

Finest 571

Chapter 571 Deception and Hatred

‘This wench is even more brazen than me?’ Lin Wanrong was taken aback when she shouted. What did she mean by ‘not a drop less’? This girl was way too overbearing.

The Sea of Death was shrouded in a dull yellow haze, and violent winds roared, sending sand and stones flying. From afar, it looked like a rapidly rising cloud of yellow dust. A massive storm howled through the air, lifting plumes of dirt and swirling fragments of rock. Even Lin Wanrong, who usually considered himself extraordinarily strong, felt as fragile as a dried leaf, trembling on the verge of being swept away. He used his body to block the flying debris, shielding Yujia in his arms.

The ferocity of the Sea of Death far surpassed Lin Wanrong’s imagination. Combined, the two of them weighed more than two hundred pounds, yet in the eye of this storm, they felt as light as a single leaf. Their clothes billowed in the gusts, and the sand beneath their feet spiraled upwards. They felt their bodies becoming lighter, as if they would be lifted off the ground at any moment.

"Are we going to die?" the Turkic girl shouted into his ear, her eyes glinting with an indecipherable complexity.

"Don't talk. Cough, cough—You won't die while I'm here!" Lin Wanrong roared. As soon as he opened his mouth, countless particles of sand and dust were blown in, clogging his mouth and nostrils, and triggering a violent bout of coughing. Even breathing felt like suffocation.

"With you here, I won't die?" Yujia bit her vibrant red lips and lowered her head slightly. She remained silent for a long moment before whispering tremulously in his ear, "How wonderful it would be if you weren't from the Great Hua!"

"Nonsense. I was born with yellow skin and black eyes; I can't change that just because you say so!" Lin Wanrong retorted angrily, "And it would be even better if you weren't a Turkic girl. Then I could properly deal with you back in the Great Hua!"

A violent gust swept past, lifting both of them into the air like pulling onions from parched land. Yujia felt as light as a floating reed, tears instantly filling her eyes. "Do you know who I am—I am—cough, cough—hold me tight—"

The wind's intensity was increasing, threatening to sweep them both away. Lin Wanrong, tightly embraced by Yujia, found it nearly impossible to move. Unable to contain himself, he roared and rolled over several times with the girl in his arms, propelling them dozens of feet away. With a loud crash, the place where they had stood was instantly leveled, and the sky was filled with swirling yellow sand.

Yujia began coughing violently; the sand had choked her as she was speaking.

Another moment's delay, and they would have been shattered to pieces. Lin Wanrong's face was as white as a sheet, and he couldn't even sweat. Looking at the coughing and tearful Turkic girl, he bellowed, "I don't care who you are! You need to be quiet now, quiet! Do you hear me?!—Damn it, we almost got killed by this sandstorm, and you almost pissed me off to death!"

He roared several times, his mouth full of sand, his face covered with yellow dust, looking utterly ferocious.

The Turkic girl stared blankly at him, her silver teeth biting her red lips tightly, and then tears began to fall.

"Don't you dare insult me!" She whimpered, suddenly diving into his arms. Without warning, she bit into his chest. Lin Wanrong had experienced her biting prowess several times before; her teeth left a neat row of marks on his chest, drawing flecks of blood.

'Damn it, this Turkic woman is truly fierce like a leopard—her bite is excruciating,' thought Lin Wanrong. The cold desert wind swept through them. He had no choice but to shield this unruly woman. Caught between the bite marks on his chest and the sandy terrain, he found himself pained on both fronts.

After what seemed like an eternity, the Turkic girl finally released her bite. Looking at the row of teeth marks stained with blood on his chest, she seemed stunned for a moment. Then her eyes grew moist, and she lowered her head in defeat.

"What, got tired of biting?" Lin Wanrong winced in pain and roared angrily.

Without saying a word, she took the water pouch that she had risked her life for, and gently pressed it against the bite marks on his chest. Then she leaned down, resting her cheek silently against the pouch. Though separated by the water pouch, he could clearly hear her racing heartbeat. She closed her eyes, a sweet smile tugging at the corners of her mouth.

Just moments before, this Turkic girl had been wild and ferocious. Now she was as docile as a civet, her eyes tightly shut. Her long, wet eyelashes quivered gently. Her hands and feet drew close, curling tightly in his embrace. Lin Wanrong was quite baffled by this sudden transformation.

As she nestled in his arms, clutching him tightly, she gradually calmed down. With her no longer causing trouble, Lin Wanrong felt much more at ease. Amidst the swirling sands of the desert, neither of them spoke. While a sandstorm raged outside, it was remarkably peaceful where they were.

After some time had passed, Lin Wanrong noticed that she had never been this quiet before. Looking down, he saw the Turkic girl sleeping soundly, her face lit up by a gentle smile.

