

Mystical Journey

Chapter 26: Ability (2)

The black trench coat was slit right open exposing the bandage covering the chest area underneath. The dagger had made a terrifying palm-sized wound.

“If you don’t want to die then give me the remedy!” Garen held the woman’s neck with one hand and almost lifted her into the air. “If you want me to die instead? I’ll finish you first!”

The bloody-eyed woman hung in the middle of the air. Her hand desperately tried to hold onto Garen’s arm and break free. Her other hand reached into the inner pocket of the trench coat and found a small yellow package.

Garen violently wrestled it out of her hand.

“I’ll use it on you first, of course, if you are the type that is not afraid of death, I can also throw you on the street naked. I am sure those homeless people would not mind some free enjoyment.” The poison began to overwhelm Garen as his breath shortened. He broke the package with an open hand and pushed the powder inside against the woman’s chest.

“No... Eat it...” The woman barely made out of a few words.

Garen put her down and squeezed her face as he poured half of the powder into her mouth before stopping.

“Cough...” The woman coughed as soon as Garen let her go. It looked like she was about to cough her lungs out but was afraid to spit out the powder. She covered her mouth and swallowed all the powder before she sat straight onto the ground, she wearily looked at Garen.

Garen felt the numbing sensation spread over half of his shoulder and knew that the poison was taking effect on his body.

When he confirmed that the woman had no negative symptoms, he tried to fight back the poison a little longer before he finally was certain and chugged the entire powder down his throat.

The yellow powder tasted sour with no odd flavor. It melted immediately as soon as it entered Garen’s mouth.

“Go!” Garen lifted the bloody-eyed woman as he began to jog forward.

Ten minutes later, they arrived at a grass field on the shadowy side of a desolate hill.

Garen leaned against the tree and left the woman by the side as he sat down to rest. He raised his arm to see that the blue wound was fading. The numbing sensation still remained.

Under the shadows of the tree without the cast of moonlight, Garen finally had the time to carefully examine the hostage.

Her silver-white hair scattered across her shoulder. The delicacy and beauty on her face cast a slight hint of nobility vibe on her. Her figure was graceful with her slim waist to what appeared to be a perfect figure.

“Be honest, who are you? Why did you attack me?” Garen asked emotionlessly as he sat on the side. Without the help of a gun and given her poor combat ability, he was not afraid that she would be able to escape.

“You killed our man last time, of course we would have to find you,” the girl regained her breath and answered. “There’s nothing you can do even if you catch me. I will not reveal any secrets.”

“Why would I want your secrets?” Garen felt the last numbing sensation disappear from his wound and felt relieved. “If I told you that the last time I killed your man was only an accident, would you believe it?”

“Do you think that’s realistic?” the woman said mockingly. She stared coldly at him, “Enough is enough, the reason why you caught me is to f*ck me; as long as you don’t throw me to the homeless it’s fine.”

Garen knew too well that if such a beauty were to be left in the hands of the homeless people, within one night the news next morning would report a naked body found beside the garbage dump.

“You woman...” Garen approached her as he began to touch the woman’s body.

She leaned against the tree slanted. She didn’t resist his hand movement as she chose to close her eyes.

But what surprised her was that Garen only searched all of her pockets and grabbed a few items before retrieving his hand.

“I would assume that your position within the organization is quite high? It would not be worth it for me to kill you right now.” Garen pondered with a black gold coin in his hand. “Tell me where did you put the stolen artifact?”

“You are also looking for that?” The woman shockingly glanced at him, “We searched the item, but it’s not within the city.”

“Just tell me where it is.”

“You can find it if you go alone,” she sneered. “I thought you belonged to the other side, but it looks like it’s only you alone.” Through a few sentences, she was able to accurately guess Garen’s background.

“To be honest, the person you killed was not important at all. Since you can’t find the item either, why don’t we cooperate?”

Garen raised his eyebrows. “Do you think I’d believe you?”

“If only Jia Ti had been by my side, and if I hadn’t believed that I would have been safe with a gun, do you think you could have gotten within two steps of me?” the woman laughed with an icy tone.

“Then why did you shoot first?”

“I will always make the first move!” she arrogantly said.

“You only guessed I belonged to the other side, what if I wasn’t?” Garen’s voice turned cold.

“I’ll just tie you to a rock and throw you in the river after I killed you, no one would ever find you again,” she didn’t directly respond, but her answer was clear. She would not let any victim escape even if they were innocent.

After a pause, she continued.

“Since I asked to partner up, then I have my ways to make you believe my genuineness. With your ability, you are at least a level four to five fighter. It is also mainly because of how strong your body is; a bullet can’t even go through you. If you work for me—”

“No way it will happen!” Garen interrupted her. “I won’t work for you. I almost killed you, so you must want to kill me too in your heart.”

She laughed, “Your combat style is fairly similar to the White Cloud Gate’s, with a powerful explosive force which makes it difficult to avoid. But with such impeccable body condition at a young age, you must have trained a unique body strengthening technique. You can let the other side know to contact me and make a promise. The White Cloud Gate is not a small force within the city.”

“The White Cloud Gate is also a part of this? It’s known within your circle?” Garen was slightly surprised.

“Renowned is an understatement,” she sneered again. “In Huai Shan, Dojo Master Fei’s words are the governor general’s words. Especially in the shadows, he is similar to the underground emperor. Anyone who dares to challenge his supremacy is dead.”

“Let’s go to the Dojo then.” Without hesitation, Garen grabbed her and dashed toward the White Cloud Gate.

Twenty minutes later.

Fei Baiyun sat at the practicing hall on the second floor. He took a sip out of the coffee. He peacefully looked at the two people in front of him.

“This is not a big deal at all. It was just an accident that you killed one of their men.” His vision settled on the silver-white woman with a ponytail. “Grace, how’s your mother, Madame Yalan, doing? The last time we met was years ago.”

