

Finest 436

Chapter 436 A Complex Matter

Straining to lower his head, Lin Wanrong caught a glimpse of his legs still attached to his body and immediately felt elated. Fairy Ning was holding a sword in one hand while carrying him with the other, her toes barely touching the roof tiles as they darted forward. She moved like a wisp of smoke, incredibly fast. All he could hear was the sound of rushing wind; he couldn't even make out their direction.

Was he really not dead? Cold sweat soaked his clothes. His relief was indescribable. To escape death once was luck, twice was a matter of fortune, but a third time indicated a deep providence. Rejuvenated, he felt as if he could see hope once again. Fairy Ning's expression remained calm, her white robes fluttering gracefully. After a moment of intense speed, a hint of pallor appeared on her face. A sweet, orchid-like fragrance wafted into his nostrils, lifting his spirits.

"Fairy Sister," he spoke, causing her to abruptly halt, the tip of her sword touching his neck.

"Don't worry, Sister, I'm in no rush. Your well-being is what's important," he said warmly, sincerity filling his eyes.

Fairy Ning gave him a cold glance and loosened her grip. His body started plummeting straight down. Looking below, Lin Wanrong's heart skipped a beat. They were several meters above ground; falling from this height would turn him into a pancake. Taking a gamble, he clenched his teeth, shut his eyes, and fell. Just as he was about to hit the ground, a disdainful snort echoed in the air, and like a flash, Fairy Ning caught him again, continuing their rapid advance.

Lin Wanrong felt as if he had just been fished out of water, his clothes completely drenched in sweat. After so many life-and-death situations that evening, he felt somewhat numb. Closing his eyes, he decided to let Fairy Ning do as she pleased.

Both remained silent, the long night seeming even quieter. After an indeterminate amount of time, Lin Wanrong suddenly felt a cold wind blowing around him. Opening his eyes, he realized they were halfway up a mountain, Jade Buddha Temple below and the remains of the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall above, a place he had bombarded. Ruins and desolation met his eyes.

'Why am I here?' Lin Wanrong was shocked. Struggling slightly, he felt a sudden sharp pain in his back. Fairy Ning had mercilessly struck him with the scabbard of her sword. "Where are you taking me?" he groaned.

Fairy Ning didn't reply. She navigated the steep mountain path, the higher they climbed, the stronger the wind became. Her robe billowed, ethereal and elegant, while Lin Wanrong, lightly clad, shivered uncontrollably. After roughly the time it takes to brew half a pot of tea, Fairy Ning finally slowed down and unceremoniously dumped him onto the ground. The sharp rocks jabbed into his rear, causing excruciating pain.

Surveying his surroundings, he found himself at the peak of a cliff, a desolate and lonely place. The collapsed arch was close by, as was a newly built tomb—the final resting place of Recluse Jing'an, whom he had buried himself.

Fairy Ning stared vacantly at the new tomb, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. Her grip tightened on her sword, veins appearing on her slender hands. Her beauty was tinged with an indescribable sense of desolation as the cold wind tousled her hair. She slowly inserted the sword into the ground in front of the tomb and knelt down. Finally, tears rolled down her cheeks as she broke into silent sobs.

It was over. Lin Wanrong felt his entire body break into a cold sweat. Could it be that the Recluse Jing'an was the mother of Fairy Sister? The head of the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall, who was driven to death by Lin San, was a matter known to all under heaven. No matter how crafty he was, no matter how well he could talk, he couldn't deceive the fairy. No wonder Ning Yuxi harbored such hatred toward him, repeatedly putting him in life-threatening situations, disregarding their past friendship.

Seeing that Fairy Ning remained silent kneeling in front of the grave, Lin Wanrong knew that no method would work this time; he had no option but to risk his life and flee. As his mind made up the decision, he moved like a shadow, slowly retreating down the mountain.

"Think you can escape?" Fairy Ning seemed to have eyes in the back of her head. She gave a cold snort, lightly raised her hand, and three cold rays shot out. Lin Wanrong dodged two but was hit in the leg by the third. Reeling from the pain, he lost his balance and fell to the ground with a thud.

Things had really gone from bad to worse. As he saw Ning Yuxi approaching with a cold expression and a long sword shining with chilly light, all he could do was give a bitter smile. Of all the ways he had imagined dying, he had never thought he would die by her hand.

"How do you think I'll let you die?" Her long sword rested against his chest. Her voice was ice-cold, in stark contrast to her once gentle demeanor.

"If I could die a quick and easy death, that would be best," Lin Wanrong sighed, showing little sadness. His eyes wandered around, taking in the landscape. "This is a nice place. Green hills and clear waters, chirping birds and fragrant flowers. Being buried here wouldn't be a waste of my loyal bones."

"Loyal bones?" The fairy sneered. "You who destroyed my sacred hall and insulted my family, who is reviled and cursed by the world, dare claim to have 'loyal bones'?"

Lin Wanrong angrily retorted, "Fairy Sister, you saved my life. If you want to beat me or kill me, I won't even frown. But remember this, you can only speak for yourself, not for everyone. How do you know that the world will only curse me and not admire me? This is the typical arrogance of your Jade Virtue Fairy Hall. Everyone has their own hands, feet, brains, and thoughts. Who are you to speak for them?"

As he spoke, as if by magic, a black, sinister-looking musket appeared in his hands, its barrel gleaming with a cold light, aimed directly at Ning Yuxi.

Fairy Ning showed no sign of surprise. "You do have some skill, being able to bring out a hidden weapon in this situation. But that doesn't mean I'll be afraid of you." She sighed softly, "There's nothing left in this mortal world for me to be attached to. Even if it costs me my life, I will take yours."

Her face resolute, she gritted her teeth and prepared to lunge at him, ready for a fight to the death.

With a soft clang of metal hitting the ground, Ning Yuxi paused in bewilderment. Lin Wanrong had thrown the musket on the ground and sighed in resignation, "Fairy Sister, as I said, you saved my life. I won't be your enemy in this life. This is my way of repaying your kindness. If you want to kill me, go ahead. If I even frown, your son can take my surname."

Fairy Ning was dumbstruck. She had seen the power of that musket; even with her extraordinary martial skills, she had no guarantee of avoiding its bullets. Lin Wanrong had returned a great favor to her, and the price was his own life. When had he become so magnanimous?

It was a prolonged silence, a moment where emotions teetered on the brink. Fairy Ning's sword tip quivered slightly. "Don't think that your life will be spared because of this. You forced the Hall Master to her death; your sins are unforgivable—"

Lin Wanrong burst into laughter, his voice tinged with melancholy. "Fairy Sister, it is your multiple rescues I respect, not your words or your conduct. What fault is there in the love between Qingxuan and me? Why should you all seek to tear us apart?"

Fairy Ning seemed momentarily stunned. "The matter with Qingxuan is beyond my control. She made a vow in her youth to renounce worldly desires and serve the Sacred Hall for life. How could I betray her sincerity?"

"Renounce worldly desires? What a joke! We live in a mundane world, sustained by food and graced by life's ups and downs. Just as blood flows through our veins, how can one renounce the worldly life? You and Master Jing'an may stand high above, but Qingxuan and I are mere mortals. We yearn for a simple life together, not to become otherworldly fairies. Speaking of which, are these so-called 'fairies' even truly divine? They seem quite phony to me."

"Do not insult the Hall Master." Fairy Ning's face turned pale. "You forced her to her death, your sins are unforgivable—"

"What splendid unforgivability!" Lin Wanrong sneered. "Well then, let's say I accept my sins. But have you ever thought, what would have happened to Qingxuan and the child in her womb if I had arrived even a moment later? Would they have survived? If I am unforgivable for saving my wife and offspring, then the people you respect must be ten thousand times worse."

"How dare you!" Enraged, Fairy Ning lunged forward, her sword whistling sharply through the air, aimed directly at Lin Wanrong's chest.

Lin Wanrong smirked. A sense of numbness enveloped him as images of familiar faces flashed before his eyes—Xian'er, Qingxuan, Qiaoqiao, Ning'er, Sister An, the Madam.

As Fairy Ning closed in, her sword aimed at his chest, she thrust it down fiercely. Lin Wanrong remained unmoved, a smile spread across his face.

"Why, why are you smiling?" Her sword met his skin but could not penetrate further. Fairy Ning was visibly confused, her teeth clenched.

