Records of the Goddess (Pure Love Version)

Chapter 23

The snow had stopped falling, and the faint footsteps of snow monsters could be heard within the desolate ancient city. The clouds rolled down from the sky, and above them, the grand battle between gods and demons was reduced to a faint speck of dust.

Everything faded from view, and those faint disturbances only served to make the world seem even more silent.

Everything was as if dead, and the Asura Palace, like a solemn yet lonely pupil, seemed destined never to open again.

Lu Jiajing remained nestled in his arms, her eyes red-rimmed, but no longer weeping. Tears were merely a tool for concealing emotions; once those emotions were exhausted, her tears dried up as well.

Lin Xuanyan looked into her eyes. She turned her head to the side, her long hair cascading down to one side, obscuring her eyebrows and eyes. The rosy hue between her brows and eyes seemed more like makeup, adding a touch of vibrancy to her otherwise plain face.

Su Lingshu stood there stunned for a long time, until the crying gradually subsided before she walked to Lu Jiajing's side. The underwear had been torn to shreds, but the luxurious outer robe with gold thread and snow waves was still relatively intact. She bent down, picked up the robe, and gently covered Lu Jiajing's naked body.

Lu Jiajing turned her head and looked at the girl she had never met before, her expression freezing.

The purple-haired girl stared at her, equally shocked. She blinked, mentally confirming the name "Lu Jiajing" stuck in her throat. She opened her mouth, but hesitated, unable to speak.

Su Lingshu's mind raced. Why was Lu Jiajing here? Shouldn't she be in seclusion at the Qingmu Palace?

So who exactly was this boy named Lin Xuanyan, and what was his relationship with Lu Jiajing?

A flood of questions arose. She didn't ask for anything in return; she simply looked at Lu Jiajing's face, which she hadn't seen in so long. Even after so much time, she still found her so beautiful every time she saw her.

Especially when her gaze fell upon those breasts, a strange envy welled up within her. Do men… all like big breasts?

She subconsciously looked down at her chest, which was now only moderately sized, and felt a little frustrated.

Lu Jiajing naturally didn't recognize Su Lingshu at this moment, but when she saw that head of purple hair, her heart stirred. That purple was too familiar, deeply etched in her memory, impossible to erase.

The two stared at each other for a moment, their gazes clear, yet subtly conveying a sense of tension.

Lin Xuanyan's expression changed slightly. He subconsciously reached out and ruffled Lu Jiajing's hair. Lu Jiajing turned her head away, dodging his hand, and glared at him.

Her throat was a little dry from the earlier intensity, and she spoke first, asking, "And this young lady is…?"

Lin Xuanyan explained, "Her name is Su Lingshu; I met her in the ancient city."

Su Lingshu echoed, "Yes. I'm from the Embroidered-Clad Clan."

Lu Jiajing nodded, silently repeating the name in her mind.

The Embroidered-Clad Clan are naturally blessed with purple hair and beautiful features. However, the clan is now in decline, with few members remaining. They are also being hunted by various demon clans, who are attempting to subjugate Embroidered-Clad Clan girls and make them their captives.

Xia Qianzhen's mother was a woman of the Embroidered-Clad Clan, so she had inherited her long, light purple hair.

It was unclear why this young girl had appeared in this perilous ancient city, or why she was a member of the Embroidered-Clad Clan.

Was it all just a coincidence, or was there a hidden scheme at play?

After speaking, Lin Xuanyan wrapped Lu Jiajing tighter with his clothes. His gaze shifted upwards, landing on the Asura King, now nothing but piles of white bones.

Su Lingshu also looked at the skeleton, her heart trembling violently. She felt a strange sense of familiarity with it.

The Asura King sat upon an ancient throne, his flesh and blood dissipating, leaving only stark white bones—a horrifying and repulsive sight.

The ancient sword pierced his chest, pinning him to the throne. A faint golden light still flickered between the hollows of his eyes, making him appear like an old man, frail and dying.

The Asura King, now only a skeleton, laboriously raised his hand, his knuckles pressing against the hilt of the ancient sword, gripping it section by section, yet unable to pull it out.

His posture was so bizarre that it looked as if he were about to commit suicide.

The Asura King's ancient voice resounded. "You are quite good."

"All these years… you should have died long ago," Lin Xuanyan said.

The Asura King said, "Over the past thousand years, many demons have entered this ancient city. Some got lost in the outer city, while others successfully broke through the formation and escaped. As for those I believed could change the fate of the Snow Kingdom, I led them to the Asura Palace. The men absorbed the essence of the demons, and the women used yin-yang cultivation to replenish their yang. Although there were occasional setbacks, we finally accumulated a portion of power. I never imagined it would be destroyed today."

"After a thousand years of languishing in a state of utter despair, now that we've finally awakened from our slumber, it's not without its own kind of liberation," Lin Xuanyan said.

The Asura King suddenly asked, "Aren't you afraid there's something else planned in the Asura Palace?"

Lin Xuanyan thought for a moment and said, "Let's observe and see how things develop."

After a moment of silence, the Asura King said softly, "Are you the most outstanding young people in the world today?"

To the Asura King, despite the young man's centuries of cultivation, he was still nothing but a young man.

Lin Xuanyan did not answer.

He had already helped Lu Jiajing up and channeled some of his magic power into her to protect her vital organs. A thick, wet liquid was still seeping from beneath her skirt—it was blood.

Lin Xuanyan didn't answer. Excellence and genius are meaningless; only those who truly reach the end will reveal their worth.

Finally, the Asura King sighed softly. "Do you have any other questions? I can assure you the truth."

"How long have you been here?" Lin Xuanyan asked without hesitation.

The Asura King looked at him, the light in his pupils gradually fading. His aged voice echoed in the ancient hall. "Over fourteen hundred years."

Fourteen hundred years ago, the Snow Kingdom was destroyed.

After answering, the Asura King was slightly taken aback, realizing the crux of Lin Xuanyan's question, and said with genuine admiration, "Truly remarkable."