‘How could she sleep at a time like this? Women truly defy logic,’ Lin Wanrong sighed in disbelief and exasperation.

Finally, the terrifying sandstorm passed, leaving in its wake a mess of scattered debris and yellow sands. Lin Wanrong found himself buried up to his thighs in the sandy terrain.

"Wake up!" He slapped her pert behind with a vengeance. Startled, she leaped up, screaming. She found herself lying on the sand, unharmed, while Lin Wanrong was nearly buried, his face coated with sand, and breathing heavily as though he were about to collapse. rÃNoßËš

"You're despicable!" The Turkic girl spat, her cheeks flushing red. She quickly squatted down, drawing an exquisite golden blade from her bosom. With a swift motion, she plunged it into the sand in front of him and began digging vigorously to free him.

Lin Wanrong turned pale with fear as he watched her careless digging. Each thrust of her blade came dangerously close to a very sensitive area. "Slow down, slow down, little sister! Using such a precious golden blade for digging is a waste—let me do it!"

"I don't need your help!" She retorted, but her golden blade moved even more rapidly, digging with increasing urgency.

"You're trying to kill me!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed in shock, hastily restraining her hand. "Little sister, thank you for your good intentions. But this golden blade of yours is too precious. I fear that

if I'm not careful, I might damage it by bumping into something hard on my body. That would be a loss for both of us!"

"Damage the golden blade?" Yujia paused, stunned. Realizing where she had aimed the knife, she quickly withdrew her hand and turned her face away, blushing. Women, Lin Wanrong thought as he chuckled, were inevitably shy.

"Shameless!" Yujia shot him a glare, then sheathed the golden blade beside her and began digging through the sand with her bare hands.

Working together, they spent a considerable amount of time clearing the mound of sand. Lin Wanrong used all his might to leap out from the sandy pile, only to discover that his legs were covered in red scratches from the sand. His trousers were tattered, flapping in the wind. Thankfully, his boxer shorts remained, sparing him utter humiliation.

Yujia looked at his disheveled state, biting her lip. She wanted to laugh, but her nose tingled with emotion.

"What are you looking at? Never seen someone as stylish as me?" Feeling a little embarrassed under Yujia's scrutiny, Lin Wanrong blurted out defensively.

Yujia turned her head and muttered softly, "So ugly—why would I look at you?"

This sudden sandstorm had created a massive dune several hundred yards away, the extent of its power evident in its vast size. Wagons were thrown into the air and shattered upon landing. Even the army's sole large pot flew several hundred yards, eventually landing in a sandpit.

"Brother Lin, are you alright?" Gao Qiu rushed over, ignoring the sand on his face.

"I'm fine," Lin Wanrong grunted. "I'll just have to travel in ripped trousers, but it's not so bad. At least it won't impede my adolescent growth!"

Gao Qiu was drenched in cold sweat, utterly impressed by Lin Wanrong's resilience.

"How's Little Li?" Lin Wanrong asked seriously.

"Don't worry, as long as I'm here, nothing will happen to him. I even gave him water just now!" Gao Qiu patted his chest in reassurance.

Lin Wanrong nodded and moved through the group with Hu Bugui, assessing the damage.

The devastation from the formidable sandstorm was unprecedented even for desert veteran Hu Bugui. Though frightened, they had encountered sandstorms before and had some experience. The group huddled tightly, helping each other, so the losses were minimal—a fact that comforted Lin Wanrong.

However, there were also regrets. Sharp sand and rocks had pierced two of their water bags, exacerbating the already tight water supply. Everyone felt a palpable sense of loss.

"Hey," Hu Bugui suddenly exclaimed, following behind Lin Wanrong. "General, where's your water bag? I don't see it!"

At Hu Bugui's shout, Gao Qiu also quickly turned around. At this moment, water was more precious than gold.

"Water bag?" Lin Wanrong instinctively touched his waist. The beautiful face of Yujia flashed before his eyes. During the fieriest moments of the sandstorm, it was this Turkic girl who had risked her life to retrieve the water bag. He had even scolded her for it. Now, her actions could potentially save dozens of parched lives.

Lin Wanrong had yet to speak when Gao Qiu glanced into the distance and let out a long "Oh," laughing, "Ah, so there she is!"

Everyone followed his gaze and saw Yujia mounted on a greenish young horse, her red lips bitten, holding a full water pouch tightly against her chest.

When she noticed everyone looking her way, the Turkic girl hummed softly and hid the water pouch behind her back. This child-like act triggered a round of uproarious laughter among the group, the atmosphere growing incredibly lively.

Gao Qiu winked and teased, "Only Brother Lin could have gotten that water pouch. Just you all wait and see."

His words were laced with innuendo, and the crowd erupted into even greater laughter, clearly understanding his implication. Yujia, too far away to know what they were laughing about, looked completely bewildered.

