice called from the other side of the door. "Are you in there? What are you doing? Why aren't you coming out for the meal?"

'How come there isn't even a name? If I weren't familiar with you, I wouldn't even know who you were talking to.' He buried his head in the water for a while before raising it to take a breath. Shaking off the water droplets from his head, he laughed and said, "Eldest Miss, I'm taking a bath. You mustn't come in, or else I'll cry out for indecent behavior."

Xiao Yuruo, outside, found it amusing. A morning bath? His words were never serious, every sentence was dishonest.

"I would be foolish to trust you!" Eldest Miss Xiao grumbled, "What are you doing? Hurry up and come out, or else I'll come in."

"I warn you, don't come in, or you'll bear the consequences."

Lin San's words sounded bluffing, Eldest Miss Xiao naturally didn't believe him. Seeing him not coming out, her stubbornness kicked in and, without a second thought, she pushed the door and entered.

"Ah--" both of them screamed at the same time.

Lin Wanrong was sitting in the tub, his hair dripping with water droplets. He saw Eldest Miss Xiao barge in hurriedly, a wooden tray in her hand. On the tray were rice porridge, steamed buns, and a few delicate dishes, clearly prepared for him.

"Eldest Miss, now that you've seen my chaste body, you must take responsibility for it!" Lin San said, laughing.

"You, you, you...why aren't you dressed?" Xiao Yuruo, flustered and embarrassed, quickly turned her head and said in an annoyed tone.

'Who bathes with clothes on?' Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Didn't I tell you? I'm bathing! Why didn't you believe me? Now, how will you take responsibility for me?"

Eldest Miss Xiao quickly left the room, her cheeks burning like fire. Seeing the delicious breakfast, she couldn't help but let out an annoyed grunt.

After bathing, he felt relaxed and rejuvenated. Lin Wanrong stepped out of the room, only to find Eldest Miss Xiao sitting outside, looking absent-minded, lost in her thoughts.

"Forget it, I'm the unlucky one here. Now that you've seen me naked, I'll just take the loss and won't pursue this matter. You don't have to look so upset either, go on with whatever you need to do!" Lin Wanrong generously said.

"Annoying!" Eldest Miss Xiao blushed and grumbled. She didn't know whether to be angry or to laugh. He seemed like a completely different person from the night before. Seeing him reach for the food, she quickly said, "Don't, the food is cold. I'll have them bring some hot ones."

Lin Wanrong nodded and said, "Eldest Miss cares about me after all!"

"Who cares about you." Eldest Miss Xiao grumbled lightly, her cheeks a bit red, "Always lazing around, making me take care of you. If others see this, won't they gossip?"

"Gossip? What gossip? What is Eldest Miss afraid of?" Lin Wanrong said with a faint smile, seemingly carefree, "Gossip is from idle people, and there's nothing I fear more than gossip in this world."

Seeing the teasing look in his eyes, Eldest Miss Xiao felt a bit flustered. She quickly lowered her head, not daring to meet his gaze.

"You... you always make fun of me!" Xiao Yuruo's eyes filled with a slight mist, feeling a bit aggrieved and touched, she quietly asked, "Where did the lantern from yesterday go? I want to see it."

"I threw it away when we got here." Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Just a broken lantern, nothing worth seeing."

Eldest Miss's nose twitched, her teeth clenched in a bitter, silent cry. "Liar, you're nothing but a liar, a specialist in fooling me!"

According to Eldest Miss's plan, their journey to the capital was primarily intended to promote the sale of perfume and soap. Although Madame Xiao hailed from the capital, she had been absent from it for many years, leaving few of her connections intact. The Xiao family was virtually unknown in the capital, with few recognized high officials or nobles. Once Xiao Yuruo arrived, she had to start from scratch.

The Xiao family in Jinling was quite influential and well-established, so their wishes were generally well-received. But the capital was not Jinling. It was a place of dragons and tigers at the emperor's feet, with high-ranking nobles at every turn. The Xiao family, although it had been operating there for many years, primarily dealt in textiles. Now, they wanted to switch to dealing in 'rouge and powders.' Even if their soap and perfume possessed a unique charm, they would have to start from scratch. It could be said that opportunities and challenges coexisted.

Eldest Miss's brow was furrowed. Sister Song sitting beside her dared not speak, for fear of interrupting her train of thought. The Second Miss sat next to Lin Wanrong, her eyes beaming as she looked at him. She would turn seventeen after the New Year, a year older. As per the

instructions of the madam, the Second Miss was also expected to participate in the family's discussions in the future.

"Lin San, how do you think we should take the first step? Should we start by visiting my mother's old friends, or should we rely on the connections Sister Song has and build up from there?" Eldest Miss inquired.

This question was a piece of cake for Lin Wanrong, who had handled countless cases himself. The launch of new products was all about ceaseless promotions and packaging. As long as people remembered and used the product, it was considered a success.

However, in this era, with regard to the target audience for perfume and soap, how to package and advertise required careful consideration. These refined ladies didn't favor extravagant lace or suspenders; the sales technique had to be tactful.

Seeing her sister's furrowed brows, and Lin San smiling faintly, Yushuang knew from her understanding of him that he must have some brilliant idea. She gave him a gentle push on the shoulder, "If you have a solution, just say it. Don't let my sister worry."

Lin Wanrong whispered, "Last night, you promised me that if I guessed the lantern riddles right, you'd give me a kiss. Why did you run away first?" The Second Miss gave a soft "tsk", her face blushing, and dared not speak again.

Laughing, Lin Wanrong stood up and said, "Eldest Miss, both of the methods you suggested are reasonable and worth trying. If nothing else, we'll at least make our faces known. Whether or not it will be effective is another matter."

Eldest Miss grumbled dissatisfied, "If you have any ideas, just say them. You always like to speak in riddles. Be careful, or I might tell my mother on you."

Breaking out in a cold sweat, Lin Wanrong thought, 'She's got no other tricks up her sleeve now, using Madam to pressure me.' He chuckled and replied, "The methods Eldest Miss proposed are feasible, but they all rely on pleasing others, which is not very reliable. The money we make from selling perfume and soap is our own, so we should focus on our own needs."

"How should we focus on our needs?" Eldest Miss asked.

"That's simple! We should take the initiative, advertise, hold exhibitions, and promote our products. With the allure of our perfumes and soaps, creating a sensation shouldn't be too difficult." Seeing Eldest Miss lost in thought, Lin Wanrong continued, "The main consumers of our products are the ladies and young misses of the capital. If we want to attract their attention, we must appeal to their tastes. In my opinion, why not hold a fragrance-tasting event?"

"A fragrance-tasting event? What's that?" the roomful of people asked in unison.

"Imagine, what would be the effect of putting perfume and flowers together?" Lin Wanrong hinted.

"It would smell even better than the flowers!" Eldest Miss clapped her hands, her face lighting up in surprise.

Lin Wanrong clicked his tongue, "Eldest Miss is indeed astute. You catch on quickly! I am impressed."

Eldest Miss cast him a flirtatious glance and teased, "Stop mocking me. I understand what you mean. But how do we get the ladies and misses to attend our fragrance-tasting event?"

"Every spring, there are countless flower appreciation events. The ladies and misses all venture out to admire them. Finding such an opportunity to host a fragrance-tasting event isn't too difficult, is it? On-site promotion, giving out samples, it's elegant and innovative, the effect will be sensational. Remember, opportunities always favor those who are prepared," Lin Wanrong said with a smile.

Xiao Yuruo nodded slightly, and the Second Miss was overjoyed. She said softly to Lin Wanrong, "Lin San, could you step outside for a moment?" With that, she swiftly darted out of the room.

Ignoring Eldest Miss's astonished gaze, Lin Wanrong quickly followed her out.

The Second Miss, hiding behind the flower bed, beckoned him over. Seeing him approach, she couldn't help blushing, her phoenix eyes half-closed, her voice trembling as she said, "Scoundrel, give me a kiss!"

Chapter 282 The Fairy and the Strong Woman

This girl, she had made such a request, wasn't she forcing him to make a mistake? Lin Wanrong thought embarrassingly. Seeing his hesitation, Yushuang pouted her small mouth, her face blushing as she hummed, "Coward! I'm not afraid, what are you afraid of, hmm—"

A powerful embrace pulled her into his arms, her small red mouth was tightly blocked, a pair of mischievous hands gently stroked her waist, her breath was light, and her body was passionate like fire, melting in this sudden passion.

"Hmm—" Lin Wanrong took a long breath, his anaerobic endurance training needed to be strengthened. He couldn't hold on for just twenty minutes, he should at least last an hour to pass.

Second Miss looked around, whimpered, and hid in his arms, not daring to raise her head, her face was burning hot, she gently patted his chest and said, "Bad guy, you're so bad, what if my sister sees it? I promised her that I wouldn't let you bully me at will. If she sees it, wouldn't I die of shame?"

This girl, where did her initiative go just now? Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "Why be afraid of her, what we have is mutual affection, if she wants to watch, let her watch enough." Second Miss had no way to deal with him, so she let him do as he pleased with a blushing face.

After a while with Xiao Yushuang, when he returned to the room, Xiao Yuruo was writing something. It seemed the Eldest Miss and Sister Song had almost decided on something. Seeing Yushuang's blushing face, the Eldest Miss helplessly scolded, "What have you two been doing, it took so long to come back? Sister Song and I have decided on some methods, come and see what you think?"

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "I had a verbal exchange with Second Miss—whatever plan you and Sister Song have decided on is fine, I'm very reassured."

Sister Song was unsure of what relationship Lin San and the Eldest Miss had, as he spoke so casually. Xiao Yuruo gave him a reproachful look and said lightly, "You're good at shirking responsibility. If this matter is messed up, not only will it cost the Xiao family, but it will also cost you."