"Sister, is Master Jing'an your mother?" Lin Wanrong asked, his smile innocent, like an unguarded child.

"She is my aunt—I won't tell you!" Fairy Ning caught herself, her eyes widening in surprise.

‘So, she's not her mother?’ Lin Wanrong sighed in relief. "I knew it. How could someone as ethereal as you be the daughter of that phony Master Jing'an? You scared me."

His body was still trembling from the risk he'd taken, his life wagered on a gambit. He forced a smile onto his face, his skin tightening. "Sister, if you tell me who Master Jing'an is to you, I'll reveal a huge secret."

"I'm not interested," Fairy Ning huffed, her expression darkening. "I need to avenge my aunt. She's the only family I have left in this world."

So it was her aunt, Lin Wanrong sighed in relief with a smile, picking up the musket from the ground. Fairy Ning was taken aback and readied her longsword hastily.

Lin Wanrong shook his head slightly, a smile covering his face. "Thank you for your sincerity, Fairy Sister. Now it's my turn to repay you. You don't have to hesitate to kill me; I can do it myself."

He raised the musket and aimed it at his temple. Fairy Ning watched, alarmed, her voice trembling, "What are you doing?"

"Nothing special, just curious about the power of this musket," Lin Wanrong nonchalantly replied. He pressed the muzzle against his forehead, his smile turning mysterious. "Don't worry. Perhaps this musket lacks power, or maybe my skull is too hard. The bullet might not harm me."

"Then go ahead and die!" Ning Yuxi's expression grew increasingly irritated, her teeth clenched.

Lin Wanrong's face turned serious, his eyes closed, and his finger reached for the trigger. As he concentrated, Ning Yuxi's beautiful eyes flickered, filled with a mixture of hate, concern, and confusion—emotions even she couldn't discern.

He said nothing, remained calm, his finger slowly moving on the trigger. Even the usually composed Ning Yuxi couldn't maintain her calm; her heartbeat accelerated, her grip tightened on the sword, and her teeth clenched audibly. Her mind was torn between conflicting thoughts.

Lin Wanrong sighed softly, his finger quickly pulling the trigger. Fairy Ning's heartbeat surged, and without thinking, she swung her sword at his wrist.

"Aow!" Lin Wanrong cried out in pain as his wrist dropped. "Sister, what are you doing?"

Ning Yuxi gritted her teeth, "This is a sacred place. Don't tarnish it with bloodshed. Jump off this cliff; let's put an end to all of this."

Lin Wanrong couldn't help but chuckle quietly. He opened the case of his musket, revealing it was empty, with not even ammunition loaded. He shook his head and sighed softly, "Today, I took this musket to ask for the two young ladies of the Xiao family's hands in marriage. To avoid accidental discharge, I had already removed the ammunition. The aim I took at you earlier was deliberate, so you would hesitate to act."

"You can call me despicable or shameless, but I am true to myself. As with the Recluse Jing'an, our viewpoints clashed but there was no hatred. I gave her a proper burial and kowtowed with Qingxuan at her grave. Standing here on this high peak, I can proudly say I have no regrets."

His expression was stern, every word forceful. Ning Yuxi looked at his resolute face and felt an indescribable sense of awe, her mind in turmoil.

Lin Wanrong turned back to her and smiled, but his smile was tinged with a kind of indescribable freedom. "Life is full of complexities and uncertainties, as intricate as Fairy Sister's desire to kill me—nothing could be more complicated than that."

"There's nothing more complicated than this," Ning Yuxi muttered to herself, suddenly struck by a realization she'd never had before: the Lin San facing him was someone she could probably never kill, even if she spent a lifetime trying.

Alas, Brother San's skills, they were effortlessly sublime, bordering on the miraculous.

Chapter 437 Thousand-Forsaken Peak, Hundred-Foot Chain

The mountain air was cold and crisp, all else silent. The two of them stood in place, saying nothing, and for a moment the atmosphere was heavy with tension. Lin Wanrong took a furtive glance at Fairy Ning, whose expression was inscrutable. Her lovely face betrayed no emotion, emanating an

aura of indifference. Lin Wanrong felt that he had at least secured his life with his daring gamble, but he dared not show the slightest hint of his inner triumph.

As the night deepened, a layer of mist condensed into droplets on the edges of Ning Yuxi's hair, clear and translucent. Under the soft moonlight, they shimmered brilliantly. Her delicate hand and fair face, her clothing whiter than snow, and her hair fluttering lightly in the cold wind, all made her seem like a celestial maiden who had descended to the mortal realm. Her ethereal beauty left Lin Wanrong in awe.

"Did you think that would be enough to save you?" Ning Yuxi's voice grew colder, each word tinged with frost. "From childhood, I was separated from my parents. My aunt is like my mother, teaching me reading, writing, and martial arts alongside my master. They are the most important people in my life. I will never forget their kindness in nurturing and educating me. You caused her death; do you think I could simply let you go?"

"Do you wish to discuss ethics and revenge with me?" Lin Wanrong chuckled coldly. "Very well. You claim that my actions led to your aunt's death. Did you see it with your own eyes, or hear it with your own ears? I may be a scoundrel, but I have never killed anyone outside of the battlefield. I had no personal grudges against your aunt; why would I kill her? What reason would I have?"

"Don't play coy. Your words exhausted her to the point of death; this is known to all," Ning Yuxi retorted coldly. "How can you deny it?"

"So you're saying I killed your aunt with words?" Lin Wanrong asked with a smile.

Fairy Ning was taken aback. Lin Wanrong's ability to twist words was indeed extraordinary. While her aunt had died because of him, it couldn't be said that he had killed her.

"If that's what you believe, I won't argue," Lin Wanrong sighed. "Your Jade Virtue Fairy Hall is the embodiment of justice, right? Then act justly. Covert assassination will only make you the laughingstock of the world. It will disturb your aunt's soul in the afterlife. I offer you a fair chance: kill me with your words. I will die without regret."

"You—" Ning Yuxi had an unparalleled beauty and was unmatched in martial skills. But when it came to verbal battles, she was no match for Lin Wanrong. Furious at his deflection, she raised her hand. A flash of silver light shot out, striking Lin Wanrong's knee. Already limping, both his legs now wracked with pain, he collapsed to the ground, his head hitting the earth. Stars danced in front of his eyes as everything went black.

"So you can talk? I'll cut off your tongue, and we'll see how you defend yourself then," Ning Yuxi said coldly, holding her sword.

Laughing heartily, Lin Wanrong showed no fear. "Is this the style of the Jade Virtue Fairy Hall? When you lose an argument, you resort to violence? I'd say your aunt had far better judgment than you. I've had enough of talking. Kill me or do as you wish."

He leaned back, lying on the ground as if it were the natural place for him, his eyes staring up at the sky. His face was a picture of calm.

Ning Yuxi raised her jade-like hand several times, tempted to end him with a single stroke, but each time she hesitated. It seemed too easy to let him die like that. Her mind wandered to his past exploits in Shandong—how he strategized behind curtains and flaunted his feather fan. Now, as she looked down at his indifferent expression, her emotions surged uncontrollably.

The rocks on the mountain were freezing. Lin Wanrong lay on the ground, shivering uncontrollably. Annoyance welled up within him. 'Even if I survive her sword, I'll freeze to death at this rate,' he thought. After waiting for a moment, tensely drawing his hands and feet close to his body, and hearing no sound from the fairy, he finally lost patience. He opened his eyes abruptly and saw that Ning Yuxi stood several feet away from him, near the cliff's edge, seemingly lost in thought as she looked at the distant peak across the way.

'Maybe my insults awakened her conscience, and she's contemplating suicide,' he mused. With a grimacing grin, he chuckled to himself. Despite the growing cold, only he would have the audacity to jest in such a precarious situation.

Noticing that he had opened his eyes, the fairy suddenly flashed a faint smile. "I hear you're someone who loves excitement, never idle for a moment, always drawn to crowds. Is that true?"

'Is that even a question?' Lin Wanrong was inwardly amused. 'Anyone you ask would know that wherever there's money and beautiful women, that's where you'll find me.' But seeing Ning Yuxi smile, a sudden chill rose within him. He hastily waved his hand, "No, no, what I really like is solitude and contemplation, especially at the summit of such isolated peaks. It's the perfect setting for a man of depth like myself."

