

Lady gu 751

Chapter 751: Stolen Things Will Never Belong To You

“Those who would attend Li Xing’er’s banquet must be a bunch of scoundrels!” Tang Lingyun snorted. “Sister, this is an apprenticeship banquet, and those who are attending are all famous figures in the oil painting world. As for her, she’s just a good-for-nothing!”

Tang Ruge knew very well that news of her and Li Xing’er arguing at the door would definitely spread. At that time, everyone would compare their banquets. Other than the venue, they would also compare guests to determine who had stronger connections.

Now that she had already acknowledged Qi Zhong as her master and become a truly powerful socialite, how could an ignorant and incompetent rich daughter like Li Xing’er compare to her?

On the other side of Furong Pavilion, all the guests had arrived. Li Xing’er had only invited her friends, so there were not many people. The spacious Furong Pavilion actually seemed a little empty.

After everyone sat down, someone asked curiously, “Who are the people in Room One? It sounds very lively there!”

Furong Pavilion was a separate courtyard in Fragrance Hotel. It had beautiful scenery and was usually not open to the public. It could only be entered with Qin An’s permission.

Room One happened to be opposite Furong Pavilion. Seeing the people coming and going and hearing the commotion, everyone couldn’t help but wonder who was holding a banquet in Room One today.

When Li Xing’er heard this, her face darkened. “She’s just holding an apprenticeship banquet. What’s there to see?”

At this moment, a waiter knocked on the door and walked in. He said respectfully, “Sixth Miss, Miss Tang from Room One wants to invite you to her apprenticeship banquet.”

Li Xing’er roared angrily, “Is she done?! Is there something wrong with her brain? How dare she invite Xi to her apprenticeship banquet?”

Qiao Xi slowly raised her eyes. From where she sat, she could see Room One opposite. There was a painting outside the door that seemed a little familiar.

“Who painted that painting?” Qiao Xi asked.

The waiter said, “Sixth Miss, I’m not too sure about that either, but I heard that it was painted by Miss Tang. Mr. Qi Zhong decided to take Miss Tang as his apprentice after seeing this painting.”

The corners of Qiao Xi’s mouth curled up slightly. “I see...”

Previously, she had casually made a painting in the art studio of Li University and left without paying much attention. Later, she remembered the painting and went back to look for it, but it was gone.

She thought that the administrator had kept it and did not pursue the matter anymore. She did not expect it to be with Tang Ruge. Moreover, she used this painting to become Qi Zhong’s apprentice?

Li Xing'er also glanced at the painting and was immediately surprised. "You said that this painting was painted by Tang Ruge? How is that possible? Is she even at this level?"

Madam Li was a little hesitant. "It resembles Han Ye's style."

Qiao Xi couldn't help but nod. When she was painting this painting, Gu Zheng had been guiding her from the side. Moreover, Gu Zheng's style was indeed very similar to Han Ye's. Madam Li could tell as well.

Madam Li sized up the painting and said thoughtfully, "I didn't expect Miss Tang to be so talented in painting. It's really an eye-opener."

At this moment, Qiao Xi finally understood why Qi Zhong, who had always been arrogant, would take Tang Ruge as his apprentice. It turned out that Tang Ruge had stolen a painting. Moreover, it was a painting that she and Gu Zheng had completed together.

Her expression was indifferent as she said coldly, "I'm not going. Help me reject the invitation."

Tang Ruge was addicted to stealing. Previously, she stole her music account. Now, she stole her painting. However, Tang Ruge did not seem to understand that what was stolen would never belong to her.

1

Qiao Xi rejected the invitation, and Tang Ruge did not bother her anymore. It was quiet for a while.

Halfway through the banquet, Qiao Xi came out to take a breather. When she passed by Room One, she saw a handsome man painting at the door. He looked very young, and there was a look of faint sorrow between his brows.

When Qiao Xi walked to his side, she heard him mutter to himself, "When can I draw a perfect painting like Miss Han Yin?"

"How do I draw the layers of this rose?"

"The flower language of pink roses is an oath of love. How can one express the fidelity of love in a painting? No one seems to paint better than she does."

"If Miss Han Yin were here, she might be able to give me some pointers."

Qiao Xi stopped in her tracks and could not help but raise her eyebrows. Was she really that powerful? She actually had fans?

Chapter 752: Two Paintings With Extremely Similar Styles

"Master has never liked me. When I first became his apprentice, he refused to hold a banquet for me, but he's holding such a grand banquet for this junior of mine. Looks like I really don't have any talent."

As she listened to the handsome man mutter to himself, Qiao Xi realized that he was Qi Zhong's apprentice. However, this apprentice was not well-liked. He did not even have an apprenticeship banquet held for him before, so he was painting alone at the door.

She glanced at the man's painting. In fact, he was quite skilled, but he lacked his own ideas. Without inspiration, he would never achieve anything by blindly imitating other people's styles. But if someone gave him some serious guidance, he would surely make a breakthrough.

After thinking for a moment, Qiao Xi walked forward and pointed. "The color here is darker."

The handsome man looked up in surprise at the unfamiliar voice. He knew that many famous painters had come to the apprenticeship banquet today. Presumably, this lady was also a painter, so he trusted her with his brush.

Qiao Xi took the paintbrush and adjusted the color on the palette. She picked up the paintbrush and painted on the paper. Instantly, a bright but pure rose appeared on the canvas.

She handed the man the brush and said softly, "Paint two more stalks on the side with the color I've adjusted."

The delicate man looked at the vivid roses on the canvas, and his eyes lit up. He began to paint confidently.

