

Finest 406

Chapter 406 Year After Year, Planting Peach Blossoms, Blooming at the Time of Heartbreak

The first encounter by Xuanwu Lake, the chance meeting at Miaoyu Pavillion, the earnest conversation in the Xiao family home, the joy atop Dangtu Mountain, scene by scene surged into Lin Wanrong's mind like a movie. Months had passed without a sight, and longing grew like a curse, ever more intense.

"Qingxuan—" Lin Wanrong stood, stupefied, as if he had lost himself, rooted to the spot, muttering like a man bewitched.

"Little brother Lin, Little brother Lin—" Xu Wei's soft words roused him, "What's wrong with you?"

Lin Wanrong came to his senses only to find more than a hundred pairs of eyes in the court all staring at him. It turned out that Li Tai had finished his declaration, and everyone was surprised to see Lin San, who had previously been witty and lively, standing there as if stupefied. He looked behind the curtain, but it was empty. Where was Qingxuan's shadow?

"Qingxuan—" Lin Wanrong cried out, stepping forward to lift the curtain.

"Lord Lin," several eunuchs hurriedly blocked him, "One cannot overstep boundaries in the court, please return to your position at once."

Lin Wanrong heard nothing, his mind filled with images of Qingxuan. The meeting he had anticipated day after day had unexpectedly arrived but then slipped away just as unexpectedly. The taste of being so near yet so far, even for someone as strong as Lin Wanrong, drove him to madness.

"Out of my way!" he shouted, pushing aside the two eunuchs blocking him, striding in. Imperial guards rushed forward, drawing their long swords to block his path. Lin Wanrong paid them no heed, continuing to charge forward.

The court officials, who had been laughing and chatting with Lord Lin moments ago, were all astonished by this sudden madness. They looked at each other, no one daring to speak.

Next door, Xu Zhiqing, peering through a carved window, watched this extraordinary scene unfold. A roar in the Golden Hall meant certain execution; why was Lin San acting so madly, as if he didn't care about his life? Her eyes fell on the slightly quivering curtain, and her heart sank. What kind of woman could make Lin San willingly risk his life for her?

"Your Majesty!" Xu Wei was nearest to Lin Wanrong and realized something terrible was about to happen. Seeing a conflict brewing with the imperial guards, he urgently pleaded, "Your Majesty, this matter is significant, Lord Lin is acting out of desperation. Please allow him to go forward and investigate!"

The Emperor smiled slightly, gesturing with his hand. The imperial guards hastily retreated, and Lin Wanrong darted inside. Behind the curtain was a room adorned with plain and elegant furnishings, a table and a chair, nothing more. The air was filled with a faint fragrance of orchids, refreshing and soothing. On the table lay a thin sheet of paper, depicting a person standing tall among peach blossoms, smiling faintly, an air of leisurely grace emanating from the ink. The ink had not yet dried, and spots were stained as if with a woman's tears. In the upper right corner were lightly penned two lines: "The late dawn of spring, known before all the flowers. Year after year, planting peach blossoms, blooming at the time of heartbreak!"

The familiar elegant handwriting, the unparalleled fragrance of orchids, and an understanding of Lin Wanrong's character – who else but Qingxuan could it be? Lin Wanrong, trembling, picked up the painting, looking at the tear stains yet to dry on the paper, faintly imagining Qingxuan shedding tears as she wrote with swift strokes. His nose tingled, his eyes moistened, and an indescribable warmth and emotion welled up within him.

"Year after year, planting peach blossoms, blooming at the time of heartbreak!" Lin Wanrong murmured with a sigh, carefully rolling up the painting scroll. He pushed aside the curtain and strode out, only to find the grand hall empty, the court assembly having dispersed long ago.

"Qingxuan—!" Lin Wanrong shouted with all his might, the resonating echo filling the grand hall, unanswered for a long time.

Why did Qingxuan refuse to meet him, and leave in such a hurry? What is the reason behind it? Gazing at the dragon throne shimmering with golden light, Lin Wanrong's heart was filled with doubt, wishing he could fly to the old Emperor's side to ask what was going on. He gritted his teeth and was about to step out of the grand hall when he saw someone rushing towards him, bumping into him.

"Ouch!" A feminine voice cried, "You, how do you walk?"

"Miss Xu?" Lin Wanrong was taken aback, "What are you still doing here? Hasn't the court assembly dispersed?"

"What if it has?" Xu Zhiqing's face turned red, feeling the warmth of his body. She quickly pushed him away, biting her lip and saying, "The palace is so vast, can't I walk around it? This palace doesn't belong to your family."

Had it been any other day, Lin Wanrong would have made light of such an intimate encounter, but today he was in no mood for such trivialities. Shaking his head with a smile, he walked past her.

"Where are you going?" Xu Zhiqing asked, her brow slightly furrowed.

Lin Wanrong smiled, "To borrow Miss Xu's words, the palace is so vast, can't I walk around it?"

Xu Zhiqing sighed, "I know even without asking, you are going to see the Emperor, aren't you?"

"You guessed it, but there's no reward," Lin Wanrong said, continuing to walk away.

Xu Zhiqing smiled faintly, "I don't know about a reward, but I do know the answer to your question."

"You know where Qingxuan is?" Lin Wanrong turned around suddenly, his eyes wide, grabbing her small hand with joy.

Miss Xu's face turned pale, and she scolded, "You, you hurt me! Let go of me, you shameless person!"

Hurt her? Lin Wanrong was stunned. He looked down to see that he was holding Miss Xu's tender, white hands and unconsciously caressing them.

"Silly girl, silly girl," Lin Wanrong released her hand, smiling awkwardly, "A habitual movement, Miss Xu, don't mind. Do you really know where Qingxuan is?"

Miss Xu lightly clenched her wrist, noticing that her jade-like, clear white hand had turned red from Lin San's grip. Seeing his excited face, her anger increased, and she snorted, "Idiot and flirt!"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Thank you for the compliment, Miss Xu. It's been a long time since I've been a flirt, and today's a nostalgic return; it feels good. Since you know Qingxuan's whereabouts, could you please tell me?"

Xu Zhiqing gave him a cool glance, unperturbed, "Do you really care so much for Miss Xiao? Would you do anything for her?"

"Of course." Lin Wanrong nodded without hesitation, "My feelings for Qingxuan are beyond your imagination. As long as I can find Qingxuan, I'll agree to any condition. Even if it's killing or cheating, I'll accept it without a frown, and if I do frown, you can ride on me for a lifetime."

Xu Zhiqing spat lightly, her face flushed red, and said, "What is this talk of killing and then violating? How can you speak such words? How can you be so shameless? Speak a few words to you, and you take them to the extreme."

Her face was red to her ears, her translucent small earlobes seemed to be tinted pink, her full bosom heaved slightly, coupled with her beautiful face and upright figure, she resembled a blooming pear tree, dazzling to the extreme. Even Lin Wanrong was left stunned by the sight.

"What are you doing?" Caught by his gaze, Miss Xu was thrown into confusion, her pretty face blushing, and her voice diminished, "This is the palace; you must not behave as you did before."

"Behave as before? Miss Xu, have I ever treated you improperly before? I have a poor memory; please give me a hint. Know that I am called the honest young man, a righteous young master, not one who enjoys an undeserved reputation. Just say it, and I will never abandon you." Looking at Miss Xu stamping her foot, Lin Wanrong laughed, his mood brightened considerably after feeling momentarily lost at the sudden sight of Qingxuan.

"You lowly person, I—I will not spare you." Xu Zhiqing's little fists clenched, her eyes reddened, tears swirling in her eyes before they fell.

Oh no, this was a big commotion, and this was the palace, where this woman would create a scene without considering the time or place. Lin Wanrong muttered to himself and quickly reached out to take her hand, "Miss Xu, everything I just said was false. I have never treated you improperly

before, it was all serious, please do not mind. How about this? You are called the honest little Miss, the righteous beautiful lady, why not abandon me for once? I won't mind."

"Pfft," hearing his nonsense, Xu Zhiqing, who had been crying, could not help but laugh, her face flushed red. She hurriedly turned her head away, her face covered with tears, beautiful and enchanting like a begonia flower wet with dew.

"I want Qingxuan, I want Qingxuan." Lin Wanrong's eyes widened as he quickly chanted to himself, using Qingxuan to suppress the allure of the beautiful Miss Xu.

Crying in the palace courtyard, Miss Xu felt a bit embarrassed, but she could not bear Lin San's teasing. She quickly wiped her tears, glared at him angrily, and snorted, "Was I indebted to you in a past life? Why must I endure such treatment from you? Why don't you treat Qiaoqiao and Ning'er this way?"

Can that even be compared? Lin Wanrong elongated his reply and chuckled, "I see, so Miss Xu wants me to treat you as I do Qiaoqiao and Ning'er. You should have said so earlier!"

"I—I didn't mean that—" Xu Zhiqing's face flushed, and in her haste, she didn't know how to defend herself, blushing as she lowered her head, "You'll be the death of me someday!"

Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "If you want to avoid that, it's quite simple. We just need to see each other less. Tomorrow, I'll talk to the Emperor and ask for another mansion so that we can move far away from your home. Is that acceptable?"

Miss Xu thought for a moment and nodded slightly, "That's a good idea, but right now, our Great Hua is in a crisis, and the whole country is contributing money and effort to resist the invaders. We should be saving everywhere. You just got a big mansion, and now you want a second one. Even if the Emperor doesn't say anything, what will the civil and military officials think of you? How will you establish your prestige? Perhaps you shouldn't move, and when I meet with Qiaoqiao and Ning'er, you just hide and don't come out."

'You actually thought of this 'burying one's head in the sand' scheme?' Lin Wanrong raised his thumb, praising, "Brilliant, truly a brilliant plan. If you meet more often with Ning'er and the others, I will only have half a wife left. Miss Xu, your vision is far-reaching; I admire you, I truly admire you."

Xu Zhiqing snorted and glanced at him, her charming demeanor faintly surpassing even Luo Ning's foxy allure. Thinking of Ning'er's overwhelming charms, Lin Wanrong stared at Xu Zhiqing, his eyes momentarily mesmerized. Ning'er was already so enchanting, what kind of allure would it be if she were to engage in flirtation with Miss Xu one day? The mere thought made his blood boil.

Seeing Lin San's eyes filled with lust and his mouth curling into a lascivious smile, although not her first time witnessing it, Miss Xu couldn't help but step back in surprise, her face like powdered porcelain, and she exclaimed, "Why are you silent? What wicked thoughts are you harboring?"

"Heaven and earth can bear witness, I have no wicked intentions. I'm merely wishing to delve deeper into the relationship between circles and crosses. If you don't mind, Miss Xu, we can 'circle and cross' together for some academic exchange," Lin Wanrong shamelessly declared.

Although Miss Xu did not know what 'circling and crossing' meant, she had long understood Lin San's cunning. She didn't dare to reply lightly to words she didn't understand, so she merely snorted and said, "I can't be bothered to argue with you; you can 'circle and cross' by yourself."