"I trust the Eldest Miss's ability to handle matters!" Lin Wanrong said with a smile, and Xiao Yuruo gave him an annoyed look.

When it came to business matters, Lin Wanrong was always too lazy to manage, just like he left the restaurant to Qiaoqiao. For perfume and soap, the Eldest Miss would be more dedicated than him. He was only responsible for giving ideas, and his ideas were golden ideas. As long as they were

implemented well, they would basically not fail. As for the specific planning and arrangement, that would depend on the Eldest Miss. After all, she was a woman and knew the habits and temperaments of the ladies and young ladies. If a big man was forced to get involved, it would turn into a mess and backfire.

The Eldest Miss knew he wanted to be lazy, but she had no way to deal with him. Thinking of the warm scene last night, a soft feeling rose in her heart, so she didn't force him to do things he didn't like.

Lin Wanrong remembered his appointment with Qingxuan, and felt anxious. He pulled Sister Song and asked, "Sister Song, you are familiar with this capital city, can you tell me where the Jade Buddha Temple is?"

"Jade Buddha Temple?" Sister Song frowned. "Where is this precious palace? I have been in the capital for more than twenty years, but I have never heard of it."

Lin Wanrong was stunned. When he had parted ways with Qingxuan, she had clearly told him they would meet in front of the Jade Buddha Temple on the seventh day of the seventh month. She would never deceive him. Why was it that Sister Song, who had been in the capital for so many years, didn't know about the Jade Buddha Temple?

He had originally planned to explore around the Jade Buddha Temple first, but instead, he had been hit with a metaphorical blunt force. Sister Song, who was a native of the capital, didn't even know where the Jade Buddha Temple was located. Where was he supposed to find Qingxuan?

Sister Song asked, "Brother Lin, are you going to burn incense? There are countless famous temples in the capital. Grand Prime Minister Temple, Small Prime Minister Temple, and Pure Pool Temple are all famous sanctuaries with flourishing incense. Every Lunar New Year, officials and nobles go to burn incense and pray to Buddha. If you go and pray, it will surely be effective!"

Lin Wanrong shook his head. "Sister Song, I want to go to this Jade Buddha Temple. You really haven't heard of the name?"

Sister Song shook her head. "I've been in the capital for so many years, been everywhere large and small, and I truly haven't heard the name Jade Buddha Temple."

The Eldest Miss, seeing his foolish demeanor, didn't understand the purpose of his questions, but seeing his absent-minded expression, she felt a pang of discomfort in her heart. She gently said, "Could it be that you have misremembered?"

"Even if I lose my life, I would not forget this place," Lin Wanrong stated firmly.

Seeing his decisive attitude, she knew this place was of utmost importance to him. She softly said, "Don't panic. The capital is large, and Sister Song can't possibly know every place. I will ask around more, surely we can help you find this place."

Lin Wanrong gave a bitter smile. "Thank you, Eldest Miss."

Xiao Yuruo was taken aback, then spoke quietly, "When you thank me like this, I feel somewhat uneasy. In the future, please refrain from saying such things, it's uncomfortable to hear."

The ever-silent Sister Song furrowed her eyebrows, pausing before saying, "Brother Lin, could it be that you're referring to the Reclining Buddha Temple?"

"Reclining Buddha Temple?" Lin Wanrong hastily replied, "Forget about whether it's Jade Buddha or Reclining Buddha, as long as it's a Buddha temple, please tell me about it."

Sister Song nodded, "The Reclining Buddha Temple is located in the northern suburbs. More than twenty years ago, it was a thriving place of worship, but it has declined in recent years. I'm not sure if this is the place you're talking about."

Lin Wanrong was overjoyed. Regardless of which Buddha it was, as long as it was a Buddha temple, there was hope. He quickly bowed to Sister Song, "Thank you, Sister Song. I will repay your great kindness in the future." As soon as he finished speaking, he quickly rushed out the door, disappearing into the bustling crowd in the blink of an eye.

"This Brother Lin is very anxious. I wonder what he wants to do at the Jade Buddha Temple, could there be a sweetheart waiting for him?" Sister Song laughed.

The Eldest Miss turned her head away, snorted, "Let him be. Even if he brings home all the women in the world, let him be."

Sister Song glanced at the overcast sky and voiced her concern, "The weather seems bad today, it looks like it might rain. If Brother Lin gets caught in the rain, it won't be good."

The words had barely left her lips when the Eldest Miss grabbed an oil-paper umbrella and rushed out in haste. But in this sea of people, where could she hope to find a trace of Lin San? She stood in the middle of the bustling street, watching the endless stream of people coming from all directions, momentarily stunned...

Meanwhile, Lin Wanrong had eagerly set out, making his way towards the north of the city. The capital was bustling, filled with commoners and entertainers, a myriad of sights and sounds that could bewilder anyone. The streets were jammed with people coming and going, with ceaseless shouting and hawking, an extreme liveliness.

However, Lin Wanrong, with the Jade Buddha Temple etched in his mind, had no interest in the city's splendors. He inquired about the location of the Reclining Buddha Temple from a few passers-by and hurried towards the outskirts.

The capital was vast. He had walked for nearly half an hour, gradually encountering fewer people until he had reached the outskirts of the city. After covering some more distance, he noticed that the path was becoming increasingly rugged. Looking up, he saw a steep cliff rising sharply before his eyes. The cliff was several hundred feet high, sheer and slick on all sides, offering virtually no footholds for climbing. Mist and clouds enveloped the mountain peak, and he could vaguely make out pavilions and towers amidst the haze, looking like a celestial realm within the clouds.

At the foot of the cliff, there stood a dilapidated temple. Its wooden doors were incomplete, moss-covered the ground everywhere, and rust was evident all around, with hardly any sign of human activity. Most of the roofs and walls of the buildings within the temple had collapsed, except for the main hall, half of whose roof still provided some cover.

A surge of emotion rose within Lin Wanrong. Was this the Reclining Buddha Temple? Could it be the Jade Buddha Temple that Qingxuan had mentioned?

He approached the temple and found the interior walls had collapsed, and the roof had been left open to the elements. A giant Maitreya Buddha, about twenty feet long and eight feet high, lay carved from stone, with a pleasingly chubby belly, smiling gently as it reclined on the ground. The elements had worn away the sharp edges of the stone Buddha, imbuing it with an air of tranquility.

In front of the statue, there stood a large incense burner, still bearing traces of smoke and flame, faintly reflecting the temple's once-vibrant past.

After surveying the grand hall, Lin Wanrong found nothing but the giant stone Buddha constructed against the mountain, leaving the place almost empty. Most of the walls of the Reclining Buddha Temple had collapsed, with the main hall being the most intact. Exiting through the hall, he found an extensive forest behind the temple. The trees were tall with robust branches. Even though spring had just passed, leaving the leaves wilted, there was no sign of desolation.

The structure of this temple was simple, and it was easy to see whether there were any living things in the front and back. Despite searching back and forth, he found no trace of life.

He explored the surrounding area, finding the cliffs steep and the surfaces smooth, offering hardly any foothold. Water surrounded the peak on three sides, with only the flat land at the Reclining Buddha Temple providing some solid ground. He wondered who had built the pavilions and towers on the peak and how they had climbed up there.

After circling the area, he returned to the forest where he had started. Not only had he not found Qingxuan, but he hadn't even spotted a rabbit. He wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead and lay down on the dry grass, sprawling his limbs out and panting heavily.

Was this really the Jade Buddha Temple? And where was Qingxuan? As he lay there, his thoughts scattered, his eyes gradually closed.

He had no idea how long he had lain there, in a hazy daze, when he sensed tiny droplets of moisture on his face. It was raining! He sighed to himself and, with bleary eyes, opened them to look ahead, immediately widening them in shock.

Above the treetops, a figure of a woman dressed in flowing white was faintly discernible, her delicate feet stepping lightly on the thin branches, gliding over them like an ethereal fairy vanishing in the clouds, untouched by the dust of the mortal world.

Had he seen a ghost? Or a deity? The sight instantly banished Lin Wanrong's sleepiness. He sat upright with a start, shouting loudly, "Hey, hey--"

The woman seemed not to hear him, continuing her movement, wafting forward like a wisp of smoke. Her figure was enchantingly beautiful, but she was not Xiao Qingxuan.

Lin Wanrong, having already despaired at the Reclining Buddha Temple, was rekindled with a shred of hope upon seeing this sudden apparition. He chased after her, shouting, "Miss, fairy, beautiful lady,--"

No matter how hoarse his cries became, the woman didn't turn around. Her form gradually became faint, and she was about to disappear from his sight. Lin Wanrong gave chase for a few paces, panting and hoarse, even losing his shoes in the process.

Damn it, did she think she was a real fairy just because she could fly? He despised anyone flying before him. If he had a missile, he would've shot her down already. Rage surged in Lin Wanrong, courage fueling his ire. He picked up the cloth shoe he had lost, and with a vengeance, he threw it at the fairy--even if it couldn't hit her, it would give her a fright!

The fairy seemed to sense something, her long sleeve flapped, and she suddenly turned her head, casting him a glance.

Lin Wanrong felt a jolt in his heart, and his footsteps came to a halt. The woman had phoenix eyebrows, light eyes, snow-white skin, and red lips. Her flawless cheeks were as clear as jade, and a faint smile played on her lips. She stood on the tip of the tree branches, her long skirt billowing, like a noble, sacred fairy from the heavens, devoid of worldly taint. It felt almost sinful to lay eyes upon her.

God, was she a real fairy? So breathtakingly beautiful. Even the formidable Lin Wanrong felt somewhat inferior before this woman. Suddenly, he snapped out of his trance, swearing inwardly, 'What kind of woman isn't suitable for a man? Why should I fear her?' But as he boldly lifted his head, the woman had vanished like a wisp of invisible smoke.

