

## PROTEGE 176

### Chapter 176: WEDDING PLAN

"By the way, Shi Min, about our wedding rings," Ling Li began. But before she could finish, Shi Min cut in with a confident smile. "Mom, I already got someone to design them. Just wait for them to arrive," he assured her, his eyes twinkling with excitement.

"Oh, then I will leave this matter to you," Ling Li replied, feeling a sense of relief wash over her. She knew Shi Min had everything under control.

"Got it!" Shi Min responded, giving his stepfather a knowing look that spoke volumes about their shared understanding.

After a delightful breakfast and a refreshing break, the group gathered in one of the grand halls where the planning committee Shi Min had assembled was waiting. As they entered, the committee members stood up and greeted them with respectful bows.

"You may all sit down," Ling Li said, her voice calm and composed as she sat on the main seat with Four Eyes and Shi Min by her side. When everyone was settled, Ling Li addressed the planning committee again. "Who is the head of the group?" she inquired, her eyes scanning the faces before her.

Several people stood up and introduced themselves one after the other, each with a sense of pride in their role:

- "Madam, I am the group head for the program."

- "Madam, I am the head for decorations."

- "Madam, I'm the head for the attire."

- "Madam, I'm the head of the food committee."

- "Madam, I'm the head for the invitation and RSVP."

- "Madam, I am the head of documentation."

- "Madam, I am the head of logistics."

- "Madam, I am in charge of the technical side of the programs."

Ling Li was momentarily overwhelmed by Shi Min's meticulousness. She took a deep breath to compose herself. "Oh," was all she could manage at first. After a brief pause, she regained her poise. "Who wants to come first?" she asked, her voice steady and authoritative.

"Madam, if I may?" the head of the program asked, her voice filled with confidence.

"Sure, go ahead," Ling Li replied, nodding encouragingly.

"Thank you, Madam," the woman said, giving a respectful bow. "Madam, about the wedding rite, may I ask if we want it the traditional Chinese way or should we follow the Catholic Wedding Rite in church?"

Ling Li was caught off guard by the question, her mind racing with possibilities. She turned to Four Eyes for his opinion, her eyes searching his face for guidance. "What do you think?" she asked, her voice tinged with uncertainty.

Four Eyes, his mind preoccupied with his proposal plan, responded, "You decide." His calm demeanor belied the turmoil within him.

Sensing her mother's indecision, Ren intervened with enthusiasm. "Mom, I think a Catholic wedding would be best; not only is the rite complete, but it is also more surreal to have the wedding in a church." Her eyes sparkled with excitement at the thought.

"Yes, Mom, I agree with big sister!" Lily seconded, her voice brimming with eagerness.

Ling Li, feeling reassured by her daughters' enthusiasm, made her decision. "Then it is a Catholic wedding," she confirmed with the head of the program.

"Very well noted, Madam. Should we invite the Archbishop to be the main presider? How many priests should we invite?" the woman asked, her pen poised to take notes.

"Regarding this, Pharsa will help you with the list," Ling Li replied, giving a knowing look to Pharsa, who acknowledged it with a nod.

"Yes, I understand, Madam," Pharsa said, her voice filled with determination.

The wedding planning continued with a flurry of activity. The head of decorations stepped forward, her eyes gleaming with excitement. "Madam, for the decorations, I propose a blend of traditional Chinese elements and modern elegance. Red and gold will dominate the color scheme, symbolizing prosperity and happiness. We could also incorporate cherry blossoms and lanterns for a touch of romantic ambiance together with the most beautiful fresh flowers. For the birthday celebration, we could have a whimsical theme with pastel colors, balloons, and fairy lights to make it magical for the twins."

Ling Li's eyes lit up at the suggestion. "That sounds wonderful. Make sure to create a detailed plan and share it with us," she said, her voice filled with anticipation.

