

Finest 446

Chapter 446 Flying Ropes

"Aiming the cannons at us? Is something amiss?" Lin Wanrong took out his telescope and scanned the area. These few cannons were huge in size, with long and thick barrels, clearly of a modified design, not to be underestimated. He put down the telescope and grasped Fairy Ning's small hand, "Sister, promise me one thing. No matter what happens, you must not leave me."

Ning Yuxi lowered her head and softly said, "Why are you bringing this up again? Is something unusual happening?"

Lin Wanrong held her hand tightly, his expression complicated, "If I'm not mistaken, this should be Qingxuan's doing. She must have invited Xu Zhiqing. Only Miss Xu, who is skilled at mechanisms and calculations, could come up with such an idea."

He spoke simply, but Ning Yuxi tensed, sensing something, "Are you saying that Qingxuan and her group have already found a way?" Her eyes grew vacant as she fell silent.

Lin Wanrong smiled slightly, unconcerned, "Even if they have found a way, I will never let you leave me. Otherwise, I'd rather not descend this mountain."

Fairy Sister looked at him softly, a mist forming in her eyes, "Don't talk like a child. If they really have found a way, then it must be fate. I'd lose willingly. The northern nomads are invading, and Qingxuan is pregnant. There are many tasks waiting for you, don't delay because of me."

People are indeed fickle. Thinking back to when she had been determined to trap him on an isolated peak, she now worried that he might fail to realize his ambitions. The taste of this change was something only she could understand. Ning Yuxi sighed softly, her expression growing more resolute.

"Miss Xu, do you really have a way to rescue General Lin?" Staring at the distant Thousand-Forsake Peak shrouded in mist, he couldn't see where Lin Wanrong was. Hu Bugui looked at Xu Zhiqing standing on the cliff edge, filled with concern.

Xu Zhiqing's eyes were slightly closed. Neither shaking her head nor nodding, she finally opened her eyes after a long moment, "General Hu, have all the items I requested been prepared?"

"They're ready, all ready," Hu Bugui nodded hurriedly, "Cannons, ropes, chains. My men and I have worked together since early morning to carry them up the mountain. We didn't miss a thing. Miss Xu, these items are custom-made and couldn't be prepared in less than two days. General Lin is fortunate to have such a confidant like you—"

"Do not misunderstand," Xu Zhiqing's expression was cold, "I don't know any General Lin, nor have I prepared anything specially. These are regular supplies for the Divine Machine Unit and have nothing to do with the man on the opposite mountain. Whether he lives or dies is not my concern."

Considering how sweet Xu Zhiqing and General Lin had been in Shandong, why had things turned out this way? Hu Bugui discreetly stuck out his tongue and nodded respectfully, "I understand. Miss Xu came to this peak to watch the sunrise, and it has nothing to do with General Lin."

Xu Zhiqing's brow furrowed, wanting to clarify, but not knowing what to say, she remained silent.

A sedan chair was rapidly ascending from the base of the mountain. Hu Bugui noticed and exclaimed joyfully, "The general's wife has returned. Miss Xu, you should consult with her quickly —Miss Xu, Miss Xu—"

Xu Zhiqing's steps were hurried and her clothes were fluttering. As if she didn't hear his words, she hurriedly went to the distance without turning her head. Hu Bugui looked back and forth between the sedan chair that had just arrived and Xu Zhiqing, seemingly understanding what was happening. He felt bad for Lin Wanrong. 'If I were him, I'd rather stay on the peak. It's safer that way.'

Before the chair had even settled, Xiao Qingxuan burst out, followed by Qiaoqiao and a young, pretty girl. "Brother Hu, what is going on? Why are there so many cannons?" Qiaoqiao asked impatiently.

Xiao Qingxuan looked toward the forest of cannons in the distance. In the middle of it all, a slender figure in blue was busily moving around, followed closely by Luo Ning. "Let's not trouble Brother Hu further," she said, smiling. "I'll go find Miss Xu myself."

The young girl trailing behind Xiao Qingxuan glanced into the distance and timidly asked, "Big Sister, where is that bad man from our home? Why can't I see him?"

"Don't worry, Second Miss," Qiaoqiao grabbed Xiao Yushuang's hand softly. "Big brother is on the opposite peak. He will come down soon; we can wait here."

Xiao Yushuang looked up at the towering peak, as sharp as a knife's blade, stretching into the sky. "Qiaoqiao, how could that bad man climb so high? He doesn't have that ability."

"He's more capable than you think," said Xiao Qingxuan, a bitter smile on her face. She paused for a moment and then walked toward Xu Zhiqing.

Xu Zhiqing wore a light blue dress and a simple piece of cloth to hold back her hair. Her body was slim and elegant, like a blossoming rose, as she peered toward the opposite peak. Xiao Qingxuan sighed softly at the sight of the mature and stubborn Xu Zhiqing.

"Sister, you're back," Luo Ning turned around and saw Xiao Qingxuan, her face lighting up in joy. "Miss Xu is here; she has a plan to bring big b—"

"Ning'er—" Xu Zhiqing hurriedly cut her off, bowed deeply toward Xiao Qingxuan, and knelt down. "Commoner Xu Zhiqing pays her respects to Princess Chuyun."

"Why do you act so distant, Sister Xu?" Xiao Qingxuan said with a smile, helping her up. "You're not a stranger to us. Remember when you and My Dear came up the mountain together? The three of us faced many challenges together."

Xu Zhiqing's eyelids drooped, avoiding Xiao Qingxuan's gaze. "There are distinctions between rank and status, and we must uphold decorum. Please, Princess, do not bring up the past. I am no longer the person I was back then; I've forgotten many things."

Ning'er, hiding behind Miss Xu, sneaked a playful tongue stick-out towards Xiao Qingxuan and subtly shook her head. Xiao Qingxuan laughed, "Sister Xu, you truly have a carefree spirit. I admire and look up to you so much. I wonder where you learned the art of forgetting. Could you teach me? So that I might forget about my annoying husband."

Xu Zhiqing clenched her teeth, "Your Highness jokes. You and your husband are deeply in love, envied by all. How could you ever wish to forget him? If you truly want to forget, I do have a foolish method. Write his name on a piece of paper, and each day pierce it with a needle ten

thousand times. When your heart is thoroughly wounded, you won't think of him, won't suffer, and will naturally forget."

"What a unique method," Xiao Qingxuan commented wistfully. "If I had your guidance when I first met My Dear, I might not have the troubles I have today."

Both Miss Xu and Miss Xiao were talented women—Xu Zhiqing possessed exceptional intelligence and innate pride, while Xiao Qingxuan had the elegance and poise that could govern a nation. Their conversation was filled with subtle barbs, each refusing to yield an inch.

Listening to the two sisters spar, Ning'er blinked in confusion, uncertain whom to side with. She quickly took both their hands and laughed, "What's this about forgetting? If everyone were like you two, my big brother and I would have lost our fate long ago. If you love someone, don't let go. If you let go, you never truly loved them. So, Sister Zhiqing, tell us how to save my big brother; you two are so close—"

Xu Zhiqing cut her off, her tone indifferent, "You may be mistaken, Ning'er. My acquaintance with the man across the way is merely superficial; I wouldn't call it close. I came today at the behest of General Li to assist the Princess, nothing more."

Ning'er glanced at Xiao Qingxuan, who could only offer a resigned smile. Xiao Qingxuan nodded, "So that's the case. I'm grateful for your help, Sister. But do you have any plans to rescue my husband successfully?"

Xiao Qingxuan was of high standing, and her questions demanded answers. Xu Zhiqing sighed softly, "You don't need to ask me, Your Highness. The man across the cliff is far smarter than me. If you shout over to him, he will tell you himself."

Xiao Qingxuan chuckled bitterly, shaking her head, "You know his temperament as well as I do. If he doesn't want to do something, not even a knife to his throat would compel him. By the looks of it, he'd rather stay on that Thousand-Forsake Peak for a while longer. That rascal infuriates me."

Xiao Qingxuan's words carried an unspoken weight. Xu Zhiqing merely responded, "If that's the case, I'll give it a try, but I can't guarantee success, especially if he's unwilling—"

"He should be willing," tears suddenly welled up in Xiao Qingxuan's eyes as she tightly gripped Ning'er's hand. As she spoke, she herself wasn't sure.

"Very well," Xu Zhiqing clenched her teeth, "Let's begin now."

"Now?" Both Ning'er and Xiao Qingxuan were surprised by Xu Zhiqing's urgency. They glanced around and soon understood. Tools and chains of various shapes and sizes were scattered about the cliff, many custom-made. Clearly, Xu Zhiqing had prepared for this for a long time.

Feeling the eyes of Ning'er and Xiao Qingxuan on her, Xu Zhiqing quickly turned her head away, her voice trembling, "Please guide us, Your Highness."

"My Dear, My Dear—" From the bamboo tube across the cliff came a tender voice calling. Lin Wanrong was leaning against a delicate figure, his large hand caressing her slender waist, half-asleep.

"Wake up," Ning Yuxi gently pushed him on the waist, her cheeks slightly flushed. "Someone is calling you."

"Who is it?" Lin Wanrong yawned, nudged his head against her soft belly, reluctantly opened his eyes, and heard Qingxuan's voice carried by the wind: "Master, My Dear, you both should take refuge in the cave for now; I'll come to bring you down the mountain shortly."

"The cave?" Lin Wanrong and Ning Yuxi exchanged puzzled glances. Could Qingxuan somehow see long distances? How did she know there was a cave on Thousand-Forsake Peak?

"What does Qingxuan want us to do in the cave?" Ning Yuxi softly said.

Lin Wanrong grabbed her hand and started walking, smiling, "Who cares, Qingxuan wouldn't harm us anyway. What's wrong with having another 'wedding night' in the cave?"

"Stop talking nonsense." Ning Yuxi hit him lightly, her face blushing. Just as they stood at the mouth of the cave, they heard a tremendous roar from across the peak. A thin wisp of smoke arose, and a huge iron ball, screeching as it spun, traced a beautiful arc in the air and came hurtling toward Thousand-Forsake Peak.

Ning Yuxi was greatly shocked, her face turning pale. "What is Qingxuan doing?"

"She's trying to shoot Cupid's arrows!" Lin Wanrong laughed, embracing Ning Yuxi's delicate figure, showing no signs of panic.

The iron ball flew for a moment but eventually ran out of force several meters from the peak. It scraped against the rocky cliff and fell, prompting a collective sigh from the tens of thousands of watching soldiers below.

Sweat covered Qingxuan's palms as she looked at Xu Zhiqing, who was operating the cannon. She carefully asked, "Sister Xu, are you sure about this? We mustn't hurt My Dear."

Xu Zhiqing wiped the sweat from her brow, her red lips tightly pressed. "Princess, don't worry; he won't be harmed. Again!"

She hurriedly moved to the second cannon, directing the soldiers to adjust the position and calibrate the angle, calculating the distances.

"No wonder Sister Zhiqing insisted on bringing up ten cannons. They were all spares," Ning'er realized, gripping Qiaoqiao's little hand tightly.

Xiao Yushuang quietly wiped away her tears and tugged at Qingxuan's sleeve, timidly saying, "Princess, will this scare that scoundrel? He's never experienced this kind of thing before."

"Don't worry," Qingxuan reassured. "Lin Wanrong is a seasoned warrior. A few cannon shots won't scare him."

"Boom!" Another deafening sound. The iron ball whizzed out again, everyone holding their breath in anticipation. The iron ball traced an arc, but it fell from the furthest side of Thousand-Forsake Peak.

Ning Yuxi turned pale, clutching tightly at Lin Wanrong's sleeves as she nestled against him. "Rascal, they really found a way. I, I—"

Lin Wanrong patted her shoulder softly and comforted, "Don't worry. Even if they set up a rope, we will descend the mountain together."

