

Finest 381

Chapter 381 On Weishan Lake

That night, the two were deeply in love, their affection and sweetness beyond words. Miss Luo, gentle and tranquil on the outside, was bold in love and hate on the inside. With her heart's desire fulfilled, she shyly cooperated with her big brother at the dressing mirror, allowing him to take what he wished. Seeing their intimate state in the mirror, she felt a deep thrill beneath her shyness, moaning softly, rising and falling like the tide, turning the humble room into a passionate spring scene.

After several bouts, Lin Wanrong's vigor was undiminished, his ambitions unfulfilled. Miss Luo blossomed beautifully, but could no longer bear his grace and favor, and fell asleep sweetly and shyly in his arms. Touching her smooth, bare chest, Master Lin smiled wryly, thinking that being too strong might not be a blessing. The tonic given by Seo Jang Geum would probably not be needed until he was a hundred years old.

The next morning, when he awoke, Luo Ning had already stirred. Her almond eyes slightly open, her face rosy, her bare arm tightly wrapped around his chest, her full breasts gently rubbing against him. Miss Luo's face was flushed, her mouth slightly open, a faint fragrant breath escaping her lips, she shyly said, "Big brother, are you awake?"

Lin Wanrong laughed and pinched her little nose, "Ning'er, you can't call me big brother now, you should call me husband."

Luo Ning blushed and nestled in his arms, "Husband, you are Ning'er's big brother, and also Ning'er's husband. No matter how I call you, Ning'er is willing."

As a new bride, Luo Ning's face was flushed with a strong spring charm. Her red cherry lips opened and closed, as fresh as if they had just been painted, so juicy that they seemed to drip water. Her charming and seductive demeanor was utterly captivating.

Master Lin stared, gulping down his saliva, thinking to himself that he had found a treasure. Ning'er seemed gentle as water, but she was a truly charming woman. Her passion and boldness last night were something Lin Wanrong had never encountered before, and her fiery enthusiasm had brought him to the ultimate pleasure.

The two reluctantly got up from the small bed, looking at the newly embroidered peach blossom on the bedsheet. Luo Ning whimpered, her face flushed, and quickly tidied up the bed, carefully folding the sheet.

Lin Wanrong stood behind her, looking at her curvy figure as she bent over, recalling her fiery passion from the night before. His heart ignited, and he tightly embraced her slender waist, pressing against her full buttocks. Lin Wanrong gently kissed her delicate earlobe and chuckled, "Ning'er, it's still early, let's do some morning exercise."

Luo Ning felt a thrill in her heart, her body softened, leaning against him, she breathed sweetly, "Husband, you're so naughty, you still haven't had enough of tormenting me last night—"

"Never enough!" Lin Wanrong laughed in her ear, Luo Ning's heart skipped a beat, her ears burning, she lowered her head, not daring to speak, and the fiery passion of the previous night was nowhere to be seen.

In the hall, she was the paragon of virtue; in bed, she was a lascivious woman. That was the flavor he desired. Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, his heart filled with a sense of accomplishment. Morning exercises were now out of the question. Luo Ning, a newlywed, was greatly affected, and even walking required small, unsteady steps. Master Lin, who claimed to treasure beauty, naturally showered her with affection and pampering, without feeling the least bit embarrassed.

Luo Ning, seeing her big brother so considerate and gentle, was overjoyed beyond words. The two fondled and caressed each other, a unique sensation in their hearts.

"Oh!" Just as they were getting passionate, Luo Ning suddenly remembered something, her face showing a trace of surprise, then turning completely red as she shyly glanced at him.

"What's wrong, Ning'er?" Lin Wanrong pulled her onto his lap, feeling the warmth from her delicate body, so comforting that he couldn't help but press a little closer.

"Oh, big brother, don't tease me," Luo Ning screamed, her ears burning, as she panted.

"Teasing, teasing," Master Lin shamelessly laughed, "It's just morning arousal, not intentional. Ning'er, did it hurt you? Do you need some medicine?"

Hearing his crude words, Luo Ning couldn't help but hit his chest a few times, but inside, she felt a bit happy. Before marriage, she was a chaste woman, but once past that threshold, hearing these

private whispers was a pleasure she wouldn't share with outsiders. "Big brother, I mean, Sister Xu..."

"Sister Xu, what about Sister Xu?" As soon as Xu Zhiqing was mentioned, Lin Wanrong's brow furrowed. 'Old Xu, it wasn't my fault, I warned about a man and woman traveling alone, and see, my words came true.'

"Big brother, it's all your fault, so wicked." Luo Ning's face blushed, "Last night, Sister Xu wanted to talk to me, waiting in my room. But I didn't return all night, oh, I'm so embarrassed, she will laugh at me to death—" Luo Ning covered her cheeks, whimpering, her blush spreading from her ears to her neck.

Lin Wanrong laughed loudly. 'Xu Zhiqing laughing at you? She's in no position to do so, probably hiding and crying under her blankets.'

"Why didn't she come looking for me when I didn't return?" Luo Ning blushed for a while, mumbling to herself as if asking him.

"Don't worry, maybe she fell asleep. Spring is the season of dreams," Lin Wanrong laughed it off, trying not to let Luo Ning ask further, or else he would be exposed. As long as he didn't say it, Ning'er would never know, and Miss Xu wouldn't leak a word. Would she say, Ning'er, your husband is a damned lecher, sneaking into my room to touch me?

A lecherous smile crept across his face, and he grabbed Luo Ning's hand, "Oh, by the way, Ning'er, I talked to Luo Yuan yesterday. Early this morning, we'll go to Weishan Lake to investigate."

When it came to serious matters, Luo Ning put away her shyness and clung to his arm, "Big brother, I'll go with you."

The two had just consummated their marriage, a time of sweet affection, so naturally, wherever he went, Ning'er would follow. Lin Wanrong couldn't refuse, and they quickly got ready, heading to the outer courtyard.

As they passed by the room they had been in last night, Lin Wanrong pointed at the door and said, "Ning'er, this is your boudoir, isn't it?"

Luo Ning nodded slightly, leaning against him with a sweet smile, her cherry lips parting slightly, "This is Ning'er's room, but also big brother's room. I and Big Brother are one, never to be separated."

These words warmed Lin Wanrong's heart, and he laughed heartily twice. Both chambers were quiet, and he didn't know if Xu Zhiqing was inside. With a guilty conscience, Lin Wanrong turned up his collar to hide half of his face. He was about to pull Luo Ning away when she broke free of his wrist, her voice tenderly saying, "Big brother, wait for me a moment; I'm going to see if Sister Xu is up yet."

Lin Wanrong opened his mouth to shout, but Luo Ning had already pushed open Xu Zhiqing's door and gone in, calling softly a few times, but there was no response. Luo Ning then returned to her own room to search but found no trace of her, and she couldn't help but frown delicately, wondering, "Where could Sister Xu be?"

"Oh, she might have gone out for a walk to clear her mind this morning. Ning'er, let's go," Lin Wanrong hurriedly said.

Luo Ning laughed, "Big brother, what nonsense are you talking about? Sister Xu's mood is good."

Good mood? That was before last night! Now Xu Zhiqing was probably hiding somewhere, crying. The two of them left the inner residence and first went to Luo Min's room to pay their respects. Lin Wanrong had stolen someone's precious daughter the night before, so he respectfully knelt before Luo Min's bed, kowtowing, with Luo Ning obediently kneeling beside him, as they performed the ritual of three bows and nine kowtows. Lin Wanrong respectfully said, "Father-in-law, rest assured, I will find the silver and return justice to you."

Tears welled up in Luo Ning's eyes as she softly said, "Father, your daughter is now married to big brother. From now on, we'll be together, never to part, serving you for life. When you wake up, we will kowtow to you again."

The two of them left the room, and it was already dawn. Luo Yuan was anxiously waiting at the door, with hundreds of people gathered behind him. Judging by their attire, with nets and fishing spears in hand, they were fishermen from Weishan Lake, skilled in swimming.

"Big Brother—" Seeing Lin Wanrong, Luo Yuan exclaimed joyfully, running toward them. When he reached Luo Ning's side, he looked at her strangely and said, "Sister, you've changed!"

Luo Ning blushed, sneakily grabbing her big brother's hand, glancing at him and saying, "What nonsense are you talking about, child? Where have I changed?"

"Sister, you've become more beautiful." Luo Yuan teased, "It must be because Big Brother came, and you're so happy that you've become more radiant and youthful."

Listening to the banter between the siblings, Lin Wanrong felt some joy in his heart and nodded, saying, "Alright, let's save the chit-chat for later. Little Luo, are these all fishermen from Weishan Lake?"

Luo Yuan nodded, "Yes, these brothers are all local fishermen who have been living off Weishan Lake for generations. They are skilled swimmers. After Father took office in Jining, he visited every household around Weishan Lake, and they all remember his kindness. They came to help voluntarily."

Luo Min, as an official, had made quite an accomplishment. This could be seen from his efforts in Jinling, where he initiated water conservation and reinforced the river embankment, and he continued to do so when he arrived in Jining. Lin Wanrong nodded slightly and said contentedly, "That's good. Do we have boats? Let's take a look at Weishan Lake."

"Of course, there are boats, several of them," Luo Yuan excitedly replied. "Miss Xu has already found one and gone out on the lake."

"Who? Who did you say?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, his face showing a touch of surprise. Luo Ning's face also reflected a hint of astonishment.

"Xu Zhiqing, Miss Xu. She came early at the fourth watch of the night, saying she wanted to find a boat to go out on the lake. So I called an experienced uncle to accompany her," Luo Yuan explained.

The fourth watch of the night? That meant she had been gone for over two hours already. In this cold weather, a young girl alone on the lake, how could that not cause concern? Luo Ning anxiously said, "Little Yuan, why didn't you stop her?"

Luo Yuan gave a bitter smile of frustration, "I did try to stop her. But Miss Xu said she wanted to go to Weishan Lake early to assess the situation, to investigate the location of the silver. I tried to persuade her to wait for Big Brother to go together, but she insisted. In the end, I had no choice but to arrange a boat to take her."

Luo Ning shook her head, puzzled, "No wonder I couldn't find her in her room. So she went to Weishan Lake. This is strange, I know Xu Sister's character well, she is usually very patient, always thinking three times before acting. How could she act so rashly this time, going to Weishan Lake so early in the dark? What could she possibly see?"

"I told you she was probably out to clear her mind, but you didn't believe me." Lin Wanrong's face flushed red as Luo Ning and Luo Yuan's astonished gaze fell on him, and he laughed, "Don't look at me, I didn't encourage her to go."

"Big brother, did you notice anything wrong with Miss Xu on the way? This rash action is not like her, and I always feel something is strange," Luo Ning said softly, taking his hand.

"Something wrong? No, I think she was very much alright, too much so," Lin Wanrong brazenly replied, laughing, "Let's not guess blindly. Once we find her on the lake, you can ask her yourself, and that will settle it, won't it?"

Having successfully diverted their attention, Lin Wanrong secretly wiped away a bead of cold sweat, feeling wronged. It was just a misunderstanding; why was he feeling so guilty?

The early morning mist enveloped Weishan Lake, making it hard to see figures even a few feet away. The refreshing moisture hit their faces with a bone-chilling sensation. Cold dew was scattered all over the dried yellow reeds, swaying and glittering with crystalline drops in the gentle breeze.

Being early spring, the weather was bitterly cold. Standing at the bow of the boat, facing the biting morning wind, Luo Ning, despite wearing a thick winter coat, couldn't help but shiver, her little face turning rosy red from the cold.

Lin Wanrong, feeling compassion, grabbed her little hand and gently rubbed it to warm it up, then tucked it into his cotton jacket to keep it warm. Luo Ning smiled sweetly, lightly pinching his chest, and softly said, "Big brother, being by your side, Ning'er feels like the luckiest woman in the world."

Ah, this girl was really too easy to appease. Lin Wanrong felt slightly embarrassed, and just as he was about to tease her a little, he heard Luo Ning say, "I have big brother by my side to keep me warm when I'm cold, but what about Sister Zhiqing? She's alone and adrift on the lake in this freezing weather. Who will keep her warm?"

'Ah, wasn't this forcing me to reflect? Miss Xu had gone to Weishan Lake alone, and a large part of the reason was due to last night's incident, I really didn't mean to do what happened last night. My hand had touched her chest, but hadn't her chest also touched my hand? It was a mutual thing.' He gazed into the distance, but all around was a foggy scene, and he couldn't make out anything more than a few yards away. How could he find Miss Xu's boat?

What's meant to be will always find a way, and what's not won't even if you try. Lin Wanrong didn't think about it too much and bent down to scoop up a handful of clear water to splash on his face. The icy, bone-chilling sensation woke him up considerably.

Weishan Lake covered hundreds of miles, stretching across several counties in Shandong, not to mention the more fatal existence of water grass and reed marshes, one patch connected to another, extending beyond sight. From the shore, the shallow areas were about the height of a person, and the deep parts reached dozens of yards. Even if the entire city of Jining were submerged, it wouldn't create much of a ripple, let alone a mere three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver? If the silver really were hidden in the lake, perhaps only the Dragon King knew the specific location.

"Big brother," seeing his furrowed brow, Luo Ning felt a pang in her heart and hurriedly grasped his sleeve, softly saying, "Don't make things difficult for yourself. If we really can't find the silver, Ning'er will accept it. Being big brother's wife, even if I die, it would be worth it."

"You little girl, what nonsense are you talking about? We have a long, loving life ahead of us!" Lin Wanrong stroked Luo Ning's hair, forcing a smile onto his face.

The crisp sound of the oar hitting the water rang in their ears. Lin Wanrong banished the distracting thoughts from his mind and asked the old fisherman rowing the boat, "Uncle, how many pounds of fish are caught in Weishan Lake every year?"

The old man chuckled a few times, striking the water forcefully with his oar, "How many pounds of fish each year? This old man never calculated that. But as for my family, during late summer and early autumn, I go out to cast my nets every day. On a good day, I can catch dozens of pounds of fish. Over those two seasons, I can easily catch eight hundred to a thousand pounds."

Luo Ning listened, puzzled, "Dozens of pounds every day? Uncle, doesn't that mean you can earn a lot of silver over the course of a year?"

Lin Wanrong gently pinched her small face, shaking his head with a helpless smile, "Silly girl, do you think fishing is like eating meals, something you can do several times a day? Fishing is like farming. You must sow the seeds, tend to them, and only in autumn can you have a good harvest.