"What will happen to the Snow Kingdom after you die?" Lin Xuanyan asked his second question.

The Asura King said, "The Snow Kingdom is not the Asura King's Snow Kingdom."

"Who created this grotto-heaven world?" Lin Xuanyan continued to ask.

The Asura King's voice grew softer and softer. "The heavens."

"In the ancient city, there's an ancient tower. What exactly is it?" he asked, voicing his greatest curiosity.

For the first time, the Asura King hesitated. "I don't know. That ancient tower has also troubled me for a thousand years. If there truly is someone in this world with such supernatural powers, then that person might have already broken through the void and left the Qiongming Realm."

The last question: "How do I leave?"

The Asura King extended a skeletal finger and pointed upwards, saying, "Of the nine guards in the heavenly palace, six remain. Kill one, and we can leave."

Two days later, in an ancient temple, thunder roared, illuminating three handsome faces.

Summer brings recurring rain; outside, torrential downpours lashed the roof beams, creating a curtain of rain before the ancient temple's eaves.

Lu Jiajing and Lin Xuanyan sat together, while Su Lingshu sat at the entrance of the ancient temple, staring blankly at the heavy rain. The raindrops, like silk threads, splashed and scattered on her cheeks, feeling slightly cool. The girl, dressed in green, resembled a banana leaf swaying gently in the rain.

The Asura King was dead, but the Snow Kingdom remained.

That ancient race would continue its long and arduous fate, traversing the most bustling yet monotonous days in that surreal ancient city.

This had been true for fourteen hundred years, and it would likely be true for the next fourteen hundred years as well.

Lu Jiajing seemed preoccupied and became increasingly silent.

Lin Xuanyan wasn't very talkative, so he also fell silent. He sat with Lu Jiajing beneath a demon statue with sharp claws and fangs, staring blankly at the rain splashing into the threshold.

He didn't know how much time passed, but the incessant sound of raindrops was the only noise in the world.

Looking at the trees outside, their branches trembling in the rain, Su Lingshu felt a pang of sadness. She didn't look at Lu Jiajing; meeting an old friend should have been a happy occasion, but she couldn't feel any joy.

Many memories had faded, but she still remembered a great deal. She had never really liked Lu Jiajing, because she always felt that this girl was two-faced.

Suddenly, a thought flashed through Su Lingshu's mind like a telepathic connection, and she secretly glanced back at the two of them.

She secretly studied the expressions of these two taciturn people.

Their expressions remained unchanged throughout, which only deepened her unease.

Su Lingshu thought of that extremely terrifying dream.

She suddenly wondered if she was still trapped in a dream, only this one was more complex than before, designed to completely destroy her.

The image of Lu Jiajing lying naked in the Asura Palace flashed through her mind again, and her unease grew stronger.

Lin Xuanyan suddenly glanced at Su Lingshu, who quickly turned her head away, feigning indifference.

Lin Xuanyan was secretly alarmed. For some reason, he had sensed a hint of killing intent emanating from this young woman.

Deep within the torrential rain, countless plants broke through the soil and grew wildly, twisting and knotting together, forming a vast expanse. Many ancient trees were even uprooted, their roots bulging open, revealing eerie and grotesque faces emerging from the rain, contorting their features and shifting their forms.

Like masks emerging from the rain.

Inside the ancient temple, the ancient sword trembled slightly. Lin Xuanyan suddenly sat up straight, one hand gripping the hilt, his gaze fixed on the heavy rain, his brows furrowing.

Beyond the distant curtain of rain, atop the dense forest, one after another, figures of the Azure Demon Clan appeared, their backs to the mountains, facing the direction of the ancient temple.

Leading the group was a strangely-looking boy in gray robes. Standing amidst the demons, he resembled a scarecrow, his eyes lifeless, yet a sinister smile graced his face.

"Incredible, they actually managed to escape from there. But they've fallen from grace; the Azure Demon Clan's killing power is no less than that of the altar."

The low growls of demonic beasts echoed from the dense forest. Many members of the Azure Demon Clan rode on the backs of these beasts, advancing at a leisurely pace along their massive bodies.

This territory belonged to them; it was fraught with danger and spies everywhere. How could a few human boys and girls possibly escape?

Inside the ancient temple, lightning flashed. Lu Jiajing coughed intermittently, her face growing paler. Of all the people injured during the trip to the ancient city, she was the most severely wounded. The yin energy injected into her body by the Asura King was constantly eroding her cultivation, causing her internal energy to become disordered. And then, upon leaving the ancient city, she had been caught in a torrential downpour, making the dampness even worse.

Those who cultivate the Dao are not easily susceptible to colds, yet Lu Jiajing's coughs echoed incessantly throughout the ancient temple.

Su Lingshu glanced at Lu Jiajing, a pang of pain shooting through her heart.

What a proud and glamorous young woman she had once been; now her career had plummeted, and she had fallen to this state—how tragic!

Thinking of this, she couldn't help but laugh self-deprecatingly, realizing her own situation wasn't much better, so what right did she have to pity her?

She had once been a near-Saint; now she had been reborn in another body, and her cultivation could not even reach the Transcendent Realm.

Last night, it had taken three people working together and putting in a lot of effort to barely break through the gatekeeper's defenses. In the past, it would have been a trivial matter.

Lost in thought, she suddenly twitched her nostrils, abruptly stood up, and turned her head to look beyond the rain.

She then noticed that Lin Xuanyan had stood up at some point and was standing beside her, gazing anxiously at the rain.

"You felt it too?" Su Lingshu asked, frowning.

"Yes, demons have arrived. And there are a great many of them," Lin Xuanyan said.

Su Lingshu thought for a moment and said, "It should be the Azure Demon Clan. I encountered many Azure Demons before, fought with them, and then accidentally entered that ancient city."

"The Azure Demons?"