Before the words had fallen, the third cannon blast sounded. This time, the iron ball seemed to have eyes, whistling through the air and landing precisely on Thousand-Forsake Peak. The mountain trembled slightly, and the ball stopped several yards away from the cliff's edge.

"We've hit the target, we've hit the target!" The soldiers on the opposite mountain erupted in unison, cheering triumphantly.

"My Dear, quickly pull up the rope on that iron ball!" Miss Xiao's voice carried enormous delight.

Gazing at the iron ball embedded in the ground, Lin Wanrong was speechless. Both joy and sorrow surged in his heart, and he hesitated, unsure of what to do.

Ning Yuxi leaned against him, her long eyelashes quivering, tears streaming down. Suddenly, she sprang from his arms and darted toward the mouth of the cave. Lin Wanrong couldn't catch her in time.

In a few leaps, Ning Yuxi reached the iron ball. There was a small hole in it, tightly bound with a glistening silk thread as thick as a little finger and faintly shimmering in white light. She hesitated for a moment, then clenched her teeth. Her trembling hands slowly untied the silk thread and gently began to pull. The silk was incredibly thin but incredibly strong. Slowly she pulled, and the rope on the opposite mountain began to inch closer, hand over hand.

"Sister, why are you so foolish?" Lin Wanrong's heart ached as he hugged her. Ning Yuxi's tears fell silently. She muttered, "I've lost, little thief, I've lost."

"So what if you've lost? So what if you've won?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed, "Is there anyone in this world who could separate us? Today, we will go down the mountain together. Let's see who dares to stop us!"

Ning Yuxi was silent. Her small hand swiftly pulled, the rope quickly moving closer.

Lin Wanrong, agitated, pressed her hand firmly. "If you promise to go down the mountain with me, we'll use this rope. If you don't agree, I'll throw this rope away."

He seized the silk thread, ready to throw it, but Ning Yuxi acted quickly, holding his hand tightly, tears pouring like rain. She choked, "Are you trying to kill me?"

Lin Wanrong sighed softly, "If I leave you here alone, that would kill me."

Ning Yuxi was speechless, mist rising in her eyes. Suddenly she looked at him with a sorrowful smile, "Better my life than yours. Let's go down the mountain together. Let the world laugh at me, curse me, slander me, vex me, annoy me—I'll be the most shameless woman in the world."

"Really?" Lin Wanrong jumped up in an instant.

Ning Yuxi's face paled, her long eyelashes trembled and tears cascaded down. "Since I've known you, when have I ever lied to you? Mm—"

His hot mouth covered her cherry lips, and the wet heat made her tremble. She held Lin Wanrong tightly, her body melting into his arms, pulling his large hand into her soft waist. Tears covered her cheeks as she passionately responded.

Upon seeing that the rope had stopped moving, Luo Ning anxiously inquired, "Big brother, what's happening? Why did you stop pulling the rope?"

Xiao Qingxuan put away her telescope, her face flushed with a blend of shyness and annoyance. "He has more important things to do, that scoundrel—"

"Aren't you going to pull the rope?" Ning Yuxi finally managed to free herself from his passionate kiss. Her breathing quickened, a faint blush appearing between her brows. Her face was so flushed it seemed like it could drip water. She shot him a look, both annoyed and coy, bewitchingly charming.

Lin Wanrong laughed twice. The two of them gripped the silken rope, and the rope on the other end began moving at an exponentially faster speed. In a short while, they had reached Thousand-Forsake Peak.

The rope, as thick as an arm, was securely tied by Lin Wanrong to a tree. Ning Yuxi frowned and said, "No matter how thick this hemp rope is, it won't be able to hold your weight. It's not reliable."

Lin Wanrong chuckled, "Don't worry, don't worry, there's more to come."

As they were speaking, they noticed that the other end of the rope began to rise. Upon inspecting through a telescope, they saw that a long, thick log had been set up on the peak opposite them. About a quarter of the log was lodged firmly into the ground by a high pillar, forming an unequal seesaw. A pulley was placed at the front end of the log, from which the rope extended. On the other end, dozens of soldiers pushed down on the lever, raising the pulley high up, making the rope higher on one end and lower on the other.

"Xu Zhiqing really knows quite a bit, even using the principle of a lever," Lin Wanrong nodded and smiled.

"Big brother, catch this," Ning Er's voice echoed again. Sliding down the rope came two specially made wooden chairs and a large winch with a handle. Xu Zhiqing commanded the soldiers to slowly press the lever, adjusting the speed of the chairs, neither too fast nor too slow.

When the chairs arrived, Lin Wanrong looked them over. Needless to say, they were sturdy. The chairs were tightly wound with silken threads, forming a very secure ring, hooked onto the rope—evidently for sliding purposes.

He lifted the winch into the air to lock it in place, tied the thick rope to it, and slowly turned the handle. The end of the thick rope on the other side was connected to a large iron chain, which hundreds of soldiers began to pull.

Ning Yuxi had a sudden realization. Using silk threads to lead the thick rope, and then using the thick rope to pull the iron chain—it was truly a clever idea. Even the winch had a significant function. Because the distance between the two peaks was several hundred feet, the iron chain would naturally sag when pulled across, requiring immense strength to hold it. This winch was specifically designed to save effort.

"Who came up with this idea?" Ning Yuxi exclaimed in silent admiration. "Every detail fits perfectly; it's utterly ingenious. Scoundrel, did you say once that 'you will go back the way you came'? Is this what you meant?"

"More or less," Lin Wanrong chuckled. "But Miss Xu has outdone even my imagination. I underestimated her before. Hopefully, she'll bring these ingenious ideas to the battlefield someday."

"Do you really intend to go north to fight against the nomads? When will you leave?" Ning Yuxi asked softly.

"Counting the days, it shouldn't be long now," Lin Wanrong mused. "Life is truly extraordinary. I could never have dreamt that one day I would voluntarily request to go to the battlefield."

Ning Yuxi nodded slightly, her smile remaining but her words absent. The wheel slowly turned, and a long iron rope stretched between the two peaks, as if it was a passage between insurmountable chasms.

Gazing at the faintly trembling iron rope, Lin Wanrong chuckled, recalling the journey that had brought him here. "Life is like a cycle, from the end to the beginning. I can hardly tell which is heaven and which is earth."

"Which is heaven and which is earth?" Ning Yuxi murmured to herself, her eyelashes quivering. Two glistening teardrops silently fell...

Chapter 447 Endless Love in Chains

Lin Wanrong had already determined the next steps. He chose a large, solid boulder to anchor the iron chain. Two custom-made chairs were hung from it. After testing the solidity himself and finding the chain held taut, he finally relaxed. As he turned his head, he saw her—her gaze deep, her expression a shifting blend of happiness and sorrow—as she stared at the thick iron chain that spanned between the two peaks.

Lin Wanrong grasped her cold hand, a chill that felt unimaginable given her martial prowess. Concerned, he quickly asked, "Fairy Sister, what's wrong with you?"

"I'm fine," Ning Yuxi replied with a soft smile. She adjusted his clothes gently and spoke softly, "I'm just feeling a bit sentimental. Our past seems as though it happened just yesterday, yet it also feels like a dream."

What Ning Yuxi said was no lie. Before scaling the Thousand-Forsake Peak, she had been contemplating how to kill him. Little did she know, ascending the peak would bring about a drastic turn of events. Describing it as a dream was not an exaggeration.

"This is no dream," Lin Wanrong laughed, his eyes filled with yearning as he looked around. "This mountain range is magnificent, the scenery breathtaking. Despite its name, the Thousand-Forsake Peak doesn't forsake one's feelings. This place is a paradise for both Fairy Sister and me. In a few years, let's come back. Leave the children and the nannies at home; it'll just be the two of us. We'll climb this peak, stargaze, soak in the hot springs—it'll be bliss."

"You're quite the dreamer," she replied, her eyes tinged with a fleeting shadow before resuming their usual sparkle. "Do you think this is a playground that you can climb whenever you wish? The peak is impossibly high. Once you're down, how do you plan to return for hot springs and stargazing?"

Her expression was indifferent as she held his hand. Together, they stood at the peak, gazing at the distant mountains, feeling the cold winds caress their faces and stir their hair—almost an ethereal sensation.

Lin Wanrong took a deep breath and chuckled, "The mountain may be high, but it can't compare to the depths of our love. Even though the peak is named 'Thousand-Forsake,' I intend to transform this place into a heaven on earth, where all lovers can achieve their union. Fairy Sister, could you relay a message for me? Ask Qingxuan to send another chain."

"Another chain?" Ning Yuxi didn't understand his actions, but seeing his resolute expression, she had no choice but to pass along the message.

"What does big brother need another chain for?" Luo Ning asked curiously.

Xiao Qingxuan remained silent, and Xu Zhiqing wore a neutral expression as she softly said, "To build a bridge."

Having succeeded the first time, the second chain was much easier to install. When the second iron chain was finally in place, Lin Wanrong positioned the chains parallel to each other, leaving less than a yard between them. Ning Yuxi quietly asked, "What are you doing?"

"You said once I go down, I can't come back up, right?" Lin Wanrong looked at her and smiled, "Well, once we reach the opposite peak, I'll place wooden boards between these chains, creating a suspended bridge. It will transform this impassable gorge into a thoroughfare. We'll come and go as we please in the future. I even have a name for it: The Endless Love Bridge."

"Though the peak may be deserted, the chains are long and our love is longer." Ning Yuxi clasped Lin Wanrong's hand, her eyes shimmering with tears.

Both floating chains had been set up. Lin Wanrong considered for a moment, then began to dismantle one of the two large chairs that hung from the same rope. Just as he was about to hang it on the other metal rope, Ning Yuxi hastily stopped him. Softly, she asked, "What are you doing?"

Lin Wanrong chuckled. "I don't feel comfortable leaving you behind. There are two ropes; we can descend side by side."

"You are rather cautious," Ning Yuxi playfully chided him, her eyes softened with affection. "Where you go, I will follow. Bound by the same rope in life, tethered by the same cord in death, we cannot be separated."

Lin Wanrong was familiar with Fairy Sister's resolute nature. Seeing her so determined, he too felt a surge of emotion. "You're right, sister. We should tie ourselves to the same rope, so that even in death, we'll be together—"

Ning Yuxi quickly covered his mouth, her voice tinged with solemnity. "This mountain is perilous and you're about to go to war; let's not speak ill-omened words. Remember, no matter the danger, I will be by your side."

Lin Wanrong eagerly nodded. "I know, I know. My Fairy Sister will never leave me."

Ning Yuxi offered a tender smile and sat him down on the chair, diligently securing the chains. The rope suspending the chair was woven from silk threads, its texture both smooth and exceptionally strong. Ning Yuxi was quite pleased with it.

Lin Wanrong, however, was stubborn. Standing up, he said, "Sister, don't think only of me. Let me make it clear: if you don't go, I won't either."

"You're overthinking things," Ning Yuxi said with a soft smile, her eyes misty. Quickly, she turned away so he couldn't see her face. She then sat in the chair behind him, switching their positions. Carefully, she adjusted his clothing and tightened his ropes, checking multiple times to ensure nothing was amiss. Finally, she nodded approvingly.

Noticing Lin Wanrong's intense gaze on her, Ning Yuxi haphazardly tied her own ropes. Her emotions were a tangled mess of bitterness and sweetness, and tears slowly rolled down her cheeks.

"Sister, what's wrong?" Lin Wanrong hurriedly asked.

"I'm happy," she said through teary eyes. Leaning into his chest, she listened to the strong beats of his heart, her hands trembling slightly as they caressed his face. Softly, she spoke, "Little thief, can we really be together in this lifetime?"