Take Weishan Lake, for example; out of the four seasons, only summer and autumn are suitable for fishing. In winter, the grass must be nourished, and in spring, the fish fry must be scattered. Only in summer and autumn can the fish be plentiful."

Lin Wanrong had grown up by the Yangtze River, so he knew these matters clearly. However, Luo Ning and her sibling were born into a family of officials and had no knowledge of farming. Listening to Big Brother talk about these things, they found it utterly fascinating. Luo Ning snuggled close to her Big Brother, infinitely delighted, her voice sweetly saying, "Big brother, Ning'er doesn't understand. Will you teach me every day from now on?"

The old fisherman gave a thumbs up and said, "I only saw that you were a scholarly young man, but I didn't expect you to understand even these things. You are absolutely right. The reeds that have been nourished all winter will soon be put to use. It's early spring now, and it's time to release the fish fry. Once tens of thousands of them are let go, the lake will be bustling come autumn."

"Releasing the fish fry, releasing the fish fry," Lin Wanrong silently muttered to himself twice, as if he had grasped something, yet it also seemed like he hadn't grasped anything at all.

Chapter 382 The Bet

After patrolling the surface of Weishan Lake, aside from once again witnessing the deep blue sky and the vast expanse of water, there was no other gain.

The sky was getting brighter, the fog gradually dispersing, and a spray of the red sun showed half its face above the green water, dyeing the surface a layer of dazzling gold, making people feel unusually warm.

Luo Ning nestled beside Lin Wanrong, the golden morning sun shining on her face, setting off spots of golden red blush, contrasting with her snow-white skin, making her look exceptionally beautiful. Ning'er's eyes were filled with the glow of happiness as she hugged Lin Wanrong's arm and softly said, "Big brother, if I could watch the sunrise with you every day, Ning'er would have no other wishes in her life."

Women are emotional creatures, just worrying about not finding money a moment ago, and in the blink of an eye, longing for a beautiful future. Lin Wanrong gave a wry smile and said to Luo Yuan who was standing to one side, "Little Luo, instruct the brothers on the boat to stop for now. After breakfast, we'll continue to investigate."

Luo Yuan nodded in agreement and passed the message along. For those who lived on the water, their entire livelihood depended on a small boat. Soon, the surrounding boats were seen with curling smoke, and the aroma of fish and rice drifted over.

The boatman, an old man, hurried around and handed a bowl of fish soup to Lin Wanrong, saying, "Sir, try our fresh fish soup from Weishan Lake. I caught it overnight. It's not easy to catch fish in the lake during early spring. Originally, I wanted to give it to Lord Luo, but then this happened."

Lin Wanrong quickly took it with both hands, expressing gratitude with a smile, and handed it to Luo Ning first, saying, "The fish of this spring are those that escaped the nets in winter. After a cold winter, well-fed on water grass, they are plump and robust, just when they are most nourishing. Ning'er, you are frail, take a sip of the soup to warm up. You lost blood last night; you need to replenish yourself."

Luo Ning was deeply moved by his first words, but the latter words seemed frivolous. She looked at her big brother reproachfully and pinched him secretly on the waist, taking the bowl and taking a small sip.

The moment the soup entered her mouth, a rich fragrance permeated her taste buds, making Luo Ning's appetite grow, and she couldn't help but take another small sip, praising, "This is so delicious. I haven't had such good fish soup in the few months I've been in Jinan."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily and said, "That's because you rarely come to Weishan Lake, so you can't appreciate the beautiful scenery or taste the delicacies. This place has beautiful lakes and mountains, a real land of fish and rice."

As he said this, he was reminded of the day when they attacked Jinan. Amid thousands of cannons, he was injured to save Sister An and Xian'er, and later, they desperately rescued him. The three of them depended on each other, boating under the moon on Weishan Lake. A warm, nostalgic feeling slowly rose in his heart. How many such carefree days can one have in life? If it hadn't been for Sister An's trickery, how could he have experienced all this? He sighed softly. Xian'er was in the capital, but where was that cunning and charming fox? Would she also think back to those days? Damn it, he missed that sultry fox.

"Big brother, big brother, look, it's Miss Xu!" Luo Ning suddenly grabbed his sleeve, excitedly shouting.

Xu Zhiqing? Lin Wanrong, who was lost in thought, was suddenly startled and quickly looked up. The mist on the water's surface had completely dispersed, and the situation on the lake was now crystal clear. From far away, a small boat was rowing towards them. A woman dressed in green

stood gracefully at the bow, her expression calm, neither speaking nor smiling. A few dewdrops clung to the tips of her hair, flashing with brilliant colors under the morning light, enhancing the beauty of her charming face.

"Sister Zhiqing, Sister Zhiqing!" From a distance, Luo Ning started waving her arms, excitedly calling out. Xu Zhiqing, upon seeing Luo Ning, paused slightly, then nodded in acknowledgment, and the small boat gradually drew closer.

"Oh, that, I suddenly remembered," Lin Wanrong quickly interjected, "the reed swamp we just passed by seems not to have been carefully inspected. Little Luo, prepare the fastest boat for me; I need to go ahead."

The situation was not right, and Master Lin was ready to escape. He had something to hide. The events of last night were known only to Heaven, Earth, Master Lin, and Miss Xu. But this girl, Xu Zhiqing, was not easy to fool. She had a crossbow with her and had even shot four arrows at him the night before. Who knew if she would flare up upon meeting him? If she chose to expose him, it would be terrible. Life and death were trivial matters, but losing honor was significant. If she made a scene, Master Lin's reputation would be ruined.

Luo Ning grabbed his sleeve, laughing and refusing, "Big brother always talks nonsense. We've come all this way, and there was no reed swamp. Sister Zhiqing, for the sake of our family, has been on Weishan Lake since before dawn in this freezing cold. We must properly thank her."

"Really? That must be quite tiring!" Master Lin laughed, trying to make his escape, but Luo Ning held him tightly. Seeing Xu Zhiqing's boat getting closer, he was beside himself with frustration.

"Sister is right. Sister Xu has traveled thousands of miles for our family's sake, and her efforts are incomparable. We should indeed thank her properly. Big brother, there's no rush. You should meet with Sister Xu to see if she has discovered anything. Perhaps the two of you together might find a solution," Luo Yuan solemnly nodded, agreeing with the analysis.

'You little rascal, trying to trap your big brother!' Master Lin and Miss Xu were like fire and water, completely incompatible. Master Lin glared at Little Luo, wishing he could kick this mischievous boy into the water.

In the midst of their conversation, the boat carrying Xu Zhiqing slowly approached. Luo Yuan and the boatman caught the small boat, and Xu Zhiqing, holding Luo Ning's hand, jumped onto their boat.

Xu Zhiqing's hair sparkled with clear dewdrops, her cheeks flushed from the cold, her beautiful eyes slightly red and swollen, looking quite fatigued. Luo Ning was surprised and asked, "Sister, what's wrong? Have you been crying?"

"No," Xu Zhiqing answered softly, "The wind and dew on the lake this morning were strong, and it got in my eyes, causing some redness."

Luo Ning, holding Xu Zhiqing's hands, her eyes reddening, said, "Sister, why were you on the lake so early? The weather is so cold; what if you catch a chill? I would never find peace for the rest of my life."

Xu Zhiqing smiled faintly, her delicate hand gracefully wiping the dewdrops from her hair, and said, "Ning'er, why speak so formally between us sisters? I couldn't sleep in the middle of the night, so I thought I'd go to the lake early. I didn't expect Weishan Lake to be so vast. I was on the boat for several hours and only covered a few miles. Seeing that time was getting on, I worried that you would be anxious, so I turned back."

Upon hearing Xu Zhiqing mention "couldn't sleep in the middle of the night," Luo Ning thought that something had been revealed, her face turning pale and ears heating up in embarrassment. She shyly lowered her head and said, "I was disrespectful last night—"

"Nothing happened last night," Xu Zhiqing interrupted, "I waited in your room and fell asleep, seeing no one."

What did Sister Xu mean by her words? Was she hinting that she had seen or heard something last night? With these thoughts, Luo Ning felt her whole body heat up, her heart beating erratically. She was too ashamed to lift her head. The two of them both had something on their minds, yet they couldn't share it with each other, guessing wildly like a riddle.

"Oh, right, Sister Zhiqing, did you find anything on the lake? Perhaps you could discuss it with my big brother—Oh, big brother, where are you?" Luo Ning was trying to have her big brother talk with Miss Xu, but he was nowhere to be found. Just as she was puzzled, the boatman came from the back of the cabin, saying, "Miss, are you asking about that official just now? Oh, he's taken over my job, cooking at the stern of the boat. Alas, I've never seen such a kind and helpful official. Miss, you are fortunate to be with him!"

When did big brother become so industrious? Luo Ning's questions found no answers. But then, she saw Luo Yuan pushing Lin Wanrong out. Master Lin, with an apron tied around his waist, was shouting, "What are you doing? What are you doing? I still have to cook!"

"It's you?!!" Xu Zhiqing's eyes blazed, and she gritted her teeth in anger.

"Standing too close, I can't see clearly!" Lin Wanrong hastily retreated a few steps, keeping his distance from Miss Xu, examining her carefully before exclaiming, "Ah, isn't this Miss Xu? My goodness, what are you doing here? Long time no see, how are you?" His words were filled with sincere intent, making them sound like old friends who hadn't seen each other for a long time. Luo Yuan couldn't help but admire how his big brother was always so enthusiastic and lively with people.

"I'm doing very well, but I wonder how Lord Lin fared last night?" Xu Zhiqing replied with a cold smile, her eyes glinting dangerously.

The unintentional speaker, the intentional listener; Luo Ning's face turned red at the words, casting a secretive glance at her big brother, her eyebrows hinting at a touch of sentiment.

'Nonsense, I was accompanied by a beautiful woman with fragrant candles, warm spring affections in a flowery bed, and endless pleasure on the mandarin duck pillows. How could I not be happy?' Seeing Miss Xu's stern expression, Lin Wanrong gave a dry laugh and said, "Thanks to Miss's concern, I fared quite well, just a little better than you."

"Shameless, you have no face!" Xu Zhiqing gritted her teeth in hatred, her eyes welling with a faint mist of tears.

Although her voice was soft, Luo Ning heard every word. Seeing that her big brother and Sister Xu seemed to have some distance between them, she felt anxious and quickly grabbed Xu Zhiqing's hand, saying, "Sister Xu, do you have any misunderstandings about my big brother? He's quite good, industrious, kind, simple and humble, reticent, and protective of the weak. You've traveled with him; you should have felt these qualities, right?"

Luo Yuan's mouth hung open in shock; he never realized that his big brother had such a lofty status in his sister's eyes. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, he thought. Why was his understanding of his big brother completely opposite to his sister's? Lin San, however, felt greatly comforted by Luo Ning's words. 'My dear Ning'er, you truly understand me. Others only see my surface, but only you have seen the deepest parts of me!'

Xu Zhiqing listened with a mix of amusement and disbelief. According to Ning'er's words, Lin San must be the most honest man in the world. If Lin San was described as honest, even pigs would laugh.

"Yes, I deeply feel his virtues," Miss Xu said, a cold smile playing on her lips. Glancing at Lin San, she saw a smile in his eyes, and his gaze was stealthily focused on her chest, seemingly playing with some lewd thoughts. Miss Xu felt a surge of anger and almost fainted from the embarrassment. Such shameful matters could not be spoken to Ning'er, and she felt a mix of humiliation and injustice. Tears welled in her eyes as she quickly hid behind Luo Ning, saying, "Ning'er, let's go quickly!"

"Go? Where to?" Luo Ning asked in confusion, grabbing her arm and pleading, "Dear sister, my big brother is really not a bad person. Don't be angry with him. Have you discovered anything on the lake? You should discuss it with him."

"Yes, yes, let's discuss it," Lin San said, looking stern and righteous. Seeing Miss Xu's reluctance, he felt no fear, thinking that since things had come to this point, there was no turning back.

"I have nothing to say to you," Miss Xu snapped, her mind filled with the humiliation of the previous night and Lin San's lewd looks. Her heart ached, tears swirling in her eyes, ready to fall.

Luo Ning had never seen Sister Xu so angered before. She quickly embraced her and shot Lin Wanrong a warning glance. Lin San shook his head with a bitter smile, saying, "Alright, Miss Xu, I admit my mistake and will apologize to you. I will be more careful next time!"

"Next time?" Xu Zhiqing said, her teeth clenched in anger, her eyes filled with fury.

Lin San thought, 'Is it a crime to have a full chest? Isn't a woman's good figure meant for men to see? Like me, who dares to openly act like a lecher, such men are already extinct in this world. You've encountered a rare specimen, and you're not content?' He laughed lazily, thinking that unless they never saw each other again, he would still look.

The two quarreled for a while, leaving the Luo siblings staring in bewilderment. How did their big brother and Sister Xu become like mortal enemies? How would they live together in the future?

"General Lin, General Lin—" Just as the situation reached a deadlock, an excited shout came from the lake, and a small boat shot towards them like an arrow.

"General Hu!" Xu Zhiqing's eyes were sharp, and she immediately recognized the person on the small boat. It was Hu Bugui, who had been sent out to search the previous day under military orders.

"Brother Hu—" As the small boat steadied, Hu Bugui took a leap onto it. Seeing his excited expression, Lin Wanrong quickly grabbed his arm and asked, "Have you discovered something?"

Hu Bugui's face was weathered and his eyes bloodshot, but his expression was one of extreme excitement. He exclaimed, "General, your brilliant calculations were correct! Last night, I followed your instructions and searched along both shores of Weishan Lake, and indeed, we made some gains."

Upon hearing these words, everyone on the boat was instantly thrilled. Even Miss Xu, who was in a quarrel with Master Lin, turned her head to listen to him. But seeing Lin San smiling at her, she hurriedly snorted and turned her head back.

"Yesterday, I took two thousand brothers with me and explored along both shores," Hu Bugui continued, his voice filled with joy. "We traveled over a hundred li in one night, visiting the fishermen and common people on both sides, and finally found some extremely useful information. The day before yesterday, in the early evening, a few big brothers went out to fish in the lake. As it was early spring, there were few fish, so they paddled further out. On their return journey, they were chased away by several small boats."

"Chased away?" Lin Wanrong frowned. "Did they see the faces of those people?"