Lin Wanrong shook his head vigorously to clear his mind. Was he dreaming? A fairy descending to the mortal realm? He searched through the woods, but where could he find the trace of a fairy?

He took a long breath. The whole day's events had been strange. He was here to find Qingxuan, so how did this fairy appear? And so shockingly beautiful? He couldn't figure out the fairy's age. Was she related to Qingxuan? An elder or younger sister? Could this Reclining Buddha Temple be the Jade Buddha Temple that Qingxuan had spoken of?

A series of questions flooded his mind, making him dizzy. He rubbed his temples hard: 'Qingxuan, Qingxuan, why are you playing all these riddles with me?'

After such astonishing sights, he was wide awake. He looked up at the sky, which was a gloomy grey. Flashes of lightning suddenly turned the sky blinding white. Tiny raindrops fell on his face, refreshingly cold, which sobered him up. A heavy rain then began to pour.

The Reclining Buddha Temple was in ruins, with decaying walls and shattered parapets. The only shelter from the wind and rain was a section of roof over the main hall that hadn't yet collapsed. Lin Wanrong covered his head with both hands, making a dash for the main hall. As he absentmindedly raised his eyes, he saw the exposed reclining Buddha, under the lightning's illumination, shimmering with specks of jade-like luminescence. It was so dazzling that it made his eyes swim.

A reclining Buddha? A jade Buddha? He slapped his hands together, leaping up in excitement. Damn it, so this Reclining Buddha Temple was actually the Jade Buddha Temple! The natural stone used to carve the reclining Buddha was, in fact, an uncut jade, unnoticeable in normal light but revealing its unique properties under intense illumination. This Reclining Buddha Temple was the Jade Buddha Temple mentioned by Qingxuan. There could be no mistake.

With this discovery, his excitement knew no bounds. He let out a few long shouts, overpowering even the thunder, wishing he could wrap his arms around this potbellied Maitreya Buddha and give it a kiss.

Having confirmed that this was the Jade Buddha Temple, he was elated. His feet moved faster, and in no time, he was under the eaves of the main hall. Just as he was about to step in, he heard a female voice from inside, "Who's there?"

His steps came to an abrupt halt. There were people in this dilapidated place? Could it be the flying fairy from before? Could she be inside, changing her clothes because they got wet in the rain? He chuckled to himself, calling out, "Madam, I've brought you some tea—"

"Thump!" A stone came flying out from inside, causing Lin Wanrong to jump. He quickly dodged, calling out, "Fairy, it's me! We just met. I even chased you for a while."

The woman inside was silent for a moment before speaking, "What madam? What fairy? Are you a monk from this temple? No... this Jade Buddha Temple has been in ruins for years. Where would a monk come from? What are you doing here?" The woman's voice was slightly apprehensive at first, then it calmed down.

"Jade Buddha Temple?" Lin Wanrong trembled. The woman said this was the Jade Buddha Temple? It really was the Jade Buddha Temple! Damn, could anyone in the world be smarter than him?

He let out a few laughs. His attention now turned to the woman in the temple. If the woman inside was indeed the flying fairy, even two Lin Sans wouldn't stand a chance against her, let alone converse peacefully. This was quite puzzling. Who was this woman inside?

Although he thought all of these thoughts, they only took a moment. Judging by the woman's pleasant voice, she must be young. He chuckled, "The lady inside need not fear. I am San Lin, a very good man. I came here today to look for a friend. I won't harm you!"

The woman's voice was calm, "So, it's Young Master San. My respects to you. Today, I came out with some friends for painting. Seeing the gloomy weather, we took shelter here. My friends went out to gather firewood and will be back shortly."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "That's great! The rain is getting heavier, and it won't be long before the eaves can no longer provide shelter. I'll also come inside to take cover!"

Just as he was about to step in, he heard the woman say, "No!"

"What's not allowed?" Lin Wanrong asked, about to take another step forward when another stone came flying, landing in front of his feet. Lin Wanrong, feeling helpless, said, "Miss, what are you doing? Starting a fight? You're no match for me!"

The woman humphed, "That's not necessarily true. What do you see right in front of you?"

Lin Wanrong looked up and gasped. In the corner, the tip of a crossbow emerged, an arrow already notched, taking aim at him.

He was a seasoned soldier. He had seen this weapon in Li Sheng's Divine Machine Unit. It was called a repeating crossbow, capable of loading five arrows at once for rapid fire, an instrument of immense power. It had played a crucial role in their battle against the bravest warrior of the White Lotus sect. How could he not recognize it? The repeating crossbow this woman held was delicate and exquisite, clearly modified for a woman's self-defense.

He had spent his days hunting geese only to be pecked blind by one, and now, in this isolated Reclining Buddha Temple, he had met a wild woman. He sighed in frustration, "Miss, you've even managed to get your hands on a repeating crossbow from the Divine Machine Unit. You're no ordinary person!"

"You recognize this repeating crossbow?" The woman inside laughed, "Young Master San indeed has exceptional knowledge. I mean you no harm. From your words and deeds, are you a scholar?"

"No!" Lin Wanrong answered promptly. Standing under the eaves, rain seeped in, wetting half of his body and making him extremely uncomfortable. With his current martial prowess, it wouldn't be difficult for him to disarm her if he could just locate her. But why should he? Just because she wouldn't let Lin San take shelter from the rain? That would be laughable!

"Young Master, you're quite interesting!" The woman said, "I'm alone in this hall. If you were to barge in, we would inevitably fall under suspicion. Even if we're innocent, rumors stop at a wise man, but to avoid criticism in this world, one has to be cautious. Don't you agree, Young Master?"

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Didn't you say just now that your friends were about to return? This wouldn't count as a case of a man and a woman alone. Moreover, you don't own this temple. Just because you want to take shelter from the rain, should others suffer the chill and the rain outside? Isn't that a bit unreasonable?"

Unable to see the woman's reaction, Lin Wanrong only heard her sigh after a long silence, "Young Master San is polite. Unfortunately, life is tough and we women are often in vulnerable positions. If we don't learn to protect ourselves, I fear we will be the ones to suffer most in the end. For a man like yourself, the worst outcome might be a severe illness from not taking shelter from the rain. However, for a woman, a single misstep can ruin her entire life. You can surely understand which is more important."

This girl sure had a sharp tongue. Lin Wanrong laughed, "Is it not just taking shelter from the rain? Miss, do you really intend to shoot a complete stranger, who is incredibly excellent, kind, and handsome, over such a trivial matter? I would like to give it a try!"

As he talked about giving it a try, he subtly stepped back, picked up a stone near his foot, and threw it into the hall.

With a humming sound, a small arrow hit a wooden column next to him, sinking in a few inches. The arrow's feathers vibrated slightly with a humming sound. Lin Wanrong broke into a cold sweat. This girl was serious about shooting. 'You're the first woman who dares to fire at me,' he thought, impressed.

"Young Master San, please do not test my patience. For me, my reputation is more important than my life! If I have to hurt you to protect my reputation, I'm willing to exchange my life for yours, even if it means hanging myself in front of everyone," the woman said resolutely.

"Alright, Miss, you've got quite the personality! May I ask, are you married?" Lin Wanrong asked, gritting his teeth.

The woman in the hall did not respond. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "I guess not. Given your taste and personality, there must be many gentlemen pursuing you. Can I be one of them?"

The woman's voice carried a hint of anger, "Young Master, show some respect!"

"My goal is to win your affection, and then reject you. I wonder if I can achieve it?" Lin Wanrong muttered, but loud enough for the woman in the hall to hear.

Hum—Hum—Hum—Hum—

Several arrows were fired in quick succession, hitting the door pillar. As the woman emerged from the hall with her crossbow, she saw a mischievous shadow fading into the misty rain. She couldn't make out his features. A laughing voice came from the rain, "Miss, better not let me run into you again, or I will definitely keep my promise."

Chapter 283 Serendipity

Since returning from the Reclining Buddha Temple, Lin Wanrong's mood had improved considerably. Although he hadn't found Qingxuan, at least he now knew that the Reclining Buddha Temple was indeed the Jade Buddha Temple, and Qingxuan had not deceived him. The appointment on the seventh day of the seventh month seemed distant, but as long as he persevered, there was a chance he could see Qingxuan earlier than expected.

Upon seeing his soaked figure running back, his face full of smiles, completely different from his demeanor when he left, the Eldest Miss couldn't help but ask, "You're still this happy after getting soaked in the rain? Was the Reclining Buddha Temple the place you were looking for?"

Lin Wanrong nodded and laughed, "Actually, I really have to thank Sister Song. Without her, I wouldn't have known when I would find it."

The Eldest Miss lightly hummed in acknowledgment, whispering, "You were looking for that place to find Miss Qingxuan, weren't you? Have you found her?"

Lin Wanrong sighed, "I haven't found her yet, but one day I will. You know, there's nothing in this world that I, Lin San, can't accomplish."

"Nonsense!" The Eldest Miss huffed, "Miss Qingxuan has deep feelings for you. Once you find her, you should treat her well. For a woman, meeting someone they truly love is a blessing of three lifetimes. You mustn't break her heart."

Lin Wanrong sized up Xiao Yuruo from head to toe, chuckling, "Eldest Miss, is this really coming from your mouth? This sounds quite unlike you."

Xiao Yuruo glared at him and said nothing more, she whispered, "Hurry and change out of those wet clothes. I'll have Sister Song make some ginger soup for you so you don't catch a cold. Tomorrow morning, Sister Song and I are visiting some prominent families in the capital. You will accompany Yushuang to Jinghua Academy. Mother has already given instructions. You only need to escort her there. Remember one thing, avoid causing trouble."

"Avoid causing trouble," this phrase had become a mantra the Eldest Miss would advise him with each time he left the house. But these days, even if he didn't seek trouble, trouble seemed to find him. It had become a routine everyone was accustomed to.