“Thank you for asking Dojo Master. My mother has been doing fine,” she answered terror-stricken. She kept her head down afraid to look at Fei Baiyun. She had thought that Garen was only an ordinary trainee within the White Cloud Gate. Maybe he would be an actual Disciple, but even then it wouldn’t have mattered.

But as soon as she arrived, she realized that Garen was the Dojo Master’s Formal Disciple. Cold sweat began to drip as soon as she understood the situation. She knew how powerful Fei Baiyun was in Huai Shan, especially for someone who lived in the shadows, and yet she almost killed his Formal Disciple.

Garen who stood by her side saw her sides drenched in sweat.

“This thing is not a big deal at all.” Fei Baiyun took another sip of the coffee. “But since you used a pistol, then the nature of this accident is now different.”

Grace lowered her head further.

“We’ll provide any form of compensation for you! This is our mistake.”

“Since my disciple is running short on money, you can help him a little. Also, the artifact that he is looking for from you guys, return it at the same time.”

“Lastly, and most importantly, Garen himself has to agree to settle this.”

“We agree to all the conditions! We’ll do the best we can!” Grace said genuinely, “We’ll do the best to serve Master Garen.”

Garen shook his head, "All my requirements are included, if you want to provide more compensations then give it to my master and my elder apprentices." He understood that if it were not for Fei Baiyun, this woman would have given him more trouble.

"You." Fei Baiyuan pointed at Garen and started laughing, "I just went to a gathering with the governor and you brought back a wonderful gift for me. This is only because we haven't released any information regarding you joining the White Cloud Gate as a Formal Disciple. In a few days, no one would dare to cause trouble for my disciple."

"Grace is pretty unlucky this time. She mistakenly thought Garen was the opponent's hitman. But I am curious as to why you wanted to stop their car?"

"I saw the stolen artifact that I wanted," Garen rushed to explain.

Grace, with a deep resignation, "You just became a Formal Disciple. I'll admit that I was unlucky this time. If it had been a bit later, I would not have ordered to kill immediately if I had seen the face."

"That's enough Grace. You have to repay for the mistake you made. Once Garen is satisfied, you'll be free."

Fei Baiyuan stated with a soothing smile on this face. "But if I hear you that you are not genuine enough..."

The words sent a shiver down Grace's spine as she immediately answered.

Fei Baiyuan's appearance may have suggested that he looked calm and relaxed, but if he was angry... It would be normal for him to murder entire families and even go after the relatives in their hometown.

The underground emperor always believed in leaving no risk behind. Once he identified his enemy, from the children to the grandparents would have no way to escape under his dark reign.

"Ok, you can go now," Fei Baiyuan waved his hand as he dismissed Grace.

With respect, Grace immediately dashed to the stairs.

Garen sat straight with his head lowered.

"Master... I have caused you trouble with this incident."

"There is no trouble. I want you to know that your senior sister and brother all have their enterprises, or better described as forces, and are tightly knit with the Dojo. Together we are a strong force not to be undermined," Fei Baiyuan stood up as he said peacefully.

"I planned to tell you about these things later, but I didn't expect that you were already involved with this. Today when you faced the pistol and escaped, you must have had a lot of thoughts."

"Yes." Garen nodded his head deep in thought.

"We practice martial arts not only because it strengthens our body. You'll encounter similar incidents in the future. You'll have to learn how to handle these incidents. There is also another thing I didn't tell you." Fei Baiyun paused.

"I originally had seven formal disciples."

Garen was shocked, but then he quickly realized as he felt his heart drenched in ice.

He understood his master's words.

Only three were left out of the original seven Formal Disciples. The other four were either dead or had other accidents.

"Grace will be your practice dummy for the Critical Fist Technique as part of her punishment. It will take her years to recover after. That's all for this incident. Keep in touch with her after this; it would be up to you to see if you can convince her to join your force."

Chapter 27: Speechless (1)

"Go to the treatment room to treat your chest wound." Fei Baiyuan left a few words before he casually strolled downstairs.

Garen stood in place as his expression changed. He didn't make a sound.

He watched his master went downstairs as his figure disappeared around the corner. He waited for his footsteps to fade away before he gently stretched the cloth around his chest.

A copper bullet was embedded in the left side of his chest near his heart, penetrating his pale skin about one centimeter deep.

He dug the bullet out with his hand as the wound on his chest immediately contracted. The edge of the wound was a little burnt with only a sliver of blood flowing.

"So this is a bullet..." He gazed at the bullet in deep thought.

He went downstairs and asked the doctor at the White Cloud Gate to treat his wounds before he slowly walked out of the dojo's main gate.

On the empty streets, a few patrol police dressed in full black strolled in front of the dojo. They were talking and laughing as they held a dim oil lamp.

A group of men in gloomy factory uniforms sat on a set of stairs across the street. Drunk from alcohol, they kept their hands in their pockets. Garen didn't know what they were talking about.

"There's a clothing factory near here that manufactures jackets and cotton clothes," a male trainer said casually as he passed by Garen. He glanced at the clothes Garen wore.

"Hey man, you're training pretty late. Where are you going? Do you need a ride?"

"That's fine; I'm waiting for someone." Garen smiled as he pointed at the black car in the front.

The car window rolled down as Grace's delicate face appeared.

"Not bad!" The male trainer laughed a bit and patted Garen's shoulder without saying anything else. He then approached the other parked car.

Grace stepped out of the car and walked in front of Garen.

"Garen..." She momentarily didn't know what to call him as she hesitated.

"Just call me by my name." Garen shrugged, "Let's leave and head to my home. I'll listen to your situation on the car."

"As long as you are pleased, we'll provide any compensations!" Grace adopted a pleading look.

"I didn't dare to explain in front of the Dojo Master, but the actual situation is that we are not the

only ones who stole the artifacts. In Huaishan City there's another company competing with us in this area."

"No rush, explain to me in detail."

Grace looked at Garen's expression and slightly relaxed since as he didn't seem to be irate.