"Hmm." Su Lingshu explained, "The Azure Demons are a demon race from the northern part of the Demon Realm. They are monsters cultivated from rootless wood, and are born with the supernatural ability to merge with plants and trees. Among wood-type demons, they are second only to the White Wood Demons. Most terrifyingly, it is said that the Azure Demons' cultivation level surges during heavy rain. Judging from this downpour, it should be quite troublesome."

Lin Xuanyan asked, "Do you have any ideas?"

"The wisest course of action would be to run, wait out the downpour, and then engage them in a prolonged fight; the odds of victory would be much higher."

Lin Xuanyan glanced at the intensifying rain and said indifferently, "I'm afraid it's too late."

Before the words were finished, an ancient hum resounded, and a streak of rainbow light vanished.

Because he was holding a sword, he felt at least somewhat at ease.

Lin Xuanyan firmly believed that as long as he had a sword in his hand, he could sever any hardship, obstacle, or entanglement with it, let alone a mere demon race residing in the far north of the Northern Region.

The dripping sound of the leak suddenly intensified, and a violent aura silently tore through the rain curtain, surging in from all directions.

The rain intensified, like a beaded curtain of iron armor, a galloping horse with clashing swords, and a chill swept over them.

Lin Xuanyan turned and glanced at Lu Jiajing. Lu Jiajing, leaning against the ancient stone statue, was also looking at him, her expression unreadable.

Lin Xuanyan said gently, "Your injuries are too severe. Rest and recuperate at the ancient temple first. We'll go and fight our way out."

Lu Jiajing nodded gently, her voice a little hoarse. "Be careful…"

Lin Xuanyan no longer hesitated; sword in hand, he charged into the heavy rain, Su Lingshu close behind. The torrential rain quickly engulfed their figures.

Moments later, a whistling sound erupted from within the rain curtain, the wind intensified, the rain poured down, and lightning flashed across the sky, casting an unpredictable glow on the ancient temple, making the statues of gods and demons appear even more majestic.

Lu Jiajing sat alone in the ancient temple, feeling the faint flow of energy within her body, her mind following the two diametrically opposed energies.

After Lin Xuanyan left, she no longer suppressed her injuries, and a series of coughs rang out.

She continuously formed hand seals and regulated her breathing, but the two opposing energies within her body were extremely weak. They moved in opposite directions, and although their paths converged, they could not merge.

The path to immortality was damaged, and the path to yin and yang was also teetering on the brink of collapse. Her own body was like this ancient temple, leaking wind and rain, riddled with holes, and she did not know which stormy night it would suddenly crumble.

Lu Jiajing lowered her head, her expression forlorn.

In the heavy rain, the blood had gradually pooled into a crimson mass. The Azure Demons' blood was also red, but a deeper, thicker color, and the rainwater struggled to dissolve it.

The ugly, gray-clad boy at the head of the group stood high atop a tree, gazing into the distance. The cold wind made his gray clothes rustle loudly.

Ahead, a vast and imposing force of Azure Demons rode their beasts, their ferocious nature fully revealed, their empty gazes making the chilling forest wind seem even more sinister.

"It's you again?" Su Lingshu looked at the gray-clad youth, her face grim.

The gray-clad youth chuckled. "If you, young lady, would be willing to visit Qingyao City, I, this humble demon, will certainly give an order to drive away all the soldiers and save your friend's life."

Su Lingshu's gaze was sharp as lightning as she coldly said, "Using so many lives to exchange for a mere woman—is this the way of the demon race, such spoiled brats?"

The gray-clad youth chuckled. "For the Azure Demon Clan, death is like a fallen leaf returning to its roots; they can break free and be reborn the following spring. How can there be any talk of death? Besides, with your beauty, young lady, ten cities wouldn't be enough to buy you. Since the young master has given the order, we subordinates will naturally serve you faithfully."

The gray-clad youth said no more. His figure trembled slightly in the air before disappearing from the spot. A rustling sound echoed through the forest, as if clothing had brushed against fallen leaves.

Su Lingshu silently took a step forward, walked to Lin Xuanyan's side, and whispered, "Be careful—this gray-clad youth's cultivation is insufficient, but we must not be careless."

Lin Xuanyan nodded, exhaled a breath of stale air, and his figure flashed like lightning, illuminating the first ancient sword light. After a thousand years of silence, this first light was so bright that even the raindrops were clearly visible.

Meanwhile, as if given a command, the thousands of demons lurking in the forest suddenly surged out and rushed towards the two.

"Save the women alive, kill the men without mercy." The gray-clad youth's strange voice came from behind the rain.

At the same time, thin gray lines, like sword flashes, pierced through the rain. Lin Xuanyan took a deep breath, twisted his wrist, and drew his longsword, disappearing from the spot.

Originally, Lin Xuanyan's cultivation had been greatly affected during this trip to the Northern Region. However, his visit to the Asura Palace had brought him a fortuitous opportunity, allowing him to acquire a sword that was in no way inferior to those of the ancients. The sword intent that had been accumulating for thousands of years flowed into his body, repairing much of his damaged sword heart. As a result, his cultivation level not only did not regress but actually advanced, and he even took this opportunity to subtly reach the threshold of the ninth realm. Although there was still a gap compared to his previous pseudo-transformation realm, dealing with these low-level demons and escaping unscathed should not be a problem.

Lin Xuanyan, like an arrow piercing the wind, plunged into the vast sea of demons, his trajectory like a rainbow carving its way through the earth.

Su Lingshu took out a small bell from her sleeve. Ignoring the torrent of rain, she sat cross-legged on the grass. The bell rang melodiously, its gentle sound mingling with the raindrops, a sound more tender than the spring breeze itself.

Flowers bloomed around Su Lingshu, and countless illusory figures unfolded along with them. Within these figures, celestial maidens scattered flowers, cranes danced, and phoenixes soared through the heavens—a dazzling array of wondrous phenomena.

But these images are not the truth; hidden beneath all the splendor lies deadly intent.

The monsters that attacked Su Lingshu were all swallowed up by the illusion, turning into blood and mud on the grass, and then melting back into the earth.

