

Daily life 321

Chapter 321 Shocking Response

Zou Yi gritted his teeth as he swung his fist, however, he saw the axe swerve to his left the moment it was about to hit him.

Has he missed

A clashing sound and force hit Zou Yi just as this thought hit his mind. The force made him trip to his left. Luckily Zou Yi still had some control of his body, so the moment he tripped to the side, he performed a sideway roll which gave him the chance to see the source of the explosive sound.

He saw a long narrow trench had been created from where he stood, up to the direction the scarlet blur had disappeared to. Within that trench was a green object that looked like a plant's root, but from the smoothness of the object, it looked more like a branch.

Zou Yi saw the green object move. It rapidly retracted back leaving a 30 cm whip lash trench behind that seemed to producing smoke. He Shan's axe was buried in the ground of that trench with faint cracks and smoke being produced from it.

Zou Yi gulped when he saw the scene. Had the attack hit him, his leg would have likely been blown clean off.

"Are you going to lay there dazed or are you going to prepare for the next attack? I won't save you for the next one."

He Shan's cold voice pulled Zou Yi from his confused state.

"You two can get up now," added He Shan.

The whole event had not taken more than ten seconds, but every person present including He Shan was breathing heavily.

The two girls got up warily as they put up defensive positions relatively behind Zou Yi and He Shan. Zou Liqin stood in front of Yu Mei holding a few black pebbles in her hands. Zou Yi had the same pebbles in his hands too.

Those pebbles were century iron pebbles and they had gotten them from Yang Qing's nephews when they had visited. The pebbles were hardy enough to punch a hole through a regular wall, which made them effective blunt-force weapons.

From what the nephews told them, with the right throw, heavily injuring someone in the qi refinement realm wasn't an impossibility. They each had four of those pebbles with them. They couldn't carry more because each stone despite being two inches in size weighed 5 kilograms each. Even with their bronze body stage cultivation, carrying more than 5 would hinder their movement.

At the moment, they each had four of them while they gave, He Shan the extra one. Yu Mei wasn't given since even with no luggage she was still struggling to keep up with them.

Everyone except He Shan was visibly on edge at the moment, especially the two ladies. Zou Yi used the corner of his eyes and saw a smooth line at the top of their heads, as if their hair had been parted.

Whatever that orange blur was, it would have penetrated their scalps had they been even a second late in dodging. He could even see small blood stains on their scalps.

Forget elimination, at this moment both girls felt how close to death they were. Both their hands were trembling; however, they forcefully endured their fear as they stared to their right, the source of both attacks.

In that direction was a bunch of fothergilla shrubs clustered together with sweet-scented white flowers growing within them. However there was one thing that seemed to fit and not fit within that area, and that was an old unassuming willow tree.

Its leaves were greying almost pale white and it stood there silently, gently swaying with the wind so peacefully, but Zou Yi knew it wasn't as peaceful and unassuming as it seemed to be.

The vine that almost took his leg had it not been for He Shan's intervention, he saw it retract back into that tree.

However, Zou Yi didn't seem to see anything remotely scarlet within the willow tree.

'What was that orange blur'

He couldn't help but look at the fothergilla with some suspicion. They were the only things that had scarlet colors in the area. He couldn't help but feel whatever attacked them, likely originated from within those shrubs.

"Just our luck to stumble onto a snapping willow," He Shan murmured with a sigh of resignation. His gaze faintly lingered on Yu Mei as he said this, who couldn't help but smile in defeat at the implied meaning of He Shan's look.

"He Shan, the orange blur..."

Of the things Zou Yi was most wary of, it was that thing. He couldn't even track it with his eyes. He may have been caught unaware, but its speed was still valid. Even alert, he had doubts he could defend against something with such speed.

"It's a scarlet crown hummingbird, and it's one of the inhabitants of that willow tree, which is why I can't help but lament our current circumstance.

We might potentially be facing four opponents, though if I count the willow tree, it would make it five...." Said He Shan with a grim expression.

He knocked three more arrows as he said while the rest readied their pebbles.

They had narrowly evaded death from two attackers, and the thought of facing three more opponents of the same caliber, made seeds of despair take root in their hearts.

He Shan didn't seem to read the mood as he continued with his explanation.

"It's not always a guarantee that they would be here but a snapping willow tree is usually inhabited by the scarlet-tipped hummingbird, a grey fog tree fog, a black verdant porcupine, and a withering weevil..."

Silence ensued when He Shan took a sudden pause cautiously eyeing the willow tree for any strange movements. He only resumed the explanation when he confirmed something wasn't brewing from the willow tree.

However, before he did, Zou Liqin interrupted with a question of her own,

"If you know that is a snapping willow, how come you didn't warn us before we stepped into the area, we could already notice it when we were back there," said Zou Liqin as she pointed a couple of meters behind them.

Even though she was still grateful for He Shan's timely warning, it was a little bit too close for comfort.

"Before we came in here, I already warned you to be alert about everything and anything, down to the blade of grass," He Shan coldly said.

"Besides when it comes to the snapping willow tree, you can never differentiate it from a normal one up until it attacks you. When dormant, it's no different from a normal willow tree, and as far as I know or what my grandfather taught me, there is no other way to differentiate it.

It was why I struck it with an arrow when we were close, to see its response..."

The trio was dumbstruck at He Shan's response.

Chapter 322 Fate Curse

"What?!" He Shan looked superciliously at them as he said this.

"Surely, you're not all so naïve as to think that we could have gotten part it easily had I not hit the tree with my arrow?" he mockingly.

From the looks of the trio, they had clearly entertained that thought when He Shan told them about striking the snapping willow tree first. Maybe if he didn't, the scarlet-beaked humming bird would have not made an appearance, and the willow tree would not have retaliated with one of its vines.

However, deep down they knew that was wishful thinking on their part.

"We may not know each other well, but I can tell you I'm not one to play with my life..." He Shan said as he sighed. He decided against mocking them further.

Their display during the attack had left him dissatisfied and in a sour mood. Even Zou Yi whom he had expectations for, let down his guard and almost invited disaster on himself when he ran toward his sister without assessing the situation first.

If their display was going to be like this, He Shan felt he might as well go at it alone, at least then he would only have to watch out for himself and not expend his concentration watching over the three of them.

But when he saw his axe, which was at the edge of breaking apart, his consternation eased up. It was one of the first things he got from his grandfather, and although it had long lost its use in terms of practicality, he still held onto it for sentimental purposes. It was one of his mementos of his grandfather.

I was no different than them when Grandpa took me in

"Even though the snapping willow may or may not have attacked us when we passed by, I know for sure the scarlet-beaked hummingbird would have attacked us.