Lin Wanrong pointed to the sky and proclaimed loudly, "I, Lin Wanrong, swear that I will marry Ning Yuxi in this life and beyond. If I break this vow, may heaven and earth annihilate me!"

Ning Yuxi laughed, her tears rolling freely. She closed her eyes and planted a kiss on his lips. Suddenly, she stood up; the ropes that had bound her came undone. A determined look crossed her face. Lin Wanrong was shocked. "Yuxi, what are you doing?"

Laughing and crying at the same time, Ning Yuxi shouted, "Little thief, remember my words: Yuxi will always be by your side. Never forget me. Go—"

With gritted teeth and a heart-wrenching scream, she mustered all her strength to push Lin Wanrong's chair forward. All he heard was the whoosh of wind; he felt as if he were flying like a kite. The sound of silk ropes rubbing against metal cables filled his ears. When he looked back, Ning Yuxi's tear-streaked face was receding into the distance.

"Fairy Sister, you deceived me? You deceived me!" With all the strength he could muster, he roared loudly, "Stop! Stop at once! Everyone stop!"

Bound tightly by ropes, even his desperate struggles couldn't free him as he slid rapidly toward the other side of the cliff. Seeing Lin Wanrong's relentless struggles and despairing face, Ning Yuxi felt as if her heart had shattered. She suddenly burst into tears, covering her face with her hands, "You scoundrel, I will never leave you. Never forget me! Never forget me!"

Xiao Qingxuan, watching from the other side, was greatly alarmed. "Sister Xu, slow down. Master is bringing My Dear back. My Dear is coming back."

Witnessing Lin Wanrong still struggling in mid-air, Xu Zhiqing gritted her teeth and said furiously, "This man is foolishly reckless. Unless he's reduced to a pulp, he won't change his ways." Despite her words, her eyes were intently fixed on him, sweat pouring down her forehead. She was constantly directing the soldiers to adjust the levers, slowing down the chair's slide.

The distance of several hundred yards seemed to pass in an instant. The wind whooshed by his ears, and as he saw Ning Yuxi's face becoming increasingly blurred, Lin Wanrong's face turned pale.

Every moment he had spent with the Fairy on the cliff came rushing back—every smile, every scolding, every anger. It was as if they were etched into his heart, unforgettable.

"Ahhh—" Unable to control himself, he let out a long howl that echoed crisply from both sides of the cliff.

"You foolish scoundrel," Ning Yuxi muttered to herself, her sword-holding hand trembling slightly.

Hearing this, Xiao Yushuang was terrified and quickly grabbed Xiao Qingxuan's hand, anxiously saying, "Sister Princess, he's heartbroken. He has never been like this before."

Xiao Qingxuan sighed, speaking faintly, "Even if he is heartbroken, what about others? It's hard on Master."

As the situation on the opposite peak became increasingly clear, Lin Wanrong felt an inexplicable sense of void. Whether it was Yuxi or Qingxuan, heaven or earth, it all became fuzzy in his mind, sometimes separating, sometimes merging again.

Holding the homemade telescope he had left behind, he saw his feet finally land on the opposing peak. Several soldiers immediately grabbed hold of him, and Qingxuan, accompanied by several women, rushed toward him. Ning Yuxi gave a wistful smile, raising her long sword and swiftly cutting the iron chain.

Just as Lin Wanrong stepped onto the peak, his hands were grabbed by Hu Bugui. Suddenly, as if sensing something, he turned his head to see a flash of white light rapidly illuminating Thousand-Forsake Peak. It was Ning Yuxi's sword.

"Let go of me!" Lin Wanrong roared, his voice filled with desperation. Before the ropes on the chair could be untied, he stepped on the edge of the cliff, and using the force from pushing back, the chair that had just landed swiftly slid back. The chain had already been cut, and the chair, carrying Lin Wanrong, plummeted like a falling meteor.

"My Dear—"

"Scoundrel—"

"Big Brother—"

"General—"

"Ahhh—"

Xiao Qingxuan, Xiao Yushuang, Luo Ning, and Qiaoqiao were all horrified, rushing madly toward the cliff. The last voice to call out was from Xu Zhiqing, who had always been aloof and cold.

"Thief!" A sharp, shrill cry echoed from the opposite cliff as a figure glided across with unparalleled speed, fast as lightning. The falling chair abruptly began to slow down. Everyone looked up, stunned into silence.

Hovering between the cliffs was a white figure with arms outstretched. Shaking violently, each hand grasped a broken chain. Against all odds, the chains were connected solely through human strength.

The crowd was dumbfounded. These iron chains spanned between two mountains and weighed a thousand pounds. Even if Ning Yuxi was the greatest martial artist in the world, it was inconceivable for her to pull these chains together with her bare hands.

A mixture of joy and sorrow overwhelmed Lin Wanrong, and he burst into laughter. "Fairy Sister, remember my words—I am not so easily deceived. We are tied by the rope of life and death; you promised!"

Suspended between the cliffs, the beautiful figure looked like a descended fairy, her strength ebbing away. Her face pale, tears fell as she muttered, "Bound by life and death—oh, you silly, foolish thief!"

Xiao Qingxuan was the first to snap back to reality. She cried out, "Sister Xu, quick, lower the ropes gently. My Master, she can't take it!"

Xu Zhiqing quickly complied and directed everyone to lower the ropes. Ning Yuxi clenched her teeth, using every ounce of her strength to hold the chains steady, not letting them tremble. Through her tear-blurred eyes, she saw Lin Wanrong grinning triumphantly, as if victorious. Her emotions were like a small boat tumbling at the peak of a wave—sometimes sad, sometimes joyful, tears flowing ceaselessly.

As soon as Lin Wanrong set foot on solid ground, everyone rushed forward. Hu Bugui lunged at him, grabbing his legs, fearing a repeat of his cliff-dropping antics. Lin Wanrong looked back; a white figure vanished into the opposite peak. The broken chains, through some unfathomable method employed by Ning Yuxi, were now connected, stretching between the two peaks—a magnificent sight that spoke of enduring love.

"Big brother—" Luo Ning and Qiaoqiao lunged into his arms, tears streaming down their faces. "You idiot, you scared us to death!"

"Don't worry, don't worry. I was just testing the strength of these chains," Lin Wanrong said. Considering his recent actions, even he wasn't sure where such courage had come from. Seeing the two women crying, he felt a pang of guilt and patted their shoulders to console them.

"Bad man—" Xiao Yushuang, unlike Qiaoqiao and Luo Ning, lacked such audacity. Seeing Lin San return safely, she was torn between laughing and crying, timidly calling out.

Touched by the sight of this delicate young girl, Lin Wanrong took her small hand and softly asked, "Second Miss, why are you here too? How is your mother? How has the household been? Is everyone well since I've been away for the past few days?"

"Enough of that." The Second Miss wiped away a tear from the corner of her eye and spoke softly, "Mother was already ill with a cold, but she was really happy when you came home that day. However, you disappeared in the middle of the night, leaving her anxious. She couldn't find peace of mind and has been bedridden ever since, in worse condition. My elder sister has also gone missing. Our family is falling apart—"

Xiao Yushuang's expression was one of profound sadness. Lin Wanrong also felt a pang of sorrow. The Xiao family had played a crucial role in his rise, and both the Eldest Miss and Second Miss had always been affectionate towards him. It felt like his own home. However, with the Eldest Miss under house arrest by the Emperor, and the Madam becoming increasingly ill, the Xiao family was truly facing bad times, and he couldn't help but feel responsible.

"Don't worry," Lin Wanrong said confidently, "Once I have sorted things out here, I will return with you to check on the Madam. Her condition will improve as soon as she sees me."

Xiao Yushuang nodded softly and said, "Of course. Mother says you are now the only man in our family. You are the one holding up our sky. Seeing you will naturally lift her spirits." She glanced

around, her face flushing red, then whispered, "You should come and live with us. Don't worry, I'll be with you all the time to make sure you don't go missing again."

Lin Wanrong managed a quiet smile but looked distressed. Right now, his main concern was Fairy Ning on the opposite peak, the Thousand-Forsake Peak.

"Big brother, what is this?" Luo Ning, who had been examining him up and down, suddenly asked, pointing a slender finger at his chest.

Lin Wanrong looked down to see a letter stuffed into his ragged clothing, peeking out slightly. Realizing it must have been placed there by Ning Yuxi while she was tidying his clothes, his heart raced as he quickly pulled out the letter. The note was pure white, its small characters inscribed with an eyebrow pencil, "Grateful for your kindness, I vow to follow you all my life. Faithful in life and death!"

Tears stained the paper. Lin Wanrong couldn't tell when Fairy Ning had written it. Looking up, he gazed at the opposite mountain peak. All was quiet and empty. Where could Ning Yuxi be?

The message in the letter didn't seem heartless. Why did she send him away? Lin Wanrong was utterly confused and felt deeply frustrated. He let out a long sigh. Luo Ning peeked over and sneaked a glance at the letter. Clearing his throat, Lin Wanrong quickly folded it back up.

Luo Ning, her face still wet with tears, coquettishly glanced at him and giggled, "Don't worry, big brother, I won't tell my sister. Wait, where is she? Why don't I see her?"

Qingxuan? Lin Wanrong was startled. He looked around; Xiao Qingxuan was nowhere to be found. He remembered that she had been at the forefront just a moment ago. Where had she gone?

As he lifted his head, he saw Xu Zhiqing looking his way from a distance. She quickly averted her eyes. Recalling the vow Miss Xu had made when he was on the wall, Lin Wanrong felt a sense of melancholy. He walked up to her, clasped his fists, and said with a smile, "Thank you, Miss Xu, for your help."

Xu Zhiqing didn't lift her head as she gave instructions to those around her: "The matter here is resolved. Brothers, please pack up the cannons and other equipment and report back to General Li at camp. If you would kindly step aside, sir, and not obstruct our work."

Lin Wanrong chuckled lightly, not minding her tone. "In that case, Miss, I shall not disturb you. I will send my wife to express our gratitude another day."

With a thunderous "boom," everyone jumped in surprise. A cannon near Xu Zhiqing had misfired, stirring up a cloud of dust and smoke in the desolate landscape beyond. Xu Zhiqing calmly said, "My apologies, the cannon misfired."

This girl really had a reckless streak. Lin Wanrong broke out in a cold sweat and made a hasty retreat, while the people like Hu Bugui and Xu Zhen had to use all their strength to suppress their laughter.

"Big brother, go and see Sister," Qiaoqiao quietly tugged on Lin Wanrong's sleeve and nodded toward a distant point. At the peak of the mountain stood a delicate figure, looking out over Thousand-Forsake Peak in serene contemplation.

"Qingxuan—" Lin Wanrong was startled and hurriedly rushed over. Before he got close, a youthful female voice yelled, "What are you doing here, you scoundrel? Haven't you troubled my Master enough?" Li Xiangjun leapt out from beside Xiao Qingxuan, her eyebrows furrowed in anger.

Ignoring her, Lin Wanrong was about to reach Xiao Qingxuan when Li Xiangjun clenched her teeth and lunged at him, her dagger flashing like lightning, aimed directly at his chest.

"Enough!" Already irritated, Lin Wanrong shouted in annoyance. Seeing his imposing demeanor, Li Xiangjun instantly felt afraid; her strength drained from her, and she burst into tears. "Sister, he's bullying me. Not content with tormenting Master, now he's bullying me!"

Xiao Qingxuan sighed softly, a bitter smile on her face. "Xiangjun, don't make a scene. My Dear, he didn't bully Master."

"I don't believe you!" Li Xiangjun glared at Lin Wanrong and spat, "If not for him, why would Master go up the mountain and stay there?"

Li Xiangjun's seemingly naive words struck Lin Wanrong as both funny and irksome. Xiao Qingxuan gave Lin Wanrong a look, unsure what to say. Finally, she sighed and said weakly, "Don't worry, Xiangjun. I'll definitely bring Master down from the mountain."