Next, the head of the attire committee stood up, her voice confident and clear. "Madam, for the attire, I recommend traditional Chinese wedding gowns for the main ceremony and elegant Western-style dresses for the reception. This way, we honor our heritage while embracing contemporary fashion. For the birthday celebration, we could have custom outfits for the twins designed by the world-renowned couturier, M."

Ling Li nodded in agreement. "I love the idea. Contact M, and let him proceed with the designs, including for the wedding, and ensure they are ready for fittings well in advance."

The head of the food committee then took the floor, her voice filled with pride. "Madam, for the menu, I propose an opulent feast with the most exquisite and expensive dishes from around the world. We will offer a variety of gourmet delicacies such as caviar, foie gras, truffle-infused dishes, wagyu beef, and lobster, Chef Leon will be flying in as early as next week to finalize. There will also be a selection of

decadent desserts, including a multi-tiered wedding cake and a grand birthday cake for the twins, both created by a world-renowned pastry chef."

Ling Li's mouth watered at the thought. "That sounds delicious. Make sure to have a tasting session before finalizing the menu."

As the planning continued, each committee head presented their proposals with enthusiasm and dedication. The atmosphere was electric, filled with a sense of purpose and excitement for the upcoming wedding and birthday celebration.

With competent and talented staff working, the meeting didn't take long.

The moment Ling Li and her entourage emerged from the hall, they were greeted by the stately figure of Old Tutor Chen, who stood waiting in the grand living room. The air was filled with an aura of anticipation. Old Tutor Chen's serene composure hinted at the significance of this unexpected meeting. His eyes sparkled with a hint of mischief as he glanced at Ling Li, who hurriedly made her way toward him.

#### Chapter 177: MEETING TUTOR MA

"Tutor Chen, I'm sorry to keep you waiting," Ling Li exclaimed breathlessly as Mushu informed her that the old tutor had been waiting for nearly an hour.

Old Tutor Chen rose gracefully from his seat, placing his hands behind his back. "Nothing to be sorry about. I know how busy you are, and I didn't send a message ahead to request a meeting. Anyway, this is Tutor Ma; Tutor Ma, this is Xiao Ling Ling, whom I told you about." His voice was soothing, carrying a tone of understanding and respect.

The contrast between the two tutors was striking. Old Tutor Chen wore a vibrant traditional Chinese Hanfu, its intricate patterns reflecting the rich history and culture of the Han people. In contrast, Old Tutor Ma donned a more subdued Tangzhuang, its elegant simplicity exuding a scholarly air. The subtle differences in their attire added depth to their characters, showcasing the blending of old and new traditions.

"Xiao Ling Ling, I've heard so much about you, even from the President. It is great to finally meet you," Old Tutor Ma said warmly, his eyes crinkling with genuine pleasure as he greeted Ling Li.

“Tutor Ma, you don’t have to be too formal with me; please have a seat.” Ling Li responded with a polite smile, then turned to Tutor Chen, indicating she wanted more information about the unexpected guest. She was well aware of Tutor Ma’s esteemed reputation as one of the Presidential advisors of the Chinese President. Ling Li wondered about the purpose of his visit.

“Ah, Xiao Ling Ling, I invited Brother Ma here because I am more at ease if he teaches Xiao Shun Chinese Government and Politics; I can only teach him arts and literature every weekend, as you know, these are my only forte,” Old Tutor Chen explained with a twinkle in his eye, revealing the careful thought behind his actions.

Ling Li’s heart swelled with delight. She had heard rumors of Old Tutor Ma’s aloofness and reluctance to engage with others. The fact that Old Chen had convinced Old Ma to guide Shun was nothing short of a miracle. Moreover, the realization that Old Tutor Ma had even flown to Russia to fulfill this role left Ling Li in awe. His reputation in the Chinese government was unparalleled, and his contributions to the law and the constitution were legendary.

“Thank you, Tutor Ma, for taking the time to come and guide Shun in his studies,” Ling Li said graciously, her gratitude evident in her tone.