It's temperamental, territorial, vindictive, insidious, and extremely bloodthirsty. Had I left the tree alone, it would have likely calculated its move before it shot out, rather than reacting like it did before. If the former had happened, one of us would have fallen to its beak, more than likely it would have been Yu Mei.

That bird is extremely calculative, it would have gone for the weaker party and worked its way up to the last person whom it classifies as a threat..."

Yu Mei shivered slightly as she heard He Shan's statement. She reflectively touched her scalp with a fearful imagination running through her mind.

She wasn't alone. Zou Liqin was right there with her when the hummingbird targeted them, as for Zou Yi, since their experience he was more wary of the bird than the tree. But with He Shan's introduction of other potential enemies all inhabiting the willow tree, he couldn't help but worry if their power scaling was similar to the hummingbird.

He Shan as if reading his mind continued,

"While we may potentially be facing five opponents, that's only if they all decide to attack, which...." He Shan hurriedly shut his mouth with his hands.

The trio reflexively looked around with wariness, expecting an attack, but when a few seconds passed with no attack, they all looked at He Shan with confused looks.

"I almost cursed us," He Shan said with a faintly trembling voice.

"Cursed us how?" asked Zou Yi.

"Haven't you all heard of the fate curse?" asked He Shan who immediately had a dumbfounded look when he saw all of them shake their heads sideways.

"But Grandpa said it was common knowledge," he muttered in perplexity.

"The fate curse is usually triggered by someone's words. If you said something is unlikely to happen, then usually it would likely happen even if it wasn't because of the words spoken.

If I didn't stop in time, I would have cursed us."

"What kind of curse is that? Isn't that just plain superstition? How could anyone believe something as silly as that?" thought Zou Yi.

He shook his head when he saw the sincerity in, He Shan's demeanor. He seemed like he believed it wholeheartedly.

"It really exists, I've seen it happen to Grandpa a million times. He would say something was unlikely and seconds later, minutes later, an hour, or even days later, the scenario he said had unlikely chances of happening, ends up happening.

We ended up in no small amounts of trouble because of it," said He Shan when he saw the looks of suspicion and disbelief from the rest.

But when he saw their still doubtful looks even after his clarification he decided to move on. They would come to know the fearsomeness of the fate curse sooner or later. He could only hope he wasn't with them when it did.

'I hope they get the worst kind. Grandpa was perfect but he had a big mouth on him, He Shan thought as he lamented his past.

"Of the five opponents, the hummingbird is the most thorny, while the willow tree is unpredictable with its attacks, you can never know its range and those vines usually hide other things in them. They might have poison, or paralyzing effects to them, but it's also the easiest to deal with since it can't move, we can escape its range as long as we move but we can't do that with that damn hummingbird eyeing us.

As for the last three, the black verdant porcupine is docile by nature, it would rarely attack unless it feels a threat to its life or to the willow tree while the remaining two; the withering weevil and grey fog tree frog are thorny opponents especially due to their abilities, they are not as vindictive as the hummingbird.

As long as we leave this area, they won't bother to pursue us. So long story short, we need to stall that bird and make a run for it. That's our only way out of here in one piece...and speak of the bastard...." He Shan's eyes narrowed on the willow covered in grey leaves.

The rest all readied themselves. Yu Mei was the only one left awkwardly standing about. She looked around to try and grab something to use as a weapon, but she immediately stopped when she remembered the experience from a few minutes ago.

Any movements, such as even bending to pick up something, could very well spell her doom, she thus decided the best thing she could do was stay put in the same posture and position.

He Shan who had spared a glance in his direction, nodded in approval.

Still a potential deadweight, but has a good head on her

"I will work on handling the bird, you two deal with the vines from the willow tree. It shouldn't be hard for you two to match its speed..." He Shan said as he pulled his bow with the three arrows already in place.

"Oh, and if you see a white flaky powder appear, run. The withering weevil has the most dangerous ability. It produces particles which if you get in contact with them, will rot your skin, and if more if it gets on you

Here it comes!!!"

He Shan paused his explanation and rapidly fired the three arrows on his bow.

The three arrows moved in an almost upward curve trajectory as they looked to pin the scarlet blur up ahead. The three arrows formed an almost triangle pattern.

The scarlet blur swerved to the left and the right in the time it took someone to complete a sneeze. The arrows missed their target and due to its speed, it seemed like it phased through the arrows.

Chapter 323 Fending Off The Two Attackers

He Shan was prepared for this, as three more arrows were launched in quick succession of the earlier ones. As he was busy tangling with the scarlet hummingbird, Zou Yi, and Zou Liqin were already called into action when the willow tree launched three vines in their direction at an alarming speed.

Luckily its speed was way inferior to the scarlet hummingbird, which was still a blur to them despite being well prepared for it.

"Yu Mei, tell us if you spot the white flakes, or fog," yelled Zou Yi as he and his sister launched the century iron pebbles in their hands.

With their strength as bronze body refining cultivators hurling the five-kilogram pebbles with ease and accuracy wasn't a difficult feat for them.

They both managed to halt two of the vines of the snapping willow tree dead in its track. Zou Yi didn't pause, as he ran forward and picked, He Shan's axe which he immediately flung at the third vine.

All three of the vines seemed to be specifically targeting He Shan who was currently locked in a firing battle with the scarlet hummingbird.

From what Zou Yi could tell, He Shan had thirty or so arrows in his quiver, and within the short span of the reappearance of the scarlet hummingbird he had already launched twelve of them.

Zou Yi couldn't help but worry about what would happen when the arrows were finished. Those arrows seemed to be the only things keeping the high-speed bird at bay.

However, he pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind as he focused on the matter at hand, which was dealing with the vines of the snapping willow while still being on guard against the other spirit beast in case, they made an appearance.

When Zou Yi and Zou Liqin launched their century iron pebbles they were mindful enough to throw them low to the ground and at a distance where they could swiftly recover them.

They only had three pebbles for each of them, they, therefore, had to use them carefully, and from the results they saw, it was their most important asset.

Two of the vines that had been hit by the pebbles had been punctured through at the point of contact. There was a large piece of the vine that had separated from the main vine and immediately in front of it were small fist-sized holes with the century iron pebbles neatly tucked in.

"Liqin be careful as you grab them," Zou Yi said as he kept guard behind Zou Liqin who was in charge of recovery.

The part of the vines that had broken off were releasing green-purple liquid that had a sweet nectary scent to them.

Zou Yi wasn't sure if that liquid was poisonous or not but it was best to err on the side of caution.

Just as Zou Liqin was going for the last pebble, the willow tree launched two more vines toward her direction at an increased speed.