"Me 'circle and cross' by myself? How ingenious of you to think of that. Oh, let's talk about Qingxuan instead." Lin Wanrong wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, feeling infinite contempt for himself. Although Miss Xu was charming, she surely couldn't surpass Qingxuan. He had thought himself above such base interests, yet found himself no different from any ordinary man. Shameful, indeed shameful.

At his mention, Xu Zhiqing was reminded of the serious matter at hand, her face flushing slightly. Why did idle matters turn serious and serious matters turn idle when with him? It was infuriating! She wanted to laugh but dared not, a strange feeling rising within her heart, sweet and tender yet also sour and bitter, a mix of emotions overwhelming her.

She quickly shook her head to dispel the jumbled thoughts, and said sternly, "Finding out Xiao Qingxuan's whereabouts is not difficult, but don't forget what you have said."

"What have I said?" Lin Wanrong looked surprised, then laughed, "If it's those words like 'endless love' and 'eternal commitment', I advise you to take them lightly; don't hold them against me."

'Here it comes again, turning serious matters into trivial ones. I won't fall into your trap,' Miss Xu warned herself, cautiously saying, "Stop talking nonsense. When have you ever spoken such words to me? A man's words are like rootless water, they come fast and leave even faster. I won't believe you."

Lin Wanrong shook his head and gave a bitter smile, "Believe or not, just tell me where Qingxuan is!"

Why did it happen again? Xu Zhiqing was secretly annoyed, and snapped, "Since the day you returned from Shandong, you said that you were staying in the capital and not going to the front line to fight the northern nomads because you had unfinished business. You also promised my father that once you had news of Miss Xiao, you would reconsider leading the troops. Do you remember that or not?"

"I remember a bit." Lin Wanrong nodded, as if understanding, "Miss Xu, did the Emperor himself inform you of this news?"

"It's good that you remember." Xu Zhiqing glanced at him lightly, "Just after the morning court was dismissed, my father pleaded with the Emperor, and His Majesty finally bestowed a silken pouch. Father ordered me to deliver it to you with the utmost haste. Otherwise, who would want to stay in the palace?"

Miss Xu took a golden silk pouch from her bosom, and Lin Wanrong quickly unwrapped it. On the paper, he found a line of vermilion characters: "All manner of troubles lie within the Jade Buddha!"

Chapter 407 Blast It To Smithereens

"All manner of troubles lie within the Jade Buddha!" Lin Wanrong looked at the slip of paper, utterly stunned. This sentence that seemed like a verse but not a verse, like a riddle but not a riddle, what did they mean? From the literal meaning, it seemed to refer to the Jade Buddha Temple. He had visited that temple when he first came to the capital, and it was there that he first met Xu Zhiqing. Besides that, he only remembered the temple's broken walls and ruins, and a large reclining Buddha statue. Wasn't the Emperor's note equivalent to saying nothing at all?

Xu Zhiqing watched him in a daze, sneakily glanced at the note in his hand, and after seeing the sentence, slightly started. Recalling how they met, she asked softly, "When you went to the Jade Buddha Temple initially, was it to find Miss Xiao Qingxuan?"

Lin Wanrong gave a helpless smile, shaking the note in his hand, "I am not a devout man or woman; why would I go to worship at a temple? Qingxuan and I agreed to meet at the Jade Buddha Temple in the capital on the seventh day of the seventh month this year, so I hurried to see her. The Emperor's note now is no different from what I already knew."

Miss Xu took the note and looked at it closely, then shook her head, saying, "Don't be disappointed yet. Miss Xiao suddenly appeared today and then suddenly disappeared, as if she has some unspeakable secret. This note seems like a hidden riddle; the Emperor's wisdom is extraordinary. His instructions may not be as simple as you imagine, and there must be a profound meaning in it. Why not go to the Jade Buddha Temple again? Perhaps you will discover something."

Xu Zhiqing's analysis was logical, and Lin Wanrong snorted, saying, "I will definitely go to the Jade Buddha Temple. But His Majesty the Emperor is truly disappointing. I've been working hard to help him think, and he knew Qingxuan's whereabouts but didn't tell me, making me extremely frustrated."

"You want to die?!" Xu Zhiqing hurriedly covered his mouth with the note, looking around to see if anyone was paying attention. Only then did she relax slightly, her eyes filled with anger as she glared at him, "Criticizing the Emperor in the inner palace, don't you want to live?"

'He's my father-in-law, and I've criticized him more than once or twice,' Lin Wanrong didn't mind. Seeing Miss Xu's angry yet worried expression, he knew she was concerned about him and felt a touch of emotion. Suddenly he grinned, holding her hand, saying, "Miss Xu, did you stay in the palace specifically to pass messages for me?"

"What nonsense are you talking about?" Xu Zhiqing's face flushed, slightly panicking, she hurriedly took her hand back, scolding, "I have no time to wait for you. I saw that you are talented, and it would be a waste if you couldn't lead the troops against the northern nomads. That's why I wanted to do something for Great Hua. Don't get it wrong."

'Did I get it wrong?' Lin Wanrong chuckled and sighed, "Actually, Miss Xu, you're quite good, knowledgeable, pretty, with a nice figure. If you could calm down and earnestly pursue me, alas, I'm currently in a period of emotional confusion; maybe you would have a chance."

Xu Zhiqing's face turned red with embarrassment, she scolded hastily, "Stop talking nonsense! Who wants to pursue you? You can remain confused on your own!" She stomped her little foot and hurried out of the palace. Not far away, she suddenly stomped her foot again in slight anger, saying, "Are you dead or something? What are you doing still standing here? Hurry to the Jade Buddha Temple to find your Miss Qingxuan. If you're too late, and you miss each other, that would be a tremendous regret."

A single sentence reminded Lin Wanrong, and he dashed toward the exit. Xu Zhiqing bit her lip and swiftly grabbed his sleeve, saying firmly, "I will go with you!"

"Go together?" Lin Wanrong looked at her curiously. "I am going to look for my wife; what are you going for?"

Xu Zhiqing's face was serious as she calmly replied, "Very simple, to help you find Miss Xiao as soon as possible, fulfill your wish, and then devote yourself wholeheartedly to serving our Great Hua."

The reason was noble, and Lin Wanrong had nothing to say. He took strides out, while Miss Xu delicately lifted her skirt, cautiously stepping through the rainwater as she followed behind him.

Upon reaching the palace gate, they saw Xu Zhiqing's carriage parked there. A maid looked at the two and hurriedly approached, brushing the rainwater off Xu Zhiqing while exclaiming, "Miss, why have you come out with Master Lin? This morning, didn't you say you never wanted to see him again?"

"Don't chatter nonsense." Xu Zhiqing's pretty face turned red as she softly replied, "When did I say I wouldn't see him again? You must have heard wrong." Her voice inadvertently lowered near the end, and she looked away guiltily.

'Wasn't this morning's incident just a joke? Why did it make you so angry?' Lin Wanrong pretended not to hear the conversation between the maid and the young lady. Seeing that Miss Xu was entering the carriage, he laughed, "Miss Xu, you go ahead in the carriage, and I'll follow in the rain. Don't worry, I'm fast."

Xu Zhiqing glanced at him annoyedly, whispering, "If you want to come up, just come up. Why do you have to find so many reasons, trying to make people pity you?"

The maid, Yuzhu, giggled and said, "Master Lin, Miss Xu invites you to ride with her."

"You won't kick me off this time, right?" Lin Wanrong, still concerned about the morning's incident, cautiously climbed into the carriage. Seeing that Miss Xu was sitting there smiling without making a move, he relaxed and settled in comfortably.

Xu Zhiqing turned her head away, a light blush spreading across her beautiful neck. She muttered, "I've never seen such a cowardly person. Where did the courage you had when committing evil deeds in Shandong go?"

Lin Wanrong sighed, murmuring to himself, "Don't remind me of the heartbreaking events. I did some good deeds in Shandong, but people caught and beat me, and I'm still recovering. It's truly hurtful."

Xu Zhiqing gave a slight scoff, feeling uncomfortable all over, and dared not speak. The maid, Yuzhu, couldn't understand what riddle her young lady and Master Lin were playing, and she was completely baffled by the situation.

The journey was quiet, and the carriage was filled with silence, interrupted only by the rhythmic patter of rain, as intense as Miss Xu's own heartbeat.

The carriage sped through the rain toward the outskirts of the city. After nearly half an hour, Yuzhu peered out and announced, "Miss, Master, we have arrived at the Reclining Buddha Temple."

Xu Zhiqing let out a soft "Ah," returning from her thoughts, and murmured, "We've arrived so soon?"

"So slow to arrive?" Lin Wanrong's words came out simultaneously with Xu Zhiqing's, but they expressed two entirely different meanings. Seeing Miss Xu's angry stare, he quickly laughed, "I meant that the carriage was slow, not as fast as my flying heart. Miss Xu, please don't misunderstand. Actually, I wanted to spend a little more time with you."

He tumbled out of the carriage, the fine drizzle sprinkling on his face, refreshing his spirits. In the distance, the faintly discernible mountains hid within the thin mist, like a fairy donning a veil, exceptionally alluring.

The walls of the Jade Buddha Temple had collapsed in the spring rain, shattered and broken all around. The occasional standing rafter and scattered tiles and bricks showed no difference from his first visit.

Xu Zhiqing dismounted the carriage, and the young maidservant held an oiled-paper umbrella for her; both stood at a distance from him. In the misty rain, the distant green mountains and waters appeared elusive and untouchable. Xu Zhiqing sighed softly and slowly recited, "The stars last night, the wind last night, rain pelted the pavilion amid the mist; whose servant girl sings a mournful song, half with tears dripping, half with sorrow!"

Upon revisiting the Jade Buddha Temple, Lin Wanrong's feelings were extraordinarily complicated. The appearance of Qingxuan had brought some new hope, but he also feared that the greater the

hope, the greater the disappointment. Looking at the ruined buildings, he was unable to move for a moment.

"This is the place." Xu Zhiqing's gentle voice broke Lin Wanrong's reverie. He looked up to see Xu Zhiqing and Yuzhu had already walked into the temple, to the only intact spot, where he had encountered Xu Zhiqing sheltering from the rain last time. Miss Xu's face wore a faint smile, as she said something to Yuzhu, then looked back at him. The young maidservant giggled, "So, this is how Miss and Master Lin know each other; no wonder you are so familiar."

"Isn't it familiarity?" Lin Wanrong laughed as he walked over, patting the pillar beside the door, where several deep arrow marks were clearly visible. "Your mistress is so ruthless, unparalleled in the world. Had I not run fast, I'd have become a night ghost in this desolate temple."

Remembering the past, Xu Zhiqing couldn't help but cover her lips and laugh, "Who told you to look so sneaky, like a bad person? A woman was sheltering from rain in a ruined temple, and you had to barge in; if you had bullied me, what then? Not shooting you into a hornet's nest was already letting you off easy."

The two women laughed together, but Miss Xu gradually lowered her head. At first, she had been afraid of being bullied by him, only to find that, after becoming familiar, she had grown numb to his bullying, even accustomed to it. How could she explain this?