Yes! That was the feeling! Each flower had its own stance, bright but pure like the rose painted by the woman beside him.

After the painting was completed, the man was about to look up to thank her when he realized that she had already left. His eyes could not help but be filled with disappointment. However, she should be here to attend his junior's apprenticeship banquet. He would definitely see her later.

After a while, Qi Zhong came out of Room One. As soon as he stepped out, he saw his apprentice painting at the door. He could not help but frown. Afraid that his painting was too bad and would tarnish his reputation, he hurriedly glanced at it.

However, Qi Zhong suddenly stopped in his tracks. The bright roses on the canvas seemed to have come alive, making one's eyes light up.

Qi Zhong's pupils suddenly constricted. He rushed over and asked, "Who painted this?"

The handsome man trembled in fear. "M-Master..."

Qi Zhong's eyes were filled with shock. He knew every one of his apprentices well. It was impossible for this apprentice to have such standards. "It's not you. It must not be..."

The man hurriedly got up and was about to bow and apologize when a few painters walked out of the private room. They were holding Tang Ruge's painting.

Qi Zhong glanced at Tang Ruge's painting, then at the roses in the man's painting. He asked excitedly, "Look! Are the roses in this painting and the roses in Ruge's painting by the same person?"

Everyone here was an experienced painter who had been in the industry for decades, so they could naturally tell that the brushstrokes and lines were similar. They replied affirmatively, "It does look like the same person's work!"

"Who painted these roses?"

Qi Zhong looked at the roses. The style of these two paintings was very similar, so they must have been painted by Ruge. This apprentice's casual painting of a rose was so stunning. She was really talented.

Hearing everyone's exclamations, Qi Zhong smiled smugly. Then, he asked his disciple, "Ruge, you painted this?"

Although he asked this, he was actually already certain that this painting was done by Tang Ruge. This apprentice of his was so smart and talented. She was completely qualified to inherit his mantle. Moreover, she was so accomplished at such a young age. In the future, her achievements would definitely surpass his and bring him even higher honor.

However, in the next second, the handsome man from before broke Qi Zhong's beautiful dream. He explained awkwardly, "Miss Tang didn't paint this."

The smile on Qi Zhong's face gradually disappeared, and the corners of his mouth twitched slightly. After a while, he reacted and asked in surprise, "This painting wasn't done by Ruge? Then who did it?"

"It's... It's a woman in a dark green coat. She's tall, young, and pretty. She's probably here for the apprenticeship party too."

Qi Zhong's expression darkened as a bad thought surfaced in his mind. Could it be that the painting back then was not painted by Tang Ruge? That was because anyone with a discerning eye could tell that the roses in this painting and Tang Ruge's painting were done by the same person.

1

Each artist had a unique style, and they had different habits too. Each stroke would be different. Although the two paintings had different concepts, every detail in the paintings were extremely similar.

Chapter 753: This Is Fate!

Qi Zhong trembled and hurriedly ordered, "No matter what method you use, you must find the person who painted this for you! Find her immediately!"

...

On the other hand, Qiao Xi came to the corridor and called Gu Zheng.

Gu Zheng's expression did not change when he heard her story. In fact, he did not care about who took the painting. It did not matter even if they sold it for money. However, he did not expect Tang Ruge to steal the painting and even use it to become Qi Zhong's apprentice.

The man's voice was grim. "You don't have to be bothered about this. I'll take care of it."

Qiao Xi asked curiously, "Gu Zheng, even Madam Li said that the painting we made together is very similar to Han Ye's style. Could it be that you're also a fan of Han Ye?"

"Huh?"

Qiao Xi suspected something in her heart, then asked, "What's your relationship with Han Ye? Do you know him?"

Gu Zheng sneered. "Mrs. Gu, I really don't know if you're smart or stupid. Haven't you come to the realization yet?"

The man's lips curled into a smile. He felt that Qiao Xi should be able to guess that he was Han Ye. Both of their aliases had the word 'Han'. This was fate!

Hearing his words, Qiao Xi was instantly enlightened. "Could it be that you're his apprentice?"

Qiao Xi said excitedly, "How did you meet him? What kind of person is he? How old is he? Can I see him?"

Gu Zheng was speechless. Was he so unlike Han Ye?

After hanging up the phone, Qiao Xi was about to leave when a gentle voice suddenly came from behind. "Xi Xi?"

Tang Ruge looked at her with a smile. "Who are you calling? I think I heard you mention Han Ye. Do you like Han Ye too?"

"Actually, I already knew that you liked to paint. That's why I asked if you wanted to learn how to paint. If you're willing, I can help you find an outstanding master. The people who came to the apprenticeship banquet today are all famous painters. It's now or never!"

Qiao Xi turned around, her eyes filled with coldness as the corners of her mouth curled into a mocking smile.

Tang Ruge was not embarrassed at all. She still said patiently, "It's fine if you're afraid that these masters won't accept you. After all, you're a beginner. You can slowly pick up the basics first. When you're better at it, I'll recommend you to some masters.

"Xi Xi, as long as you like to paint, go ahead and learn. I'll do my best to help you."

1

Qiao Xi couldn't help but laugh out loud. She said casually, "Miss Tang, eavesdropping on others on the phone isn't something a lady should do. Besides, did I ask you to help me get a master?"

Faced with Qiao Xi's disdainful expression, Tang Ruge's heart burned with anger, but she still suppressed her anger. In the next second, her eyes suddenly turned red. "Xi Xi, I..."

"Ruge." At this moment, Madam Tang and the guests walked over.

