Records of the Goddess (Pure Love Version)

Chapter 22

In the southern part of the Northern Region lies a Starfall, stretching for thousands of miles. Scattered throughout are star-like plants that corrode magical power; even those with immense magical strength find it extremely difficult to swim across.

Many powerful demons who attempted to force their way across were drained of their magical power just before reaching the summit, and then swept into the abyss by the swift current.

On the full moon of the fifteenth of each month, the flow of the Starfall becomes weak, no longer roaring as usual.

Perhaps because the moonlight was so bright, the star grass among the star waterfalls would appear faint, making the Starfall easily traversable on that day.

Pei Yuhan had been sitting by the waterfall for seven days. An ancient sword lay across her lap. The white-robed swordswoman remained impeccably dressed, though a hint of weariness lingered in her eyes.

Today was the fifteenth, and many demons crossed the Starfall to reach the other side on this day. Pei Yuhan was one of them.

Along the way, she killed many demons. Some were attracted by her beauty, some coveted her magic and wanted to use her as a furnace, and some coveted the ancient sword.

The world is in turmoil, all driven by self-interest.

The word "profit," however, can be extremely hurtful.

Pei Yuhan never intentionally drew her sword to kill anyone; it was just that there were far too many reckless humans and demons.

Living under the open sky, enduring wind and rain, her face had inevitably grown somewhat thin. Yet, as the moon rose high above the treetops, casting a sliver of moonlight upon her profile, her serene beauty remained undiminished.

She straightened up; the ancient sword hummed in her ears, a mournful sound.

She waited for the moon to reach its zenith, then crossed the Starfall and continued north.

The Northern Region was extremely vast, more than twice the size of a human dynasty.

Searching for a person in this largely uncultivated wasteland is like finding a needle in a haystack.

Finding Lin Xuanyan in the Northern Region would be a tremendous effort, even for a powerful demon lord.

Pei Yuhan could not be found either.

But you can envy fish.

Just like the day Lin Xuanyan and Ji Chanxi competed, Xianyu traveled thousands of miles to block his path.

That scene remained etched in the memory of this swordswoman for countless days and nights.

The tip of the Envy-Fish Sword points northward, into the northernmost region.

Finally, the bright moon climbed to its zenith, like a silver platter in a poem, or a pale head hanging high overhead.

The sound of water gradually faded, transforming from a thunderous roar into a gentle gurgle.

The bright moonlight cast its glow, dimming the starlight cascading down the waterfall.

Pei Yuhan's location was relatively secluded, with few monsters crossing the waterfall.

She also deliberately released some of her aura, immediately dispelling any thoughts the demons might have had; they stood respectfully at a distance.

But some monsters still didn't know their place.

For example, just as Pei Yuhan stood up, a slender man in a long red robe landed in front of her. The man had a jade-like face, gently fanned himself with a folding fan, and placed one hand behind his back. He smiled slightly at Pei Yuhan and gave a slight bow.

Pei Yuhan glanced at him. "Chu Jiangming, do you have something to say?"

The newcomer was none other than Chu Jiangming, the demon king who had caused chaos in the royal city that day.

Although he was gentle and refined, Pei Yuhan could tell from his footsteps that he was injured.

Neither she nor Chu Jiangming could kill the other, so she didn't want to waste time here; the full moon lasted only one night.

If she missed it, another thirty days would pass.

Chu Jiangming smiled and said, "Fairy Pei, we meet again."

Pei Yuhan said coldly, "You didn't come here today to spout this nonsense, did you? Why are you here? Are you trying to stop me?"

Chu Jiangming said, "Under normal circumstances, I might have tried to stop you, but today the fairy will surely be able to detect my injury, and will naturally not seek death in front of the Cold Palace Sword Immortal."

Pei Yuhan stared at him coldly without saying a word.