Zou Yi wasn't sure but he felt some sort of agitation from the vines, like they were filled with anger, hence the ferocity and speed.

Does injuring the vines hurt it? He wondered as he launched two pebbles in quick succession.

The first one missed as the vine was speedily retracted before his pebble made contact, while the second pebble did hit the vine but not most of it, as it too was being retracted it just wasn't as fast as the earlier one.

Zou Liqin picked up the last pebble and dashed to her position while Zou Yi rushed forward and picked up the pebbles he had just thrown while Zou Liqin covered for him.

Their cooperation was seamless, and as people who have fought and survived alongside each other for the past five years since their eviction from the Zou clan's main grounds, it was only to be expected.

Zou Yi easily picked the last pebble with no attack launched his way.

The short reprise gave him a moment to observe the confrontation between He Shan and the scarlet hummingbird.

He Shan may have questionable traits to him, but Zou Yi had to admit, when it came to skills, even he a former scion of a rank 2 family felt inferior.

The way He Shan fired those arrows; it was almost as if he could direct them mid-air to perfectly land on the scarlet hummingbird's flight trajectory. No matter where it moved, an arrow was always there to welcome it.

He Shan looked like a puppet master, controlling both his arrows and the scarlet hummingbird into the perfect dance. However, no matter how beautiful the play was, its end was about to arrive since He Shan was only left with six arrows and three of them were already in his hands ready to be fired.

Zou Yi hesitated on whether they should lend a hand to He Shan. His hesitation was he didn't want to cause problems with his ill-timed amateurish interference. He still didn't know how He Shan kept track of the scarlet hummingbird's movements when he was at the same cultivation base as Zou Yi, who still struggled to keep track of it, though he did get short quick glances of it, whenever it twisted and turned to dodge, He Shan's arrows.

It was just about the size of a grown man's palms. It had a gem green coating on its plumage around the head and neck, and circular black rings around it. At its neck the plumage was white. The beak was the most distinctive. It was scarlet red, almost looked as if it was coated in blood, and was as thin as a needle.

He couldn't believe that such a thing almost punctured a hole through his sister's and Yu Mei's heads.

"You two, when I say it, I want you to throw those pebbles to the left and right of my arrows. Don't bother with accuracy just focus on speed..." said He Shan as he rapidly fired the three arrows in his hands.

Zou Yi and Zou Liqin both tightly clenched their pebbles awaiting his instruction.

In quick succession, He Shan knocked the three arrows and fired them as he simultaneously yelled,

"NOW!!"

Zou Yi and Zou Liqin immediately launched their pebbles with so much speed that they produced a hissing sound as they flew.

That was when they saw an incredible scene. The scarlet hummingbird which seemed like it was pinned down by their attack, dodged He Shan's arrows, and gently glided downwards passing in between the gaps of the two pebbles Zou Yi and Zou Liqin had launched.

If it wasn't an opponent that would butcher them given the slightest of opportunity, Zou Yi would have whistled in admiration at the finesse in which it dodged.

"That's what I was waiting for."

Chapter 324 Snapping Willow Strikes

Something tiny the size of a bird's egg appeared on the flight path of the scarlet crown hummingbird. It looked like a rubber sac, like something that came out of the entrails of some beast.

The sac exploded instantly when it almost collided with the scarlet crown hummingbird. A thick viscous black-green liquid was produced from it which immediately covered the hummingbird as it was flying downwards.

At the speed it was flying, it was difficult for it to escape getting drenched in the green liquid.

Zou Yi and the rest didn't know what that green liquid was, but they assumed it definitely had properties that could help them with their current predicament.

His guess proved to be true. The scarlet crown hummingbird that flew so fast that it looked like a blur in their eyes, got a little bit sluggish in its flight the moment it made contact with the green liquid.

A look of shock appeared in its tiny beady eyes as it tried to rapidly flap its wings, but with every passing second its flapping speed would reduce. Realizing the danger it was in, it immediately gave up targeting them as it turned in the direction of the snapping willow tree.

Even though its speed had reduced, it was still fast, and covering the distance back to the tree would not take more than ten seconds at its current speed.

Both Zou Yi and He Shan as if on tacit understanding, launched their century-iron pebbles toward it. Zou Liqin held back as she kept a close eye on the snapping willow tree that looked to be preparing another more powerful move.

It was intertwining several of its vines together forming a knot that was as thick as three of her combined. She wasn't sure if the century iron pebbles would be able to damage it as they did before, she could only hope He Shan and Zou Yi could finish off the scarlet-crowned hummingbird before the snapping willow tree attacked.

One of the pebbles thrown at the scarlet-crowned hummingbird managed to hit one of its wings which made it lose balance and tumble into the ground.

Just as He Shan and Zou Yi were about to go in for the kill, Yu Mei spoke up,

"There are white flakes showing up from the tree," she warned.

He Shan and Zou Yi both looked up in time to see tiny white flakes circling around one of the branches of the willow tree. Because its scale was small, one could easily miss it as long as you were not looking keenly enough, but in a few microseconds, the size grew.

"Let's run," He Shan yelled as he quickly grabbed his rusty beat-up axe and made a run for it to his front.

Zou Yi had been contemplating whether to go for the century iron pebble, but when he saw He Shan's hasty retreat he decided against it.

He nodded toward his sister and made a beeline toward Yu Mei and grabbed her by the hand as he hurriedly made a getaway with her. She had the slowest pace, and physical capabilities since she had no cultivation base to speak of. In essence, she was just a normal 13-year-old girl.

Even though she was the oldest of the four, because of no cultivation base she looked like the youngest and the smallest of them.

The group used every strength they had to make a run for it, while still keeping a close eye on the willow tree. From the way it was compressing its vines despite them not engaging it, it seemed like it wasn't done with them, and with them this close to leaving the area, it was only a matter of time before it launched its attack.

Just as they were about to leave the open clearing, the attack finally came. A thick spiral vine that looked like it was more like an oversized arrowhead was launched in their direction, more specifically it seemed to be directed at Zou Yi.

The force at which it was launched was so big that it produced a whistling sound.

Zou Yi's eyes flinched as he saw the attack. At the front, He Shan had half expected the attack to be launched in his direction for the damage he had done to the scarlet crown hummingbird. When he saw the attack veer toward Zou Yi, he exhaled a sigh of relief as he increased his pace to draw as much gap as he could between him and Zou Yi, who had to worry about himself and Yu Mei that he was dragging along.

"Li Qin, grab her."

Zou Yi immediately made the decision to offload Yu Mei to Zou Li Qin while he prepared for the attack that was no more than ten seconds away from hitting him.

Zou Liqin looked troubled, especially on noticing that her brother seemed to have been singled out by the tree.