Madam Tang's expression darkened when she saw her daughter's aggrieved expression and red eyes. "What's wrong?"

Tang Ruge bit her lip and said aggrievedly, "I happened to pass by and heard Xi Xi say that she liked oil paintings on a call. I just wanted to recommend a master to her, but she..."

She suddenly choked as if she had suffered a great grievance.

Madam Tang frowned and glanced at Qiao Xi unhappily. However, because the other guests were present, she could not fall out with Qiao Xi. She could only say calmly, "Miss Qiao, although Ruge's

actions might be a little abrupt, she has good intentions. It's fine if you're unwilling to accept them, but why do you have to say such unpleasant words?"

Qiao Xi's eyes turned cold as she replied impatiently, "When did you hear me say anything nasty? Moreover, why must I accept the master she recommends?"

Madam Tang looked unhappy.

Tang Lingyun, who was at the side, could not take this lying down. She roared angrily. "Qiao Xi! What kind of attitude is this? Is this how you talk to your elders? You don't have any manners at all! I think you're just jealous that my sister has become Mr. Qi Zhong's disciple. You're unhappy about it, so you're bullying my sister! Why don't you look in the mirror and see what kind of person you are?! You actually want to compare yourself to my sister?"

"Mr. Qi Zhong will never accept an apprentice like you! You're just a wild girl who bullies others!"

Qiao Xi was so angry that she laughed. Just as she was about to retort, she suddenly saw someone running over in a hurry. That person was Qi Zhong's assistant, Zhang Yong.

When Tang Lingyun saw that Zhang Yong was here, she became even more smug. "Sister, look at our identities. Why bother with someone like her?! Look, Assistant Zhang is here to look for you!"

Chapter 754: Miss Qiao, I Want To Take You In As My Apprentice!

Tang Ruge slowly turned around and was about to step forward to welcome Zhang Yong when Zhang Yong walked past Tang Ruge and walked up to Qiao Xi. "Miss Qiao, I'm Mr. Qi Zhong's assistant. Our master wants to see you. I wonder if you have time?"

The smile on Tang Ruge's face disappeared instantly. She could barely control her expression as it gradually became ferocious.

The guests were all dumbfounded. Assistant Zhang was actually here to look for Qiao Xi?

Seeing Tang Ruge's horrible expression, Qiao Xi curled her lips and smiled. "Of course, I have time. Let's go."

Assistant Zhang's face was filled with joy. He couldn't be bothered to greet Tang Ruge and respectfully led the way for Qiao Xi. The two of them quickly disappeared from everyone's sight.

Tang Ruge lowered her head and trembled slightly. The anger and unwillingness in her heart surged like a cold tide. After a moment of silence, she calmed down and smiled apologetically at everyone. "I'm sorry. I'll go over and take a look too. Perhaps Master has something important to tell me."

At this moment, her heart was beating violently. She had a bad feeling. Why did Master want to see Qiao Xi? Could it be because of that painting?

How was this possible? How did Master know that the painting was done by Qiao Xi? Even if Qiao Xi told Master, Master might not believe that Qiao Xi had such standards!

Tang Ruge kept telling herself that she had to calm down and not let Qiao Xi get a hold on her. Otherwise, her reputation would be completely ruined.

On the other hand, Qiao Xi followed Assistant Zhang into a small room beside Room One. Qi Zhong was sitting on the sofa, surrounded by a few apprentices.

Just as her grandfather had said, Qi Zhong's painting skills weren't bad, but his character was indeed not good. His reputation had gradually declined over the years, and at this moment, he needed an outstanding apprentice to salvage his reputation.

Seeing Qiao Xi enter, Qi Zhong's face was filled with adoration as he said gently, "Miss Qiao, did you paint these roses?"

Qiao Xi glanced at the bright roses. She originally thought that Qi Zhong had invited her here to ask about the other painting.

"I drew them."

Qi Zhong's eyes were filled with surprise. She was the one who drew the roses, so the rose garden by Tang Ruge was most likely her work too.

Actually, it did not matter if it was true or not. As long as she could paint this rose, it would explain everything. In the next second, Qi Zhong said arrogantly, "Miss Qiao, I want to take you in as my apprentice."

Coincidentally, Tang Ruge rushed to the door and heard this.

"I'll announce your identity at the apprenticeship banquet later. This apprenticeship banquet will be for both you and Ruge. In the future, you'll learn from me. If you perform well, I can even hold a grand apprenticeship banquet for you again."

Tang Ruge felt as if she had fallen into an ice cellar. Her body was cold and trembling.

No, no!

The guests were following closely behind, so they heard what was said as well. Everyone couldn't help but look at each other. Wasn't this apprenticeship banquet for Tang Ruge alone? Why was Qiao Xi suddenly involved?

Qiao Xi's eyes were indifferent as the corners of her mouth curled into a smile.

Tang Ruge could see her smile from this angle and felt her heart almost stop beating. Could it be that Master had already discovered that she had been pretending? Was that why he wanted to take Qiao Xi in as his disciple? Was she going to be chased away?

At this moment, Tang Ruge finally couldn't calm down. She rushed forward and questioned, "Xi Xi, to think that I treated you as a friend. You actually said bad things about me in front of Master and made him misunderstand me. Can't you bear to see me do well?"

She was sure that Qiao Xi had reported something about her to her master. Otherwise, why would her master suddenly want to take Qiao Xi as his disciple?

No! She couldn't just sit and wait for death. She had to take the initiative to attack, or she would be defeated by Qiao Xi!