Humphing, Li Xiangjun brandished her small dagger at Lin Wanrong one last time before leaving satisfied.

Seeing Qingxuan standing silently at the edge of the cliff, Lin Wanrong cautiously approached her. "Qingxuan, are you really certain you can bring Fairy Sister down from the mountain?"

Miss Xiao bit her red lips and hummed, her fragrant shoulders trembling, but she said nothing.

Lin Wanrong was about to take her hand when he saw that her beautiful face was streaked with tears. In the dim twilight, she looked so vulnerable that he couldn't help but feel a surge of pity.

"Qingxuan, what's wrong?" Lin Wanrong was shocked and quickly embraced her. Miss Xiao suddenly burst into tears and pounded her small fists against his chest. "You shameless rascal, are you tired of living? Jumping down might solve your problems, but what about me? What about our child?"

"Rest assured, I have it under control," Lin Wanrong tightly embraced Miss Xiao, whispering softly in her ear. "Think about what kind of man your husband is. I've never been one to suffer a disadvantage."

"But what if Master slips up?" Xiao Qingxuan angrily pinched his chest, her tears flowing more freely. "You're putting me and our child at risk!"

Slip up? Lin Wanrong sighed. He hadn't considered that. Life is unpredictable, and even a clay Buddha still has some clay nature. He was a flesh-and-blood man, not some Daoist sage—impulsive moments were inevitable.

Xiao Qingxuan leaned against him, silent for a while. Then she softly asked, "Why aren't you saying anything?"

Lin Wanrong smiled, lightly brushing the tip of her nose. "I'm silent because we are husband and wife; too much explanation makes things tedious. Think about it. Why, when your Master took me away, did I give you a riddle that you instantly solved? It's because spouses are supposed to understand each other best. You know me better than anyone."

Xiao Qingxuan felt warmth fill her heart. She buried her flushed cheeks into his chest, "You really know how to sweet-talk. It's like I owe you from a past life. Who knows how many young ladies you've charmed with that mouth of yours?"

"Not that many," Lin Wanrong chuckled. "I rarely use those tricks anymore. I'm afraid others can't handle them. Saying them only to my wonderful wife is more than enough. If I told you ten sweet things a day, you'd handle it fine, but I wouldn't."

Miss Xiao shook her head, smiling bitterly. She had planned to give him the silent treatment for a few days to teach him a lesson. But a couple of sweet words from him melted her resolve. Truly, one thing always conquers another.

Noticing Lin Wanrong's eyes fixated on Thousand-Forsake Peak, Xiao Qingxuan felt a pang of sadness. "Are you waiting for Master to come down the mountain?"

"Yes, ah, no!" Lin Wanrong was startled; it seemed like Xiao Qingxuan had picked up on something.

At this point, why wasn't he being honest? Annoyed, Miss Xiao pinched his arm hard. "Let me tell you the truth. Right now, Master definitely won't come down."

"Why?"

"You are such a fool!" Seeing his puzzled expression, Xiao Qingxuan sighed softly. "You're pressuring Master to come down in front of everyone. Even if she were made of mud, she wouldn't do it. Where did all your usual cleverness go?"

Lin Wanrong slapped his forehead. Ah, her words woke him up like a bolt of lightning. How could he not have thought of that? Being too passionate as a man really could lower one's intelligence.

"My good wife. Ah, you've gotten even more radiant in just a few days—so tell me, when will the fairy be willing to come down?"

Annoyed, Xiao Qingxuan huffed, "How would I know? You've been with Master these past few days; you should understand her better than I do."

"You arrived too quickly; I didn't get a chance to understand you deeply," Lin Wanrong sighed, his face filled with consternation. He stole a glance at Xiao Qingxuan, and carefully said, "As for Fairy Sister, she has treated me quite well these past few days. She is beautiful, has an amazing figure, is well-educated and compassionate. Sometimes I really wish she would be my—"

"Be your what?" Miss Xiao clenched her teeth and hummed, her expression a mixture of smile and scorn.

Sweat beads covered Lin Wanrong's forehead. Even with his thick skin, he found it difficult to express himself. After hesitating for a moment, he gritted his teeth, deciding it was now or never. "Be my—"

Before he could finish, a soft hand covered his lips. Xiao Qingxuan looked both shy and annoyed: "You always like to make things complicated. Is it so difficult to ask my Master to be your Fairy Sister? Let me accept on her behalf. After all, you've grown quite accustomed to calling her Fairy Sister. She is my master, and she is your Sister. We can each call her what we like, without any interference."

"Can we both call her the same?" Lin Wanrong seemed both happy and concerned, his expression playful.

"How can we call her the same? That would disrupt the hierarchy and make us the subject of ridicule," said Miss Xiao, furrowing her brows.

Lin Wanrong straightened his expression, speaking solemnly: "Actually, that's not the case. I want Fairy Sister to be—mmm—mmm—"

Miss Xiao pressed her hand firmly over his mouth, preventing him from speaking, her face flushed with both shyness and annoyance. "Let's just leave it at that. Later, I'll discuss it with Ning'er and Qiaoqiao. Once you and my Master clear up the misunderstanding, we'll bring her home to be properly taken care of. Won't it be great if our family lives happily and united?"

Lin Wanrong was about to protest, but hearing her last sentence, he felt invigorated. Seeing her small hand covering his mouth, he stretched out his tongue and lightly kissed it. Xiao Qingxuan trembled, releasing her hand quickly, her face flushed: "You scoundrel—"

Lin Wanrong let out a sigh of relief, nodded and smiled: "Living happily and united, Qingxuan, you've said it well. But I have no idea when Fairy Sister will come down from the mountain.

Thousand-Forsake Peak has beautiful scenery and hot springs; I fear she might forget you two disciples if she stays too long."

Xiao Qingxuan looked towards Thousand-Forsake Peak, which was gradually becoming obscured by mist and clouds in the evening light. Only two iron ropes flying across the peak stood firm.

"Even if she wishes to forget, I doubt she can," said Miss Xiao, letting out a wistful sigh. But noticing her husband staring at Thousand-Forsake Peak, lost in thought, she felt disheartened.

One of life's most frustrating moments was before her. Despite her usually detached demeanor, Xiao Qingxuan was at a loss in this situation.

"Qingxuan, actually, these past few days, I've been pondering over something. Something I'm not sure is good or bad," Lin Wanrong suddenly changed his demeanor, his expression turning incredibly serious.

"What is it that has you so troubled?" Miss Xiao softened, involuntarily grabbing his hand as she asked in a gentle voice.

Lin Wanrong found a tree stump to sit on and sighed, "Do you know that when the White Lotus Sect caused trouble, I was invited by Xu Wei to command troops in Shandong?"

Xiao Qingxuan nodded and said, "You led tens of thousands of troops, personally slew the foremost warrior of the White Lotus sect, and captured their rebel leader Lu Kanli. You were also the first to break through the city of Jinan. You are the main contributor to the eradication of the White Lotus sect. Everyone knows this; it's the talk of taverns and teahouses, and storytellers have recounted it countless times."

"That's exactly the problem," Lin Wanrong said, his expression unreadable, caught somewhere between a smile and irritation. "After a few victories, everyone thinks I'm a talent. Not only has Xu Wei taken notice of me, but even Li Tai wants me to join his army to fight against the Turks in the North. Not to mention my old comrades like Hu Bugui and Li Sheng from Shandong. But what they don't realize is that I've spent my life perusing erotic art, yet never studied a single chapter of military strategy. Going into battle, it's all gut instinct. One mistake, and I'd jeopardize the lives of my good brothers."

Miss Xiao blushed and gently said, "Not everyone's skills come from book learning. Zhao Kuo read countless military texts, yet he led his men and his country to ruin and suffered endless disgrace.

You, on the other hand, have learned everything through practice. Though not scholarly, it's genuinely practical knowledge. Otherwise, you wouldn't have destroyed the White Lotus sect and gained the respect of learned men like Li Tai and Xu Zhiqing. Moreover, your achievements over the past six months have been nothing short of remarkable. How could anyone accomplish that without some level of skill?"

"So, you're in favor of me going?" Lin Wanrong brightened at Miss Xiao's praise.

Xiao Qingxuan carefully adjusted his clothes and softly said, "Why ask me when you've already made up your mind? No wife wishes for her husband to go to war. But if you have talents that go unused, that's a sin in itself. My father has already mentioned this matter to me some time ago. I didn't tell you because I didn't want to influence your decision. To me, you can do no wrong."

"Dear wife, why do your words always touch my heart?" Lin Wanrong hugged her tender waist and spoke sweetly.

Xiao Qingxuan looked at him and chuckled, "Enough sweet talk. Since you've decided to go to war, my sisters and I will support you. There are still a few days left before you leave; have you considered which young ladies still need to be informed? I can send someone to deliver messages for you."

"How could I?" Lin Wanrong gave a sheepish smile, his mind racing. Apart from Eldest Miss and Xian'er, almost everyone who needed to know had been informed.

The troubling part was that he had been stranded in the mountains for the past few days, and he didn't know what had become of Eldest Miss.

Seeming to read his thoughts, Miss Xiao held his hand and softly reassured him, "Don't worry. My father asked me to tell you that whatever is due to you will not be lacking. If Eldest Miss is so devoted to you, I will plead on her behalf to my father tomorrow."

With Xiao Qingxuan's involvement, Lin Wanrong felt his confidence surge. Then, his brow furrowed again. It was one thing for Eldest Miss to be under house arrest and unaware of his situation, but where had Xian'er disappeared to these past few days? She had been at the back hill of the Grand Prime Minister Temple tending to her mother's tomb; how could she be so out of touch?

"Qingxuan, you are Princess Chuyun, and you should have a younger sister named Princess Nishang. You know that, right?" Lin Wanrong asked cautiously.

Miss Xiao hummed in acknowledgement, giving him a glance. "Of course, I know. After descending the mountain that day, Father told me about it. Xian'er has been separated from our father since childhood and has suffered much under the care of Martial Aunt An. Given the longstanding friction between Martial Aunt An and my Master, her resentment towards me is understandable. But had I known she was my sister, would I have fought her in Jinling?"

"Even if Xian'er harbors resentment towards Qingxuan, she wouldn't ignore me if she heard I was in danger, would she?" Lin Wanrong said, puzzled.

Shaking her head with a wry smile, Qingxuan replied, "If she were in the capital, how could she ignore you? The day you rescued me was a spectacular event that became well-known everywhere. When Xian'er heard of your deeds, she burst into tears and left the capital overnight, heading towards Sichuan."

Headed to Sichuan? Lin Wanrong felt a mix of joy and surprise. This jealous girl must be seeking the help of Sister An. I wonder if Sister An will try to assassinate me like Fairy Ning did. If I get stabbed a dozen times by this seductive fox, I'd be the lucky one.

"My Dear, My Dear," Miss Xiao softly called out, jolting him back to reality. "If Xian'er has sought Martial Aunt An's help, that would be bad. Unlike my Master, Martial Aunt An is cunning and capricious. She's a worldly fox, adept at deception. If she hears Xian'er's complaints and becomes angry with you, I'm afraid you'll suffer. Moreover, you're the one who eradicated the White Lotus cult that she founded—"

'Suffer at the hands of Sister An? That's laughable; the one I'm afraid of is her not coming!' Lin Wanrong chuckled lewdly in his mind but feigned surprise on his face. "Oh my, Qingxuan, are you serious? Is Martial Aunt An really that powerful? What should I do? Can you ask Fairy Sister to descend from the mountain as soon as possible to help me deal with Sister An?"

"What Sister An?" Qingxuan looked puzzled.