Chu Jiangming chuckled. "Fairy Pei, you truly have great courage! To dare venture into this dangerous place for a disciple who has only been with us for half a year is truly admirable. However, does Fairy Pei really think that your Transcendent Realm cultivation allows you to roam freely in the Northern Region? There are many powerful demons in the Northern Region, though they may be unknown. But the more unknown they are, the more terrifying they are, because most powerful beings don't seek fame like lesser demons. If something were to happen to Fairy Pei and she were to perish in the Northern Region, it wouldn't be worth it."

Pei Yuhan said indifferently, "I don't need your pretense. Were you sent by the Demon Lord today? Or was it your own idea?"

Chu Jiangming turned to look at the Starfall and smiled. "Fairy Pei's departure from the Cold Palace on her sword was driven by passion, worthy of praise and respect. Crossing the borders of the Xuanyuan Dynasty to come to the Northern Region was to fulfill her duty as master and disciple. Now, having sat in silence before the Starfall for seven days, Fairy Pei's heart should have calmed, and she should have weighed many pros and cons. Why still insist on going her own way? This… is somewhat foolish."

Pei Yuhan ignored him. The tip of the Envy-Fish Sword pointed at Chu Jiangming, its sword intent like a volcano about to erupt.

Chu Jiangming felt a chill emanating from behind him.

The chill didn't freeze the smile on his face. He continued, "There are those in heaven who call themselves immortals, using the mortal realm as their chessboard and all living beings as their pieces. They've laid out a grand scheme. With your cultivation, Fairy, you should be able to sense it. The Demon Lord, however, was born to fulfill this destiny, a variable on this chessboard. Now that the Demon Lord intends to wage a game of chess against the celestial immortals, we, as his subordinates, naturally must eliminate many of these variables."

Pei Yuhan's tone softened slightly. "Even if we're being used as pawns, so what? They say fate is unpredictable; even those old monsters can't foresee all the variables of destiny."

Chu Jiangming's smile faded. "I spent half a year hiding in Chengjun City and heard many secrets, including those concerning Fairy Pei. Fairy Pei should also know that beauty is never power, but merely a tool for venting desire. Over the years, Fairy Pei has endured hardship and humiliation; whatever she has been through, she is ultimately admirable. Those who cultivate the sword have a clear sword heart, capable of transcending life and death, let alone a mere physical body and a heart full of desire. Whether out of selfishness or other reasons, I still hope that Fairy Pei can stop here and quietly wait another twenty years in the Xuanyuan Dynasty."

The sound of water grew fainter, the moonlight shone brighter, the sky was cloudless, and the bright moon's reflection was like pale snow on the hem of a garment.

After a long silence, Pei Yuhan sighed softly. "Yuhan's mind is made up. If the Demon King insists on stopping me, then I have no choice but to draw my sword."

Chu Jiangming smiled calmly. "This place is surrounded by tigers and wolves, so I naturally won't fight with you here, Fairy. Haiwu City is a necessary stop on my journey north. I'll wait for you there."

Pei Yuhan's face was as cold as ice, her eyes sharp as swords. Haiwu City was Chu Jiangming's territory. Since he had said that, this journey north was destined to be unsuccessful.

As they were parting, Pei Yuhan suddenly smiled and asked, "You like Shao Shenyun?"

Chu Jiangming paused, tucked his folding fan into his sleeve, and quietly walked towards the Starfall. His red robes were reflected in the waterfall, a desolate sight, like autumn maple leaves in the dead of night.

"How dare I speak of love? I am but a subordinate, a pawn, of the Demon Lord. I will serve him to the utmost, even unto death."

Snow still falls on Asura City, the battle between immortals and demons continues in the heavens, and the snow monster's gaze remains as grave as ever.

Everything in the world seemed to have become a variety of walking corpses, from the vast, frozen wilderness to the desolate ancient cities. It was as if even survival was not the sole meaning of life. Those struggling beliefs donned armor, soared into the clouds, and were ultimately and mercilessly cut down.

Five hundred years is enough for the world to change drastically, enough for countless steadfast souls to sink and fall into depravity; let alone a thousand years—perhaps even the passage of time would have numbed their hearts.