"LIQIN DON'T!!" yelled Zou Yi when he saw her contemplating coming his way.

Things were already bad enough without his sister adding herself into the fray.

Zou Liqin flinched at Zou Yi's yell and whatever ideas she had evaporated as she grabbed Yu Mei and run after He Shan.

Zou Yi reduced his pace a little bit to ensure whatever collateral damage might come from the attack will not affect his sister and Yu Mei who were just a few meters ahead of him.

I hope this isn't the end for me. It would suck when I'm just looking forward to coming out at the other end of this thing and making Dad and Mom proud.

How petty is that tree anyway? It was just punctured on a few vines which should be no different from losing a few nails right? What I'm I thinking?

Zou Yi ruefully smiled as he tightly held on to two century-iron pebbles in his hands as he run.

Please don't hurt

He thought as he gritted his teeth and jumped sideways the moment the compressed massive vine was upon him. It was as thick as a trunk but towards the end, it was pointy and sharp as a needle.

Chapter 325 Zou Liqin's Fears Resurface

The snapping willow tree was clearly looking to impale him and even with his bronze body, Zou Yi felt it wouldn't be difficult for the willow tree to do so. He couldn't help but wonder why the snapping willow

tree was called that way when piercing moves seemed to be its forte. Zou Yi couldn't help but think maybe the name had something to do with its temperament.

Ever since his parent's death, as a means of coping with uncomfortable and scary situations, he started thinking about inane things which slowly evolved over the past five years into an unconscious habit because of how much he did it.

Boom!!

Crack! Crack! Crack!

A sand explosion formed at Zou Yi's former position. Clouds of dust and leaves filled the area along with a strong gust of wind that almost made Zou Liqin and Yu Mei trip.

"ZOU YI!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" yelled Zou Liqin as she forgot herself and ran in that direction, she saw Zou Yi get flung too, dragging Yu Mei along who seemed to struggle to match her pace no matter how fast she tried to run.

Microseconds after the explosions, Zou Liqin felt a sharp wind brush up against her, and immediately after she saw something orange flash past her at an alarming speed like a broken kite.

She instinctively knew that orange flash was Zou Yi being flung from the attack by the snapping willow and the direction he was thrown to, was the same direction they were running towards.

Trees shattered like thin dried branches everywhere that orange blur passed through.

He Shan who was close to twenty meters away from the Zou Liqin, grimaced when he saw those snapping trees. He had been running in a straight line, and the direction that Zou Yi seemed to have been flung to, seemed to deviate from his path by a few inches.

He seemed to hesitate for a bit before finally, he headed in the direction of the shattered trees.

The three members all rushed in the direction that was filled with a cacophony of noises. The booming sound a few seconds earlier, the crashing trees had destroyed the tranquil setting of the area, and with it came different cries from the resident of the area. The cries were of fear, and some were laced with threat.

He Shan's look turned grim when he heard this. While chaos would have been their best friend in certain circumstances, in this instant when they had a teammate potentially heavily injured, it was the worst possible outcome.

He wasn't in good shape either. While it seemed like he had effortlessly handled the scarlet-crowned hummingbird, only he knew how much of a strain his body was in. He had pushed his body to its limits and even over-exerted his arms, eyes, and every other sense of his body to ensure he kept the hummingbird at bay.

Every tendon in his body felt like it was being boiled in magma and his bones were molded of the heaviest of metals. His eyes felt like they had knives poking his eyelids. It took all he had to keep running and he wasn't sure he had any energy left to handle even a weak opponent.

The only people who looked to have some energy left for fighting were Zou Liqin and Yu Mei, however He Shan couldn't bank his safety on them, especially in their current state. Zou Liqin looked to be delirious. In her current state, she couldn't react rationally and was no different than a ravenous beast. With the way she was, He Shan would rather entrust their safety to Yu Mei even though she was the weakest with no cultivation base.

Despite everything that had happened, her eyes were clear even when she was being dragged like a rag doll. He Shan could tell that her breathing was shallow and ragged, while her legs were filled with shallow cuts everywhere because of the reckless force with which Zou Liqin dragged her with.

"Zou Liqin calm down, while we don't know the state in which we will find your brother, we can at least tell he is alive. Had the attack put him at risk of losing his life, the leaves we were given would have instantly reacted and the fact that it didn't means he is okay," said Yu Mei as she struggled to talk under the severe shortness of breath.

Zou Liqin who seemed like a crazed beast, had some clarity return to her eyes when she heard Yu Mei's words.

"You're right, we are on a test," said Zou Liqin in a tone that seemed like she only realized it, and was saying those words as a form of reassurance for herself.

Yu Mei had a gaze of pity as she looked at her from the back. In the realm created by the heart-cleansing waterfall, she could see the illusions formed by Zou Yi, Zou Liqin, and He Shan as she walked around there, and it wasn't only them, she came across the illusions of other participants.

She was a spectator in its test while others had their deepest desires dug out by the waterfall, therefore she saw how much Zou Liqin suffered and what her deepest fear was. Her greatest fear was losing Zou Yi and within that realm, she had indeed lived with that loss for a couple of years. Even if the realm was an illusion, the loss she felt was real and very fresh, and Zou Yi getting hurt right now more than likely dug up those four years she was in there.

...

With some clarity returning to her, Zou Liqin controlled her pace as she looked apologetically at Yu Mei when she saw her disheveled appearance, especially her robes that were torn at the bottom, and her feet that were filled with bruises.

With her running controlled, Yu Mei was able to get some relief, albeit only a tiny little bit. The damage was already done, and that short burst had likely pushed her body beyond its limits. He Shan was even surprised at how much will she had to still keep up and still have the presence of mind to think rationally and help Zou Liqin calm down.

However, he knew no matter how much willpower she had, the rules governing her body could not be undone, when they stopped, her body would immediately crush, and at that point, they would have two members incapacitated in just the first few minutes of them stepping into the mountain.

He couldn't help but lament their luck and think maybe they should have chosen the north-northeast direction that Yu Mei had earlier chosen.

He had no way of knowing that that direction had already caused the elimination of 50 participants, and of those participants, one of them was a legacy.

Chapter 326 Saving Zou Yi

It didn't take long before He Shan and the rest saw a pile of rubble and trees clustered together up ahead of them, and beneath it was a compartment that had caved in.

Zou Liqin immediately let go of Yu Mei once she spotted the rubble. Without care for her image, she ran into the piled-up mess ahead and started throwing the pieces of broken trees to the size as she yelled for Zou Yi.

"Zou Liqin, watch your voice will you? The crush has already created enough of a commotion as it is, we don't need to add any more to it by alerting every beast or participant out here of our location.