"Oh, if your master is my Fairy Sister, then logically speaking, Xian'er's master would be Sister An. Fairy Ning will deal with Sister An, you will handle Xian'er, and I will wholeheartedly take care of all four of you. Isn't that a perfect arrangement?" Lin Wanrong's eyes twinkled, his heart nearly bursting with joy.

"I don't know when my Master will descend the mountain," Qingxuan shook her head softly. "She's naturally calm and dislikes public appearances. In my opinion, it might be best to withdraw all the troops from this mountain and let things die down. Perhaps when everyone has forgotten about this, my Master will appear before you."

Lin Wanrong had a good understanding of Ning Yuxi. What Qingxuan said made sense; the greatest surprise often comes from the most unexpected places. He touched the letter in his pocket, a sense of anticipation filling his heart. He couldn't help but wonder what it would be like if Fairy Ning suddenly appeared before him, bringing an overwhelming sense of joy.

As dusk settled on the mountain, Lin Wanrong gazed at the opposing cliff, where he thought he saw a faint light emanating from a stone cave. He imagined Fairy Ning's beautiful face, shedding tears of joy under the lamplight. Her lonely figure seemed like a solitary flower blooming in the crevice of the cliff, filling Lin Wanrong's heart with waves of melancholy.

"My Dear, let's go," Qingxuan finally spoke, her voice tinged with mixed emotions. She took his large hand, pulling him forward with resolute determination.

After taking a few steps, Lin Wanrong suddenly turned back, dashing back towards the edge of the cliff like a madman. He cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled at the top of his lungs, "Bound by fate, never to part! I will come back; I will definitely return!"

Suddenly, a dim light lit up on the peak of the opposing mountain. It looked like a lonely little star sprinkled into the distant night sky, gently flickering and dancing, never falling...

Chapter 448 Dark Skies, Hard to See Clearly

The night was deep and the streets were deserted. Not a soul could be seen. The clip-clop of horse hooves resonated in the air, mingled with the sounds of clashing swords and spears. Hu Bugui and his men were escorting General Lin and the ladies back to their residence.

Noticing Lin Wanrong's low spirits, Miss Xiao was at a loss. She took his hand and softly said, "Don't worry. As long as I'm here, I'll take good care of Master. Once I've recovered in a few days, I'll personally go to the mountain and bring Master down."

"That won't do." Lin Wanrong was startled and quickly tightened his grip on her hand. "Times have changed; you're not the adventuress you once were. You're five months pregnant. How could you

undertake such a dangerous journey? Even after you've given birth and recovered, you can't go. You're my wife; I can't bear to put you in danger."

Miss Xiao smiled tenderly and nestled against him. "Just hearing you say that is enough for me. Is this how you've been cajoling my Master these past few days?"

"Well, sweet words are inevitable," Lin Wanrong chuckled awkwardly, stealing glances at Xiao Qingxuan's expression. "As you know, Fairy Sister initially wanted to kill me, but later changed her mind and sent me back. Many twists and turns happened between us. I'll tell you all about it when we go to bed."

Xiao Qingxuan touched her flushed cheek, biting her red lip and letting out a shy hum. "Don't even think about it. Tonight, you're not allowed in my room."

"Why?" Lin Wanrong was surprised. "My dear wife, I've been taking hot spring baths daily up on the mountain. I'm very clean."

"What does your interaction with Master have to do with me—" Miss Xiao turned away, her face turning red. "Fast for a day tomorrow, then you may enter my room."

'What's going on? Apart from hugging and kissing with your Master, I've done nothing else. I'm essentially still innocent.' Lin Wanrong's expression was one of distress.

Luo Ning covered her lips and looked at him flirtatiously. "Big brother, your verbal skills are unparalleled. I'm sure my Sister's Master must have been conquered by your eloquence. Otherwise, why would she voluntarily send you back? Right?" Ning'er looked somewhat flushed, her eyes twinkling, her smile mysterious.

"Actually, my verbal skills are just average," Lin Wanrong said, sweating profusely. He turned and playfully squeezed Luo Ning's hip. "My skills are more in my hands. You've experienced it, haven't you, Ning'er?"

Qiaoqiao noticed their playful gestures, her cheeks flushing. She hurriedly leaned against Xiao Qingxuan, wanting to watch but not daring to.

During the days Lin Wanrong had been trapped on the mountain peak, his wives had been anxious and scared, unable to muster a smile. Now that the worst was behind them, their spirits lifted. Inside

the carriage, aside from Second Miss Xiao, there were only the four of them, husband and wives. Some teasing and bantering only served to enhance their intimacy.

Seeing the two of them getting touchy-feely, Xiao Qingxuan had to suppress her own shyness. She shot him a disapproving look, her face flushed, and said, "Stop it. Don't you see that Yushuang is still here?"

Second Miss hurriedly lowered her head, speaking softly, "It's fine, it's fine. It's a rare occasion to be with my sisters; I feel joyful."

Lin Wanrong's heart ached for her. He moved closer and took her small hand, "Second Miss, don't worry. I promise you, within three days, Xiao Yuruo will definitely return."

"Really?" Xiao Yushuang exclaimed in joy, glancing at him softly before lowering her head, "Rascal, you better not be lying to me. You know, there's no one in this world I trust more than you."

His heart was touched by her words. He remembered the times in the Xiao family in Jinling before he had made his name. Second Miss had even risked her life to save him; how could he not be concerned for her? Thinking back on their shared past—selling books, dealing with dogs, saving each other—each scene flashed before his eyes. A subtle sense of joy filled his heart. He didn't care that others were watching; he hugged her and gently kissed her beautiful face, "Yushuang, thank you!"

Second Miss was delighted beyond measure; her eyes moistened with tears. She let out a soft 'ah,' covered her cheeks with both hands, and stammered, "Wh-what are you doing? Our sisters are still here. I'm so embarrassed!"

Qiaoqiao grabbed her hand and laughed, "We're all sisters here; there's nothing to be embarrassed about. Now, we, the renowned young ladies of Jinling, are all sisters. Look at us, including big brother; we all met in Jinling."

Mentioning Jinling, everyone in the carriage had an epiphany. Indeed, they had all met in Jinling.

Xiao Qingxuan smiled and gave Lin Wanrong a white-eyed look before extending her hand toward Second Miss, "Yushuang, come sit next to me."

Second Miss was usually a little fiery in temperament, and initially wanted to measure herself against Lin San's 'other women.' However, upon seeing Xiao Qingxuan's face, she lost all her spirit. Suppressing her shyness, she softly hummed in agreement and obediently sat next to Xiao Qingxuan.

"Qiaoqiao is right," Xiao Qingxuan smiled, "We all have an unbreakable bond with Jinling. Yushuang, you probably don't know that you played a role as a matchmaker in my relationship with My Dear."

"I was a matchmaker?" Xiao Yushuang was surprised for a moment and snuck a peek at Lin San, "Sister Princess, what are you talking about? I had no idea."

Xiao Qingxuan's face flushed, she shook her head and chuckled, recounting the story of her relationship with Lin Wanrong.

Hearing how Xiao Qingxuan spent her nights in conversation with the man in his room, adding poetic atmosphere with her presence, Second Miss was stunned. Her heart sank, and her face turned melancholic, "It's vexing that he kept me in the dark. If only I could have met you back then."

"People meet each other for a reason," Xiao Qingxuan was dignified, perceptively capturing the younger girl's thoughts with just one glance, "Yushuang, don't feel resentful. If you hadn't invited My Dear into the Xiao family, I wouldn't have had the chance to meet him again, nor would we have such an opportunity. What you didn't know is that, at that time, the person I was most envious of was you."

"Envious of me?! Why?!" Second Miss was stunned.

Miss Xiao nodded slightly and smiled gently, "I speak nothing but the truth. In those days, though My Dear and I conversed daily, we were constrained by our respective statuses, full of unspoken barriers. Many topics we could only touch lightly. While you and My Dear spoke outside, I would listen from within the room. I never saw your face, but I felt your sincerity. You spoke your mind and dared to love and hate, much stronger than me in many ways. What I wished for the most back then was to be like you—to speak and act as my true self."

Xiao Yushuang's face flushed, utterly shy, "Sister Princess, you flatter me. I am not as good as you describe."

"You are that good," Lin Wanrong laughed heartily, winking, "Second Miss, you may not know, but the first time a dog bit me in this lifetime was your valiant general."

This statement instantly reddened the Second Miss's face. She pounced on him playfully, causing everyone to burst into laughter. Seeing Yushuang's chest pressed against him, her quickened breath, and her flushed face, Lin Wanrong's eyes softened and he whispered, "Yushuang, do you like this?"

The Second Miss seemed to melt under his gaze; her body went limp. Lying softly in his arms, she murmured, "I like it! You scoundrel—"

As for matters concerning the Xiao family, they ultimately had to be resolved. Xiao Qingxuan wouldn't stand in the way, especially given Yushuang's purity, her affection for Lin San, and her kindness towards her.

Seeing Lin Wanrong blowing in Yushuang's ear, her small ears already a transparent red, wanting to struggle but also not willing to, Xiao Qingxuan shook her head helplessly and laughed, "Don't tease Yushuang anymore. She is still so young—Since all the sisters are here today, why not settle this matter? It couldn't be more appropriate for Second Miss Yushuang to enter our Lin family. My Dear, have you proposed to Madam Xiao yet?"

"I have, I have," Lin Wanrong was overjoyed, "Not just proposed, but I also sent a substantial betrothal gift."

He listed the gifts one by one. The Second Miss's face turned crimson; the ladies giggled. Xiao Qingxuan gave him a sidelong glance, her lips parting slightly, "You're so eccentric! Musket, drug, erotic book—are these things to win a lady's hand? It's fortunate Madam Xiao is good-natured, or she'd have kicked you out. Leave this to me; I'll prepare the gifts in a few days and personally propose to Madam Xiao, making this perfect for you."

With Miss Xiao's promise, it was a done deal. Xiao Yushuang, her wish fulfilled and shyly ecstatic, buried her head in his chest and dared not look up.

As for the matter of marrying a wife being arranged by Miss Xiao, all that was left for Lin Wanrong was to consummate the marriage. He sighed and smiled mischievously.

Qiaoqiao clapped her hands and giggled, "Today is truly a double celebration. Big brother has returned, and Second Miss Xiao is also joining our Lin family. It seems our family is getting more

and more prosperous. Second Miss, why don't you stay at our house today to get used to the atmosphere—"

"No, not today," Xiao Yushuang was sweetly flustered, her voice barely audible, "My mother is alone at home, I'm not at ease leaving her. Maybe later—ah, you're making fun of me—" The three ladies laughed in unison, dispelling days of gloom.

After exchanging a few words, Xiao Qingxuan instructed the carriage to pass in front of the Xiao residence. When they reached the entrance, Xiao Yushuang excused herself to alight from the carriage. Just as the curtain was lifted, she stole a quick glance at Lin San, her lips parting as though she had something to say.

"Do you still feel like a stranger among us?" Xiao Qingxuan asked, clearly seeing her hesitation. She grasped her hand and smiled, "If there's anything you wish to say, please feel free. We're all family here."

Second Miss hummed in agreement, her cheeks flushing as she spoke, "Sister Princess, the bad man is not at home, and without any men around, our house has become a mess. Even Mother has fallen ill from the stress. I was thinking... I was thinking of asking him to stay with us for a few days." Her voice faltered, embarrassment preventing her from speaking clearly.

Xiao Qingxuan had a moment of realization. Ah, she wants her husband to return to the Xiao residence. Yushuang was too pure and lively to ever think of such a scheme; it must be Madam Xiao's idea. The Xiao family, two daughters and a widowed mother, were already on the brink of ruin. It was Lin San, who had seemingly fallen from the sky, who had lifted them up. Lin Wanrong's importance to the Xiao family was known to all. Xiao Qingxuan sighed softly, acknowledging that her husband would forever be entangled with the Xiao family.