Hearing the Eldest Miss's words, Lin Wanrong suddenly realized that tomorrow was the seventeenth of the first lunar month. Jinghua Academy would be starting its term, and Yushuang was essentially a "university student" in this era, which was indeed worthy of celebration.

After eating dinner and taking a hot bath, the vitality of his body, chilled by the sudden rain, was restored. The Eldest Miss was still in the living room with Sister Song preparing gifts for their visit tomorrow. Seeing the light shining brightly in Yushuang's room, he quietly sneaked over to her room and lightly tapped on her door, whispering, "Second Miss, Second Miss--"

Yushuang's voice came from inside, "Come in, the door isn't locked!"

With a squeak, he pushed the door open. The room was warmly lit. Yushuang was busily packing her things into a suitcase. There were clothes, toys, snacks - all sorts of things a young girl might like. At the end, she even added in the four treasures of the study, along with many soaps and perfumes. It looked as if she was preparing for a long journey. Seeing this familiar scene, Lin

Wanrong was reminded of the night before he left for university when his mother packed his bags. His initially passionate mood calmed down instantly, warmth filling his heart. He walked over to Yushuang and said, "Is everything packed? Don't forget anything."

Second Miss huffed, "You think I'm like you, leaving things behind everywhere! All the things I need to bring are listed on paper, nothing is missing." She turned around and grabbed his hand, saying, "Today was clearly overcast, and you still went out without an umbrella. If you catch a cold, we'll see what you do!"

This Second Miss had a touch of a fussing housewife about her. Lin Wanrong chuckled and gently tapped her small nose, peering into the box, "Are you planning to move with all this stuff? We're all in the capital, you can come home every fortnight and we can send over anything you need. Wouldn't that be much easier?" Seeing the delicate Yushuang preparing so many things, he felt like he was sending a child off to school, even though standing before him was a girl he had mentally chosen to be his wife a hundred times over.

Second Miss looked at him and shook her head firmly, "No! I'm going to the academy specifically to learn. If I come back every half month, how can I focus on my studies? Besides, with you, the bad guy here, I'm afraid I'll not want to go back once I come home. Bad guy, you and sister must promise me that you won't come to see me after I start school. I want to put all my focus on my studies. You've said it too, I'm still young, and I can learn a lot of things. In the future, I can help sister and you. Lin San, will you promise me?"

Lin Wanrong paused. This girl had such a firm mindset, he had underestimated her before, nearly making her a decoration.

"Yushuang, let's sit down and have a good talk." He nodded seriously, an unprecedented seriousness in his voice, "I've been talking about sending you to Jinghua Academy, but I still don't know what you want to learn."

Second Miss smirked, "I'm going to learn poetry and painting. I see that you seem to know quite a lot about these, once I've learned them, I'll definitely defeat you in the future!"

Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile, "What are you learning these for? Can poetry and painting help your sister, or me? One talented lady Luo is already a handful for me. If you learn these too, in the future, our house will only be filled with the banter of two talented ladies, and I as the husband will have to keep my distance."

Second Miss giggled, "I'm a girl, if I don't learn poetry, what do you want me to learn?"

Lin Wanrong pondered, "Is there anything like arithmetic or addition? You could learn bookkeeping, and when my business expands in the future, you can be a chief accountant, managing the accounts of the Lin family."

"What's a chief accountant?" Yushuang asked, her eyes wide with curiosity.

"Oh, a chief accountant, it's, it's someone who handles the main accounts," he explained haphazardly.

Second Miss covered her mouth and giggled, "Alright then, I'll become your chief accountant in the future, hee hee!"

His own words sounded awkward to him, and he couldn't help but chuckle, "Though we say that, I've never been to Jinghua Academy, I wonder if they only teach things like poetry and painting? I don't know if there's a major for learning accounting specifically?"

Yu Shuang nodded and laughed lightly, "You, you're really underestimating the Jinghua Academy. It's the highest place of learning for our Great Hua students. It teaches not only arithmetic and mathematics but also cultivates military strategy. As for the poetry, calligraphy, and painting you mentioned, that goes without saying. You can choose to study any of these subjects if you wish."

Lin Wanrong was surprised, "So, the Jinghua Academy is really a comprehensive, all-encompassing, and diverse university. It has faculties of Arts and Sciences, and even offers military training. I did underestimate this place."

"And what did you choose, after all?" Lin Wanrong asked with a smile. "You didn't pick military studies, did you? Are the Lin family to have another female general?"

Second Miss gave a slight smile. From a brand-new small pouch wrapped in red cloth, she took out a small, exquisite object, swinging it lightly. The beads on it made a rattling sound, "Hehe, Lin San, do you recognize what this is?"

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Little darling, you've been preparing. We truly have a meeting of minds, don't we? From now on, the chief accountant of the Lin family will be none other than you."

"Hate, nonsense!" Second Miss blushed, flicking the beads on the object lightly with her finger, making a rustling sound. Yu Shuang said, "This thing. I saw it from someone else. They say it's very useful for accounting. I had a hard time finding one. But not many people know how to use it. I wonder if the masters at Jinghua Academy will teach this?"

"If they don't, I, your husband, will! Isn't it just an abacus?" Lin Wanrong giggled, took the small abacus, and flicked it a few times, "Three minus two equals one, four minus one equals three, ——"

Yu Shuang was so shocked that her mouth gaped, "Naughty, you, where did you learn this? I've seen only a few people in Jinling who can use this abacus! And what's the trick you're reciting —— It turns out you're the chief accountant!"

Sweat, 'I'm not an accountant, I just learned this in elementary school.' But seeing Yu Shuang's surprised expression, he was somewhat astonished. It seemed that in this era, although the abacus had appeared, it was not yet widespread, and no one had summarized the rhymed formulas for bead arithmetic. He didn't know if there were any experts at Jinghua Academy! Mathematics is the mother of all knowledge, the cornerstone of natural science. If mathematics cannot develop, technological progress would be just empty words.

He couldn't help scratching his head with a troubled look, should he teach this bead arithmetic formula to Yu Shuang? This way, she might become the first person in the mathematics in Great Hua, and it would also bring honor to his Lin family. But seeing Yu Shuang's delicate little hand, his thoughts faded, never mind, he should cherish his own wife, these hard tasks should be left to others. Later, he could find someone compatible in Jinghua Academy, teach them this formula, and he would have contributed something to the mathematics of Great Hua.

Yu Shuang gently threw herself into his arms, "After you send me to Jinghua Academy tomorrow, don't come looking for me. I won't leave this academy until I've mastered my studies."

"I support you, absolutely!" Lin Wanrong patted her fragrant shoulder, "I've always been fully supportive when it comes to my wife's pursuit of progress!"

Second Miss softly hummed in agreement before suddenly exclaiming, "Five limbs? Where did that come from?"

He laughed heartily but didn't respond. Second Miss sighed, "You enjoy your gallivanting outdoors, accompanied by sister and your lady friends, which is fine. But I'm alone, immersed in strenuous learning. This longing is like a knife. What if I miss you?"

"That's simple," he retorted. "I'll draw a self-portrait, making sure I appear gallant and dashing. Place it by your pillow and take a glance before and after meals. That will ease your yearning, won't it?"

"Who wants to look at you?" Second Miss's face flushed crimson. In a lower voice, she added, "Then paint me in it as well. The two of us, forever together."

Ever since Lin Wanrong found himself in this utterly unfamiliar world, he never envisioned returning to a university campus. However, standing at the entrance of Jinghua Academy, he felt as if he had been transported back to his own university days.

Jinghua Academy was the leading educational institution in Great Hua, located outside the southern gate of the capital, directly opposite the Imperial Palace. The academy consisted of three departments—literature, mathematics, and military strategy. Only exceptional talents who passed rigorous examinations were admitted.

Examinations? Lin Wanrong glanced at Second Miss walking beside him and shook his head helplessly. Even in ancient times, people used connections to gain entry into universities.

In Great Hua, literature was valued over martial arts. Most students who enrolled in Jinghua Academy did so to study under famous literary masters. Upon being recommended to the court, they were certain to rise rapidly in their careers. Students of military strategy were relatively fewer. They were either descendants of martial families or meritorious soldiers—also a force to be reckoned with.

The weakest were students like Second Miss, studying mathematics. They lacked both military power and political influence, which were underappreciated, not just in Jinghua Academy, but across the entire Great Hua Dynasty. Consequently, very few enrolled to study algorithms and mathematics—less than one in ten. This was a far cry from Lin Wanrong's era when mastering science and math was a prized achievement.

Early in the morning, Lin Wanrong, who had accompanied Second Miss to register, looked at the sparse list of math applicants and then the throng of people in front of the literature board. He shook his head. What was this about? Merely composing sensual verses and romantic poetry could make

Great Hua rich and its people strong? What a joke! He, too, was considered a half-baked talent, but he viewed this title with disdain!

However, Second Miss was exceedingly excited. At the tender age of seventeen, she reveled in the bustling atmosphere. Here was Great Hua's highest academy; her excitement mixed with pride mirrored Lin Wanrong's feelings when he first entered university.

There were few applicants for the mathematics course Xiao Yushuang wanted to study. The classroom was a small courtyard with only forty to fifty people, less than ten of whom were women. When Second Miss entered, she naturally caused a sensation.

Yushuang glanced at Lin Wanrong with apprehension. Seeing his reassuring smile, she felt a sense of calm descend upon her. She cast a lingering glance at Lin Wanrong before heading toward her designated place.

According to their agreement, once inside the academy, Lin Wanrong had to leave. He couldn't disturb Yushuang's rigorous study—of course, he fully endorsed such a dedicated spirit.

With a smile towards Yushuang, Lin Wanrong quickened his pace, about to exit the small courtyard, when hurriedly two figures approached from outside. Leading was a woman, her head lowered in deep thought, who walked hastily without paying attention to the path before her. She almost collided with him.