Nothing good will come of it if they decide to be curious and come here," He Shan austere said as he went to Zou Liqin's side and helped remove some of the parts of broken trees and rocks.

He had an incredulous look as he removed the rubble. He couldn't understand how Zou Yi was even alive with such a scene on display. The piled-up trees and rocks had created a miniature mound that was at least 20 meters in height.

There was also a deep trench that had extended for a quarter of a kilometer and that was what he saw at the final scene. The attack from the snapping willow tree had launched Zou Yi for at least a kilometer and within that kilometer, he crashed into everything that was within that distance. Broken bones were the least of Zou Yi's injuries.

He Shan couldn't help but lament the current circumstance. Part of him even contemplated leaving, however, he wasn't in a good state himself, and if the journey up was anything like what they had just gone through, then his chances of making it up alone, were close to non-existent, he was better off teaming up with Zou Yi and the rest even if they didn't seem like much help at the moment.

The one saving grace was they had the opportunity to get stronger as long as they found a special zone. They could use whatever resources that were in there to strengthen themselves. He was eager to try the 108 steps of the autumn leaves cultivation art, especially the movement arts. From the brief glimpse he took, he found it more diverse and deeper than what he learned from his grandfather.

If she can improve, she can be a worthy teammate. Outwardly she doesn't seem like the tenacious sort, but she sure is full of surprises.

While he was removing the rubble, he spared a glance to observe Yu Mei who looked to be completely spent that a single gust of wind could likely topple her over.

Sweat had soaked her robes entirely to the point that one would think she had gone for a swim in them, her feet had more wounds on them, her hair was all over the place and with some sticking to her face and she was wheezing as she struggled to breathe. She didn't look like she was that far from keeling over and fainting, however even with her run-down body, her eyes still exuded a tranquil calmness as she carefully looked around.

He Shan couldn't help but admire her tenacity. Of the three, she was the only one he had the least hope for, but she turned out to be one of the biggest assets when the moment called for it.

Too bad even with all her tenacity, her body finally couldn't take it as her legs gave away and she fell on her side scraping her hands on some of the branches. She tried to get up but her arms soon followed.

"Don't force yourself or something worse will happen to your body, for now just focus on regulating your breath. Relax and gently take short breaths through your nose with your mouth and eyes closed. Empty your mind and just breathe.

Right now that should be your job, the rest leave it up to me and Zou Liqin. When we find Zou Yi we will need to get out of here," He Shan said when he saw the calm-eyed Yu Mei stubbornly try and get up.

Yu Mei hesitated for a moment before she silently nodded toward He Shan and did as he asked.

...

With He Shan and Zou Liqin working together it didn't take them long to empty out the rubble and find a badly beaten up Zou Yi who looked to just be hanging on to dear life.

His robes were in tatters, and some of the bones like the femur, radius, ulna, and clavicle were already showing. His whole body was covered in dirt and wood chippings that he had collected along the way, and it was held together by his leaking blood. His body looked like that of someone that had been charred.

Wait!! Is he smiling? thought He Shan as beneath that grime he saw what looked to be a weak smug smile.

Zou Liqin who was already at the edge seemed like she would lose it when she saw how beat up he was. However at the last moment she bit her lip hard to the point it dripped blood and gently went to her brother's side.

Zou Yi who had shallow breaths and eyes closed, opened them when he sensed Zou Liqin come over.

"L....i....i...."

He tried to open his mouth, but all that came out were low squelching sounds, that got drowned out by the blood he was coughing out when he tried to speak and move his hand toward Zou Liqin.

"Brother, don't move," Zou Liqin hurriedly said as she clumsily dug out a few herbs from her robe.

She spread them on the ground, quickly looking through them as she muttered words whenever her hands passed through each herb.

From what He Shan could tell, she seemed to be mentioning herb names and their uses. He heard a few names he was familiar with like; hidden toothwort, river mound morrel, and jade resplendent peony root to name a few.

Even if he couldn't recognize the first one he recognized the first two as go-to herbs for injuries. The hidden toothwort could be considered the prime herb of first aid, well to body refining experts like them, it was. It helped regulate the body's stress, and with a body in Zou Yi's state, he definitely needed it, before they could move him, the hidden toothwort would need to be applied to him, to help regulate his body from his bleeding, breathing down to the pain levels, which the hidden toothwort was excellent

at. As for the river mound morrel, it would help in replenishing his blood essence along with boosting his healing abilities.

The more herbs Zou Liqin poured out, the more He Shan recognized. They were all restorative herbs, and for someone whose body was slathered in countless scars, the reason he was able to live through the injuries behind those scars, was through those herbs. Having one was like having another life.

The qualities are great too, by the looks of it, and she seems to have gotten her emotions in check, thought He Shan as he scrutinized both the herbs and Zou Liqin who despite her urgency was very careful in picking the herbs she would need as she closely monitored Zou Yi's state to try which of his many injuries was the most dire.

Chapter 327 Destruction Of Seventy Three By One

Once everything was in order, with no hesitation Zou Liqin chewed on the jade-resplendent peony root which she later poured on her hands and squeezed it above Zou Yi's open wounds. A white golden liquid would be produced every time she squeezed, and every time the liquid came in contact with Zou Yi's wounds, a sizzling sound would be produced, like the sound of something being burnt.

Even with his body covered in dirt, black markings that were granular kept appearing across different parts of Zou Yi's body as they got sucked toward the areas that had the white gold liquid that Zou Liqin had squeezed from the jade-resplendent white peony root.

Black vapor immediately started getting produced from Zou Yi's body. All people present knew what that signified, Zou Yi had poison in him.

Was it the snapping willow tree or something else? wondered He Shan as he carefully took a few steps back to avoid the vapor.

Zou Yi could have been poisoned by the snapping willow tree, or by any of the million things he crashed into on the way over.

Speaking of the tree....

He Shan quickly made his way to Zou Yi once the black vapor had cleared out and carefully analyzed his torso.

How could he? it's not there...

He Shan had a dumbfounded look the closer he observed Zou Yi's body. Even though he was already a few meters ahead of Zou Yi, he had seen the form attack the snapping willow tree employed when it attacked Zou Yi, and even in the best-case scenario, He Shan had Zou Yi being run through by that elephant-sized arrow, but the hole he expected to see wasn't there.

The closer He Shan observed Zou Yi, the more flabbergasted his look became. All of Zou Yi's injuries seemed to have come from him barrelling through the forest, and there didn't seem to be a trace of the snapping willow tree on him.

How did he do it?... So that's how...

He Shan managed to spot a couple of broken smooth black objects tightly clenched in Zou Yi's hand.