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, glancing at Xu Zhiqing, "Bullying you, so what? As long as I make a move, I can bully you into joy, believe it or not!"

Though the Jade Buddha Temple was expansive, it was dilapidated everywhere. Only the one giant reclining Maitreya Buddha faintly revealed the splendor of the past. Taking out the brocade bag bestowed by the old Emperor, he once again pondered the two lines: "All manner of troubles lie within the Jade Buddha." Now in the Jade Buddha Temple, he saw nothing at all. 'Old man, don't play tricks on me!'

Xu Zhiqing also stopped laughing and slowly walked to his side, gazing at him before saying, "This line seems to have a Zen meaning. Think back again; when you parted with Miss Xiao, did she say anything else? Did she mention anything else related to this Jade Buddha Temple?"

That day on Mount Tu, had he not been alert, he would have been left without notice by Qingxuan. At that time, he hadn't even heard the name of the Jade Buddha Temple, so how could he have heard Qingxuan mention information about it?

Seeing Lin San shake his head, Xu Zhiqing felt a wave of disappointment. If he could not find Xiao Qingxuan, would he never have the opportunity to serve his country? Soon after, a baffling thrill of joy emerged within her heart, and she quickly shook her head, dispelling the chaotic thoughts. "Do not be anxious," she said, "There must be another secret within this imperial edict."

"All manner of troubles lie within the Jade Buddha!" Lin Wanrong murmured the two phrases as he paced slowly back and forth in the main hall, his eyes falling upon the massive Jade Buddha.

'In the Jade Buddha, in the Jade Buddha,' a spark flashed across his mind, and he suddenly slapped his palm, exclaiming joyfully, "In the Jade Buddha, in the Jade Buddha, I know, I know!"

He dashed towards the towering Jade Buddha, seemingly possessed, and slowly caressed the cold stone figure. This stone Buddha, carved into the cliffside and standing several dozen feet tall, was so large that Lin Wanrong could only reach its ankles. Miss Xu also gasped and, lifting her long skirt, ran to his side. "In the Jade Buddha? You mean there's a secret inside the Jade Buddha's belly? Oh, how did I not think of that!"

"Actually, your intelligence falls just a bit short of mine. With a little more effort, you may even surpass me," Lin Wanrong said playfully, in high spirits.

Miss Xu looked at him and smiled coyly, "I already knew that. Except for boasting, you may not be able to beat me at anything else."

Xu Zhiqing's hair was sprinkled with droplets of rain, and her charming cheeks were filled with joyous smiles. Her bright red lips were slightly curled, appearing like a longing young wife, yet also like a shy young girl. Lin Wanrong felt touched and smiled at her, "Miss Xu, thank you!"

"Thank me for what?" Seeing his fixed gaze, Xu Zhiqing felt a bit flustered and quickly turned her head, whispering.

"Thank you for coming with me." Lin Wanrong sighed, "Actually, my mood was really bad just now. If it weren't for you being with me, I don't know what I might have done."

Xu Zhiqing blushed and whispered, "You always jest and never seem serious; what great thing could you do? However, your feelings for Miss Qingxuan are beyond what I expected. It's not like your usual carefree style."

"My relationship with Qingxuan goes beyond your imagination and even beyond my own," Lin Wanrong laughed, "Although we haven't spent much time together, she is the person who understands me best in this world. She's a clever woman who knows me, understands me, and even risked her life to save mine. If you were me, what would you do?"

He recounted his experiences with Qingxuan in Jinling, including how she was able to converse with Lin San through the night—a feat that even she couldn't match. Listening to this, Xu Zhiqing couldn't help but sigh, "Miss Xiao is sincere and devoted. She knows you, loves you, and is willing to die for you. No wonder you are so attached to her. If it were me, even losing my life for her would be worth it."

"Losing your life is not acceptable," Lin Wanrong laughed, "If two people genuinely love each other, you should hope that you won't depart before her."

"Not depart before her?" Xu Zhiqing asked, puzzled, "What does that mean? Do you wish for the one you love to die before you?"

Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled, saying, "Considering the favor you've done for me today, I'll teach you a lesson you might find useful when you marry someday. The highest realm of loving someone is to watch over her until the end of her life, bearing all the grief and pain of longing. Do you understand?"

Such a novel idea was new to Miss Xu, and she was entranced as tears welled up in her eyes. She suddenly lowered her head, saying, "You're absolutely right, Lin San. Where did you learn all this?"

"I taught myself," Lin Wanrong laughed. "I'm naturally intelligent, as I'm sure you've noticed."

Xu Zhiqing looked deeply into his eyes and spoke softly, "There's one thing I don't believe, though. If the person you love dies before you, could you really go on living? If it were me, I'd never eke out a miserable existence."

The notion of dying for love was ancient, but Lin Wanrong's education had moved beyond such thoughts. Hearing Miss Xu bring it up, he paused for a moment, then softly recited, "Connected, connected, you and I agreed for a hundred years; Whoever dies at ninety-seven, wait on the Bridge of Helplessness for three years."

"Whoever dies at ninety-seven, wait on the Bridge of Helplessness for three years!" Miss Xu murmured to herself, tears streaming down. "Where did you learn this poetry? You must have brought it out just to make me cry."

"How did you know? Stealing bits of poetry to fool girls is my specialty," Lin Wanrong said, laughing.

'I wonder how many poor girls have been deceived by this wicked spirit.' Miss Xu's face turned red, and after a few stammers, she slowly wiped away her tears, saying, "Lin San, can you tell me, did you love any other women before Miss Xiao?"

Lin Wanrong was momentarily taken aback, then burst into laughter, "Who remembers such embarrassing things? I'm a very loyal person, as you well know."

"I don't believe you at all," Xu Zhiqing said with a covered smile, a wistful look in her eyes. "You must have loved other women. I can see it. The woman you love must be the happiest in the world. Miss Xiao is truly lucky."

"Naturally," Lin Wanrong replied unabashedly. "I have a famous saying: Love until you live, love until you die, love until you're both alive and dead. Love until you're numb, love until you're tingling, love until you're both numb and tingling!"

Xu Zhiqing covered her lips, smiling, a soft light in her eyes. "After being so serious for a moment, you've become unserious again. Just now, you were the most serious Lin San I've ever seen. If you were like that every day, I'm sure you could deceive many young ladies of good families."

Lin Wanrong spread his hands, looking helpless. "That's difficult. Some ladies like me serious, some like me unserious. It's hard to please everyone! Miss Xu, do you prefer me serious or unserious?"

"Like you? Ghosts might!" Xu Zhiqing snorted, easily seeing through his scheme, her face slightly flushed. He was deep and profound when serious, like the starry sky, and cunning and sly when not, like a fox. Choosing which she preferred was genuinely hard to say at the moment.

After talking with Miss Xu for a while, Lin Wanrong's mood was even more buoyant. He climbed up the Maitreya Buddha statue, tapping it continually, the smile on his face growing ever brighter.

Seeing Lin San climb so high, Miss Xu was terrified, calling out in a delicate voice, "Lin San, come down quickly! Don't hurt yourself!"

Lin Wanrong descended from the stone statue, exclaiming excitedly, "Miss Xu, this stone statue is hollow!"

Xu Zhiqing showed no surprise and covered her mouth as she giggled, "You fool, I knew that already. Hundreds of years ago, at the time of the founding of the Great Hua Dynasty, Emperor Taizu built this Maitreya Buddha statue. Thousands of workers were employed to hollow it out from the inside and cast the statue."

Lin Wanrong's eyes widened, "Why didn't you say so earlier? You made me climb up and down like a monkey!"

Miss Xu's face turned slightly red, and she spoke softly, "You were so eager just now, and I was fascinated by your storytelling. I didn't get a chance to tell you before you went up. Now what? Even if the statue is hollow, what does that prove?"

"I don't know either." Lin Wanrong wiped the sweat from his brow, only to be handed a fragrant handkerchief. He thanked her and continued, "But since His Majesty pointed to this place, there must be a secret inside. I'll return and gather the Infantry, Cavalry, and Divine Machine Unit and use cannons to blast this statue open."

Xu Zhiqing jumped in fright, thinking Lin San was indeed crazy. She hurriedly said, "No, you can't. This statue was built by Emperor Taizu, and it has a long history. No one can damage it without authorization. If someone reports you to the Emperor, it will be a capital offense!"

"What's a capital offense compared to Qingxuan?" Lin Wanrong scoffed, rushing out, "Miss Xu, lend me your carriage and maidservant."

Lin Wanrong hurried out and handed his personal seal to a maid named Yuzhu, instructing her to take it to General Li Tai's camp outside the city and find a general named Du Xiuyuan. Lin San ordered him to assemble the troops and cannons and hurry to the reclining Buddha temple within half an hour.

The maid looked helplessly at Xu Zhiqing, who had run out panting. Seeing Lin San's determined look, Miss Xu reluctantly nodded. As the carriage departed, she sighed softly, "Your unauthorized troop deployment and selfish motives, the bombardment of the reclining Buddha; any of these are

capital offenses. You're doing all this for Xiao Qingxuan. If I were her, having a husband like you, I would be content for a lifetime."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "You could also have me as a husband. I would consider it."

"Don't even think about it!" Miss Xu snapped angrily, tears suddenly rolling down, "I remember clearly what you said outside this temple. Do you think I'm that easy to deceive?"

Realizing that she still remembered that incident, Lin Wanrong was unsure how to comfort her as she sobbed. After waiting for a moment, they heard the distant sound of hoofbeats, and a man leaped down, saying, "General Du Xiuyuan greets General Lin and Miss Xu."

Miss Xu quickly wiped her tears and nodded slightly. Lin Wanrong was not polite either, slapping Du Xiuyuan on the shoulder, "Brother Du, how many cannons have you brought?"

"General, upon receiving your order, I have brought all of the Divine Machine Unit cannons under my command, a total of eight," Du Xiuyuan reported formally.

"Good," Lin Wanrong shouted, pointing at the Buddha's belly, gritting his teeth, "See that Buddha statue? Gather all the cannons and aim at that stone statue. Blast it to smithereens!"

Chapter 408 Peach Blossoms, Seeing Peach Blossoms Again

Destroy this stone statue? Du Xiuyuan was startled, glancing at the Maitreya Buddha, and whispered, "General, is this perhaps inappropriate? To my knowledge, this reclining Buddha was built by Emperor Taizu—"

Lin Wanrong smiled faintly and said, "Brother Du, don't worry. I, Lin San, will take full responsibility for any consequences. I've been disliking this Buddha statue for a long time. A few cannon shots to get rid of it will ease my irritation."

That's a reason? Du Xiuyuan and the men behind him, Xu Zhen among them, looked at each other in disbelief, unable to utter a word. Xu Zhiqing helplessly shook her head, saying, "Just follow General Lin's orders. If anything goes wrong, I'll take responsibility with him."