'That Old Gao, always jumping to salacious conclusions,' Lin Wanrong shook his head in exasperation and waved his hand, signaling the caravan to move on.

Having already faced the mirages and sandstorms of Lop Nur, everyone had grown fearless. As long as they didn't lose their way and had enough food and water, this so-called Sea of Death could be conquered.

As they pressed on, encountering several more fierce sandstorms, they grew increasingly accustomed and less panicked. One prominent feature of this Silk Road was the countless skeletal remains buried beneath the thick sand—grisly signposts guiding their way.

Li Wuling's injuries were gradually healing, confirming the mediocre medical judgment of Gao Qiu. By the fourth day after the storm, Li Wuling was able to walk. This great news significantly lifted everyone's spirits.

The one who had contributed most to Li Wuling's rescue was Yueya'er, yet ironically she was Turkic. The vagaries of life were indeed puzzling. But since the day of that sandstorm, Yujia had somehow become increasingly reserved. Her eyes would sometimes glow brightly and then dim, displaying a rollercoaster of emotions—happiness, sadness, and even inexplicable fear at times. It left everyone scratching their heads.

As days passed, their water and food supplies dwindled, and the journey grew increasingly challenging. They were eventually forced to slaughter some of their weaker warhorses for sustenance. Despite these efforts, after several more days, they completely ran out of water, leaving the party of over five thousand in a dire predicament.

"Brother Lin, didn't you say we'd be out of the Lop Nur in seven days?" Gao Qiu, holding himself up against his horse and panting, questioned, "Two sets of seven days have passed. Why are we still circling this desert?"

Gao Qiu had just burst the bubble of Lin Wanrong's prior exaggeration meant to boost morale. All their water supplies had been used up the night before, and if they couldn't get out of the desert in the next three days, they would end up like their predecessors on the Silk Road—buried forever in this Sea of Death.

Lin Wanrong, anxious and desperate, licked his dry, cracked lips and rasped, "Don't worry, Brother Gao. If my guess is correct, the exit of Lop Nur should be near. Maybe by tomorrow—or even tonight—we'll be swimming in a clear lake."

After nearly twenty days in the desert, where even a drop of water was rationed let alone a proper bath, Old Gao couldn't help but lick his lips in yearning. Even though he knew that Brother Lin was merely offering false hopes, the desire was hard to suppress.

By now, the sandstorms had gradually subsided and the air wasn't as dry. For four or five consecutive days, they hadn't encountered any sandstorms—an indication they were nearing the edge of the desert. Yet finding the actual exit of the Lop Nur was no simple feat.

As he surveyed the surroundings, he suddenly felt a tug on his sleeve. Turning around, he saw the pretty face of the Turkic girl. Her radiant red lips, dulled from dehydration, contrasted with her eyes that shimmered like tranquil pools, fixated on him.

It had been several days since Yujia had spoken to him, so her approach surprised Lin Wanrong.

"Come with me," she said, leading him to a secluded corner. Biting her lip, she pulled something from her bosom. "This is for you!" What he took into his hand was a glass bottle, about the size of a child's palm, containing just enough water to cover its bottom.

"Where did this come from?" Lin Wanrong was taken aback. Water had been strictly rationed these days. Even a few drops were a day or two's allocation.

"I stole it," she replied coldly, averting her gaze.

"That's impossible," Lin Wanrong said in disbelief. "Have you been going without water these past days?"

"Nonsense, I drank water," Yujia retorted stubbornly. "It's your own fault for not searching me properly. I saved it secretly from my water bag!"

Biting his lip, Lin Wanrong said, "Leave half of it for yourself and give the rest to Little Li."

"How dare you!" Yujia became instantly furious, snatching the bottle from his hand. "He's your brother, not mine. If you're planning to give this last drop away, I'd rather spill it into the desert!"

She yanked open the cork, ready to pour the water onto the ground.

"Have you lost your mind?" Lin Wanrong hastily grabbed the bottle back. Sighing at the stubborn girl, he relented. "Fine, consider it a debt I owe you. Half for you and half for me, alright? Don't shake your head. I have my principles too. I'll spill it into the desert if I have to. On the count of three, open your mouth—"

Before Yujia could comprehend what was happening, a trickle of water flowed past her lips and into her throat. Subconsciously, she sucked on it, realizing something was off. Lin Wanrong didn't stop; he had poured all the water into her mouth, leaving not a single drop.

Staring at the empty bottle, she was stunned for a moment before bursting into tears. "You despicable man, how dare you deceive me! I hate you, I utterly despise you, I never want to see you again!"

Mounting her steed, she snapped the reins and spurred her horse into a gallop.

'What just happened?' Lin Wanrong stood there, dumbfounded, when he suddenly heard Hu Bugui behind him exclaim, "General, look!"