Hu Bugui shook his head. "It was already dusk when they were returning, so they couldn't see the faces of those people. But according to them, those small boats were heavily laden, and the fishermen on board were strong and robust, unlike ordinary fishermen. They chased them away a great distance before turning back. One of the fishermen, overcome by curiosity, secretly followed them. He was startled to find that behind those few small boats, there was an entire fleet."

"A fleet?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed joyfully, "How big were the boats? How many?"

"Because he was too far away and afraid of being discovered, he didn't dare to linger long, and he couldn't describe the size of the boats. But he estimated that there were about forty to fifty of them. The cabins were all covered with canvas, appearing grey and indistinct."

"Forty to fifty boats?" Lin Wanrong excitedly clapped his hands and turned to the boatman, "Uncle, what's the largest boat you've ever seen on our Weishan Lake?"

The old boatman replied, "I've been fishing on Weishan Lake all my life, and the largest boats I've seen were the naval vessels sent by the court last year to exterminate the White Lotus Cult. Those big ironclad ships could hold over a hundred people, and they even had cannons. But those are sea boats; they can't move in the shallow waters of Weishan Lake, so most of them were just for show."

Lin Wanrong nodded. During the extermination of the White Lotus, Xu Wei had mobilized naval vessels to blockade Weishan Lake. It was only to prevent the White Lotus from escaping by water, not for combat, so whether they could reach shallow waters was irrelevant.

Xu Zhiqing pondered for a moment and then said, "The thieves have stolen the silver and are in a hurry to move it. They surely wouldn't dare use naval vessels. Firstly, ironclad ships are too conspicuous and easy to spot; if they were to run aground in shallow water, they would be helpless. Secondly, all of Great Hua's naval forces are under effective control. They couldn't get their hands on such ironclad ships."

Xu Zhiqing was the daughter of Xu Wei, and she was also Li Tai's daughter-in-law and a highly regarded female military strategist. Her understanding of the Great Hua navy was no surprise. Lin Wanrong gave a thumbs up, laughing, "Well said, hit the nail on the head, I admire you!"

Xu Zhiqing snorted lightly and turned her head away. "What's the use of flattery from a shameless person like you, uncle? Please continue speaking."

The boatman nodded and said, "As for the other ships, they're pretty much the same, not much difference. I know the deep and shallow waters of Weishan Lake like the back of my hand. A typical wooden ship can carry about eight hundred catties, and that's a good one."

"That's right!" Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver, calculated at eight hundred catties per ship, would require more than thirty to forty wooden ships. Isn't that the fleet from that night?"

With this calculation, the fleet that had appeared that night was undoubtedly the one smuggling the silver, and everyone became excited. Even though they had confirmed that it was indeed the fleet carrying the silver, and that the silver was indeed in Weishan Lake, they still knew nothing about where it was specifically hidden.

After the initial excitement, Luo Ning and her brother realized the key issue, and their excitement gradually waned. Luo Ning looked at Lin Wanrong and whispered, "Even so, Weishan Lake is hundreds of miles wide. Where should we look for the silver?"

Lin Wanrong shook his head and smiled, "Don't worry, Big Brother is here. Ning'er, think carefully about when your father discovered the silver was missing, and when he began to block off the lake?"

"Father discovered the silver was missing at the second watch of the night, and he immediately issued the blockade order. Fast horses reached the shores around the third watch," Luo Ning thought for a moment and nodded.

"That is to say, it's certain the silver didn't make it to shore. Even if they put the silver on the ships at the first watch, by the third watch, it would only be three hours. A wooden ship, carrying eight hundred catties, how far could it go in three hours?" Lin Wanrong spoke smugly. If he had a few wisps of a small beard, he would look quite like a wise sage. "Oh, and one more important question, Brother Hu, did you ask about the wind direction on Weishan Lake that night?"

"I was in a hurry to report, so I forgot to ask," Hu Bugui said, looking embarrassed. He had been ordered the previous night to travel a hundred miles searching for clues without even stopping for a drink. His oversight was excusable.

"The wind was coming from the southeast that night," Xu Zhiqing said calmly, sounding quite certain.

"How do you know?" Lin looked at her in surprise.

"I already inquired about it when we left the lake," Xu Zhiqing responded without even glancing at him. She seemed to loathe him deeply, snorting, "You know the silver is in the lake, yet you never even asked about the wind direction. I don't know what filthy thoughts occupy your mind all day."

This young lady was speaking metaphorically, but she was indeed smart, considering all aspects of a situation. Master Lin thought to himself, admiring her assets, that he would let it slide this time. Reluctantly taking his eyes off her chest, he comforted himself.

"The young lady is right; the wind was indeed from the southeast that night," the old boatman interjected.

"Wow, Miss Xu guessed it right again." Lin Wanrong chuckled, his face full of feigned admiration. "Eh, by this calculation, weren't those thieves sailing against the wind? It seems Heaven itself is helping us. Uncle, three hours, how far do you think these wooden boats could go?"

"With a full load of eight hundred catties of silver, there won't be much space left on the wooden boat, at most four people with four oars paddling together. And they were sailing against the wind; even if they took turns rowing without rest, they couldn't travel more than a few miles in an hour. Moreover, the fleet would be moving together, and the speed would be even slower. I reckon about sixteen or seventeen miles in an hour should be about right," the old boatman declared decisively.

Sixteen or seventeen miles in an hour? That meant fifty miles in three hours? Lin Wanrong pulled out pen and paper, made some calculations, and was about to give orders when Xu Zhiqing spoke, "Don't just consider the distance the small boats could travel; also think about whether the silver submerged in the water would be pushed by the current? The current last night was blowing from the northwest."

"Miss Xu, you are so learned, even knowing fluid mechanics," Lin Wanrong exclaimed in admiration. Xu Zhiqing did not even look at him, completely ignoring his comment.

"No matter if it's the southeast wind or the northwest wind, I'll include the force of the water flow as well. If the lake water pushed my silver another ten miles, then within sixty miles, this will be our search direction." He drew a point on the paper and radiated several lines from it; the silver was within this radius.

Seeing his triumphant expression, Xu Zhiqing snorted contemptuously and took hold of Luo Ning's small hand, saying, "Ning'er, help me with something."

Luo Ning nodded, and Miss Xu continued, "Ask that shameless man how he knows that these three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver haven't been scattered by the thieves?"

Luo Ning looked at her big brother hesitantly. If she asked, she would be admitting that her big brother was shameless; if she did not, it was a matter of importance. Lin Wanrong laughed, confidently saying, "More than three hundred thousand taels of silver would certainly not be scattered. Even splitting them into two piles is unlikely. Firstly, they didn't have ample time; coordinating forty boats is no small feat; secondly, scattering the silver under the water might cause it to be broken up by the current. They wouldn't be so foolish. More than three hundred thousand taels of silver would form a small mountain underwater and wouldn't be easily moved. They surely fixed all the silver together before daring to submerge it."

Miss Xu snorted and said no more, seemingly having no objections.

What was initially a baffling problem had been concretely clarified by Lin Wanrong and Miss Xu in a few words, and even calculated the radius according to technical principles. Everyone was impressed, especially by the coordination between Miss Xu and Lin Wanrong, whose complementing answers were incredibly in sync. Luo Yuan shook his head and sighed, "This sounds quite simple, and I understood it as soon as my big brother and Sister Xu explained it. Why couldn't I think of it myself?"

"That's what's called knowing after the fact and hindsight intelligence. If you had half the brains of big brother and Sister Xu, father wouldn't worry about you," Luo Ning teased her younger brother, then leaned affectionately against Lin Wanrong, her face glowing with happiness. She softly said, "Big brother, Ning'er is proud of you."

"Don't say it like that; this achievement belongs to everyone. I've only done a small part," Lord Lin said modestly.

Xu Zhiqing gave a cold smile: "Let's not boast too much. We've only calculated that the silver is likely within this range, but we still have no way to search for it."

Her words were indeed true. Even though they had narrowed the search range from several hundred li to just sixty, it was still a vast area. Searching for the silver within sixty li of water was no easy task.

"Can we find some underwater experts to search every place?" Luo Ning tentatively proposed a solution.

"This method is not feasible." Seeing that Lord Lin was deep in thought, Xu Zhiqing was the one to respond, shaking her head: "A sixty-li water area is not particularly large, but it's not small either. Even if we send the best underwater hands, searching ten li a day would be difficult. The emperor

has given us only seven days, and after yesterday, we have only six left. There is no time. Moreover, there is a serious problem. The three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver must be sunk to the bottom of the lake. Weishan Lake is incredibly deep, and the deeper you go, the greater the pressure. People can't endure it, and even if they reach the bottom, they can't stay long enough to search."

Luo Ning nodded, not fully understanding. When it came to poetry, she might have been able to compete, but how could she match the knowledgeable Sister Xu when it came to the principles of everything?

Lin Wanrong nodded, impressed that this Miss Xu, apart from being well-endowed, had considerable skills and even knew these principles. He pondered for a long while before addressing the old boatman: "Uncle, how deep is the water where we are?"

The old boatman slowly lowered his bamboo pole, and although it was as tall as three people, it still didn't reach the bottom. He laughed, pulling up the pole: "We've only traveled four or five li, and based on my experience, this is still shallow water, about five or six bamboo poles deep."

Luo Yuan gasped. A bamboo pole was as tall as three people, and five or six of them was considered shallow water? This was outrageous!

"How about I report to General Li Tai and bring fifty thousand more brothers from the camp? We can encircle the lake within sixty li and build dikes day and night to level it! General, don't worry; I, Old Hu, guarantee it'll be done within five days!" Hu Bugui said confidently, his proposal startling the old boatman.

Lin Wanrong forced a smile: "Brother Hu, don't scare me. Mobilizing tens of thousands of soldiers, their food, drink, and other needs, not to mention filling the lake and building fields, is no small task. Those three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver probably won't even cover the cost. Besides, Weishan Lake is renowned as a land of fish and rice. If we really fill it, how will we explain it to future generations? We can do foolish things, but never malicious ones!"

Hu Bugui gave an embarrassed chuckle: "I was just talking, just talking, old man, please don't mind."

The old boatman sighed: "My lord, please don't say such things again; it frightens me to hear it. Our people have lived on Weishan Lake for generations, relying on fishing for our livelihood. We release fish in spring and catch them in autumn; Weishan Lake is our lifeline. If the lake is filled, what will we eat?"

"Uncle, what did you just say?" A glimmer of insight flashed through Lin Wanrong's mind, and he hurriedly grabbed the old boatman's hand to ask.

"This sir," the old boatman repeated, "I said, 'Weishan Lake is our lifeline. If the lake were to be filled, what would we eat?'"

"No, not that. It was the sentence before that one," Lin Wanrong excitedly said.

The old boatman looked at Lin Wanrong, puzzled. It was just one sentence; why would it excite him so much? "I said, 'Springtime is for stocking fish, autumn is for catching fish.' Sir, is this the one?"

"Yes, that's it, that's it!" Lin Wanrong's face was alight with excitement, muttering, "Springtime is for stocking fish, autumn is for catching fish. Stocking fish, catching fish. Uncle, what kind of net do you use for fishing?"

"For fishing, we use many different types of nets. There are cast nets, small enough for one person to handle, which fall open like a flower; these are for catching small fish. Then there are long gill nets, ranging from dozens to hundreds of feet, set in the water at night, and when raised the next day, they contain many large fish. There's also a longer net called a drag net. Every autumn, after fishing, the fishermen along the shore gather to discuss catching the remaining fish in the lake. We choose an auspicious day, spread out the drag net, divide the area, and hundreds of us pull together to catch all the fish in the lake. This is our final catch of the year, so it's also called a 'complete haul'."

Talking about fishing, the old boatman's words flowed nonstop, describing cast nets, gill nets, and drag nets. Xu Zhiqing listened with great interest, let alone Luo Ning and Luo Yuan. They were born into wealth and were unfamiliar with these things, but Lin Wanrong, who grew up along the Yangtze River, knew them intimately. Listening to the old man's prattle, he felt an indescribable warmth.

"Excellent, excellent, the drag net, the drag net!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, rubbing his hands together, "Uncle, how big are the holes in the drag net?"

"The holes? They vary in size, from coarse to fine. Fishermen may not have much, but nets are essential. You want a small hole; you get a small hole," the old boatman explained.

Xu Zhiqing couldn't hold back any longer and snorted, "Are you thinking of using these fishing nets to catch silver?"

"Eh, willing to talk to a shameless person this time?" Lin Wanrong replied, laughing without answering her question.

Xu Zhiqing ignored him and coldly said, "If you think of using fishing nets to catch silver, you are greatly mistaken. Even if you have the longest fishing net, it won't work. The net is weighted with tin blocks, which can sink to the bottom in shallow water, but in deep water, they can only reach three-tenths below the surface, at best."

"Don't worry, my Miss Xu," Lin Wanrong laughed, "When it comes to fishing, I was soaking in the water when you hadn't even begun to learn your letters." He then threw back at her the words she had used on the road.

"What do you want the fishing net for?" Xu Zhiqing asked, not arguing this time, her mouth twitching.

"Do you want to know? Come here." Lin Wanrong gestured to Miss Xu with a finger, his smiling face full of hidden meaning.

"You, what are you going to do?" Once bitten by a snake, one is afraid of the rope in the well for ten years; Miss Xu subconsciously reached into her bosom, on guard.

Lin Wanrong shrugged nonchalantly, "It doesn't matter. If you don't want to know, I won't insist. Uncle, let's continue our earlier conversation."

Curiosity killed the cat, and Miss Xu Zhiqing bit her silver teeth, forcibly restraining the fear in her heart as she slowly walked over to him, cautiously and warily saying, "Speak, I'm listening."

"Show some sincerity, come closer, closer, yes, that's how it should be." Seeing the tiny beads of sweat on Miss Xu's delicate nose, Master Lin couldn't help feeling triumphant inside. He was even impressed by his own ability to affect her. "You, speak quickly!" Getting close to him, remembering his "lecherous behavior" from the night before, feeling his hot gaze scanning her, Xu Zhiqing's heart was pounding, her face flushing, and she scolded him in a soft, challenging voice to bolster her courage.

"Do you want to know?" Lin Wanrong leaned close to her ear, finding her flushed, crystal-clear little ear rather amusing, "But I just won't tell you!"

"You—" Xu Zhiqing was both shocked and angry, teased by him once again, especially in front of so many others. Her anger was palpable. Seeing his playful and smiling face, Miss Xu wished she could kick him hard to relieve her frustration.

"You probably have no other way but to pretend you know something." Xu Zhiqing suppressed her anger, calmly responding.