Lin Wanrong whispered something into Du Xiuyuan's ear, and Du Xiuyuan slightly nodded. Clenching his teeth, he saluted and said, "Your subordinate obeys!" He waved his hand, and the officers behind him quickly led the soldiers into formation, with Divine Machine Unit positioned at the front. Eight brand-new Divine Machine Unit cannons were placed on the ground, their dark barrels gleaming coldly.

Lin Wanrong gratefully glanced at Miss Xu and whispered, "Miss Xu, don't be too kind to me; I fear I might not be able to resist offering myself to you."

Having become accustomed to his mad ravings, Xu Zhiqing had developed some immunity and snorted, "What nonsense. When you find Miss Qingxuan, just contribute more to our Great Hua."

Lin Wanrong sighed helplessly, thinking, 'Contribute to Great Hua? Have I not contributed enough? Though I claim not to want to do the work, haven't I always handled things when they go wrong? Who do I tell my grievances to?'

"The gunpowder is loaded, and the angle is adjusted. General, please give the order," Du Xiuyuan's loud shout awoke Lin Wanrong from his thoughts. Looking not far away, he saw that Du Xiuyuan had brought a full five thousand troops. Banners waved, blades gleamed, and the force was mighty. Divine Machine Unit's cannons were fully adjusted, waiting for his command to fire in unison, shattering the stone statue into pieces. The atmosphere at the scene was tense and grave.

Xu Zhiqing's small hands were covered in sweat. Bombarding the reclining Buddha, something she never would have imagined before, had she become as mad as Lin San? "Lin San, can't we wait a bit—" She had barely started speaking when Lin San cut her off with a wave of his hand.

"Prepare!" Seeing General Lin's gesture, Du Xiuyuan waved his colorful flag, and the cannon operators focused intently on the Buddha statue.

"Fire!" Lin Wanrong gestured with his hand, and Du Xiuyuan pushed down his small flag, shouting loudly.

"Boom!" "Boom!" Several deafening explosions startled the surrounding warhorses into neighing. The maid, Yuzhu, hastily covered her ears. Xu Zhiqing's face turned pale, and she hardly dared to look at the stone statue. After a round of cannon fire, thick smoke rose in the distance, enveloping the stone statue, making it difficult to discern the situation.

Lin Wanrong stood in his place, unmoved and calm, as if nothing had happened. Du Xiuyuan wiped the sweat from his brow, his heart pounding; every time he followed General Lin, it made his heart race.

When the smoke cleared, Miss Xu mustered the courage to look towards the stone Buddha. To her surprise, the statue was intact, without the slightest damage. Around the statue, several feet away, stones were strewn about, the eaves were blackened, and there were several traces of fire. Could she have seen it wrong? She couldn't believe her eyes and looked again, only to find the statue whole and undamaged.

Poor accuracy? It couldn't be. The newly calibrated cannon she helped improve was not to be underestimated in both precision and power. Puzzled, she looked at Lin Wanrong and found him as composed as ever, without any sign of surprise.

"What's going on?" Xu Zhiqing frowned and asked Du Xiuyuan.

Wiping his sweat, Du Xiuyuan replied, "Miss Xu, it was Master Lin's order to aim in front of the statue first. To tell you the truth, I've been accurate many times before, but this is the first time I've been asked to miss on purpose!"

Xu Zhiqing looked at Lin Wanrong with joy and surprise, "Lin San, did you change your mind?"

"Not a change of mind," Lin Wanrong chuckled, "but rather a show of force first. We'll fire a few shots and see if there's any reaction. If nothing stirs, I'll blast it."

Stir, what kind of stir? Seeing Lin Wanrong's inscrutable face, Xu Zhiqing dared not ask more and kept her doubts to herself. Everyone waited in silence for a moment, but the statue remained eerily still, leaving Lin Wanrong uncertain as well.

"Brother Du, aim carefully this time and hit it hard!" Lin Wanrong said through gritted teeth. As his words fell, they suddenly heard a soft sound, and the statue's belly slowly opened to reveal a dark cave. Everyone was too far away to see inside clearly.

The sudden appearance stunned everyone. No one could have imagined that this man-made jade Buddha would contain such a mechanism, with a deep cave several feet above the ground, half the height of a city wall, leading to who knows where. Even well-read Xu Zhiqing had not expected such a secret within the Buddha built by the founding Emperor.

"What should we do?" Xu Zhiqing asked softly, her nose beaded with sweat, her small hand unconsciously grasping Lin Wanrong's tightly.

'Damn, it really is "all in the jade Buddha." My father-in-law didn't fool me. Since he directed me here, it must be right,' Lin Wanrong thought, and with a wave of his hand, he ordered, "Prepare the cloud ladders and attack!"

Du Xiuyuan was taken aback. Attack? But since Master Lin had given the order, they had to at least make a show of it. He waved his hand, and the infantry rushed forward with the ladders.

"Who are you attacking?" Xu Zhiqing quickly grabbed his hand, "We can't see anyone right now, where are you attacking?"

"Who says there's no one?" Lin Wanrong gently caressed her small hand, "Miss Xu, think about it, why was there no sign from the statue before we fired, and suddenly a large hole appeared after we fired a few shots?"

Xu Zhiqing, being intelligent, thought for a moment and exclaimed, "You mean, the mechanism is operated by someone? After we fired, they were intimidated by the power of the artillery and had to open the cave?"

"Exactly!" Lin Wanrong said reluctantly, patting her little hand. "That's the power of artillery. Therefore, we should always engage in more cannon firing, for the enjoyment of others and ourselves." As he spoke, a hint of a roguish smile appeared on his face.

Xu Zhiqing was utterly confused, but his public caress of her small hand was clear. She hurriedly lowered her voice and said, "Let go of me quickly, before others see."

"Eh? Isn't this Du Xiuyuan's hand?" Lin Wanrong said in surprise. "How did it become Miss Xu's? Am I dreaming?"

Du Xiuyuan inhaled sharply, hearing Lin Wanrong's ridiculous excuse. "General Lin, I'm eight cannon-lengths away from you!" Lin Wanrong continued to play with Xu Zhiqing's hand before finally letting go, sighing, "One mistake can lead to endless regret. Next time, Miss Xu, don't stand so close to me. This time I mistook you for Du Xiuyuan, but next time, if I mistake you for Qiaoqiao or Ning'er, it will be a disaster."

These words served as a warning, and Xu Zhiqing thought about how she had been taken advantage of by him multiple times because she had stood too close. Oddly enough, even when she was far from him, she always seemed to unconsciously drift closer. That was the real mystery.

"General, shall we attack the cave now?" Seeing the soldiers ready to go, Du Xiuyuan hastily called out, feeling uncomfortable even saying the words "attack the cave."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, saying, "Prepare to attack the cave!"

At his command, hundreds of soldiers raised their ladders to the cave entrance, ready to storm upwards. Just as they were about to reach it, a tender child's voice called out, "Who dares to cause trouble at the entrance of the 'Jade Virtue Fairy Hall'?"

"Jade Virtue Fairy Hall?" Lin Wanrong was stirred, thinking, 'I'm looking for you.' He knew that Qingxuan and her fairy sister were from the same source, so Qingxuan must also belong to this Hall.

A petite and exquisite figure appeared in the cave entrance, a girl of about eleven or twelve, with two little braids swinging, her face carved like jade, looking incredibly adorable. She held a bright and gleaming treasure sword, standing imposingly at the entrance.

"What a cute little girl," Xu Zhiqing exclaimed, her eyes flashing with a deep affection.

"Cute, yes," Lin Wanrong said with a wry smile, "but she might be a little tiger. Miss Xu, have you ever heard of the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall? What exactly does this hall process?"

Xu Zhiqing laughed, scolding, "What nonsense are you talking about? Jade Virtue Fairy Hall is a legendary, mysterious organization with high prestige in various places. During the time when the founding Emperor seized the land, they were relied upon heavily. Afterward, the Emperor named the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall as the 'Holy Hall,' claiming it to be 'Equated with the nation.' Many people, especially the gentry, are their staunch supporters. Is that Miss Xiao of yours also from the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall? No wonder she can sit in the court!"

"Equated with the nation?" Lin Wanrong sneered. Upon hearing this title alone, he knew that the founding Emperor was a person with intentions. A small civilian organization dared to claim equality with the nation. Wasn't this seeking death? The founding Emperor might have refrained

from taking drastic measures out of helplessness, but this title of "Equated with the Nation" would undoubtedly be a thorn in the side of subsequent Emperors. No wonder his father-in-law was unimpressed with this immortal hall; there was more to it than met the eye.

"Miss Xu, what exactly is practiced in this hall? Literature or martial arts?" Thinking of the exceptional skills of Fairy Sister, including Sister An, who had betrayed her teacher, Lin Wanrong assumed that this Hall must be a martial arts society that relied on fists to make a living.

"It teaches both literature and martial arts. The Jade Virtue Fairy Hall does have martial artists, but they are more famous for their cultural education, producing generations of great scholars. Many master thinkers who started schools of thought were disciples of the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall. Most of the influential ministers in the current court have been influenced by the Hall. When my father was young, he even studied Confucian virtues under a former master of the Hall. Mei Yanqiu, whom you fought in Jinling, is also a disciple of the Hall," Xu Zhiqing explained calmly.

'No way?' Lin Wanrong was greatly shocked. He had originally thought that the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall was just a small martial arts faction, but it turned out to be a forum of master thinkers who made their living through literature, not martial arts. No wonder he had these thoughts. Qingxuan, Ning Yuxi, An Biru—weren't they all top-notch experts?

"So, meeting them can be considered encountering a worthy opponent," Xu Zhiqing said with a slight smile. "You'll find both literary and martial challenges, and their eloquence and wit are boundless. I wonder how you'll handle it."

His head was spinning. If it were just a martial arts faction, he could have easily defeated them with a few cannon blasts. But facing such a master forum, he was not up against one person, but a group of wise scholars. What could he do?

"Are you attacking or not?" Seeing his distressed expression, Xu Zhiqing couldn't help but ask, holding back laughter.

Attack? He was facing a group of scholars. A mere reference from one of those old chaps would leave him sprawling.

"Hey." As he was hesitating, he heard the little girl standing at the entrance speak: "You soldiers, what are you going to do? Are you attacking or not? Who's the leader among you? Come out and answer me."

Being pointed at and questioned by such a young girl was somewhat embarrassing. Lin Wanrong walked forward with a smile and said, "Little sister, how are you? What are you doing here? It's noon already; you should go home for lunch!"

The little girl glanced at him, suddenly clapped her hands, and laughed, "So you're the leader! I saw you sneaking around earlier. You looked like bad news, but I didn't expect you to be the leader. What's your name?"

She could see that? Lin Wanrong was annoyed. If she could tell, he couldn't be that bad. He chuckled, "My name is very special, and everyone likes to say it. My surname is Shu, and my given name is Shuhao

"Shu Shuhao The little girl called out, frowning, "It does sound a bit strange!"

The soldiers below had already burst into hearty laughter. Xu Zhiqing walked over to Lin Wanrong's side and playfully jabbed him, scolding, "You can never be serious, not even with such an adorable little girl!"