Tang Lingyun lost her temper and cursed loudly, "Qiao Xi! You b*tch! You're just jealous that my sister acknowledged Mr. Qi Zhong as her master. Why are you so evil?!"

Tang Ruge, who had always been calm, could not hold it in anymore. Everyone in Li City knew that she had acknowledged Qi Zhong as her master. This apprenticeship banquet was specially held for her. Now that Qiao Xi had appeared out of nowhere, she would definitely be mocked by the socialites of the upper-class society if word of this got out.

At this moment, Tang Ruge could no longer care about her image. She hurriedly explained, "Master, no matter what Qiao Xi said, don't believe her. There are some misunderstandings between us, so she keeps targeting me! I really painted that rose garden!"

The entire scene was silent. The expressions of the apprentices beside Qi Zhong changed, and they were so embarrassed that they could not speak.

Chapter 755: Exposed! The Socialite Becomes A Thief

Qiao Xi was the first to break the silence and sneered.

"Miss Tang, we're talking about this rose, not the rose garden. Why are you so nervous?"

"You're guilty! Could it be that you didn't paint the rose garden?"

Tang Ruge's face was ferocious, and her eyes were filled with fear. Her forehead was covered in sweat as she stared fixedly at the rose. Her blood seemed to have frozen.

"Q-Qiao Xi, don't spout nonsense. I-I'm not guilty..." Tang Ruge stammered, making everyone even more suspicious.

Madam Tang was still relatively calm. Her eyes turned cold. "Miss Qiao, you need to have evidence when you speak! Our Tang family is a scholarly family. Ruge has received the best education since she was young. She's a top socialite in the capital. How could she steal someone else's painting?"

Qiao Xi was not in a rush to retort. Instead, she found a comfortable seat and sat down. She lazily leaned against the back of the chair and narrowed her eyes in satisfaction.

Tang Lingyun was instantly infuriated. "Everyone is standing, yet you still have the cheek to sit down? You're really uneducated!"

To Qiao Xi, Tang Lingyun was a stupid pig who was being used by others. She could not even be bothered to argue with Tang Lingyun. Her cold gaze landed on Tang Ruge as she slowly said, "Which rose in the rose garden did you draw?"

The commotion here attracted everyone's attention. Although they did not know what was going on, they heard Qiao Xi's question.

At that time, Qiao Xi had created this painting in Li City University's art studio. It was winter now, so there were no roses at all. However, every summer, one could see the rose garden through the windows of the art studio. Qiao Xi had improvised this painting based on her own imagination. Moreover, she was afraid that this painting would be too monotonous, so she added a couple in love in the painting.

Everyone knew that this painting was completed by two people. It had only been less than a month, so Tang Ruge must still remember which rose she drew.

Under everyone's gazes, Tang Ruge could not help but tremble. She almost stopped breathing. How could someone like her, who did not know anything about paintings, tell the difference between these roses?

Which rose was it?

There were so many roses in the rose garden, and they all looked similar. How did she know which one she had drawn?

However, she had to say it in the current situation. After hesitating for a moment, she reached out and pointed at one of the bright roses. This rose was in the middle, and it was the most outstanding and eye-catching.

The corners of Qiao Xi's mouth could not help but curl up. Tang Ruge really knew how to choose. She hit the nail on the head.

Tang Ruge looked at everyone's gazes, and her body gradually stiffened. Her throat seemed to be stuffed with cotton. Her mind was blank, and she wished she could faint immediately.

A few old painters who had decades of experience in painting had burning eyes. They could all tell that this rose garden was not painted by one person. The rose in the middle was clearly painted by a man. The force was stronger and the strokes were decisive. Most of the other roses were drawn by a woman. The couple was in a passionate relationship.

Now, Tang Ruge actually said that the rose in the middle was drawn by her?

"Miss Tang." Just as Tang Ruge was feeling uneasy, Qiao Xi said mockingly, "Unfortunately, you guessed wrong. So, did you really paint this?"

Tang Ruge's body went soft, and she almost fell. Fortunately, Madam Tang, who was at the side, was supporting her. Hence, Tang Ruge did not make a fool of herself in public. However, at this moment, the seniors who were originally full of admiration for her were all full of disdain.

Tang Ruge's lips turned pale, and her eyes gradually became empty.

It was over! Everything was over. She had invited so many friends and relatives. There were also the painters Qi Zhong had invited. They had all seen her make a fool of herself.

If she had known that today's incident would happen, she would not have admitted that this painting was hers. She would not have lost her dignity in public. At this moment, she wished she could find a hole to hide in.

"So, Tang Ruge stole Miss Qiao's painting and used it to become Mr. Qi Zhong's disciple?"

“What kind of awful family is this?! She’s a shameless thief!”

“You stole someone else’s painting and even ran in front of them to show off. I’ve never seen such a disgusting person!”

Madam Tang was originally defending her daughter, but when she heard everyone’s curses and accusations, her face turned red with shame.

“No... Let me explain...” Tang Ruge’s throat was dry as she spat out a few words with difficulty. She thought crazily about how to explain the situation, but she could not find a perfect reason.

“Actually... Actually, this painting is...”

Chapter 756: You Brought This Upon Yourself!

Qiao Xi raised her eyebrows and asked, “Miss Tang, are you going to say that you painted this yourself?”

“Well, let me tell you that this painting was made by two people, a man and a woman. The style of painting is especially similar to the artist, Han Ye. Could it be that Miss Tang’s style is very similar to Han Ye’s? Why don’t you show it to us so that we can broaden our horizons?”