“No need to be so polite; Brother Chen and I are both willing to teach outstanding people, and I have heard from Old Chen how talented Shun is,” Old Tutor Ma responded modestly, a hint of pride in his voice.

Ling Li suddenly realized that her family and friends had been patiently standing behind her. “Tutor Chen, Tutor Ma, these are my family members and good friends.” She gestured toward her loved ones. With a gentle tug on Four Eyes’ hand, she introduced him, “Chu Yan is my husband,” she said, pride evident in her voice. Four Eyes gave a respectful bow to the two Old Tutors.

Ren, with her graceful demeanor, stepped forward. “This is my eldest daughter, Ren,” Ling Li continued. “Shi Min is my only son, Lily is my second daughter, and I have a pair of twin girls who are only a year old.” The children bowed in unison, their manners impeccable.

Ling Li’s voice softened as she called out, “Shun, come here.” Shun, who had been standing quietly behind Shi Min, stepped forward with measured grace. “This is Shun, Tutor Ma; Shun is Ren’s fiancé.” Her introduction was filled with warmth and affection.

“Good afternoon, Tutor Ma; I am Shun Chung,” Shun introduced himself respectfully with a deep bow, his voice steady and confident.

“Good, good,” Tutor Ma’s face lit up with delight at Shun’s respectful demeanor.

“Quan Ye and Tong Xue are our family friends,” Ling Li concluded as the two friends bowed respectfully to their esteemed guests.

Ling Li and Old Tutor Chen exchanged a few final pleasantries before concluding their meeting.

“Thank you for coming, Tutor Chen, Tutor Ma. It’s a great honor to have you here,” Ling Li said, her voice filled with genuine appreciation. She then turned to Shun and Ren, her expression softening.

“Shun, Ren, please join Tutor Chen and Tutor Ma for your afternoon session,” she invited, a warm smile spreading across her face. Her eyes shone with pride as she looked at her children, the promise of a bright future reflected in their eager faces.

Shun and Ren nodded, excitement and nervousness dancing in their eyes. “Yes, Mother,” Ren responded, her voice steady despite the anticipation she felt. Shun’s hands clenched into fists at his sides, not out of fear but to contain the thrill of the impending lessons. The pair shared a quick, conspiratorial glance before heading towards the two tutors, their minds already racing with the possibilities of what they might learn today.

As the group dispersed, Four Eyes, Chatty, and Fatty headed towards the back courtyard, their determination palpable. Mushu, known for his strict training regimen, awaited them with a stern expression. Goldie had been assigned to track Solaris, leaving Mushu to oversee their drills, katas, sparring, and conditioning. The trainees were both anxious and eager, knowing that Mushu’s perfectionist nature would push them to their limits. The courtyard, bathed in the golden afternoon light, seemed to hold its breath in anticipation of the grueling session ahead.

“Alright, you all,” Mushu barked, his voice cutting through the courtyard like a whip. “Today’s training will test your endurance, strength, and precision. No slacking off!”

Four Eyes exchanged a wary glance with Chatty and Fatty. They could already feel the strain of the upcoming session, but their resolve remained unshaken. Determination etched into their faces, they began their drills, each movement executed with precision and focus under Mushu's watchful eye. The air was thick with the sound of their exertion, the rhythmic thud of feet, and the sharp intake of breath, creating a symphony of effort and discipline.

#### Chapter 178: THE EYE OF THE HIDDEN VALLEY

Meanwhile, Lily's training in the afternoon was for the dance sports competition, and Solaris was her dance partner. Solaris was suspected to be more than he appeared, his innocent smile hiding something more. Following a meeting the previous night, Leeroy, Lily's close-in bodyguard, was tasked with being vigilant and watching Solaris's every move while Goldie and Rockie followed Solaris around the clock. Earlier, Mushu had been notified of Solaris's arrival. With his subordinates' help in distracting Solaris's driver, he managed to place several trackers on Solaris's car.