This little girl even knew how to play the provocation game. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Really? Am I just pretending? I don't think so! How about this, Miss Xu, let's make a bet!"

"Big brother, bet on what?" Luo Yuan perked up at the mention, a naturally mischievous person who thrived on chaos. Seeing a possible thaw in the relationship between his big brother and Sister Xu, Luo Ning also looked at his big brother with a smile.

Xu Zhiqing hadn't expected that her provocation would backfire, with this shameless man taking control. If she backed down, wouldn't she be teased by him again?

"What's the bet?" When the shameless man's sharp eyes fell on her, she felt a little flustered but a surge of defiance gave her the courage to lift her head and haughtily ask.

"If I find the silver with this fishing net, you agree to one condition of mine." Master Lin looked at Miss Xu up and down with a lecherous smile. To look openly was satisfying, and this girl could be described with one word, big—really big!

"Shameless lecher!" Xu Zhiqing muttered to herself, feeling somewhat helpless. She'd seen him thousands of times, so could she gouge her eyes out?

She gritted her teeth, "And if you don't find it?"

"If I don't find it, then I'll be Miss Xu's horse, and you can ride me for the rest of my life." Master Lin laughed heartily, dismissing the idea entirely.

Luo Yuan gasped, "Let Miss Xu ride for a lifetime? What a malicious vow, only big brother could think of such a thing."

'If you don't find the silver, I'll whip you hard, and you'll be a horse for the rest of your life,' Miss Xu thought bitterly. She couldn't guess the deeper meaning of Master Lin's words.

"Fine, then it's settled. A gentleman's word is his bond!" Miss Xu's silver teeth gritted audibly as she pronounced the word "bond" heavily.

"Miss Xu, big brother hasn't mentioned his condition for you yet." Luo Ning kindly reminded Xu Zhiqing.

Miss Xu was taken aback, 'True, I was so angry I didn't think straight.' She glanced at Master Lin, "Speak, what's your condition?"

"Lean in," Lin Wanrong signaled with a self-satisfied hook of his finger.

Miss Xu leaned in, only to feel that debauched man blow a breath into her ear, whispering, "My condition is simple, heh heh, it's just a touch—"

"You licentious thief, shameless—" Miss Xu felt her head explode with a bang, her face flushed red, memories of the previous night flooding back, tears welling in her eyes, as if about to fall.

"Hey, Miss Xu, you've misunderstood—" Lin Wanrong hurriedly explained, "I didn't mean that!"

Xu Zhiqing's eyes were red-rimmed, tears swirling, she suddenly turned her head away, her shoulders slightly trembling, "You don't have to say, I know your condition. Since I have already agreed to you, I'll resign myself to it. I just hope you'll do your best to help Uncle Luo recover the silver."

"Really? I haven't said it, and you understand?" Lin Wanrong opened his mouth wide, his face filled with disbelief.

"With the dirty thoughts in your heart, I know even if you don't say it." Miss Xu turned around, her eyes bright and calm, "I've agreed to you, the bet is on."

The self-righteous girl, Lin Wanrong sighed, no longer willing to explain to her. Luo Ning noticed something amiss between the two and quickly grabbed Lin Wanrong, "Big brother, what request did you make of Sister Zhiqing?"

"I asked her to take advantage of me, believe it or not?" Lin Wanrong chuckled.

Luo Ning shook his head firmly, "I don't believe it, big brother would just talk nonsense."

Lin Wanrong glanced at Xu Zhiqing, sighed, "Yes, I don't believe it myself. Uncle, where were we?"

"We were talking about the fishing net!" the boatman laughed, "The gentleman was asking me about the size of the holes!"

"Oh, right, right, Uncle, how long is the fishing net you have?" Lin Wanrong thought for a moment and asked.

"This one, the longest is more than a mile. Think about how we need hundreds of people to pull it each time, you can imagine how long it is," the boatman laughed.

"Can you make some even longer, like, several miles?" Lin Wanrong guided gently, Xu Zhiqing's brows furrowed at hearing this. Such a long fishing net—was this guy really planning to fish for silver? Stupid! Dumb!

"If we connect several nets together, one net can be made up to three or four miles long. Any longer won't work, it's hard to pull!" the boatman explained.

Lin Wanrong slapped his thigh, laughing, "Good, three or four miles long it is. Uncle, is it difficult to connect these nets together? Can you make me thirty of these long nets?"

The old boatman shook his head and smiled, "What's so hard about that? We fishermen, mending nets and connecting lines, it's the most basic craft. You want as many nets, no problem. We live off this, we can't do without it."

"Wonderful, wonderful," Lin Wanrong excitedly grabbed his hand, "Uncle, can you please hurry and get me some fishing nets, ready to use by tomorrow? I'll assign Brother Hu Bugui and his two thousand elite soldiers to assist you, what do you think?"

Seeing the official's anxious face, the boatman nodded, "This shouldn't be difficult. Let Officer Hu contact the three towns and nine villages, and we'll rush to work tonight. Tomorrow we guarantee to give you thirty long fishing nets, four miles long!"

Everyone listened to him talk for quite some time, but no one had any clue what he wanted to do with those things. Miss Xu was especially perplexed but felt a vague sense of joy. If he was unsuccessful, she wouldn't have to honor the wager and suffer his humiliation. However, if he failed, Ning'er's entire family would be executed. For a moment, she was caught between a rock and a hard place, torn between two difficult choices.

"Uncle, you mentioned earlier that you are preparing to release some fish fry into the lake. Is that true?" Lin Wanrong changed the subject, bringing the conversation back to fish after discussing the nets.

The old boatman nodded: "Yes, it's true. Every spring, we release fish. It's a joint effort between the fishermen and the government. The fries are ready, and as long as there's money, it can be done. We had already discussed this earlier and started fundraising, but unfortunately, Lord Luo's incident delayed everything."

"Don't delay it, don't delay!" Lin Wanrong said, his heart on fire. "Releasing fish in spring is vital for the livelihood of our fellow fishermen on Weishan Lake. It's an urgent matter. How can we postpone it?"

"We're more anxious than you are, Sir!" the boatman lamented. "But without money right now, there's nothing we can do."

"Uncle, how much money is needed?" Lin Wanrong asked.

The old man held up three fingers, and Lin Wanrong slapped his chest, confidently saying: "Three hundred taels? Don't worry, Uncle, I'll cover it."

The old man bowed respectfully and said, "Sir, it's three thousand taels!"

"Three—thousand—taels—" Lin Wanrong grimaced, his eyes bulging out. "Uncle, are you sure? Three thousand taels of silver is a robbery!"

"It can't be helped, this is the world we live in. Three thousand taels for three hundred thousand fish fry—this is the hope of all the fishermen on Weishan Lake," the old man sighed, his face filled with worry.

Three thousand taels for three hundred thousand fish fry? Dammit, the inflation was fierce! Although he was a wealthy man, making money was not easy for him. He thought of all the hard work spent running the restaurant and making the perfume. Three thousand taels was equivalent to fifty bottles of perfume. Wasn't life hard for him?

"Big Brother," Luo Ning gently tugged at his sleeve, her eyes filled with tears. "Are you really buying the fish fry?"

'Why would I buy fish fry if I don't fish? It's all for your father!' He gave her a bitter smile and nodded. "Yes, I'm buying the fish fry, becoming a fisherman on Weishan Lake. Ning'er, will you still follow me?"

Luo Ning gave a shy smile, "Big brother is so annoying! Ning'er is your wife; whatever you want to do, Ning'er will support you. Grandmother left me some jewelry before going to the capital, worth perhaps a thousand taels. I'll give it all to you, big brother, so you can do whatever you want."

This girl truly was considerate. Lin Wanrong patted her little face, chuckling, "Good girl, this time your big brother is making a big sacrifice for you. You must compensate me well tonight."

"How should I compensate you?" Luo Ning's face flushed a pale pink. She looked at him, lightly biting her lip, her eyes seeming ready to brim with tears.

Lin Wanrong pinched her charming little hip, laughing lecherously, "Tonight, we'll try a new position, and I guarantee my little Ning'er will want to try it again."

"Big brother—" Luo Ning called out shyly, unable to keep her head up.

"Uncle, I will pay the three thousand taels of silver," Lin Wanrong's face turned bright red as he pulled out the silver bills from his bosom. He carefully counted for a while, a pang of pain in his heart, "But I have one condition. You must rush back now, and gather all the fish fry and fishing

nets by tomorrow morning. Then gather all the fishermen from the neighboring villages. Tell them that this Master has three thousand taels for the fish, and I need their labor for a few days. Is this deal acceptable?"

"Yes, yes," the old man excitedly knelt down. "Master, you are like a Bodhisattva descending from heaven. The old man and the folks around here are endlessly grateful."

Lin Wanrong helped him up, sighing, "Uncle, I am no Bodhisattva, and I have my selfish reasons. These three thousand taels, if they can help recover the three hundred and fifty thousand taels, I will make a huge profit. This deal is worth it. If it doesn't work out, consider it as me accumulating virtue for my father-in-law, doing one last good deed for the villagers!"

"Master, rest assured, I'll go back and notify the villagers right now. Even if we have to risk our lives, we will have the fish fry and fishing nets ready within the time you've requested. This old man can't read much and doesn't understand what private or public interests are, but one thing I know is, as long as it helps our villagers, no matter what your intentions are, they are good."

The old man gave some instructions for his boat to an assistant, then jumped onto another small boat, kowtowing respectfully to Lin Wanrong. Master Lin tried to help him up but was too late, so he let him go on his way.

Luo Yuan gave him a thumbs up, Luo Ning's face turned bright red as she clung tightly to him, softly saying, "Husband, you are the best person in the world! Ning'er will always be proud of you!"

Three thousand taels of silver, all to buy back pride; this deal was worth it for him. Lin Wanrong smiled contentedly, burying his head in Ning'er's shoulder, "Sweet Ning'er, your husband is hurt, my heart is bleeding. Hold me as we go back, let's indulge in some daytime pleasure to comfort me!"

Luo Ning covered her cheeks in embarrassment, her tender little leg lightly touching his leg, an indescribable intoxicating sensation.

"You shameless lecher." Xu Zhiqing was standing beside them, having overheard their intimate whispers. The memory of last night's encounter surged in her heart, filled with anger. Remembering his confidence in needing nets and fish fry, she didn't know how he planned to recover the silver, yet a vague premonition told her that she might lose. Was she really going to let this lecher touch her again? She feared he might get used to it!

Her face burned as she sneaked a glance at them. She saw that lecher bury his head in Ning'er's shoulder, smiling at her. That smile, eerie and strange, was unspeakably lascivious...

Chapter 383 Ruined Good Deeds

After everything was arranged, Lin Wanrong's mood improved. Along the way, he held Luo Ning's small hand, whispering jokes in her ear that were both cheeky and clean. Luo Ning listened with a blushing face, her chest quaking, her heart pounding non-stop, yet filled with a feeling of excitement.

Xu Zhiqing stood beside the two, sometimes overhearing Lin Wanrong's teasing words, feeling a shiver of fear at first, but later becoming increasingly numb. Luo Ning of today was not as clingy as she had been before, always shadowing Xu Zhiqing. Following her sense of responsibility towards her close friend, Xu Zhiqing stayed close to the two, only responding to Luo Ning and completely ignoring Lin Wanrong. After encountering a few cold shoulders, Lin Wanrong prudently gave up on his teasing.

The journey was smooth and uneventful, and by noon, they reached their sixty-mile destination. Along the way, Lin Wanrong kept observing the sixty-mile stretch of water, noticing it was quite wide and with minimal reed marshes, quite suitable for net fishing. He felt somewhat relieved. Instructing Luo Yuan to set floating markers with a few fishermen, he marked the approximate sixty-mile range from the shore and assigned guards to watch over the area day and night, finally feeling at ease.

"Big brother, do you really plan to fish for silver with nets?" Luo Yuan asked incredulously as he watched the fishermen place the markers. "I think what Sister Xu said makes sense; these nets with tin bottoms are too light, they won't sink to the bottom."

Seeing Xu Zhiqing's ears perking up to listen, Lin Wanrong laughed loudly and slapped Luo Yuan's shoulder, "The mountain man has his clever ways. Little Luo, don't you trust your big brother? Also, there's one more thing. Later, spread the word that we've found the location of the 350,000 taels of silver buried in Weishan Lake, and we'll start fishing for it tomorrow morning, heh heh."

"Big brother, do you suspect that there are still thieves nearby?" Luo Ning quietly asked, following him.

"Naturally," Lin Wanrong nodded. "Ning'er, think about it; if you were a thief and buried all this silver in the lake, would you leave it so easily?"

"No," Luo Ning shook her head, "I would leave people to watch and be ready to move the silver at any sign of trouble. Oh, I understand now. Big brother, you are waiting for the thieves to walk into a trap?"

Lin Wanrong smiled without answering, and Xu Zhiqing took Luo Ning's hand to explain, "They might not walk into a trap. But they may reveal something in their haste, and that would be unavoidable. Little Yuan, you must patrol the sixty-mile lake surface tonight with guards, be vigilant, and immediately detain any suspicious individuals."

Luo Yuan looked at Lin Wanrong as if seeking his opinion. Lin Wanrong nodded, and Luo Yuan immediately became excited, "Big brother and Sister Xu, rest assured, I will complete the task. Big brother, I heard from General Hu that the Emperor has issued a decree for your trip to Shandong. You can command all the local officials, soldiers, and supplies in Shandong. Can you give me forty to fifty thousand of your troops? I will seal off the sixty-mile water surface without a leak."

Lin Wanrong patted him on the head, laughing, "Have you lost your mind, young man? Do you think this is child's play with mud? Asking for fifty thousand men right away? Can you even handle that many?"

Xu Zhiqing and Luo Ning burst into girlish laughter, while Luo Yuan scratched his head somewhat sheepishly, "Then how many troops should you give me? It's rare for me to lead soldiers, and I won't do it if the number is too small."

Lin Wanrong smiled, "You can't become fat with just one bite. You used to lead the Hung Hing brothers to slash at people, and that was just passable. But now you're not leading the Hung Hing; you're leading troops into battle. It's not a game. When we go back, you go find Brother Hu Bugui and lead five thousand troops to patrol this sixty-mile lake surface. If you do well, opportunities won't be scarce for you in the future. After all, you're my brother-in-law, and I've always been protective of my family."