Once the two got in the car and closed the doors, Grace slowly started the car as the antique vehicle began to lurch forward. Amid the rumble of the engine, Garen sat silently in the passenger seat as he stared at the retreating scene of the night.

The light fragrance of Grace's perfume whiffed into his nose. The street lights cast shadows across his face one by one. His previous excitement finally calmed.

"I am part of the Manuyllton Corporation, one of the three biggest gang-related companies in Huaishan. One of the other two companies has no common business areas with us, but the Blackplume Corporation also accepts hiring missions and the selling of restricted items like us. They are the ones that escalated the tension between us," Grace explained as she drove.

"Restricted items and hiring missions? What are these?" Garen lowered his voice.

"Restricted items include firearms, artifacts, and drugs like rainbow candy. Hiring missions include, robbery, or even murder. This is nothing surprising and a lot of gang-related companies are similar. These two areas offer the most lucrative profits, while the primary operations of the company act as a cover. The money from the legitimate business is only considered a bonus."

Grace started to feel less tense.

"Your company is called Manuyllton Corporation? What's the size of the company?"

"There are approximately 50 people that act as the core. The other supporting individuals total to less than 200 people. I am middle to upper management and in the middle of the pack. But don't worry, with Master Fei, the upper management will do anything to compensate you. I am certain about this point."

"Do you still have the artifacts with you from the first time we met?" Garen asked as he remembered the Potential increase from when he tried to stop the car.

"The artifacts are still there and in one of my houses. Do you want them now?"

Grace let out a sigh of relief as she was afraid that Garen wouldn't ask. But since he asked, the problem became much easier. Garen was clearly new to the scene, but with the backup of Master Fei and his three seniors, even the boss of the corporation would not dare shortchange the compensation.

"Now would be the best time. Where do you live?"

"Downtown, beside the central park."

"Not too far, let's go grab the artifacts and then I'll go home. This is part of the compensation." Garen nodded.

“Then the other compensation...”

“Let’s not rush this. You have some means of selling artifacts in your company right? Maybe I’ll have to ask you for help in the future,” Garen said without any fluctuation in his voice.

“No problem, I’m at your disposal.” Grace immediately nodded.

After a short while, the car slowly stopped in a downtown area with a circular park. Grace got out of the car and entered a white building on the left side. She ran out after a few minutes.

Once she got in the car, she placed a black bag in front of Garen.

“These are the artifacts we found in the city. There are a total of three items. Are these what you’re looking for?”

As soon as Garen touched the bag, streams of coldness flowed from the bag into his body.

Joy emerged in his heart as he opened the bag without much of an outward reaction. Inside was a white rectangular wooden box with a shade of yellow. The lock was open.

As he lifted the cover, there were three cross emblems sitting inside on the black velvet cover. From left to right, there was a bronze, a burgundy, and a silver-white artifact.

APM

The three emblems had the same design, only the letters in the middle were different. They were A, P, and M.

Garen immediately recognized that the burgundy emblem was the one lost by Old Man Gregor. It was also the one that had Potential.

The moment he opened the box, an enormous amount of Potential flowed evenly into both of his hands. The cold streams flowed directly from the veins in his arm, past his shoulder, and across his neck before they concentrated around his eyes.

Garen clearly saw the Potential Meter in his visual field increase steadily.

From 80%, it rapidly rose to 90, and then to 100, 110, 120, 128, 133.

In the few minutes since he had opened the box, his potential skyrocketed to above 200%.

At this moment, the stream of energy from the box began to slow down.

Garen then felt a source of potential from the burgundy cross emblem in the middle, the same artifact he had discovered at the old man's antique store.

While the burgundy emblem continued to release potential slowly but steadily, the other two emblems had released all of their potential.

He gently touched the bronze cross emblem's surface as the rough and cold sensation transmitted to his fingertip. He only took this emblem.

"Nothing else?"

"No, these are the only things I have with me. Out of the three emblems, only the middle one was collected from the city. The others were transported from other places." Grace rushed to answer.

"I'll take this emblem with me. The other requirement is that the rest of the compensation goes to my master. Now take me back."

Garen responded simply and did not say any more. He slowly caressed the bronze cross emblem.

"Ok. So when should I train with you?" She looked relieved as her feeling of impending doom subsided.

"It will start after the Formal Disciple ceremony."

Grace forced a smile. She had heard about the role of practice trainers at the White Cloud Gate. Certain explosive techniques must be practiced on humans to measure the results. Only a few knew the details about the practice trainers. Rarely would they be healthy without any injuries.

The best case scenario was to have a few broken bones, while more severe consequences included organ damage. It would take at least a few years to recover, but it was also normal for the practice trainer to be killed. Usually, they would find people who only cared about money and not life. If she wanted to survive this time, it would depend on Garen.

The car gradually came to a halt two hundred meters away from Garen's neighborhood. Garen gently closed the door after walking out of the car. He watched the car turn before it disappeared.

He raised his right hand and looked at a piece of white paper. The Confederation Bank's name and an absurdly large number were printed on it.

“One million dollar bank deposit. Money comes pretty fast.” He shoved the deposit slip in his pants pocket and he strolled toward the direction of his home.

“I am back.”

As he closed the door behind him, the living room was pitch black. Only a yellow light slipped through the door cracks of his sister’s bedroom.

No one responded.

“Only two people at home again?” He took a breath before he changed into his slippers and turned on the light.

He sat on the sofa. A dark yellow wooden cup filled with brewed black coffee was left on the table.

Thirsty, Garen chugged the coffee. It tasted bitter but sweet as it was completely cold. The edge of the cup had the scent of a cigarette.

“Father didn’t finish after he brewed it.” He put the cup down and leaned against the sofa. He felt the bronze cross emblem in his pocket continue to provide him with potential.

“I don’t know how much potential this emblem will provide. The other two were finished in just a few short moments.”

He felt joyful as his potential in his vision continued to rise.

“As long as I have sources of potential, I can continue to grow with the help of Potential points. There is almost no limit. I am confident that I can surpass anyone!”