"Is it?" Ning Yuxi chuckled. "Do you know what the most painful thing in life is?"

"For men, it's impotence; for women, it's infertility."

This uncouth comment made Ning Yuxi grit her teeth. Lifting her delicate hand, she pointed and asked, "What do you see over there?"

Following the direction of her finger, Lin Wanrong was met with an insurmountable mountain peak, towering sky-high, its cliffs sheared as if cut by a blade, impossible for humans to ascend.

"What a massive peak!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed.

"That peak is called Thousand-Forsaken Peak," Ning Yuxi said calmly. "Above a thousand feet, there exists an unparalleled peak. On that peak, one can touch the starry sky. Since ancient times, only one person has ever ascended it."

"Who?" Lin Wanrong couldn't help but ask.

"I don't know," Ning Yuxi replied, her expression placid. "Probably the person who named this peak."

"You're teasing me," Lin Wanrong laughed. "If even you don't know who it was, how can you claim someone has climbed it?"

"Because I have eyes," Ning Yuxi's expression turned icy. She picked up a small stone and flicked it with her finger. With a crisp sound, the stone plummeted as if it had hit something solid.

Lin Wanrong's eyes widened. On closer inspection, he saw that the formidable peak was bound by a dark iron chain that reached all the way to their own mountain. The chain was several hundred feet long and rusted in spots, its age unguessable. Given Ning Yuxi's skill, the stone she had flung caused hardly a ripple in the chain, attesting to its solidity.

Could there truly be one who feared not death? Lin Wanrong was dumbfounded. Not only had someone ascended the insurmountable Thousand-Forsaken Peak, but that person had also managed to anchor an iron chain from the summit. How could this have been possible? The chain was rusty and appeared unused for centuries, corroborating Fairy Ning's claim that only one person had ever made it up there, a claim that seemed highly credible.

"What do you think?" Ning Yuxi asked, her expression as still as an ancient well.

"Incredible," Lin Wanrong muttered, only to startle himself with a sudden realization. "Fairy Sister, this towering peak has nothing to do with me, does it?"

Ning Yuxi cast him a glance, impassive as ever. "Initially, it didn't. But something you said reminded me that justice must be served. You may have been the catalyst for my aunt's death, but you didn't kill her with your own hands. If I were to kill you now, it would neither quell the rage in my heart nor leave you at peace."

"Exactly, exactly! It's good that you think that way," Lin Wanrong exclaimed joyfully. "Killing benefits neither of us. Why not sit down and chat amicably? Share some stories and enjoy each other's company? Wouldn't that be much better?"

Gazing toward the distant Thousand-Forsaken Peak, Fairy Ning's expression remained unreadable. "Vengeance is a complex matter, one that leaves no room for joy or happiness. Do you know what the most painful thing in life is? A chasm as wide as the heavens can be but a hair's breadth away. You have torn me from my aunt for all eternity. I'll repay you by making you taste the same bitter sorrow of eternal separation."

Lin Wanrong found her words perplexing, but a chill ran down his spine as he instinctively sensed that something was awry.

"You look down on my sacred hall, don't you? You pride yourself as a common man?" Ning Yuxi suddenly grinned. "Then I'll make you an immortal of another realm, within sight but forever out of reach of worldly attachments."

Swiftly, Ning Yuxi leapt forward, lifting Lin Wanrong's body and heading for the cliff's edge. His heart pounded wildly as he screamed, "What are you doing? I'm not jumping!"

"I'm being quite fair," Ning Yuxi said flatly. "I'll cross this hundred-foot chain with you. If we fall, it will be both of us; you won't suffer alone."

Lin Wanrong's hairs stood on end, his body as cold as stone. He struggled frantically, shouting, "I'm not going! I don't like rock climbing—"

With unyielding determination, Ning Yuxi clenched her teeth, lifted him up, and gracefully leapt onto the rust-covered rope, poised like a swallow. Lin Wanrong's scream abruptly halted. Glancing

downward, he saw only a boundless sea of clouds, unable to discern the ravine below. Gusts of cold wind whistled by, turning his cheeks crimson, but he no longer felt any pain.

Walking a tightrope was an acrobatic feat he had only ever watched, never imagining he'd experience it himself—especially not hoisted in someone else's hands, above a bottomless abyss. Lin Wanrong didn't know how to describe the emotions welling up inside him. He suddenly recalled how he had arrived in this world. Was he going to return everything today? A jumble of sorrow and joy seized him, and yet, he found himself unable to cry.

Ning Yuxi stood solemnly on the Hundred-Foot Chain, utterly still. She took a deep breath and cautiously took a step forward. The rope swayed slightly, eliciting a startled cry from Lin Wanrong. In response, Ning Yuxi tapped her feet quickly, advancing five steps in one breath. Then she stopped, as steady as a rock, harmonizing her movements with the swaying rope.

'I really wish I were dead,' Lin Wanrong inwardly muttered, his face twisted in a grimace. 'Not everyone can enjoy the sensation of swinging in mid-air like this.' He sighed, "Fairy Sister, you look so slender, not fat at all. Why does the rope keep shaking like this?"

"Silence!" Ning Yuxi's face turned pale, her teeth clenched. "You're the one who needs to lose weight; you're as heavy as a pig!"

Gazing at the Hundred-Foot Chain ahead, Lin Wanrong realized he couldn't move forward or backward. His life was once again in her hands. He shook his head, gaining a new understanding of Ning Yuxi's stubbornness and determination.

"Sister, let go of me," he suddenly spoke, his expression incredibly calm.

"Why?" Ning Yuxi was taken aback.

"Because I've experienced something like this before," he said sincerely. "Falling twice doesn't scare me. It's just flesh and bones, nothing important."

"Do you think this is my first time?" Ning Yuxi replied coldly.

Lin Wanrong paused, understanding her meaning. He remembered how she had risked her life to save him back in Shandong. He looked at their current situation, so different yet strangely the same. His feelings were complicated.

"Close your eyes!" Ning Yuxi commanded softly. Before he could react, she moved again. This time, she didn't stop, executing several leaps and covering a significant distance.

Wind howled past Lin Wanrong's ears, and for a moment he felt as if he were walking among clouds. When he opened his eyes, he saw Ning Yuxi standing on the rope, her face pale as paper, her body trembling slightly. In a rash decision, he tore off his coat and plummeted down.

At that moment, he was filled with regrets for everything he was leaving behind—Qingxuan, Ning'er, Qiaoqiao, and his unborn son. But his mind was calm. "Am I finally going back? I didn't expect even the circumstances to be the same, truly hitting rock bottom—"

"You idiot!" A sharp cry rang in his ears. At the last moment, Ning Yuxi had grabbed the collar of his shirt.

Looking up, Lin Wanrong was struck dumb. Ning Yuxi's eyes were red, her face as white as paper. She was hanging upside down from the rope, like a monkey reaching for the moon, gripping his collar tightly. As they locked eyes, their breaths seemed to sync.

On the Hundred-Foot Chain of Thousand-Forsaken Peak, their fates converged in the most magical way. Lin Wanrong grinned, unable to conceal his tears from her beautiful eyes.

'He's so ugly,' she thought, confused but intensely emotional. Her hand clenched his collar even tighter.

'Do I want to cry or laugh?' Lin Wanrong pondered, but felt incredibly calm. At this point, he had nothing to lose. He leaned in and kissed her red lips deeply. "Sister," he whispered, "I need to lose weight."

A solemn warning: Do not imitate the 'Kiss of the Stacked Tower' without Fairy-level skills; it could lead to serious injury!

Chapter 438 Make You an Immortal

"You—" Ning Yuxi paled with shock, her arm that had been reaching out suddenly dropped. Lin Wanrong plummeted several feet, letting out a scream. Suddenly roused, Fairy Ning stretched her wrist and grabbed his collar, halting his descent.

A little over a foot of distance separated their heads, and the previous intimate moment was lost. Lin Wanrong sighed deeply, recalling the tender taste of the Fairy's lips and feeling an indescribable yearning.

Ning Yuxi's face was as white as paper; her silver teeth gritted so hard they made a noise. Tears fell like raindrops, landing on his face. "Shameless lecher, how dare you tarnish my purity? We are irreconcilable!"