As the boy and girl arrived beneath the ancient city, umbrella in hand, a colossal body plummeted from the sky, crashing down before them. Its crimson eyes held a tragic and desolate beauty. In the instant of its demise, it was torn apart by the swarming snow monsters of its own kind, becoming nourishment for the next generation of warriors.

They carried an extremely simple umbrella, hastily carved from a piece of dead wood by the roadside, clean and concise, then magically covered on its surface to shield them from the wind and snow.

The boy handed the umbrella to the girl, who took it and pouted with a hint of resentment.

Throughout the journey, Lin Xuanyan had acted irresponsibly, just as when they had carried each other as they fled for their lives, even sharing an umbrella for a mile before switching between them.

Upon reaching the city gate, exactly one mile away, Lin Xuanyan handed her the umbrella without taking another step.

Su Lingshu was slightly shorter than him, so holding the umbrella was a bit difficult for her. She raised her arm slightly, tilting the umbrella upwards so it wouldn't obstruct Lin Xuanyan's view.

The snow monsters stared blankly at the two outsiders, their expressions dull and puzzled.

A young snow monster leaned against the wall, the biting snow falling on it as if to build a tiny grave.

Lin Xuanyan's expression changed slightly. He walked to the little snow monster's side and squatted down.

Logically, this little snow monster should have died long ago. Snow monsters are incredibly resilient, but even they couldn't withstand the relentless onslaught of wind and frost day after day.

Under Su Lingshu's shocked gaze, he patted the little snow monster's head.

In her eyes, Lin Xuanyan was inherently cold-hearted and indifferent to everything, so why would he be interested in a dying snow monster?

Then her gaze sharpened slightly.

On the little snow monster, there was a faint shadow of a lotus flower. That pale, almost imperceptible lotus flower had been protecting it, allowing it to live to this day.

A faint, rippling smile suddenly appeared on Lin Xuanyan's face.

It turns out that some people, though seemingly indifferent, have such tender hearts.

Su Lingshu was utterly puzzled. Who had left this lotus flower? Was it his friend?

This lotus flower looks somewhat familiar?

That smile quickly faded with the cold wind. He straightened up, gazed into the distance, and felt a sense of unease. He quickened his pace.

Su Lingshu looked displeased. She quickened her pace to catch up, but still couldn't quite keep up with his speed. Lin Xuanyan paused, took the umbrella handle from her hand, and said softly, "Let me do it."

Su Lingshu glanced at him, her beautiful eyes hardening with frost. She pursed her lips, snatched the umbrella, and stormed off.

Lin Xuanyan raised his arm to shield his forehead. He thought to himself, "Girls' thoughts are so strange." He quickly caught up with Su Lingshu, who lowered the umbrella and placed it on her shoulder, preventing Lin Xuanyan from getting under it.

For some reason, Lin Xuanyan had a strange feeling, like a newlywed couple being kicked out of bed on their wedding night.

This feeling was fleeting. He suddenly looked up, and above the gray, desolate palace, a phantom of a blue lotus flower bloomed like fireworks.

The moment the lotus rose, an ominous feeling welled up inside him, like bile bursting forth.

Su Lingshu suddenly felt a gust of wind brush past her. She slightly raised her umbrella and saw Lin Xuanyan's figure rapidly disappearing into the city.

Su Lingshu gazed silently at the illusory blue lotus in the sky, thinking to herself, "Now I'm certain—his friend is definitely a woman."

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Inside the Asura Palace, dark red array patterns had spread across the walls and floor.

The patterns had leaped completely out of the murals, like a dense spiderweb, enveloping the entire hall.

The pulsation of the array patterns carried a dull and ancient rhythm, like the pulse of some enormous creature; with each beat, the air in the hall seemed to freeze a little more.

Lu Jiajing was bound to the center of the formation.

Two thick, dark red beams of light, each as thick as a child's arm, rose from the ground, wrapping around her arms and pulling them apart.

More array patterns, like vines, climbed up her calves, thighs, and waist, locking her firmly in a kneeling position.