Suddenly, the smile that appeared on his face faded.

He realized that the potential increase had slowed down compared to moments ago.

The coldness from the emblem continued to flow without any difference in thickness, but the numbers on the Potential Meter began to slow down.

“What’s going on?”

Garen sat straight as he carefully examined the increase in potential. From the moment he touched the emblem until coming home now, the potential points had already rocketed to above 300%. Now, however, the rate of increase began to diminish.

Chapter 28: Speechless (2)

In the beginning, the Potential meter would increase by one percent every two seconds, but now, it would only increase by one percent every four seconds. Furthermore, the speed of this increase was still regressing.

Garen closed his eyes to fully experience this change. From his pockets, the Potential flowed into his body, eventually ticking the Potential meter in his eyes. Soon, he immersed himself into the process of increasing the Potential.

“The density of qi has increased... but the concentration has decreased.” Garen opened his eyes as he slowly stroked the emblem in his pocket.

As the density of qi decreased, the speed of his Potential meter’s increase had also slowed down. Finally, after ten minutes or so, the qi had steadily slowed down. Only a very thin flow of qi was still entering his body, and the Potential meter would only tick once in a long while.

“Normally, the antiques and jewelry would return to normal after having the qi inside them absorbed, but this emblem isn’t doing that. Does it still have more Potential, or is the absorption of qi just slowing down? Could it be possible that the Potential has already been used up, and the emblem is producing more?”

Creak.

The door opened.

Garen stopped his thought as he saw Ying Er, in her white pajamas, walk in while yawning.

“Why’d you come back so late?” After the accident from last time, she had become more relaxed around him. However, they still had not spoken much out of embarrassment.

“I had some business to deal with at the dojo,” Garen casually answered in a low voice, completely forgetting to imitate the original Garen’s usual tone.

“Something at the dojo?” Ying Er was suddenly interested. “What, you finally got expelled?”

“You really want me to get expelled?” Garen asked back in disappointment.

“With your strength? I’m not gonna lie, but I can beat you up with one hand and one leg,” Ying Er replied with despise in her voice. “Dealing with business; a kid trying to talk like a grown man. What kind of business could you possibly have?”

Ying Er yawned again after the rant and left to get some water. she went back to her room and turned off the light.

Garen sat in the living room a little longer before going back to his room after brushing and cleaning up. His Potential meter was still growing slowly, and this absurd situation was out of his expectation. The absorption of qi had all been a one-time thing, and none had this decreasing speed at the end. Turning on his desk lamp, Garen sat in front of his desk and took out the emblem. He touched the emblem and moved his focus onto the attribute panel.

“This time, the Potential meter increased to 361%, I can use three Attribute points. ”

“Enhancing intelligence would enable me to quickly master some subjects, and my studying ability would probably improve as well. I don’t think this is useful right now.

The entirety of his last life was spent on studying: he went to college, got a master’s degree, and got a good job. However, that job’s salary was still pathetically low. Studying is only useful in order to reach a higher social class later; it’s more useful in the sense of improving one’s competency. Since he had already received the higher education from Earth, Garen wasn’t too concerned with improving his intelligence.

“Agility increases the reaction speed for both my body and my nervous system, and, in addition, it would also increase my speed. This is quite useful.

“Strength and vitality are both fundamentals to the White Cloud Dojo. By enhancing these attributes, my strength, explosiveness, and my body’s resilience and recovery would all improve. These are all great options.”

Garen thought. A few days after the Formal Disciple Ceremony, he would be able to learn both the White Cloud Secret Arts and the Explosive Fist Arts, maybe even the Mammoth Secret Technique.

At that time, these three Attribute points would come in great use. Using them right now seemed like a waste.

He carefully estimated the speed of qi absorption right now. “If this speed of absorption doesn’t change, I could probably get one more Attribute point in a week.”

He didn’t know when this emblem would stop emitting qi; if all the qi was used up, it would be hard to find another antique like this in the entire Huaishan City. These antiques were extremely rare on their own, and they could not reproduce qi after absorption.

After confirming the situation to himself, Garen decided not to enhance his attributes frugally. These Attribute points were precious, so he could not afford to lose them on pointless enhancements.

“Let’s wait until after the ceremony.”

The next morning, Garen woke up early and went to school after eating a pear. Ying Er had already left before him; the result of the competition had come out, and today was the day of the award ceremony.

Garen watched in the crowd and applauded with all his strength as Ying Er stood on the stage and received her third place prize money and award medal. Next to him were a few girls who wore heavy perfume that was cloying to his nose. As soon as the archery award ceremony ended, Garen hastily squeezed his way out.

“How was your sister, Garen?” Kalidor came out of nowhere and asked, tapping Garen’s shoulder.

“Third place, kind of expected, her opponents were too strong,” Garen replied while covering his nose. “There’s too many people in there, I couldn’t bear the smell. How is Ai Fei, have you seen her?”

“I apologized to her about the other day, yet she didn’t say anything. What’s going on between you and her?” Kalidor asked in confusion.

Garen bitterly laughed. “She’s not talking to me either, I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Who’s not talking to you?” Fayne joined from the side. “Let’s go over there. Also, Kalidor, I have to warn you about that thing.”

“What thing?” Kalidor froze and asked.

“Jake told me all about it.” Fayne smiled as he put his arm around Kalidor’s shoulder.

Jake came from the back and tapped Garen’s shoulder. “Fayne is overreacting, it’s not a big deal. Let’s go, Garen.”

“What’s going on?” Garen was confused.

The four strolled on the path behind the classroom building; on the sides were tall and dense Winter Heron trees.

These trees were extremely cold-resistant, and their leaves do not fall during the winter. Piece by piece, the green leaves covered the morning sunlight.

Under the shades, Fayne spoke up in a low volume.

“Kalidor, do you really know Ai Fei?”

“She’s all right, a nice and kind girl.” Kalidor blinked and asked, “What is it?”