"Fairy Sister, you misunderstand," Lin Wanrong gasped, choked by the collar Ning Yuxi gripped so tightly. "It was merely an innocent blessing, an act from the heart and bounded by propriety. I harbored no other intentions. You may not believe it, but never have I been so pure in my life."

Lin Wanrong was known for his deceitful beginnings, and Ning Yuxi knew it well. How could she trust him? Just as she was about to let go, tears still falling, her eyes caught the sight of his tattered robe drifting downward in the mountain wind, as soft and soundless as falling catkins. She paused, closed her eyes, and more tears flowed. "Lin San, I will not let you go."

With a sharp cry, she gripped Lin Wanrong's collar with one hand and hooked her feet around the rope with the other. Spinning swiftly, her body traced a graceful arc in the air.

Lin Wanrong felt a whooshing wind by his ear. When he opened his eyes, he saw Fairy Ning sitting at the center of the rope, her face as pale as paper, blood at the corners of her mouth, and her chest heaving rapidly. One of her slender jade legs wrapped tightly around the chain while the other extended straight out to balance her. Her flowing hair scattered in the wind, making her look like a lotus in bloom high up in the heavens.

"Fairy, are you hurt? Where is the injury? Let me see." Lin Wanrong was shocked and instinctively reached out his hand. Before he could finish speaking, he felt a sharp pain in his chest and a sweetness in his throat. Coughing up a mouthful of fresh blood, he saw Fairy Ning's eyes cold as ice, a sword sheath pressed against his chest. She had struck him in her anger.

Lin Wanrong let out a few cries but found himself out of breath, unable to speak, as the icy wind swept through the sky. He felt dizzy, his limbs completely devoid of strength.

"As I said, I will not let you go," Ning Yuxi opened her eyes, devoid of any visible anger, her voice indescribably calm.

The calmer she was, the worse it boded. Lin Wanrong opened his mouth but couldn't utter a word as the mountain wind filled his throat.

After gathering her strength for a moment, Ning Yuxi rose slowly but steadily. Standing on the trembling rope, she balanced herself with feet placed one in front of the other. With her right hand holding the sword and her left lifting Lin Wanrong's body, she gave a light cry and, with a swift tap of her lotus foot, glided forward like a swallow skimming water. After moving several yards, she paused to catch her breath and then continued, making her way toward the cliff on the other side.

Lin Wanrong could not speak, but all his fears and anxieties proved fruitless. In a way, he had become accustomed to them. It was like riding a roller coaster, especially since he was in the company of a fairy. He took a long sigh of relief and a slight smile appeared on his face. Struggling, he drew a circle on his chest and sent a distant gesture toward Ning Yuxi.

Contemplating whether to strike him once more, Ning Yuxi gritted her teeth. But when she saw his pale face, she lowered her sheathed sword.

The two of them, one who wouldn't speak and the other who couldn't, were enveloped by the howling winds of the valley, with not a trace of any other sound. Amidst the utter silence, Lin Wanrong felt a strange sensation. It seemed as if he could hear Ning Yuxi's heartbeat gradually syncing with his own—a feeling, he supposed, that could only be described as sharing life and death together.

A distance of a hundred feet, instantly covered on land, seemed like an endless chasm in this lofty height. With each step they took, both their spirits ebbed and flowed—sometimes overwhelmingly intense like tidal waves, and at other times silent yet saturating like a gentle stream. Ning Yuxi's lips broke, a trickle of blood seeping out from the corner of her mouth. A thin layer of sweat formed on the tip of her nose. Her beauty now laced with an awe-inspiring resilience. She stole a quick glance at Lin Wanrong only to find his eyes closed, his breathing steady, seemingly as peaceful as a baby floating in a cradle, already deep in sleep.

'How can he sleep at a time like this?' Ning Yuxi felt both an urge to cry and to laugh. She looked ahead and noticed that they were nearing the precipitous peak adorned with green trees, red flowers, and protruding strange rocks. Even for a composed fairy like her, she couldn't help but feel elated. She bit down on her silver teeth and, with a few quick leaps, reached the edge of the chain bridge.

Taking a few more tentative steps to step onto the mountain peak, she felt as if all her energy had been drained. Her body went limp and she collapsed onto the cold rock.

Lin Wanrong, who had been in a deep sleep, was jolted awake as if he had been dropped. The aching sensation throughout his body made him open his eyes. He found himself lying on a protruding rock. The hundred-foot chain lay before him. His right hand had already stretched out over the edge of the cliff. One glance was enough to reveal the unfathomable gorge beneath him. The chilling winds blew across, numbing his hands and feet with pain.

"Ah!" He screamed, hastily pulling himself back, away from the edge of the cliff, gasping for air in large, frantic gulps.

"You're awake?" A calm voice, tinged with exhaustion, spoke.

"Fairy Sister?" Lin Wanrong looked up to see Fairy Ning sitting at the edge of the cliff, her black hair dancing in the wind, both legs casually dangling over the edge. She was the epitome of ethereal beauty. She suddenly turned, offering Lin Wanrong a mysterious smile.

"Awake, awake, very awake," Lin Wanrong stammered. "Could you come closer? I'm scared of heights and can't stand cliffs."

"At this point, you're still afraid of heights?" Ning Yuxi chuckled, her foot kicking something. A soft clinking sound rang out. "Do you hear that? Do you know what it is?"

"Iron chain," Lin Wanrong said, the memory fresh in his mind. Just tonight, he'd nearly come full circle back to this starting point. How could he forget?

Fairy Ning nodded with a smile. "You are indeed clever to recognize this. It is indeed an iron chain, but it is also a path—a path connecting the heavenly palace to the mortal world."

"Yes, yes," Lin Wanrong hurriedly nodded. He glanced around to find jagged rocks jutting up from the peak, colorful flowers in full bloom, green trees shading the area, and streams babbling. It seemed like a paradise on Earth. Unfortunately, he had never been one for idyllic settings. Shivering involuntarily, he rushed to say, "Fairy Sister, we can enjoy the scenery for a bit, but let's think about how to get back. Ah, I've got it. I'll take off my clothes and tie them into a loop, attach them to this chain—" As he spoke, he gestured animatedly. "This side is higher and that side is lower. We can slide down the chain. It'll be thrilling but not too dangerous. What do you think, Fairy Sister? Don't worry, I'll only take off my clothes; you won't have to."

"Not bad, you've thought of quite a solution," Ning Yuxi smirked. She stared at the iron chain, her expression indifferent. "I wonder how those who first climbed this peak managed to attach this chain. The wisdom of our forebears is beyond our comprehension."

What was she trying to say? Lin Wanrong felt puzzled. Had he risked life and limb to climb up here just to discuss the wisdom of ancient sages?

"Lin San, you are quite clever, aren't you?" Ning Yuxi said coolly. "When you were searching for silver in Shandong, you were able to think of some rather cunning schemes. Do you think you could have attached this chain?"

Attach the chain? Lin Wanrong paused and looked across the chasm. The closest peak was the one they had just climbed. Even so, the straight-line distance between the two was several hundred feet. A mist filled the air, making it impossible to see any figures, let alone hear any sounds from the opposite side. Considering how Ning Yuxi had led him through a perilous journey to reach this point, he felt a mixture of dread and gratitude. "I can't say how this chain bridge was built, but I'm certain I couldn't do it. There are many mysteries in this world that I, a mere mortal, cannot fathom. I don't wish to be an immortal either."

Ning Yuxi glanced at him but said nothing. Both gazed into the distance, the flickering lights far away seeming like tiny stars in a brilliant night sky.

'I wonder if Ning'er found Qingxuan? Can she understand me? When will she come? And what about Qiaoqiao, Yushuang, Yuruo, Xian'er? They must be waiting for me in that distant light,' he thought, a sudden wave of emotion surging through him. His longing had never felt so sincere.

Reading his thoughts, Ning Yuxi spoke calmly, "This boundless mortal world, full of colorful flowers and willows, dazzling glamour and various human follies; do you like it?"

"As an ordinary man, what else could I like if not these?" Lin Wanrong chuckled awkwardly.

"That makes sense," Ning Yuxi nodded. "You laugh, you fight, you curse, but you can never sit still. It would be a miracle if someone of your temperament could stay here for even a moment. The whirlpool of mortal attachments indeed suits you well."

Confused by the Buddhist talk and fate, Lin Wanrong could hardly grasp what was on the Fairy's mind. He offered a sheepish laugh and chose not to respond.