Su Lingshu gently shook the bell, one of her most prized possessions, though its use was extremely taxing on her magic power. However, the demons today were too numerous, so she had to finish the fight quickly.

Her face grew paler and paler, the color draining from her lips, yet she continued to shake the bell with her eyes closed, the vibrant spectacle illuminating her features with dazzling brilliance.

Lin Xuanyan's side, however, was far more brutal. He relentlessly swung his sword, the trajectory of the blade shifting from initial elegance to the simplest, most effective slashes. He hacked left and right, blood splattering, yet never touching his white robes. Countless beasts' tough hides were sliced open as easily as paper by this ancient sword, their heads severed from their bodies.

A mournful cry echoed through the forest as massive demonic beasts fell one after another. The Azure Demons atop them were even more powerful, but they posed no threat to Lin Xuanyan's sword light.

But the most terrifying thing was still the sheer number of the Azure Demon Clan. Human strength has its limits, and the Azure Demons could easily wear you down with sheer numbers. Could he really wipe them all out with his current power?

The gray-clad youth who had mysteriously vanished was surely lurking in the shadows, waiting for his chance to strike.

He suppressed the distracting thoughts in his mind, spun the sword, let out a low shout, and circulated his inner energy. He exhaled a breath of stale air, and the sword energy flowed forth with the force of a galloping horse.

The rain curtain was torn apart instantly, and the raindrops cleaved by the sword didn't evaporate; instead, they shot out like steel balls, piercing the bodies of several weaker demonic beasts with a series of swift movements.

Those emerald-green demons, though appearing frail, possessed extraordinary strength. The immense force of the raindrops sent them tumbling forward and backward, yet failed to pierce their bodies.

The sound of swords slicing through spines echoed continuously. Lin Xuanyan, his eyes bloodshot, switched from a one-handed grip to a two-handed one, the sword flashing and slashing wildly, his hands seemingly about to fly off with the sword.

The fighting continued, the bloodshed and clamor spreading relentlessly; every drop of rain seemed to carry blood, to smell of it.

The fields were littered with corpses, and the number of Azure Demons emerging from the nearby jungle had decreased significantly, no longer as densely packed as before.

A raindrop the size of a soybean fell and landed on Lin Xuanyan's clothes, spreading into a dark stain.

He glanced at his clothes out of the corner of his eye, panting heavily, trying to suppress the pain in his body.

The circulation of his vital energy had slowed to half its initial speed; he didn't know whether he would collapse first or the Azure Demons would finish off the remaining enemies.

He glanced at the Azure Demons surrounding him, then at the ancient temple not far behind him.

Clad in white robes stained with blood, he stood guard at the temple gate. With no way to retreat, he had no choice but to fight to the death.

More and more raindrops broke through his protective sword aura and fell upon him. The sound of the bells beside his ears gradually faded.

He didn't have time to turn around and look at Su Lingshu behind him. He believed in the mysterious girl's strength. Although the Azure Demons were after her, he still felt he had dragged her down, and a nameless guilt welled up inside him.

In a split second between life and death, with no time to think, at the temple gate, he, clad in white, swept towards the demon soldiers like a whirlwind.

The rain gradually soaked his clothes.

His sword-wielding posture became increasingly clumsy, more like wielding a knife, and the wounds on the demonic beasts grew increasingly uneven, from smooth and even at first to pitted and scarred now.

Finally, as Lin Xuanyan raised his sword, a chilling aura filled the air.

That aura was like a tiger poised to pounce, waiting only for Lin Xuanyan's momentum to reach its lowest point before striking suddenly.

The boy in gray finally reappeared amidst the fierce wind and rain.

The lightning and thunder in the sky had gradually faded, but the rain had reached its peak, the surging raindrops billowing like dust and spreading like mercury across the ground.

Unlike humans, the Azure Demon Clan possesses a unique advantage on days of torrential rain.

The rain nourishes their hearts and lungs, making their magical powers even more complete.

Humans, on the other hand, had to divert their energy to fight off the torrential rain that fell like steel balls.

As one force diminished while the other gained, even with the ancient sword in his hand, Lin Xuanyan would find it increasingly difficult, until he was completely exhausted.

The gray-clad youth attacked from behind, silently. He had calculated that, given Lin Xuanyan's current speed, there was absolutely no way he could block his carefully prepared strike. Even if he did, he would be severely injured.

Su Lingshu opened her eyes in horror. She sensed the gray-clad youth's trajectory, but it was too late to stop him. She could only watch helplessly as, moments later, a spiky thorn pierced Lin Xuanyan's back.

Tear!

A burst of sparks erupted, illuminating two pairs of eyes. Those two eyes met for a fleeting moment in the rain, as swift as a life-or-death situation.

The gray-clad youth's face turned ashen. The scaled dagger in his hand snapped in two, instantly falling into the viscous blood. He retreated rapidly, not having time to ponder why Lin Xuanyan had reacted so quickly. This attack had failed, and that was that; he could try again later.

Lin Xuanyan had also been waiting a long time for the gray-clad youth to strike, and had paid a heavy price to lure him into an attack. This included being soaked in rain and evading many attacks that wouldn't normally have harmed him.

Having waited so long for this attack, he certainly wouldn't let the gray-clad youth escape.

The ancient sword shot out, hurtling towards the gray-clad youth. Its speed far exceeded the youth's escape speed.

"Pfft!" A mouthful of blood suddenly spurted from Lin Xuanyan's mouth.

The instant the gray-clad youth was struck, his back was also hit hard. Like the mantis stalking the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind.

The gray-clad youth landed heavily injured, his arm severed in half, yet a ferocious smile twisted his face. He gripped the ancient sword tightly with his other hand, trying to buy time for the person who had ambushed Lin Xuanyan.

Bang! A spray of blood exploded behind him.

The instant the sword left his hand, Lin Xuanyan was momentarily at a loss for what to do.

That momentary lapse in concentration was fatal; a chill ran through him, as if a dagger were pressed against his skin, ready to pierce his heart at any moment.