Fayne hesitated before continuing, “We’ve been friends for so long, I’ll just say it. Ai Fei, she’s a gold digger. To be honest, I don’t think she’s right for you, man.” He saw Kalidor’s face changing color.

“You are different from me. We all know I’m with a different girl every other week, but I’m not invested in them like you do, Kalidor. This is who you are.”

“And, you know where I’m from and my family... I’m used to these kind of things...”

“Okay, enough, I get what you mean.” Kalidor’s expression turned gloomy; he didn’t argue with Fayne, because he was already familiar with this friend of his.

Jake looked at Garen with a sympathetic expression.

“Why are you staring at me like that?” Garen asked.

“Don’t you like Ai Fei?” Jake whispered. “You even asked her out and got rejected.”

“What?” Garen was dumbfounded. “I asked her out? And got rejected? Where did you hear this? When did I ask her out?”

“Ai Fei told her roommates so.” Jake glance at Kalidor who was walking in front of them, and then gave Garen an even more sympathetic look.

“I... f**k...” Garen was speechless. These few days, he had been busy at the dojo, without paying much attention to things at the academy. He didn’t expect Ai Fei to gossip to her friends about that night’s misunderstanding. He was only trying to ease her embarrassment at the feast the other day, but Ai Fei misconstrued it as flirting

And, when he asked to escort her home and Ai Fei refused, that became him getting “rejected”.

“When did I say I liked that girl?” Garen didn’t even want to say her name. He originally thought she was a nice and independent girl, yet he suddenly learned that she could make up a story out of thin air.

“So Ai Fei and Kalidor are together now?” Garen asked.

Jake nodded. “Ai Fei went to Kalidor’s dorm room last night and didn’t go back.” Jake patted Garen’s shoulder. “Don’t be too upset.”

“Garen, don’t blame Kalidor on this one, Ai Fei approached him first. To tell you the truth, Jake and I knew what kind of person she is; she got in touch with me a while ago

and said she had a crush on me. I rejected her, then she started hanging out with all of us.”

“Seems like she’s taking a move on Kalidor after knowing his family’s background.”

Garen was speechless as he looked at Kalidor who was also looking back at him with a guilty expression.

“Don’t be like this, Garen. A girl like Ai Fei isn’t worth getting upset with.” Jake once again patted Garen’s shoulders in an attempt to comfort him.

“But I honestly don’t even like her!” Garen helplessly explained. “Think about it, with my sister watching all day, how can I be interested in other girls?”

The three of them didn’t seem to buy it.

“I didn’t think she was this good at acting. I’m telling you the truth; I didn’t ask her out, she’s not my type. That night, I thought she was in trouble and helped her out. Since we went together, I asked if she needed me to escort her back. She said no, and I went home. That’s it.”

“Don’t worry about it, we won’t look down on you. These sad memories, just let them go.” Jake shook his head.

“Jake and I saw you guys getting really close to her, that’s why we couldn’t approach you these days,” Fayne added. “Garen, she’s not worth it, don’t overthink this.”

Garen helplessly shrugged his shoulders; he knew all of his explanations were in vain. “Does everyone in the class know about this?”

Jake and Fayne sympathetically nodded.

“Okay…” Garen felt a bit confused. “Well, not that I know what kind of person she really is. Who are we going to copy our homework from?”

“I guess I’ll ask Lan Ruo; see if she’s willing to lend us a hand,” Fayne answered.

“Never mind, I’ll do it myself.” Garen shook his head. Seeing the commiserative expression of the trio before him, he felt frustrated.

“That girl isn’t a virgin,” Kalidor suddenly said.

“That’s for sure.” Fayne nodded with a smirk. “Right, Garen, my cousin’s friend, Felicity, came to visit again. She asked if you have time. Apparently, she wanted to ask you something. Since when did you two hook up?”

“Felicity? That girl who went to Jaderipple Lake with us?” Garen asked. After receiving a positive answer, he was puzzled. “Why is she looking for me?”

“I don’t know.” Fayne shrugged.

“She must have fallen in love with you at first sight.” Jake laughed next to him. “Felicity’s family isn’t just ordinarily wealthy; if you could date her, you don’t have to worry about money for the rest of your life.”

“Do I look like that kind of person?” Garen twisted Jake’s arm and said, “Can you talk like a human being?”

As they were speaking, two innocent girls approached them, with both of them holding delicate lace parasols, wearing white dirndl dresses; they both looked like daughters of nobles.

As the two groups approached each other, all the boys including Garen straightened their backs, paying much more attention to their appearances.

“Garen, your fly is open!” Jake suddenly shouted.

Right as the two girls looked over, they heard the shout. They both turned around and giggled while covering their mouth.

Garen’s face heated up as he looked down at his pant’s zippers. Thank god it was closed! He furiously turned around to go after Jake who had already ran far away.

“You’re dead!”

Morning of October 1st.

White Cloud Martial Colosseum.

Bright light beamed in from the wooden window, landing on the carpet. Faintly visible dust floated in the air.

While Garen respectfully stood in the middle of the colosseum, Master Fei Baiyun sat in his high chair with Senior Sister and 2nd Senior Brother standing beside him.

Third Senior Brother stood to the right, holding a square wooden plate covered in red cloth.

Both sides of the colosseum had a row of chairs and a dozen men sat scattered in these seats, divided into two groups. They were all wearing white robes with sharp and fiery gazes. Leading them were two elderly men between the age of fifty to sixty.

“Since you were directly chosen by me as a disciple, the extra etiquette will be unnecessary. Today we are honored to have Master Hurley and Master Hester here as our witnesses. Let’s begin.”

Fei Baiyun nodded towards Joshua, his third disciple.

“Begin the ceremony!” Joshua shouted. As flippant as he usually was, he did not dare to be glib at events like this.

Two young girls wearing white robes walked up. One of them held a red envelope, the other held a maroon wooden cup. Each held a wooden plate.

“Read the code of conduct,” Joshua proclaimed.

Garen straightened his body and picked up the red envelope. He opened the seal and recited the code of conduct inside.