As the sun dipped lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the courtyard, Lily slipped away to change into her dance training outfit. She moved with graceful ease, her excitement for the upcoming session evident in the spring of her step and the sparkle in her eyes. Leeroy followed her, his protective instincts kicking in as he watched her every move, his expression a mask of calm vigilance.

As they entered the training hall, they found Solaris already waiting. His face lit up with an innocent smile the moment he saw Lily. This expression contrasted sharply with the intense focus of their friends in the courtyard. Solaris's eyes gleamed with unspoken secrets, and for a moment, Lily felt a shiver of uncertainty run down her spine.

"Solaris," Lily greeted warmly, her voice filled with a mixture of surprise and delight. "You're here early!"

Solaris nodded, his eyes twinkling with excitement. "I didn't want to miss a moment of our training," he said earnestly. His enthusiasm was genuine, and it made Lily's heart flutter. His voice, gentle yet firm, wrapped around her like a comforting embrace.

Leeroy, standing a few steps behind, narrowed his eyes slightly, his gaze fixed on Solaris. He was determined to keep a close watch, his protective nature making him hyper-aware of Solaris's every move. "Let's not waste any time," Leeroy interjected, his tone calm but firm. "We should start the training." He said when he saw Solaris still wanted to get closer to Lily.

Lily nodded in agreement, taking her place in the center of the training hall. She began her warm-up routine, her movements fluid and graceful. Solaris watched intently, his admiration for her evident in his

expression as he followed suit. Leeroy, meanwhile, remained vigilant, his eyes never leaving Solaris. Every muscle in Leeroy's body was coiled like a spring, ready to act at the slightest hint of danger.

Back in the courtyard, the sounds of exertion filled the air. Four Eyes, Chatty, and Fatty moved through their katas with determination, each strike and block executed with precision. Mushu's voice rang out with corrections and encouragement, pushing them to refine their techniques. His eyes, sharp and discerning, missed nothing.

"Focus, Fatty!" Mushu called, his tone sharp but encouraging. "Your stance needs to be stronger. Channel your energy properly!"

Fatty gritted his teeth, adjusting his posture and repeating the movements with renewed focus. He could feel the burn in his muscles, but he welcomed it, knowing it meant he was growing stronger. Sweat trickled down his forehead, stinging his eyes, but he blinked it away, his resolve unwavering.

Chatty, on the other hand, focused on his speed and agility, moving with a lightness that belied his determination. His breaths came in quick, controlled bursts, and his eyes narrowed in concentration with Cannonball wrapped around his neck. Cannonball earlier told Chatty that he could accelerate Chatty's cultivation if he stayed with him during training, while Cannonball would channel his internal energy to Chatty. At the same time, Four Eyes maintained a steady rhythm, his strikes precise and controlled. His brow furrowed in concentration, every fiber of his being dedicated to perfecting his form.

As the afternoon progressed, the courtyard and the training hall buzzed with activity. Each individual pushed their limits, their dedication unwavering. Ling Li occasionally glanced towards the training areas, her heart swelling with pride at the sight of her family and friends working hard to improve themselves. She could feel the weight of responsibility on her shoulders, but she bore it with grace, knowing that their hard work was a testament to their collective strength and determination.

In the grand study hall, Old Tutor Chen and Old Tutor Ma prepared to begin their session with Shun and Ren. The two young students sat attentively, their minds eager to absorb the wealth of knowledge their esteemed tutors had to offer. They both knew how important their mission and role in the future. The room was filled with an air of anticipation, the promise of growth and learning hanging in the balance. Shun's fingers twitched with excitement while Ren's eyes sparkled with curiosity. Old Tutor Chen and Old Tutor Ma exchanged a knowing glance, their hearts filled with a sense of purpose as they embarked on another journey of enlightenment with their young protégés. They divided the large study hall, each tutor and student taking each side of the hall.