At the critical moment, a bell rang.

Unbeknownst to them, Su Lingshu had vanished from the spot.

A flash of emerald light streaked past, and the girl, her hand like a blade, slashed down from the sky, instantly cleaving through the emerald vines that had wrapped around his arms and pierced his body.

The moment the girl landed, her footwork shifted rapidly, her figure swift and agile, leaving a series of afterimages. Sometimes she threw punches, sometimes her palms transformed into blades, relentlessly pressing forward. She forcefully overwhelmed the man with her offensive.

At this moment, the ancient sword had escaped the gray-clad youth's control and returned to Lin Xuanyan's hands. The youth gripped his sword, piercing through the rain and tearing through the curtain of dew; the bright sword light was even more dazzling than the lightning in the sky.

The one who had launched the sneak attack was none other than the young master of the Azure Demon Clan! He hadn't shown himself from beginning to end, waiting for this opportunity.

However, none of them had anticipated that this purple-haired girl would be so strong.

One wrong move and the whole game is lost. The young master of the Azure Demon Clan didn't even exchange a glance with the gray-clad youth before they each fled in different directions.

Lin Xuanyan revealed a ruthless glint in his eyes. His sword light illuminated the dim sky, and each raindrop transformed into a sword.

From within the vast fog, the young master of the Azure Demon Clan's piercing screams echoed, heart-wrenching and devastating.

The falling rain relentlessly slashed at his body, leaving him mangled beyond recognition, riddled with wounds.

Meanwhile, Su Lingshu pursued the gray-clad youth. The sound of bells rang rhythmically from her palms, and the youth, as if facing his natural enemy, slowed his movements each time a bell rang. Before long, Su Lingshu had leaped above him.

The gray-clad boy looked up at the pretty girl who was chasing him like a hawk, a sense of despair rising in his heart.

The rain fell on him, the raindrops that should have nourished him feeling like whips lashing his skin. He couldn't help but think of the day his family was wiped out. It was the same day, a heavy rain.

He was originally a member of the Graywood Clan, but the Graywood Clan was not prominent in the Northern Region, unlike the powerful Azure Demon Clan.

The Azure Demon Clan has always been intolerant of outsiders, and their pursuit of the Graywood Clan had never ceased.

Five years ago, the Graywood Clan, who had intended to relocate to avoid trouble, were exposed and surrounded and annihilated by the Azure Demons.

He was the only one who survived.

Because he was the one who had tipped off the enemy and acted as an inside man—a member of the Graywood Clan.

That day, he personally killed the burly Graywood Clan man who had bullied him, and he also personally killed his own family members who had been kind to him.

He felt neither the thrill of killing his enemies nor the guilt of killing his family.

That day, his mood was colder and more indifferent than the torrential rain.

From then on, he became a confidant of the young master of the Azure Demon Clan, serving them wholeheartedly. However, he knew that deep within his body still flowed the blood of the Graywood Clan, even though that blood never felt warm.

He also knew that his allegiance to the Azure Demons was only for temporary peace; a true man's ambition lies in the world.

But today, he was so close to death again, and he was unwilling to accept it.

A moment of clarity can bring life and death.

He suddenly remembered the forbidden technique of the Graywood Clan, the Reverse Reincarnation Technique. His face contorted in a grimace, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth, his body thin and frail from the rain.

Su Lingshu came up above him.

A beam of light descended from her sleeve, piercing the gray-clad boy's body with lightning speed.

The girl, who had been so confident of winning, suddenly frowned.

She immediately followed the direction in which the gray-clad boy was falling.

Upon closer inspection, she was shocked to discover that the gray-clad boy had vanished without a trace; she had only stabbed a gray garment.

On the other side, the young master of the Azure Demon Clan was pinned to the ground by a sword, barely clinging to life, on the verge of death.

Those remaining members of the Azure Demon Clan dared not make a move upon seeing their young master captured.

Su Lingshu quickly arrived at Lin Xuanyan's side, and Lin Xuanyan gave her an inquiring look. The girl shook her head and said regretfully, "He got away."

Lin Xuanyan didn't press further. The Azure Demon before him was clearly of higher status.

"If you kill me, the Azure Demon Clan will never let you go. There is absolutely no way you will leave the Azure Demon Clan's territory alive!" The Azure Demon young master's face was contorted with rage.

In the midst of this fierce battle, Lin Xuanyan had also suffered severe injuries. The wounds he had been forcibly suppressing began to spread again, and streaks of blood seeped out, slowly staining his white robes red.

The rain gradually subsided, and everything was coming to an end.

Lin Xuanyan raised his sword expressionlessly and thrust it towards the young master of the Azure Demon Clan.

In the instant of his death, the young master went completely mad, yelling, "Attack! Kill him!"

The words stopped abruptly; a single sword strike sealed his throat.

The young master of the Azure Demon Clan was shattered in two, but the smile on his face became even more eerie.

That dry voice sounded again.

"I will not die. The death of the Azure Demon Clan is just the beginning. Next year, I will be reborn, and I will be waiting for you on the Netherworld Path. You cannot escape…"

The sound echoed across the plains like a curse.

Upon witnessing their young master's slaying, the Azure Demon Clan members, no longer hesitant, charged forward like madmen towards Lin Xuanyan, advancing instead of retreating.

Lin Xuanyan dragged his long sword on the ground, turning his head to look at them indifferently, like a merciless Grim Reaper in the underworld.

Inside the ancient temple, Lu Jiajing's coughing grew increasingly violent. The chaotic energy within her body was tangled and disordered, surging and churning within her acupoints and lungs, causing a sharp, agonizing pain.

The natal lotus flower circulated throughout her body, constantly stabilizing and balancing the energy around her. It took immense effort to barely suppress some of her injuries.

She glanced at the tightly closed temple doors; the sounds of fighting grew fainter and fainter, as if the battle was nearing its end.

She always believed Lin Xuanyan could win, no matter who his opponent was.