Ning Yuxi felt a subtle sense of pleasure holding the renowned and ever-adaptable Lin San in the palm of her hand. With a slight smile, she brushed her flowing hair aside, and with her Autumn Water Sword, she created dazzlingly brilliant arcs of sword light. "Do you recognize this?"

"What a massive sword!" Lin Wanrong exclaimed in awe.

Ning Yuxi rested her sword's blade on the iron chain and smiled, "You should recognize this too."

"It's an iron chain—a celestial path leading to the mortal world," Lin Wanrong's expression drastically changed. He lunged forward, "Fairy Sister, what are you planning to do?"

"Nothing much," Ning Yuxi said with an aloof smile. "I simply wish to turn you into an immortal."

Her sword swung with the grace of flowing water. With a sharp clank, the hundred-foot iron chain broke from its anchor and descended. Its pace quickened, disappearing into the clouds until only the faint sounds of the chain striking the cliff on the other side could be heard.

"Aah—" Lin Wanrong yelled as he reached to grab the broken chain, but he was too slow. Nearly stumbling, he caught himself just in time.

'Become an immortal, become an immortal. I'm really going to become a damn immortal,' he inwardly muttered, staring at the chain that had plummeted. His demeanor instantly deflated, and he slumped to the ground.

What is it like to be so close yet worlds apart? To be separated from loved ones for a lifetime? Finally, he understood Ning Yuxi's intentions. How torturous it would be for a man as lively and freedom-loving as him to be trapped on this desolate peak, forever parted from his wife while watching the colorful tapestry of human life unfold below. All his grand ambitions—to conquer Goryeo, to fight off the Turks—had turned into the world's greatest joke because of this mountain.

Ever since she met Lin Wanrong, Ning Yuxi had only seen him spirited and passionate. She had never seen him so dejected. Had she won? A mist appeared in her eyes as she turned her head, leaving her feeling strangely empty, unsure of what to think.

A deathly silence. The unbearable moment seemed to stretch into a millennium. Lin Wanrong, usually so talkative, remained silent for hours. Even Ning Yuxi, for all her self-possession, couldn't stand the heaviness. The absence of his voice made her feel oddly uncomfortable.

"Do you hate me?" she abruptly asked, noticing the grey in Lin Wanrong's eyes and feeling an oppressive emotion closing in on her.

"Why should I hate you?" Lin Wanrong took a deep sigh and then broke into laughter. "As you said, you've been fair. We've been linked by this hundred-foot chain in life and death. You didn't abandon me, nor did I abandon you. This mountain that traps me, doesn't it trap you as well?" He burst into laughter, suddenly standing up, his eyes shining, "What's wrong with becoming immortals together?"

Ning Yuxi stood at the edge of the cliff, allowing the mountain wind to whip her skirt and long hair, looking like a statue of a fairy. Soft celestial music filled the air as she began to sing softly:

"People say heaven is wonderful, where immortals are carefree. But how many tears lie behind success? Immortals are without worries, casting fame and fortune aside. To be like them, you must forget all gains and losses. Heaven is wonderful, so is the mortal world—"

Chapter 439 The Death of a Robust Man

The melody was crisp, akin to the gentle fall of pearls on a jade plate, serene and ethereal, as if sounds from beyond the heavens were cleansing the soul. Ning Yuxi stood on the cliff in her ethereal white robes. Moonlight graced her pale, beautiful cheeks, her demeanor as profound as the heavens and the earth themselves. Lin Wanrong stood close to her, listening to her soft singing and felt a sudden surge of tranquility. Listening to this celestial music amid soaring clouds was perhaps the happiest moment of his life. In that instant, the clamor of the mundane world seemed to have distanced itself from him.

As the melody came to an end, Ning Yuxi was thoroughly absorbed in the splendid ambiance she had created. A light mist appeared in her eyes as she stood silently, serene in her countenance.

"Beautifully sung, beautifully sung," a playful voice chimed in beside her. "I never knew that even a fairy like you would sing ballads. I haven't heard any in a long while. The last I heard was in Jinling, the song was either 'Seventeen Touches' or 'Nineteen Touches.' I've read so much lately that I've forgotten."

"It's 'Eighteen Touches,'" Ning Yuxi, still engrossed in the celestial atmosphere she had created, vaguely heard him and casually replied.

"Ah yes, 'Eighteen Touches,'" Lin Wanrong chuckled. "I never knew that the tune was so famous, even you remember it clearly. I wonder if you would grace us with a few verses."

Realizing the impropriety of her own words, Ning Yuxi hurriedly let out an internal curse, a tinge of blush spreading across her cheeks. Lin San's casual comment had shattered the serene atmosphere, as if she had fallen from a celestial realm back into the worldly dust. The feeling infuriated her.

"If you speak again, I will cut off your tongue," Ning Yuxi glared at him, infuriated.

"Even without a tongue, I would speak," Lin Wanrong shook his head and sighed. "This mountain peak is so high and cold, perpetually shrouded in mist. Apart from us, there's not even a shadow to be found. Asking me not to speak is like asking me to jump off this cliff."

"Then go ahead and speak," Ning Yuxi replied indifferently. "I hope you still find such enthusiasm ten years from now."

The comment struck a nerve with Lin Wanrong. Being a jovial man, the idea of spending a lifetime on this desolate peak was worse than death to him. Ning Yuxi knew his temperament well; her single remark had effectively deflated his spirit.

The peak soared high, far removed from worldly concerns, where years and months had no meaning. Only the moonlight, pure as water, and the deepening night sky indicated the ceaseless cycles of days and months. Silence fell between the two, giving Lin Wanrong an opportunity to take in the sights around the peak.

The mountain occupied a vast expanse, its surface punctuated by jagged rocks of varying heights. Hidden within were expanses of forests, bamboo and pine trees with deep roots and flourishing branches. Between the rocks and in the forest, the ground was covered in blooming flowers. Many were nameless, far surpassing the flora of the valleys below in their vibrant colors.

Close to the forest, a natural cave formed on the rocky face, its depths unfathomable. Beside the cave was a green lake, its water clear and pure. Bubbles emerged from the middle, suggesting a lively spring beneath. Warm mist rose steadily from the lake's surface.

Hot springs? Lin Wanrong was overjoyed at the sight and hurried toward the spring. He was quick, but someone was even quicker. Before he had taken more than a few steps, a whoosh of wind passed by his ear. Fairy Ning darted forward like a bolt of lightning, her face filled with delight. Yet, she stopped as she reached the edge of the spring.

‘Could it be that the fairy wants to bathe with me?’ He chuckled and caught up to her. Testing the water, he found the surface to be slightly hot, while the depths were comfortably lukewarm.

"Angelica, Seven-Leaf Orchid, Honeysuckle, Mandrake—" He looked at the abundance of rare herbs spread all around them. Fairy Ning couldn't contain her happiness and picked one. Just as she was about to sniff it, a loud 'plop' echoed—like something heavy had fallen into the water.

Startled, she saw a pile of clothes scattered not far away. Circles of ripples were spreading slowly across the water, vanishing in the blink of an eye.

‘Where is Lin San?’ Her heart tightened. She scanned her surroundings, but it was eerily silent, and he was nowhere in sight. Just as she was about to call out for him, a head surfaced from the water. Shaking off the droplets from his hair, Lin Wanrong smiled and waved, "Sister, I'm here."

Half of Lin Wanrong's body was submerged, the mist from the hot springs enveloping him. His muscular arms were visible, and he looked extremely pleased with himself.

Fairy Ning shot him a glance, her face flushed. She turned the flower in her hand into a gust of wind that she aimed directly at him. "You shameless man, undressing in front of a lady. Do you think I won't kill you?"

"Whether you kill me is up to you, but whether I undress is my decision. Being good at undressing has always been one of my strong suits." The vibrant flower barely missed his ear. Rubbing his reddened ear, Lin Wanrong chuckled, "The water is really warm. Fairy Sister, why don't you join me? I can give you a massage."

Amidst the red and green plants, by the hot spring, and with a muscular man adorned with wildflowers—the situation was indeed bizarre. Fairy Ning's face reddened further. She angrily scoffed and kicked his clothes into the water. "This is a paradise, an earthly Eden. Its beauty is ruined by shameless, disrespectful men like you!"