"Sister Princess, are you...are you upset?" Seeing Xiao Qingxuan silent for a long while, Second Miss spoke hastily, her face filled with remorse.

"Don't worry, your Sister Princess is not so easily angered," Lin Wanrong interjected, taking both women's hands. He smiled softly, "The Xiao family and the Lin family are one and the same. I would never abandon either."

Xiao Qingxuan glanced at him sharply, her eyes discerning. "Well spoken. But would you feel the same if the Xiao family didn't have two such stunning daughters?" Nevertheless, she smiled, "Very well, since you've made up your mind, Yushuang, I'll leave him in your care."

Xiao Yushuang's face lit up with joy, and she nodded vigorously. "Rest assured, Sister, Mother and I will take good care of him, so he'll never want to leave us."

Xiao Qingxuan smoothed out Lin Wanrong's clothes and spoke softly, "You have only a few days left before you depart for the battlefield. Take care of the Xiao family's affairs properly and don't bully them. Just remember one thing: take good care of yourself. Your son and I can't endure any more scares like this."

Touched by her sincere words, Lin Wanrong could only nod in agreement.

"If you find it hard to stay there, then come back. I'll be waiting for you," Xiao Qingxuan said, her cheeks flushing slightly.

Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat. He looked at her cautiously and asked, "So, are we still abstaining?"

"How should I know?" Xiao Qingxuan replied, her face turning red as she gently pushed him away. "Go now. Once you've sorted things out, I'll forgive you."

As Xiao Qingxuan's carriage disappeared into the distance, Lin Wanrong stood still, pondering the deeper meaning behind her words.

The moonlight was like water, casting a serene glow over him. Compared to the usual lively and restless Lin San, he seemed to have an added layer of mature intelligence. Xiao Yushuang stood beside him, her joy manifesting as she wrapped her arms around his and gently leaned into his embrace.

"Eh, the little white rabbit has turned into a big white rabbit!" Lin Wanrong suddenly exclaimed.

"What little white rabbit?" The Second Miss looked at him puzzledly, only to find his eyes mischievously fixated on her chest. "You're disgusting!" She let out a gentle, pleased spat and quickly pushed the door open to enter.

The night was deep, and the shop was quiet and somewhat disorderly compared to usual days. Xiao Yushuang lit a lamp, and she noticed that the official documents he had been working on were still

on the table, now adorned with some elegant small characters. She picked up a few sheets and saw that the writing was simple and clear, each containing just one word: "Approved."

"These were reviewed by my mother," Xiao Yushuang said, snuggling against him with a joyful smile. "She said that no one in the world could compare to you in handling matters. Wait here; I'll see if my mother has gone to sleep yet. I'll give her a pleasant surprise—seeing you will surely improve her health."

Xiao Yushuang tiptoed towards the inner chambers. Lin Wanrong chuckled and held her back. "Let's go together. I have to go in anyway. And we can see if there's hot water for us to wash our—hands!"

Having been teased by him multiple times, the Second Miss had grown thicker skin. With her cheeks flushed, she took his hand and they quietly moved toward the Madam's room.

A faint light came from inside the room, indicating that Madam Xiao hadn't gone to bed yet.

"Mother—" The Second Miss called softly. After a moment of silence, an excited voice came from inside. "Yushuang, you're back? Did you find him?"

"Don't worry; seeing him will definitely give you a start," the Second Miss laughed softly, quite pleased with herself. "Mother, please open the door. It's cold outside!"

The sound of hurried footsteps approached, and the door swung open. "You little girl, can't even wait for a moment, huh—"

Madam Xiao had delicate features and a tired but beautiful appearance. She was holding a lantern and wore only a high-quality silk nightgown that barely reached her knees. Her long, well-defined legs glowed softly in the dim light. In her haste, she hadn't fastened her robe properly, revealing a generous expanse of her full chest between the folds. Her voluptuous figure was barely contained within the thin silk, sensual and inviting.

"Ah, close your eyes, close your eyes—"

With a "thud," the door slammed shut before the Second Miss could finish her sentence. Madam Xiao's panicked voice echoed from within the room, "Yushuang, why did you bring him here?"

"Why should I close my eyes?" Lin Wanrong said, his expression utterly serious. "It's pitch dark in here; I can't see anything. Hey, why isn't Madam Xiao opening the door? I've already been waiting for two tea periods!"

Still shaken, Xiao Yushuang waved her hand in front of his face for a moment before finally asking, half-believing and half-doubting, "Did you really not see anything?"

Lin Wanrong didn't even blink as he said, "It's so dark here, the lighting is so poor, and my eyes are so small. What could I possibly see? Huh, who touched my face? Madam, this isn't a joke to be made."

The Second Miss patted her chest, relieved, and laughed, "Mother, don't be afraid. It's dark and hard to see clearly. Look, haven't I brought this rascal back?"

Hard to see clearly? His eyes were wider than a bull's. The Madam's voice trembled as she said bitterly, "You naughty girl, you're going to scare your mother to death! Lin San, you're back? Go rest early, we can talk more tomorrow."

Chapter 449 Entrustment

"If that's the case, Madam, please rest well. I'll come to visit you again tomorrow," Lin Wanrong said gravely, his voice strong. Madam Xiao merely hummed softly in response, saying nothing more.

Seeing her mother silent, Second Miss pulled him towards the opposite room. Pushing the door open, they found the room exactly as it had been the day he was kidnapped, spotlessly clean.

Lin Wanrong sank into a chair, his thoughts drifting to Fairy Ning from that night. A sense of longing surged in his heart. 'I wonder if the Fairy Sister is accustomed to living alone on the cliff without me.'

Xiao Yushuang ordered a maid to bring in hot water. Looking at the large wooden tub filled with floating, fragrant petals, Lin Wanrong said, "This is such a large tub; I probably won't be able to use it all. It's a waste, Second Miss. How about we each take half? Don't worry, I won't peek. We can have Huan'er put up a curtain in the middle to keep watch—"

Huan'er stifled a laugh and turned her face away. Second Miss's cheeks flushed. "You're incorrigible. Who wants to share a bath with you? My mother was startled earlier; I need to go talk to her. I'll come back to keep you company after you've finished bathing."

"Ah, Madam was startled? That is a serious matter. Second Miss, you should stay with her," Lin Wanrong reassured Yushuang. Misunderstanding the tone in his voice, she felt grateful and nodded lightly, taking Huan'er with her as she left the room.

As soon as the door closed, Lin Wanrong quickly undressed and plunged into the wooden tub. The moist, hot steam enveloped him, his whole body tingling in comfort. Even his pores seemed to sigh in relief. His thoughts drifted to the scene where he'd spied on Ning Yuxi bathing in a hot spring atop a remote peak. His heart filled with both warmth and anticipation.

On the table lay a set of new undergarments, emitting a faint, pleasing scent. He flicked through the silk clothing and found that it was hand-stitched with exquisite craftsmanship. Embroidered at the hem were a pair of butterflies, their wings unfurled as if in flight. Off to the side, embroidered in red thread, was a small character—Lin. The last stroke was incomplete, trailing a few strands of thread.

‘Hmm? Was this specifically prepared for me?’ Lin Wanrong thought, flipping the garment over a few times. He noticed the faint scent and realized it was made by a woman. Given that the Xiao family had risen to prominence through the textile business, the craftsmanship was unsurprising. The question was, who had made it?

Slipping into the new clothing, he felt its soft, smooth texture against his skin; it was incredibly comfortable. Lying in bed, he tossed and turned, unable to fall asleep. The moonlight streamed through the window, peaceful and soothing. He wondered what the Fairy Sister was doing right now, where the Eldest Miss was, and whether Xian'er had found Sister An.

Lost in thought, he suddenly heard the soft sound of a wooden latch. The door opened quietly, and a slender figure slipped in.

"Who's there?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed in surprise. ‘Could it be that Sister An has come to kill me? Even if she had wings, she couldn't be this fast.’

"It's me, you rascal," came the shy, trembling voice of the woman. Through the dim light of night, he faintly made out her elegant silhouette. It was Second Miss. She removed her outer garment, revealing a pink dress underneath. Her voluptuous figure slightly arched forward.

"Yushuang, weren't you speaking with the madam?" Lin Wanrong exclaimed in surprise. Just as he was about to reach out to her, Second Miss raised her head, her face flushed. Suddenly, with a determined bite of her lip, her trembling hand lifted his quilt, and she delicately slid under the silk covers.

Her body was soft and smooth, her recently matured figure reminiscent of a budding flower, perfectly contoured and crystal clear. She carried the fresh scent of a bath, like a newly bloomed lily, pure and lovely.

Such a tempting beauty voluntarily climbing into bed made Lin Wanrong's heart race. He quickly swallowed, pulling her close, "Second Miss, please refrain. I've only just come of age."

"Stop it, you rogue," Second Miss's face burned like fire. She let out a soft cry, wrapping her arms, as white as lotus roots, tightly around him. Her smooth cheek pressed against his chest, and Lin Wanrong could hear her heart pounding.

"Kiss me," in the darkness, Second Miss seemed to muster more courage. Her hands circled his neck, her rosy lips slightly parted, her eyes filled with tenderness. She bravely looked up at him.

"I'm not very good at this," Lin Wanrong said, caressing her soft curves, grinning shamelessly.

"Stop, mmm," Second Miss moaned softly. Before she could finish speaking, he covered her lips with his. His strong body held her close, their bodies pressed so closely together. Yushuang felt as if she had been struck by lightning, lying weakly in his arms, letting him savor the sweet nectar of her lips, almost forgetting to breathe.

After what felt like an eternity, Yushuang felt as if she was about to suffocate. Reluctantly, she pulled away, her breathing ragged, her eyes filled with fiery passion. "Rogue, you always tease me."

Lin Wanrong blinked, smiling, "How did I tease you? I only did as you asked."

"Don't speak," Second Miss's face turned even redder, her hand covering his mouth. "You've been teasing me since the moment you laid eyes on me." A sweet, shy smile appeared on her face. Pressing her cheek firmly against Lin Wanrong's chest, she whispered, "I want you to tease me for all eternity."

Such a request was hard to refuse. Lin Wanrong wrapped his arms around her delicate body, feeling a sense of peace. "Yushuang, has the Madam gone to sleep?"

Second Miss, her face flushed, slowly shook her head. Lin Wanrong was taken aback, "Really? How is that possible? Is she planning to catch us in the act?"

"Catch you? Nonsense," Second Miss playfully hit him, her movements gentle, her gaze soft. She hesitated for a moment, then softly said, "Rogue, I have a question for you, and you must answer me honestly."

Lin Wanrong quickly nodded. Second Miss huffed, "Earlier, when my mother opened the door, did you see clearly..." She paused, not finishing her sentence.

"See what clearly?" Lin Wanrong asked in confusion. "Huh, Madam opened the door? I wasn't aware."

"But mother said she saw you," Second Miss stared into his eyes, trying to discern if he was telling the truth or lying.

Lin Wanrong blinked and sighed, "Did Madam really see me? Alas, it seems my eyesight has sharply deteriorated from overuse lately. I should find a doctor to have it properly examined. Don't worry, Second Miss, next time I'll make sure to see Madam more clearly so as not to disappoint you."

"What do you mean 'see more clearly'? It's better if you can't see clearly!" Second Miss scoffed, her face flushing with embarrassment. She looked at Lin Wanrong from head to toe, finding his expression as composed as ever, utterly inscrutable. Reluctantly, she nodded and softly said, "Fine, I'll believe you. Scoundrel, it's enough that you torment me; you better not torment my mother."

'Well said,' Lin Wanrong thought, taking her small hand and letting out a few dry laughs. "Do I look like the kind of person who would do that?"

"Probably not," tears suddenly brimmed in Second Miss's eyes as she lowered her head and whispered, "Scoundrel, do you hate my family?"