Her clothes had been scorched dozens of times by the intense heat of the array, revealing large expanses of her snow-white skin.

Although the clothing still provided some coverage, the array patterns left faint reddish burn marks on the skin, as if gently branded by red-hot threads.

Her long hair cascaded down like a waterfall, the ends trailing on the cold stone bricks.

The Asura King sat enthroned on his throne. He raised his skeletal hand, fingers clenched, manipulating the array's operation.

As the array patterns pulsed, wisps of pale blue light were drawn from Lu Jiajing's body—the life essence condensed over five hundred years of secluded cultivation.

The luminous mist flowed slowly along the array patterns, like a stream flowing into a river, eventually disappearing into the white bones on the throne.

With each strand drawn out, Lu Jiajing's face paled further, and a thin layer of flesh and blood covered the Asura King's bones.

His arms were covered with a layer of pale golden muscle definition.

At the location of the heart on his chest, a dark red light was slowly taking shape; it was the rudimentary form of the heart, not yet beating, but already possessing the shape a heart should have.

"The essence of a person of utmost purity and cleanliness is indeed extraordinary." The Asura King's voice carried an uncontrollable sense of satisfaction.

Lu Jiajing did not answer.

Her breathing was rapid and erratic, and beads of cold sweat covered her forehead.

The feeling of having one's essence slowly drained away is indescribable; it's more terrifying than pain.

It was like being stripped of layers of clothing in the dead of winter, or like someone reaching into her chest and slowly draining the flame of her life.

She could feel her lower elixir field shrinking, her meridians drying up, and her five hundred years of cultivation slipping away irrevocably like grains of sand in an hourglass.

But she didn't close her eyes.

She was watching.

Observing the flowing patterns of the array, the rise and fall of each streak of light, and the dense arrangement of runes on the ground.

The Qingmu Palace houses tens of thousands of books, including many scattered fragments of ancient battle formations.

Although she wasn't a master of array formations, she had spent countless lonely nights perusing those yellowed ancient scrolls.

At this moment, those fragmented memories, long buried deep within her, were being activated one by one by the array patterns before her.

The Asura King noticed her gaze. "What are you looking at?"

Lu Jiajing slowly raised her head. Her lips were bloodless, but her eyes were unusually bright. "I'm looking at your array formation. It's not quite the same as the ones I've read about in ancient books."

The Asura King's fingers paused slightly, and the pulsation of the array patterns slowed by half a beat.

"What's different?"

"The thirty-seventh array rune—" Lu Jiajing's body was suddenly interrupted by a violent pulsation. She arched her back sharply, and a large amount of azure light mist surged from her chest.

On the Asura King's chest, flesh and blood were visibly growing and spreading, the pale golden muscle lines unfolding layer by layer like the rings of an old tree.

Once the extraction subsided slightly, Lu Jiajing, panting, looked up and continued, "The thirty-seventh line flows counter-clockwise. In your formation, it follows the clockwise direction. Also, those three intersecting lines in the southeast corner should start with Qian (Heaven), then Kun (Earth), and then turn to Kan (Water). You drew Qian and Kun rising together."

A sudden silence fell over the hall. Even the pulsating array patterns seemed to freeze.

The Asura King slowly rose from his throne.

The skeleton's face was expressionless, but the slight tightening of his fingers betrayed his inner turmoil.

He had never studied formations.

A thousand years ago, he had copied the diagram of the immortals descending into Asura City into the main hall after studying the murals for decades, relying on the instincts of his remnant soul.

He had never delved into the origins or sequence of each line.

He had simply copied them verbatim, like someone copying a book without recognizing the words.

How do you know?

Lu Jiajing struggled to lift her eyelashes, her voice weak yet clear. "The Qingmu Palace houses ten thousand volumes. There once was a fragment of a book called 'The Northern Wilderness Array Manual,' which happened to record the complete array manual for this formation."

This was a lie.

The Qingmu Palace had never possessed such a book.