Lin Wanrong swiftly sidestepped, barely avoiding contact. 'This girl, in such a rush,' he mused. 'Good thing I have the reflexes of a swallow, otherwise, she'd be a swallow in my arms.'

The man following the woman, seeing the near collision, anxiously rushed forward and asked, "Miss Xu, are you okay? Did you get hurt?"

'This guy, always jumping to conclusions,' Lin Wanrong thought. 'We didn't even touch, and he's asking if she got hurt?' He shook his head in resignation. He noticed the man was in his early twenties, dressed in white, slender, with a jade-like face and crimson lips. He was strikingly handsome, even more so than the legendary beauty Pan An.

Lin Wanrong had an innate dislike for men more handsome than himself. He didn't bother to glance at the woman either and turned to leave.

"Hold on!" The handsome man called out, "Sir, you almost knocked Miss Xu down. Shouldn't you at least apologize?"

'Wait, the girl almost knocked into me, and now I'm the one at fault?' Lin Wanrong sighed internally. Remembering the Eldest Miss's words, "Don't cause trouble," he slowly turned back with a cheerful smile and said, "Oh, I almost knocked her over? I'm truly sorry about that, miss. I apologize."

The so-called Miss Xu seemed to snap back from her deep thought then, frowning, she asked, "Brother Ye, what's happening? Is something wrong?"

Lin Wanrong was at a loss. 'This girl, so engrossed in her thoughts that she didn't even notice the near collision. Good thing there are no cars for her to drive in this era!' However, her voice sounded somewhat familiar, as if he had heard it somewhere before.

The handsome Young Master Ye explained, "Oh, Miss Xu, it's nothing major. You were deep in thought earlier, and this gentleman here almost ran into you. I asked him to apologize to you."

Lin Wanrong had to hold back his frustration. Had this been in the past, he would have lost his temper, but things were different now. Yushuang still needed to study here, and the Eldest Miss had specifically told him to avoid any trouble. For the sake of the two sisters' peace, he endured.

Miss Xu calmly shook her head, "No need, Brother Ye. I was indeed thinking and walking hastily, almost bumping into this gentleman. In terms of fault, I share half of it."

She sounded familiar, and her words were reasonable, taking half the responsibility, even though she was entirely at fault.

Young Master Ye nodded and said, "Miss Xu, your graciousness is truly a model for all the teachers and students of Jinghua Academy. I greatly admire you." Miss Xu just smiled faintly without speaking.

Lin Wanrong shook his head in disdain. 'Keep flattering her, your skin is thicker than mine.' He didn't bother giving Miss Xu another look. Just as he was about to leave, he heard Young Master Ye ask, "Sir, are you a student of the academy? Are you here to study mathematics? How come I have never seen you before? Miss Xu, have you seen him?"

While Young Master Ye was courteous and humble in his speech, his words were always tinged with an air of arrogance. Perhaps it was because he was handsome, Lin Wanrong consoled himself, and replied, "I am not a student of the academy. I'm here today to accompany my young mistress, who has come to study mathematics. She is from the Xiao family in Jinling—"

"The Xiao family's young mistress?" Miss Xu gasped, "You came from Jinling?"

The Xiao family was well-known, even in the capital? Lin Wanrong feigned modesty and confirmed, "Indeed, I am from Jinling." He had just tolerated Young Master Ye's interrogative questioning, without losing his temper. However, as he conversed with Miss Xu, he never once lifted his head to look at her, using this as a form of silent protest against the duo - 'I won't look at you!'

"Do you know Miss Luo Ning, the talented woman from Jinling?" Miss Xu asked.

"Miss Luo?" Lin Wanrong nodded, "I do. We're quite acquainted. We know each other very well."

Young Master Ye chuckled, "Miss Luo is the daughter of Luo Min, the former governor of Jiangsu. She has a high status. How can a servant like you be acquainted with her?"

"Haha—" Lin Wanrong suppressed his laughter, "A servant? How lowly? Why doesn't Miss Luo consider me as such? I earn my living with my own hard work, I eat with my own hands, why should I be inferior? Sir, you categorize people into classes, this contradicts the Buddhist teaching that all beings are equal. I suggest you go to the Jade Buddha Temple in the north of the city to gain some merit."

Young Master Ye was stunned that a servant could be so eloquent. After a moment, he shook his head, "Whether or not people are classified into classes is not for you or me to decide, it's in people's hearts. I won't argue with you, so as to maintain my dignity."

Lin Wanrong shook his head without a word. This man's self-perception was incredibly high. Today, for the sake of the young mistress, he couldn't be bothered to argue, it was time to leave!

As he was about to step away, Miss Xu raised her eyebrows slightly and hurried a few steps forward, "Jade Buddha Temple? Sir, are you familiar with the Jade Buddha Temple?"

With her steps blocking his path, Lin Wanrong lifted his gaze and was instantly taken aback.

This Miss Xu was in her early twenties, her slender figure and graceful bearing a sight to behold. Her skin was as white as snow, her lips cherry-red. Almond eyes, peachy cheeks, although her face bore no smile, there was an indescribable air of calmness about her as she stood in front of him. Lin Wanrong was somewhat dazed, marveling not only at her beauty but more so at the aura that she radiated. It was a serenity filled with confidence, a true intellectual beauty.

Unperturbed by Lin Wanrong's stare, Miss Xu calmly asked, "Could you tell me, sir, how did you come to know about the Jade Buddha Temple?"

"Cough, well—" Lin Wanrong felt a sense of foreboding rise within him and hastily took two steps back, "Who in the capital who has lived some years does not know about the Jade Buddha Temple? I learned of it from an older sister."

Miss Xu gently shook her head, "Most people only know of the Reclining Buddha Temple, not the Jade Buddha Temple! The reclining Buddha is carved from uncut jade, few in the capital are aware of this."

"Miss, people all have eyes, it is not only you who are good at observing," retorted Lin Wanrong.

Miss Xu gave a slight nod, "Sir, your vision is indeed sharp. May I ask then, did you visit the Jade Buddha Temple yesterday?"

"Yesterday? It was pouring rain yesterday, why would I go to the Jade Buddha Temple!" Lin Wanrong stated righteously, a flicker of determination in his eyes.

Miss Xu stared into his eyes for a long moment before asking, "Do you know what happens to a person's eyes when they lie?"

"I do not know, my eyes have not been wandering!" Lin Wanrong replied solemnly.

Miss Xu responded with a soft "oh", her face devoid of any emotion as she said, "My goal is to win your affection, and then reject you. Sir, could you please repeat this sentence to yourself?"

Cold sweat started to bead, layer upon layer. Even Lin Wanrong, a seasoned scholar of the darker arts, was at a loss as to what to do next.

Chapter 284 The Enigmatic Lady

"Hahaha..." He let out three hearty laughs, arranging his thoughts. From her single sentence, he had already deduced who the young woman before him was. A meeting outside a dilapidated temple, he wondered if it was a stroke of fortune or misfortune. He chuckled a few times before responding, "Miss, we are not acquainted, your words aren't quite appropriate. I find myself unable to reciprocate, perhaps you should confide in someone else. I have urgent business to attend to and can't afford to linger. Please excuse me."

Having said this, he turned and wiped away cold sweat, hastening his departure, unwilling to waste another second.

Miss Xu sighed and responded, "Whether you speak or not makes no difference. I didn't want to engage in something trivial, but I didn't expect the one speaking so frivolously with me to be from the Xiao family of Jinling. You have truly disappointed me."

He broke out in a cold sweat. His actions had indeed brought disgrace to the Xiao family, and the whole affair felt oddly unnerving. He stopped, turned around to face Miss Xu, and with a playful grin, said, "So, you really want me to say it? Alright then – My goal is to win your affection, and then reject you!"

Young Master Ye's face changed color, he shouted, "Audacious! You're awfully rude to dare insult Miss Xu. You should be punished!"

Lin Wanrong spread his hands in innocence and retorted, "Sir, you heard her too, I didn't want to say it. It was Miss Xu who asked me to repeat it. I merely complied. Where did I go wrong?"

Young Master Ye was left speechless, while Miss Xu gave a slight smile, "You're quick-witted. Not entirely hopeless after all! May I ask Young Master San, has the young lady of the Xiao family arrived in the capital as well? When I was young, I was cared for by Madame Xiao. I've heard my father mention the young lady's name, but I've never had the chance to meet her. If she's in the capital, I'd very much like to see her." By identifying him as the Young Master San, she indirectly acknowledged that she was the woman who had taken shelter at the Reclining Buddha temple the day before.

Given the circumstances, Lin Wanrong, now having nothing to lose, nodded, "Thank you for your concern, Miss Xu. Both the young ladies of the Xiao family are in the capital. I will definitely convey your sentiments. But may I ask who your esteemed father is—"

"My father is but an ordinary scholar, not worth mentioning," replied Miss Xu indifferently. "When Madame Xiao left the capital, I was but a child who knew nothing of the world. I can't believe it's already been twenty years. I wonder if she, the elder still doing well?"

Elder? The youthful and beautiful Madame Xiao, referred to as an elderly woman by Miss Xu, was absolutely ludicrous. Lin Wanrong glanced at Miss Xu.

He had previously noticed Miss Xu's appearance, but now he observed her attire. She was dressed in an elegant, pale-blue outfit, her figure graceful, her expression calm. Her hair was coiled up high and held loosely in place with a jade hairpin, simple and dignified.

Had Miss Xu already married? Lin Wanrong paused in thought. When he had asked her outside the temple yesterday if she was married, she hadn't responded. Seeing her hairstyle today, he was even more puzzled. However, this woman was poised and dignified. Judging by her words, she seemed to be over twenty years old. If she was married, it wouldn't be unusual.