These two siblings are not simple he muttered as he saw the smoothness and familiarity in which Zou Liqin went about to address Zou Yi's injuries.

One of them managed to deflect a full-force blow that was the equivalent of a late-stage qi refinement cultivator through quick thinking and with the use of a pebble, and the other had a fastidious mind when it came to first aid.

He Shan however quickly pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind as he went on to assist Zou Liqin in attending He Shan. He had expected her to be guarded and apprehensive of him when he offered to help, but she was quick to accept his help and even assigned areas to him.

Isn't she a little too trusting? thought He Shan as he went about resetting Zou Yi's bones. He took out a neatly wrapped cloth from his beast skin top and removed a few ingredients which he ground and applied around the areas he had reset the bones.

The two silently and methodically went about restoring Zou Yi's body as Yu Mei worked on steadying her breathing and giving her body time to recover what little strength it could.

....

"Too bad for senior Lanfen's daughter," said Dai Chen with a sigh.

"That it is, her son showed some skill too bad his luck wasn't too good," said Xia Boqin.

"If he chose to work with some of the other participants he may have passed. A loss here may serve him some good. It may help temper his character more," said Kang Huilang.

The three judges including Yang Qing had their attention all centered at the same spot, the north-northeast of the mountain.

There's a kilometer-wide crater filled with charred marks, debris everywhere, deep wide cracks, and trees that had blue flames on them. It evidenced that a terrifying battle had taken place, and currently leaving that place was a young deer gently tip-toeing about as it sniffed and gobbled some of the herbs around the area.

The young doe looked ordinary at first, however, if one looked at its coat one would notice it faintly shimmered with different colors, which gave it an almost ethereal look. That innocent-looking doe was the culprit behind the crater of destruction in the area, and also the elimination of 73 participants, one of which was a legacy.

"I don't think I've seen it in the beast-taming hall, did you get it from somewhere Yang?" asked Xia Boqin.

"No, I didn't. While the spirit beast from the beast taming hall have some skill, they would still need some time to adjust to this environment, for an effective test it's better to go with local inhabitants.

Every creature here is a natural resident of this place including the seven-colored doe. I was just as surprised when I found it here. Other than the special zones, everything else is a naturally occurring element of the place.

Those participants have the worst luck for stumbling into one of the five overlords of this mountain so early into the test," said Yang Qing.

"I hope Senior Lanfen doesn't hold a grudge for this. You all are witnesses that it was purely coincidental," said Yang Qing.

While legacy participants did get eliminated once in a while, it was a rare occurrence and those who did will forever be branded with the stench of failing an entrance examination, no matter the reason.

Yang Qing couldn't help but worry about an official from the external logistic division bearing a grudge against him for her son failing the test. The legacy participant had shown some skill as he had managed to go more than fifty rounds with that seven-colored doe before he was decimated. Before him, the doe had obliterated 50 participants in one go before they had a chance to register what happened. He was the only one of the 73 participants who had managed to push the spirit beast, which was a feat in itself.

The seven-colored doe was a progeny of the seven-colored deer which is a spirit beast that at its peak would have a Dao level of mastery of seven elements i.e. water, wind, earth, wood, fire, metal, and lightning. It was no weaker than the phoenixes, or dragons at its peak, however, the doe before them wasn't at that level.

In terms of cultivation, it was just at the early stages of qi refinement and had not yet unlocked its bloodline. But its base strength gave it enough ability to destroy all within the realm of qi refinement, with a few exceptions being those with the same classification of monster just like it, which the legacy participant sadly wasn't.

While legacies had an advantage when it came to the starting line, it didn't equate to them having the same talent as their relatives. Situations that called for something special, would usually leave them exposed, and that was true for that legacy participant. From what Yang Qing had seen of the participants, he had seen a few that had the capabilities of going toe to toe with that seven-colored doe, and even maybe coming out on top.

The fact that that participant couldn't, was only a reflection of his natural talent. He could only blame his horrible luck for being in a situation that demanded monstrous amounts of it. However, Yang Qing quickly pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind as a smile of relief appeared on his face.

Chapter 328 Racing Through The Forest(1)

"Good, it's a little bit better now," He Shan said as he performed a once-over check on Zou Yi.

Zou Yi agreed with his summations as she seemed visibly relieved too, though she still looked worried about Zou Yi.

The most grievous injuries Zou Yi had were on his back more than anywhere else. When he got blasted by the snapping willow tree, he crushed back first into every tree he came across within that one-kilometer stretch before he finally stopped. A majority of those trees were as sturdy as rocks, so Zou Yi took considerable damage when he crushed into them and the force with which he crushed into them.

Luckily Zou Yi seemed to have guarded his neck when he was crushing into those trees; otherwise, ending up with a broken neck would not have been an impossibility.

With Zou Liqin and He Shan working together, they reset some of his bones, restitch his wounds, and braced his body up as they applied different herbs. Once they were done doing the best they could with what they had, He Shan, at the end, fed him the leaves of a blue ocean felonwort which would help boost his blood circulation and vitality.

When they cleaned his body of the grime and blood, his skin was slightly pale from exhaustion and blood loss. The blue ocean felonwort usually was an earth-rank herb that was used by qi refinement cultivators in restoring their blood and healing their injuries. It had gentle properties that made it usable even by those in the body refining stage.

The herb He Shan had on hand was young and wasn't of the best of qualities, thus barely qualified as an earth-rank herb and could, at best, be considered a top-tier mortal-rank herb. However, considering Zou Yi's realm and present needs, it suited the moment perfectly.

The whole treatment took almost a quarter of an hour to do, and Zou Yi had been lucid throughout the whole treatment. The more time went by, the better he seemed in terms of awareness and mobility.

He grabbed the blue ocean felonwort from He Shan and ate them as he grimaced from the disgusting taste. Some color seemed to return to his face as he chewed on it.

"We need to start moving. Some of our friends here may decide to abandon all caution and try to find out the cause of the commotion. It wouldn't be too good for us if they find us in this state..." He Shan said as he scanned his surrounding with a solemn expression.

Even though fifteen minutes didn't seem like a long time, it was long enough for any spirit beast or human that had that commotion to start getting curious in the place of caution, and if they were found in the state they were in, they would be sitting ducks.

He Shan was barely hanging on, and Zou Yi was a stitched-up pile of broken bones, blood loss, and injuries. They did the best they could, but Zou Yi would need some time until his natural vitality kicked in. As for Yu Mei, while she had gotten her breathing in check, He Shan could still spot tremors in her body, which showed she was in no condition to fight, let alone even make a speedy escape.