With those words, Luo Ning blushed and pinched him hard around his waist. Luo Yuan, however, was extremely excited, "Alright, that's settled then. I'll lead five thousand this time, but next time, it must be fifty thousand. By the way, I heard that General Li Tai will soon lead two hundred thousand troops to resist the nomads. Big brother, can you talk to the old general and include me? I'm not asking for much, just to lead ten thousand troops. I guarantee I'll chop those nomads down, so they won't dare start a war again."

Luo Ning seemed a bit anxious, casting her eyes urgently at her big brother. Luo family had only this one heir, Luo Yuan. Going to the front line to fight the nomads was no trivial matter, and if anything happened to him, the Luo family line would end.

Lin Wanrong wore a bitter smile. This young man had grown too accustomed to having his way in Jinling, developing a fearless attitude, thinking he could mold those nomads as easily as mud. Just as he was about to speak, Xu Zhiqing interjected, "Little Yuan, why are you telling him all this? He's selfish, only thinking about his petty gains and ignoring the greater good of the nation. General Li asked him several times to lead troops to fight the nomads, but he refused every time. From what I see, if the nomads were to attack, he'd be the first to run."

"My big brother is not like that!" Luo Yuan's face turned beet red as he loudly defended, "He's courageous and wise, defying the powerful, fighting the White Lotus Sect, playing tricks on the young prince. Everyone in Jinling knows that he's a true hero."

"Is that so?" Xu Zhiqing replied calmly, "Maybe that was true in the past, but not necessarily now. He doesn't even dare to go to the battlefield. What kind of hero is that?"

This girl's thinking was indeed profound. Even at this juncture, she didn't forget to employ her provocation technique. Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Little Luo, I'm no hero. I'm just getting by day by day. When it comes to going to the front line, I indeed don't feel like going."

"Big brother, why is that?" Luo Yuan was bewildered, "You took over Jining City, wiped out the White Lotus Sect. Why don't you want to fight now? Victory in battle can lead to titles and high positions. How others will envy you!"

Lin Wanrong patted him on the shoulder and said with a faint smile, "The entire landscape of our nation is now drawn into the map of war. How can the common people find joy amidst such chaos? Speak not of the rewards and titles of war, for behind every victorious general, countless soldiers have laid down their lives. War means death. When you witness numerous lives falling beside you, it feels suffocating. I despise such scenes. Every soldier who dies on the battlefield was born and nurtured by loving parents. Every inch of their being is a testament to their parents' love. No life is lesser than another. In the end, it's the innocent civilians who suffer the most, while the elites continue to live their indulgent lives. They swear to defeat the enemies without regard for their own lives, yet thousands of luxurious armors are lost amidst the enemy's dust. Think of the countless wives waiting for their husbands, children longing for their fathers. The bones of many soldiers lie by the Wuding River, yet they remain the dream men of their families back home. When you ponder on the number of families torn apart by war, you'll come to loathe it deeply."

"But the nomads are slaughtering our brethren, insulting our Great Hua. If we do not lead troops against them, won't our Great Hua be nearly annihilated?" Luo Yuan asked, not quite understanding.

"To hate war, yet have to fight, is the helplessness of life. It's the old saying, 'Rise, and the people suffer; fall, and the people suffer!'" Lin Wanrong laughed and patted his shoulder again, "Do you understand your big brother's feelings now?"

Xu Zhiqing sighed softly and said no more, while Luo Ning clung to her big brother, her heart full of tenderness.

When they disembarked from the boat, it was already evening. The sunset over Weishan Lake filled the sky, the waves reflecting a beautiful golden color.

Xu Zhiqing suddenly said, "Did we overlook something? What will the weather be like tomorrow? Will it rain? If it does, things might not go smoothly."

'This young lady is truly diligent, considering everything,' Lin Wanrong thought, nodding and smiling, "Thank you, Miss Xu, for the reminder. I have already noticed this. Tomorrow will be as bright and sunny as today, cloudless, a day that couldn't be better."

Seeing his certainty, Xu Zhiqing was puzzled, but she had her reservations about Master Lin, so she didn't inquire directly. Master Lin, smiling, explained, "In my hometown, there is a saying, 'Morning glow, wait for boiling tea; evening glow, dry the toads.' The evening glow today is so beautiful and captivating, tomorrow will undoubtedly be clear."

"Although folk sayings are passed down collectively, they are not always precise; it's better to be cautious," Miss Xu shook her head, unconvinced by Master Lin's judgment based solely on a proverb.

'This Miss Xu really is stubborn,' Master Lin thought, 'Competing with me all day. Fine, fine, I'll teach you another trick.'

"Miss Xu's considerations are comprehensive, and I admire that," he said, chuckling. "But when I say tomorrow will be clear, it is not a wild guess. It is derived from the logic of nature. Now is the time of sunset, and if Miss Xu often stays by Weishan Lake, she would know that this is when the fish rise to the water's surface. If rain were coming tomorrow, the air in the water would become thin, and the fish would sense it first. You would see ripples on the water's surface, and large numbers of fish coming up to breathe. I observed earlier, and there is no such scene now; tomorrow

should undoubtedly be a bright sunny day. Predicting the weather, there are many good methods among the people, including watching fish rise to the water, ants moving before the rain, observing cloud shapes, and so on. If Miss Xu is interested, I can open a class one day to teach this subject. The tuition fee would be only five taels of silver." Master Lin said with a playful smile, speaking convincingly, with seriousness in jest, making it hard not to believe.

Along the way, the exchanges between Miss Xu and Master Lin were most captivating. Miss Xu's knowledge was profound, and her thoughts were well-considered; she could speak eloquently on any subject, earning people's deep admiration. Master Lin was even more incredible, resembling an unbeatable iron man, knowing everything and able to summarize anything in detail. Though his words seemed to flow effortlessly, they concealed profound truths, even overshadowing Miss Xu.

It was a vivid lesson in natural education. Master Lin's knowledge came from real-life experience, and he spoke authoritatively. Luo Ning listened with great interest, feeling particularly joyful. She clung to her big brother's arm and asked in a charming voice, "Big brother, where did you learn all this? How come Ning'er has never heard of it before?"

"Self-taught, self-taught," Master Lin replied without batting an eye. "I observed clouds by day and stars by night, diligently studying for twenty years, to achieve this success. The hardship and taste of this endeavor are not something I can convey to outsiders."

Xu Zhiqing listened with concealed bitterness. What night observation of the sky and self-education? With those lustful eyes of his, always fixed on others' chests or behinds, when would he have time to look at the stars? Surely he had simply picked up others' conclusions, and yet he boasted without shame. He had no shame.

As they were talking, suddenly a horseman galloped up. Hu Bugui jumped off his war horse, and hurriedly reported, "General, I've mobilized the fishermen and villagers within eighteen miles. Everyone is deeply grateful for the general's righteousness. They've gathered spontaneously, and today alone have made more than thirty nets. We can make another thirty tonight. Three hundred thousand fish fry are also ready and will arrive tomorrow morning."

Lin Wanrong excitedly clapped his hands, "Good, very good, Brother Hu has worked hard. Now everything is ready, and we only need the east wind. Let's see what kind of big fish we can catch tomorrow."

Returning to the residence after dinner, it was already late at night. Lin Wanrong, newly married to Ning'er, was naturally inseparable from her. Recalling Luo Ning's passion the previous night, Master Lin's heart itched with desire. Fearing that Miss Xu might take over Ning'er's room as she

had done the night before, he shamelessly followed Luo Ning, wrapping his arms around her slender waist, laughing, "Ning'er dear, where have you arranged for your husband to sleep tonight?"

Luo Ning knew exactly what he had in mind. Her body felt weak, her pretty face flushed, her beautiful eyes shimmering, a bewitching charm about her. She said shyly, "Big brother, we are husband and wife, naturally sleeping together in life, buried together in death. Ning'er's room is big brother's nest."

This girl was truly tempting. Master Lin, knowing the taste, touched Luo Ning's full buttocks, feeling as smooth as if washed in milk, eliciting a fiery glare. The sensual pleasure was beyond words.

Following Ning'er into the bedroom, he smelled that familiar fragrance and thought of the previous night's erotic encounter, feeling a sudden alertness. What if Xu Zhiqing was hiding somewhere, ready to strike him down?

He looked around and searched Ning'er's bedroom but saw nothing unusual, finally feeling at ease. Miss Luo poured him a cup of hot tea, laughing, "Big brother, what are you doing?"

"I'm looking at Ning'er's bedroom. Ah, it's my first time coming in here!" he said, lying with his eyes wide open, his face not reddening in the slightest.

Luo Ning gave a shy smile and extended her little hand into his, saying, "Big brother, you must not speak like that again. This is Ning'er's boudoir, indeed, but it's also big brother's home. I am big brother's wife."

Lin Wanrong embraced her into his arms, preparing to let his hands roam, but Luo Ning stopped him, speaking softly, "Big brother, Ning'er wants to ask you something. You must not hide it from me, okay?"

"Hide from you? Why would I hide anything from you? You should know, I'm famous for my honesty and sincerity, not being good with words. Asking someone as upright as me to lie would be better off killing me," Lin Wanrong, full of righteousness, said with words that resounded like thunder.

"I don't believe it at all," Ning'er chuckled softly. "Today, in front of so many people, Ning'er only spoke like that for husband's sake. Seeing Sister Zhiqing's expression, Ning'er was truly embarrassed!"

"Embarrassed by telling the truth? Really now!" Lin Wanrong buried his head in her soft and ample bosom, gently nuzzling. "Ning'er, how do you keep this place so well-maintained, so full and luscious?"

Luo Ning let out a soft cry of reproach, both shy and proud, feeling his big mouth press against her tenderest spot through her clothing, her whole body tingling, her voice trembling, "Big brother, do not tease Ning'er, let me talk to you."

"Why not do both? It's more efficient that way, sharpening the knife doesn't stop the chopping of firewood!" Lin Wanrong held her slim waist, a surge of heat pressing against her hips, the sensation making him hum contentedly.

Miss Luo, now a newlywed, was exquisitely sensitive to his teasing, letting out a soft moan, her breath suddenly becoming hot, "Big brother, don't tease me, oh, Ning'er wants to ask you something serious, oh, you and Sister Zhiqing—"

Something serious? What could be more serious than this? Lin Wanrong was about to engage in something even more "serious" when he suddenly heard Miss Luo mention Xu Zhiqing, and he froze, "Ning'er, what's the matter with Miss Xu?"

Seeing big brother behaving more properly, Luo Ning exhaled a long breath, her face flushed with embarrassment, she whispered, "Big brother, did you do something wrong to Sister Xu?"

"Never, absolutely never! I swear to Heaven, if I've done anything to wrong Miss Xu, I'll become her ox or horse, for her to ride for a lifetime." Facing a major moral issue, Lin Wanrong was remarkably composed, responding with righteous indignation, taking such a grave oath. Having sworn, he suddenly giggled, shamelessly saying, "Ning'er, why are you asking this? Miss Xu and I are pure and innocent, without any hint of impropriety. We are whiter than snow."

Luo Ning smiled, gently tapping his nose, "Big brother, I only asked one question. Who made you answer so much? You and Sister Xu are the people I trust the most, and no one understands your innocence better than I do."

Sweating, should he feel touched or burst into laughter? Ah, what a dilemma. Lin Wanrong wanted to laugh but didn't dare; his expression was exceedingly strange, appearing to Luo Ning as though big brother was moved to tears.

She touched her big brother's face and said softly, "Big brother, even though I'm more than a decade younger than Sister Ning, we share a bond like real sisters and tell each other everything. When Ning'er was studying in the capital, I lived with her, and it was Miss Xu Zhiqing who took care of me all the time. She was like a teacher and sister to me, caring for me in every possible way. Ning'er has remembered every little thing, and I dare not forget. Now that she has come thousands of miles to help us with our family matters, big brother, what do you think Ning'er should do to repay her?"

'Repay her? You're not thinking of giving her your husband, are you? That won't do; your husband is not just anyone; he's only to be admired from afar, not to be trifled with—and if he is to be trifled with, only by a beautiful woman!'

"Eh, Ning'er, how you intend to repay her isn't going to involve me—alas, I can't bear to part with you," Master Lin said with a pained expression.

"Big brother, where is your mind wandering?" Luo Ning chuckled and blushed. "I am asking you to get along well with Sister Xu. You always talk nonsense."

"Really?" Master Lin let out a dry laugh. "You scared me to death, scared me to death. Thankfully, I still retain my innocence."

Luo Ning giggled and tapped his forehead. "No wonder Sister Xu gets angry with you for always talking nonsense. You must have had no peace on your journey."

"Speaking of Sister Xu, she's indeed a tragic person. Engaged to someone she never even met, she has lived as a widow all these years. I don't know how she's been able to endure. We've known each other for many years, and I've never seen her cry. Just for that alone, she is much stronger than your Ning'er." Luo Ning's eyes dimmed, and she wiped away a tear. "She is proud, learned, and looks down on most men. But she's been alone and miserable all these years. If you care about Ning'er, big brother, don't be angry with Sister Xu anymore. I'm torn between my dearest husband and my gracious sister, and it's hard for me to be in the middle."

Seeing Luo Ning's pitiful appearance, Master Lin's heart overflowed with love, and he quickly embraced her, saying, "Ning'er, my little darling, I am not so petty. Rest assured, I promise not to make things difficult for her. But as you've seen, it is your Sister Xu who treats me coldly; I've always greeted her with a smile."

"Mm!" Luo Ning smiled sweetly and kissed her big brother's face, reassuring him, "Don't worry, big brother, I will speak to Sister Xu as well. With your talents, I'm sure she doesn't mean to trouble you intentionally. I just worry that there might be a misunderstanding between you two."

A misunderstanding? Unfortunately, the girl doesn't believe it. Lin Wanrong laughed and slowly stroked Miss Luo's waist, whispering in her ear, "Ning'er, let's consider this matter settled, shall we?"

Miss Luo lightly nodded, her ears reddening. She knew well what her big brother meant, and thinking of their passionate love, she felt a thrilling mixture of shyness and anticipation.

"My little darling, do you remember what I told you on the boat today?" Master Lin's face wore a mischievous smile. "We'll try a new position today, called the rear-entry. The key to this position is to lift your hips, stabilize your graceful legs, penetrate like thunder, and reach full speed. It's the ultimate in pleasure, boundless comfort! Alas, who knows when I'll finally get what I wish for?"