Tang Ruge’s lips trembled, and she could not say anything for a long time. Of course, she knew that Han Ye was a famous painter, but she had never seen his work.

At this moment, a respected senior said, “It’s indeed not easy to imitate Han Ye’s style, but this rose garden painting is 70 to 80 percent similar to Han Ye’s style. The painters must have been taught by an expert. Even with my standard, it’s difficult for me to do it.”

Another person directly followed Qiao Xi’s words and said, “Miss Qiao is right. If you’re so skilled, why don’t you directly show us your ability and paint with Han Ye’s style?”

Hearing everyone’s questions, Tang Ruge trembled. Her face was pale, and her body was swaying as if she would faint the next second.

She was the eldest daughter of the Tang family and a socialite in the capital. Why were these people so overbearing?

Today was her apprenticeship banquet. She had already gloriously become Qi Zhong’s last apprentice and inherited his legacy. Her future was supposed to be bright. However, Qiao Xi and Li Xing’er had ruined her plans, causing her to be looked down on by everyone.

“Mr. Qi, Ruge must have remembered wrongly. She had just casually added two more strokes. This painting was originally done by Miss Qiao. Let’s cancel today’s apprenticeship banquet. We’ll be leaving first.”

Madam Tang forcefully endured the disappointment in her heart and gnashed her teeth as she spoke. When she looked at Qiao Xi, it was clear from her resentful gaze that she wished for nothing more than to hack Qiao Xi into pieces.

Miss Qiao snorted. "Madam Tang, why are you glaring at me? I'll only say this. You can be forgiven for your sins, but you can't live with the sins you've brought upon yourself!"

Tang Ruge stood on the spot, feeling very reluctant. She was only one step away from becoming Qi Zhong's final apprentice. At that time, the entire high society's socialites would have to respect her. However, now that her reputation was ruined and she had to run away, how could she raise her head in the future?

1

Madam Tang did not give Tang Ruge a chance to react and pulled her away angrily. The Tang family also left awkwardly.

Qi Zhong sized up Qiao Xi and pondered. Although Qiao Xi's painting skills were very outstanding, he heard that the Qiao family had already rejected her and she no longer had the support of a powerful family. Now that she had offended the Tang family as well, her future would definitely not be easy.

1

About ten years ago, Qi Zhong had already lost all inspiration. That was why he wanted to take in an outstanding apprentice and let them bring him glory.

Now that he knew that the creator of this painting had no background, perhaps he could...

Qiao Xi stared into Qi Zhong's eyes as if she had already seen through his thoughts and could not help but sneer.

Qi Zhong was silent for a moment before he said gently, "Miss Qiao, I do admire you a lot. I've already decided to take you in as my apprentice. This apprenticeship banquet was originally prepared for Miss Tang, so let's end it here. In the future, I'll specially hold a grand apprenticeship banquet for you. For now, come back to my residence with me."

With that, he instructed his assistant, "Immediately prepare a spacious studio for Miss Qiao. Get her to create two paintings for me to take a look at. What happened with Tang Ruge can't happen again."

Qi Zhong's eyes were filled with a smile of success. After Qiao Xi completed the paintings, he would find an excuse to take them away and display them in his name. As his apprentice, Qiao Xi would definitely not dare to object.

When everyone mentioned Han Ye, Qi Zhong had felt a little jealous. 13 years ago, this painter appeared out of nowhere. His first painting shocked the entire oil painting world and he was treated as a god. However, he had been in the oil painting world for decades but had never achieved anything like Han Ye.

If a genius painter like Qiao Xi was taken under his wing, he would still have a chance to surpass Han Ye and become a top painter who could compare to him.

Qi Zhong suppressed the excitement in his heart and slowly said, "I must take in an apprentice today. Since you've chased Tang Ruge away, then you'll become my apprentice! This is your honor."

Qiao Xi turned around and sneered. "I didn't say I wanted to be your apprentice. Whether you accept Tang Ruge or not has nothing to do with me."

Qi Zhong immediately choked, then widened his eyes in shock. "What do you mean? You're unwilling?"

Chapter 757: Paper Can't Cover Fire

The entire venue was silent as everyone looked at Qiao Xi in shock. Qiao Xi actually rejected Master Qi Zhong's invitation? Shouldn't she feel honored? Why were her eyes filled with disdain?

Qiao Xi's expression was indifferent as she said casually, "Why would I be willing?"

"You!" Qi Zhong was angered to the point his face flushed red, and his fingers trembled as he pointed at Qiao Xi.

With his qualifications and achievements, there were many people who he was unwilling to accept as his apprentices. Now, he wanted to accept Qiao Xi as his apprentice. He agreed to hold a banquet for her to acknowledge him as her master, and he would even give her an independent studio so that she could create in peace. He had never treated an apprentice so meticulously, yet she was actually unwilling?

He admitted that he had taken a liking to Qiao Xi's creative talent, but Qiao Xi was a painter without any background. How many years would she have to endure the difficult path ahead of her before she could make a name for herself? Now, as long as she acknowledged him as her master, she could save herself a lot of trouble and become famous in one go. She would be envied by everyone, yet she did not know what was good for her.

Qiao Xi's eyes were filled with disdain. "Mr. Qi, I've already made myself very clear. I won't acknowledge you as my master. If there's nothing else, I'll be leaving first."

She turned around and was about to leave when she suddenly stopped in her tracks. Her gaze landed on the rose garden. "My husband and I completed this painting together. Since it's my painting, I can take it with me, right?"

Without waiting for Qi Zhong to answer, she picked up the painting.