“Do not disrespect your master; do not be ungrateful! Do not flaunt and show off; do not be arrogant! Do not commit crimes; do not take what is not yours! Do not be conceited or complacent, do not be lazy or procrastinate!”

“Disciple Garen Lombard promises to follow these rules and make our dojo proud!”

“Memorize these rules. Do you have anything else to say?” Fei Baiyun looked at him with a smile.

Garen closed the envelope, then kneeled on the floor.

After three kowtows, he lifted the wooden cup from the plate and presented it to Fei Baiyun with both hands.

Fei Baiyun accepted the cup and drank a sip of black tea from it. He then took a feathered pen from Joshua and swiftly wrote down his name on the envelope. He presented the envelope to the two witnesses.

“Will the witnesses please sign their names!” Joshua shouted again.

The two elders both smiled and each signed their names on the envelope.

The bald elder to the left said with a salute, “I didn’t expect Master Fei to have another disciple at his age. He has great talent and a calm mind. Congratulations!”

Fei Baiyun let out a satisfied smile. “I’m getting old too, Garen will be my last disciple. I will not have the energy for another one. My hopes and the White Cloud Gate’s hope depends on the four of them from now on.”

The past few days Master Fei had been investigating Garen's background, his personality, and the way he treats people. Fei Baiyun was extremely satisfied with the results.

Most importantly, Garen's talent might not be the greatest, but it was worthy of the gate's martial arts inheritance. At the very least, the Mammoth Secret Technique would continue. Currently, only his second disciple Frank practiced this move and fighters like him were prone to danger every day, leaving his Secret Technique at risk of being lost forever.

"Brother Fei, what are you talking about? If you are old, what about us? We are about the same age, but I still want to live for few more years and have a few more disciples of my own." The red-haired elder said while nodding his head.

Fei Baiyun stood up. Behind him on the rosewood table were a few memorial tablets. Words from an unknown language were written all over them.

"With the sixth generation of our White Cloud Gate under my leadership, let us kowtow to honor our former masters and ancestors."

Garen kowtowed respectfully toward the tablets. Fei Baiyun watched the obedient Garen and nodded in approval.

"It is unfortunate that your parents are out of town today. The two masters are always busy, so we had to rush the ceremony. Since the ceremony is finished, you will henceforth be my last inheriting disciple. You will take the Gate's pride as your own."

"Yes, Master!" Garen nodded with a solemn and respectful expression.

"Very well, now you may rise."

Garen slowly stood up as the ceremony concluded.

The colosseum was on the second floor of the White Cloud Gate and a crowd of mostly Formal Disciples from the dojo had already gathered at the staircase entrance. The dojo had three types of students: regular, formal, and core disciples.

Garen had become a core disciple in such a short time, in part due to his talent and young age.

Fei Baiyun's White Cloud Gate was different from the other Gates with regards to the process of accepting students because of its status in the city.

From reading the code of conduct earlier, Garen noticed that the White Cloud Gate was a sect of both good and evil since the code of conduct did not mention anything about morality and ethics.

Basically, as long as one did not betray the gate and did not do anything that would harm the gate's reputation, one could do whatever he or she pleased.

After the ceremony, Fei Baiyun and the other two masters stayed behind to chat, while the other disciples and students left to get ready for lunch.

Garen followed his Senior Sister and Senior Brother downstairs. Walking behind them, he saw Rosetta's white tiger tattoo on her naked back. The tiger looked ferocious and the tattoo moved with Rosetta's movements, emitting a blood scented vigor.

The tattoo spanned from her back to her chest and across her shoulder. The back of the tiger had a clearly visible blood red spine.

Upon closer inspection, Garen realized that there was actually a blood red scar on her shoulder. She had tattooed the tiger on the scar, and used it as the tiger's spine.

Second Disciple Frank was tall and sturdy, he was speaking with Master Hurley's disciple enthusiastically. That man was also a bruiser, the two seemed to be just each other's type. They were also old acquaintances.

Senior Sister Rosetta was speaking with one of Master Hester's disciples. The guy seemed to be interested in her and was making a move on her.

Garen sat next to Joshua as he listened to the boring conversations from both sides.

The two junior disciples were both the type of people who were unable to sit still for a second.

"Senior Brother, is it true that Formal Disciples can only get to the intermediate level of the White Cloud Secret Arts?" Garen asked.

"It's true because the later levels require some rare medicines and other conditions. Only the core disciples can obtain these medicines from the dojo. Why do you ask? You've only learned the beginner level of the Secret Arts and are still far from the intermediate so what's the hurry?" Joshua was puzzled. "Well, since we aren't doing anything and you have now completed the ceremony, I suppose it won't hurt to explain the later stages to you."

"I'm just curious," Garen laughed. "Any man who is in martial arts would want to know the future direction of his training."

"You sound pretty mature." Joshua nodded, "From my own experience, the intermediate level of the White Cloud Secret Arts can increase your strength by half. The expert level, which only our Master, Senior Sister, and Senior Brother have achieved, can actually double one's strength. Our Senior Sister's strength grew by 100 pounds, and our Senior Brother grew by 150 pounds. The expert level of the White Cloud Secret Arts

is the highest level achieved by people from our dojo. The master level was only achieved by the founder who created our gate. I hear that combined with the Mammoth Secret Technique, his strength could really match that of a mammoth!”

“Force of a mammoth! That would be over two thousand pounds!” Garen was astonished.

“Nobody has tested it before, but it is indeed very powerful,” Joshua said, stroking his chin with great anticipation.

After some chatting, the Gate provided lunch for everyone, then the two masters left with their disciples. Some other guests showed up at the dojo to congratulate them on the ceremony.

These distinguished guests included the mayor and the governor.

With the addition of these other guests, the ceremony was enough to influence all of Huaishan City.

After the reception, it was already late afternoon. The food eaten at lunch had already been digested and expended as energy.

After dinner, Fei Baiyun called Garen in front of a small, narrow room.