The temple roof leaked, and water had accumulated in the hollows inside. She glanced at the water, where her reflection shone. The ancient temple was dimly lit, and her reflection appeared sorrowful and wretched, utterly desolate.

She leaned against the wall, curled up, and began to resist the chaotic energy surging within her body once more. She knew that if she couldn't control it, her yin-yang cultivation might be destroyed today.

At a crucial moment in her cultivation, her mind suddenly jolted.

Something had begun to rumble and rustle dust from the side wall of the ancient temple. Lu Jiajing stared at the sudden opening in the wall, a sense of impending doom washing over her.

A grayish-green mass rolled in through the gap and landed heavily on the muddy floor of the ancient temple.

Lu Jiajing's pupils suddenly contracted.

The thing was about half a person's height, grayish-green in color, and covered with knots and cracks, like an old tree burl that had been buried underground for a hundred years before being dug up.

Dozens of aerial roots extended from its base, wriggling slowly and stickily, leaving dark watermarks in the mud.

The most terrifying part was its front—a spindle-shaped mouth was split open in the center, above which was a murky, single eye, its surface covered with a grayish-white film, slowly rotating and pointing towards Lu Jiajing's direction.

A few pieces of gray cloth, not completely faded, remained on the creature, slowly being corroded and dissolved by the grayish-green mucus seeping from its surface.

The Graywood Clan's forbidden technique, "Reverse Rebirth."

This wasn't a survival technique; it was clearly regression.

Abandoning their human form, they reverted to the most primal, original form of the Graywood Clan.

It had no limbs, no facial features, no language, and its intelligence had degenerated to the point of being reduced to mere instinct.

But after the degeneration was complete, the demonic power emanating from this half-human-sized, grayish-green burl was several times purer than when it had been in human form.

In the silent ancient temple, Lu Jiajing and the featureless monster faced off in silence.

The Graywood demon's single eye slowly rotated.

The cloudy eyes held no lust, no malice, not even any discernible emotion, only an empty instinct, like withered wood drawn to light, vines climbing a wall, or a drowning person grasping at the last piece of driftwood.

The mouthparts split open silently, revealing concentric rings of fine, keratinous serrations.

Lu Jiajing took a deep breath, and a beam of azure light burst forth, forcing the Graywood demon back several feet.

The Graywood demon's roots dragged across the muddy ground, crawling towards her again. The movement was incredibly slow, almost like a plant in a time-lapse photograph—each inch of extension carried an irresistible certainty.

Lu Jiajing's mind raced, and she coldly said, "Escaping death is no easy feat. If you push your luck, don't blame me for crippling your cultivation foundation. Cough… cough cough…"

Lu Jiajing's silence only made things worse; once she opened her mouth, she spat out another mouthful of blood.

She coughed violently, struggling to cover her mouth with her hand, but her eyes remained fixed on the approaching monster.

At this moment, she must not show any sign of backing down.

The Graywood demon's single eye remained fixed on her, its roots stretching forward inch by inch.

Suddenly, the Graywood demon stopped.

It saw a faint blue lotus flower blooming above Lu Jiajing's head.

The illusory image, resembling a Daoist lotus, possessed an inherent sanctity and naturally exerted a suppressive and restraining effect on demonic creatures.

The Graywood demon's roots curled slightly, as if in fear.

Lu Jiajing's face was as cold as ice. Her hands formed a strange hand seal, and her aura shifted, as if she were about to unleash a magical artifact to slay demons at any moment.

The iris in the Graywood demon's single eye twitched. It paused for three breaths, then continued forward.

The lotus flower above Lu Jiajing's head, which had been merely a bluff, shattered instantly.

The Graywood demon's roots suddenly accelerated, coiling around her limbs like dozens of gray-green snakes.

An invisible demonic power seeped from its roots, pressing down on her like a boulder.

This demonic power was at most at the fourth realm.

Normally, she could shatter it to pieces with a mere thought.

But at this moment, even her breathing was trembling, and she couldn't even lift a single finger.

The Graywood demon opened its mouth wide, emitting a low, buzzing sound.

The knots on its body surface began to crack one by one, oozing dark green specks.

The points of light hovered in the air, slowly arranging themselves into the shape of a rune, ancient and twisted, like the growth rings of a withered tree being imprinted onto a flat surface.

Lu Jiajing stared at the rune, her pupils suddenly contracting.

The Decaying Meridian Technique.

She had seen this name before in a tattered ancient book in the Qingmu Palace.

The oldest and most useless forbidden technique of the Graywood Clan.

It's considered useless because the caster must continuously draw thirty-six runes in the air for a quarter of an hour, completely absorbed and defenseless; while the recipient can easily break free from the demonic power's suppression and interrupt the spell with just a little remaining strength.

Throughout the millennia-long history of the Graywood Clan, the Decaying Meridian Technique had only been successfully performed a handful of times, and each time the recipient had been a dying person.

But at this moment, Lu Jiajing was worse off than a dying person.

She strained with all her might to lift a finger, to channel even a sliver of her true energy. The demonic shackles remained unmoved. Her body no longer belonged to her.

The first rune solidified in mid-air, like a red-hot branding iron, and slowly floated towards her.

The moment the rune touched her left shoulder, a surge of scorching demonic power, like molten resin, poured into the shoulder well point of her left shoulder.

That wasn't a superficial burn—the demonic energy seeped directly into the meridians, spreading inch by inch along the pathways deeper, eventually solidifying, crystallizing, and sealing off the acupoints.

She felt the meridian pathways in her left shoulder blocked by an irreversible force, like an old tree taking root at the base of a wall, its roots cracking the bricks and then solidifying into something harder than the bricks.

Lu Jiajing's body trembled violently, her teeth clenched, and she made no sound.

The second rune had already formed in the air. The shoulder well point on the right. The same burning heat, the same infusion, the same solidification.

The third one.

The fourth one.

The fifth one.

The runes were imprinted at a steady, moderate pace, with exactly ten breaths between each two. The Graywood demon's rhythm in creating the runes was almost mechanical.

