

Crossing to the Future, it's Not Easy to Be a Man

Chapter 12: Tests Could Be Anywhere

Ling Lan gulped silently and tried to remain calm as she asked, "Will you be teaching me physical skills?" Ling Lan was extremely interested in learning these skills. In her previous life she had been mostly confined to a bed, but now that she had a healthy body, she wanted to learn as much as could so that this great body of hers was not wasted.

The man remained expressionless, replying flatly, "No, I am just here to introduce the skill paths you may choose."

Ling Lan exhaled in relief yet couldn't help but feel a little disappointed. Although facing the man was extremely stressful, like a mountain pressing upon her making it hard to breathe, this also meant that he was very formidable. If he had been her teacher, she would certainly have benefitted greatly.

The man paid no mind to Ling Lan's conflicted feelings, but continued by introducing himself. "You may call me Number One."

Number One? Was that a codename? Could it be that in this learning space, all the instructors had no names but only went by codenames? Was it because names were unnecessary? Or was there some other reason?

Number One continued, "As follows, I will introduce the options you have under the highest level of physical skills training. There are three sets — the Offensive Series, the Balanced Series, and the Defensive Series."

Ling Lan listened very attentively as this choice would affect her entire life. She could not afford to be careless.

"The Offensive Series, as its name implies, will cover the physical skills necessary in building a foundation for forceful offensive attacks. The Balanced Series will cover foundational physical skills suitable for a mixture of offence and defence, while the Defensive Series will focus on defence. Each contractor may only choose one set to practise." Number One seemed satisfied with Ling Lan's serious attitude as he further explained, "These three foundation physical skill sets cannot be practised simultaneously, or else the body will be greatly damaged."

Ling Lan was startled — she had indeed been considering the ambitious idea of learning more than one set, and she had not expected Number One to see through her intentions and warn her. Gratefully, she said, “Thank you, Instructor Number One!”

Although Number One had said that he would not be her instructor, Ling Lan sincerely felt that Number One was strong enough to be anyone’s instructor, and thus deserved the title.

Number One seemed a little taken aback by Ling Lan’s manner of address, but quickly brushed it off. In his usual flat tone, he asked, “Which set will you pick?”

Ling Lan considered the three sets. Honestly, Ling Lan was drawn towards the Balanced Series — since it covered both offence and defence, this meant that the set had no obvious weaknesses, while the other two sets had very distinct advantages and disadvantages. Ling Lan did not plan to become a master practitioner, but only wanted to strengthen her body. Just as she was about to answer, a flash of inspiration caused her to say instead, “Instructor Number One, I would like to hear your recommendation. Which set would work best for me?”

Number One’s gaze turned sharp — his focused gaze was like a dagger flying straight at her, but Ling Lan’s face still held a neutral smile, as if she felt none of Number One’s rage.

The two of them stared at each other. The pressure coming from Number One grew heavier and heavier. Though Ling Lan still looked calm on the surface, she was already quaking in her bones. She desperately encouraged herself to hang in there, telling herself that she just needed to hold on a little bit longer.

Finally, Ling Lan prevailed. Number One dialled back his killer gaze, and an almost indiscernible smile flitted across his face. Ling Lan’s heart settled — she knew she had made the right choice.

As expected, Number One gave her his recommendation. “I recommend you choose the Defensive Series!”

In truth, the presence of Number One was not so simple as to just introduce the sets to the contractors. He was actually another one of the examiners. From his very first sentence, he had begun misleading the contractors, giving contractors the false impression that they were free to choose any of the three physical skill sets he described.

Of course, once a contractor had chosen, Number One would also allow said contractor to practise that set of physical skills. The problem was, had the contractor really chosen the set that was suitable for him?

In the first place, the learning devices had been designed to nurture excellence in outstanding talents. Although this lucky shot-in-the-dark method of choosing could still result in several prodigies, it did not fit in with the original intentions of the learning devices ...

As such, the only valid explanation was that this was all still a test. A test which assessed the observational skills and logical reasoning of the contractors. Anyone with a little smarts would have noticed — did a simple introduction of the physical skill sets really require the presence of such a formidable instructor as Number One? This was obviously illogical.

Naturally, Ling Lan wasn't that smart. She had not noticed this little logical flaw, but had in fact been truly fooled. However, she was very clear on one point, and that was that Number One was very strong. Moreover, she believed that no one knew the pros and cons of the three physical skill sets better than Number One. And since there was such an impressive instructor right in front of her, wouldn't it be a waste not to ask him for some advice?

Thus, Ling Lan decided to ask Number One at that crucial moment. In this almost accidental manner, Ling Lan stumbled her way past another test. It had to be said that Ling Lan was really very lucky.

Since Number One had given his recommendation, Ling Lan naturally did not presume to think she could choose any better, and she quickly selected the Defensive Series of physical skills to learn.

Once Ling Lan verbally acknowledged her selection of the Defensive Series, the scenery in front of Ling Lan's eyes changed. At this point, Number One had disappeared, and the person in front of her was now a delicate-looking female soldier. The soldier smiled and said, "Hello. For this period of time, I shall be responsible for your training. You may call me Number Nine!"

This self-proclaimed Number Nine female soldier had a rather slim figure and did not possess the strong aura and thick sense of bloodshed that Number One did. Her strength was of a more introverted type — the description 'still as a statue, movement as a wild hare' ¹ described her perfectly.

Ling Lan believed that, in a fight, this female warrior would probably be able to defeat a hulking brute with just one move. She called out respectfully, "Instructor Number Nine, please take care of me."

Number Nine did not say anything more but immediately started doing several stretching exercises, indicating for Ling Lan to repeat them after her.

Ling Lan found that although these few moves seemed easy, they were actually not. They stretched each part of the human body to its extreme, with the clear purpose of

increasing the body's flexibility. These moves had some similarity with the popular yoga from 10000 years ago, giving Ling Lan a strange sense of déjà vu.

This set of moves had a total of nine stances. After Number Nine performed them three times, she noticed that Ling Lan had memorized all of them. Without giving Ling Lan any chance for questions, she sent Ling Lan's consciousness back to the main study hall with a flick of her finger.

Ling Lan was struck dizzy by the unexpected blow. She wrapped her hands around her head and squatted, staying still as she waited for the dizziness to pass. As it slowly faded, she found that Little Four, who had been out here waiting for all this time, had worried himself sick over her. He was spinning in circles around her, trying to see if she was alright.

"I'm fine, Little Four. Just a little tired. I need to go out and rest a little." Ling Lan squeezed out a smile with some effort to reassure Little Four. She felt as if her spiritual and mental energy had been drained, and was so tired that she just really wanted to sleep.

She quickly said goodbye to Little Four, returned to her physical body, and fell into a deep sleep, for real this time.

Dead to the world, Ling Lan did not know that the anxious Little Four secretly used his energy to help Ling Lan activate her Qi circulation. He did so over and over again until her Qi started circulating on its own. Only then did Little Four stop and keep away his energy.

After doing this, Little Four's image in the learning space became much dimmer ...