"Hate? What are you talking about?" Lin Wanrong was taken aback.

Xiao Yushuang spoke solemnly, "You've faced danger several times, all happening within the Xiao family's estate. This time you almost lost your life. Even my mother feels guilty. Don't you harbor any resentment?"

"What is there to resent?" Lin Wanrong laughed heartily. "Fate governs life and death; fortune is in the hands of Heaven. I've faced death more than once or twice—"

"Don't talk nonsense," Second Miss hurriedly covered his mouth, "You'll be fine."

Lin Wanrong kissed her delicate white palm and smiled, "So, how did you convince Madam to come here?"

A faint blush spread across Xiao Yushuang's face, her expression tender and dignified, "I told my mother that from now on, I'll protect you, always, ensuring you won't suffer the slightest harm."

"Protect me?" Lin Wanrong paused.

"Don't you believe me?" Anxiety flashed in Xiao Yushuang's eyes. Swiftly, she drew a shining dagger from behind her waist, "With this, if anyone dares to touch you, I'll fight them to the death —"

Lin Wanrong quickly snatched the dagger from her hand and threw it far away, "Foolish girl, I'm fine. Don't do anything rash. Si De is too careless—why hasn't this dagger been melted down? What if you hurt yourself?"

Xiao Yushuang nestled in his arms and murmured softly, "Better that I die than you. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Gazing at the young girl's earnest expression, Lin Wanrong wanted to laugh but found himself unable. A gentle sweetness and emotion swelled in his heart. He held her tightly, without uttering a word.

Sensing his thoughts, Second Miss smiled sweetly at him and kissed his cheek, "Scoundrel, thank you. You're the best scoundrel there is."

The best scoundrel? Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter. Embracing Xiao Yushuang's tender, flower-like body that night, he felt an unprecedented sense of calm. Aside from occasional playful touches, not a single inappropriate thought crossed his mind—a remarkable achievement, to be sure.

The next morning he awoke to find the lingering fragrance beside him, Xiao Yushuang was already gone. As he stepped out of the inner courtyard, Si De was busy moving potted plants into the garden. Seeing him, Si De exclaimed with excitement, "Brother San, when did you get back?"

"Ah, probably between morning and evening. Huh, where did these flowers and plants come from?"

Si De whispered, "The Madam had them brought over from Jinling. They're all new varieties planted by Fubo. The Madam said that when Brother San was in Jinling, he was most fond of flowers. So, she told us to plant a large garden, just like the one in Jinling. When Brother San has time in the future, he can go flower-picking with the young misses, to relive the past."

Si De's words flowed like a river, leaving Lin Wanrong dazed. Picking flowers with the young misses to relive old feelings, truly, not just anyone could pull that off. The Madam certainly had the sentiment.

After making a full circle without finding the Second Miss, he was about to head back to the inner room when he saw a mature, graceful figure walking towards him. She moved quickly, her demeanor elegant.

"Hey, Madam, you're out for a stroll this early? Oh, isn't this General Zhenyuan? Long time no see, how are you—Hey, young man, I warn you, don't even think about it. I can bite harder than you—"

General Zhenyuan, being led by the Madam, began to bark wildly and grow restless the moment he saw Lin Wanrong. Startled, Lin Wanrong jumped and quickly covered his rear.

The Madam found it amusing and covered her small mouth with a light laugh. "Lin San, I heard from Yushuang that you could kill a tiger with a single punch. General Zhenyuan is familiar to you, why would you be afraid?"

'The Second Miss really cares for me. It took hundreds of punches to kill a wild dog, and now in her mouth, it had turned into me killing a tiger with a single punch.'

"Madam, you're so gentle, beautiful, pure, and kind, why would you keep such a ferocious dog?" Seeing the red tongue that General Zhenyuan stuck out, Lin Wanrong broke into a cold sweat. This was an old enemy from Jinling; he couldn't afford to be careless.

The Madam didn't answer his question, but instead looked him up and down. Her voice was soft, "Lin San, have you been well these days?"

"Thank you for your concern, Madam." Seeing the menacing dog, Lin Wanrong unconsciously stepped back, laughing, "I'm doing very well, walking tall and seeing far, entirely carefree."

"Walking tall, seeing far?" The Madam muttered to herself. Her face suddenly turned crimson, a mix of embarrassment and anger. She shot him an annoyed look and quickly turned her head away.

Oops, a slip of the tongue. Lin Wanrong stood stunned. Seeing the Madam's blushing face and her alluring figure, his heart skipped a beat. He quickly waved his hands, "Madam, you're mistaken. You were dressed so modestly yesterday; I couldn't see anything."

The Madam bit her red lips, her face flushed. She slightly loosened her grip on General Zhenyuan's leash. The dog lunged forward a few steps, barking loudly. Lin Wanrong was scared out of his wits, turned, and ran, bumping into a soft body. The Second Miss's voice rang out, "What are you doing, you rascal?"

As if he had encountered a savior, Lin Wanrong hurriedly hugged the delicate figure of Yushuang. "Second Miss, your timing is perfect. Please protect me; this ferocious dog is about to bite."

Seeing Lin San, usually as tough as a rock, scared of a dog made the Madam laugh. Just as she was about to call General Zhenyuan back, she caught Lin San sneaking a glance at her. Her pretty face turned red, and she quickly put on a cold expression.

"Put me down quickly; my mother is still here," Second Miss spoke in a soft and hurried tone, her face flushed with embarrassment.

Upon seeing Xiao Yushuang, the ferocious dog, General Zhenyuan, immediately calmed down, wagging its tail. Lin Wanrong finally let out a long sigh of relief. Xiao Yushuang extricated herself from his embrace and asked, "What were you discussing with my mother? Why did General Zhenyuan try to bite you?"

"Well," Lin Wanrong glanced at Madam Xiao and began, "it's not much really. I was just discussing matters of taste with Madam. She was complimenting my good eye when General Zhenyuan became jealous and wanted to bite me—"

This man is full of nonsense. How could General Zhenyuan be jealous of him? Madam Xiao felt both embarrassed and annoyed but held her tongue.

Second Miss looked at her mother, then back at Lin San, laughing, "I don't believe you. You must have upset my mother. Be careful not to wrong her. She is more afraid of dogs than you are. Ever since you had that incident, she's felt guilty, and bravely decided to adopt General Zhenyuan to guard the house."

"I see," Lin Wanrong sighed seriously, "please rest assured, Madam. After this northern expedition, if I manage to come back alive, I will treat the Xiao family as my own, work diligently, and strive to repay your kindness."

One moment he was acting suspicious, and the next he was so earnest; it was hard to know when he was being truthful. Madam Xiao sighed helplessly, "What do you mean treat the Xiao family as your own? I've already promised you both my daughters. Is the Xiao family going to be left for outsiders? You really know how to vex me."

Lin Wanrong chuckled awkwardly and remained silent. Seeing his eyes fixed on her, Madam Xiao felt slightly uncomfortable and quickly changed the topic, "Are you truly going to lead troops into battle?"

"Yes," Lin Wanrong nodded gravely, "since there are things I'm destined to do, I won't shy away from them. This morning, I'll help you manage some business affairs. After lunch, I'll go meet Li Tai to discuss some work. War is ruthless; once I leave, I have no idea when I'll be able to return."

Seeing his solemn face, Madam Xiao didn't know what to say. Conversing with Lin San was a roller coaster of emotions; she couldn't keep up with his changing moods.

"Lin San, come here," Madam Xiao beckoned softly. Lin Wanrong hurriedly approached.

Madam Xiao took Xiao Yushuang's hand and gently placed it in his. She softly sighed, "From this moment on, I entrust Yushuang to you. I hope you'll treat her well and never let her suffer."

"Mother—" Second Miss burst into a mix of joy and embarrassment, her eyes welling with tears as she hugged her mother.

"Foolish child," Madam Xiao tenderly stroked her hair, her own eyes moistening.

"Um, Madam, what about the Eldest Miss?" Lin Wanrong asked, slightly embarrassed.

Madam Xiao's eyes welled up with tears, and she was lost in her emotions when Lin Wanrong interrupted her. She couldn't help but roll her eyes at him, "You really do have a thick skin. Once I've promised you both my daughters, where else could you possibly go?"

Seeing Xiao Yushuang tightly holding Lin San's large hand, her face a mix of shyness and joy, Madam Xiao let out a long sigh, "Fine, fine. Although Yuruo is not here, I will make the decision for both of them and give you my daughters—"

Xiao Yushuang spoke shyly, "Since my sister is not here, I request that you, Mother, act as the matchmaker. I'm entrusting my sister to you." Second Miss took her mother's hand and deliberately placed it into Lin Wanrong's.

Chapter 450 Please Remove This Man From The Tent

Second Miss was innocent and lively, acting on a whim. She took her mother's jade-like hand and placed it in Lin San's palm, startling the Madam.

"What nonsense are you talking about, you little imp?" Madam Xiao shook her head with a light laugh, her face flushing. She subtly pulled back her hand. "When Yuruo returns, we'll make up for the formalities. Why would we need a substitute? Don't you agree, Lin San?"

"Ah, yes, yes," Lin Wanrong hurriedly nodded, saying earnestly, "Holding the wrong hand is a serious matter, one I have no intention of making at the moment. Besides, with Madam Xiao's exceptional beauty, standing alongside Eldest Miss and Second Miss, you are like a trio of blooming flowers in this garden. How could anyone simply substitute for another?"

In one sentence, he complimented all three of them. Second Miss's eyes sparkled like a painting as she held her mother's hand and giggled, "Naturally. My mother has been famous for her beauty since childhood. Countless young men have been smitten by her. Even now, her charm and

unparalleled beauty have earned her admirers in both Jinling and the capital city. You do have good taste!"

"You naughty girl," Madam Xiao's face turned slightly red as she chuckled and patted her daughter's beautiful face, "I was hoping you'd discipline Lin San a bit. Who knew you'd pick up on his slick talking before even getting married? What are we to do with you in the future?"

Second Miss laughed delightfully, holding her mother with one hand and Lin San with the other. The joy and shyness in her eyes seemed to blush half the horizon.

"What about my poor Yuruo? Where could she be?" Madam Xiao looked at her second daughter's beautiful face and felt a pang of sorrow, tears forming in her eyes.

"Don't worry, Mother. Yuruo will return within a few days," Second Miss whispered in her mother's ear. Madam Xiao wiped her tears and nodded slightly, "If the princess intercedes, that would naturally be for the best. But she is the First Princess of Great Hua; you two will have to keep that in mind. Lin San, my two daughters have been so kind to you. You must treat them impartially."

Madam Xiao's words made Lin Wanrong laugh heartily, "Ever since I joined the Xiao family, I have been grateful for Madam Xiao and both misses' kindness. I haven't even had the chance to show my gratitude, so how could I mistreat them? If there's any favoritism, it's that I'm more inclined towards them. After all, I've spent 300 days of this year with them."

His words rang true. Lin San had only recently been away from the Xiao family more often. Before that, he had been an exemplary employee, protecting the young ladies and helping to restore the family's glory. He was the most meritorious. Madam Xiao nodded and smiled, "If that's the case, I feel reassured. You certainly have a way with words; it makes people believe anything you say."

Upon hearing her mother's praise for Lin San, Second Miss was overjoyed and chirped, "Mother, Lin San is honest and reliable; he's not prone to lying. If I say that he saw nothing last night, you must believe me now."

Lin Wanrong was filled with gratitude. "So Second Miss does trust me. In the future, I must spend more time in her room. Ah, and invite Eldest Miss as well. As the old saying goes, 'When three people walk together, one will inevitably get wet.'"

Madam Xiao was taken aback. Seeing Lin San's sly, rat-like grin, she had no words to express her irritation. Her red lips were tightly closed, her beautiful eyebrows raised slightly, and a blush colored her cheeks as she shot him an angry glare.