Lu Jiajing began to tremble slightly.

Each rune imprinted was a new invasion.

The sensation of demonic power solidifying inch by inch within her meridians was so vivid. She could feel those once-unobstructed meridian channels being blocked one by one, as if someone were lighting lamps along her meridian network—only instead of light, they were illuminating cold, grayish-green flames.

The eleventh.

The twelfth rune.

Runes began to be injected along her spine: the great vertebra point (Dazhui, GV14), the spirit path point (Shendao, GV11), the gate of life (Mingmen, GV4), and the lumbar hinge (Yaoyangguan, GV3).

Each one landed on a key acupoint along the Governing Vessel.

When her gate of life was sealed, Lu Jiajing let out a suppressed groan for the first time.

A burning and tingling sensation exploded from her lower back, as if her entire spine had been injected with scalding pine resin.

Her back involuntarily arched, then fell heavily back onto the muddy ground.

The eighteenth rune.

The nineteenth rune.

Runes drifted towards her lower abdomen: the sea of qi (Qihai, CV6) and the origin pass (Guanyuan, CV4).

When the acupoints near her lower elixir field were sealed, Lu Jiajing finally couldn't help but let out a low moan.

The moment her sea of qi was sealed, the last vestige of her cultivation completely vanished.

The foundation of her five-hundred-year-old immortal cultivation was being blocked one by one.

The twenty-third. The twenty-fourth. Runes were branded into both wrists: the great abyss (Taiyuan, LU9) and the spirit gate (Shenmen, HT7). Her hands lost their last bit of strength, her ten fingers lying limply on the muddy ground.

The twenty-ninth. The thirtieth. Ankles: the ankle cleft (Jiexi, ST41) and Kunlun (BL60). Sensation in both legs became blurred and distant.

The thirty-third acupoint. Back of the knee: the middle of the crook (Weizhong, BL40). The thirty-fourth acupoint. Crook of the elbow: the marsh at the elbow (Quze, PC3).

Lu Jiajing was drenched in cold sweat.

Her long, dark blue hair clung loosely to her face and neck, and her clothes, soaked with sweat and rain, outlined her trembling body against her skin.

She bit her lip until it bled, and the light in her pupils gradually dimmed.

The thirty-fifth acupoint. Between the eyebrows: the hall of impression (Yintang).

The thirty-sixth acupoint. Center of the chest: the chest center (Tanzhong, CV17).

The moment the final rune entered the chest center point, all thirty-six vital acupoints simultaneously lit up with a dark green light.

Those rays of light, faintly visible through her skin, were like thirty-six ethereal green stars scattered across her entire body: her shoulder wells, spine, lower back, lower elixir field, wrists, ankles, knees, brow, and chest.

Then all the lights went out simultaneously.

Silence fell.

Thirty-six vital meridians and acupoints had been permanently sealed. Unless intervened by external forces at the Saint Realm or higher, the seal could never be broken.

The Graywood demon completed the Decaying Meridian Technique, and the light in its single eye quickly dimmed.

Its body began to disintegrate: aerial roots withered and broke off one by one, knots peeled off piece by piece, and the entire tuberous body shriveled, collapsed, and turned to dust at a visible speed.

From beginning to end, not a sound was made.

He did the only thing he could do, and then disappeared.

The ancient temple fell silent once more. Only Lu Jiajing's faint breathing and the dripping of rainwater from the leaking roof remained.

Lu Jiajing lay on her back on the cold, muddy ground, motionless.

She could feel the thirty-six acupoints in her body, each one like a cold nail, firmly anchoring her five-hundred-year-old foundation of immortality deep within her meridians.

The pure energy could not circulate, cultivation could not be mobilized, and even the natal lotus could not be sensed.

She could feel the demonic energy still pulsating faintly deep within those sealed acupoints, like thirty-six tiny gray hearts embedded in her meridian network. Each pulsation reminded her: these seals would accompany her for the rest of her life.

She suddenly wanted to laugh. Her lips moved, but she couldn't manage a laugh.

She had remained chaste for five hundred years.

Her former lover couldn't take her body, the Grand Elder on the Floating Island couldn't take her body, and despite the Third Prince's relentless torment of lust, she had managed to protect her last shred of virginity with her cultivation.

The Asura King used an ancient array to extract her life essence, but she was saved at the last second.

Today, in this cold, dilapidated temple, under the watchful gaze of its broken spirits, the lofty, noble, and unparalleled beauty of Lu Jiajing, the Holy Maiden of the Qingmu Palace, was permanently defiled by a lowly, ugly, and inhuman mutated monster using the most worthless and useless spell in the world, on the leaky, muddy floor of the temple. Her five-hundred-year-old foundation of immortality was permanently tainted.

This defilement was more thorough than simply losing one's virginity.

Losing one's virginity is instantaneous; what's lost is merely a thin membrane.

The thirty-six vital acupoints sealed by the Decaying Meridian Technique were each a testament to her five hundred years of arduous cultivation, the foundation upon which she stood at the pinnacle of all women.

Now they were permanently blocked by a group of lowly monsters that couldn't even speak.

She could rebuild her cultivation level, but she could never reopen these acupoints again—unless a powerful force from outside the Saint Realm intervened.

As for those who had reached the Saint Realm, there were only a handful of them in the entire world.

If she hadn't waited for him, she wouldn't have come to the Northern Region.

If she hadn't been in the Northern Region, she wouldn't be in her current predicament.

He had taken her away from the desolation of the Qingmu Palace, brought her to this desolate wilderness surrounded by tigers and wolves, and then abandoned her alone in this dilapidated temple.

"If I hadn't waited for him…"

The moment this thought arose, the crack spread upwards from the deepest recesses of her heart, more irreversible than any demonic seal.

It climbed along five hundred years of time, tearing through the sea of flowers at the first sight of the mountain gate, tearing through the boundless blue lotus atop the peak, tearing through the boy's infatuated gaze upon the girl, tearing through the words "Sister will protect you"—tearing through all the shining moments of her life.