Qi Zhong's expression was as dark as ink. "Miss Qiao, I'll give you another chance. Think about it carefully. If you offend me in the oil painting world, will you still be able to remain in the industry?"

Qiao Xi raised her eyes and glanced at him as if she was looking at an idiot. "I never intended on continuing to walk down this path. Painting is just a hobby to me. I don't treat it as work, and I don't care about my future in this industry."

Qi Zhong was so angry that he almost fainted.

However, on second thought, Qiao Xi did not want to be an artist at all and did not care about her future in this industry. Such a person was just right to work for him. He would give Qiao Xi money, and Qiao Xi would paint for him. Wouldn't it be good for the two of them to take what they needed and form a mutually beneficial relationship?

When Qiao Xi left, she heard everyone discussing. "I've never seen such an ungrateful person. Mr. Qi was willing to take her in as his disciple, but she actually refused?"

“I want to see how capable she is. She doesn’t even take Mr. Qi seriously.”

Qiao Xi found a clean white cloth to cover the canvas and returned to the lounge with the painting. She had just returned to the lounge when a wave of hurried footsteps came from outside.

“Qiao Xi! Why are you doing this to me?! Are you satisfied now that you’ve seen me lose my dignity?!” Tang Ruge finally revealed her true colors. Her previously gentle demeanor had long since vanished and was replaced by a ferocious one.

Tang Ruge’s breathing was rapid, and her eyes were bloodshot. Flames of anger burned in her eyes as she questioned, “How did I offend you? You embarrassed me in public! You exposed me in front of the teacher and made me lose all my dignity. I even lost the chance to become an apprentice. You’re too vicious!”

Qiao Xi rubbed her ears with an impatient expression.

Tang Ruge was about to break down. She knew that from today onward, she would become the laughing stock of the entire high society. Those people would laugh at her behind her back.

Ever since she was born, the Tang family had been nurturing her as a socialite. Of course, she had never disappointed them. She had always been the top socialite in high society who was elegant and dignified. However, she had now become a thief.

What was even more infuriating was that after Qi Zhong gave up on her, he wanted to take Qiao Xi in as his disciple. This almost made her go crazy.

At this moment, Tang Ruge was no longer pretending. She roared angrily at Qiao Xi. “Are you very proud now? Not only did you ruin my apprenticeship banquet, but you also became Qi Zhong’s disciple. You’ve become a talented woman who everyone is envious of while I’m a thief!”

Hearing Tang Ruge’s crazy roar, Qiao Xi only replied indifferently, “I rejected Qi Zhong.”

Tang Ruge’s expression froze.

Qiao Xi said casually, “Miss Tang, not everyone will want what you want. I never wanted to be Qi Zhong’s apprentice, nor have I ever thought of ruining your apprenticeship banquet. If you want to blame someone, you can only blame yourself for doing something wrong. You should have some principles. Even if you managed to become Qi Zhong’s disciple with my painting, you’d still be exposed one day.

“This is my private lounge. Please leave.”

Tang Ruge’s eyes almost popped out from anger, and she was jealous to the point of going mad. She knew that Qiao Xi looked down on her. Qiao Xi was Young Master Luo’s younger sister, Gu Zheng’s wife, and the boss behind Fragrance Hotel. However, what right did Qiao Xi have to look down on her?

Chapter 758: Rumors Can’t Be Trusted

Tang Ruge's heart was filled with unwillingness. She was a socialite from the capital and had grown up being praised by everyone. She was proficient in the four arts since she was six years old and had always been first place since she was young. She was gentle, elegant, and handled matters appropriately. Everyone thought that she was perfect, but why did everything not go smoothly for her after she met Qiao Xi? Why was she suppressed by Qiao Xi until she could not raise her head?

"Qiao Xi, you've ruined everything for me! I'm supposed to be the most dazzling person here. It's because of you, you—"

Smack!

Qiao Xi raised her hand and slapped Tang Ruge, interrupting her. She stared at her coldly. "You're very noisy!"

"Ah! You... You hit me?"

"Tang Ruge, I warned you a long time ago that my patience has a limit. I can tolerate you once or twice, but don't go too far." Qiao Xi's slender fingers stroked the painting as she said coldly, "You stole my painting, yet you're blaming me for destroying everything you have. Please think clearly who the victim is!"

Tang Ruge held her burning cheek and was truly unable to take it anymore. She raised her hand with the intention of slapping Qiao Xi, but Qiao Xi suddenly grabbed her wrist.

Qiao Xi swung her hand fiercely. Tang Ruge was wearing high heels, so she lost her balance and fell to the floor. She gritted her teeth in hatred. "Qiao Xi! I won't let you off! Just you wait!"

Tang Ruge struggled to get up from the floor and ran away in a sorry state.

Qiao Xi grunted coldly. She wanted to see what other tricks Tang Ruge had up her sleeve!

"Little Six, watch out for your weak image!" Qin An's voice sounded. He appeared at the door with a smile. "Didn't I give you the poison? Just poison her. Let's see how she'll quarrel with you then."

Qiao Xi shook her head. She would not use poison unless she had no other choice.

"I passed by Qi Zhong's lounge just now and heard something interesting. I recorded it so you could listen too." Qin An handed her a recording pen.

Qiao Xi understood the situation after listening to a few words. She was not surprised in the slightest. "I guessed it a long time ago. Generally speaking, it's very difficult to change an artist's style after establishing it, but Qi Zhong's style changes every few years. An oil painting master is relying on the works of others to establish himself in the oil painting world. How laughable!"

Taking in an apprentice was just a cover. Qi Zhong's real goal was to find someone whose paintings he could pass off as his own.