'Damn it, I'm the victim here! It's clearly her who's not letting me off,' Lin Wanrong thought, his face contorted in distress, unsure whether to laugh or cry. The little girl understood the pun in a moment, her face turning bright red, as she pointed at Lin Wanrong and furiously declared, "You, you treacherous minister, I won't let you go!"

"Treacherous minister? That's quite a unique name; I've never been called that before," Lin Wanrong laughed. "Little sister, you're mistaken. I am a loyal minister, a grand loyal minister, known by everyone in Great Hua. What's your name? Tell your big brother."

The little girl snorted and refused to answer. Xu Zhiqing kindly said, "Little sister, don't be afraid. This big brother may look quite vile, but he's good at heart. What's your name? Will you tell me?"

The little girl glanced at Xu Zhiqing and smiled slightly, "Sister, you're really pretty. My name is Li Xiangjun."

"Li Xiangjun? That name sounds familiar," Lin Wanrong squeezed out a friendly smile, "Little sister Xiangjun, is this place Jade Virtue Hall?"

"What Jade Virtue Hall?" The little girl snorted, "It's Jade Virtue Fairy Hall. You, how come you have no knowledge at all?"

"Yes, yes, I'm ignorant," Lin Wanrong wiped the sweat from his forehead, embarrassed by being called ignorant for the first time ever. Xu Zhiqing and Du Xiuyuan and the others secretly held back their laughter, witnessing Lin Wanrong's rare defeat.

"Were you the one who just bombarded our gate?" The little girl angrily asked, "How could you do such a brutal thing?"

"Where, where, little sister, we were just setting off a few fireworks to pay tribute to your esteemed Hall," Lin Wanrong chuckled, "By the way, little sister, can I ask you about someone? You're so beautiful and smart, I'm sure you'll know."

"I won't tell you even if I know," Li Xiangjun snorted, her expression unwavering.

"Actually, even if you don't say it, I know you must be familiar with Xiao Qingxuan, right?" Lin Wanrong casually asked, though his palm unconsciously grabbed Xu Zhiqing's, sweat beading in his palm.

The little girl's face lit up with delight, "You, you know my Senior Sister?"

Lin Wanrong's mind exploded with realization, his eyes moistening as he squeezed Xu Zhiqing's hand painfully. Xu Zhiqing's face turned pale with pain, but seeing his excited expression, she seemed to be infected by his emotion and gritted her teeth to endure it.

Lin Wanrong's voice trembled slightly as he said, "I know her, of course I know her, she's the most important person to me! Little junior sister, where is Qingxuan? Can you tell me?" Realizing that this girl named Li Xiangjun was Qingxuan's junior sister, he hastily changed his address.

"Why should I tell you?" Li Xiangjun huffed, "Senior Sister said that most people in this world are deceitful and insincere. Even Brother Liu of the literary school, Senior Sister does not approve of, let alone you? Just by looking at you, I know you're not a good person."

"The literary school's Brother Liu? What does he do?" Lin Wanrong was shocked, chuckling, "Is he as handsome as me?"

The little girl didn't bother to glance at him and laughed, "My senior sister is the most beautiful woman in the world. Unparalleled in both literature and martial arts, Brother Liu is Literary school's number one scholar. His looks are like those of the legendary beauty Pan An; he's elegant and refined. Despite being repeatedly rejected, he remains infatuated with my senior sister. You could never compare to him."

'Trying to court my wife?' Lin San was furious, "Is there anyone in this world more handsome than me? If so, he must be a monster or a freak! What's this Brother Liu's name? Where does he live? How tall is he? I'll go meet him! Whether it's a battle of literature or martial arts, I'll beat him until he can't find his way home!"

Li Xiangjun giggled and drew her fingers across her face, "Bragging! Brother Liu is the number one literary talent in the world. Even our old master praises his elegant demeanor, recognizing him as a true genius. How could you compare to him?"

'Number one literary talent in the world? Damn it, boasting doesn't cost a thing.' Lin Wanrong snickered, "Little junior sister, do you know Master Xu Wenchang? How does your Brother Liu compare to him?"

"This..." the little girl hesitated, "Master Xu is a recognized leader among the talented. Brother Liu has not yet left the mountain to compete with him, so it's hard to judge who's better. But I believe Brother Liu won't lose to him."

'Damn, so this is how you create your so-called number one in the world,' Lin Wanrong grinned, "Little junior sister, I'm also the number one suave genius in the world. Do you believe it?"

The little girl snorted dismissively, "If you say you're the number one shameless person in the world, I might believe that!"

Xu Zhiqing burst into laughter at their bickering, this little girl had indeed seen through Lin San's true nature.

Lin Wanrong's face turned red, and he stopped arguing with the little girl. Instead, he took out a small bottle from his chest, smiling slightly, "Little sister, do you recognize this? This is called Orchid Fragrance, a unique treasure in this world."

"You, how do you have this?" Li Xiangjun was astonished, "The Orchid Fragrance was obtained by my senior sister in Jinling. She said it was the only one in the world. Where did you get it?"

Lin Wanrong's voice caught in his throat as he slowly said, "Take this to her and tell her: On Mount Dangtu, in front of the Jade Buddha Temple, on the seventh day of the seventh month, husband and wife will reunite."

The little girl was eager to ask but finally spoke, her voice soft, "You are one step too late. Senior sister just returned and was called by the Master for a chat."

Master? Lin Wanrong probed, "Is the master Ning Yuxi, the Fairy Ning?"

"Hold your tongue!" Li Xiangjun's eyes widened, "My master's name is not something you can call!" Her expression darkened as she continued, "My master is the head of the Martial school. The Master of the Hall comes from Literary school and oversees both literary and martial schools."

So Fairy Ning was Qingxuan's master. No wonder she protected Qingxuan so strongly. According to the little girl, the head of Jade Virtue Fairy Hall had a background in literature. What did she want with Qingxuan?

"Are you really my senior sister's friend?" the little girl suddenly asked, "Do you know someone named Lin San?"

Lin Wanrong nodded hurriedly and said, "Know him? How could I possibly not know someone as handsome as that? What do you want with him?"

The young girl gritted her teeth and said, "I want to kill him. It's all his fault that my senior sister is in such a state."

"Little junior sister, please clarify what you mean. How did he harm Qingxuan?" Lin Wanrong's eyes narrowed, and he spoke loudly.

Li Xiangjun wiped away her tears with her little hand and said, "My senior sister has changed completely since she returned from Jinling last time. She has become much more haggard and thin, sometimes looking worried and sometimes secretly smiling, never letting go of that bottle of orchid perfume. My master found it strange, so she went to Jinling and found out that it was that Lin San

who had ruined my senior sister. In her anger, she descended the mountain to kill Lin San. When my senior sister found out, she fainted on the spot."

Lin Wanrong's eyes turned red as he listened, and he clenched his fists, saying, "Little junior sister, please do me a favor and take me to see Qingxuan. I must see her."

Seeing the fierce look in his eyes, Li Xiangjun jumped in fright and hurriedly waved her hands, saying, "No, no, the Hall's master has ordered that no one may visit my senior sister without permission. Violators will be expelled from the mountain. Even when I visit her, I must do so secretly. Besides, you are not a disciple of the Fairy Hall; you cannot even enter the mountain gate, let alone see my senior sister."

"Not a disciple of the Fairy Hall, so I cannot enter the gate?" Lin Wanrong said with a cold smile, "All under heaven is the Emperor's land. If the Emperor were to come, would he not be allowed in either?"

Seeing his imposing manner, the young girl replied, "If one has an imperial order, that would be another matter."

"Very well!" Lin Wanrong pulled out a golden token and shouted, "Today I am here on imperial orders to enter the Fairy Hall. Please, Miss, do me this favor." Xu Zhiqing glanced at it; the golden token was the one bestowed by the Emperor before he left for Shandong. She hadn't thought it would come in handy now.

Li Xiangjun hesitated for a moment, then said softly, "Please wait a moment while I consult with others." She returned shortly and said respectfully, "The Fairy Hall welcomes the imperial envoy!"

As Lin Wanrong was about to enter through the opening, Du Xiuyuan hurriedly grabbed him and said cautiously, "General, be careful. There may be a trap. Let me take my brothers with you."

Lin Wanrong laughed heartily and said, "Brother Du, don't worry. I have the Emperor's mandate. Would this Jade Virtue Fairy Hall dare to rebel?"

Xu Zhiqing bit her lip and said, "I will go with you. I also want to see this world's foremost Fairy Hall."

This girl was stubborn, and refusing her would be futile. Lin Wanrong smiled helplessly and indulged her.

After the two entered the cave mouth, Li Xiangjun led them up the steps. The Jade Virtue Fairy Hall stood on the steep peak next to the Jade Buddha Temple, surrounded by water on three sides, with only one side connected to land. The entrance was within the reclining Buddha at the foot of the mountain. The valley was steep, with many peculiar peaks, surrounded by green pines and cypresses, and misty clouds, resembling a paradise in the clouds. The jade-like towers and pavilions that Lin Wanrong had glimpsed from afar during his first visit to the Reclining Buddha Temple were perched on this insurmountable peak, looking like a heavenly palace.

"Big, Brother Lin," the young girl Li Xiangjun suddenly spoke, calling out timidly.

Lin Wanrong was surprised, "How do you know my name?"

Li Xiangjun said, "My Senior Sister once said that if one day someone breaks into the mountain gate to see her, disregarding all means and fearing no death, it must be Lin San without a doubt. Big Brother Lin, my Senior Sister regards you like these green pines and cypresses; if you betray her, I, Li Xiangjun, would rather lose my life than not kill you with my sword."

Following behind them, Xu Zhiqing whispered a sigh, Lin San was right; the one who understood him best was none other than Miss Xiao.

Lin Wanrong laughed loudly, "In a person's life, there are things that can be done, and things that cannot. Those who abandon their loved ones and forsake their children are loathed by both man and god!"

Li Xiangjun nodded slightly, hesitated at a fork in the road, then suddenly bit her lip and gently pulled Lin Wanrong like a nimble cat, "Big Brother Lin, Sister, follow me and keep silent."

This was a small path leading to the mountaintop. Halfway up, they came across a garden in full bloom with peach blossoms. Li Xiangjun suddenly stopped, looked around to see that no one was paying attention to her, and nodded, whispering, "Big Brother Lin, I can only take you this far. Inside the peach garden is my sister's favorite place. Try your luck in there." She paused, almost spoke again, then sighed softly, "You are fortunate to come today; Heaven blesses my sister. If you miss today, you and your wife will have no more fate."

What did she mean? Just as Lin Wanrong was about to grab her to ask for an explanation, Li Xiangjun had already run far away.

This was a small courtyard, with only a tiny archway for entrance and exit. From outside the garden, a few large trees peeped out, flourishing and lush.

Xu Zhiqing hesitated for a moment, then slowly said, "You go in. You and your wife should reunite; I should not disturb."