The only puzzling aspect was why this Young Master Ye was willingly spending his days around a married woman, seemingly unafraid of idle gossip. From her words and actions yesterday, it was clear that Miss Xu placed great importance on her reputation. "My goal is to win your affection, and then reject you," Lin Wanrong remembered his bold words from yesterday and shook his head in regret, a bad start indeed.

"The Madam remains as beautiful as in her youth, living a rather content life. Thank you for your concern, Miss Xu." Lin Wanrong suppressed his doubts and responded.

Miss Xu nodded and took a few steps forward with Young Master Ye. Suddenly, as if recalling something, she turned back and asked, "Young Master San, being from the Xiao family, was it you who guessed the riddles during the Lantern Festival at the 'Fairylane Comes with the Clouds'?"

"Guessing riddles at the Lantern Festival? Oh, you mean him. His surname is Lin, handsome, charming, and brimming with talent. He's ten times more attractive than Young Master Ye here!" Lin Wanrong chuckled.

Miss Xu smiled, "I made those lantern riddles simple, originally for the scholars to guess, to quiet their grumbles. I didn't expect that they would be answered by a servant of the Xiao family, quite a surprise indeed."

Simple? Was this girl purposely trying to annoy him? What exactly was this Miss Xu's background? She had an improved repeating crossbow, was acquainted with Luo Ning, and even knew Madam Xiao. What did she do?

Young Master Ye laughed, "When you wrote those riddles, I was present as well. I was wondering why the riddles you made this year were so simple. I hadn't expected that it was to cater to the scholars. Miss Xu, your thoughtfulness is beyond me."

Speechless! Were these two ganging up to insult him? As Miss Xu continued forward, passing by Lin Wanrong, she said calmly, "Young Master San, it's good to be confident, but do not be overly arrogant. I hope to never hear such words and actions as yesterday's again." Her steps were light, and she breezed past him.

Lin Wanrong hesitated for a moment, then asked with a smile, "Miss Xu, may I ask, are you married?"

As if she hadn't heard him, Miss Xu had already walked inside. Young Master Ye suddenly turned and said, "If it's not your place to ask, then don't."

Lin Wanrong laughed a few times, and called out to Miss Xu's retreating figure, "Miss Xu, my words from yesterday still stand."

Miss Xu paused, shook her head in resignation, and sighed, "There would be no problems in the world if only people didn't make them themselves."

She was indifferent to the Young Master San's lunatic ravings. Just as she was about to enter the classroom, a boy of sixteen or seventeen rushed out, shouting, "Teacher Xu, Teacher Xu, something terrible has happened, a heavenly omen!"

"Cheng Dawei, what has happened? What heavenly omen?" Miss Xu asked in surprise.

"Teacher Su, look—" Cheng Dawei led Miss Xu and Young Master Ye to the courtyard, where countless ants were crammed together, forming a giant "heaven" character on the ground. Although

the ants were constantly crawling, they all followed the lines of the character. Cheng Dawei's eyes spun, "Ants forming a group, a heavenly omen! Teacher Su, how should this be explained?"

Following Cheng Dawei, the students who were studying the principles of the cosmos had also rushed out, marveling at the sight of the ants clustering in front of them.

Lin Wanrong had been ready to depart, but the clamor from the courtyard drew him back. Carefully observing the ants' path, then glancing at the mischievous boy named Cheng Dawei, he couldn't help but smile. This kid, he thought, was something else!

Young Master Ye frowned at the scene, asking, "Why would these ants gather on their own accord? Could it really be an omen from heaven?"

Miss Xu shook her head and said, "There is no such thing as rootless water in the world. Everything follows a certain reason. These ants are gathering for a specific reason. Instead of assuming it to be a celestial omen, it's better to investigate it thoroughly."

Miss Xu gathered her long skirt and slowly squatted down to scrutinize the ants' movement. Her facial expression was focused and beautiful. Lin Wanrong admired her secretly, thinking, how remarkable it was for a delicate woman to possess such insight and abilities.

After a while, Miss Xu reached out a delicate finger, wrapped in a jade handkerchief, and gently stroked the ground. A few ants climbed up the cloth. Her body shuddered slightly, and her face showed a hint of anxiety. It wasn't surprising that she was naturally afraid of ants, being a woman. She bit her silver teeth, her face turned a bit red. She carefully avoided the ants and continued to wipe the ground with the handkerchief.

After a few wipes, a trace of joy suddenly appeared on her face. She put away the handkerchief and asked with a smile, "Today, which one of you brought honey?"

A student replied, "I saw Cheng Dawei bring honey, but I don't know what he intends to do with it."

Miss Xu said to Cheng Dawei with a smile, "Could you please show me the honey?"

Cheng Dawei, somewhat embarrassed, handed over a small sealed jar. Miss Xu wrapped a piece of wood with the handkerchief she'd used before, dipped it into the honey, and drew the character for

"heaven" on the ground. Strangely enough, after a moment, her newly written character was also swarming with ants, the phenomenon reappeared.

Everyone was surprised. Miss Xu nodded and laughed, "Cheng Dawei, this must be your doing, right?"

Cheng Dawei bowed his head, chuckling sheepishly, "Miss Xu, you were the one who told us to observe the things around us closely and to share our new discoveries. After your lecture about how a sprouting seed can push over a big stone, I personally verified it. It really worked."

Miss Xu responded with a gentle smile, "The story of the germinating seed was also something I heard. In Hangzhou city, the White Lotus Sect had once used this trick to deceive the people. It was only exposed by an extraordinary man, saving the townsfolk from disaster. Everything in the world follows its own laws. As long as we observe closely and think deeply, we can always find the rules. Just like this time, ants being attracted by honey, if it wasn't for Cheng Dawei's careful observation, none of us would have learned this. Therefore, these laws of the universe and the principles of calculation are not useless. On the contrary, they are closely related to us, just like poetry and prose, they are all the treasures of our Great Hua and are indispensable."

The students studying mathematics were genuinely interested in the subject. Hearing Miss Xu's words, they cheered and jumped in excitement. Lin Wanrong hid behind the crowd, gazing at Miss Xu's excited and flushed face among them, feeling a faint sense of emotion stirring in his heart. He had already been amazed by Miss Xu's talents when he saw her riddles at the lantern festival event. Today, he had seen yet another extraordinary side of her. Without a doubt, the term "remarkable woman" was well-deserved by Miss Xu.

When the crowd had quieted down, Miss Xu smiled and said, "Cheng Dawei's actions today have given us new knowledge, yet it has also delayed our study time. Therefore, a small punishment is necessary. Cheng Dawei, you seem quite fond of the art of abacus, don't you?"

Cheng Dawei nodded, "Miss Xu, are you asking me to learn this?"

Miss Xu laughed, "Not only do I want you to learn, but I also want you to be able to summarize some simple, easy-to-remember rhymes, and share them with everyone. Only then will you have learned well. You have a keen observation and open mind, I believe you can do it."

A sense of gratitude flashed in the young man named Cheng Dawei's eyes. He said loudly, "Miss Xu, thank you for believing in me."

Miss Xu nodded with a smile. Suddenly, she noticed a beautiful young woman among the students and exclaimed, "Are you, by any chance, the Second Miss of the Xiao family?"

Xiao Yushuang shyly replied, "Miss Xu, I am Xiao Yushuang."

Miss Xu happily held her hand and said, "Dear sister, I'm glad you've finally arrived. Let's go inside and chat."

The students of Mathematics cheerfully entered the building, all except for Cheng Dawei who remained deep in thought. Lin Wanrong patted him on the shoulder and said, "Little brother, what are you thinking about?"

Cheng Dawei was startled. Looking up, he saw a stranger and asked in surprise, "Who are you? Do I know you?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "You don't know me, but you'll certainly remember me. I have a few puzzling phrases that I don't understand. Can you explain them to me?"

Cheng Dawei was bewildered as the stranger in front of him recited, "One subtract five becomes four, two subtract five becomes three... eight minus one becomes five subtract three, nine minus one becomes five subtract four! So, have you remembered it?"

Cheng Dawei initially looked bewildered, but soon, he seemed to understand something. His voice trembled with excitement as he said, "This... this is an abacus chant? No, no. Nine minus one plus one, how does it add up to ten?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head, "I don't know what it is. I'll repeat it again, remember it, go back and study it thoroughly. Maybe you can complete Miss Xu's task, who knows?"

Cheng Dawei was speechless, listening again as Lin Wanrong repeated the chant, not daring to miss a single word. Lin Wanrong playfully patted his shoulder and said, "Little brother, work hard, you'll be successful."

Seeing Cheng Dawei still reciting the chant, Lin Wanrong decided to leave him alone. Wiping the sweat off his forehead, he left the courtyard. Remembering the abacus chant was something from

his primary school days, and he had forgotten quite a few lines. However, with Cheng Dawei's cleverness, deducing a few lines would not be a difficult task.

Having performed good deeds for the day, Lin Wanrong felt invigorated, whistling a tune as he strode towards the entrance of Jinghua Academy. In the distance, he noticed two familiar figures approaching.

The duo was taken aback when they noticed him. One of them dashed forward like a whirlwind, exclaiming, "General Lin, General Lin. We've been waiting for you."

Caught off guard, Lin Wanrong clapped the man's shoulder and said, "Xu Zhen, what brings you here? Oh, and Young Master Li Wuling, we meet again." The second person was none other than the young boy he had met by the river during the lantern festival on the fifteenth night of the first lunar month, a boy named Li Wuling.

Li Wuling asked, surprised, "Lin San, what are you doing here? Did someone bully you and you've come seeking my help? Didn't you mention my name, Li Wuling?"

Taken aback, Lin Wanrong could only laugh, while Xu Zhen declared with fervor, "General Lin, it's not just me. Li Sheng, Brother Du, and Brother Hu are all here too. Marshal Xu sent us to study here."