Ling Li busied herself in the alchemy room, her slender fingers deftly handling the precious ingredients laid out before her. The soft glow of the alchemical flames illuminated her focused expression, casting shadows that danced on the walls like phantom dancers. The flickering light accentuated the determination in her eyes, a mirror of the unyielding resolve that burned within her.

Pharsa, ever vigilant, stood guard outside the door, her keen eyes scanning for any signs of intrusion. The weight of their mission pressed heavily upon them, yet their resolve remained steadfast. Pharsa's heart pounded with anticipation, her senses heightened as she stayed alert for the faintest hint of danger. She knew how critical this moment was, and she couldn't afford to let anything slip past her watchful gaze.

The air was thick with the fragrant aroma of herbs and elixirs, mingling with the underlying tension that Ling Li couldn't shake off. The opening of the 'Eye' in the Hidden Valley fast approached—a rare occurrence every four years that coincided with the family competition—and she felt the weight of her responsibility growing heavier by the minute. The 'Eye' was a place where martial arts cultivators sought to find and compete for new cultivation techniques, each hoping to possess the highest level and rarest of techniques and gain knowledge and wisdom from the original owners.

#### Chapter 179: I WON'T LET YOU SUFFER ALONE

Ling Li's brow furrowed as she meticulously combined the azure bone, ruby coral, and ice lotus that Otako had sent with some of her rarest herbs and potions. Each ingredient held immense power and potential, and she knew that only Four Eyes and Shun had broken through to level four, while the rest needed enhancement pills and breakthrough elixirs. Her hands moved with practiced precision, a ballet of alchemical mastery. The upcoming family competition added another layer of urgency to Ling Li's task, especially since Shi Min had been stuck at a bottleneck for many years, unable to break through to Immortal Ascension.

Ling Li's heart ached with concern as she thought of Shi Min. The memory of her own heavenly tribulation flashed before her eyes—the relentless lightning strikes that had tested her strength and resilience. She remembered the twenty lightning strikes she endured, each more ferocious than the last. The fear and pain of that ordeal still lingered in her mind, thinking that Four Eyes and the rest of her family members would all undergo the same fate in the future. She glanced at the elixirs in progress, a mixture of hope and anxiety swirling within her. The weight of the past pressed heavily upon her, but the hope for the future spurred her on.

"Otako and I can protect Shi Min and the rest," Ling Li silently vowed to herself, her determination unwavering. She couldn't bear the thought of them suffering the way she had, facing the heavenly tribulation alone.

With each precise movement, Ling Li poured all her skill and knowledge into the delicate process. Each drop of powder and liquid glistened with potential, a testament to her dedication and love for her family and friends. Her mind was a whirlwind of memories, fears, and hopes, all coalescing into a single purpose—preparing for the trials ahead.

As the hours passed, the alchemy room became a haven of concentration and purpose. Ling Li's hands moved with practiced precision, guided by her deep understanding of the ingredients and their interactions. The soft hum of flames from the kiln and furnaces filled the air, creating a harmonious rhythm that resonated with the energy in the room.

Outside, Pharsa maintained her vigilant watch. She understood the importance of this task and the immense pressure on Ling Li. Her resolve to protect and support her friend was unwavering. The quiet night was filled with the subtle sounds of nature, a stark contrast to the intense activity within the alchemy room. Pharsa's eyes darted to every shadow, her senses attuned to the slightest disturbance. She knew that any threat could jeopardize Ling Li's work and their entire mission.

Ling Li's mind raced with thoughts of the upcoming family competition and the opening of the 'Eye.' She envisioned her family and friends entering the Hidden Valley, ready to seize the opportunity to elevate their cultivation techniques. She imagined Shi Min finally breaking through his bottleneck, his aura radiating with newfound power and confidence.