Would Qingxuan be inside? Could he see her? Lin Wanrong's heart pounded, as if he were back on the night of his first date with his girlfriend. The difference was that Qingxuan was his dearly beloved wife and confidante, and as he approached home his courage faltered. He did not dare ask about her, feeling a mix of happiness and pain that threatened to suffocate him.

Lin Wanrong slowly moved forward. Miss Xu watched his back, her heart aching, her feelings indescribable. "Lin San—" she suddenly called out.

Lin Wanrong quickly turned around, smiling, "You should come in with me, and I'll introduce you to Qingxuan."

Miss Xu shook her head firmly, saying softly, "What am I to do at your reunion? If you see Miss Xiao, just stay inside. If you don't see her, come out quickly; I'll wait for you here."

Her voice was soft and low, showing a vulnerability that sharply contrasted with her usual competence. But under these circumstances, Lin Wanrong had no time to pay attention to that.

Lin Wanrong nodded, his footsteps heavy as though weighing a thousand pounds, and slowly moved forward. Xu Zhiqing stared blankly at him, tears sparkling in her eyes. The mountain wind caused her long skirt to dance and flutter, and from heart to body, she trembled slightly. Her lips stammered a few times, and the words "We'll not part unless we meet" slipped from her mouth, so faint that only she could hear them.

Upon entering the garden, the first sight that met his eyes was a yard full of peach and plum trees, with the ground strewn with a riot of colorful fallen petals. Red, white, yellow, and multicolored petals seemed like a shower of blossoms raining down, swaying and falling through the air, dazzling to the eyes. The peach blossoms atop the sheer peak bloomed so vividly, and recalling Qingxuan's painting of the falling flowers, his heart twitched with a pang. He seemed to see Qingxuan sitting

alone in the courtyard at sunset, her delicate hand slightly raised, gently scattering the lonely peach blossoms.

With a gentle slap on the tree trunk, the blooming peach blossoms drifted down onto his face and body, and a faint fragrance assailed his senses. He slowly continued, his footsteps taking him deeper into the garden.

He had only taken a few steps when he looked up and was struck as if by thunder. He froze, unable to move another inch.

A graceful woman sat quietly in the center of the garden, surrounded by a riot of fallen petals that accentuated her jade-like, radiant cheeks. The gentle breeze lifted her pale yellow dress, and her long, graceful hair danced with the wind, making her look like a fairy, pure and ethereal.

Her slender, fair hand gently lifted, catching the falling peach blossoms, as brilliant tears slowly trickled from her beautiful eyes. She murmured, "The late dawn of spring, known before all the flowers—"

"—Year after year, planting peach blossoms, blooming at the time of heartbreak!" A clear yet deep voice resonated behind her, both strange and familiar.

Xiao Qingxuan's body trembled, and the small bottle of perfume she tightly held in her hand dropped to the ground with a soft clink.

Chapter 409 A Joyous Occasion at Home

Xiao Qingxuan slowly turned around, her unparalleled face that had been the subject of Lin Wanrong's thoughts day and night appeared before his eyes.

Her cloud-like hair danced gently, and her exquisite skin, flawless to the touch, seemed as if it could be broken by a mere blow. Her fine willow eyebrows resembled the spring waters of March, and her deep, dark pupils were like the vast starry sky. Her rosy lips were bright as crimson spots, and on her cheeks as white as jade, two rows of tears slowly fell. Her eyebrows slightly furrowed, conveying an endless sorrow. Her graceful figure stood in the peach blossom forest, akin to a resentful goddess, surpassing even the celestial fairies by a fraction.

"Qingxuan—" Lin Wanrong called out softly. His legs felt as though they were filled with lead, heavy as a thousand pounds, and for a moment, he couldn't move his feet.

Xiao Qingxuan stared at him blankly, her red lips quivering a few times, but she couldn't say a word. Her tears fell like beads off a broken string, tumbling down.

"Qingxuan—" Lin Wanrong's heart ached greatly. The beauty was right before his eyes, and he cared for nothing else as he sprinted towards her.

"Don't come over," Xiao Qingxuan turned away, her fragrant shoulders trembling, sobbing, "You, you must go back quickly. Our marital fate has ended; don't let me ruin you."

"What are you saying?" Lin Wanrong was stunned, "Marital fate ended? What does that mean?"

Xiao Qingxuan's shoulders shook even more violently, her voice choked, "Don't ask any more, just go back quickly. If someone sees us, it will endanger your life. I can't hurt you, and I can't hurt our—" She choked up, unable to continue, her long sleeve subtly gesturing for him to leave quickly.

Who was Lin Wanrong? By nature, he was one who would not leave when urged, nor retreat when driven. Seeing Qingxuan's distressed face only made him more obstinate. After going through endless hardships to find Qingxuan, how could he simply leave? That was not his nature. When matters reached this point, he instead became calm, walking to Qingxuan's side, reaching out with his large hand to firmly grasp her small one.

The long-missed Qingxuan, her little hand as soft as silk, yet cold as ice, devoid of any warmth. As he held it, Qingxuan felt somewhat frightened, but more so, warmth. Though she wanted to refuse, her heart ached like a prickling needle, as though happiness were slipping away from her fingertips. Both joy and pain filled her as tears rained down, sprinkling onto their intertwined hands.

"Why aren't you leaving yet? Do you want to annoy me to death?" Xiao Qingxuan sobbed, using all her strength, yet her small hand unconsciously grasped his even tighter.

"Why should I leave?" Lin Wanrong laughed, "I'm chatting with my wife; even the gods of thunder and lightning wouldn't dare to strike us. Where would I go? If I left, not only you, but even I would be annoyed to death by myself."

Xiao Qingxuan, torn between joy and sorrow, closed her eyes as her tears continued to fall. Her voice, though, involuntarily softened, "How can you still have this shameless nature? I must have owed you something in a previous life."

Lin Wanrong, holding her hand, laughed heartily, "Isn't this nature good? If not for this nature, how could I have married you? I'll be like this for my whole life; except for you, no one can make me change."

His words were sweeter than honey, and even Xiao Qingxuan, a woman transcending the mundane world, couldn't resist his sugary bombardment after being his loving wife. Her little hand hastily covered his lips, whispering, "Don't speak loudly; if someone hears us, our entire family will be finished."

"Are we a family?" Lin Wanrong's heart filled with joy, and he lightly kissed her jade-like, tender fingers, delightfully saying, "I knew it, Qingxuan, you can't bear to part from me. If you ask me to speak softly, I will."

Xiao Qingxuan was a little elated, but also a bit pained in her heart. Her face turned pale, and tears wet her cheeks. "A tragic fate, you and I are a tragic fate from past lives. We're entangled in such a way, and I'm afraid it will cost you your life and hurt us even more."

Lin Wanrong hastily replied, "Are you worried that your master will still kill me? Don't worry, Fairy Ning and I are now very, very good friends. The misunderstandings from the past have been cleared."

Xiao Qingxuan shook her head slightly, "You won't understand. My master loves me and favors me privately. If she wants to kill you, she'll definitely succeed. The affairs of the Fairy Hall are incredibly complex, and as the head of the Martial School, my Master can't manage all these big issues. Only I—" She sighed softly, tears falling, "I've heard of everything you've done these days. You're now famous, respected by all. I have no regrets in being your wife for a lifetime. But sadly, Qingxuan's fortune is thin, unable to enjoy the beautiful moments of this world, and may even bring you disaster. You must forget me, live your happy life, for if I ruin you, I'll never be at peace in this world."

Lin Wanrong was shocked, and the words of Qingxuan seemed to be explaining what would happen after her death. Could it be that she—?

He quickly grabbed her hand and said seriously, "Don't think nonsense, we're husband and wife, united. No matter what, we'll face it together. To be humble, nothing has been born yet that can defeat me. You mustn't lose hope. If I lose you, I guarantee I don't know what I'd do."

Xiao Qingxuan shook her head with a bitter smile, "What are you thinking? When did I say I would take my own life?" Her voice softened, and a flush of color appeared on her face, whispering, "Even

if I did, it would be after five months. You and I were husband and wife, I must give you an explanation."

Qingxuan's face was pale but tinged with a hint of red, like a peach blossom emerging from the snow, elegant and noble. Months had not seen her; her face was more refined, her figure more voluptuous, and a soft glow spread across her face, like a transcendent, beautiful fairy, noble and stunning. Looking at her, Lin Wanrong's heart felt incredibly peaceful and serene. No one else could bring him this feeling; at this moment, not even the most beautiful women like Sister An or Fairy Ning could compare to the incomparable Qingxuan.

Five months later? What did that mean? Lin Wanrong stared at Qingxuan in a daze for a while, pondering her words, puzzled and unsure, but Xiao Qingxuan bit her silver teeth, pushed his body away, and said through teary eyes, "You must leave the mountain quickly, not a moment longer. If the Hall Master sees you, he will take your life, and I won't be able to go on."

"What nonsense from the Hall Master, to separate me and Qingxuan like this?" Lin Wanrong roared in anger, "Why should I be afraid of him? He's just a Hall Master, and I'm not even afraid of the Emperor, let alone him? If he angers me, I'll blast this green mountain flat with cannons. For my wife, I'll be ruthless, crazy, there's nothing I wouldn't do."

Xiao Qingxuan felt a wave of dizziness in her heart. The deeper the happiness, the deeper the pain, and tears fell like spring rain in March. Choking back her sobs, she pushed him away, "You must leave the mountain quickly, and don't talk nonsense. If you anger the Hall Master, everything will be lost. Even if you're not afraid, we have our child—"

"What did you say?" Lin Wanrong was struck as if by lightning, his mind ceased to think, feeling nothing but emptiness. He tightly gripped Qingxuan's hand, "Qingxuan, what did you say? Say it again! Our child? Our child?!"

Xiao Qingxuan was shocked, no longer able to push him away. She covered her cheeks with both hands, tears streaming through her fingers, "I don't know, I don't know—I hate you, I hate you, why did you come only now?" Overcome with emotion, she could no longer contain herself and fell into his embrace. Her tender little fists pounded against his chest like erratic drums, tears pouring down like a floodgate had been opened. Months of accumulated emotions burst forth in that moment. Even though Xiao Qingxuan was usually as calm as water, after living through months of longing and worry, joy and terror, even her strong will couldn't hold up any longer. She collapsed in his arms, choking back sobs, nearly fainting.

"Our child, our child—" Lin Wanrong was in a daze, his mind unable to grasp anything else, his words reduced to just those few syllables. He didn't even feel the blows raining down on him from Qingxuan.

"I came too late?" Lin Wanrong was suddenly alarmed and quickly loosened his grip on Qingxuan's soft waist, his eyes gazing at her belly. He didn't know until he looked, and when he did, he was ecstatic. He saw Xiao Qingxuan, dressed in a gentle satin yellow dress, her figure incredibly graceful. If not for careful examination, he wouldn't have noticed her slightly protruding belly, already pregnant.