Study? He remembered that Jinghua Academy also offered military studies. So, Xu Wei had sent these men to study, implying that he held them in high regard. Each of these men had served under his command, and Lin Wanrong felt a surge of pride. He took in Xu Zhen, saying with a smile, "Not bad, you've grown taller and stronger. It seems we'll be counting on you in the upcoming battle against the northern nomad."

Standing tall, Xu Zhen replied, "Naturally, I, Xu Zhen, would rather die on the battlefield. General Lin, we've been hoping to see you every day. In about a month, we'll be fighting the northern nomad. With you leading us, we'll have a spine, and we'll fight with ease."

His words struck a chord in Lin Wanrong. He reminisced about his time in the army, missing it deeply. Fighting the White Lotus was internal strife, even a successful battle left little room for pride. Battling the northern nomad invaders was a soldier's duty. But was fighting the northern nomad really his job? And with Qingxuan here, he felt torn.

Unaware of Lin Wanrong's inner turmoil, Xu Zhen introduced him to Li Wuling, "Wuling, this is the General Lin I mentioned to you. He led our forces to victory against the White Lotus."

Li Wuling had caught snippets of their conversation and gleaned some information. Hearing Xu Zhen's introduction, he sized Lin San up, disbelieving, "You're Lin San, the same General Lin who accomplished a great victory?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Hard to believe, isn't it? This is my true self, always keeping a low profile."

With a clap, Li Wuling responded, "Excellent! You're a victorious general, praised by all. Today, I shall challenge you to a martial arts competition to see who's better. Let's go, hurry!"

The young boy, full of mischief, grabbed Lin Wanrong and pulled him forward. Lin Wanrong was left sweating in surprise, thinking, 'Why does this kid always want to compete in martial arts? Last time it was his grandfather, but now it's me. If I win, they'll say I bullied a child. If I lose, they'll say I couldn't even defeat a child.'

Lin Wanrong glanced at Xu Zhen, who responded with a rueful shake of his head. It was clear he was at a loss with Li Wuling too. Lin Wanrong replied helplessly, "Young Master Li, I'm no hand at flashy fighting. I prefer the real deal, with cold steel. Even if I were to be wounded under your blade—no, wait, I misspoke. If you were to be wounded under my blade, you shouldn't harbor any grievances."

This Li Wuling, whose child was he to be so fond of combat? Lin Wanrong asked Xu Zhen, "Whose son is this?"

Xu Zhen's face turned serious, "Young Master Li Wuling is the only legitimate grandson of the current esteemed General Li Tai."

"Li Tai? Who is Li Tai?" Lin Wanrong asked softly.

At this statement, not only did Xu Zhen widen his eyes, even the persistent Li Wuling halted his mischief. Both of them looked at Lin Wanrong, faces filled with disbelief.

Swallowing, Xu Zhen managed to say, "General Lin, you can't be serious. You've never heard of the formidable General Li Tai?"

With an awkward smile, Lin Wanrong replied, "I grew up in a remote and poor village. I honestly haven't heard of him. Is this General Li Tai very famous? Just by hearing the name, it does seem impressive. Of course, Young Master Li Wuling also has a fine name. Truly, the saying 'Like father, like son' rings true."

Li Wuling clapped his hands and laughed, "Excellent, excellent! Finally, someone who hasn't heard of my grandfather's reputation. This way, when he bullies me later, he can't say, 'Li Tai has served the country loyally for generations, defended our borders and his fame is widespread. Who in the world doesn't know this, yet you, a small thing, can't even handle it?'"

Xu Zhen was left speechless. How did General Lin, who didn't even know the greatest warrior of the imperial court, manage to climb the ranks and win victories? It was beyond comprehension.

Not wanting his hero to suffer such embarrassment, Xu Zhen let out a forced laugh and said, "There's something you might not know, General Lin. This General Li Tai has, from his ancestors' time, served in the military. He has guarded the border for tens of thousands of miles. Twenty years ago, he led fifty thousand elite soldiers, made a long-distance surprise attack, and directly captured the northern nomads chief's tent, killing the enemy commander. His fame was immense, and northern nomads trembled at his name. General Li is a martial genius, skilled in military strategy, and is considered the number one warrior of our empire. His prestige is unparalleled. Moreover, the Li family has been loyal and patriotic for generations, defending our nation with their blood. The eldest son of General Li—"

At this point, Xu Zhen stole a glance at Li Wuling and continued, "His eldest son, the Great Marshal of border defense, fought against the northern nomads for seven days and nights on the very day his wife was due to give birth. He fell in the line of duty, leaving behind a widow and an orphan!"

Li Wuling clenched his teeth, his eyes shimmering with unshed tears. He made a fist and declared, "Why talk about these things? Death is death, casualties are part of war. If he's gone, there's still me. If I die, there's my son. The Li family's men cannot be fully defeated, cannot be exterminated. Even if the northern nomads are wiped out, the Li family will not fall!"

Lin Wanrong finally understood. This was about Li Wuling himself. No wonder the lad was so fiercely competitive. He patted Li Wuling's shoulder, rendered speechless by the revelation.

Xu Zhen continued, "The general's second son, a great commander of the border guards, was also killed in an ambush by the northern nomads eight years ago, dying amidst a rain of arrows. It's tragic. He served on the border for many years, yet never even got to see the face of his betrothed

—" By this point, Xu Zhen was choked up. "The Li family, defenders of our nation and our Emperor, have been loyal for generations. Their noble name is renowned across the world. They are idols to the soldiers of Great Hua."

Lin Wanrong nodded solemnly. What else could be said? They were like gods of war! It was because of families like the Li's that their Empire wasn't subjected to foreign bullying and could stand tall!

He felt a pang of embarrassment. He hadn't even recognized such a loyal and virtuous family. Seeing Li Wuling's grief and anger, his small fist clenched as if it might shatter, Lin Wanrong burst into laughter, "Li Wuling, weren't you going to challenge me to a martial arts competition? What are we waiting for?"

Li Wuling looked up at him in surprise, "Li...General Lin, are you serious?"

Lin Wanrong nodded, and roared with laughter, "Does one jest in the army? Li Wuling, for the sake of the Li family's generations of loyalty, no matter who you face, you can't lose. Understand?"

"I understand! General Lin, I will defeat you!" With a roar like a tiger, Li Wuling lunged toward Lin Wanrong, throwing a punch straight at his chest...

Chapter 285 Declining the Army

"No more, no more," Lin Wanrong chuckled, hopping out of the combat ring. He laughed and said, "Little General Li is indeed a martial arts prodigy. I'm not his match. I concede, I concede."

Li Wuling had a rich family tradition in martial arts; he was undoubtedly skilled. However, compared to Lin Wanrong, a semi-expert who had also seen the battlefield, he fell short. Lin Wanrong had sparred with him for a few rounds, not fighting back, merely allowing him to vent the frustrations within his heart.

Despite his youth, Li Wuling was extremely sharp. He understood the situation, quickly pulling back his attacks. A flash of gratitude flickered in his eyes, and he bowed, saying, "Thank you, General Lin!"

Wrapping an arm around his shoulders, Lin Wanrong said, "What are you thanking me for? Just remember to include me the next time you play the lantern game. I still want to meet more ladies of

quality. Speaking of which, I was taken advantage of during a lantern riddle competition a few days ago. I didn't drop your name, which was indeed a loss."

Li Wuling replied, "Indeed! In this capital, just dropping my name, Li Wuling, earns anyone some respect. No one dares to bully the Li family yet."

Lin Wanrong roared with laughter. Coming from a long line of distinguished generals and having a great reputation in the Great Hua, the kid indeed had the right to be arrogant.

Their sparring session on the training field had attracted many onlookers. Xu Zhen, who saw them joking and laughing together, held a great admiration for Lin Wanrong. He seemed like a magnet, effortlessly drawing everyone near him into camaraderie.

Finally, when the little menace Li Wuling left, Lin Wanrong started to grimace in pain in private, muttering, "This little runt doesn't know how to hold back. I let you win out of goodwill, but you specifically aimed for my weak spots." Although young, Li Wuling was somewhat headstrong. Enduring his punches today to help cultivate a future warrior for Great Hua, Lin Wanrong comforted himself, was not a wasted effort.

Li Sheng, Du Xiuyuan, and Hu Bugui had received Xu Zhen's report earlier and were hiding at a distance, watching General Lin "educate" Li Wuling. Seeing his pained expression, they hurried over, struggling to contain their laughter.

Seeing the three men, Lin Wanrong greeted them cheerfully, "Brothers, long time no see. I wish you all a joyful and prosperous year ahead."

They all laughed heartily together, gripping each other's hands firmly. Hu Bugui said, "General Lin, we saw your intense duel with Li Wuling on the training field. It was quite a sight, a true battle of the titans."

Lin Wanrong laughed. He didn't feel any regret over intentionally losing to Li Wuling. These men, all battle-hardened generals, could naturally see through it. Their playful teasing showed their deep bond as brothers, something none of them would hold against each other.

"How have you been faring at the Jinghua Academy, brothers? Have you learned anything new and interesting?" Lin Wanrong asked with a smile.

Shaking his head, Hu Bugui sighed, "Since childhood, I've detested school. I've had countless tutors trying to teach me to read and write. I never imagined that at this age, I'd have to return to school. It's quite unexpected."

Du Xiuyuan replied, "That's true, the time you, old Hu, spent in the brothel far surpasses the time you spent in school. Naturally, school can't compete with the brothel." A chorus of laughter echoed, Hu Bugui's face reddened slightly, yet he surprisingly made no retort.

Li Sheng, chuckling, informed Lin Wanrong, "General Lin, you're not aware. After Brother Hu arrived in the capital, he got attached to a woman in a brothel. They're so entwined now that he's raising funds to buy her freedom."