Luo Ning's heart was about to collapse as she listened, her face flushed like red cloth, and she shyly punched him, saying, "Big brother, you love to tease people? Why don't I see you tease Qiaoqiao in the same way?"

"Little darling, Qiaoqiao has many more tricks than you," he whispered in her ear, lightly teasing. "Have you forgotten? That day in Jinling, in your boudoir, if you hadn't intentionally caused trouble, I would have flown away with Qiaoqiao. Ah, playing games in Zhang San's room and messing around in Li Si's room, and then playing with Wang Wu, it's such a good taste."

Speaking of that day's affair, Luo Ning's heart filled with a different kind of emotion. She lowered her head and gathered her courage, tremblingly saying, "You scoundrel, teasing other women in my boudoir, I won't forgive you—Husband, whatever you do to Qiaoqiao, you must do to me too. Don't hold back, Ning'er won't lose to anyone!"

Master Lin's heart blossomed with joy, "Good girl, once we are finished here, we will go to the capital to meet Qiaoqiao. You and Qiaoqiao should learn from each other, compete in bed, and see who has more tricks. Only constant interaction can bring mutual improvement. The chaos of flowers can dazzle the eyes, but only shallow grass can hide the horse's hooves. Good poetry, such good poetry!"

His words became more and more vulgar, more and more unbearable. Luo Ning's heart trembled, wanting to scold him but not daring to open her mouth. Her body was already devoid of strength. With a soft moan, she threw herself into his arms, no longer daring to raise her head. Such boudoir whispers, even a touch was full of romance. Master Lin was well versed in the ways of it, his control of the situation was masterful, unparalleled in the world.

Master Lin began to untie her clothing, reaching into her embrace, moving his hands from top to bottom. Just as he touched the two hot buttocks, preparing to unleash the dragon-claw hand, a woman's voice sounded outside the door, "Ning'er, have you rested yet?"

"It's Sister Xu!" Luo Ning hastily sat up from Big Brother's embrace, pulled up her clothes, and glanced at him in a flustered and charming way, her face emanating thick spring love.

'What's going on? The arrow is already on the string, what is Xu Zhiqing coming to do? Is she playing with me?'

Luo Ning bashfully replied, "I haven't slept yet, Sister Zhiqing, do you need something from me?"

"Ning'er, are you free? I want to talk to you. Why don't we sleep together tonight, and have a long chat?" Miss Xu's voice carried a faint weariness.

Luo Ning's heart panicked, and she looked helplessly at big brother, a hint of apology flashing in her eyes, "Big brother, Sister Zhiqing wants to talk to me. What should I do?"

'What to do? What else can be done? Is she going to invite me to sleep with them? This Xu girl is doing this on purpose!' Master Lin's teeth itched with rage, but seeing Ning'er's dilemma, his heart softened involuntarily, and he bitterly smiled, "Then you go, sigh, I'm used to sleeping alone. I wonder when I'll get what I wish for?"

Luo Ning grabbed his hand, gave a charming smile, and her face flushed. She leaned close to his ear and whispered in an almost inaudible voice, "Big brother, if Qiaoqiao is willing, Ning'er is willing too, but it can only be Qiaoqiao alone, um—" She darted out the door like a bird, almost running into Miss Xu.

Master Lin, a certain person, was momentarily stunned before bursting into great joy, "Ning'er, Ning'er, it's not just Qiaoqiao; there's also Eldest Miss, Second Miss, are you willing?"

"Shameless!" Miss Xu's voice came from outside the door; it was unclear what she had heard.

'You disrupted my marital life, a grave sin indeed, and you even dare to call me shameless? I defy you, I defy, I defy, defy, defy!' Master Lin raised his middle finger and jabbed it angrily, his face filled with a vulgar smile.

After spending the night in Luo Ning's boudoir, enveloped by the soft silk quilt as delicate as Ning'er's tender skin, Master Lin was plagued by the vexation of thinking about how the cooked duck had been snatched away. He spent a sleepless night.

On the second day, he got out of bed at the fourth watch of the night. Xu Zhiqing and Luo Ning were still silent, and he did not wake them. He left the room alone and had not yet reached the lakeside when he heard the noisy, bustling voices ahead. As he drew near to see clearly, he was instantly dumbstruck!

Chapter 384 The Fish Leaps Through the Dragon's Gate

Both banks of the lake were densely packed with people, a massive throng that stretched as far as the eye could see. A dark mass of old and young, men and women, craning their necks to look into the lake, as if expecting to find some treasure.

"What's all this commotion?" Master Lin was taken aback and grabbed an old man, asking, "Elder, why have so many people gathered here so early in the morning, before the sky has even brightened?"

"You must be an outsider, young man," the old man whispered mysteriously after looking around. "Let me tell you, something big has happened. Incredibly big—silver has grown in our Weishan Lake! I've heard there are several million taels of it. The Imperial Court has sent a high official here to fish out the silver. Just think, several million taels of silver—what would that look like? Piled up, it might be even higher than Mount Tai? Our Weishan Lake truly has produced a treasure. We villagers, who might not see so much silver in ten lifetimes, all got up in the middle of the night to come and watch how the high official of the court is going to fish it out. Who knows, maybe after they haul in their nets, we could try our luck fishing in the lake too!"

Silver grown in Weishan Lake? Several million taels? Master Lin was covered in a cold sweat. How could rumors spread like this? This was clear evidence. Yesterday, he had only let Luo Yuan spread the word that the court's lost official silver had been found in Weishan Lake. He had not expected that overnight, it would turn into this. People's words were indeed to be feared, and Master Lin finally realized it.

"Big brother, big brother—" Luo Yuan came running, breathless, his hair disheveled and eyes bloodshot, showing clearly that he had not slept well the previous night.

"Little Luo, what's happening here? How did so many people suddenly arrive?" Lin Wanrong pointed at the crowd around them, shaking his head in disbelief.

Luo Yuan forced a bitter smile, "Big brother, we underestimated the villagers' ability to create stories. Yesterday, I deliberately spread the word that the official silver was found. Who would have thought that after patrolling the lake all night, I'd wake up to hear all kinds of different versions? Some say silver grows in Weishan Lake, others say treasures are buried underwater, and still others say the Dragon Palace is in our lake. In any case, all sorts of wild legends, but the fact that Weishan Lake is about to produce great treasures is true. This is a once-in-a-thousand-year event! See, the villagers came early, bringing their families to watch the excitement."

Salute to the great masses! Master Lin was left speechless by Luo Yuan's words. He had planned and calculated, yet overlooked the people's ability to distort facts, leading to this miraculous spectacle of thousands coming to watch the silver being fished out. With this feat, he, Master Lin, would go down in history as unmatched.

Fishing for silver in front of tens of thousands of people—if he found some, it would be fine, but if not, what would happen then? What rumors would tens of thousands of people create? It would be better for him, Master Lin, to simply find a block of tofu and smash his head against it, for he could not bear the shame.

Was this not seeking trouble? Master Lin sighed and shook his head, patting Little Luo on the shoulder, "Little Luo, your big brother really shot himself in the foot this time. With tens of thousands watching, the pressure is just too damn high!"

Luo Yuan's eyes were red, "Big brother, I never thought it would turn into this. It's my fault for dragging you into it."

Lin Wanrong repeatedly waved his hand, "Little Luo, this has nothing to do with you; it is I, your big brother, who has miscalculated. Damn it, I understand now. A hundred schemes can't defeat ten mouths."

A soft laugh burst out behind him. Lin Wanrong turned around in haste, only to see Xu Zhiqing, standing with Luo Ning behind the two of them. The giggle just now was Xu Zhiqing's, undoubtedly mocking Master Lin's blunder.

"Ning'er, how did you get up? It's not time yet; you should sleep a bit more!" Lin Wanrong said, heart aching at the sight of Luo Ning's little face frozen red.

"Big brother, Sister Xu and I got up at the third watch. We saw you sleeping soundly and didn't wake you; the two of us went out first," Luo Ning gently said.

Lin Wanrong's face turned red, 'So these two girls got up earlier than me, and here I thought they hadn't woken up yet!' He laughed, "I never expected that such a small thing would draw so many villagers to support me. I'm truly flattered, it adds luster to my presence."

Luo Ning looked at him sympathetically and said softly, "Big brother, don't put too much pressure on yourself. Whether this succeeds or not, Little Yuan, Father, Sister Xu, and I will always support you."

"Yes, big brother, we all support you!" Luo Yuan firmly said. Xu Zhiqing glanced at him and said nothing.

Lin Wanrong gave a bitter smile and asked Luo Yuan, "Little Luo, did you discover anything when patrolling the lake last night? With such a commotion, those rascals better have shown themselves, or it would be a waste of my efforts!"

Luo Yuan nodded excitedly, "Big brother, you are a genius. During the first watch, when we were inspecting the lake's surface, we found some people sneaking around in a small boat among the reeds. We surrounded them, captured two, but two others escaped by diving."

"Really?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed joyfully, "Damn it, I knew I wasn't so unlucky! Where are those bastards? I'll interrogate them myself!"

"Big brother," Luo Ning chided softly, looking at him, "Don't use foul language; Sister Xu is here!"

Xu Zhiqing shook her head, "I won't mind. I never expected any kind words from some crude people."

Miss Xu's words hit a nerve, and Master Lin cheekily retorted, "Miss Xu is right; I am indeed 'crude,' too bad you can't taste it!" He leered at her, and she glared back, unable to find fault with her own words. Lin Wanrong then said, "Little Luo, come, let's go look at those young rabbits!"

The two captives, grabbed by Luo Yuan, were tied up on a small boat on the lake. When Lin Wanrong arrived, the two were tied together, sound asleep. One was a delicate-skinned chubby man, the other as thin as a monkey, clearly no good men.

Feeling irritated after getting up early, Lin Wanrong was annoyed seeing them sleep so soundly. He waved his hand, "Come, pour some water on this fat pig and skinny monkey."

Soldiers quickly brought a wooden bucket, scooping water from the lake and dousing the two men. The chubby man and the skinny monkey simultaneously shivered, letting out a strange cry, waking up freezing. They saw a healthy young man standing before them, his face with a cold smile, emanating a chilling aura, filled with murderous intent.

"You, who are you?" The chubby man stammered, "Why did you capture us? We are fishermen on Weishan Lake!"

"Fishermen?" Lin Wanrong sneered coldly and bellowed, "Come on, chop off his hands for me!"

Two soldiers stepped forward, pinning the chubby man down, and drew their steel blades, gesturing menacingly. The chubby man turned pale with fright, stammering, "Si-Sir, I am really a fisherman, you cannot kill the innocent!"

"Fisherman?!" Lin Wanrong roared in anger, "Look at those chubby hands of yours, soft and tender without a single callus, and you dare call yourself a fisherman? If you fell into the lake, you'd sink like a stone, not even buoyant enough to float a bubble. You, a fisherman? Come on, chop off his claws, let him pretend in front of me!"

"No, Sir. I'm guilty, I'm guilty! I'm not a fisherman, I'm a local farmer." The chubby man quickly kowtowed, "Last night, I heard that there was silver in the lake, and I was overcome with greed. I thought I'd take a look under cover of darkness, but I didn't expect to be caught by you fine gentlemen. I deserve to die, I deserve to die!" A cunning gleam flashed in the chubby man's eyes as he kowtowed in apparent terror.

Lin Wanrong snorted and turned to the thin man, "What about you, are you a fisherman too?"

"Sir, I'm the same as the shopkeeper here. I was also overcome by greed and came to have a look, that's all. Please, Sir, forgive us, forgive us!" The thin man also desperately kowtowed.

Lin Wanrong's mouth twisted into a cold smile as he chillingly said, "You two, lift your heads and look at me."

The chubby man and thin man quickly looked up, only to see a cold gleam in this man's eyes, as if he could see right through their thoughts. Frightened, they quickly lowered their heads again.

"Do you know who I am?" the official asked, his voice devoid of emotion, revealing nothing of his thoughts.

"We don't know, we don't know!" They both shook their heads quickly.

"You don't know? Well, that's good. Let me introduce myself." Lin Wanrong spoke calmly, "My name is Lin San, and last year I suppressed the White Lotus Cult here on Weishan Lake. I personally beheaded the White Lotus's bravest warrior and captured the rebel king Lu Kanli. I conquered Jining City. The number of lives I've taken is not less than ten thousand, maybe eight thousand." The two listened, hearts pounding with fear, sweat pouring down their foreheads, their legs trembling.

"I tell you this, not for any particular reason, but just to make sure you remember my name, so you can complain to King Yama." [TL: King of the underworld] Lin Wanrong chuckled, casually waving his hand, "Alright, time's up. Come on, drag this fatso and skinny one out, chop them down!"

"You can't, you can't, Sir! How can you just kill people at will? I will report you!" Both men shouted in unison.

"Report me?!" Lin Wanrong slammed the table, "I command tens of thousands of soldiers, killing two people is like squashing ants. What's the big deal? Behead them, behead them!"

The chubby man paled, "Sir, spare me, spare me!"

Lin Wanrong scoffed, "Spare you? Just because you say 'spare me,' I should spare you? You must give me a reason that I can use to convince myself, right?"

"Sir, actually, we were commanded to—" The chubby man was about to speak, but seeing the thin man's eyes widen, he instantly fell silent, his voice frozen in terror.

"Chop this monkey-like fellow for me!" Lin Wanrong stood up with a swish, barking in anger. Two soldiers immediately dragged the thin man away. Not long after, a chilling scream was heard, and the chubby man fell to the ground in fright.

"It's your turn now!" Master Lin said indifferently.

"Mercy, sir, mercy! I confess everything! I was instructed by others to come here and investigate the situation."

"Instructed by whom? Investigate what?" Lin Wanrong coldly snorted.

"I am the scribe of the Zhuping County government in Jining Prefecture. Last night, I was ordered by my lord to come and inspect the condition of Weishan Lake's surface. My lord instructed me to specifically observe the area forty to fifty li south of Jining City for any abnormalities. That's all I know, please, sir, spare me, spare me!" he pleaded.

"Zhuping County government?" Lin Wanrong huffed, stepping out of the cabin. Luo Yuan was standing at the doorway, grinning and giving him a thumbs-up. "Big brother, you're amazing! In just a few moments, you frightened that youngster out of his wits!"

Lin Wanrong laughed, "Intimidating people is easy; all it takes is putting on a stern face. Where's that skinny monkey? Have him lead the way and order Hu Bugui to gather the troops. We must quickly raid the Zhuping County government. Perhaps, we might even fish out a big catch."