"Ah—" Lin Wanrong madly lifted Xiao Qingxuan, spinning her around in several large circles, shouting with joy, "I'm going to be a father, I'm going to be a father—"

"You must put me down, put me down quickly." Seeing his wild actions, Xiao Qingxuan was both comforted and worried, and hurriedly patted his shoulder, whispering, "Don't hurt the child."

'Dammit, I'm just too happy,' Lin Wanrong thought, carefully setting her down and having her sit on a stool, his face a mix of shock and joy, his hands not knowing where to place them.

Xiao Qingxuan was touched, and took his hand with a gentle smile, like a hundred flowers blooming, that kindly maternal glow making everything else lose its color.

Holding Qingxuan's small hand, Lin Wanrong experienced an unreal yet genuine sensation he had never felt before, a feeling of blood connection that nothing could sever. Looking at Qingxuan's slightly raised belly, where a new life was growing, Lin Wanrong suddenly felt the urge to cry. He actually had a descendant now, after being in this world for so long, this was the first real feeling of integrating himself into it.

Lin Wanrong smiled, his lips dry, and murmured, "Qingxuan, do you know, not until today did I have a feeling of putting down roots. It's so real. Thank you!"

The words contained too many meanings, and although Xiao Qingxuan was the person in this world who understood him best, she couldn't fully grasp his intent. A mix of sourness and joy filled Xiao Qingxuan's heart, as if she could feel the surging emotions in his soul.

Having been with him for so long, she had never seen him cry. She extended her small hand, gently wiping away the tear marks from the corner of his eyes, softly saying, "You're going to be a father

now, why are you acting like a child? If our child is born and sees you like this, won't he or she die laughing?"

Lin Wanrong laughed and wiped the corner of his eyes, crouching beside Qingxuan, "I'm happy, so happy. Qingxuan, let me hear our son's movements."

Xiao Qingxuan's face showed displeasure as she huffed, "Do you prefer sons over daughters?"

"Never, absolutely never!" Lin Wanrong hurriedly swore to the heavens, "I prefer daughters over sons, daughters over sons!"

Qingxuan chuckled and covered her lips, lightly laughing, "I've never seen a father like you before." Since their reunion, Xiao Qingxuan had shed countless tears, and this was the first time she had shown a smile. Her soft and gentle radiance seemed to outshine even the fairies.

Lin Wanrong stared in awe, murmuring, "Qingxuan, you look so beautiful."

"Don't need your praise," Xiao Qingxuan softly replied, tightly gripping his hand, a faint blush spreading across her face. The two enjoyed a moment of silent companionship, as if they were back in their small room in Jinling, at Lin San's humble yet warm house.

"Let me listen," Lin Wanrong said with a playful smile.

Xiao Qingxuan's face turned red, and she lightly said, "Don't, if someone else sees, oh, you rascal..." Lin Wanrong leaned close to Qingxuan's slightly protruding belly, listening to the soft sounds of his own bloodline, and Xiao Qingxuan sighed softly, her face flushed with a mix of pain and happiness. She tightly clutched his hair, knowing that all the suffering and waiting were worth this moment.

After listening for a while, Lin Wanrong looked up, laughing, "I bet it's a boy in there, kicking merrily, like it has four feet moving."

"You're the one with four feet," Qingxuan blushed and argued, "Don't you dare bully our child. No matter if it's a boy or girl, you mustn't tease them."

"How could I?" Lin Wanrong patted his chest, "If we have a son, he'll be as handsome as his father, and if it's a daughter, she'll be as pretty as her mother. The next generation of the Lin family will be of top quality. But, speaking of that, Qingxuan, you've done a great deed for the Lin family. We've had a thin lineage for generations, and I never thought that with me, it would flourish at once. Sigh, I'm just too capable, can't help it."

"What do you mean 'flourish at once'? It sounds so crude," Qingxuan's face turned crimson, and she chuckled, punching him playfully. Listening to his nonsense, her uneasy mind calmed considerably. This profound sense of security was incomparable and was what attracted her to him.

Lin Wanrong stood up, embracing her waist, and Xiao Qingxuan lovingly nestled against his shoulder. The couple, having waited for many days and endured hardships, finally reunited, enjoying a warmth that outsiders could never understand. This brief peace and tranquility were so precious that even if they were offered to become immortals, they wouldn't desire it.

"Oh my, I forgot something," Lin Wanrong suddenly jumped up, his face full of regret.

"What is it?" Xiao Qingxuan brushed her disheveled hair from her temples, speaking softly.

Lin Wanrong counted on his fingers and said, "I forgot to purchase baby supplies. Things like milk powder, diapers, cotton clothes, a crib, a wet nurse – oh my, there's so much to do. I also need to refurbish the garden at home so the baby won't stumble when learning to walk."

Xiao Qingxuan listened and shook her head, chuckling lightly, "It's still early days, why are you worrying about all these things? Moreover, I live on the mountain; even if you prepare all this, how are you going to get it up here?" As she spoke, her expression turned melancholy, and she sighed, looking at Lin Wanrong without saying a word.

Thinking of how Qingxuan was once an untouchable fairy, and how, after a trip to Jinling, she returned pregnant while still unmarried in an era when propriety was valued above all else, one could imagine the hardships she had endured.

Lin Wanrong snorted, "I understand now. Has someone used our baby to threaten you? This 'Jade Virtue Fairy Hall,' proclaiming the teachings of Confucius and Mencius, the path of the scholar, would stoop to such despicable acts? Qingxuan, why don't we just go home? Let's see what they can do to you."

"Don't talk nonsense," Xiao Qingxuan's eyes filled with tears, "No one is forcing me, it's all my choice. When I was young, I made a vow. Only after meeting you did I stray from that path. Now, I'm simply fulfilling my promise. After you descend the mountain today, don't come back. Wait for our child to be born; taking care of the child is what matters."

Recalling what Li Xiangjun had said, that missing today would sever his marital connection with Qingxuan, Lin Wanrong grabbed her hand and shook his head, "Asking me to leave the mountain is absolutely impossible, unless you come with me."

Xiao Qingxuan choked, "Do you want to die? Even if you don't care about your life, what about our child? Are you going to let him be born without a father and mother? You heartless rogue, so stubborn, you'll be the death of me one day!"

Among the women Lin Wanrong knew, only Xiao Qingxuan would scold him like this. Strangely enough, he found it both comforting and touching. He smiled and pulled her close, "Who says I don't care about my life? My Lin family just received joyous news; how could I throw my life away so quickly? I'm only doing what a normal person would do, spending every day happily with my wife and child. Is that wrong? Even if your Master comes personally, I'll argue with her. And even if you were wrong, as your husband, I'll take the blame for you. Whatever punishment they have should be directed at me; it has nothing to do with you."

'Even if Qingxuan refused to leave the mountain, as long as she remained there for one day, I would send troops to surround the peak, ignoring whoever is the Master or sect leader. As long as my wife is here for a single day, I'll make sure you all would be trapped within, unable to move. You claim to be above worldly matters here, don't you? You claim not to partake in worldly pleasures, don't you? I'll send food, cotton clothing, baby bottles every day, and in a few days, I would bring a massive family entourage up the mountain to show concern. I'll make your tearing apart lovers known to the world, and let's see what you can do about it. In short, once I found Qingxuan, I must never let her slip away.' Lin Wanrong smirked, having made up his mind about the plan, knowing that only someone with his shamelessness could pull it off.

Xiao Qingxuan couldn't argue with him, feeling warmth in her heart as if bathed in brilliant sunshine. She leaned gently on his shoulder and sighed helplessly, "Why didn't I meet you earlier?"

"It's all my fault, making you suffer," Lin Wanrong said, laughing mischievously.

"Silly talker!" Xiao Qingxuan gently smiled, knowing his nature, and didn't press him further. She grabbed his hand and began to shed tears, "Since you are so determined, we as a family will face life and death together, never to be separated!"

Chapter 410 Once United by Heaven and Earth, We Will Never be Parted!

"Lin San, Lin San—" From outside the courtyard, a woman's anxious call suddenly rang out. Xiao Qingxuan's expression changed slightly, and she pulled Lin Wanrong behind her to shield him.

Seeing Qingxuan protecting him this way, Lin Wanrong's heart was touched, and he hurriedly took her small hand, softly saying, "Don't worry, she's my friend."

"Your friend?" Qingxuan sighed. "Your journey up the mountain has already been arduous enough. Why should you let someone else trouble themselves for our sake, especially a woman?"

'Telling her not to come would have been a hundred times harder than having her come.' Lin Wanrong patted Qingxuan's little hand, smiling, "It's okay, Miss Xu is no outsider. Let me introduce you. Miss Xu, I'm over here—"

Xu Zhiqing's face was filled with anxiety as she hurried over, and the first thing she saw was the woman standing beside Lin Wanrong. With skin as white as snow, cherry-red lips, an extremely beautiful face, and a quiet and elegant demeanor, her cloud-like hair scattered in the wind, she seemed like a celestial being who had fallen to earth, making others feel ashamed of their appearance.

Xu Zhiqing stared in amazement. Was this extraordinarily beautiful woman Lin San's wife? Although she prided herself on her looks and intellect, in front of this noble woman who resembled a banished fairy, she could not help but feel a little inferior.

"Is this Miss Xu?" Xiao Qingxuan took Lin Wanrong's hand and smiled slightly, her demeanor gracious and graceful, outshining all flowers. "I have only just reunited with My Dear today, and in my excitement, I have forgotten my manners. If I have been remiss in my treatment of you, Sister, I hope you will forgive me."

A single call of "My Dear" made Lin Wanrong's heart blossom with joy. He felt a tingle inside and hurriedly said with a beaming smile, "Qingxuan, there's no need for such formality. We are all family here. Miss Xu is the daughter of the world's number one scholar, Mr. Xu Wei, and her learning and insight are no less than Mr. Xu's."

Xiao Qingxuan's beautiful eyes moved, and she glanced at him, then smiled at Xu Zhiqing, saying, "So, Sister, you are the daughter of the great literary master, the first extraordinary woman of our great country. I have long admired your name. Had fate not delayed us, Qingxuan would have met you long ago."

'No wonder Lin San is so concerned about Xiao Qingxuan. This Miss Xiao's beauty and grace are unparalleled in the world, far beyond me.' Xu Zhiqing sighed inwardly and gently stepped forward, softly saying, "Miss Xiao is too kind. I am just a woman, with nothing extraordinary about me. But you, Miss, with your celestial bearing and graceful demeanor, like a white lotus that has washed away the dust of the world, make me feel utterly inferior. Lin San, if you ever wrong this angelic woman, you will surely incur the wrath of heaven and earth."

'Nonsense! She's my wife, my child's mother; how could I not love her?' Even Xu Zhiqing has to bow to Qingxuan's charm, which appeals to both men and women. Lin Wanrong took Qingxuan's hand and laughed, "You can rest assured on that account. My greatest virtue is loving my wife."

Xiao Qingxuan's face turned slightly red, and she softly said, "Don't talk nonsense, lest Miss Xu laugh at us. Sister, My Dear has always been like this; please don't think him frivolous."