After Qin An left, Qiao Xi's phone suddenly rang. When the call connected, a gentle voice came from the other end. "Hello, is this Miss Hanyin?"

Qiao Xi hesitated for a moment before replying, "Yes."

The other party's voice was a little excited. "Miss Hanyin, I'm a staff member of the international oil exhibition. The art exhibition will be held in Li City this time. We found out that you're living in Li City now. I wonder if you're willing to attend the oil exhibition this time."

Qiao Xi refused. "I'm sorry, I don't want to go."

The other party instantly choked, then they said gently, "Many artists will be attending this art exhibition. Mr. Qi Zhong will be attending, as well as... Mr. Han Ye."

Han Ye?

Qiao Xi was slightly stunned. "Are you sure Han Ye will go?"

Han Ye was already so old, yet he still wanted to come to Li City for the exhibition. It would not be easy for him. If she did not go, wouldn't she miss the opportunity to meet her idol? She did not know when the next time would be. After all, he was already at this age. She did not know how long he could live.

1

After Li Xing'er's birthday party ended, Qiao Xi hurriedly returned to Longwan Residential and told Gu Zheng the good news with an excited expression.

At this moment, Gu Zheng was reviewing documents in the study. When he heard her words, he only smiled slightly. Then, he regained his composure and nodded. "Yes."

Qiao Xi said excitedly, "Senior, you haven't seen Han Ye in a long time, right? You must help me take a photo this time. When Grandpa comes back, I'll show it to him. He'll definitely be very envious of me!"

Gu Zheng slowly looked up, his eyes filled with smiles. "Alright."

'If your grandfather finds out that you're married to Han Ye, he'll definitely be even happier.'

"But he's coming to Li City for the exhibition despite his old age. I wonder if his body can take it." Qiao Xi frowned. "I heard that Han Ye hasn't come out of seclusion for so many years because his health isn't too good. He came all the way to Li City this time. What if his body is exhausted?!"

"Cough, cough..." Gu Zheng was drinking tea when he suddenly choked. His face turned slightly red as he looked away. "No, Han Ye is in good health. Rumors can't be trusted."

Chapter 759: Lu Corporation's Counterattack

Qiao Xi said with a serious expression, "You're right. An outstanding painter like Han Ye will definitely live to a hundred years old. How could he have fallen sick?! Moreover, the paintings he left behind are too few. He won't die so early!"

Gu Zheng's expression was indescribable. In the end, he smiled helplessly. "Mrs. Gu, you're so cute."

Qiao Xi met Gu Zheng's affectionate gaze and blushed shyly. Gu Zheng was becoming more and more eloquent. Just a few words from him could make her blush and her heart beat faster. She was becoming more and more infatuated with this man.

The room was silent for a moment. Qiao Xi curiously looked at the table and said in surprise, “Why is Lu Corporation’s proposal with you?”

Previously, the Lu family was the target of Gu Zheng’s scheme and they ended up bidding for that plot of land at a high price. They lost billions of yuan. Lu Corporation, which was already in a difficult state, was facing even more trouble. If this continued, they would face the risk of bankruptcy.

However, how did Lu Corporation’s proposal plan end up in Gu Zheng’s hands?

Gu Zheng handed the proposal in his hand to Qiao Xi. She glanced at it. “Lu Corporation is going to launch a perfume this quarter to save the Lu family’s situation?”

“Yes.” Gu Zheng nodded.

Perfume was an indispensable item for women. New perfumes were even more sought after by everyone. If the sales volume was high, they could use this to make a name for themselves and even earn back a sum of money.

However, Lu Corporation’s perfumes had always been very ordinary. Why did Lu Yan think that the perfume this time could bring the Lu family out of their troubles?

“Lu Yan poached the perfumers under Gu Corporation who were involved in perfume development with a high salary,” Gu Zheng replied indifferently. One could not hear any dissatisfaction in his tone. It was as if he was talking about something that had nothing to do with him.

Qiao Xi frowned. “But haven’t all the perfumers participating in the research and development of Gu Corporation’s perfume signed contracts? If they suddenly jump ship, they’ll have to pay a high penalty.”

Perfume research and development was the most important part of a brand. If someone jumped ship during the research and development process, it was very likely that the formula would be leaked. The results of a year of hard work would be wasted. Hence, the perfumers who participated in the research and development would sign a contract with the company that forbade them from jumping companies.

“Lu Yan paid for their breach of contract and gave them a high salary. They couldn’t resist the temptation and went to Lu Corporation,” Gu Zheng said casually.

Qiao Xi looked at the information of these perfumers. They were all old employees who had worked in Gu Corporation for more than ten years. Even so, they could not resist the temptation of money. Actually, the salaries offered by Gu Corporation were already very high. Since Lu Yan was able to poach them, it meant that he had offered them an almost ridiculous price. That was why these people would rather breach the contract to join Lu Corporation.

“Gu Corporation doesn’t just have these few perfumers. This doesn’t seem to have much of an impact on Gu Corporation. It doesn’t matter if Gu Corporation doesn’t release new perfumes this year. The sales of the previous few perfumes have always been very good!” Qiao Xi was puzzled.

Gu Zheng smiled meaningfully. “We’ve all underestimated Lu Yan. Not only did he poach four perfumers, but he also invited the internationally famous Sally.”

Qiao Xi had heard of this famous perfumer, but she had never seen her before. This perfumer was arrogant and did not like to interact with others. However, she accepted Lu Yan's invitation this time and rushed to Li City from overseas to participate in the research and development.