Avoiding eye contact with his bare upper body, she quickly skirted around the hot spring and headed toward a cave. Lin Wanrong wiped off the water droplets from his hair and laughed, "We are

born into this world bare, and I have merely returned to my original state. What is there to be ashamed of? We are alone here, a man and a woman, in primeval chaos like when Pangu created the world. Why bother with norms and shame? Why not return to our origins together? Hey, hey, Fairy Sister, don't walk so fast, I'm afraid of the dark!"

Ignoring him, Fairy Ning continued into the cave, not looking back once. Lin Wanrong splashed some spring water onto his face, feeling waves of comfort wash over him. 'Fairy Sister is highly skilled in martial arts; she must have gone in to eliminate demons and protect me. How virtuous, how virtuous.'

Since he had arrived at this secluded peak, there seemed to be no immediate way down. He consoled himself with the thought that it was a sort of hot spring vacation, complete with the company of a beautiful fairy. He was always good at comforting himself, and after the initial phase of hesitation, he became more resolute.

He soaked in the hot spring, closing his eyes and catching some sleep. Refreshed, he meticulously washed the clothes that the fairy had tossed aside. He thought to himself, 'Although I have reached a state of being one with nature, Fairy Ning has yet to realize this. If I go bare and she does not, that would be unfair to me. Better put my clothes back on.'

He slipped his still-damp clothes back on, and the mountain wind raised goosebumps all over his body. He sneezed a few times and grumbled, "I must enlighten you, and together we will progress to the primitive society."

By the hot spring's edge, in the forest, bamboo shoots had sprouted, and several bamboo trees from last year had grown quite robust. Feeling discontented, he forcefully uprooted a green bamboo and headed toward the cave, swinging it around.

The stone cave was ancient and tranquil, its walls smooth. Stalactites dripped slowly, exuding a serene scent. Walking further in, he noticed dim light emanating from up ahead. As he approached, he saw Ning Yuxi sitting cross-legged on a stone bench, her eyes slightly closed. An ancient-looking oil lamp flickered on a stone table, while a bonfire burned robustly a few feet away.

"Fairy Sister, where did you find this lamp and firewood?" He eagerly approached the bonfire. Given her martial prowess, Ning Yuxi had no need for a fire—clearly, she had prepared it for him.

"Can't you see for yourself? This cave has been inhabited many years ago. All these were left by them," Ning Yuxi responded indifferently. Lin Wanrong surveyed the room. There were tables, chairs, beds, as well as farming tools and a pestle for grinding medicine in one corner.

People had indeed been here, Lin Wanrong nodded. Whoever had been on this peak before must have been an herbalist. Not only had they set up iron chains but had also lived here for a long time, even if the traces had now mostly faded away.

Sitting by the bonfire, steam rose from his damp clothes, making him feel cozy but uncomfortable. Yet, with the fairy so close by, even this shameless man didn't dare disrobe in her presence. He fidgeted uncomfortably in his seat.

Ning Yuxi's face turned a slight shade of red. She stood up to leave, but Lin Wanrong, alarmed, quickly grabbed her sleeve. "Sister, where are you going? Please don't leave; I'm scared to be here alone!"

'As if I'd believe that!' Ning Yuxi's face flushed even more. She smiled slightly and broke free from his grasp, handing him her precious sword. "If you're afraid, use this for protection. But be careful, don't hurt yourself—and if you do, make sure I don't see it. Also, don't leave this stone chamber; otherwise, if something happens, no one can save you."

'What do you mean? You want to kill someone for this?' Lin Wanrong was stunned for a moment. Fairy Ning shoved her precious sword into his hand and disappeared around a corner before he could say anything more. He was used to her aloof nature by now. With her martial skills, no one could harm her, and the sword would be more useful in his hands anyway.

Ning Yuxi had deliberately left him alone. The stone chamber was now his domain. He took off his damp clothes and hung them by the fire to dry, then lay on the stone bed and sighed contentedly. The events of tonight felt as unbelievable as a myth. Having survived life-or-death situations only to be trapped on a remote peak, he found himself strangely content, especially with the company of such a heavenly beauty. He thought to himself, 'I've got time to kill. In a situation like this—just the two of us and a roaring fire—if nothing happens, it'd be a real shame.'

He chuckled lewdly, his mind wandering. His gaze fell upon a few slender bamboo stalks in the corner. He jumped off the bed, drew Ning Yuxi's precious sword with a swoosh, and felt its chilling blade against his skin. What a sword, what a sword, he thought. He blew on it a few times, and with a swift motion, he chopped the bamboo into several sections. The bamboo had grown for many years and was as thick as an adult's forearm, but under the blade, it was cut as easily as if it were rotten wood. Remembering how he had nearly lost his life that night, Lin Wanrong unconsciously touched his neck.

After skillfully trimming the bamboo sections, he sighed deeply, sweat appearing on his forehead. Such delicate work was exhausting. More than half an hour had passed, his clothes were dry, but the fairy had not returned.

Could she have been eaten by wolves? he worried. Dropping the bamboo on the ground, he quickly donned his clothes and, holding the sword Fairy Ning had left behind, he headed out. The path was quiet; not a sound could be heard. His concern growing, Lin Wanrong gripped the sword tightly and quickened his pace.

Reaching the entrance of the cave, he found it partially blocked by a pile of loose stones, about knee-high. This wasn't the case when he had entered. Lin Wanrong felt his heart tighten. He leapt onto the pile and yelled, "Fairy Sister, where are you?"

"Stay away!" A frantic voice came from outside the cave. Lin Wanrong recognized it as Ning Yuxi's.

Could it be that some rogue was harassing her? Drawing his sword, Lin Wanrong shouted righteously, "Sister, don't worry! I'm coming to save you—ouch!"

As he hurried toward the mouth of the cave, his foot sank into the pile of stones. It was a trap, set deliberately with a few dry twigs as a disguise. His feet plunged into the stones up to his knees, the jagged edges scraping his legs painfully. As he screamed, he opened his eyes and was struck dumb by the sight before him.

The hot spring was enveloped in mist, where an incredibly beautiful woman bathed, her radiant face and snowy neck submerged in the water, and her long hair trailing down into the pool. Her skin was as delicate as jade, her shoulders as smooth as silk, and her ample chest mostly submerged in the spring. The water seemed to hesitate around her, as if unwilling to flow past such beauty. The mist made her cheeks flush red. Her expression was a mixture of embarrassment, annoyance, and an indescribable allure that words couldn't capture.

"Sister, I did it on purpose—ah, no, no, I didn't mean to!" Lin Wanrong's eyes were fixed on the beautiful sight before him, to the point that he even forgot the pain in his legs.

"Turn away now!" Ning Yuxi let out a desperate cry, hurriedly submerging her bare shoulders into the water.

"My legs are stuck; I can't move!" Lin Wanrong chuckled smugly to himself. Good heavens, if this was a trap, he would gladly fall into a hundred more like it.

"Cover your eyes!" Ning Yuxi spat out through gritted teeth. She had set this trap to ward off wolves, never expecting it to become his excuse for inaction.

"Oh." Lin Wanrong obeyed, dutifully covering his eyes, although his fingers were spread wide apart.

"You scoundrel, I'll kill you!" Flustered and exasperated, Ning Yuxi could not hold back any longer. She pulled a jade hairpin from her hair and, with a flick of her wrist, hurled it through the air with a whooshing sound.

Lin Wanrong quickly ducked his head, feeling the force of the wind as the hairpin skimmed past his neck, leaving him drenched in cold sweat. Had he reacted a moment later, his neck would have been pierced. Clearly, Ning Yuxi was truly furious.

'Uh-oh, she's not playing around anymore.' Breaking into a cold sweat, Lin Wanrong somehow mustered the strength to free his legs from the crevice in the rock. He immediately turned and ran into the cave.

"I'll kill you, you thief!" Tears rolled down Ning Yuxi's cheeks as she grabbed a handful of stones from the bottom of the pool. Channeling all her strength, she hurled them toward the cave entrance like a shower of stars. The stones smashed against the cave wall, each shattering to pieces, demonstrating the force behind her throw.

"Ahhh!" A bone-chilling scream echoed from the cave, followed by the sound of a body thudding to the ground.

Ning Yuxi paused, her hand still poised to throw more hidden weapons. She listened intently; the cave was deathly silent, not a sound to be heard.