Lin Wanrong had spent the entire morning at the Xiao residence, diligently tackling a backlog of official duties. Encouraged by Madam Xiao, he was working with utmost care and attention. The Second Miss, now formally promised to him by Madam Xiao herself, found her long-held wishes fulfilled. She stayed contentedly by his side, her face alight with a constant smile. Madam Xiao was considerate and attentive, personally bringing in ginseng soup and bird's nest into the study from time to time and watching the couple finish their meal. Seeing their joyful and loving interactions filled her with a sense of indescribable happiness and emotion. Her only reservation was that Lin Wanrong was perhaps a bit too flirtatious for her liking. With this thought, she couldn't help but shoot him a stern glare, causing Lin Wanrong to feel slightly uneasy.

After lunch, remembering his military commitments, Lin Wanrong wasted no time. He mounted a fast horse and headed straight to the army camp located outside the city gates. The weather was fine and warm, and as he rode, he heard the distant rumble of cannons and the clash of weapons, accompanied by the battle cries and neighing of war horses.

Shielding his eyes to get a better view, he saw that the field ahead was filled with rolling dust, broken walls, and intense fires. Thick smoke rose into the sky, and the dust kicked up by galloping horses obscured half of the heavens. Countless soldiers were rapidly charging and fighting on horseback, their faces covered in soot and filled with killing intent. The scene was almost indistinguishable from real combat.

Lin Wanrong realized at a glance that the dust, cannons, fires, and smoke were all simulating a real battlefield environment. Most of General Li Tai's troops had little actual combat experience, so this realistic training exercise was rather innovative and useful for alleviating the soldiers' fears.

Urging his horse to go faster, Lin Wanrong had not yet reached the battlefield when he heard approaching hoofbeats. A team of soldiers on patrol duty quickly rode towards him. A young voice shouted, "Who goes there? Are you a spy from the Turkic tribes? Men, seize this spy at once!"

The voice sounded familiar. Lin Wanrong looked up and saw a young officer commanding the team, poised and full of energy.

"Little Li, are you trying to capture me?" Lin Wanrong pulled on the reins and burst into hearty laughter.

Li Wuling looked intently for a moment and saw a white horse with a rider of medium complexion, waving at him and grinning. Overjoyed, Li Wuling snapped his whip, and his horse neighed as it galloped towards him.

"Lin San—General Lin, why did you take so long to come? I've missed you terribly," said Li Wuling, who had matured considerably since they last met, from a frail boy into a young man. He galloped up to Lin Wanrong, steadied his horse, and clutched Lin San's arm in excitement.

Lin Wanrong laughed loudly, "Miss me for what? I'm not a courtesan from a brothel."

Though young, Li Wuling had grown up in the army and was brash in nature. Hearing Lin Wanrong's coarse language delighted him. He chuckled, "You may not be a courtesan, but you are more fun than one. When you went to Shandong some days ago, I had begged Aunt Xu to take me along. But my grandfather wouldn't allow it. Otherwise, how could I have let you monopolize such a universally-known good opportunity like 'the fish jumping over the dragon gate'? I regret it so much—"

Lin Wanrong chuckled, taken aback by the boy's forthrightness. "You were looking for me? Well, that should have been simple enough. My house is right next to yours. I've come and gone hundreds of times, but I've never seen you."

Li Wuling wrapped an arm around his shoulder, sheepishly admitting, "I did intend to seek you out. But I was stopped by Aunt Xu. She says you're heartless and ungrateful, a man beyond redemption. She even warned me not to take after you. Oh, she's also adopted two ferocious dogs, one named Lin San and the other Lin Si. Aunt Xu claims they share your surname Lin, asserting that no Lin is any good—Ah, this is what she said, not me. Brother Lin, do you have any grudges with Aunt Xu?"

A shiver ran down Lin Wanrong's spine. Xu Zhiqing was indeed relentless. If she happened to call out for Lin San while walking her dogs on the street, he'd probably have to jump out like an obedient canine.

"No grudges per se," Lin Wanrong sighed. "But you know how women are—difficult to please. Especially when they see a striking man like me, I become the object of their desires. And that puts me in a difficult position." His expression turned wistful.

Li Wuling gave him a thumbs-up. "You've got guts, Brother Lin. No one else in the entire realm would dare speak about my Aunt Xu like that."

"Hm, Li Wuling, while everyone else is busy with military drills, why are you the only one idling around?" Lin Wanrong glanced at the bustling training grounds in the distance before returning his gaze to Li Wuling.

"I, I—" Li Wuling's face flushed a deep red. He gripped Lin Wanrong's arm, pleading, "Brother Lin, you have to help me this time. The army is about to set out, and my grandpa and Aunt Xu won't allow me to join the battlefield. Even this patrol duty outside the training grounds took me days of begging to get."

Lin Wanrong nodded, understanding the situation. Li Wuling was the only surviving heir of the Li family, and both of Li Tai's sons had died in battle. Naturally, Xu Zhiqing and Li Tai were just concerned for him.

Seeing Lin Wanrong's expression, Li Wuling grew anxious. "Brother Lin, don't tell me you also look down on me? Since when has my family produced cowards? Am I afraid of death?"

"Who said you're afraid of dying?" Lin Wanrong chuckled, patting him on the shoulder. "Your situation is just unique. The Li family has served at the borders for generations, honored throughout history. Both your father and uncle died in battle, leaving you as the family's sole heir. Moreover, you're still young. If something were to happen to you, it would be a devastating blow to the General and the empire."

Li Wuling snorted defiantly. "What could happen? At worst, I'd die. My father and uncle could die, so why can't I? Sure, I may be the only heir to the Li family, but among the millions of soldiers, how many are the sole heirs? Why can they die but not me? Brother Lin, you're also an only heir, and even the Prince Consort of Princess Chuyun—"

Lin Wanrong paused for a moment, then smiled and nodded. "You sure have a way with words. How old are you this year?"

"Fifteen!" Li Wuling answered loudly.

Lin Wanrong's expression darkened. "I asked for the truth!"

His demeanor stern, Li Wuling felt somewhat intimidated and quickly lowered his head, muttering softly, "Thirteen, but I look like I'm fifteen."

"Thirteen, still a child soldier, huh?" Lin Wanrong sighed as he caught sight of Li Wuling's defiant gaze. The young man's bravery was living up to his family's reputation.

"Brother Lin, I've already spoken with Brothers Hu Bugui and Du Xiuyuan. As soon as you arrive, I'll be under your command. Just let me go to the front lines. I promise not to cause you any trouble and I'll do whatever I'm told," Li Wuling cautiously said, noticing Lin Wanrong's contemplative silence.

"You lack ambition," Lin Wanrong scolded. "Just doing whatever you're told? Then what is your brain for? One must have his own thoughts in life and even more so in battle. It's all about using your head."

Li Wuling let out an 'Oh' and then seemed to have an epiphany, beaming with joy, "Brother Lin, does that mean you agree?"

"Agree my ass," Lin Wanrong laughed. "I haven't even settled my own affairs, let alone yours. First, take me to see the General, then we'll discuss the rest."

Li Wuling, quick on the uptake, sensed the hidden intentions in Lin Wanrong's words and was overjoyed. Leading him across the training grounds, they headed directly for General Li Tai's camp.

All along the way, the sounds of martial training were ceaseless. Lin Wanrong observed closely and recognized many familiar faces—those young men who had once been green troops under his command had now become seasoned warriors. It filled him with pride.

"General Lin—" An old soldier from Shandong saw him and was overjoyed, getting hit on the shoulder by a wooden sword from his opponent as a result. Sweat poured down his face from the pain.

Lin Wanrong clenched his teeth and snorted, "A soldier can't afford to be distracted. If he is my brother, cut him down!"

"At once!" The old soldier was so excited that he forgot the pain, swinging his sword at his opponent, who was forced to retreat, panting heavily, the helmet tumbling to the ground and the hair blowing in the wind.

"Aunt Xu—" Li Wuling shrieked. Lin Wanrong looked up to see Xu Zhiqing in military garb and armor, her face slightly pale. Her captivating lips were tightly pressed together as she glared at him, breathing heavily.

"General, shall we continue the attack?" asked the soldier quietly, noticing Lin Wanrong's pause.

"What a great question," Lin Wanrong smirked coldly, his expression fierce. "Strike! Why wouldn't you? Remember, she's the enemy, not a woman—Look, the enemy is fleeing!"

Xu Zhiqing picked up her helmet and leapt away, never looking back. Li Wuling chuckled, "This is great. I can guarantee that when we go home tonight, Aunt Xu's 'Lin San' is going to get whipped again."

"What the hell are you talking about? Make it clear. This Lin San is not that Lin San," Lin Wanrong said, drenched in sweat, pulling Li Wuling out of the training area. "Little Li, what is Miss Xu doing here, fighting? We nearly hurt her!"

"Don't worry, she won't get hurt. She orchestrated this whole training ground," Li Wuling said nonchalantly. "Think about it. Aunt Xu has been through real battles with live blades and cannons countless times; she won't be rattled by a small scene like this. I think seeing you distracted her, causing her defeat."

It turned out that this practical military drill was Xu Zhiqing's idea. Recalling her innovative sling tactic from yesterday, Lin Wanrong silently admired the young woman's intelligence and ingenuity.

As they walked along, Lin Wanrong caught sight of Hu Bugui, Du Xiuyuan, and others. These men had risen from humble beginnings under Lin Wanrong's mentorship and were now high-ranking generals in Li Tai's army, commanding tens of thousands of soldiers. Lin Wanrong nodded approvingly; this was indeed the right way to make use of talent.

When they arrived at the front of General Li Tai's camp, Li Wuling whispered nervously, "Brother Lin, you go in. But remember, don't forget about me. You mustn't forget!"

"Who dares to make a commotion outside my tent?" a powerful voice thundered from within the tent. Li Wuling quickly slipped away, not daring to linger another second.

"Lin San of Jinling, here to pay my respects to the General," Lin Wanrong announced cheerfully, his voice carrying into the tent.

The sound of clinking armor emanated from inside the tent, followed by a group of people rushing out. Leading them was an elderly, venerable general—none other than Li Tai himself. Behind him were several military officers, each radiating a powerful aura.

Upon seeing Lin Wanrong, Li Tai's eyes lit up with joy, "Ah, good, good. You've finally come. I knew you wouldn't disappoint me. Gentlemen, this is the renowned Lin San. You've all heard of him. The National Tutor of the Turkic Khaganate, Lu Dongzan, suffered a defeat at his hands, and the White Lotus cult was practically eradicated by him alone."

"It's an honor," the officers hastily greeted Lin Wanrong, their attitudes a mixture of respect and indifference.

Lin Wanrong responded graciously, "I apologize for the delay, family matters kept me. I'm sorry to have kept you all waiting."

Whispers filled the air; no one dared to comment aloud. To place family over state affairs and to admit it so brazenly—Lin San was indeed unparalleled in this regard.

Li Tai beckoned him into the large tent, "Whether early or late, it's the contribution that counts. Ah, Zhiqing, Lin San is here. Don't you want to greet him?"

Inside the tent, a detailed map hung on a wall, marking various locations and landscapes. A slender figure stood in front of it, engrossed in her study. So focused was she that she didn't even hear Li Tai's call.

"General, Miss Xu is currently devising a strategy; it would be unwise to disturb her," a young officer, approximately in his thirties, stepped forward and discreetly informed Li Tai. He glanced at Lin Wanrong as he spoke.

Li Tai nodded, "You and Zhiqing are no strangers; you can always greet each other later."

Lin Wanrong chuckled awkwardly but before he could speak, the silent Xu Zhiqing suddenly broke her concentration and calmly said, "General, please escort this man out of the tent."