"Lu Corporation has already developed a new perfume. It's currently being tested." Gu Zheng pointed at the two bottles of perfume on the table.

Qiao Xi opened the lid and sprayed it on her wrist twice. "It's average."

Gu Zheng raised an eyebrow and smiled. "You think it's very ordinary, but to ordinary people, it's already considered a high-end perfume."

Qiao Xi instantly blurted out, "Of course! I've been studying perfume for eight years—"

Before she could finish speaking, Qiao Xi suddenly realized that she had exposed her identity. She hurriedly swallowed the words in her mouth and changed the topic. "I've used countless perfumes in the past few years, and I'm quite knowledgeable about perfumes. These two bottles of perfume do smell good, but they're not very special. Sally's skills are very good, but the fragrances she produces are too strong. They're not suitable for women in the country."

Gu Zheng said meaningfully, "Actually, Lu Yan originally wanted to invite the perfumer, Mu Jin. Her style should be more suitable for women in the country. Unfortunately, he couldn't invite her and could only choose Sally. Junior, do you know Mu Jin?"

Qiao Xi smiled awkwardly. "I don't know her! Who's that? Actually, I don't know much about perfume either, hehe..."

Chapter 760: Master Perfumer Mu Jin

"Didn't you just say that you're very knowledgeable about perfume and have been using perfumes for eight years?" Gu Zheng smiled teasingly. He had long known about Qiao Xi's other identity—the perfumer, Mu Jin.

Seeing that she was feeling guilty, the man did not expose her. He changed the topic and said, "Actually, Lu Yan isn't confident about the perfume itself but the bottle."

To women, fragrance was important, but the appearance of a perfume bottle was also very important. If it was good enough, they would be willing to pay for it. Lu Yan wanted to make use of this to earn a profit from the new perfume.

Many people bought perfume not only for use but also for collection. Looking at exquisite perfume bottles on the table would make one feel happy.

However, what should Lu Yan use to be recognized by the public?

Gu Zheng pointed at a line of words on the table. "Lu Yan wants to use Han Ye's oil painting as the packaging for the perfume bottles."

Qiao Xi raised her eyes in shock, but with her understanding of Han Ye, he would probably not agree with Lu Yan's thoughts. It was absolutely impossible even if Lu Yan offered a high price.

Every single one of Han Ye's paintings was expensive, but he did not continue to create any more. This meant that he did not lack money. Moreover, he was a low-profile person. It did not seem reasonable to ask him to print his paintings on perfume bottles.

Gu Zheng said, "There aren't many paintings by Han Ye. The most famous two are 'Sleeping Jasmine' and 'Love of Lilac'."

Of course, Qiao Xi knew them. These two paintings were her favorite. The artistic conception was subtle, and there was a young woman's back view in both paintings. They were enchanting.

She had even copied these two paintings with her grandfather, but she could not match the original works' artistic conception. She could only come up with a rough outline.

Lu Yan chose these two paintings to be the packaging of the perfume bottles, which meant that the main notes of these two perfumes were jasmine and lilac. They corresponded to these two paintings, so they would definitely be popular.

"However..." Gu Zheng paused. "I don't think Han Ye gave Lu Yan permission to proceed."

No permission?

If that was the case, even if the perfumes were listed on the market, they would all be taken down in the end. Moreover, if Han Ye wanted to pursue this matter, Lu Corporation would have to pay a huge sum of money.

However, how could Lu Yan be so rash? Before confirming this plan, he must have already investigated Han Ye's identity. After confirming that it would not harm Lu Corporation's interests, he could then go ahead with ease.

...

Lu family.

Lu Yan frowned. "Is Han Ye really no longer alive?"

"Young Master, we've sent three groups of people to investigate. That's the result of our investigation. There won't be any problems."

1

"Does he have a family?" Lu Yan asked.

The launch of the new perfumes this time was Lu Corporation's comeback. It could only succeed and not fail.

He thought about it for a long time before deciding on the current plan. With Sally's and Han Ye's reputations combined, the perfumes paired with the paintings as their packaging would definitely sell well.

Now that Sally had already signed the contract and he poached the perfumers from Gu Corporation, the only thing missing was Han Ye. The people he sent out to investigate for a long time all said that Han Ye had passed away, but they did not find any information about his family.

The subordinate replied, "Han Ye doesn't have any family, but there's an artist called Han Yin in the oil painting world. We've investigated this person. She doesn't seem to be related to Han Ye at all."

After the proposal was set, Lu Yan had asked around about Han Ye. As long as he could find him, he would get him to agree to let them use these two paintings no matter what. However, the news he received was that Han Ye was no longer alive and had no family.

Even though he could use these two paintings without spending any money, Lu Yan was still a little uneasy because he could not allow himself to fail again. He had to ensure that nothing would go wrong this time.

"Investigate carefully what the relationship between Han Yin and Han Ye is."

At this moment, a subordinate rushed in. "Young Master, Han Yin has released news that she has nothing to do with Han Ye. It's just a coincidence that both their names have the word 'Han'.

"The international oil painting exhibition is going to be held in Li City this time. Han Yin's and Han Ye's works will be displayed in the art exhibition. I heard that all the artists whose paintings will be shown will be present. Only Han Ye's paintings were brought by the person in charge. He won't appear at all. Coupled with the results from our investigation, we can now confirm that Han Ye is no longer alive."

Lu Yan heaved a sigh of relief. "In that case..."

"Let's postpone the matter of the perfumes' packaging for now. We'll go to the art exhibition and see what happens there before deciding."