"Understood!" Luo Yuan was about to rush off, full of enthusiasm, but suddenly stopped and turned back. "Big brother, the fat man mentioned that the Zhuping County government instructed him to pay special attention to the water area within forty to fifty li. Could the silver be hidden within that range?"

Lin Wanrong thought for a moment and smiled, "No matter, our search range includes sixty li anyway. We'll just pay closer attention when we search the forty to fifty li range."

Once off the ship, Luo Ning and Xu Zhiqing were awaiting him. Ning'er excitedly said, "Big brother, I heard from Little Yuan that we've made some progress in our investigation, haven't we?"

Lin Wanrong, smiling, rubbed his temple, "I suppose so, though it's of little value. The only gain is knowing the bandits' hideout near Jining. I've ordered Hu Bugui to apprehend them. If we can catch a big fish and find the location of the hidden silver, that would be best. But I suspect the chances are slim. These rogues are as slippery as eels. Since the scribe from the government didn't return last night, they might have sensed danger and relocated. So, we must still rely on ourselves."

Luo Ning flashed a sweet smile at him, "Ning'er believes in big brother. You can definitely do it." She handed him a small basket, "Big brother, have breakfast! Sister Xu and I made this ourselves this morning. It's still warm!"

Breakfast made by Miss Xu? How could he accept such a favor? Master Lin laughed heartily and bowed slightly to Miss Xu, "Miss Xu, you are too kind. I'm undeserving."

"If you feel undeserving, then don't eat it, pretending to be polite!" Xu Zhiqing huffed. Yet her attitude had improved significantly compared to the previous day; she even made pastries for Master Lin. Who knew what Ning'er had said to her?

As the sky began to lighten, the curious crowd along the shores grew, packing the banks to bursting.

Having finished breakfast, Master Lin stood up and patted his round belly. Seeing the scene before him, he was taken aback. Human curiosity truly knew no bounds. Thankfully, troops had been deployed the previous night to guard both sides of the lake. Otherwise, the crowd alone would have created chaos on Weishan Lake. Master Lin wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, feeling fortunate.

Luo Yuan returned after delivering the orders, followed by the old boatman from the day before and several hundred sturdy men.

"Sir!" The old boatman rushed over, clasping his fists, "This humble old man has fulfilled his duty. From yesterday morning to this dawn, we have assembled sixty nets, each four miles long, a total of two hundred and forty miles! The three hundred thousand fish fry have also arrived, and with a command from you, Sir, we can release them into the lake. Thousands of strong fishermen along the shores are waiting for your summons."

"Excellent!" Master Lin exclaimed joyfully, grabbing the old man's hand, "Uncle, have everyone spread the sixty nets, some placed sixty miles out on the lake surface, each pulled by separate small boats. The rest should be placed near the shore and pulled from both sides. Maintain several yards' distance between each net and make sure they don't spread too far apart. One thing to remember, you must encompass the entire sixty-mile stretch of water within the nets!"

"No problem, we have plenty of nets and manpower!" The old man proudly laughed, "But this old fellow doesn't understand why we need so many nets now, during early spring. There aren't many fish in the lake, as we caught them all last winter. What will these nets catch?"

"Last year's fish are gone, but we haven't caught this year's fish yet!" Master Lin smiled mysteriously, "Stocking fish, then fishing, Uncle, you mentioned it yourself, don't you remember?"

"Stocking fish, then fishing? Oh, are you talking about the new fish fry? But Sir, why release them only to catch them again? Won't that cut off our harvest?" The old man asked, puzzled.

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, "Don't worry, Uncle, I'm not going to catch the fish fry. I'm just borrowing them for a use, to let them dance."

The old man didn't understand, but the kind official had solved the fishermen's urgent problem and didn't seem to be a bad person, so he was reassured.

"Uncle, what would it look like if these three hundred thousand fish fry were released into this sixty-mile stretch of water?" Xu Zhiqing suddenly asked, her brows slightly furrowed, as if pondering something.

The old man smiled and said, "The entire Weishan Lake is several hundred miles wide, and three hundred thousand fish fry would be enough. If they are only in this sixty-mile area, once released, there will be a constant movement of fish heads, fish chasing fish, fish driving fish. With one pull of the net, you could see the scene of fish racing."

Xu Zhiqing silently nodded, seeming to understand a little but still uncertain, just like Lin San, who was shameless but also clever. Which one was the real him? She couldn't figure it out.

The bright sun slowly rose from the water's surface, hanging high in the sky, its soft rays warming everyone's face and body. This perfectly confirmed Lin San's prediction yesterday that today would be a sunny day, clear and cloudless.

Usually calm Weishan Lake was bustling, extraordinarily lively. Starting from the south gate of Jining City, within the sixty-mile stretch of water, nearly seven or eight hundred small boats were assembled, with over two hundred miles of fishing nets, and thousands of excited, robust fishermen, looking as though they were celebrating a festival. The scene was even more bustling than the end-of-autumn net fishing on Weishan Lake.

The fish fry had already been transported by small boats, and high wooden boxes were set up on the boats, filled with water and teeming with fish fry, all growing and wriggling together, a lively

spectacle. Hundreds of fish fry boats were stationed in the center of the sixty-mile stretch, waiting for Master Lin's command to release them into the lake.

Lin Wanrong stood quietly at the bow of the boat, gazing at the bustling boats and people around him, a surreal feeling suddenly rising in his heart. 'Such a lively scene, was it really created by me? If I succeed this time, I would be a genius among geniuses, but if I fail, the Luo Min family will be ruined, and I'll regret it for the rest of my life.' The pressure was enormous.

He stood there motionless, his heart thrilled to the extreme, then suddenly a feeling of calm washed over him. The lively lake seemed to vanish before his eyes, and he heard nothing but his own heartbeat. Was this what it felt like when pressure reached its peak? The feeling that even his body did not exist? He smiled bitterly, a look no one could see on his face.

Staring at her big brother's mountain-like back, Luo Ning seemed to see the heavy burden he bore, all held up by this lone figure. His usual jesting and laughter seemed joyful, but he never spoke of his sorrows, and who could understand the heaviness in his heart?

"Big brother—" Luo Ning murmured, her eyes filled with tears, a feeling of deep emotion and happiness in her heart.

Xu Zhiqing stared at his figure, thinking that if there were one person in this world she could not see through, it was this Lin San. She clenched her little fists and softly said, "Ning'er, let him have some quiet. At this time, words are useless. Only he can help himself!"

Lin Wanrong slowly raised his hand, and the bustling lake suddenly fell quiet. The breath of over a thousand people synchronized. Luo Ning was so anxious that she couldn't even feel her heartbeat, her eyes fixed on her big brother's back.

"Don't be nervous, don't be nervous!" Xu Zhiqing told herself over and over, but her palms were sweating uncontrollably.

Lin Wanrong's arm was held aloft for a long time, and then he suddenly slammed it down. Shouts rang out across the lake:

"Release the fish!"

"Release the fish!"

"Release the fish!"

More than a hundred boatmen on their boats pulled the gates, wooden troughs opened, water poured out, carrying countless fish fry into the water with a splash. Crowds of dark fish heads gathered together, then dispersed, sinking into the lake, disappearing without a trace.

Three hundred thousand fish fry were released in the blink of an eye. The lake that had just been filled with playful fish was calm again in an instant, smooth and undisturbed, as if nothing had ever happened.

After a short while, Lin Wanrong still had not moved, and Luo Yuan couldn't help but ask softly, "Why hasn't big brother given the command?"

Miss Xu shook her head and said, "We must wait a little longer for these three hundred thousand fish fry to scatter and swim within the sixty-mile area. It takes time."

Luo Yuan nodded, understanding that there was much more to this plan, wondering how his big brother and Sister Xu had thought of so much.

The lake was silent, fish occasionally leaping and slapping the surface, all eyes were on Lin Wanrong, waiting for his next command.

Half an hour passed, and Lin Wanrong nodded to the soldiers at the stern of the boat, "Light the fireworks!"

Two dazzling fireworks shot into the sky, popping twice in the air, leaving two trails of brilliant colors. The over a thousand robust men gathered around the lake and on the water saw the fireworks rise, their spirits lifted, shouting in unison:

"Raise the nets—"

"Raise the nets!"

"Raise the nets!"

The long fishing nets were slowly drawn, shaken straight, dropped into the water, stirring up waves after waves. Fishermen carried the thick ropes on their shoulders, shouting in unison, slowly pulling them. Such a grand scene was rare in a hundred years, and the people along both shores of the lake watched with excitement, the crowd's voices roaring like a festive celebration.

More than sixty fishing nets, resembling a moving dike, enclosed sixty miles of the water surface, drawing them slowly, closing in.

Lin Wanrong stood motionless in the center of the lake. The distant, robust, and heroic cries of the fishermen filled him with joy, as if he had returned to his homeland. He couldn't help but join in the shouting.

"What is big brother doing?" Ning'er asked with a puzzled frown.

"Who knows what he's up to, always acting so strange." Miss Xu shook her head and hummed softly. Both their eyes were fixed on Lin Wanrong when suddenly they heard Luo Yuan exclaim, "Quick, look, what is that?"

Following Luo Yuan's direction, they saw a massive school of fish heads emerging around their small boat, a sight without end, rapidly moving toward the lake's center. Even further away, a more massive school of fish was coming from all directions, converging like a moving circle.

"The fish fry have come back! The surrounding nets have worked. The newly released fish fry have nowhere to go but to turn back to the lake's center," Xu Zhiqing observed closely, and sighed, "The nets are still far away; this is just the beginning. The real spectacle will be when it's time to gather the nets."

"I get it. Big brother intentionally released so many fish fry, then drove them back, making them swim to the lake's center," Luo Ning clapped her little hands, a sweet smile on her face. "Big brother is so clever."

Xu Zhiqing playfully pinched her small face, laughing, "Little girl, whether one is clever or not is proven by results, not just words. If we can't find the silver, even releasing three hundred thousand pufferfish would be useless."

Hearing Sister Xu's teasing, Ning'er blushed, holding Xu Zhiqing's hand, firmly saying, "That won't happen. I know big brother better than anyone. He would never do something without assurance. Since he has done this, there must be a reason. Sister Xu, you did agree to big brother's terms. If you lose, you must keep your promise." Luo Ning giggled, her face revealing a mischievous look. She didn't know what big brother wanted Sister Xu to do, but someone as serious as him wouldn't do anything unethical.

The speaker was unintentional, but the listener was intentional. Xu Zhiqing's heart skipped a beat, and that detestable voice seemed to echo in her ears again. Miss Xu's face was tinged with a faint blush, looking at Luo Ning's pure and innocent face, she sighed softly, unable to utter a word.

With the nets' gradual advancement, the space for the fish fry to move grew narrower, countless fish leaping out of the water from all sides, some over a foot high, like layers of silver waves on the lake's surface, creating a beautiful and magnificent scene.

According to Lin Wanrong's plan, the nets were to be pulled from both sides, meeting on the lake's surface. Since one side was downwind and the other upwind, the meeting point should be forty miles from the shore, precisely the location the fat man had instructed, an excellent place for careful investigation.

But things do not always go as one wishes, and with a stretch of more than sixty miles of water and the slow progress of dragging heavy fishing nets, the slowness of the operation could only be imagined. Fortunately, these were fishermen of Weishan Lake, strong and experienced in casting nets and fishing, and by rotating shifts, this plan was smoothly executed.

Two hours later, the fishermen were already exhausted, and the nets around them could finally be slowly closed. They looked at each other from north to south, still separated by dozens of miles. The lake's surface was already churning, countless fish fry leaping forward, rising and falling in waves, as if the lake had grown a foot higher.

The people on both sides of the lake, watching this spectacle, were dazzled and excited. Year after year, they had watched fishing, but never had they seen the water surface so full of fish; truly a once-in-a-century sight. But hadn't the official from the court said he was going to fish for silver? How come the fish were almost all caught, yet not a single piece of silver had appeared?

Sweat beads rolled down Master Lin's forehead, and his cracked lips were almost bitten to bleeding, his anxiety indescribable. Nearly ninety percent of the sixty-mile lake surface had been searched, yet everything remained calm, with no abnormalities. Was his speculation wrong? Was the silver not in the lake? Or was his method of herding fish simply not effective?

He had been standing at the bow for two hours, his legs already numb, and under constant high pressure. Even though his determination was unwavering, he felt a sense of mental and physical exhaustion. If he failed, Ning'er's whole family would be doomed; he couldn't afford to lose! He sighed, and suddenly felt a warm little hand grasp his own. Looking back, he saw Miss Luo standing beside him, her eyes filled with firmness and unparalleled tenderness. "Big brother, I believe in you. You will succeed."

Miss Xu was standing next to Luo Ning, glancing at him, her lips quivering a few times, her face flushed with embarrassment. "You, you can rest assured, even if you do not succeed, that condition, I, I will fulfill it for you." She whimpered, quickly turning her head away, a charming pink blush rising on her snow-white neck.

"Heavens! Sister Xu, big brother, look, look, the fish are leaping over the dragon gate, they're leaping over the dragon gate!" Luo Yuan's cry of astonishment broke everyone's thoughts.

Everyone looked up and saw a strange sight on the lake. The originally smooth lake surface had been encircled by countless fish fry into a large circle with a diameter of several tens of feet. The fish fry, once they reached here, seemed to hit a wall, one after another leaping several feet high, drawing a perfect arc in the air before gently falling back into the water.

Countless fish were rising and falling, soaring into the sky, building a hundred-foot-square bowl with their bodies on the lake surface, just like the legendary fish leaping over the dragon gate.

Official Lin suddenly jumped up, not caring who was beside him, and fiercely kissed her on the face, waving his fists and shouting, "I've found it, I've found it!"

Chapter 385 Found It

"What are you doing?" Miss Xu fiercely pushed him away, her pretty face blushing a charming pink, her eyes filled with a faint anger, glaring at him.

Lin Wanrong, in his triumph, was caught off guard by her push and almost fell into the water. Fortunately, Luo Yuan's quick reaction saved him. Seeing Xu Zhiqing's face filled with anger, Luo Ning quickly explained, "Sister Xu, big brother didn't do it on purpose. He was just too excited and forgot himself for a moment. Please don't blame him."

"Yes, yes, Miss Xu, please don't misunderstand. I simply couldn't help myself." Lin Wanrong chuckled, smacking his lips, the lingering fragrance still present on his lips. He recalled the soft, warm, and delicate touch of her just moments ago, thinking that this Miss Xu really was captivating.