Sweat, so old Hu actually enjoyed this, his preference seemed quite similar to that of Gao Qiu who favored mature women. Somewhat embarrassed, Hu Bugui looked at Lin Wanrong and said, "General Lin, are you also here to study in this academy? That's excellent. With your leadership, we brothers will be able to learn better. After a month, we'll head to the front line, giving those barbarians a sound beating."

Lin Wanrong replied with a smile, "Brother Hu, I came today to bring someone to the academy, not to study here myself."

The men seemed taken aback, and Du Xiuyuan asked, "General Lin, why so? Marshal Xu had already prepared the recommendation letter. As soon as you arrived, our Right Wing Army's tens of thousands of brothers would have been reunited. At that time, going to battle, killing the northern nomads, and establishing unparalleled merit would be just around the corner. How can General Lin give up?"

With a light smile, Lin Wanrong responded, "Brothers, given my status, does this matter of the military have anything to do with me?"

Upon hearing this, everyone was stunned. They had been appreciated and promoted by Lin Wanrong, experienced bloodshed, and swiftly rose from hundred-man commander to ten-thousand-man commander. Their respect and gratitude for General Lin came from their hearts, and they had never considered his status. However, General Lin was different from them. He had no military status, and he wasn't interested in joining the army, which was why he had declined Marshal Xu's well-meaning offers to plead for his merit. If he didn't want to go, no one could force him. They had witnessed General Lin's spiritedness, but they couldn't understand why he seemed so passive at this moment.

The men looked at each other, not knowing what to say. Lin Wanrong chuckled and said, "I'm a simple person with no great ambitions, and never dream of achieving merits or building up a career. It would be better if you all didn't hold high hopes for me."

They exchanged glances, having witnessed General Lin's unique personality. He usually mingled with people with a jovial attitude, but he was resolute when it mattered. To persuade him would require time and opportunity, perhaps even the intervention of Xu Wei.

Hu Bugui and the others were pursuing advanced studies here, and they invited Lin Wanrong to visit their academy. The academy was quite spacious, with a large sand table positioned in the middle. Lin Wanrong took one look at it and was dumbfounded.

On the sand table, roads, mountains, rivers, and fields were all proportionally created. Even the city walls were modeled after the actual ones, with exceptional precision in their height and length. Comparing to the military sand table Lin Wanrong had seen in his past life, this one was a bit crude, but in this age of cold weapons, such thinking and initiative, and putting them into practice, was indeed a remarkable achievement.

Seeing Lin Wanrong's astonished expression, Du Xiuyuan laughed and asked, "General Lin, what do you think?"

Lin Wanrong nodded and asked, "Brother Du, who built this sand table?"

Du Xiuyuan looked on with admiration, "General Lin," he said, "you might find this hard to believe, and it puts us men to shame, but this sand table was actually created by a female teacher at the academy. Not only is she proficient in music, chess, calligraphy, painting, astrology, and calendrical calculations, she's also unparalleled in military strategy. It's even said that General Li Tai often seeks her advice. This sand table is her labor of love, and we were all amazed when we first saw it."

Li Sheng interjected, "Our Divine Machine Unit's repeating crossbow was also modified by this teacher, becoming smaller in structure but significantly more powerful. Despite being men, we are all in great admiration of her."

A female teacher! A sand table! A repeating crossbow! No need to say, he knew who it was. 'That girl, she's capable of all this? Damn it, should I take back what I said earlier? It's too challenging!'

As they were talking, Li Wuling brought over an old man, his hair and beard white and demeanor imposing. Upon seeing the old man, Hu Bugui and the others straightened up, bowing their heads in respect, "We greet General Li!"

General Li? Could this be the legendary pillar of Great Hua, Li Tai? Lin Wanrong looked up and saw the old man, his white hair and beard, forehead and corners of his eyes filled with wrinkles, yet he had a rosy complexion and an energetic spirit. His walk was purposeful and vigorous, full of authority.

Li Wuling giggled, "Grandpa, this is Lin San I told you about. He said he's never heard of your name, you can ask him. I'm not lying."

Sweat, this kid was conscienceless. 'I played with you for such a long time, yet you dragged your family here to retaliate against me.' Lin Wanrong hurriedly bowed his hand and said, "Could this kindly-faced yet imposing figure be the legendary Li Tai, the general who makes the northern nomads tremble in fear?"

Li Tai eyed Lin Wanrong up and down before suddenly asking, "You are the Lin San that Xu Wei spoke of? You look ordinary to me, I can't see how you're capable of leading an army to defeat the White Lotus Sect."

Lin Wanrong laughed, "What General Li said is correct. Ability is not something that can be seen, and it has nothing to do with one's appearance. Pan An may have had a face that could ruin kingdoms, but it's useless compared to General Li's mighty physique and tiger-like strength."

Li Tai stroked his beard and smiled, "Comparing me with Pan An, you certainly have a knack for it. Let me ask you, what is the most important thing when it comes to leading an army?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "General Li, can I not answer this question? My knowledge is limited, even if I do answer, I'm afraid I might not satisfy you."

Li Tai's face hardened, "Answer if you are asked, where did all this unnecessary talk come from?"

This old man, really straightforward, Lin Wanrong thought, his attempts at evading the question punctured. He thickened his skin and laughed awkwardly, "In leading an army, moral integrity is the most important. Without it, one would lose the heart of the army. Only by caring for the soldiers, being kind to others while strict with oneself, can you win over the people's hearts, and have your military orders carried out smoothly."

Li Tai chuckled, "You certainly know how to generalize, but how to win people's hearts is a significant issue. Let's hear your thoughts."

"That's simple," Lin Wanrong boldly declared, "Eat, live, and travel with them, treat them like brothers. Lead the charge, enjoy the rewards last, cherish the lives of your brothers, and learn to run away!"

Upon hearing the latter part of Lin Wanrong's statement, Hu Bugui and the others couldn't help but laugh, recalling the general's stunning remarks during the time he commanded the troops in Chuzhou. Li Tai questioned, puzzled, "Learning to run away? What does that mean?"

"Preserve the strength of the living, make no senseless sacrifices, learn to pull back the fist before striking again," Lin Wanrong replied with a smile. "Sometimes, fleeing is the only correct choice."

Li Tai stared at him, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and declared, "If you were under my command and dared to utter such words, I would deal with you first."

Li Tai, a veteran of many battles, stared with such intensity that Hu Bugui and the others fell silent. Even the usually mischievous Li Wuling became quiet. But Lin Wanrong showed no fear. He smiled and said, "Even if General Li punished me, I would still act the same. General Li is responsible to Great Hua, while I am responsible to my brothers under my command. Our starting points are different, so naturally, our methods will also differ."

Seeing Lin San argue with the old General Li, everyone was quietly anxious. Hu Bugui subtly tugged at his clothes, to which Lin Wanrong subtly shook his head. Suddenly, Li Tai laughed, "You are quite young, but you do have some ideas, interesting indeed! Xu Wei has repeatedly recommended you in front of me. Today, after meeting you, I am somewhat surprised. Come to my camp, I will appoint you as a deputy commander. Show what you've got. If you manage the troops well, I'll promote you to the supreme commander. If you perform poorly, you can pack your things and leave directly!"

Hu Bugui and the others were elated. It turned out that Li Tai's stern questioning was because he valued General Lin. Being in General Li Tai's camp was the dream of countless Great Hua soldiers, implying great military exploits and endless glory. Li Tai's direct invitation for Lin San to serve as a deputy commander in his camp indicated his high regard for him. Although Xu Wei's recommendation was not to be ignored, Lin San's performance also played a significant role.

Seeing Lin Wanrong in a daze, Du Xiuyuan urgently pulled him, saying, "General Lin, General Lin--"

"Oh?" Lin Wanrong snapped back to reality, seeing Li Tai looking at him, he gave a wry smile, "Thank you, General Li, for your kindness. However, I am inexperienced and have no plans to serve in the military again. I'm afraid I might disappoint you."

"What?" Li Tai grunted, "You don't want to come? So, after becoming the Commander of Xu Wei's right wing, you don't want to serve as a Deputy Commander under me? I tell you, fighting the northern nomads and annihilating the White Lotus are two different things. The northern nomads are ten times more formidable than the White Lotus. They are not mere common thieves."

Seeing Li Tai's bristling eyebrows and commanding presence, even Li Wuling hurriedly tugged at his sleeve, "Lin San, it's a rare opportunity that grandfather values you so highly. You should accept his offer. You're the one I recommended!"

Lin Wanrong was at a loss, when had he become so sought after? Even the pillar of Great Hua wanted him to serve in the military. If he refused, this old man would be extremely upset.

Lin Wanrong said seriously, "General Li, I have never been interested in military affairs, nor do I have the desire to join the military. This time I came to the capital because I have other matters to attend to. I hope the old general understands!"

"Nonsense! The rise and fall of a nation are everyone's responsibility. As a grown man, you should be out in the field, making achievements. How can you be tied down by trivial matters? What could be more important than the security of our Great Hua?" Li Tai thundered in anger.

How could Lin Wanrong say that he couldn't join the army because he was searching for a wife? He knew his own circumstances; being drafted by Xu Wei to quash the White Lotus rebellion and accidentally winning battles. Facing the northern nomads on the front line this time around wasn't like ten against one, as was the case with the White Lotus; this was a life-or-death blood battle, devoid of any chance to play tricks. If he alone died in battle, it wouldn't be a big deal. There would just be a few more widows in the world. However, if he caused his brothers to get hurt, he could never atone for his crime, even in death.

The crowd couldn't understand his feelings. Watching Lin Wanrong's firm shake of the head, Li Tai was greatly disappointed and sighed, "Xu Wei's judgment is usually impeccable, but it seems he has missed the mark this time. What a pity, such a pity!"