A bald and half-naked elder sat cross-legged on the ground in front of the room. His body was full of muscle, his veins were like dark snakes coiling on his body, and his long white beard descended onto his chest. Bowing down and showing great respect, Fei Baiyun went up and whispered a few words to the old man.

The bald elder nodded, opened his eyes, and looked at Garen, seemingly trying to memorize his face. Then, he closed his eyes again without saying a word.

Fei Baiyun nodded to Garen and pushed open the door.

Creeeaaak.

The door opened to a room shrouded in complete darkness. Fei Baiyun lit up an oil lamp on the wall and the dim light filled the cramped room.

In the room there were some notebooks scattered between many bookshelves.

“These are martial arts practice notebooks from our ancestors. You can go through them as you wish. But never mind that for now. Follow me inside.”

Fei Baiyun stopped Garen from opening up one of the notebooks and strode past the bookshelves.

“This place is safely guarded by uncle Bai, who has remembered your scent. As long as you don’t bring others, you can come here on your own from now on. This is one of the privileges of being my disciple.”

“Yes Master, I understand.”

Fei Baiyun nodded as they approached the last row of shelves. On the last shelf was a red teapot-shaped container.

Fei Baiyun took down the teacup and emptied into his hand. A small red pill rolled out of the spout.

He handed the pill to Garen. “Eat it!”

Garen took the pill, put it into his mouth, and he swallowed it without any hesitation.

“Master, what was that pill?”

“Body Enhancement Pill. Your White Cloud Secret Arts is intermediate level already, right?”

Fei Baiyun looked at Garen with a faint smile. Garen was shocked and didn’t know how to reply.

“Don’t worry, the beginner level of the White Cloud Secret Arts is the easiest to surpass. In addition to my special herbal medicine incense, advancing in a short time isn’t that rare. Some of our former masters in the gate reached the second level even faster because they had great talent and potential. However, once you reach this level, you cannot advance to the next without specially made medicine.”

He put the red teacup back on the shelf.

“Remember to come here and take a pill once per day and you’ll be able to improve your White Cloud Secret Arts. This technique cannot be mastered with just practice, but practice is also crucial of course.”

“Yes, Master.” Garen held his surprise and replied. He felt like Fei Baiyun’s eyes were like a pair of searchlights and he couldn’t hide anything from them.

“Don’t try to hide your skills. You are only at the elementary level of the Explosive Fist Arts, which is not that big of a deal. I’ve seen a lot of people like you and in the real martial arts community this is quite average.”

Fei Baiyun spit out all of Garen’s secrets at once. Watching his new disciple’s face of embarrassment, he felt a sense of gleeful satisfaction. If he hadn’t found out this disciple’s secrets, he would not be in such a rush to take him as a disciple.

As for the “real martial arts community” he mentioned, if there were really that many students easily learning the Explosive Fist Arts, the White Cloud Gate would have taken over the province already. He only said this to make sure Garen wouldn’t be too full of himself.

Someone with talents like Garen had only appeared once in the history of the White Cloud Gate. He was born a White Cloud disciple, his body perfectly fit with the White Cloud Gate’s techniques, and he had great talent.

Garen knew his secrets were exposed, so he didn’t say anything else, but laughed it up.

[And here I was, afraid I was too exceptional...]

Chapter 30: Surprise (2)

“It’s fine if you want to hide your true powers. It’s impressive that you reached such a level at your age, and it is probably better for you if fewer people know what you are capable of. It will seem more reasonable if you revealed your skills after several years of training,” Fei Baiyun said, patting Garen’s shoulders.

“Okay, let’s go to the training floor. Today, I will teach you the White Cloud Combat Arts. These skills are not only used in combat, but also used in killing your opponents,” he continued.

“Yes! Master!” Garen was excited.

Several minutes later.

On the second floor of the Martial Arts Hall.

Fei Baiyun and Garen stood across from each other. The evening sun made the carpet shine scarlet.

“Your fundamentals are good, so I will teach you the entry level stances first.”

Fei Baiyun stepped forward and raised his right palm, slanting it upwards. He also put his left fist by his waist.

“This is the basic stance of White Cloud Combat Arts. Take a closer look,” Fei Baiyun said with a clear voice. He saw Joshua coming from the first floor and nodded his head. Joshua looked at him and closed off the stairway with a cover.

“There are four basic skills in the White Cloud Combat Arts: Swing, Rush, Stomp, and Strike. These skills will help you in attacking, dodging, defending, and assassinating during fights. You can use them in whatever order you want. I will show you the Stomp first,” Fei Baiyun continued.

After finishing the sentence, Fei Baiyun stomped forward with a single foot. His body leaned forward and it looked like he put all his body weight on that foot.

Pong

The floor shook and the noise it made echoed in the hall.

“And the Rear Stomp!” Fei Baiyun kicked his other foot backward and it sounded like his foot slashed apart the air. Wearing an ordinary pair of flats, his extreme burst of speed and strength made each of his movements look flawless. Garen couldn’t even imagine what would happen to someone if they were standing behind Fei Baiyun.

“There are two different types of Stomps, one is more about speed,, and the other about strength. You need to combine them with the Explosive Fist Arts skill and use them on your feet. In order to do it properly, you need to harden your blood vessels and your muscles before applying the force to your feet. When you use the Stomp skill, your Qi and blood will be drawn to your bottom half. This will not only hurt your enemies, but will also surround yourself with Qi. You need to carefully manage your breathing and your heart rate while using it,” Fei Baiyun said and demonstrated the Stomp several more times. He asked Garen to try it after the demonstration and whispered Garen the secret techniques before letting Garen start.

It was fine if Garen’s stance was wrong, but if Fei Baiyun found that Garen was not matching his breathing with his heart rate, he would slap or kick Garen. The kicks and slaps actually helped Garen perform the actions properly.

“There is one universal rule in the White Cloud Gate, and that is Stability. Whatever you do, you do it with stability. You need to make sure your Qi and blood are stable, then apply them onto the skills you use. You will be able to modify your skills and make them explosive this way,” Fei Baiyun said.