But the lingering fear of the lightning tribulation gnawed at her. She knew that each cultivator's ability to withstand the tribulation of lightning was crucial, and the power of the tribulation adjusted to the circumstances of the martial artist. Ling Li's heart clenched at the thought of Shi Min enduring such a trial soon.

Ling Li's hands trembled slightly as she added the final ingredient, the elixir glowing with a vibrant light. She took a deep breath, her resolve strengthening. "I won't let you suffer alone, Shi Min. I'll protect you, just as you've always protected me."

As the elixir bubbled and settled, Ling Li's heart swelled with a mix of pride and determination. She carefully poured the elixir into a vial, the liquid shimmering with a promise of power and transformation.

With the elixirs ready for the next process, Ling Li felt a renewed sense of purpose. The opening of the 'Eye' and the family competition were just the beginning. She knew that the journey ahead would be

filled with trials and tribulations, but she was ready to face them head-on with her family and friends by her side.

The last stage of the process is the refinement of the pill, which requires the utmost concentration and focus from Ling Li. Before proceeding, she went out to look for Pharsa.

“Pharsa, I will be refining important elixirs; it will take me five days to finish them. I don’t want any disruption during this time. Also, call Mushu’s group to guard the whole place,” Ling Li instructed, her voice carrying a tone of urgency and resolve.

Pharsa was stunned, thinking that the surprise proposal that Four Eyes planned was five days from now. “Ling Li! How could you think of refining pills now that you are carrying three babies in your womb?! No matter what, if you can live without eating for months, your babies can’t!” Pharsa exclaimed, her voice laced with concern. She couldn’t think of any other excuse to reason with Ling Li. Pharsa knew that the refining process was very intricate, and it couldn’t be said that it would truly be finished in five days. Ling Li would be in seclusion during these days, and no one could bring her out without destroying the pills under refinement.

Ling Li was amused by Pharsa’s reaction and flicked her forehead with her fingers, “How could you be more concerned than me? The mother of the babies?” Ling Li said with a chuckle, her eyes twinkling with amusement.

Pharsa panicked and had to think of another reason, “How sure are you that you will be finished in five days?” she anxiously asked, her eyes wide with worry.

“Pharsa, tell me, are you hiding something from me? You seem to be stopping me from refining these important pills. Enlighten me, and maybe I would consider,” Ling Li said as she gazed suspiciously at Pharsa, her eyes narrowing.

Pharsa opened her mouth, but nothing came out; if only her brain waves could be seen, they were all crisscrossing at high speed. Finally, like a thunderbolt, she was able to think of the best alibi, “Um, five days from now.... Um... Murphy and I have some important announcements to make.” Pharsa said.

Chapter 180: ARE YOU PREGNANT?

“It’s supposed to be a surprise, but you! You ruined it! Hmph! You can’t be present on that day!” Pharsa hurriedly added, acting aggrieved as she lied through her teeth, her face flushed as if she were angry; however, the reality was that she was so regretful for using such an alibi.

“Oh, Pharsa, tell me, are you pregnant?” Ling Li seriously asked, her brows furrowing in suspicion.

“Ling Li! How could you think of me like that!” Pharsa denied it fiercely, her face turning an even deeper shade of red.

Ling Li chuckled as she saw Pharsa’s face puffing in anger. “Alright, hahaha. I promise I’ll be out on the fifth day no matter what and witness your announcement with Murphy,” Ling Li said with a warm smile, assuring her.

“That’s more like it. Otherwise, forget that we are sisters,” Pharsa said, acting dissatisfied, her eyes still wide with feigned indignation.

“Alright, I’m going in. Time is precious, and the ingredients couldn’t wait long and needed to be processed immediately. Call Mushu to have his team guard this place,” Ling Li said before entering the alchemy room once again, her resolve unshaken.

Outside the door, Pharsa called and informed Mushu, who was busy training the three masters. Mushu instantly dispatched his team to join Pharsa. They stood resolute, ready to face any threat that might come their way outside the alchemy room. The night was serene, but they all knew the path ahead would be anything but easy.