"Think you can fool me by playing dead?" She gritted her teeth and unleashed another volley of hidden weapons, albeit with less force and speed this time.

Silence! No shrieks or cries, Lin Wanrong's voice had vanished as if swallowed by ghosts, never to be heard again.

"You dare to play dead?" Ning Yuxi's fingers trembled slightly, an inexplicable sense of dread washing over her. "Speak up, speak up now, or I swear I'll chop you into eighteen pieces!"

Despite her threats, the cave remained eerily quiet, offering no response. Her face turned pale, and she leapt gracefully from the pool, her flawless body appearing ethereal in the moonlight. She hastily draped her clothes over herself and rushed toward the cave's entrance.

As she peered into the cave, she froze. Lying at the entrance was a strapping figure with broad shoulders and a powerful chest. On his ear hung a wildflower she had gifted him; she would recognize this robust man even if he turned to ashes. He lay there motionless, as silent as the grave, utterly lifeless.

"You dare to deceive me!" Ning Yuxi's face was as white as snow, and her heart felt empty. Her body wavered, and she leaned against the wall, tears streaming down her face. Her mind went blank, unable to think of anything else.

Chapter 440 The Tender Summit

Inside the cave, silence prevailed. Sporadic gusts of icy wind whistled through, cutting the stillness. Lin San, who had been animated just moments ago, now lay motionless on the ground. Ning Yuxi's heart was a blur, her body trembling. She took tentative steps towards him. Though the distance spanned only a few steps, it felt like an eternity.

Lin San lay there, his face deathly pale. There was no sound of breathing, and his hand still clutched the treasured sword that Ning Yuxi had given him.

"So, you're dead then?" Ning Yuxi gently crouched down, tears slowly falling. "I risked my life to save yours on Hundred-Foot Chain, only for you to humiliate me later. Good riddance; you deserved to die. I've always despised you—utterly despised you."

Her small hand trembled as her face displayed a mixture of tears and laughter. Slowly reaching toward his cheek, a trace of tenderness filled her eyes. "High above on the celestial mountain, separated from the mundane world, who you are and who I am no longer matter. I wanted to find someone to spend my waning years with. Yet you humiliated me like this—"

"All my life, I've been devoted to the Way, indifferent in my dealings, never competing with anyone. But for you, I've felt both anger and resentment. Even if I became an immortal, I'd be one who had violated precepts. You enjoy the bustling world, so I'll trap you here for a lifetime. You

may loathe and hate me, but you can do nothing about it—good that you're dead. No one will ever humiliate me again. I'll remain peacefully beside you, reminiscing the days when you tormented me, cultivating my karmic path for reincarnation, letting you humiliate me once more in the next life."

As she spoke, her tears continued to flow. Her hand touched Lin San's face, only to find it warm and moist, his breath present. He was no corpse but a living being.

"You, you—" Ning Yuxi was alarmed. She leapt to her feet, wiping the tears from her eyes and fiercely kicking him in the leg. "You faking little thief, I'll kill you!"

Lin Wanrong could no longer hold his breath. Taking a deep sigh, he opened his eyes and grinned, "Sister, I never said I was dead. You simply assumed. Ouch, stop kicking!"

Mocked by him, Ning Yuxi felt mentally devastated, devoid of any compassion. She kicked him brutally again. Lin Wanrong yelped in pain but then stared at her, his eyes glowing as he forgot his pain.

Ning Yuxi, seeing that her blows didn't elicit cries of pain, found it puzzling. Glancing at him, she noticed his gaze focused on her chest, drool extending from the corner of his mouth.

Taking a quick look at herself, she gasped, her face turning crimson. She had just bathed and, thinking Lin San was dead, had rushed over without properly dressing. Her clothes were disheveled, her long skirt had come undone, revealing her slender, elegant legs. Her ample bosom was barely contained by a thin inner garment, the contours clearly visible.

"You little thief!" Ning Yuxi, usually as composed as a fairy, had never felt so wretched. Both her body and spirit had been toyed with. Overwhelmed by shame and anger, tears flooded her eyes. With a powerful kick to Lin San's behind, she leapt further into the cave like a flying arrow.

Lin Wanrong let out a groan as he tumbled several times on the ground, feeling pain surge throughout his body. He had already been dealt a heavy blow to the chest while crossing the chain bridge, and now another thump on his backside. Even an iron man would have found it unbearable.

Lying on the ground, he gasped for air, but his heart swelled with smug satisfaction. 'Lucky that I made it out in time,' he thought, 'I've certainly gotten an eyeful today. Fairy Ning's figure is truly remarkable—curvaceous and slender. She and Sister An can surely hold their own in a beauty contest. To think that I managed to take advantage of her makes me probably the luckiest man in the world.'

After basking in his own glory for a moment, he felt rejuvenated, and even the pain in his body seemed to diminish. His clothes were torn and tattered, and his trousers below the knee were shredded into strips. His shins were covered in scrapes, all thanks to the stone traps laid by Fairy Ning. Yet, compared to the advantages he had gained tonight, these trifles were insignificant.

He rested at the entrance of the cave for a brief moment, listening intently but hearing no sound from within. He wondered about Fairy Ning's condition. Pushing himself off the ground, he stifled the pain in his legs and tiptoed inside.

He had barely reached the entrance of the stone chamber when a gust of wind hit him. Various objects flew toward him as Fairy Ning's voice, filled with loathing, rang out, "You shameless thief! Get out! I never want to see you again!"

Lin Wanrong quickly dodged, and the objects fell to the ground with a clatter. It turned out they were bamboo tubes he had been fixing earlier.

He hid beside the entrance to the stone chamber and cautiously spoke, "Fairy Sister, do you intend to separate from me? If so, please return my belongings."

"What connection do I have with a shameless thief like you? What is there to return?" Ning Yuxi scoffed, clenching her fists tightly. Just thinking about Lin San's misdeeds made her so furious she wished she could cut him in half.

Lin Wanrong sighed, saying resignedly, "It's not a big deal. I simply ask you to return my heart."

"Shameless!" Ning Yuxi's heart raced as she picked up another object and hurled it at him. "Leave! I never want to see you again!"

With a clang, an ancient medicinal hoe struck the wall and broke in two. Lin Wanrong leapt up in alarm. "Why are you so heartless? Why should I 'leave'? Can't I just 'walk away'?"

Outside, the sound of footsteps faded away, suggesting the shameless thief had retreated. Fairy Ning let out a long sigh and looked at the scattered items in the room, astonished. 'Did I do all this? How did it come to this?'

She was naturally calm and peaceful, and had never had a heated argument with anyone. But today, Lin San had enraged her to the point of madness. Her usual composure had vanished, leaving her feeling lost and afraid.

Lin Wanrong took a few steps and sat down in a corner, leaning against the cold rock wall. There was no fire, and the temperature was far different from the warmth inside the stone chamber. 'Fortunately, I still have Fairy Sister's precious sword,' he thought, picking up the discarded bamboo tubes. With great care, he began to carve.

In the dead of night, the stone cave was chillingly cold. Ning Yuxi sat cross-legged for a while, her gaze falling upon the dim oil lamp and the blazing bonfire, but her thoughts refused to settle. It was cold outside, but how was that scoundrel faring? She suddenly shook her head and spat softly, "Who cares what he's doing. It would be best if he froze to death."

Just as she was about to fall asleep, there was a soft rustling noise. Something rolled into the cave from the entrance. She focused her eyes and saw that what had rolled in was a short, thick bamboo tube. It stopped right in front of her, and a brass wire was threaded through the bottom of the tube, extending all the way to the bend of the cave's entrance outside.

"What is this?" Ning Yuxi was puzzled as she picked up the bamboo tube and examined it closely. A small hole was drilled at the bottom, and the brass wire was inserted through it. Tied to the other end of the wire was a piece of porous charcoal. It looked very strange.

On this isolated peak, there were only two living beings, and it was obvious that this was Lin San's mischief. She wasn't surprised that he had found some brass wire among the tools left by previous inhabitants of the cave, but what exactly was he up to?

After fiddling with the tube for some time without figuring anything out, she was about to lose patience when a voice suddenly came from the tube, "Sister—"

"Ah!" Ning Yuxi jumped, inadvertently dropping the tube. 'How did I hear Lin San speak?'