“If you turn on the water faucet and block the water with your finger, the water will burst out when you let your finger go for even a bit,” he continued

Step by step, Garen started to focus on practicing the Stomp and tried to make sure his breath matched his heart rate, following everything Fei Baiyun said.

He was still thinking about the Stomp when he got back home. The White Cloud Secret Arts would bring him incredible power when the skills were combined with the Stomp.

The White Cloud Secret Arts technique was like an engine, and the higher the level he reached, the bigger the burst of power he would have. Every skill in the White Cloud Combat Arts aimed to increase one's strength.

Garen kept practicing the skills he learnt over the next several days as Fei Baiyun taught him all four forms.

The Swing was all about swinging the feet and arms like a whip. The Rush used the Mammoth Strike to counterattack. The Strike could help Garen reach his peak for a short duration, allowing him to use his arms like knives to stab into the enemy's eyes.

There were many possible combinations when using the four forms and different combinations were designed to be used against different opponents. Garen found some useful books in the tiny library room and there was a lot of information written by previous Masters of the White Cloud Gate. Garen found the standard combinations and applications of the four forms and also created some combinations by himself.

Garen learned the four forms in a hurry and he made sure he could at least reach the standard level. One month had passed since the final exams and he began to think about his attribute points. He finished the exams with no problems, but he was not expecting a high grade. He only wanted to focus on practicing martial arts.

He could increase the level of the White Cloud Secret Arts as long as he had the requisite medicinal herbs, though it would take some time. The Explosive Fist Arts, however, required tempering the body by beating it with wooden clubs in addition to some special potions. Advancing to the next level of Explosive Fist Arts was not a simple matter of using Attribute points.

The noon of November the 2nd.

In the White Cloud Dojo.

Garen was topless; he had recently started training under the sunlight. There was sweat all over his tanned skin.

He stood in the middle of the training room as two apprentices hit him in the back, chest, and the arms with two arm-sized wooden bars.

Garen closed his eyes as he tried to move his Qi and blood to the places getting hit in order to recover faster.

[It's been a month since I started practicing the White Cloud Secret Arts and the Explosive Fist Arts, but nothing is leveling up. It'd be much easier if I could just apply

points to the skills,]' Garen thought and shook his head. He could still see his attribute bar and his skill bar after closing his eyes.

There were some changes to his attributes, but on the skill bar he could only see that the Basic Combat Techniques was replaced with the White Cloud Combat Arts. The two skill sets were combined and they were set back to the first level.

01

On the attribute bar, Garen could see his Strength and Stamina had both increased by 0.1. His current attributes were Strength: 1.78, Agility: 1.10, Stamina: 1.04, Intelligence: 1.20, Potential: 377%.

[There's barely any potential left on the Bronze Cross. One month passed, and I only got about 10%. I need to find some new antiques,] Garen thought, as he raised his hand to ask the two apprentices to stop.

The two stopped hitting Garen with the bars and were sweating heavily. They put down the bars and sat aside to rest.

"Garen, you are so strong. My arms are sore and you're not even hurt!" one of the apprentices said admiringly.

"Keep training and one day you will be just like me. You will be able to learn the Explosive Fist Arts after you become a Formal Disciple," Garen said while he started to think about the distribution of his attribute points.

[I don't need to apply points to the White Cloud Combat Arts since it will level up just from practicing. I thought I could just simply apply points to the White Cloud Secret Arts and Explosive Fist Arts, but it seems that it won't work. These skills that need external help won't be leveled up so easily,] Garen thought. He tried to apply points to the two skills many times, but it would not work. The only thing he could do was apply the points to his attributes.

He still remembered the night he met Grace, how he felt helpless against the pistol, and how fast the poison could travel through his body. Garen made up his mind as he stared at the Strength and Stamina attributes.

[Stamina increases my resistance, recovery speed, and will also increase my general defense. During the tests, I thought my organs were much stronger than before. The dojo's arts did not make my organs stronger and I never specifically trained my organs. The effect probably came from the point I applied to the Stamina attribute,] Garen thought. He sat and took a rest, then finally decided to apply all his points to Strength and Stamina.

He stared at the Stamina attribute for three seconds as it changed from 1.04 to 1.34. Adding one attribute point increased the Stamina by 0.3. Garen could feel heat rush through his whole body; this sensation lasted for about ten seconds.

When he opened his eyes again, he felt he could see things clearer and that his hearing was enhanced as well. He looked at his right arm and his skin looked denser. Garen touched his skin; it felt silky smooth.

“You two can leave now, I’ll stay here for a while and will clean everything up after,” Garen told the two apprentices. The two were used to situations like this and they knew Garen would stay late to train more, so they smiled and left.

Garen closed his eyes again, and he stared at the Strength attribute. He applied one point to it and it increased from 1.78 to 2.08. Garen could feel his body getting stronger and the 0.3 increase to Strength raised his total force by 60 pounds, which was a third of a normal adult male’s peak strength. This meant that 0.1 Strength equaled 20 pounds.

[One more point,] Garen thought, as he was about to apply it to Stamina. Suddenly, something from the skills bar caught his attention. A word changed as he was preparing to apply the point to Stamina.

“White Cloud Secret Arts: Advanced.”

[What is this... Applying points to my Stamina can allow me to increase the level of White Cloud Secret Arts?!] Garen wondered excitedly.

[Can I apply points to it now?] Garen speculated. He stared at the White Cloud Secret Arts for three seconds and the status changed again. “Advanced” was no longer there and he saw “Completed” instead.

There should only be three levels of the White Cloud Secret Arts and the attribute point made it advance to the last level.

Garen was elated with the result, but he suddenly felt pain when he tried to stand up. His skin, muscle, and bones started to ache. He could feel heat cycling around his chest and it slowly spread to his four limbs. When the heat was almost gone, he started to feel a chill from the center of his chest travel through his body chasing after the vanishing heat.