Once inside, Ling Li meticulously prepared everything for the complex process of pill refining. The process often included intricate steps such as heating, cooling, grinding, and mixing, each of which had to be executed with exact precision to avoid failure or creating harmful substances and backlash to the alchemist. She arranged the azure bone, ruby coral, and ice lotus in front of her, their potent energy resonating in the air.

Ling Li then prepared to infuse her energy into the ingredients. She steadied her breathing and closed her eyes, drawing upon her spiritual and magical energy. As she began to channel her power, she felt the familiar warmth spread through her veins. The energy flowed from her hands into the ingredients, infusing them with life and potential. This energy manipulation required intense concentration to

control the flow and ensure that the ingredients were properly harmonized. Any distraction could disrupt the balance, leading to disastrous results.

The environment played a crucial role in the success of these processes. Ling Li made sure to maintain specific conditions within her workspace, carefully monitoring factors such as temperature, humidity, and ambient energy. These elements could significantly affect the outcome of the pill refining, and Ling Li's full attention was demanded to ensure the optimal environment for success.

Powerful pills were valuable and sought after, making accomplished alchemists like Ling Li targets for theft or sabotage.

The presence of guards she had called for ensured Ling Li she could work without fear of external threats. Additionally, the powerful pills she was refining emitted strong energy fluctuations during refinement, which could attract unwanted attention from enemies or rival alchemists within a certain radius. Pharsa's vigilant watch outside the door provided an additional layer of security, allowing Ling Li to focus solely on her work.

The combination of potent ingredients and the infusion of energy could sometimes lead to volatile reactions. Alchemical explosions were a common risk, and maintaining focus minimized the likelihood of accidental detonations that could harm the alchemist and their surroundings. Ling Li was acutely aware of this danger and took every precaution to ensure a safe and controlled process.

Most importantly, many alchemical processes had specific time windows during which certain actions had to be performed. Missing these critical moments could fail or reduce the potency of the pills. Ling Li remained vigilant and precise in her timing, her senses attuned to the subtle changes in the ingredients and their reactions.

With each precise movement, Ling Li poured all her skill and knowledge into the delicate process. As the hours passed, the alchemy room became a haven of concentration and purpose. Ling Li's hands moved with practiced precision, guided by her deep understanding of the ingredients and their interactions. The soft hum of flames from the kiln and furnaces filled the air, creating a harmonious rhythm that resonated with the energy in the room.

When Ling Li finally placed the pill into the kiln for final baking, she positioned herself in a meditative pose beside it. She closed her eyes and steadied her breathing, her hands gently resting on her knees. The kiln glowed with a soft, otherworldly light as it began the final stage of refinement. Ling Li poured

her spiritual and magical energy into the kiln, feeling the connection between herself and the pill intensify.

The energy flowed from her core, radiating through her limbs and into the kiln. The heat from the alchemical flames enveloped her. But Ling Li remained focused, her mind attuned to the delicate process taking place within. She would maintain this meditative state, continuously infusing the pill with her energy until it was fully refined and ready. What is the exact time of completion? No one can tell.

Ling Li's thoughts drifted to her friends and family, their faces flashing before her closed eyes. She drew strength from their love and support, knowing that her efforts would ensure their success and safety. The rhythmic hum of the kiln and the steady flow of her energy created a symphony of power and purpose.

As the hours passed, Ling Li remained unwavering in her meditative pose, her energy intertwining with the pill as it reached its final form. The air around her shimmered with the potent energy, a testament to her dedication and mastery of the alchemical arts

Meanwhile, Shi Min had just created a new group chat, pulling everyone into the loop with a flurry of messages and updates about Four Eyes' grand wedding proposal plan.

Early that evening, the group found themselves back in the group chat, eager to share their updates. The excitement from the gazebo meeting still lingered in the air as they typed away on their devices.