Then it collapsed with a crash.

Her Dao heart shattered.

The rain outside the temple had stopped, leaving only broken bones and limbs scattered on the ground.

Lin Xuanyan pulled his sword from the last Azure Demon's body and finally let out a long sigh of relief. He looked around at the horrific scene, a veritable hellish carnage, his expression growing increasingly cold.

Su Lingshu patted his shoulder. "Are you alright?"

Lin Xuanyan's expression softened slightly. "It's nothing."

He put away the ancient sword, glanced at the blood-mist-shrouded jungle, and said softly, "There shouldn't be any danger nearby. Go check the road; I'll go back to the temple and bring Lu Jiajing out. We need to leave here as soon as possible."

Su Lingshu nodded in agreement.

Lin Xuanyan returned to the ancient temple. As he pushed open the temple door, his heart suddenly pounded like a drum, and he had a strong, vague premonition of something ominous.

With a piercing screech, the dilapidated temple doors were pushed open, revealing a dim glimmer of daylight and the faint sight of floating dust.

Lin Xuanyan's face turned deathly pale. He stood there stunned for a moment, then dashed into the temple.

"Lu Jiajing! What's wrong with you?" Lin Xuanyan pressed down on her shoulders, continuously channeling his inner energy into her, but her body was like a leaky vessel that could not retain even the slightest bit of it.

This was a sign of the collapse of one's Dao heart.

Lu Jiajing looked at him indifferently, her expression cold and blank.

Her clothes were mostly soaked with sweat and rain, clinging messily to her body.

Beneath the fabric, thirty-six dark green seal marks were faintly visible: shoulder wells, spine, waist, lower elixir field, wrists, ankles… Each was slightly indented, like marks left by a red-hot iron on the skin, or like the rings of withered wood imprinted on her body.

The eerie green light had faded, leaving only dark, gray lines that coiled like vines around her meridian network.

Beside her lay a pile of grayish-green dust and a few pieces of dried roots.

That was the only trace left by the Graywood demon after it had exhausted all its demonic power.

There was no body, no face, not even a single intact piece of flesh could be found.

Like an incense stick that has burned for too long, only a pinch of white ash remains in the incense burner.

Ultimately, it was his own carelessness. A wave of self-reproach and regret washed over him. He opened his arms, wanting to hug Lu Jiajing, but she pushed him away.

"I'm sorry," Lin Xuanyan said softly.

Lu Jiajing didn't answer; she was like an empty shell, a walking corpse, her heart colder than her body.

Lin Xuanyan cautiously said, "The Great Dao can be reshaped. I'll take you to slaughter all the Azure Demon Clan members, okay?"

Lu Jiajing finally spoke, her voice no longer melodious, but dry and hoarse. "Don't go."

She pursed her lips and said with difficulty, "You will die."

Lin Xuanyan held her hand. "It's okay. I'm not afraid."

Lu Jiajing looked at him and suddenly asked, "Do you like me?"

Lin Xuanyan's eyes gradually welled up with tears. He gripped her hand tightly and said in a trembling voice, "I have always admired and loved Palace Master Lu."

"Heh, Palace Master Lu." Lu Jiajing turned her head, leaning against the wall, her hair slightly disheveled and clinging to her beautiful face. Lin Xuanyan wanted to reach out to help her tidy her hair, but Lu Jiajing pushed him away again.

Lin Xuanyan felt a bitter taste in his mouth and was speechless for a moment.

Lu Jiajing's voice was soft and weak. "I waited for you for five hundred years, and you ruined my life for five hundred years. You are not worthy of me at all."

Lin Xuanyan was struck dumb, stunned, and stammered, "You… what did you say?"

"So many people pursued me, yet I chose you, a heartless man, from among this sea of people. My taste has always been terrible."

Lu Jiajing turned her head, looking at the stunned Lin Xuanyan with a mixture of laughter and tears. A wave of bitterness instantly filled her chest, and in a moment, tears streamed down her face.

Her voice was choked and hoarse, like the first thaw of a stream on an ice field.

"Ye Linyuan, how long are you going to keep up this act?!"

It felt like being struck by lightning; something exploded inside him with a buzzing sound, and all his thoughts froze for a moment.

After a long silence, Lin Xuanyan finally came to his senses. He asked blankly, "You… when did you find out?"

"The day I saw the Envy-Fish Sword, I knew it was you." Lu Jiajing's expression was calm, but tears streamed down her face uncontrollably.

"I've been waiting for you, year after year. Although later I couldn't distinguish between obsession and love anymore—I'm no longer the Lu Jiajing I was back then, and you're not the same person you were either—seeing you again still makes me very happy. What about you?"

That year, a young girl, beautiful and proud, had met him amidst the sea of flowers at the mountain gate. She lifted her skirt and walked carefully on tiptoe, showing tenderness to the fragrant grasses.

That year, at the age of sixteen, atop the boundless peak, amidst a sea of clouds, countless blue lotuses bloomed, winning the admiration of the world.

That year, the girl, elegant and refined as jade, tapped her head with her fingers and said, "You idiot! You're so slow-witted, you'll definitely get bullied in the future. Why don't you come with me? I'll protect you."

Do you want to cultivate?

My sister will steal the secret recipe to support you.

The handsome young man stared blankly at the spirited young woman, nodding adoringly. At that moment, the mountains were ablaze with flowers, the waterfall roared, and the shimmering sunlight seemed to melt away all the beauty in the world.

That year, that year…

Five hundred years of dramatic changes had swept across the land, leaving behind only fleeting moments of warmth and coldness, and the bonds of human kindness lost.

The boy's vision blurred. His hand trembled as he reached out to touch her cheek, but Lu Jiajing grasped it tightly. She reached out and flicked Lin Xuanyan's forehead with all her might. Time seemed to rewind, as if returning to those days. She parted her cherry lips, choking back tears, and said, "What an idiot…"