The two errors she had just pointed out were anomalies she had noticed while observing the flow of array patterns through her rudimentary understanding of array principles, despite the extraction of her vital essence: the thirty-seventh array pattern formed a weak energy clash with the adjacent pattern, and a very faint mist of light dissipated from the southeast corner where they intersected.

An ordinary person might not notice even after staring at it for three days and three nights, but in the desperate situation where her vital essence was being drained inch by inch, her senses had been forced to become sharper than ever before.

The Asura King slowly descended from his throne and approached her. He knelt down, his skeletal fingers gripping her chin, his golden pupils staring directly into her eyes. "What do you want to say?"

"The true name of this formation isn't 'Asura City Immortal Falling Formation Diagram'—that's the name you gave it later." Lu Jiajing calmly met those abyss-like eyes. "Its original name is 'Return to Origin

Sacrifice Formation.' 'Return to Origin' signifies the return of all things to their origin. It can refine the life essence of one person and transfer it to another. The creator left a backdoor: if the core array eye of the sacrifice is moved from the feet of the recipient to the feet of the sacrificer, the flow path of the essence can be shortened by seventy percent, and the extraction efficiency at least triples.

"With your current formation, the essence of your power must circulate throughout the entire hall before converging on the throne. At least sixty percent dissipates or is lost along the way." She paused, a faint sneer playing on her lips. "You've already extracted a considerable amount, but you should be able to feel it yourself; less than half of that essence actually entered your body."

The Asura King remained silent. What she said was true. He could sense a large amount of his vital essence dissipating into the air of the hall during its circulation; only about three or four tenths were actually absorbed by his bones.

"Why are you telling me all this?" His voice turned somber.

"Because I don't want to die." Lu Jiajing looked directly into his pupils. "At the current rate, when my essence is exhausted, you can at most reconstruct half a physical body. At that time, you will neither gain a complete body nor have lost the only person capable of pulling you out of the ancient world." Her voice was softer, yet sharper. "In the past thousand years, how many truly pure and innocent people have you encountered?"

The Asura King's fingers tightened suddenly. Her jawbone creaked as he gripped it.

A thousand years.

A full thousand years.

This empty palace contains only bones, snow, and the eternally silent antiquity before the throne.

In the long void, he had almost forgotten even his own name.

It was impossible to wait another thousand years.

It was impossible for another person of perfect purity and innocence to draw that sword.

"How do I adjust it?"

Lu Jiajing's heart skipped a beat. Her expression remained impassive, her voice still calm. "Rearrange the array patterns beneath my feet. The thirty-seventh—turn counter-clockwise—"

"Teach me," the Asura King interrupted her.

He remained wary and didn't intend to do anything himself, preferring to let her explain step by step while he did the rest.

"The thirty-seventh one, counter-clockwise," Lu Jiajing said.

The Asura King raised his hand, and the array patterns trembled in the air, the thirty-seventh slowly rotating counter-clockwise.

"Southeast corner—first Qian, then Kun, then Kan. The rune in the Kan position borrows a stroke from the remaining energy of the Kun position. See that leftward arc in the Kun position? Connect the starting stroke of the Kan position to its end."

The Asura King's fingers traced lines in the void. The array patterns vibrated and rearranged like plucked strings.

"The fourth path in the northwest corner interchanges the Li and Dui positions. The Li fire is on the outside, and the Dui marsh is on the inside."

"The two parallel lines to the due north were widened by three inches, allowing the thunder pattern from the Zhen position to flow between them."

One, two, three.

Lu Jiajing's voice grew softer and softer; the continuous loss of her vital essence caused her consciousness to blur, and her vision to black out intermittently.

She bit her tongue, using the pain to stay awake.

Each time she spoke, it was like using her last bit of strength to push open a stone door.

In the brief moments between instructing the Asura King on adjusting the array patterns, she secretly activated her natal lotus.

A tiny blue lotus silently emerged from between her brows, sliding along the edge of the array patterns, close to the ground.

The Asura King's entire attention was focused on the rearranged array patterns in the air, and he failed to notice anything amiss.