She waited for a moment, and the cave remained eerily quiet. Was it possible she had misheard? Carefully, she put the tube to her ear again, but heard nothing.

Feeling a tinge of disappointment, she was about to put the tube down when an annoying voice came from it, "Sister, have you gone to bed yet?"

There was no mistake this time; the voice indeed came from the bamboo tube. Astonished, Ning Yuxi wondered, how did Lin San manage to get inside the tube?

"Where are you? How are you speaking to me?" She asked, her voice tinged with a tremor.

"Sister, please speak into the tube. Ah, actually, I don't even know where I am," Lin San's voice carried a mixture of deep longing and subtle agony. "In my dreams, I met the Goddess of Xiang River. She said this bamboo was a manifestation of her spirit and asked me what my unfulfilled wish was. I initially wanted her to take me off the mountain, but I couldn't bear leaving you here all alone. So, I told the bamboo that I wanted to talk to you. When I woke up, I found myself inside this bamboo. Yes, you're touching me right now."

'What a genius I am,' Lin San chuckled silently, hiding in a corner of the cave. He was extremely pleased with the "telephone" he had crafted.

"So, you can't come back now?" Ning Yuxi's voice was tinged with doubt and a certain cold detachment.

"Theoretically, no, I can't return. However—" Lin San drew out his words with a mysterious tone, "the Goddess said that if you would be willing to kiss the bamboo tube, she would allow me to transform back into human form."

"Really?" Ning Yuxi laughed coldly. "At least you're aware that you're not in human form now. Then just stay like that! Wait for someone to kiss you so that you can become human again."

"Sister, how could you be so heartless? Huh, the voice sounds so close. Could the phone be broken? Why are there a pair of embroidered shoes here?" He looked up to find Ning Yuxi standing before him, holding a bamboo tube, a cold smile on her face.

"Ah, I have feet and hands again, I've returned to human form. Fairy Sister, thank you so much!" Lin San sprang up in joyful surprise, cold sweat covering his forehead.

The man had no shame! Seeing his antics, Ning Yuxi wanted to laugh but suppressed it. Noticing that he was thinly clad, his lips black from the cold, and his body shivering, she hurriedly lowered her head, hummed, and turned away.

'Damn it, I've been exposed so quickly,' Lin Wanrong wiped the sweat from his forehead and sat down dejectedly on the ground.

"Come in and talk!" A faint voice suddenly came from the bamboo tube. Thanks to the activated charcoal tied inside the tube, he was able to hear it.

"Fairy, are you talking to me?" Lin Wanrong was overjoyed and shouted into the tube. Silence fell on the other end, no further messages came.

Quickly gathering the items at his feet into his arms, he reached the entrance of the stone chamber and cautiously peered in. He saw Ning Yuxi casually sitting on the bed, fiddling with the magical bamboo tube, seemingly unaware of his arrival.

"Sister, I'm coming in." Having learned from his previous mistake, Lin San announced his entry beforehand.

Ning Yuxi did not respond, neither lifting her head nor acknowledging whether he was allowed in or not.

Not one to fear easily, Lin Wanrong carefully took a step in. Seeing that Fairy Ning had no unusual reactions, he finally relaxed and strode in.

The bonfire blazed, and warm air greeted him. Lin Wanrong sat down on the ground, tears of gratitude in his eyes. "Thank God, thank the goddess of Xiang river, I've finally returned to the world of the living."

Seeing his emotional state, a smile crossed Ning Yuxi's face. She softly asked, "Did you make this talking bamboo tube? What's it called?"

"As long as the Fairy doesn't resort to violence, everything's negotiable," Lin Wanrong relaxed seeing Ning Yuxi play with the tube. He smiled and said, "This? It's called a 'communicator,' my latest invention. Two people can talk from a great distance. Quite magical."

Ning Yuxi smiled faintly, "Talk from a great distance? Can we communicate from the top and bottom of this mountain?"

"Not at this stage, but definitely in a hundred years," Lin Wanrong answered with a smile.

"That's good," said Fairy Ning indifferently, "In a hundred years, we'll no longer be in this world. Who communicates with whom won't concern us. What matters is now."

Lin Wanrong chuckled awkwardly. He understood her intentions—Fairy Ning planned to keep him trapped on this peak indefinitely. Lin Wanrong didn't argue; warmth was the priority, other matters could wait.

The chamber fell silent. Lin Wanrong picked up the remaining bamboo segments and continued carving. Ning Yuxi's mood seemed to gradually improve; she looked thoughtful at times, and at others, she smiled as she played with the communicator. She glanced at Lin San to find him holding her treasured sword, carving small notches into the bamboo edges, tightly fitting several long bamboo segments together. It appeared that he had successfully connected three or four of them.

"What is this?" Ning Yuxi inquired curiously.

"It's a rudimentary telescope! Take a look," Lin Wanrong said, handing her the bamboo tube with a smile.

Ning Yuxi lifted the tube to her eye and peered through it. To her surprise, she saw another eye blinking back at her. Startled, her heart pounding, she quickly set the telescope down and stammered, "What in the world is this? Stop playing tricks."

"The telescope still lacks some lenses. I don't have the materials, so this is as good as it gets. But it does focus and extend your vision," he chuckled awkwardly.

Between talk tubes and telescopes, his resourcefulness seemed to know no bounds. No wonder the Fairy Hall was defeated by him; they stood no chance. A flood of mixed emotions welled up in Ning Yuxi as she recalled the origin of their enmity.

"This talk tube is for you," Lin Wanrong said, stuffing both bamboo tubes into her hands. "Keep it well; it will be an artifact in the future."

Ning Yuxi shook her head lightly, "What do I need this talk tube for? To talk to myself?" She handed it back to him, but then hesitated, took one tube back, and blushed slightly.

Lin Wanrong burst into hearty laughter, only to wince in pain from his leg wound.

"Serves you right," Ning Yuxi snapped, irritated by the sight of his leg marred with bruises and scrapes. "I told you to stay in the stone chamber, yet you deliberately went out to cause trouble. Next time, I'll set a trap to snap both your legs, then see how you misbehave."

Though she spoke harshly, she mysteriously produced a jar of ointment. As she opened it, a pleasant fragrance filled the air, indicating its potent qualities.

Such a task of caring was hardly suited for a celestial being like her, Lin Wanrong thought. Nonetheless, he accepted the ointment, tore a strip of cloth to use as a pad, and began applying it to his leg.

Watching him clumsily try to apply the ointment to the back of his leg, Ning Yuxi frowned, took the pad from him, and snorted, "You're just wasting my ointment. Sit still."

A soothing sensation washed over him as Ning Yuxi knelt down to carefully apply the medicine. He had never seen such tenderness from her.

Moved beyond words, Lin Wanrong suddenly grabbed Ning Yuxi's small hand and softly said, "Sister, can we stop this endless fighting? We're the only two people on this peak. If you die, I'll be heartbroken; if I die, you'll be lonely. I can endure hardship and poverty in my lifetime, but loneliness is unbearable."

Ning Yuxi's heart trembled. She hastily withdrew her hand and huffed, "I'm not afraid of loneliness. And who wanted to fight you? If you hadn't provoked me, why would I have acted like that toward you?"

"I've been wronged too; I didn't actually see anything," Lin Wanrong replied, staring into her eyes and wearing an expression of utter sincerity.

"You still say that?!" Ning Yuxi's expression turned furious, her face flushing as she remembered the embarrassing moments. It was only because they were on this isolated peak that she was so restrained. Had they been anywhere else, she would have already killed him.

Above the lonely peak, within a humble chamber, under the dim yellow oil lamp, Ning Yuxi spoke softly, expressing fleeting moments of mild irritation and embarrassment. Her cheeks were flushed, her beauty surpassing that of both heaven and earth. Lin Wanrong's lips were dry as he murmured, "Yuxi, I—"

Ning Yuxi's small hand paused, and her breathing became involuntarily erratic. It wasn't the first time he had called her by name, but this time the impact seemed a hundredfold, as if the pounding of spring thunder were resonating in her soul.

"What, what do you want to say?" Ning Yuxi was visibly flustered, her chest rising and falling rapidly, unsure of what to do.

"Yuxi, I like—"

"Boom—""Boom—"

The distant sound of cannon fire cut him off. Lin Wanrong's expression changed instantly, and he shot up, "Qingxuan has arrived!"