Zou Liqin was the only fighter they had, but even though physically, she seemed okay, mentally, she was spent. She had poured every mental energy she had into ensuring Zou Yi's injuries were addressed, from the broken bones to the tiniest of cuts, while also ensuring he wasn't poisoned or had a parasitic creature or any other nefarious object in him. She rechecked over and over with He Shan before she finally settled down, and when she did, all that mental strain during those fifteen minutes came flooding back into her body.

He Shan seemed to hesitate about something before he finally took out a mushroom that looked like it was made of red animal flesh from a cloth where he stored most of his things. The cap was the most distinctive as it seemed like it was even beating.

Zou Yi and Zou Liqin both flinched when they saw it, and He Shan's wary expression when he took it out amplified their fear of the strange-looking mushroom.

"This is the red suckle berserker mushroom. It gives anyone a temporary boost in strength for fifteen minutes. With our state, Zou Yi, I, and Yu Mei should take it. Zou Liqin, take this."

He Shan handed Zou Liqin what looked to be a crudely wooden mallet. Zou Liqin took the mallet, questioning why He Shan would suddenly hand her a mallet.

When she grabbed it, she was surprised at how heavy it was. She could still comfortably hold it with one hand, but from its weight, it roughly weighed twenty kilograms. She couldn't help but evaluate the wood it was made out of. It was dark grey and scaley looking.

"Zou Liqin, please carefully monitor us. When you see any of us froth at the mouth, please use the mallet to knock the person out immediately. The mallet is made from grey tempering oak, which has properties that will help us keep our sanity or knock us out.

In exchange for giving us a temporary boost in strength, the red suckle berserker mushroom erodes the mind, and after the fifteen-minute duration is out, it will leave us paralyzed for thirty minutes to an hour. It varies.

Honestly, I'd rather not use it because of the many risks, but..."

He Shan left a few words unsaid as he smiled bitterly at the rustling sounds around them. Clearly, a few curious individuals were already making their way to them.

"Why don't I take the mushroom in place of my brother? In his state, wouldn't it be a risk for him? We could take it, and both carry him," said Zou Liqin worriedly.

With Zou Yi's body already frail, she shuddered to imagine what further damage he would suffer when the side effects of the red suckle berserker mushroom kicked in.

Chapter 329 Racing Through The Forest (2)

"Are you sure you want to risk your brother's safety? What if we get attacked by something as fast as the scarlet hummingbird or the snapping willow? Can your brother, in his current state, be able to fend off something at that level?

Side effects aside, the mushroom is the only way we can make enough distance between us and whatever beasts coming our way, but if you don't want him to take it, I won't force it but should something happen, it will be on you," said He Shan.

"Liqin...stop...I'll take it," said Zou Yi when he saw Zou Liqin still had more to say. He slowly rose up, albeit with wobbly legs and an unsteady gait. He had to use Zou Liqin to steady himself.

He Shan didn't waste much time as he split the cap of the mushroom to its ring and left the stem for Yu Mei, who was already up.

"No need to chew it. Just insert it into your mouth, and it will dissolve," He Shan said as he went ahead and placed it in his mouth.

Zou Yi and Yu Mei subconsciously closed their eyes as they put the mushroom in their mouth. With how disgusting it looked, its taste was bound to be anything but tasty. Zou Liqin looked worried as she watched them swallow it.

"Mmh," Zou Yi moaned in surprise. The disgusting taste wasn't there. The mushroom instantly dissolved in his mouth, and all he got was the taste of the mix between passion fruit and orange with a tinge of hotness.

Immediately after, he felt the liquid he had just swallowed fill every cell, tissue, and organ down to his bones with explosive energy.

The tired sensation he had seconds ago was gone, including his pain. He was mesmerized by the miraculous effects the mushroom had on his body. The energy even gave him the illusion that he could punch through the last attack from the snapping willow tree in his current state.

However, his reverie of vengeance was cut short by He Shan ordering them to leave. They still maintained their earlier formation except with one minor change. Zou Liqin had taken the place of Zou Yi in holding up the rear while he took her place at the center with Yu Mei.

"You guys better refund me everything I've spent," He Shan muttered as he launched bags releasing light grey smoke to their left and right.

"He Shan, what is that?!!" yelled Zou Yi as he spat out saliva with a look of disgust showing up on his face. He looked to just be at the cusp of vomiting. He wasn't alone in it, as Zou Liqin and Yu Mei made similar faces that seemed like they were about to hurl.

"It's the dung of an alabaster-inflamed lion. It's really good stuff, especially in deterring other beasts. Just that one bag cost 1,000 gold coins. You all owe me 2,000 gold coins," said He Shan as he increased his pace while muttering the cost every time he threw out a bag containing the dung of an alabaster-inflamed lion.

The run became torturous for the trio as they struggled not to vomit, with He Shan ruthlessly flooding the area with cloud smoke. Their eyes had reddened at some point as they started feeling even the taste of the dung in their mouth. Despite how they felt, they couldn't complain since the results were there.

They could hear the whimpering voices of a couple of spirit beasts when they got hit by the smoke. Just like this, the distance between them and the area Zou Yi crushed into continued to grow by the second, and with the boost from the mushroom, Yu Mei was able to keep up with them effortlessly.

He Shan would zig-zag around while the trio faithfully followed his lead. Ten minutes passed by without a major incident. They had encountered a few spirit beasts, but none were particularly troublesome for them. He Shan even insisted that they help him carry a few of them for later.

With the fifteen-minute mark coming up, they spent it searching for a secluded area where they could rest when the paralysis hit, leaving Zou Liqin as the only person to watch out for them for thirty minutes or an hour until the paralysis wore off. The most ideal spot would have been the special zone, but they lucked out in that regard. However, they did manage to spot a few herbs mentioned in the booklet, which they quickly snagged up as they looked around.

With time slowly dwindling and no place in sight that seemed safe, panic showed on their faces, except for one person, Yu Mei.

"Yu Mei, what's wrong?" asked Zou Yi. He noticed for the past few minutes, Yu Mei had her brows scrunched up, almost as if she was in deep contemplation about something.

"I keep hearing voices coming from there?" she said as she pointed at a river running to their left.

Zou Yi, Zou Liqin, and He Shan all curiously looked at the river. They didn't know how long it was, but in their escape, they found it and had been running close to it just in case they needed to mask their scent and cater to their water needs later.

He Shan had said they'd suffer from severe dehydration after the paralysis wore off, and being close to a water source was important. But now it seemed there was something off with the river if Yu Mei's words were anything to go by.

Zou Yi couldn't help but think maybe he wouldn't have gotten hurt if they had agreed to follow the direction Yu Mei had pointed at before. After what he had been through, he was more than willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.