The lotus flower pierced through the cracks in the palace walls and suddenly rose into the air amidst the wind and snow outside the Asura Palace.

She had identified a total of seven points that needed adjustment.

When the seventh adjustment was completed, the entire hall suddenly trembled.

All the array patterns changed color simultaneously, from dark red to deep blue, and then from deep blue to blazing white.

The light was more than twice as bright as before, illuminating the main hall of the Asura Palace as if it were daytime.

The pulsation of the array patterns suddenly accelerated, as fast as the beating of a drum.

The Asura King retreated to his throne, opened his arms, and awaited the influx of an even more powerful torrent of essence into his body.

However, what surged forth was not essence.

It was a backlash.

The array patterns seemed to suddenly awaken, ceasing to draw anything from Lu Jiajing's body and instead frantically extracting the newly condensed life essence from the Asura King.

The cyan-gold light mist, like a burst dam, surged back along the array patterns, rushing into Lu Jiajing's body.

Her parched meridians were suddenly filled with this power, and her limbs and bones trembled violently as if struck by lightning.

The Asura King let out a deafening roar.

His flesh began to disintegrate.

First, the muscles in his fingers peeled away piece by piece, revealing the stark white bone; then came his arms, shoulders, and chest.

The newly formed heart silently turned to ashes in the red light, revealing each rib.

The flesh seemed to be torn away layer by layer by an invisible hand. With each layer torn away, the Asura King's aura weakened, and the golden light on his bones dimmed slightly.

"You—lied—to—me!"

The Asura King roared and pounced from his throne. His skeletal hand curled into a claw, and five razor-sharp gusts of wind shot straight at Lu Jiajing's throat.

The moment the backlash began, the array lost its hold on Lu Jiajing, and she broke free of its constraints.

She collapsed to the ground, her vital essence mostly drained, leaving her extremely weak.

She wanted to hide, but she couldn't even lift a finger.

Skeletal claws slashed down through the air.

She closed her eyes. She had done everything she could. The lotus had been released; she just didn't know if he would see it.

Suddenly, wind and snow poured into the Asura Palace, chilling everyone to the bone. The Asura Palace was heavily guarded; where did this wind and snow come from?

Lu Jiajing suddenly opened her eyes.

A white figure flashed past the corner of her eye.

Her heart trembled violently; she tried to straighten up, but it felt as if all her strength had been drained away.

The powerful gust of wind carrying the white bone claws was abruptly cut off by an even sharper aura.

The Asura King's figure slammed heavily against the wall, leaving a deep dent.

He struggled briefly, finally managing to free himself, and landed on the throne with a thud.

The golden light in his pupils was faint; the flesh and blood had long since faded, revealing only stark white bones.

A sword was embedded in his chest.

It was that ancient sword again.

A thousand years had passed, and the same pattern remained unchanged.

Lu Jiajing felt her back being lifted, and she saw that handsome face with a touch of heroism; her eyes instantly welled up with tears.

She didn't know where the strength came from, but she suddenly wrapped her arms around his neck, buried her face in his chest, and began to sob.

It was as if all of time had vanished, and she had returned to the age of sixteen, still that beautiful girl whose emotions were readily apparent.

Tears soaked the clothes on his chest.

Lin Xuanyan held her tightly, looking at the cracks in her clothes caused by the array patterns, at the faint red burn marks scattered across her snow-white skin like vine branding marks. His nose stung, and tears welled up in his eyes.

Su Lingshu arrived late. Standing at the entrance of the main hall, she stared at the absurd and bizarre scene before her, at the woman in Lin Xuanyan's arms whose face she couldn't discern. Suddenly, her umbrella slipped from her grasp.

She took a step forward, as if she had missed a step.

She felt empty inside, as if she had lost something, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

She simply stared blankly at the young man in white; the icy coldness in his eyes melted away, leaving only boundless tenderness.

He held Lu Jiajing tightly, murmuring softly.

"Don't be afraid, I'm here. Don't be afraid… don't be afraid…"