Xu Zhiqing, embarrassed, turned her head away, gritting her teeth, "Shameless person, I can't be bothered to talk to you."

Luo Ning also glared at her big brother, seeing his joyful expression, and quickly changed the subject, "Big brother, what did you just say? Have you found the silver?"

"Of course." Gazing at the bustling scene before him, Master Lin's face was radiant, his earlier dejected mood swept away. He waved at Luo Yuan, "Little Luo, see that big circle? Have our men place buoys within this span of a few yards."

Luo Yuan was immediately excited, loudly asking, "Big brother, do you mean the silver is right beneath this dragon gate?"

Lin Wanrong nodded with a smile, "Eight or nine times out of ten, that's the case."

Luo Yuan joyfully accepted the command, and dozens of small boats rushed over, surrounding the large circle formed by the leaping fish, placing buoys. The fish flopping and landing on the boats created a peculiar sight. As the fishing nets drew closer, more and more fish gathered around the circle, jumping higher and higher, as if constructing a shimmering dragon gate on the lake surface. The onlookers were stunned, some of the devout even falling to their knees, shouting, "The fish leap through the dragon gate, the Dragon reveals his spirit!"

"You say the silver is beneath this dragon gate?" Miss Xu finally couldn't help but ask, the corner of her mouth lifting in a faint smile.

"What, Miss Xu, do you have a different opinion? Look, this is the fish leaping through the dragon gate, a sight rarely seen in a thousand years!" Master Lin looked enthusiastic.

Xu Zhiqing's face turned utterly serious, "Lin San, don't blame me for not warning you. Do you know how much space three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver takes up?"

"I know, I know, of course, I know." Lin Wanrong chuckled, "A truckload can carry it away. I know this better than you."

"Then you're so confident?" Seeing Lin Wanrong's full confidence, Miss Xu couldn't help but become puzzled, wondering if she was wrong in her doubts. And what was this 'truck' thing he was talking about?

"I don't have a hundred percent certainty, but there's an eighty percent chance." Lin Wanrong smiled slightly, "Miss Xu, I admire your patience and attention to detail, but don't be too rigid in your thinking. Connect all the information together. Three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver don't take up much space. How would you bury it in the lake to be safe? Forty boats to transport the silver, don't you think the target is too big? Use your brain, use it more!"

Master Lin slapped his temple lightly, looking smug, which angered Miss Xu enough to snort, no longer wanting to talk to him, pondering his words in her heart instead.

Upon Luo Yuan and his men completely lowering the buoy, Lin Wanrong waved his hand, and the hundreds of skilled underwater divers who had already gathered rowed over in small boats. Lin Wanrong was in high spirits; he gleefully ripped off his long robe, leaving only his tight-fitting clothes, exposing his robust upper body. Miss Xu, startled, exclaimed, "Ah!" and quickly turned her head away, angrily asking, "What are you doing?"

"What else can I be doing? I'm going swimming in the lake," Lin Wanrong replied, rubbing his arms a few times to get the blood flowing, and said with great enthusiasm.

Although Luo Ning knew that it was quite inappropriate for her husband to undress in broad daylight, especially in front of Miss Xu, she understood his excitement. Blushing slightly, she took Lin Wanrong's arm and said softly, "Big brother, you're going into the lake too? With so many skilled swimmers here, let them handle it!"

Lin Wanrong laughed and patted her little hand, "Don't worry, Ning'er. You should know that I'm known as 'Two Guns on Land, A Dragon in the Water.' It's not an undeserved reputation. Wait here, and I'll be back soon."

The hundreds of skilled divers were assembled, and although it was early spring and somewhat chilly, these were fishermen from Weishan Lake, well-accustomed to the water and strong of body. The weather was no issue to them. Seeing their superior undress and preparing to dive with them, they were even more excited.

Lin Wanrong assessed the position of the buoys and arranged the hundreds of men in a large circle around them. With a wave of his hand, they all leapt in together, sending ripples across the surface of the water, which quickly returned to calm.

Seeing her big brother go underwater, Luo Ning waited anxiously, biting her silver teeth and whispering, "Why isn't big brother coming up? It's killing me!"

Once Lin Wanrong had entered the water, Miss Xu returned to normal and laughed, "Ning'er, you're too anxious. He just went down; he can't come back up so quickly. Don't worry, his thick skin won't let him freeze."

Luo Ning's face turned red, and she took Miss Xu's hand, complaining, "Sister Zhiqing, you're making fun of me too. I'm worried that big brother won't find the silver, and it makes me feel bad."

Miss Xu sighed softly, "I also predicted that he might be wrong. But he spoke with such confidence that it made me hesitate. Could the silver really be buried here?"

Luo Yuan chimed in, "Miss Xu, I believe my big brother. Otherwise, why would he come up with a strategy to fish for silver, only to create a spectacle of fish leaping through the dragon's gate?" Luo Ning nodded in agreement, apparently not understanding the trick. Miss Xu thought for a long time, watching countless small boats drifting in the distance, her eyes brightened, her face turned a shade redder, and she murmured, "Am I really going to lose? This shameless guy, he had it planned all along!"

Seeing the puzzled looks on Luo Yuan and his sister, Miss Xu couldn't help but lower her head, shyly saying, "I didn't understand the reasoning behind the fish leaping through the dragon's gate either. But seeing all that he's done, along with his hints, I think I've guessed some of it. Luo Yuan, tell me, how much space would three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver take up if it were on land?"

Luo Yuan thought carefully, smiling, "I've never seen so much silver, but since those thieves transported dozens of boats, it would naturally take up the space of dozens of boats."

Miss Xu shook her head gently, "Space for several dozen ships? That's what you naturally think. But according to the specific gravity of pure silver, three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver, if cast into one piece, would roughly take up an area the size of three Luo Yuans standing together."

Luo Ning spoke up, "Sister Zhiqing, you can't calculate it that way. This silver was all cast into ingots, taking up at least twice as much space, if not more. If placed together, the length, width, and height should each be about ten feet."

"So Ning'er has also studied this." Miss Xu lightly tapped Ning'er's nose, "Little Ning'er is really smart. What you said is right; this official silver should be about ten feet cubed. But why would they use forty ships to transport ten feet cubed of silver? Don't you find that strange?"

This question was one that her big brother had asked earlier, and it had genuinely puzzled Miss Luo. Ning'er laughed, "Sister Zhiqing, you are becoming more and more like big brother, always liking to pose riddles."

"Why mention him out of the blue?" Miss Xu's face flushed, as if with rouge, "We're discussing our own matters, and yet you can't forget him for a moment. The thieves using forty ships to transport the silver, could it all be a bluff? I don't think so. Transporting silver with forty ships would be too conspicuous and easily detected. They have no need to take that risk."

"Yes," Luo Ning frowned, snorting, "Big brother must know, but he just won't tell us. It's infuriating!"

He's never far from her thoughts, the shameless man. Was this what it was like to be married? Miss Xu was slightly taken aback for a moment, and then she heard Luo Ning whisper in her ear, "Sister Xu, what is the reason? Tell Ning'er quickly."

"If you don't mention that hateful man again, I'll tell you," Miss Xu said with a smile.

Luo Ning giggled, lightly covering her mouth, "Sister says not to mention him, but she keeps talking about him herself. You're really putting Ning'er in a difficult spot."

This girl had a sharp tongue, becoming more and more like that shameless person. Xu Zhiqing's face warmed slightly, and she asked, "Ning'er, if you were the thief, and you hid the silver in Weishan Lake, only taking up a ten-foot cube, would you feel at ease?"

Luo Yuan, who had been listening for a long time, finally found a chance to jump in, "Not at ease, definitely not at ease. That's three hundred and fifty thousand taels of silver! If it were washed away by the water, it would all be gone. If you ask me, it would be best to pile the silver into a small hill and bury it. That would be reassuring."

"Luo Yuan is absolutely right," Xu Zhiqing praised with a smile, "It must be buried as a small hill, standing firmly in the water. That's the only way it would be safe. If I'm not mistaken, those forty ships, they're not just for transporting the silver. I'm afraid something else was also filled inside."

Fill? Luo Ning clapped her hands, excitedly saying, "That's it, that's it! What big brother said earlier must mean this. By increasing the size and height of the silver, it can resist the impact of the water flow, making it safer and more reassuring. Sister Zhiqing, you are so smart!"

'That shameless man is much smarter than me,' Miss Xu shook her head and laughed, "Forty boats carrying silver, if my predictions are right, the silver must have been supplemented with large quantities of tin or copper blocks. This way, the space occupied under the water would be larger, ensuring stability. If estimated, the length and width must be around fifty to sixty feet square, and the height about twenty feet, perfectly matching the area of 'Fish Leaping over Dragon Gate.' Lin San released three hundred thousand fish fry to increase the density of fish in these waters. By casting nets to catch the fish from all sides, they forced the fish fry to approach the lake center. The young fish hurriedly swam from all directions and met the mountain of silver, momentarily blocked and unable to pass. Those in deeper waters had to squeeze into shallower waters, and those in shallow water had to jump up. The higher the fish density, the more crowded this place became. Driven to the wall, even rabbits will bite, so when crowded to a certain degree, with pursuers from behind and the path forward completely blocked, the phenomenon of 'Fish Leaping over Dragon Gate,' which is rarely seen in a century, was artificially created."

Luo Yuan uttered a long "Oh," laughing, "Big brother is really talented to think of such a method. I admire him greatly. But wait – something's not right." He seemed to remember something and continued, "Big brother mentioned that the fishing nets were weighted with tin, which won't sink to the lake's bottom. Why didn't the fish fry swim through the bottom of the nets?"

Xu Zhiqing nodded, "Little Yuan is right; this is what confuses me too. But in practice, very few fry escape the nets. That's quite strange."

The boatman rowing beside them burst into laughter, "Young Master, two Young Ladies, you must never have fished before. If you are correct, we would never catch any fish in Weishan Lake. No fishing net can completely sink to the bottom; wouldn't all the fish run away?"

Miss Xu's face turned red, and she humbly asked, "Boatman, can you explain how this works to us?"

The boatman smiled, "The principle is quite simple. We, common folks, have a saying called 'the alert cat, the dazed fish!' A cat's eyes change three times a day, sometimes big, sometimes small, but they see clearly day or night – this is the alert cat."

"What does 'the dazed fish' mean?" Luo Yuan asked.

"The dazed fish is the opposite of the alert cat. Different fish live in different waters; some in deep, some in shallow. Sea fish mostly live in deep waters, but those in Weishan Lake mostly prefer shallow, with a few in deep. When you cast a net, those accustomed to shallow waters seldom dive deeper; they swim forward and right into the net holes. Because they don't adapt, we can catch them. This is the dazed fish. Today, when three hundred thousand fish fry were released all at once, the lake became crowded. Some fish fry swam to deeper waters but were uncomfortable, so they hurriedly squeezed up, another reason for the group of fish leaping out of the water."

Luo Yuan realized, "The alert cat, the dazed fish – so that's what it means, quite dazed indeed! Seeing big brother eat, drink, play, and fool around without reading much, where does he get all this knowledge?"

"How do you know big brother doesn't read?" Luo Ning huffed, defending her own husband, "In my opinion, big brother has profound insights, enabling him to plan ahead everywhere."

Miss Xu remained silent for a moment, then sighed, "It seems I have been viewing the world from a narrow perspective. I thought that having learned so much from books, I knew everything, but I was actually far from the truth. Truly useful knowledge is accumulated through life experience, and on this point, I am indeed not equal to Lin San."

She and Lin San were two distinct individuals; one was a theoretician, and the other a pragmatist. After several confrontations with neither side gaining the upper hand, such a sentiment was not surprising.

The three were talking when suddenly, bubbles erupted on the distant lake surface, and one after another, heads emerged. These were the hundred or so strong men who had gone underwater earlier, their faces flushed red, panting heavily, water dripping from their hair.

"Where's big brother?" Luo Ning searched for a while but didn't see Lin Wanrong's figure. Growing anxious, she suddenly felt a gentle tremor beneath the small boat, and she let out a sharp scream.

Miss Xu, quick-eyed and nimble-footed, extended her small foot, and her embroidered shoe stepped on a pair of large hands gripping the gunwale and rocking it stealthily. She stomped down hard twice, and scolded delicately, "You shameless scoundrel, show yourself at once."

"Ouch!" Lin Wanrong's cry of pain came from under the boat. "Miss Xu, are you playing for real?!"

"Big brother?!" Luo Ning screamed in surprise, bending down to see Lin Wanrong gripping the bottom of the boat, grinning at her.

"You naughty thing!" Luo Ning uttered tenderly, stretching out her little hand to pull him up. Luo Yuan hurried over to help, while Miss Xu turned her head away, giggling. 'Serves you right, you shameless man, now you taste your own medicine!'

Lin Wanrong clambered onto the boat, taking several deep breaths. Luo Ning quickly handed him a bowl of steaming ginger soup. Watching him gulp it down, she finally relaxed.

"Big brother, how did it go? Did you find the silver?" Luo Yuan, ever impatient, immediately asked once Lin Wanrong had caught his breath.

Lin Wanrong glanced at Miss Xu seemingly unintentionally, his eyes narrowing as he grinned, "Miss Xu, you stomped on me several times just now; it was on purpose, wasn't it? Heh heh, are you hoping I found the silver or not?"

Xu Zhiqing's heart fluttered, and she didn't dare to answer. Luo Ning snapped, "Big brother, what are you talking about? Sister Xu came all this way to help us find the silver, didn't she?"

"Is that so? Oh, I forgot." Lin Wanrong shook his head and laughed. Then his face turned serious, and he said solemnly, "I'm sorry, Ning'er—"

"What?" Xu Zhiqing screamed, almost unable to believe her ears. Was this shameless man's confidence before going underwater all a lie? How could he do this?

Luo Ning's joyful face turned as pale as snow, her large teardrops rolling in her eyes. She bravely bit her cherry lips and gently caressed Lin Wanrong's cheek, softly saying, "Big brother, it's alright. Don't blame yourself. It's Ning'er's fate to be your wife. I'm content with that and don't care about anything else."

Lin Wanrong sighed deeply, holding her soft body in his arms, biting her ear and saying, "I'm sorry, Ning'er, I tried my best, but I only recovered—three hundred and fifty thousand taels!!!"

"What?" Both women froze simultaneously, glancing at each other before pouncing on him like mad, raining down blows like a storm, crying out, "I'll beat you—"