"What voices?" carefully asked Zou Yi.

"It's a mix of noises from different creatures. So far, I've heard noises from a bull, crane, swallow, frog, cricket, cicada, katydid, bear, rhino, and the loudest of them all was from a tiger," said Yu Mei with visible fear on her face as she mentioned the tiger.

The trio all had looks of dismay when they heard Yu Mei's response. When she said voices, they expected something along the lines of fish noises, or if it was something mystical, they expected ghostly noises at least or some creature whose name they had never heard of, and not birds, mammals, and insects that don't live in water.

He Shan shook his head, clearly in no mood to listen any further. As for Zou Yi, even if he wanted to speak up for her, he struggled to believe what she said, especially when they didn't hear anything from there.

"Wait!" Zou Liqin suddenly said.

Chapter 330 Finding The Source Of The Voice

"What is it, Liqin?" asked Zou Yi with a curious gaze.

"Yu Mei, you said you heard a tiger's roar?" asked Zou Liqin.

"Mmh," nodded Yu Mei.

"Was there anything special about it, like was it any different from a normal tiger's roar?" asked Zou Liqin.

He Shan and Zou Yi looked puzzled at Zou Liqin's questioning.

None of them believed Yu Mei or if those voices existed because if they did, how come none of them had heard it? He Shan assumed the side effects of the red suckle berserker mushroom had already kicked in, and Yu Mei was beginning to exhibit some of its symptoms, such as being delirious.

Even though He Shan had been mindful enough not to give her the cap, which had the most potent attribute, the stem he gave her would still be potent to her, considering she had no cultivation base whatsoever. On the other hand, Zou Yi chose to reserve his judgment, especially when he saw his sister's contemplative look.

She was always keen, observant, and meticulous in everything she did, and he had grown to trust her judgment when it came to certain matters unequivocally.

"Its roar seemed normal at first, but it seems to contain a certain charm or aura to it that isn't in any of the other noises," said Yu Mei after some thought.

"Does the roar come from a fixed point?"

"At first, it sounded like it came from all over the river, but the more we move, the distinctive the location. If we keep following this route at no more than four hundred meters, we should be able to find the source," Yu Mei answered.

Even with the discussion ongoing, none of the members paused their run. They still kept actively looking around for a safe space or any bullfrog markers that identified special zones.

However, when Zou Yi and He Shan heard Yu Mei say the location she had heard those voices were in the direction they were running towards, they reflexively slowed down their pace, and He Shan even looked like he wanted to change the direction they were running towards.

"Yi, He Shan, I think we should head in the direction Yu Mei is talking about," said Zou Liqin with firm eyes.

He Shan, who was already preparing to switch directions, fired back,

"Are you crazy? We don't even know if there is anything there, and how come she is the only one who can hear those voices, and we can't? What if it ends up being a location like that waterfall? Didn't you almost fail that test? You're sure you want to take a gamble and confront something that may have a similar nature to that waterfall?"

He Shan's words were a ferocious jab toward Zou Liqin, whose expression turned downcast and fearful once He Shan mentioned the waterfall.

"He Shan, please watch your heads, another word out of you about my sister, and we will have to part in less than amicable ways," Zou Yi coldly said.

He Shan, who was running ahead, narrowed his gaze as he turned his head and made Zou Yi's cold and threatening look.

"I'm only speaking the truth. With three of us about to be paralyzed, should we be taking an unknown risk?" asked He Shan, unwilling to shrink back.

Just as it seemed like the two were about to argue some more, potentially leading to a fight, Yu Mei interrupted them.

"The voices I've heard, I think you would have probably heard them if you were not under the effects of the red suckle berserker mushroom," said Yu Mei.

Yu Mei's response highlighted something they had ignored in their desperation to search for a safe location to recoup at. They were so focused on the paralysis side effects that they forgot the other effect that had slowly but surely sneaked up on them: an agitated and frenzied state.

He Shan, who was more familiar with the mushroom, had also overlooked it when the symptoms were already so clear. The fact that he was short with Zou Liqin, and he and Zou Yi almost went to blows, despite where they were, proved the red suckle berserker mushroom was eroding their rationality.

He Shan stopped and looked at his hands, which were red as the mushroom itself and trembling. He switched his gaze to Zou Yi and noticed his eyes were bloodshot and veins protruding on his face. When he switched over to Yu Mei, he was shocked to see the only thing different about her was that she had a rosy complexion in contrast to her earlier exhausted pale face. But when it came to her eyes, they were clear, and her body micro-movements seemed normal, unlike the tremors exhibited by both him and Zou Yi.

"I'm sorry for my rude words, Zou Liqin," He Shan said as he performed a crude head bow to Zou Liqin.

Zou Liqin, who was caught by surprise by He Shan's apology, answered in a fluster,

"No...No...It's okay. Your worry was valid."

"You said we can't hear it because of the mushroom's effects, but why can't she?" asked He Shan as he pointed at Zou Liqin. She wasn't given the mushroom, so she wasn't under its effects.

Yu Mei seemed to hesitate about her answer but sighed as she gently said,

"She may not have the mushroom in her system, but she has the same agitated mental state."

Yu Mei offered an apologetic look towards Zou Liqin as she said that.

The trio immediately what she alluded to when she made that remark, especially the person herself. Even though she seemed okay on the surface, she was still struggling against the trauma of the heart-cleansing waterfall, and Zou Yi's following injured state had done a number on her, adding on the

pressure of watching out for her teammates when they became paralyzed, meant she was stretched thin mentally.

"Liqin is there a reason you think we should go that way?" asked Zou Yi.

His voice was strained and hoarse. Of the three, the effects of the mushroom seemed to be hitting him the fastest. With his earlier injured state, it was only to be expected.

Zou Liqin looked at him with worry in her eyes before she answered,

"There's the Azure Dragon of the East, the Vermilion bird of the South, the Black warrior of the North, the White Tiger of the West, and the Yellow dragon of the center.

These can be further expounded into seasons. The Azure dragon is synonymous with Spring, the Vermilion bird with Summer, the Black tortoise with Winter, and lastly, the White tiger with Autumn.

If you look around, the season around us is Autumn, and surely it can't be a coincidence that the loudest roar Yu Mei heard was of a tiger.

I think rather than us aimlessly running around. We should head in the direction she heard the roar come from. It's much better than us randomly running about.

At worst, we find nothing there, or it's a trap. We get eliminated, but as things stand, aren't we already at risk of that if we don't find a safe place in the next four minutes, or we take a risk and find out if there is really something there, and if there is, it may very well be what we need, a safe place and maybe it might even guide us to a special zone.

I feel we should take the risk," Zou Yi said with some conviction in her tone.