'This is considered frivolous? More "frivolous" deeds, your husband has done many.' Xu Zhiqing sighed softly without speaking. Lin Wanrong said, "Miss Xu, you were calling me earlier. Is there something wrong?"

Xu Zhiqing let out a cry of "Oh!" Her expression turned anxious, and she hurriedly said, "I was just outside and saw someone coming this way. I don't know if it's urgent or not."

Qingxuan's face tightened, and she glanced at Lin Wanrong. Lin Wanrong shook his head firmly, and Xiao Qingxuan sighed. Turning to Xu Zhiqing with a slight smile, she calmly said, "Thank you for your kindness, sister. It might have been urgent just now, but it's no longer important. My Dear and I share life and death, fortune and misfortune together. Nothing else can come between us." A lotus-like smile surfaced on her face, dignified and pure. Lin Wanrong, filled with joy, held her hand, and the two were full of affection and unspeakable sweetness.

Xu Zhiqing felt a pang of emotion and quickly turned her head away. "Miss Xiao, hearing you say that reassures me. I wish you both a hundred years of blissful marriage and a lifetime together."

No sooner had her voice fallen than a clear male voice rang from outside the garden, "Junior Sister Xiao, are you in there?"

The only junior sister surnamed Xiao in the garden was naturally Xiao Qingxuan. Lin Wanrong glanced outside, spotting the edge of a white garment fluttering near the gate. The man had not yet entered the garden, presumably waiting for Xiao Qingxuan to speak.

"It's Senior Brother Liu!" Xiao Qingxuan's eyebrows furrowed slightly, and she gave a bitter smile, shaking her head. She grabbed Lin Wanrong's hand and asked softly, "Husband, should we let him in?"

'This Senior Brother Liu seemed quite obedient, but he dared to call my wife 'junior sister,' as if I wouldn't beat him for that.' Lin Wanrong laughed, feigning indifference, "Let him in, it's windy and rainy outside, cold enough. Don't want him to freeze. Ah, generous men like me are a rare breed nowadays."

Xiao Qingxuan shook her head, smiling, and pinched his hand, calling out to the garden, "Senior Brother Liu, what do you want with me?"

Senior Brother Liu's voice carried urgency, "Junior Sister Xiao, I heard two people come up the mountain, a man and a woman. I'm afraid they might harm you, so I came to check on you."

'How ridiculous, wanting to see my wife with such a lame excuse!' Lin Wanrong was irritated, chuckling without saying a word.

Xiao Qingxuan seemed to know Lin Wanrong's feelings and smiled at him, calmly saying, "Thank you for your concern, Senior Brother. I am fine. Please go back."

A silence hung outside the garden, lasting for quite some time before Senior Brother Liu's voice came again, "Junior Sister Xiao, I have something urgent to discuss with you. Please let me in to talk."

'This Senior Brother's face is indeed thick,' thought Lin Wanrong, clenching his fist and humming, "Qingxuan, has this Senior Brother Liu ever practiced martial arts?"

Xiao Qingxuan shook her head, "Senior Brother Liu is a scholar and doesn't practice martial arts. Why do you ask?"

"That's good to know." Lin Wanrong smiled, "Such a scholar, I could beat seven or eight of them with my fists and feet. If he keeps chattering outside and interrupts me and my wife's conversation, I won't be polite."

Qingxuan laughed, holding him back, "Don't talk nonsense. Your martial arts are mediocre. What if you hurt yourself in a fight?"

"Junior Sister Xiao—" Senior Brother Liu, waiting outside for a long time with no response, became somewhat agitated, "Please forgive my rashness. But I have something to say today, and if I miss today, I will regret it forever. This Peach and Plum Garden is a sacred place to me. You've never allowed me in, but today's matter is urgent. Even if you scold me a thousand times, I'll accept it."

Lin Wanrong blinked in disbelief. 'Grandmother's, pursuing my wife openly in front of me? Do you think I'm just thin air?' He was about to rush forward, but Xiao Qingxuan slightly smiled and took hold of his hand, saying, "You can't even bear this slight indignity? From my childhood till now, I have met countless men and never shown a pleasant face to any of them. But then I met you—"

A gentle blush spread across her face as she looked at Lin Wanrong and gave a coquettish smile. Her voice soft, she called to the outside, "Senior Brother Liu, please come in!"

Outside, a young gentleman approached, of average build, dressed in white, his hair bound with a light blue silk scarf. His eyebrows were like drawn swords, his nose like a gallnut, walking with calm and composed temperament, graceful and elegant, resembling the looks of Pan An, and the style of Song Yu.

Upon seeing the vigorous and spirited appearance of Senior Brother Liu, Lin Wanrong felt a surge of annoyance. 'What's so special about nice clothes? It was probably your parents who paid for them; what's there to be arrogant about? If you've got guts, take them off and compare!'

Xu Zhiqing glanced at Lin San and then at Senior Brother Liu, suddenly covering her lips with a chuckle. Lin Wanrong looked at her curiously, "What are you laughing at?"

Miss Xu's face turned slightly red as she haughtily replied, "This Senior Brother Liu surpasses you in looks and grace. Miss Qingxuan taking a liking to you is truly a blessing you've cultivated over several lifetimes."

Lin Wanrong paid no heed, laughing, "Looks and grace? Miss Xu, if you had seen me losing my temper, you wouldn't say that. Ask Qingxuan what I looked like when she first met me?"

Recalling their first encounter by Xuanwu Lake and how he had bullied her, Xiao Qingxuan's face turned a shade redder. Yet her heart was filled with warmth, and she gently smiled at him, holding his hand, expressing all her affection wordlessly.

Seeing the understanding between them, Miss Xu sighed softly. Lin San's unruly nature could only be tamed by a lady like Miss Xiao, who was detached from worldly conventions. Luckily, someone was there to keep him in line; otherwise, with his wild and bullying ways, few women in this world could escape his clutches. Miss Xu's face flushed, and her heart was filled with a mixture of emotions.

"Junior Sister Xiao—" A sudden call broke the sweetness between the two. Lin Wanrong snorted in annoyance and looked up to see Senior Brother Liu staring intently at him, his face flashing with surprise, anger, and jealousy. At least, this Senior Brother Liu's manners were still decent, tightly clenching his teeth without exploding.

'See, kid, you've never seen someone so handsome, have you?' Lin Wanrong grinned, carelessly saluting in mock respect, "Wow, I haven't seen such a handsome talent in a long time, almost catching up with me!"

Senior Brother Liu was taken aback, unfamiliar with Lin Wanrong's playful and unserious demeanor. He thought that Junior Sister wouldn't like someone with such a bizarre style. Feeling a bit lucky, he forced a smile and quickly returned the salute, "I dare not, I dare not!"

"Yes, yes!" Lin Wanrong giggled and said, "I've roamed the world of martial artists for over ten years, always looking for someone handsome but never finding anyone. Who would've thought that today, on this visit, I'd unexpectedly come across a brilliant fellow like you, just dripping with handsomeness? It's truly fate. Brilliant fellow, may I ask for your esteemed name and your age this year?"

"My name is Liu Shiyuan, aged twenty-two, and I am the eighth-ranked disciple of the Fairy Hall's Literary School," Senior Brother Liu hastily said. "But may I know who this distinguished brother is—"

"So, it's Brother Bullshit " Lin Wanrong laughed and said, "I am Fairy Ning's nominal disciple from the Fairy Hall's Martial School, diligently studying the thirty-six scattered hands of Dong Xuanzi. I

specialize in victory with a single strike, wandering the Jianghu for many years. My brothers on the road have given me a nickname, 'Fast Sensation Cannon God.'"

"Fast Sensation Cannon God?" This nickname was quite unique indeed. Liu Shiyuan quickly responded with a fist salute, "I have heard much of you, much indeed. So, you're a Junior Brother from Martial School. Oh, has Fairy Ning returned? I have never heard of the Fairy Ning accepting male disciples."

"Indeed, Fairy Ning does not accept male disciples." Lin Wanrong said with a mysterious smile, "But I have some connections with the Martial School, and because of her love for the School, she took me as a nominal disciple. Just a nominal one, nothing more. It's all about sending gifts on holidays and receiving New Year's money, that's all."

Xiao Qingxuan listened to his nonsense and felt amused. She quickly pulled him and chided lovingly, "Don't talk nonsense. If Master hears you, you'll have to bear the consequences."

Hearing Qingxuan and this Senior Brother Liu's conversation, and understanding that Fairy Ning had not yet returned, Lin Wanrong's heart sank a little, but he did not show it and smiled without speaking.

Seeing the "Fast Sensation Cannon God" acting intimately with Junior Sister Xiao, Liu Shiyuan's heart tightened. His eyes fell on Xiao Qingxuan, and he softly said, "Junior Sister, these two are—"

Xiao Qingxuan smiled slightly and took Xu Zhiqing's hand, "This young lady is the world's number one scholar, Mr. Wen Chang's daughter, and also our Great Hua's number one exceptional woman, Miss Xu Zhiqing."

"You are Miss Xu from Jinghua Academy?" Senior Brother Liu was astonished, and quickly bowed deeply, "Miss, I have long admired your great name. Meeting you today is truly a fortunate occasion in this life."

Xu Zhiqing calmly returned the salute, "Young Master Liu, you flatter me. Zhiqing is but a common woman, undeserving of such praise."

Seeing Liu Shiyuan's gaze fall on Lin Wanrong again, Xiao Qingxuan lightly smiled, holding Lin Wanrong's hand tightly, their fingers interlocking. She looked at Lin Wanrong tenderly and said firmly, "As for this man, he is my lifelong and inseparable husband—"

"Junior Sister, what did you say? He is your husband?" Liu Shiyuan's face turned pale, as if struck by a hammer, and he staggered back a few steps, staring blankly at their intertwined hands, like a man stunned.

Xiao Qingxuan said calmly, "Senior Brother Liu, everyone in the Fairy Hall knows that Qingxuan has practiced diligently since childhood, indifferent to the men of the world. However, fate played a trick on me. I encountered my husband in Jinling, and since then, I have been hopelessly entangled. Breaking my past promise, I know I'm at fault, but even if there are countless trials, My Dear and I will face them together. Living in the same bed, dying in the same tomb, once united by heaven and earth, we will never be parted!"

Lin Wanrong listened, a mix of joy and sorrow overwhelming him. He hastily grabbed her small hand, wanting to say something. His lips moved a few times, but he could not utter a single word.

Xiao Qingxuan tightly held Lin Wanrong's large hand, smiling gently, "My Dear, you are my husband, so please tell Senior Brother Liu your full name."

Xu Zhiqing, standing to the side, listened with a heavy heart and astonishment. This one sentence was no different from pushing Lin San to declare war against the Fairy Hall. But this fool, Lin San, probably would dare to poke a hole in the sky for Miss Xiao. Xu Zhiqing shook her head and sighed lightly. Unknowingly, tears began to flow freely.

This was the day he had been waiting for. Lin Wanrong's blood boiled with excitement, and he laughed loudly, "My name is Lin San, and I am the number one servant of the Xiao family in Jinling Prefecture!"